
habitat himalaya[®]

A RESOURCES HIMALAYA FACTFILE * VOLUME X NUMBER I * 2003

A BRAVE NEW STEP TWENTY YEARS AFTER

Surya Bahadur Pandey
Kathmandu, Nepal

Background

Nepal has witnessed several involuntary resettlement with large spatial development which include hydropower, irrigation, and protected areas. While developing a network of protected areas, Chitwan, Koshi Tappu, Rara, Bardia, Suklaphanta and Shivapuri have had outstanding experience on resettlement and rehabilitation. The intent of this document is to explore the roots and vagaries of resettlement through Nepal's history to determine why it took 20 years to extend the Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (RSWR) in Kanchanpur District.

The Reserve (area: 305 km²), initially a hunting reserve since 1969, was gazetted (area: 155 km²) in 1976. Later, it was proposed for the 150 km² extension. The extension was primarily targeted towards the long-term survival of the endangered species such as the swamp deer, tiger and elephant. The 1981 initiative began with the Royal directives which explicitly suggest that all displaced household will be given land for land as a form of compensation; compensated land would be arable; and social, cultural composition of households and settlements will be maintained in resettled areas.

Kanchanpur, The land of Free

Nepal had conceded some of its territory to the British India in 1815 (Hunter, 1896). The British rulers in India, restored it back to Nepal in 1860, for assisting them to quell the Great Mutiny of India in 1857. This area, widely known as 'Naya Muluk', also referred as 'Audh Tarai' by the British Rulers then in India (Landon, 1928), would be recognized later as Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur Districts (Regmi, 1988).

Earlier, Kanchanpur was so much infested with malaria, extension of cultivated area was almost impossible. As the state needed more funds in the form of land tax, criminals crossing over Indian territory, were allowed to settle freely to create settlements and cultivate more areas (Regmi, 1978). Till that time, majority of populace belonged to the indigenous Rana Tharus. Later, Dangoura Tharus from Dang were introduced as farm labourers because they were largely resistant to malaria. As land tenure changed, additional labourers from Indian territories, also arrived later.

Nepal's resettlement history is influenced by three large spatial events: 1) In early 1960s, Nepalis residing in Burma (Myanmar) returned back including thousands of Nepalis and ex-army families from the northeast India; 2) Exodus of hill people in the western Terai took place after the 1954 flood, and incidence of poverty with crop failures, and 3) Land Reform program which brought thousands of migrant labourers from India who resided in Nepal since then (Kansakar, 1979). With the establishment of Nepal Resettlement Company (NRC) in 1963, Nawalpur resettlement in 1964, was its first and the largest was in Kanchanpur District in 1971 (Elder et al. 1976). NRC settled thousands of families from Jhapa, Bhojpur, Chitwan, Dhading and Nawalparasi Districts, in 6,800 ha of forest in Kanchanpur. Nearly 367 ha of forest also, was cut adjacent to the Indian territories where 135 ex-army families were settled. Recently, 466 ha of forest was allocated to the families who were once bonded labourers (*Kamaiya*). Much of the forest which covered 97% of the District (Regmi, 1988) was lost to settlements.

In 1961, Kanchanpur was estimated with a population of 37,730 because Both Kailali and Kanchanpur were one district. With 6.02% growth, the population reached to 68,863 in 1972 and 377,899 in 2000 (Fig. 1). Contribution to population growth from settlers ranged from 4.5 – 11.8% in the last 30 years (KDDC, 2002). Thus, Kanchanpur with the lowest population of all Terai districts, became a major migrant center with highest population growth rate.

The Perils of Resettlement

Of present forest in Kanchanpur, 305 km² is in the RSWR, and 577 km² contain three forest types: 1) sal forest, 2) deciduous riverain forest, and 3) mixed hardwood forest. Of these, eleven forest blocks of 560.33 km², is classified into: production forest, community forest, leasehold forest, protected forest and religious forest. In addition, there are 29 forest patches, totalling 17 km².

Information on existing forest cover in Kanchanpur, could be conflicting when two sources are examined. District Forest Working Scheme (DFWS) (Khadka, 2000) suggests forests cover as much as 577 km² and Forest Research and Survey Center (FORSEC/FINNIDA, 1994) gives forest

cover as 386 km² in 1994, with second highest forest cover loss in Terai districts (Fig. 2). Perhaps such discretion between forest land and forest cover originates from forest encroachment and degradation. FORSEC is correct about existing forest cover and the DFWS is also fitting in terms of forest area under the District Forest Office. Moreover, 8,250 landless families and 8,963 illegally settled families, who require land settlement in Kanchanpur today (KDDC, 2002), may take more forest.

