

## Chapter 5

# Conclusion: Understanding Peasantry and Subsistence Farming in Nepal

Sustenance of resource management and food securing essentially means sustainable use and management of resources available to people, living in and around a vicinity of a geographically set region integrated ecologically, socially and culturally, in production activities, i.e., farming, so as to rationally conserve the environment, taking in to consideration the future use. Sustenance of resource management would mean appraisal of traditional ways of resource uses, continued for centuries and even millennia, but often prone to be neglected in this modernizing world. Appraisal of traditional ways would not only imply the preservation but also include “transformation”, as per need, of the traditional ways, making choices and systematic arrangements. The set of conditions for such an appraisal would be, common interest based on the needs, easier access, cost efficiency, joint accountability, internalization of the external interventions chosen, and they should be bundled into a system, with sub-systems if needed, rather than left as individual components, in which case it would hardly be effective to make a difference. The prerequisites for this would be, spontaneity, joint ownership, participatory decision making and concept of mutual aid based on community organic network. These prerequisites are also the norms of the society.

With little exercise of systematic arrangements of locally available know-how, resources and organization in a location specific way, the production can be enhanced in a sustainable manner, without much depending upon external assistances and or interventions. These measures would be locally available and cheap, much cheaper than getting know-how from other countries and international agencies, which would fail more than succeed due to difference in environment and socio-cultural dynamics of the society and the context in which they are developed originally. Such location specific measures can be adopted in farming as well. The farming with these measures is termed as location specific environment adaptive farming. Further, these measures can be practiced and achieved at the farm level, in a small holding scale. But, it is necessary to formulate a set of well-defined policies to achieve effectiveness. This is very essential for sustaining vast numbers of very vulnerable small and marginal farmers, often living at fragile regions at a meagre subsistence level.

In the context of subsistence farming, considering the issues of food securing and eco-conservative resource management nurturing sustainability in the process of development, this issue deserves much more attention than many of the other issues. With this in mind the conceptual framework of location specific environment adaptive farming and its application in the Nepalese farming is being discussed here to conclude this study. This chapter will first examine the main characteristics of the Nepalese farming and the rural setting in which it is conducted, and then their recent dynamisms with implications to subsistence farmers’ activities pertaining to food security and local resource use will be discussed and comprehended together.

From the findings of this research it can be conceptualized that, traditionally, Nepalese farming is location-specific, environment-adaptive in nature and essentially consists of crop, livestock and forestry (inclusive of pastures wherever applicable) productions, each interdependent on the other and well integrated in a bionomically balanced complex (BBC)<sup>1</sup>, each using products and by-products of the other in an efficient way. Crop production supplies fodder for livestock in the forms of leaves, stems, straws, bran, husks and the crops. Livestock in turn supplies labour and manure in the form of dung and other excretions to the crop and forestry productions. Forestry supplies much needed fodder for the livestock and manure and other material inputs needed for crop production. It also lessens the losses in crop production by preventing soil erosions and other natural hazards. All these three components of the farming together supply food, fuel, medicine, clothing, shelter, labour and other needs of the farmers of different sizes, different types and different ethnic groups.

