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IIDS INSIGHTS

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IIDS

Institute for Integrated
Development Studies • 1979

MARCH-APRIL RECAP:

Here's what IIDS was up to



March 7

MOVIE SCREENING

'Bend It Like Beckham' was screened as part of our Women's Day celebration in the presence of IIDS staff, Trainees and Interns.

US TALK SERIES

Dr. Gauchan was engaged in discussions across the United States centered around Structural Reform 2.0, the significance of the Nepali diaspora, and the pivotal role of Nepali Think Tanks in a globalized world.



March



April 5

VISION LAB EXERCISE

IIDS and The World Bank organized an event aimed at setting clear objectives and actionable initiatives for medium-term progress in the country's digital transformation journey.

DISCOURSE ON STATE FINANCING OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTIONS

The session was headed by Mr. Bhojraj Pokharel, Former Chief Election Commissioner and deliberated on the use of public funds to finance elections and political parties within the socioeconomic and political context of Nepal.



March



April 16-19

CGIAR FORESIGHT PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE FORUM

Strengthening relationships, exchanging knowledge, and influencing policy were among the goals.

ECONOMIC REFORM AND UPCOMING BUDGET SESSION

The session highlighted the necessity of Structural Reform 2.0, identify and address the structural challenges that persist beyond external shocks, and pave the way for sustainable growth and resilience.



April 25



April 26

MOVIE ON THE HOUSE (MOTH): THE WAVE

The documentary shed light on the dangers of conformity and the susceptibility of individuals to political manipulation and indoctrination. Following the screening, there was an interactive panel discussion.

THE ROLE OF CAPITALISM AS IT PERTAINED TO THE PANDEMIC: PRE & DURING

Capitalism, for the longest time, has been the dominating world force. It is seen as the driver of economic growth. At the same time, it exists on the foundations of exploitation and different facets of inequality. While the pandemic exposed the flaws of capitalism by demonstrating how it weakens health and social systems, these inadequacies were already put in place. Capitalism pre-pandemic set the stage for a multitude of inefficiencies. The same capitalist structures during the pandemic exacerbated the failures of the system.

PRE-PANDEMIC:

The world food system demonstrates one of the most critical links between capitalism and weakened structural foundations of production. Dominant systems of food production and distribution are large-scale, fossil-fuel driven, and capital intensive. They operate based on cost competitiveness, which leads to a disconnect between production from consumption and relinks them through buying and selling. This marginalizes people in the developing world as producers and consumers as they face a reproduction squeeze, where they are unable to keep up with lowered industrial-agricultural food prices. As a result, they resort to diversifying their commodities for niche markets. This has increased the prevalence of 'wild meats' which has created breeding grounds for new infections and diseases. Furthermore, modern agriculture has weakened the resistance of animals to novel pathogens, causing more Zoonotic diseases to emerge (Akram-Lodhi 2020). This relates to pandemics as diseases like the Coronavirus, Swine Flu, Bird Flu, Ebola, etc. have risen as a result of these production processes, causing global disruptions.

Additionally, the emphasis on the distinction between the Global North and the Global South is also an essential part of capitalism. Because of neoliberal agendas, structural adjustment has systematically dismantled state capacities. This is relevant to the COVID-19 crisis, it made institutional capacities weak. It undermined the reduction of poverty and contributed to widespread hunger, malnutrition, poor housing, and public health crises (Saad-Filho and Ayers 2020).



Furthermore, a very significant component of capitalism is its reliance on women's low and unpaid domestic work to socially reproduce the workforce and people's ability to work (Dattani 2020). There is a link between gender-based violence and capitalist modes of production, as much of what is done by women is deemed invisible. This pertains to COVID-19, as it increased the workload on women, while raising the number of domestic violence cases against them.

Another aspect of neoliberalism that failed as proven by the pandemic is the prevalence of privatized healthcare facilities. For instance, the Macron presidency in France, authoritarian and capitalist, undermined healthcare as a public good, leading to healthcare inequality. This has also led to unequal healthcare outcomes between different groups. The main components of the system were efficiency, innovation, and financial integrity. To generate profit, the goal of the French healthcare system was to increase the number of procedures and cut bed days, a process that favors younger people and those without pre-existing conditions. This emphasis on standardized methods led to preventative healthcare being poorly financed. Adding on to the profit motive, the nation had the highest cost of medicines in Western Europe with Big Pharma being closely tied to medical research establishments with publicly employed scientists. Due to the high investment in private hospitals and clinics, sections of the medical community are more attracted (and encouraged) to private healthcare delivery (Jones 2020). This system left France in a bad state to deal with a global medical crisis.

