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Nepal, Factor 17: Good Governance

Nepal: A Governmentally Unstable Country

Over the years, Nepal has faced many struggles with a poor government system. In 1951, King Tribhuvan was restored back to the throne after a long Rana Dynasty. Then, in 1996, a Civil War started between the monarchy and the Maoists, a group of rebels from a Communist Party. During this civil war, in 2001, King Birendra, his wife and eight other members of the Royal family were killed when his son, Prince Dipendra, opened fire inside the palace before killing himself. The King's brother, Prince Gyanendra Shah then took the crown. In February of 2005, King Gyanendra disbanded the government and assumed absolute power of the country. The Civil War finally ended in 2006 with the Comprehensive Peace Accord, which was monitored by the UN mission in Nepal. August 15, 2008 Pushpa Kamal Dahal, or Prachanda was elected as the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic and was sworn in on August 18 (Major Events in Nepal's History). In 2008 the Parliament voted unanimously to become a secular nation. In May of 2009, the Prime Minister resigned after Nepal's President, Ram Baran Yadav, reinstated fired General Rookmangud Katawal. May 23, 2009 Madhav Kumar Nepal became the new Prime Minister. In June 2010, the Prime Minister made a deal with the Maoists and agreed to resign in exchange for the term of Parliament and the deadline to complete a draft Constitution until May of 2011, which averted a political crisis. February of 2011, after a total of seventeen attempts, Jhala Nath Khanal was elected the new Prime Minister. In May 2012, political parties could not agree on a new Constitution before the Constituent Assembly's term expired so Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai announced that he would hold elections in November of 2012 for a new legislature. Early in 2013, Nepal's political parties agreed on an interim government to hold elections and Chief Justice Khil Raj Regm was appointed Prime Minister. On February 10, 2014 President of the Nepali Congress Party Sushil Koirala was elected as Nepal's Prime Minister and was sworn in the following day (Infoplease). There is a widespread feeling that no one is really in charge and that has been true for years now. "The government and other larger political parties have been playing political games to form government with their leadership. The government has been focused on constitution reformation and thus unable to prioritize the development projects" (Shrestha). This hurts everyone from farmers and the lack of roadways to bring their products to market, to children with inadequate schooling, to anyone in need of electricity, which cannot be obtained twelve to eighteen hours out of every day. Nepal's government is at a point where if changes aren't implemented soon, the country could be in major trouble.

A typical family in Nepal can vary between regions. In rural areas, the population is much less dense but each individual family may have four to six children. Urban areas have a higher rate of density in them but the average family normally has two children. The composition of each house is mainly multi-generational, with the female normally moving in with the husband's extended family. Visiting between families is also very common, especially on holidays, which occur on average about twice a month (Yackley-Franken 37). Urban areas are also becoming more and more westernized and are starting to see more people moving to a one generational house, but this is occurring less in the rural areas. You may also see families moving to the city and leaving their son on the family farm or even their grandparents if they instead decide to stay (Lemon).

On an average day, Nepal's citizens will start their day off at 6 am with tea and possibly bread. Then at 9 am they have daal bhat, tarkari or achar. Between 1 and 4 pm they will have popcorn, beaten rice or roti. Then at 7 pm they will again have daal bhat, tarkari, or achar. Daal bhat is white rice with a lentil soup poured over. It varies greatly based on the vegetables that are in season and the spices that are chosen to be used in it. Tarkari is a form of curried vegetables, achar is pickled vegetables and roti is Nepalese

bread. The most popular meats in Nepal are buffalo, chicken and goat, but are usually only consumed about once a week in urban areas and only twice a month or less in rural. With a majority of Nepalese following Hinduism, and also being a landlocked country, beef and seafood are not popular (Shrestha).

Nepal's first school was founded in 1853, but was only for the Royal family. It wasn't until 1951 that the general public had access to education (Bhattarai 10). Today, most people reach a secondary level education or tenth grade, but if you go back just one generation many children were only able to reach their primary level, or up to fifth grade (Shrestha). Many schools operate without electricity, running water, heating or cooling. Enrollment rates in the hilly and mountainous regions are lower and even though Nepal has an economy largely based on agriculture, with about seventy-five percent of the population earning an income from it, there is no emphasis in schools on the subject. Teacher training, employing female teachers and minority groups is still in need of work, but there has been improvements in the education system. The gender gap is closing in, now for every 100 males attending schooling there are 99 females and the enrollment rate for children in grades first through eighth is at eighty-seven percent (World Food Programme Fighting Hunger Worldwide).

Nepal has free basic healthcare that can be obtained from public health posts, but other medical care can be very expensive because of their low income as well as because the idea of health insurance barely exists in the country (Shrestha).