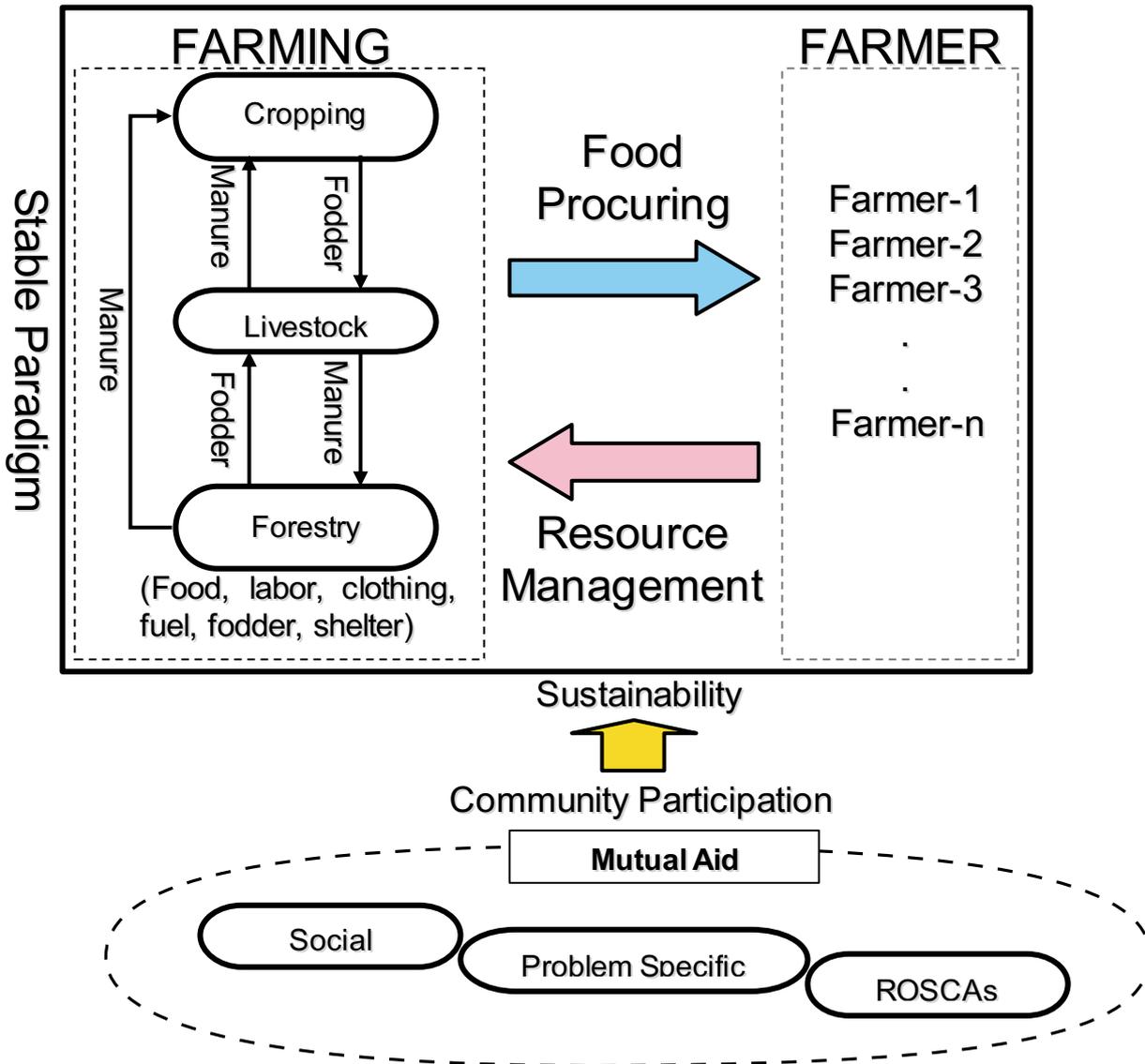
Thus procured goods are consumed directly and or indirectly by exchanging them with various other goods and/or cash, for meeting their welfare needs, i.e., food. They do it in a systematic way by managing the resources available to them locally in a sustainable manner, through community participation, thus conserving the local ecology and retaining the stable BBC. This balanced complex has been maintained traditionally for centuries and even millennia through community participation based on the concept of mutual aid, in the context of existing social network, problem specificity and self-help principals, including different rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs). The construction and maintenance of conduits for farm use, community wells and springs, community roads, community houses, undertaking of community fairs and festivals through the *guthi* systems among the Newars, capital accumulation through *dhikur* system, a kind of indigenous ROSCAs among different ethnic communities, forest uses through *mana-pathi* system among montane people are some of the examples of community participation in sustenance of resource uses and securing of food. This balanced complex as a whole is indeed a stable paradigm and contemporarily subsistence in nature.

In addition, Nepalese montane farming, is generally fragile, more often marginal, and the region as a whole is inaccessible, adding vulnerability to the subsistence farming and the farming community as a whole. The existence of villages with low literacy rates, almost non existence of physical and social facilities, high dependencies on fragile agriculture and low levels of food (cereal) self sufficiency at household levels as revealed by the study villages, in particular the ordinary subsistence villages of each district indicate this fact. This concept of understanding the peasantry and the subsistence farming in Nepal is shown in **Figure 5.1**.