Resettlement Status in RSWR Extension Area

Almost all the 17 settlements in the extension area, did not have a long history of settlement. The land records in

Wounded at Birth

The magnitude of problems connected with the resettlement, had flared for three reasons: 1) Poor and incorrect record keeping of all households; 2) Delayed relocation of households; and 3) Rapid encroachment in the resettlement sites. In addition, misuse of funds and corruption also contributed to its complexity. The 1st Resettlement Commission in mid 1980, referred as "Forest Sector Strengthening Committee", had two complementary tasks: 1) Address deforestation in the district; and 2) Extend area for the RSWR. Along with a wide ranging administrative powers and responsibilities, a special court was constituted under the commission

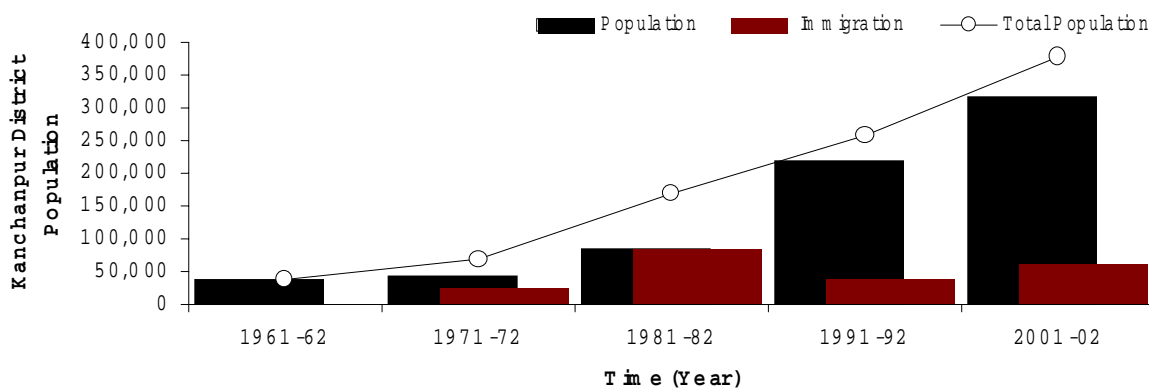


Figure 1. Population growth in Kanchanpur District.

the District Revenue Office suggest that most of them were settled after 1950s (Bhattarai, 2001) except a few zamindari holdings. As for the ethnicity and culture, only Padau village had both the Rana and Dangoura Tharus. Rest were migrants from the far western hill region (Bhattarai, 2001). The occupants numbered about 2,249 households who were categorized into four classes for land compensation: 1) 1,026 had landownership; 2) 100 households had registered land without ownership; 3) 954 households were confirmed as encroachers; and 4) 169 households were under enquiry. The Government had agreed in principle to allocate 2,108 ha of forest land and released 2,070 ha, so far.

(Bhattarai, 2001). But, it bogged down in the large-scale resettlement of Kailali and Kanchanpur Districts. The 2nd Commission constituted in mid 1981, acquired 217 ha of forest land and clear-felled, but resettled none. The 3rd Commission in early 1986, has no significant record to show except discrepancy.

The 4th and 5th Commissions (late 1987 – mid 1988), had a forest extension office, which provided list of households in the extension area, and started allocating land. This list would be the only basis for land compensation later. However, the survey did not record the name of all the members of each household nor their sex and age.

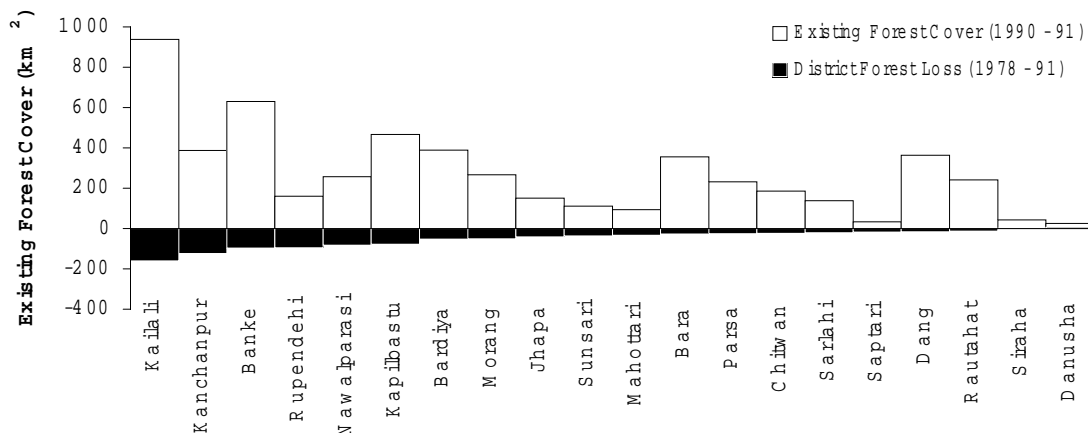


Figure 2. Forest loss in Nepal's Terai districts (1978 - 91).

