


Environmental Stress and Demographic Change Contributing to an Insurgency and Reflection on the ongoing Peace Process in Nepal



Richard Matthew
University of California Irvine

Bishnu Raj Upreti
Swiss National Center of Competence in Research, North-South, South Asia
Regional Coordination Office, Nepal

Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars
Washington,
1st November 2006

Map of Nepal



Basic Data about Nepal

- ❑ Landlocked with three main bioregions: terai, central hills and Himalayas
- ❑ Size of Arkansas
- ❑ Officially Hindu
- ❑ 25 million people
- ❑ Per Capita GDP USD less than 300
- ❑ 42% under poverty line
- ❑ Literacy rate is 45.2% (women 27.6%; men 62.7%)

Background to Conflict

- ❑ 1846-1950 ruled by the Rana dynasty
- ❑ 1950 Ranas overthrown by pro-democracy forces from the influence of events in India
- ❑ 1950-62 multi-party democracy
- ❑ 1962: Party-less *panchayat* system introduced
- ❑ 1989 end of Cold War, Tiananmen Square, renewed pressure for democracy
- ❑ 1990 multi-party democracy restored, but failed to meet people's expectation from the political change
- ❑ 1996 “People's War” declared by CPN

The Context

- Situation of States within the State.
- > 75 % area under Rebels
- NR, especially land became fundamental issue for Rebels
- RN: Source of economy to wage war
- Government/parties used insurgency as means to grab power
- Nepal has experienced a 5-fold growth in population in less than a century, placing enormous stress on its modest natural resource base and its subsistence agricultural economy
- ❑ These stressful conditions undergird a decade of insurgency
- ❑ Big question remains unanswered yet:
 - Can a sustainable peace--that is, a peace informed by ecological limits, economic and social justice, and political inclusiveness—be implemented before the country becomes a failed state?

A Conflict of Grievance than Greed

- ❑ The conflict reflects grievances over:
 - Very deep and persistent economic and social inequalities
 - Lack of political inclusiveness
 - Perception of government as corrupt, and biased towards Kathmandu and elites
 - Vulnerable status of women
 - Vulnerable status of indigenous peoples
- ❑ Effects of war include human rights violations; over 13,000 killed; significant economic losses

Specific causes of conflict

- Skewed distribution of land and other resources (80:20)
- Poverty and unemployment
- Irrational exploitation of NR
- Discrimination, exclusion and geographical isolation
- Monopolisation of national politics and governance failure
- Absence of a vibrant civil society
- Absence of non-violent mechanisms to manage differences
- Strategy and tactics of warring parties
- Culture of denial and resistance to change
- Legal causes (e.g., constitution protecting Hindu religion)
- Ideological cause
- ❑ Population and environmental factors have not received adequate attention in Nepal
- ❑ They create underlying conditions conducive to conflict that must be addressed as part of a sustainable peace process

Key Players



Nepal Army



Political parties



Maoists



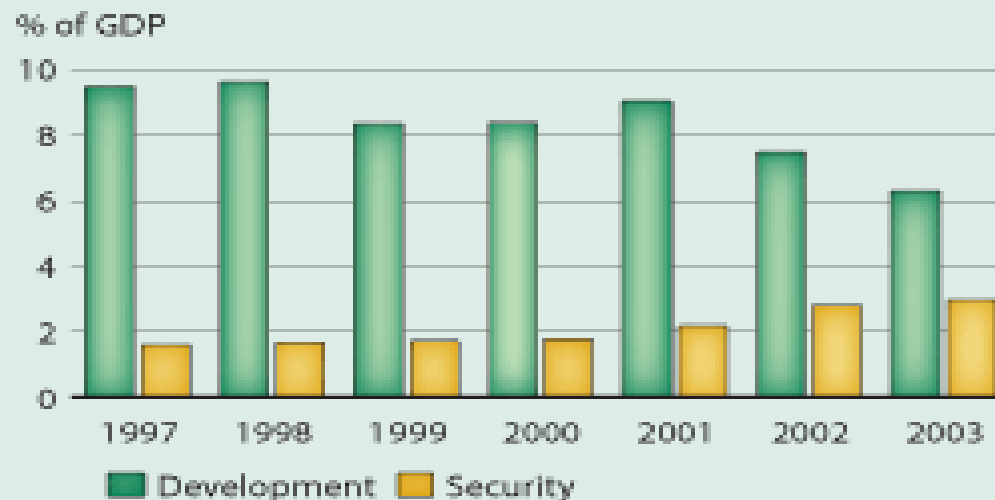
**Monarchists
and monarchy**

Glimpse of conflict



Shifting Priorities

Figure 2.18 Government Expenditures on Development and Security, Nepal, FY1997–FY2003