It can also be conceptualized here that the integrated farming that jointly supplies food, fuel, fodder, medicine, clothing, shelter and labour, as mentioned above, although still holds the same BBC entity, is vigorously changing, each components of BBC being decomposed and often segregated from each other, lessening its effectiveness in totality. This dynamism is visibly perceived from 1980s and more pronounced in 1990s. As a whole the contribution from forestry in the food procurement is decreasing and more and more people are unable to keep livestock of meaningful size, thus, over extrapolating the crop production component under tremendous strain. Furthermore, the generation of cash from farming through the introduction of cash crops, production at commercial levels and so on, has become more and more prevalent in addition to food production. This is a trend observed in all the study villages, although in a different degree in its penetra-

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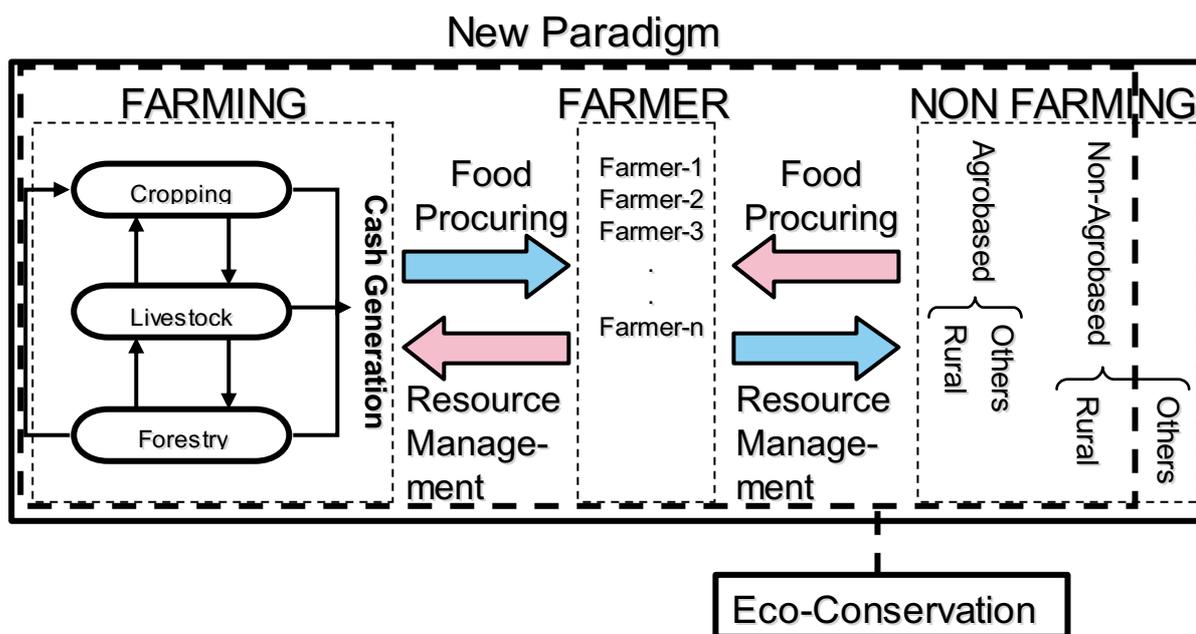
1 Bionomically balanced complex of farming is a balanced farm management in a given rural setting with integration of crop, animal/ fish and forest/ pasture usage and irrigation management, including technology and social organization, and rural nonfarm activities as per need (Maharjan 1997).



**Figure 5.1: Traditional Peasantry and Subsistence Farming in Nepal**

tion in the subsistence farming system. This is done primarily to meet the growing consumption demand due to population growth and needs diversification, influenced by modernization in the broad sense, most of the times accompanied by changes in the value system, generally aggravating strain on eco-conservative resource management and consequently raising questions on sustainability.