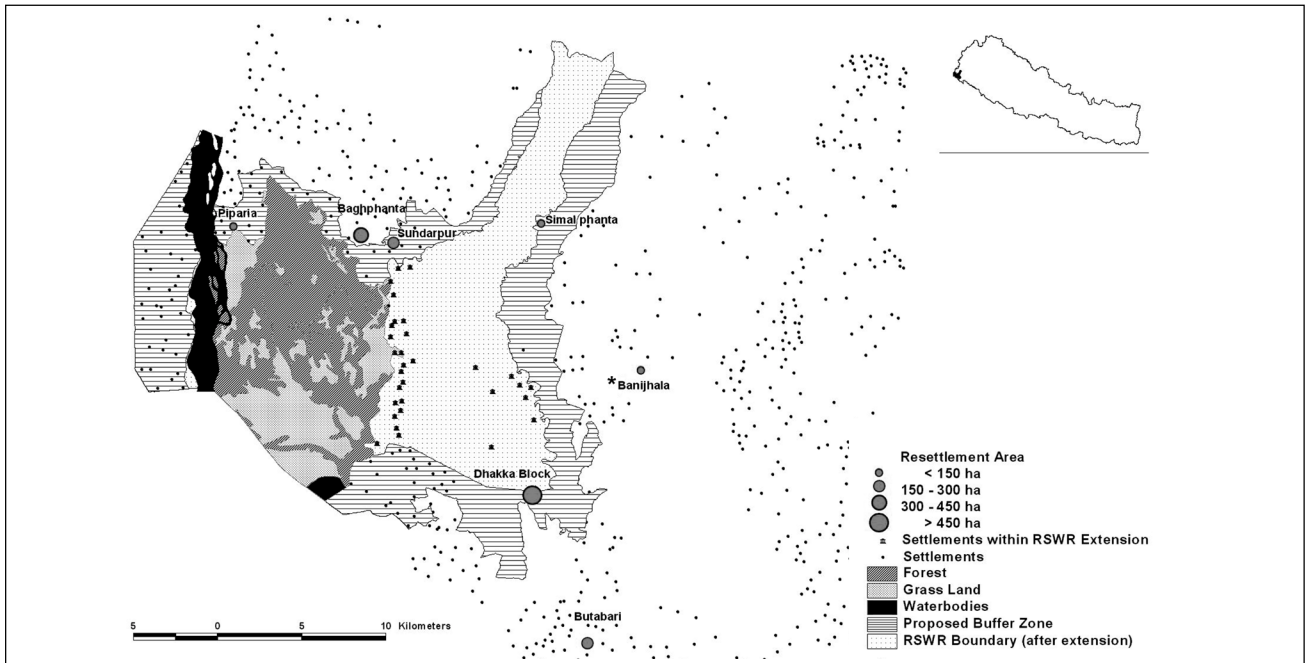


Figure 3. RSWR with its northeast extension showing settlements and proposed buffer zone.

Therefore, the survey had created complexity as it could not be used to ascertain whether the person claiming land in the resettlement area constituted a separate family or a part of the old family (Bhattarai, 2001).

The multiparty democracy engulfed the next five Commissions (6th - 10th between mid 1992 - 1995) which were much dominated with party politics. The worst happened after the 11th Commission in mid 1996, when politicians headed the rest of the Commissions (11th - 18th). All Commissions short-lived because of frequent change of governments. As a result, eight dissolution and 9 reconstitution of Commissions occurred in six years.

Political Parade and Voteground

Even after 20 years and 18 Commissions, RSWR resettlement was not resolved. These Commissions distributed land ownership certificates in those areas which were unauthorized. They allocated land which were occupied by encroachers. Knowing these, families who were compensated, did not show any willingness to move into resettled areas. In addition, certain released area for resettlement such as Dhakka, Butawari and Simalphapta had encroachers who had verification from the land distribution committee long before the extension was announced. The verdict is still awaited from the Supreme Court on 297 households. Furthermore, the 13th, 15th and 18th Commissions distributed 136 ha from Banijhala Resettlement Area, to unlisted households and this case is under the Supreme Court investigation (Table 1*). The commission members went on inflating the number of settlers to award land to party loyalists, and their relatives (Table 2). The encroachers were further encouraged by the leaders of political parties during general elections that

the land occupied by them would be registered in their name. Thus, resettlement was more aggravated when the landless problem was misused to gain electoral votes by political leaders. The Commissions denied land rights to many but distributed 0.17 - 0.68 ha to their known-ones. For example, land distribution records show that one household was compensated 15 times.

