

Justice on environmental conservation

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Environmentalists and environmental activists are different. Environmentalists don't support haphazard development but favour development for the humankind and conservation of environment. Dropping Arun hydroproject was definitely not an environmental issue but many people perceived it was due to environmental issues needed to be clarified.

No one should blame environmentalists for its dismissal. Still there are environmental activists, who claim the dismissal of Arun hydroproject is not a failure but a success story. They have imagined the social, economical and environmental impact of the project if implemented but they have not considered their responsibilities after its failure. Really, has the socio-economic status of local people improved after its rejection? Or would it have better been after its implementation? These things need to be judged in reality.

Construction of a dam in a major river definitely affects aquatic life and ecosystem but it brings several boons in the form of uplifting the livelihood of people. This is coupled with energy generation, source for drinking water, irrigating agricultural lands and preventing floods.

In Nepal, even if you could save lives and property each year by preventing flood, with the development of dam, that is more justifiable than the cost of environmental damage. Checking of flood is not only saving lives, it also helps to protect agricultural lands being washed down or filled with muds, killing aquatic life and other epidemic calamities.

Our concern should be on such development which can at least secure the basic needs of individuals. It is almost impossible to conserve nature with empty stomach. "Empty stomach" does not mean the greed, it's the need to survive. What is the purpose of conservation if that does not have a value or cannot be used? If people can assure their own existence, comparable to the same person of any part of the world, no one will disturb nature.

The needs, utilization and problems of resources in developed and developing countries are different. Certainly they need to look at the issues of development and environment differently. The main problem of the people from developing countries is to fight for basic needs, whereas, it is not a concern of developed countries. So the angle of looking at environment and natural resources are different. One tries to fulfill the needs while others want to conserve them in natural state. Why are people from developing countries moving to developed countries? One of the reasons is securing the basic needs.

In Nepal, farmers are the feeders of the whole population but if you look at their own life, they struggle for two times basic meal. Is it justice to tell them not to use high yielding crop or other practice by which they can have returns of their hard work?

People from developed world have prosperity and think about environment and nature. We lack prosperity so we think about utilizing the resources available. We do not want to die just because we lack basic needs, food, shelter and clothes in the name of environment. Neither should one not deprive a person of the facilities developed for the humankind. For example, the tribal communities of Asia or Africa are having their own tradition and culture. People from developed countries consider that as the culture preservation and enjoy their performance and play. They have preserved that culture for many generations and are leading the same life, with unfilled or half-filled stomach, naked body, homeless, uneducated, and unsocial for developed one. Who is getting the benefit? The one who is preserving the tradition and conserving the nature or the one who makes them play and utilize their resources in other way?

The general perception is that one who has the maximum resources enjoys the most luxurious life. In other words, economically sound person must have all the basic needs to have comfortable life. One who works hard or has resources should get this privilege. Africa is considered the richest continent from the viewpoint of natural resources. But they are forced to conserve and preserve their resources by developed countries in the name of environment. They are working day and night to sustain life to preserve the nature.

Let's see the reality - Africans are trying to do as they were told, preserve natural resources, and they are successful in doing so. They lack development in the name of environment. They are dying of hunger. They are homeless, clothesless, illiterate and lack economic development. Why should they conserve their resources? It is for the people of developed countries who consume almost all at the cost of environment.

Though environmentalists favour conservation rather than development, I strongly urge for certain degree of developmental activities in developing world to equalize the livelihood of people living in the same planet and simultaneously preserve and conserve the environment. Neither development should be at the cost of environment, nor at the cost of people's life of any developing countries. We have already experienced the impact of development on natural resources of developed countries but developing countries should get freedom to develop and think of their resources. Certainly, they are aware of not to make the same mistake done by the developed world.

Developed countries already have life and infrastructure due to developmental activities, and they have also disturbed nature during the developmental phase. At present, they are in the position to think of nature. Whereas developing countries have nature but no life. According to Gross Domestic Product and Human Development Index, the situation of developing countries is very poor. How could these indexes be raised? Alternatives have to be searched. Developing countries cannot or should not compete with developed countries in developmental activities but they should at least have significant development for existence.

If developed countries are really worried about environment and development of developing countries, first they should help in the upliftment of livelihood of the people. How could we believe that developed countries are in favour of environmental conservation?

In practice, it has never been experienced. One example is Kyoto protocol. Most developing countries could get maximum benefit from the resources they have preserved. Developed countries have been asked to bring down pollution level but it has not received any priority. It has been experienced that developed countries always want to preserve environment and natural resources in developing countries in the name of new dimension of sustainable development, but initial development always costs nature and natural resources. No matter how much Nepal could conserve nature, the global contribution can melt the mountains, flood the plains and threaten the wildlife.

We who lack development could not enjoy the resources. Now we will face more problems even if we conserve nature. Is that the definition of sustainable development? Conservation of environment is not the only responsibility of developing countries. It is not justice to force developing countries to prioritise environmental conservation without basic development. Although the maximum environmental damage is caused by developed countries, they do not compromise their living standard and consume more. Instead of guiding and forcing the developing countries, regarding their policy on nature and natural resources, they should concentrate themselves first on their living style. Then only the environmental disasters will be minimum.