Trade has always played a large role in the globalization of world economies and hence is important to look at while examining the pre-pandemic era. Successive Australian governments have been supporters of neoliberal trade policies--with no barriers to entry and free trade. They emphasized the principle of comparative advantage to be able to generate low production cost chains for corporations. However, because trade agreements lack transparency and companies hold a certain degree of power over government, increased monopoly rights at the expense of consumers caused strains in low-income countries. In addition, multinational corporations lobbied for rules that gave investors rights to by-pass national courts. This led to the creation of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) which essentially gave corporations the power to sue governments. This caused over 1000 cases worldwide and was rejected by low-income countries of the World Trade Organization (Ranald 2020). This is significant to the context of the pandemic, as when governments have less power to regulate crises due to private corporate ownership of essential services, there is more concentrated ownership of them by other companies.

The health of the labor force is another key component of the failure of this economic system. In Australia, while the pre-COVID labor market was superficially good in health, wage theft and underemployment were crucial challenges (Kaine 2020). Employers were failing to comply with the fair wage act, especially for those who were casual workers, and with temporary visas. Also, there were attacks on labor union movements. Before the pandemic, the role of the government was to be supportive of the capital of high-income earners which played a hand in the cycle of inequality as lower-income individuals couldn't save and invest for the future (Peetz, Colley and Nolan 2020). This created economic insecurity, which was further exacerbated when COVID-19 hit the economy.



DURING PANDEMIC:

One of the most obvious failures of capitalism was the lack of proper healthcare facilities all over the world--ranging from developing countries to the developed ones. Due to this, COVID-19 can be seen as less of an exogenous shock and more of a series of nationally generated policy failures. Indicators of healthcare failures have resulted in its unequal application (Primrose, Chang, and Loeppky 2020). This can be seen by how neoliberal policies left the elderly unaccounted for, and by how the disease has disproportionately affected certain groups of people (poor, racialized, and working-class).



Furthermore, strategies such as the establishment of welfare states, managing lockdowns, and subsidizing businesses that contained the virus in the developed world, did not occur in the Global South. Developing countries lacked (and still lack) basic infrastructures such as electricity, food, water, and primary healthcare. This is due to the variations of social crises that have led to a lack of financial, institutional, and managerial capacities. As a result of these and pre-existing structural adjustment programs, under the pandemic, deaths from secondary effects such as poverty, hunger, violence, and other diseases were estimated to be larger. Given their problems, the Western world was less inclined to aid these nations, which caused another turmoil with crushed commodity prices, reduced Foreign Direct Investments, lack of remittances, and declines in trade and tourism. Additionally, 25 million jobs were estimated to be lost which further enhanced the problems caused by the coronavirus (Saad-Filho and Ayers 2020).

During COVID-19, capitalism led to social relations taking new forms as a result of the intersections of work, class, violence, and mobility. This translated as inequalities in many different spaces, both in the private and public spheres. For instance, school closures led to inequities that disproportionately affected disadvantaged children. This was observed by the class gap in parenting approaches. While rich, educated families tutored their children and gave them educational experiences at home, children of working-class parents were often left to their own devices. Similarly, the exacerbation of inequality was also seen by how workers with disabilities and those with less education were more likely to get dismissed by their employers. This is a problematic characteristic of capitalism, as it perpetuates a cycle of injustice and inequality where vulnerable groups of people are not equipped with facilities to protect themselves from the dangers of such shocks. Adding on to inequalities, the pandemic also proved that people with fewer assets are worse off. This is because people with the capacity to own such assets had high levels of financial literacy, along with the ability to save. On the contrary, people with lower incomes and without assets, did not have the liberty to save (as they did not earn enough), and were not as financially literate (Leigh 2020).

The inadequacy of the system had a gendered component to it as well. On one hand, 'fem-cession' was happening because service and care industries, which were hit the most were largely dominated by women (Leigh 2020). On the other hand, greater demands on women's labor as a result of decreased public resources in addition to the need to generate more income to cover household expenses due to the potential loss of employment amid an economic crisis led to increased domestic workloads. Furthermore, domestic violence cases also drastically increased due to confined spaces and mental pressures that arose from economic insecurity (Dattani 2020).

Adding on to capitalism's flaw in the domestic space, class boundaries between employers and domestic workers exponentially increased (Dattani 2020). This was because unlike normal times, the workers no longer had the agency or ability to get outside of their home (their workspace) to run errands, but to also take a break. Furthermore, this had led to them not having rest days. As a result, they were trapped with heightened workloads which created other forms of exploitation.

Migrant workers, who already had minimal rights, lost any bargaining power and agency concerning their employment. They lost their jobs and were left with minimal financial support. Due to this, they became victims of poor employment practices. As a result, their disposability was considered over their productivity. This highlights a common neoliberal trait--employers having more power during a recession resulting in labor rights being affected. Linking biopolitics to the politics of labor shows how the pandemic exposed a system where some lives were valued more than others. The division between people who could stay at home and earn as opposed to people who were deemed 'essential' created a class divide. Due to this, vulnerable groups were structurally more exposed to health risks, exploitation, and unsafe working conditions to ensure that the other part of the population was safe (Cauwer and Christiaens 2020).

About the Author:



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सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता नागरिकको आवश्यकता कि राज्यलाई बोझ ?