One Big Push

In October, 2001, the Reserve management started motivating compensated families to move out from the extension area. For any political resistance, the management were assisted with elephants and army personnel. In many cases, families were helped by the Reserve to transport their possession and building materials. All these activities were completed by May, 2002, totalling some eight months. This was done during the state of emergency when the Reserve personnel were able to isolate in-migration in the extension area and associated politics. Of the 2,249 households, 2,114 were relocated from the extension area. Of compensated households, even each of the 954 households who were confirmed encroachers, were compensated with 0.34 ha (10 kattha) land. The Reserve has no settlements now.

Now, there are three categories of households who need to be resettled: 1) 135 households under category four, of the extension area, 2) 297 households who had occupied the resettled land in Sundarpur/Bandarpur long before the extension, and 3) 6 households of occupational caste who were evicted from the entrance of the Reserve. If all 438 households are to be compensated, 75 ha is required against 194 ha of remaining land (Table 1). This part will resolve RSWR resettlement issues for good.

Resettlement Location	Land Released	Land Compensated	Non Agriculture Land	Remaining Land
Dhakka Block	642.69	574.43	48.15	20.11
Simalphanta	108.80	84.66	0.00	24.14
Butawari	284.24	272.16	8.02	4.06
Baghphanta	565.76	416.23	143.07	6.46
Piparia	115.60	105.58	9.86	0.16
Sundarpur/Bandarapur	217.60	158.44	56.40	2.76
Banijhala	136.00	* 136.00	0.00	* 136.00
Total	2,070.69	1,747.49	265.49	193.69

Table 1. Status of resettlement areas (ha) (* Banijhala distribution was unauthorised).

Location	4 th Commission	15 th Commission
Rauteli Bichawa	500	1,338
Dekhatbhuli	138	473
Pipladi	465	1,586
Jhalari	96	-
Total Household	1,199 (remaining of 2,249)	3,397

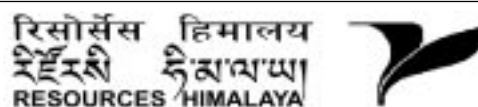
Table 2. Comparison of households by two different commissions.

Once, Nepal's resettlement had some potential for generating social equity through economic equality (Elder et al., 1976). However, all resettled areas suggest that following social equity from economic equality has been a distant reality because far-reaching reforms are in want (Dixit, 1994). Resettlement has been a costly reminder

and difficult task because of the nascent democratic institutions, shadow politics and feeble governance (Pandey and Yonzon, 2002). As literacy expands in modern times with pervasive economic inequality, lessons from resettlement, starkly point toward development and social turmoil.

REFERENCES

- Bhattarai, A. M. 2001. Displacement and Rehabilitation in Nepal. Anmol Publications. New Delhi.
- Dixit, A. 1994. Water Projects in Nepal: Lessons from Displacement and rehabilitation. Water Nepal, Vol. 4(1): 74–85.
- Elder, J. W., Ale, M., Evans, M. A., Gillespie, D. V., Nepali, R. H., Poudyal, S. P. and B. P. Smith. 1976. CEDA/INAS/Univ. Wisconsin. Tribhuvan University Press. Kathmandu.
- FORSEC/FINNIDA. 1994. Deforestation in the Terai Districts 1978/79-1990/91. Forest Research & Survey Center. Kathmandu.
- Hunter, W. W. 1896. Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson. Hazel, Watson and Viney. London and Aylesbury.
- KDDC. 2002. Periodic District Development Plan, Part 1. District Development Committee, Kanchanpur.
- Kansakar, V. B. 1979. Effectiveness of Planned Resettlement Project in Nepal. Vol. 1. CEDA. Tribhuvan University. Kathmandu.
- Khadka, M. B. 1999. Forest Working Scheme. District Forest Office. Kanchanpur.
- Landon, P. 1928. Nepal. Ratna Pustak Bhandar (reprint: 1976). Kathmandu.
- Pandey, S. B. and P. Yonzon. 2003. Resettlement History of the Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve. Resources Himalaya & PCP (UNDP). Kathmandu.
- Regmi, M.C. 1978. Land tenure and taxation in Nepal. Ratna Pustak Bhandar. Kathmandu.
- Regmi, M. C. 1988. An Economic History of Nepal 1846 – 1901. Nath Publishing House. Varanasi.
- Surya Bahadur Pandey, presently Assistant Management Officer, Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation, received his Master's degree in natural resource management from Lincoln University, New Zealand. Mr. Pandey had led successfully the RWSR management to resolve the resettlement of all households in the RSWR extension area in 2001. Readers may write to him at suryapandey@dnpsc.gov.np



GPO BOX 2448, Kathmandu, Nepal
habitat@resourcehimalaya.org
www.resourcehimalaya.org

Resources Himalaya is a not for profit, independent research organization concerned with the conservation of the Himalayas. Since last 17 years, we have examined issues on natural resources on the grounds of human experiences and self governance to have their applicability far beyond the circumstances in which they originate.