There are three main regions in Nepal, all being long and skinny: mountainous, hilly and the plain region. The mountainous region is a part of the Himalayan mountain range and borders Tibet. The plain region is at the more southern part of the country bordering India and is very flat comparatively. Hilly, is right in the middle of the other two and is also in the middle in comparison to elevation. In the mountainous and hilly regions, the farm sizes are fairly small but people may own and farm land in multiple locations. In the plain region, the average farm is much larger, about the size of an acre. Families will usually work the land that they own but some may work for another farm in exchange for a portion of the crops (Shrestha). The most popular crop in the country is rice, which accounts for around fifty-five percent of all of the crops raised (Yackley-Franken 53). Wheat, corn and sugarcane are also popular and mustard, cauliflower, spinach, tomatoes, chili peppers, potatoes, cucumber and squash are grown in some areas. The number one animal raised in Nepal is oxen, but they also have dairy cattle, sheep, goats and chickens (Shrestha).

Nepal is mainly subsistence farming and is very traditional. There have recently been farmers in urban areas using tractors to plow their fields. The use of oxen is more common, but for them even that can be expensive, with the price of oxen between \$3.10 and \$30.90 US dollars (Yackley-Franken 63). Vegetables are normally only picked as needed and any extra are left in the field instead of all produce being harvested at once. If there are any surpluses in other crops it is normally traded within the village because importing and exporting can be very difficult and expensive. There are also a lot of fertilizers and pesticides being put on the fields or "medicine" as they often refer to it. There is very little concern about effects of these chemicals though because of them being unaware of long term effects and entire farms have been known to be wiped out from pests. There have been some efforts to fix this problem but the chemicals are more appealing for their quick fix and there aren't any good, affordable green alternatives in this part of the world.

The land in the Kathmandu Valley was an ancient lakebed, and is extremely fertile, and although to them it is considered flat, terraces are still needed. Terraces work very well but are labor intensive and require complex irrigation systems (Lemon). Between June and mid-September is Nepal's monsoon season and they receive about ninety percent of their annual rainfall during this time (Bhattarai 28). Even though they receive a large amount of water during this period of time, the rest of the year is very dry and irrigation systems are needed. The irrigation systems in the plain region are fair but in the mountainous and hilly regions they are very poor. Which comes of no surprise due to the difficulty for them to reach drinking

water, often having to walk miles to reach a water supply (Shrestha). Less than forty percent of land that is being farmed is irrigated and only seventeen percent is year round, but there is capability in the country for it to reach two-thirds (Nepal: Priorities for Agriculture and Rural Development). The mountainous and hilly regions only have one season of rice, corn or wheat but the plain region can have two to three seasons of rice in a year (Shrestha).

There are many barriers to employment and earning an income at a living wage. Nepal's government is lagging which leads to slow economic development finally, leading to low revenue coming into the government which ends up becoming a vicious cycle (Bhattarai 77). Another reason for the low employment and income issue is that in rural areas and small cities they mainly use bartering and don't have any need for money so they never technically earn any. Also, the people only earn what is necessary, rendering the adage which goes "Nepalese earn just enough for living and this is the reason the country is not being developed." People consciously make the choice to not earn more than needed because that would cause them more work than is necessary. In Nepal, many people may leave the country for a higher level of education or for an occupation. They then will normally send money back to their family and that is what will support them, but that in the long run hurts the Nepalese economy. Higher jobs in Nepal are hard to obtain with most of the jobs found working in shops, restaurants, industrial, teachers and public/government (Shrestha).

The first paved road in Nepal was constructed in 1956 and today there are still only 9,900 miles of roads built with only about one-half of them paved. This makes it extremely difficult to get to places even if they aren't far away in distance (Yackley-Franken 43). Also, there are twelve to eighteen hours of scheduled blackouts every day because the country can't meet its energy needs. So there is no way to have refrigeration in the country because one-half of your day is without power anyway. The stores are mainly specialized with only a few select, in season, crops sold. Stores containing numerous items are sparse and will normally only have nonperishable goods (Lemon). The concept of processed foods is very uncommon and foods that are out-of-season can be hard to obtain (Shrestha).

Agriculture productivity has been affected by the government in many ways. A weak government leads to a weak economic standing in a country. Farmers, not having adequate roadways, can have a hard time transporting their products to market. Farmers, also making very little money, do not have the capital to better their production and make it more efficient. Agriculture accounts for thirty-nine percent of the country's total GDP and sixty-six percent of the workforce, making it a major part in the country and something that the government needs to focus more on (:: Department of Agriculture ::).

Another issue in some areas is obtaining water. Many towns in the rural areas do not have the infrastructure or water pipes running through the community so a great deal of time can be spent getting water for their usage (Shrestha). "The government of Nepal needs to improve irrigation management to achieve higher agricultural productivity and overcome 'dismal' water and crop shortages." There isn't enough emphasis on irrigation, many places do not have it at all and the ones that do frequently have not been maintained and are very unreliable. During some seasons, only two-thirds of the irrigation systems they do have work (NEPAL: "Dismal" Irrigation System Worsens Crop Shortages). Also because of inefficient fee collection and pricing, only about three percent of operations and maintenance costs are being recovered (Nepal: Priorities for Agriculture and Rural Development). So the irrigation systems have no way to improve unless the government steps in and starts making it a priority. When there is too much or too little rain during the growing season, farms don't produce to their full capability and they may not have enough to sell at markets to earn a living or, even worse, have enough to feed their families.