दीर्घकालीन गरिबी निवारण, असमानता घटाउने, समावेशीतालाई प्रोत्साहन गर्ने र समाजका सबैभन्दा कमजोर वर्गहरूलाई सहायता प्रदान गर्ने उद्देश्यले सञ्चालित सरकारी कार्यक्रमहरू सामाजिक सुरक्षा कार्यक्रम अर्न्तगत पर्दछन् । सामाजिक संरक्षणको व्यापक दृष्टिकोणको एउटा पक्ष को रूपमा रहने सामाजिक सुरक्षा कार्यक्रमहरू विशेष गरी उत्पादनशील गतिविधिहरूमा संलग्न हुन नसक्ने व्यक्तिहरूका लागि आम्दानीको पुनः वितरण गरि दैनिक जीवनयापनमा सहजता निर्माण गर्न, सामाजिक जोखिम व्यवस्थापन गर्न, तथा गरिबी निवारण गर्न मुख्य औजारका रूपमा प्रयोग गरिन्छन् ।

सामाजिक सुरक्षाका नीतिगत तथा कानुनी पाटाहरूलाई केलाउदा नेपालको संविधानले निर्देशित गरे बमोजिम आर्थिक रूपले विपन्न, अशक्त र असहाय अवस्थामा रहेका, असहाय एकल महिला, अपाङ्गता भएका व्यक्ति, बालबालिका, आफ्नो हेरचाह आफैं गर्न नसक्ने तथा लोपोन्मुख जातिका नागरिकको सामाजिक सुरक्षाको अधिकार सुनिश्चित गर्ने उद्देश्यका साथ सामाजिक सुरक्षा ऐन, २०७५, सामाजिक सुरक्षा नियमावली, २०७६ सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता बितरण कार्यविधि, २०७७ बनाई लागु गरेको छ ।

संविधान प्रदत्त सामाजिक सुरक्षाको अधिकार सुनिश्चित गर्न धेरै वर्ष देखि सामाजिक सुरक्षा कार्यक्रमहरू सञ्चालनमा रहेका छन् । सामाजिक सुरक्षा कार्यक्रमहरूको निकै लामो बिगत रहेता पनि हाल सम्म करिब एक तिहाइ मानिसहरूमा मात्र पुगेको तथ्य विभिन्न अध्ययनहरूले उजागर गरेका छन् । केहि महिना अगाडि अन्तराष्ट्रिय खाद्य अनुसन्धान संस्थाको सहयोगमा सर्वाङ्गिण विकास अध्ययन केन्द्रले नेपालका ५ प्रदेशका नौ जिल्लाहरूको ८१२ नमुना घरधुरीमा गरेको सर्वेक्षणबाट पनि कुनै एक प्रकारको सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता प्राप्त गर्ने घरधुरीको संख्या करिब ३२ प्रतिशतको हाराहारीमा रहेको देखाएको थियो । दक्षिण एसियाली देशहरूको औसतको तुलनामा नेपालले आफ्नो कूल गार्हस्थ्य उत्पादनको बढी हिस्सा सामाजिक सुरक्षामा खर्च गरेको भए पनि सामाजिक सुरक्षाको प्रभाव क्षेत्रमा उल्लेखनिय बिस्तार गर्न सकेको छैन ।

हाल नेपालमा सामाजिक सुरक्षाका कार्यक्रमहरू छरिएर रहेका छन् । योजना आयोगको तथ्यांकका आधारमा ३० सामाजिक सुरक्षा तथा संरक्षणका कार्यक्रमहरू अर्न्तगत विभिन्न ७६ परियोजनाहरू १३ मन्त्रालय मार्फत संचालनमा रहेका छन् । यसरी कार्यक्रमहरू छरिएर रहेकोले गर्दा ठोस उपलब्धि हासिल नहुनुका साथै प्रभावकारीता माथि पनि बारम्बार प्रश्न उठ्ने गरेको छ । जनसांख्यिक बनोट हेर्दा पनि नेपाली समाज बुढ्यौली समाजको बाटोमा अग्रसर भएको देखिन्छ । एकातर्फ हचुवाका भरमा सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता वृद्धि गर्दै जाने र अर्को तर्फ लाभार्थीको संख्या बढ्दै जादा नेपालको अर्थतन्त्रमा थप चाप पर्ने देखिन्छ ।



विगतका वर्षहरूमा सरकारी विनियोजनमा देखिएको उल्लेख्य वृद्धिलाई ध्यानमा राख्दा यी कार्यक्रमहरूको वित्तीय दिगोपनको सन्दर्भमा महत्त्वपूर्ण चिन्ता रहेको छ । अर्थ मन्त्रालयबाट प्राप्त तथ्यांक का आधारमा सामाजिक सुरक्षा बजेट र मुलुकको कूल गार्हस्थ्य उत्पादन (आधारभूत मूल्य)को अनुपात आ व २०७४/७५ मा ३.०३ प्रतिशत रहेकोमा आ व २०७९/८० मा ११.३४ प्रतिशत पुगेको छ । अझै आर्थिक रुपले विपन्न नागरिकहरूको सामाजिक सुरक्षाको व्यवस्था गर्ने प्रावधान अहिलेसम्म कार्यान्वयन हुन सकेको छैन । सामाजिक सुरक्षा ऐन २०७५मा उल्लिखित केही थप कार्यक्रमहरू सरकारले कार्यान्वयन गर्न बाँकी नै छ । २०३० सम्म दिगो विकास लक्ष्यहरू हासिल गर्नका लागि यस्ता कार्यक्रमहरूलाई समावेश गर्दा सामाजिक सुरक्षा बजेट अनिवार्य रूपमा बढ्नेछ ।