Villages in Baitadi, Chitwan and Lalitpur districts comprise of these changes in the farming and consequent rural and farming transitions, each at different degrees and entering into a process of creating a new paradigm and seeking sustainability therein. As such, Bungamati in Lalitpur district is trying to attain sustainability by undertaking vegetable farming. Patan and Melauli in Bataidi and Dalchowki in Lalitpur are trying to use local forest resources in sustainable way through the formation of spontaneous users groups where collective decisions are made in joint management of the forest. Groups are also formed for saving and credit activities, farm products, such as milk marketing and various other activities. This is indeed a new phenomenon adopted and internalized from the development interventions started by NGOs and government during recent decades.



**Figure 5.2: Recent Dynamism in Peasantry and Subsistence Farming in Nepal**

Moreover, farming alone is not able to meet the growing food needs and other demands of the people. In order to fulfill their livelihood demands the farmers turn to nonfarm activities, agrobased and or non-agrobased in nature, within the rural regions and beyond, thus, entering into the process of creating a new paradigm, inducing dynamism in the nonfarming sector, often accompanied by a different set of value systems. In this new paradigm, food is procured from both the sectors of farming and nonfarming and eco-conservative resource management is sought in the newer and extended BBC, with agro and non-agrobased nonfarm activities in the rural region and beyond.

Some of such agrobased nonfarm activities in the rural region and beyond are, food and agro processing and marketing activities, such as, processing of rice, wheat, edible oil, milk, meat and other agricultural products, their marketing and transporting and so on. Other nonfarm activities in the rural region are, physical construction work relating to irrigation, roads, houses, schools and other infrastructures, making of agricultural tools, cottage industry, tailoring, transportation, works relating to teaching and health care, management of school, forest guarding and management, governmental and NGO work, extension and training, managing of teashops and eateries, corner shops, agricultural inputs dispensaries, tourism, and day labouring. All the study villages have these nonfarm activities at various degrees and contribute in supplementing their food and other needs. As a suburban historical village, Bungamati in Lalitpur district has abundant handicraft activities in the village that make use of artisanship of its dwellers and cultural heritage.

Nonfarm activities beyond rural region are many. Some very common ones are, government work, including police and army, small and large entrepreneuring, shop keeping, factory working, transporting, midwifery, day labouring, migratory labouring, and so on. Migration is also observed in all the study villages but is more pronounced in the villages in Baitadi district. The concept of this rural dynamism and new paradigm is visualized in **Figure 5.2**.

Sustainability of this new paradigm is also sought through community participation. But since many of the activities in this paradigm are new to the local societies, development interventions are frequently made in the processes and in the name of community participation by government and NGOs. These interventions

have in due time become incorporated in the newer BBC and essentially play a role in sustenance of resource management and food procuring. They mostly take the forms of cooperatives, associations, (users) groups and introduce new know-how regarding production and consumption, organization and institution building, human building, resource management and eco-conservation. These development interventions would have limited effect in subsistence farming if are not systematized, appraised and internalized in the community levels in its application on the basis of spontaneity, joint ownership, participatory decision making and concept of mutual aid based on community social network, as mentioned above. This is well demonstrated by successful management of community forest users group, well evaluated, in particular, by the villagers in both the study villages in Baitadi district. There are signs of similar trends in the study villages of Chitwan and Lalitpur districts, as well.

Hence, in order to support the activities of subsistence farmers pertaining to food security and sustainable resource management, it is important to re-evaluate local knowledge including social networks and internalise any meaningful external interventions that would enhance food security, resource management and their livelihood, as a whole.

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Peasantry in Nepal: a study on subsistence farmers and their activities  
pertaining to food security. By Keshav Lall Maharajan

Research Center for Regional Geography, Hiroshima University

Kagamiyama 1-2-3,

Higashi-Hiroshima, 739-8522, JAPAN

Tel +81 - (0)824 - 24 - 6659 Fax +81 - (0)824 - 24 - 0320

E-mail : rcrge@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

URL : <http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/rcrg/>

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〒739-8522 東広島市鏡山1丁目2番3号

Tel 0824 - 24 - 6659 Fax 0824 - 24 - 0320

E-mail : rcrge@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

ホームページ : <http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/rcrg/>

印刷所 株式会社ニシキプリント

〒733-0833 広島市西区商工センター7丁目5番33号

Tel 082 - 277 - 6954 Fax 082 - 278 - 6954

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