The government is largely stagnant due to frequent turnovers in Prime Ministers. Just since 2008 there have been seven different Prime Ministers with the longest term being 622 days in office. This lack of

stability makes it very ineffective and difficult to create and carry out policies. The economic trend of the government is measured in the Economic Freedom Score which shows since 2011 it has stayed pretty much the same (Nepal). Because of no change, the situation for rural farms and urban families has been getting worse due to: Nepal once rich with timber and now only has twenty-nine percent remaining; pollution fills the air, trash is piled up along rivers; over grazing, chemicals and heavy farming is diminishing the fertile grounds and the government giving little help towards the problems aren't nearly enough (Yackley-Franken 16). The government has made major leaps in the equal rights for women in the past years which have helped, but women still aren't always considered to be equal. As a developing country, Nepal is disadvantaged because they fail to utilize the natural resources they do have because of their lack of infrastructure, education, modern agricultural techniques and sound government stability.

Improving the education in agriculture would introduce best practices to optimize farming in this area, including the improvement of their current irrigation system and spreading it throughout the country. Then with improvements from the government to the infrastructure, farmers would be able to take their products to market and sell it to make a profit. Also with education, more focus could be put on sustainability and protecting the environment in farming operations and slowing deforestation, preserving soil erosion. Climate volatility will affect the yields of crops and also a growing population may not be able to keep up with the demands of feeding a further growing population. The government will also need to address and create a method for reducing the pollution and waste management in the country for the overall health of the people and animals.

I would suggest agriculture education and working toward a more sustainable crop production with large scale agriculture rather than farming for family food. The FFA is an excellent way in the United States to get teenagers interested in agriculture. Starting an organization like this one would be very beneficial in educating the population on agriculture practices that could better the country. Also, the infrastructure of the country needs to be a higher focus and priority. One of the most meaningful things that I would suggest is expanding their opportunities in their water resources. Nepal has many fast flowing rivers running down from mountains. It is said that only about two percent of their potential in hydroelectricity is utilized. Nepal is currently importing electricity at very expensive rates to try to meet a portion of the electrical shortage. Further development in hydroelectric power could be used to end the shortage and then excess could be sold to India for a profit which would increase the money coming into the country and help give the entire economy a boost and further develop the country (Bhattarai 29). The other improvement to their water resources would be expanding and improving their current irrigation system which would make for a better yield and productivity of crops.

Implementing the FFA like organization would need to come from the schools and then move towards coming from the students, it being a student led organization here. My suggestions for the hydroelectricity system would have to mainly come from the government. There has been a trend towards licensing rivers for that use, but people have been more interested to then sell the license for a profit rather than constructing the dams. For the irrigation systems it would need to start with government improving the systems and getting farmers to pay their fees defraying the cost. Once they are more reliable the farmers will be able to count on them and increase the number of irrigation systems and work to maintain the systems already in place. Right now, farmers should work to increase the number of irrigation systems

and families should send their children to school to get a better education. Of course, the government should build better infrastructure in the country improving the overall economy and issue of lack of jobs.

Nepal is said to be the birthplace of Buddha, home to eight out of ten of the world's largest mountains, including Mt. Everest, holding forty different ethnic groups and seventy different languages in only 56,827 square miles. Nepal embraces their diversity and is a place that many people find intriguing, but the way it is right now, it has a very unstable government. They have faced a Civil War, the King and his family was murdered and huge turnovers in Prime Ministers, all just within the last fifteen years. There is countless potential in the country for tourism, hydroelectric power and agriculture but it will take a strong backbone government to be able to develop to its full potential. To achieve this strong backbone they need leaders to be put in place that will focus on education, infrastructure, agriculture, and hydroelectric power because those things will bring money back into their economy. This will eventually raise the living standards of the people. With the economy then thriving, better jobs will be created and people will no longer have to leave the country to find better employment. With the people staying in the country for work, the economy will increase even further. Agriculture productivity needs to increase to keep up with the growing population of the country, but with more emphasis on increasing and bettering the irrigation system it can be achieved. Education has made major improvements in recent years, but more is still needed. Agriculture needs to be incorporated into the curriculum in schools and the government needs to work to improve the school's buildings adding electricity, heating, cooling and running water. The road infrastructure also needs to be improved so that children will have an easier time getting to school and also so farmers will be able to take their products to market. There are a lot of changes that need to take place within the government, but the efforts that they put into it now will all be worth it in the end, and ultimately make Nepal the country it has sought to be since its origin.

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