सामाजिक सुरक्षा कार्यक्रमहरूको खर्चको ढाँचामा गैर-एकरूपता देखिन्छ । आ व २०५१/५२ मा मासिक रु १०० प्रदान गर्ने गरि सुरुवात गरिएको ज्येष्ठ नागरिक भत्ता आ व २०६५/६६ मा रु ५०० आ व २०७०/७१ मा रु १००० आ व २०७३/७४ मा रु २००० आ व २०७७/७८ मा रु ३००० हुदै आ व २०७८/७९ बाट मासिक रु ४००० पुगेको छ । गृह मन्त्रालयको पछिल्लो आ व को तथ्यांकका आधारमा कुल सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ताको करिब ७७ प्रतिशत रकम (कुल सामाजिक सुरक्षाका लाभार्थीको करिब ५३ प्रतिशत लाभार्थी रहेको) ज्येष्ठ नागरिक भत्तामा खर्च भएको छ । उल्लेखित तथ्यांकबाट ज्येष्ठ नागरिक भत्तामा अत्याधिक ध्यान केन्द्रित गरेको देखिन्छ । जबकि कुल सामाजिक सुरक्षाका लाभार्थी को करिब ३२ प्रतिशत लाभार्थी रहेका बालपोषण भत्तामा (जम्मा ५३२ प्रति महिना प्रतिव्यक्ति) लगभग ६ प्रतिशतमात्र खर्च गरेबाट देशका भविष्यका रुपमा हेरिने बालबालिकाहरूलाई असमान सामाजिक सुरक्षा प्रणालीले नजरअन्दाज गरेको देखिन्छ । उक्त तथ्यलाई विश्व बैंक तथा यूनिसेफ लगायतका दातृ निकायहरूको सामाजिक सुरक्षा सम्बन्धि प्रतिवेदनमा पनि महत्त्वका साथ उठान गरेको पाइन्छ ।



यी र यस्ता विषयबस्तुमा व्यापक छलफल र बहस नभएका पनि होइनन् । छापाका विविध माध्यमहरू तथा सामाजिक सञ्जालमा पनि बेला बेलामा सामाजिक सुरक्षाका विषयबस्तुले माहोल तताउने काम गरेका छन् । यद्यपी, सामाजिक सञ्जालमा सक्रिय रहेका मानिसको संख्या, आयात भएका मोबाइल सेटहरूको संख्या, सिम प्रयोग गर्ने मानिसको संख्यालाई मात्र हेरेर सुचना प्रविधिको विकास भएको मान्नु हतारो हुन सक्छ । राज्यको प्रणाली नै कमजोर सुचना प्रणालीमा निर्भर हाम्रो जस्तो मुलुकमा सामाजिक सुरक्षाका क्षेत्रमा अझ चुनौतीपूर्ण देखिन्छ । विभिन्न सामाजिक सुरक्षाका लाभग्राहीहरूको तथ्यांक एकै ठाँउमा नभएको कारणले गर्दा कति घरधुरीले दोहोरो लाभ पाईरहेका छन् र कति घरधुरी यस्ता कार्यक्रमका लाभ भन्दा बाहिरै छन् एकिन तथ्यांक छैन ।

सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ताको जीवनयापनमा सहयोग पुर्याइरहेको तथ्यलाई नकार्न सकिदैन। विभिन्न मुलुकहरुमा भएका अध्ययनहरुले सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता र खाद्य सुरक्षा बिच अन्योन्याश्रित सम्बन्ध रहेको उजागर गरेका छन्। उक्त तथ्यको भाव सँग नेपालको सामाजिक सुरक्षा प्रणाली एकाकार नहुने प्रश्न नै रहन्छ। तथापि, सन् २०१७ मा गरिएको एक अध्ययनले नेपालजस्ता देशहरुले नागरिकको आवश्यकता पूरा गर्न, राज्यमा समावेशीता प्रदर्शन गर्न मात्र नभई नगद हस्तान्तरण विशेष गरी सामाजिक सुरक्षाका लाभार्थीलाई ध्यानमा राखि भोट बैंक बढाउन पनि प्रयोग गर्ने गरेको देखाएको छ। विभिन्न समयमा चुनाव निकट रहेको अवस्थामा सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्तामा हुने वृद्धिले यसलाई थप प्रमाणित गर्दछ।

सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ताको प्रभावकारिता मापनका लागि कति प्रतिशत हिस्सा कुन वर्ग लाई गइरहेको छ एकिन गर्न गाह्रो छ। यी कार्यक्रमहरूसँग जोडिएका घरपरिवारहरुको एकीकृत डाटाबेस नभएका कारण सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता वितरण आर्थिक रुपले विपन्न वा गरिबी लक्षित छन् या छैनन् यो पनि रहस्यको गर्भ मै छ। नेपालमा सञ्चालनमा रहेको एकमात्र गरिबी-लक्षित कार्यक्रम प्रधानमन्त्री रोजगार कार्यक्रम हो। यद्यपि यो धेरै सानो स्तरमा सञ्चालनमा रहेकोले धेरै मानिसहरुलाई समेट्दैन र गरीबि निवारणमा तात्त्विक फरक पार्दैन।



नेपालको संविधानले सामाजिक सुरक्षा सम्बन्धि केहि प्रावधानहरु प्रदेश र स्थानीय सरकारलाई सुम्पिएको छ। तर हाल सम्म एकृकित अभिलेख राख्ने प्रणाली अभावका कारण यस्ता कार्यक्रमहरुको बारेमा जानकारी पाउन मुस्किल पर्छ। यसका साथै नेपालको सन्दर्भमा तीन तहका सरकारहरुबीच सामाजिक सुरक्षाको अभाव, न्यून संस्थागत क्षमता र अल्पविकसित कानुनी र नीतिगत संरचना प्रभावकारी सामाजिक सुरक्षा प्रबर्द्धनका बाधकका रुपमा रहेका छन्।

जिज्ञाशा पैदा हुन सक्छ, प्रश्नै प्रश्नबाट घेरिएका सामाजिक सुरक्षा भक्ता के राज्यको बोझ मात्र हो त ? पक्कै पनि हैन यदी सामाजिक सुरक्षा भक्तालाई राज्यको बोझका रूपमा मात्र हेरियो भने त्यो अनुचित हुन्छ । राज्यको स्थापना नै नागरिक हितका लागि भएकोले गर्दा राज्यको हरेक नागरिकका उपर उत्तरदायित्व छ । अझ विशेष गरी विकासको मुलप्रवाहबाट पछाडी पारेका वा पारिएका वर्ग, समूदाय, लिङ्ग प्रति राज्यको थप जिम्मेबारी हुन्छ । आर्थिक रुपले विपन्न, महिला, अपांगता भएका व्यक्तिहरु, बालबालिका र बृद्धबृद्धा प्रति राज्यको थप करुणा र सहयोगको आवश्यकता पर्दछ ।

सामाजिक सुरक्षाको निर्विवाद महत्वलाई स्वीकार गर्दै यसलाई रणनीतिक रूपमा सम्बोधन गर्न राज्यको आफ्नो आयश्रोत र राजस्व सृजना गर्ने क्षमतासँग मिलाएर नीतिहरूको निर्माण तथा परिमार्जन गर्नुपर्दछ । एकिकृत तथ्यांक संकलन तथा भण्डारणका लागि विभिन्न पात्रहरु र कार्यक्रमहरूबीचको समन्वयमा सुधार गर्नु पर्दछ । यसका साथै यथेष्ट अध्ययन अनुसन्धानको माध्यमबाट कार्यक्रमहरूको प्रभावकारिता मापन गरि समयानुल परिमार्जन गर्दै सम्भावित लाभार्थिको परिभाषा पुनः परिभाषित गर्नु पर्दछ । समग्रमा सामाजिक सुरक्षा तथा वित्तिय व्यवस्थाको दिगोपना सुनिश्चित गर्दै अर्थतन्त्रमा पर्ने अनावश्यक चाप न्युनिकरणका लागि अतिरिक्त स्रोतहरूको उपयोग र आर्थिक वर्गिकरणमा आधारित सामाजिक सुरक्षाको कार्यान्वयन अपरिहार्य देखिन्छ ।

About the Author:



Adhikari is a researcher at IIDS, holding an M.Phil in Economics from Tribhuvan University. Working within the IFPRI unit at IIDS, he is actively involved in research focusing on understanding the connections between economic systems, agriculture, and environmental sustainability to form evidence-based policies. He is dedicated to driving positive change through his research while also contributing insights through his publications. His commitment to advancing knowledge and promoting sustainable development underscores his passion for leveraging economics for social progress.

Madan Adhikari

What constitutes a right decision? This perennial quandary plunges us into a labyrinth of uncertainty, where clarity eludes us amidst the intricacies and paradoxes of existence. As I ponder this timeless inquiry, I embark on an odyssey of introspection, delving into the depths of subjectivity.

In our relentless pursuit of optimal choices, we often succumb to the allure of assessing outcomes – be it a coveted promotion or a fatter paycheck – tangible benchmarks of triumph. Yet, amidst the quest for "betterment," I'm reminded of the inherent subjectivity veiling this notion. Can genuine fulfillment be quantified by external conquests, or does it dwell within the recesses of our individual experiences?

Maslow's pyramid of needs offers a glimpse into the labyrinthine motivations of humanity, with self-actualization standing as the zenith of fulfillment. However, as I mull over this, I'm struck by the profoundly personal trajectory toward self-realization. Can one truly guide another's path, or is this odyssey best undertaken in solitude? In our search for guidance, we often turn to sage advice from specialists – be they physicians, financial pundits, or career mentors – each professing expertise in their domain. Yet, amidst the nebulous definition of "improvement" itself, who truly wields the key to genuine betterment?

Some seek solace in religious doctrines, hoping to glean direction in their quest for sound decisions. Across diverse faiths, moral codes delineate the boundaries of right and wrong, virtue and vice, prescribing conduct and creed. However, given the deeply intimate nature of the journey toward fulfillment, can such precepts genuinely illuminate one's path? Is religious counsel indispensable for discerning right from wrong, or does it merely represent a hegemonic force dictating societal norms?

In a world rife with disparity and injustice, the pursuit of self-fulfillment may appear a privilege reserved for the fortunate few. Yet, I ponder: could those confronting adversity unearth deeper fulfillment than their privileged counterparts? Does genuine contentment transcend material privilege?

This discourse extends beyond individual aspirations, intertwining with broader socio-political narratives. From the ideological clashes of the Cold War era to contemporary economic debates, the pursuit of a "better life" persists as a central motif. Yet, can such aspirations be objectively gauged, or do they reside within the realm of subjective experience? While tangible progress may be quantifiable through myriad metrics, the enigmatic notion of a "better life" defies universal consensus. Despite strides in measurable benchmarks, humanity's quest for an ideal socio-political paradigm persists.



If individuals are indeed best suited to chart their course, given the subjective nature of fulfillment, then perhaps Hayek's contention – that knowledge exists not in concentrated form, but as disparate fragments of incomplete and often contradictory wisdom possessed by individuals – holds merit.

As I ponder the broader socio-political tapestry, I confront existential queries about humanity's place in the cosmos. Amidst the vast cosmos, does the destiny of our species bear significance? Throughout Earth's annals, myriad species have flourished and faded, underscoring life's ephemeral essence. From primordial microbes to the pantheon of biodiversity, the intricate ballet of evolution underscores life's resilience amidst its fragility. It's a sobering contemplation, one that implores us to transcend our anthropocentric hubris.

Ultimately, this philosophical voyage isn't about invalidating noble causes or movements; rather, it's an entreaty to embrace decision-making's intricacies with humility and introspection. As we navigate life's convoluted pathways, let us not be solely swayed by external yardsticks of success, but by the pursuit of significance and fulfillment in an ever-evolving world.

About the Author:



Aaryan Rijal

Rijal is a Research Assistant at the Center for Economic Policy. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Dickinson College, USA. He graduated with a major in Quantitative Economics and a minor in Mathematics. His academic interests revolve around Development Economics, Macroeconomics, Econometrics, and International Political Economy.

NAVIGATING CLIMATE CRISIS: NEPAL'S STRUGGLE, IMPACT, AND ROADMAP TO RESILIENCE

Climate change has become one of the world's most urgent environmental issues. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has determined that the average surface temperature of the Earth has risen by 0.75 degrees Celsius over the last century. Notably, this rate of increase has accelerated significantly since 1995. Based on projected greenhouse gas emissions, it is anticipated that global temperatures may increase by an extra 2 to 5 degrees Celsius, or perhaps even more, by the year 2100 (Dervis, 2007). Melting glacial, greenhouse effect, forest fires, precipitation patterns, desertification, biodiversity loss and sea level rise are some of the consequences of it (Hamza et al., 2020).

According to the statistics from 1975 to 2005, Nepal has heated up every decade by roughly 0.6 degrees Celsius which is approximately three times more than the average of the world. (MoFE, 2019). Nepal is among the poorest emerging economies, with 20.27% population living in extreme poverty (NPHC, 2019). It is extremely sensitive to climate change and has already undergone quicker fluctuations in temperature and atmospheric conditions than the world average (USAID, 2017).

Climate change presents a significant global challenge, particularly affecting poorer nations like Nepal (GON, 2019). The topography of Nepal can be divided into three ecological regions the Himalaya, Mid-hills, and the low-lying Terai. The tremendously varied, and complicated climate is caused by the contrasting topography and regional weather patterns of the country (Sapkota and Rijal, 2016). The surging influence of the climate will have a dramatic impact on marginalized groups, the environment, economic security, and important industries such as energy, food cultivation, and water in the country (MoFE, 2019).

Unforeseen circumstances caused by climate change, such as landslides, flash flooding, wildfires, and droughts, have led to the destruction of life, assets, and wellbeing of many people along with substantial damage to numerous climate-sensitive industries and the nation's economy. As indicated in the climate vulnerability and risk assessment study, out of 77 districts, 50 were highly susceptible to the consequences of climate change (DCA, 2021). Moreover, climate change leads to increased food insecurity, hunger, water pollution, and water-borne infections, with studies suggesting a higher likelihood of spreading water-borne illnesses due to droughts and floods (Lucien, 2021; World Bank & ADB, 2021).

However, Climate change is more than just an environmental issue; it is also a social concern. Climate change exerts a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, with women and indigenous populations bearing the brunt of its cascading consequences, due to entrenched inequality and reliance on natural resources for livelihoods in remote and vulnerable areas they often become the victim of natural calamities (World Bank, 2022). The destruction caused due to global warming tends to imperil many of the previously obtained progressive achievements of the country and halts in achieving the country's development goals (DCA, 2021).

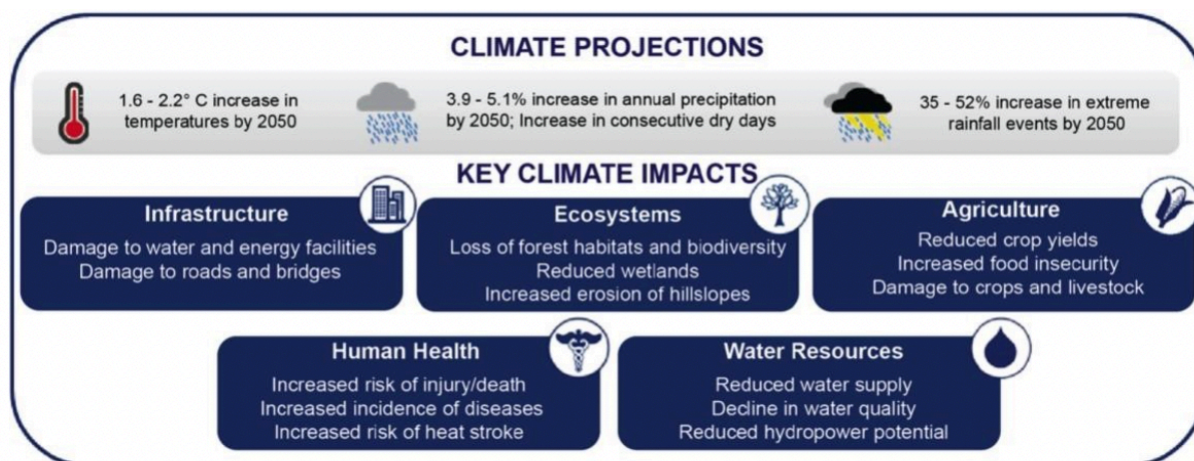


Figure: Climate projections and its impact on different sectors. Source: USAID. (2017).

In light of the challenges faced by small developing nations like Nepal in combating climate change, it is evident that they bear a disproportionate burden despite their minimal contribution to global emissions. This burden is exacerbated by lack of transparency and widespread corruption leading to the misallocation of funds intended for climate change mitigation efforts. Political conflict and weak governance further hinder progress towards achieving climate targets in Nepal.

Moreover, national efforts to enhance climate resilience in socioeconomic sectors encounter significant obstacles due to limited knowledge, empirical evidence, and documentation regarding the influence of climate science on various aspects of development. Additionally, the utilization of climate modeling to predict potential impacts is constrained.

In conclusion, addressing climate change in Nepal requires a multifaceted approach that spans technological, managerial, and institutional dimensions. It is crucial to ensure the availability of technological and managerial opportunities at both regional and national levels to effectively deal with the effects of climate change.

Furthermore, integrating climate crisis considerations into policy reforms, regulations, and development programs is essential for fostering environmentally friendly socio-economic progress. Strengthening the capacity of public bodies, policymakers, the business sector, NGOs, and civil society organizations is imperative for successful climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. Finally, developing a robust institutional framework with adequate human and financial resources is critical for overcoming climate-related challenges and ensuring a sustainable future for Nepal.

About the Author:



Bibhuti Thapa

Thapa is a Trainee at the Center for Sustainability. She holds an interdisciplinary MSc degree in Development and Sustainability from the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Thailand and a BSc Honors in Environmental Science from NAMI College, affiliated with the University of Northampton. She is passionate about sustainable development, research, and social innovation.

My family and I embarked on a journey to visit my sister in Australia and soak up the Aussie vibes from Sydney to Adelaide and everywhere in between. Our itinerary was diverse, featuring a 10-day road trip that took us from Canberra to Adelaide, then to Melbourne, and finally back to Sydney. When the family chaos became too much to handle (love you, fam!), I embarked on solo day trips that were equal parts exhilarating and enlightening. And, oh, the cousins! We met a plethora of Aussie relatives. It was like a family reunion on steroids, with beer and barbeque in the backyard. Now that I've returned home, I find myself reflecting on my observations, which are purely based on my cross-sectional perspective across cities, people, and connections I made in over a month. This article is only the essence of what I've absorbed and internalized from my journey.

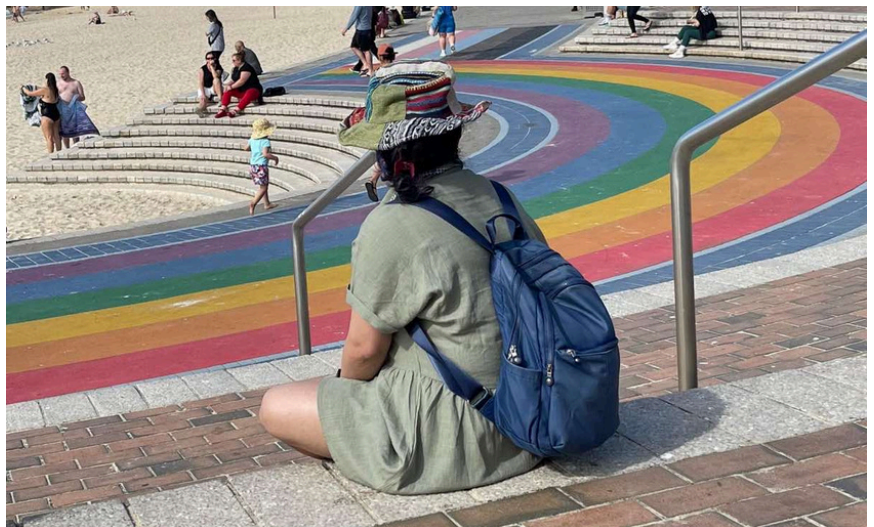
THE GREAT ROAD TRIP:

I can gladly say that we covered more ground than a herd of migrating emus. And let me tell you, the sights of the road trip weren't that great until the Great Ocean Drive. We made sure to pause at every jetty, apostles, and beach along the way because a road trip isn't complete until we've snapped a billion photos, recorded TikToks, maybe even hopped on a few video calls, filmed some vlogs, shed a tear or two, relieved ourselves a bit, indulged in some drinks, and of course, snacked to our heart's content. The sights of the coastal drive were amazing. I can confirm that I saw at least two dozen marsupial sign boards in the inland drive and witnessed none of them! It's understandable why we missed out on seeing the iconic Australian wildlife considering we were on the road only during the day and the roos are supposedly spotted at dawn or dusk.

ADVENTURES IN THE URBAN JUNGLE:

The graffiti lanes in Melbourne represented a profound sense of liberation to me. The changing weekly artwork on the walls reflected the limitless creativity and individuality of the city dwellers. Apart from these designated graffiti zones, I couldn't overlook graffiti in unexpected locations such as tunnels, train tracks, ceilings, and fences adjacent to the tracks. While strategically chosen to ensure visibility, particularly for commuters on trains, opting for such locations may not be the wisest thing to do, or so a non-artistic person like myself would think.

The most exotic experience for me was undoubtedly trying a camel burger and savoring the cheesy sweet dessert called Kanafa at the Ramadan festival in Lakemba. On the other hand, the most bizarre moment occurred during my solo trip to The Rocks when I found myself pretending to enjoy a bitter Negroni, completely aware of what I had ordered, and still did it because, well, YOLO.



REFLECTIONS AND REVELATIONS:

It's impossible not to be impressed by the genuine warmth and kindness that radiate from Australians. Strangers readily offer a helping hand and engage in friendly conversations without hesitation. Navigating and traveling alone in Australia is remarkably easier due to the nature of its people. Their courtesy goes above and beyond, reflecting a societal mindfulness that is both inspiring and humbling. The efficiency of their systems and the courtesy in their culture redefine how smoothly society can function. Queues flow seamlessly, bureaucracy is streamlined, and interactions are marked by a level of consideration that goes beyond mere politeness. In Australia, taking the time to appreciate others isn't just a nicety—it's a way of life.

I think the kindness and niceness of Australians are deeply rooted in the happiness they experience. With a smooth, efficient system and few daily disruptions, there's less stress over minor inconveniences. This likely contributes to their considerate nature towards others. Experiencing the excellent quality of public services in Australia, especially the public transportation, made me momentarily forget the significant contributions Australians make through taxes and the hefty fines imposed for traffic violations.

And as for their penchant for photography, let me tell you—strangers in Australia can capture better shots than anyone you know! They take the time to capture your best shot, offering to retake if needed, and kindly checking if you're satisfied with their photography.

During my countless trips to Westfield and evening strolls in the parks, I found solace in bonding with locals, whether it be over our mutual appreciation for my dyed hair or Easter sales. In these interactions, I felt safe and embraced a newfound perspective on empathy. I'm also grateful that the culture of leaving home at 18 isn't that common in Australia, as it gave me the opportunity to reconnect with my cousins. I recognize the privilege I have in being able to travel to different cities and be warmly welcomed by so many people.

So here's to the bitter Negroni, the kangaroo encounters yet to come, the cousins I reconnected with, and the endless road ahead. Until next time, Australia—cheers!

About the Author:



Dilasha Joshi

Joshi is a Sr. Program and Research Assistant at the Center for Sustainability. She graduated from the Asian University of Technology with a degree in Development and Sustainability. She has a Bachelor of Technology in Environmental Engineering from Kathmandu University, and has previously worked in the worked in education. She aspires to work in transformative education, youth empowerment and policy making.