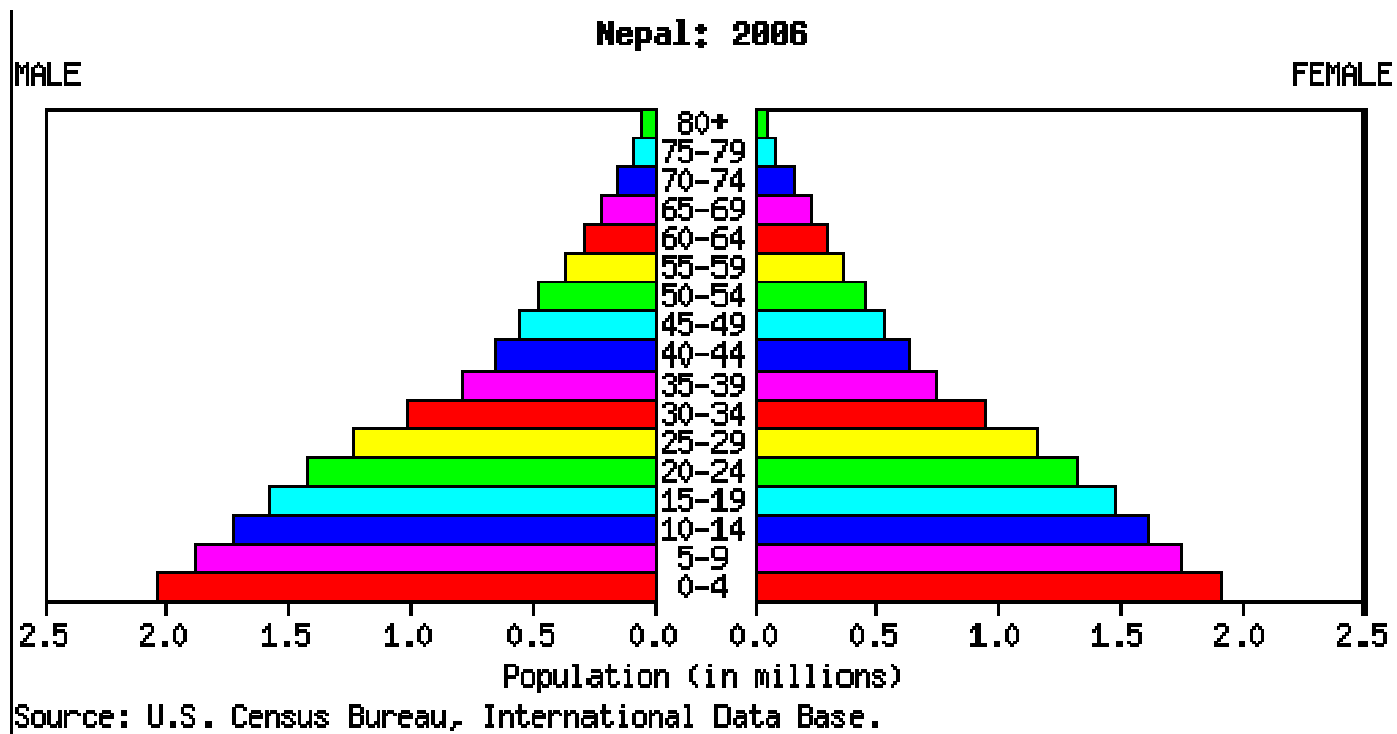


Source: Ministry of Finance.

Population Data (2001 census)

- ❑ 40% under age 15
- ❑ Median age is 20.1 (26 globally)
- ❑ Population growth rate is 2.25%
- ❑ Female fertility rate is 4.1
- ❑ Almost half of the population lives in the terai (17% of land); prospects for development of other bioregions are small
- ❑ Population density has increased from 38.3 to 157.3 people/km² in a century
- ❑ 200,000-300,000 IDPs

Population Pyramid



Nepal Population

Population by district, Nepal, 2004-2005



Population in thousand



<100



100 – 399



400 – 799

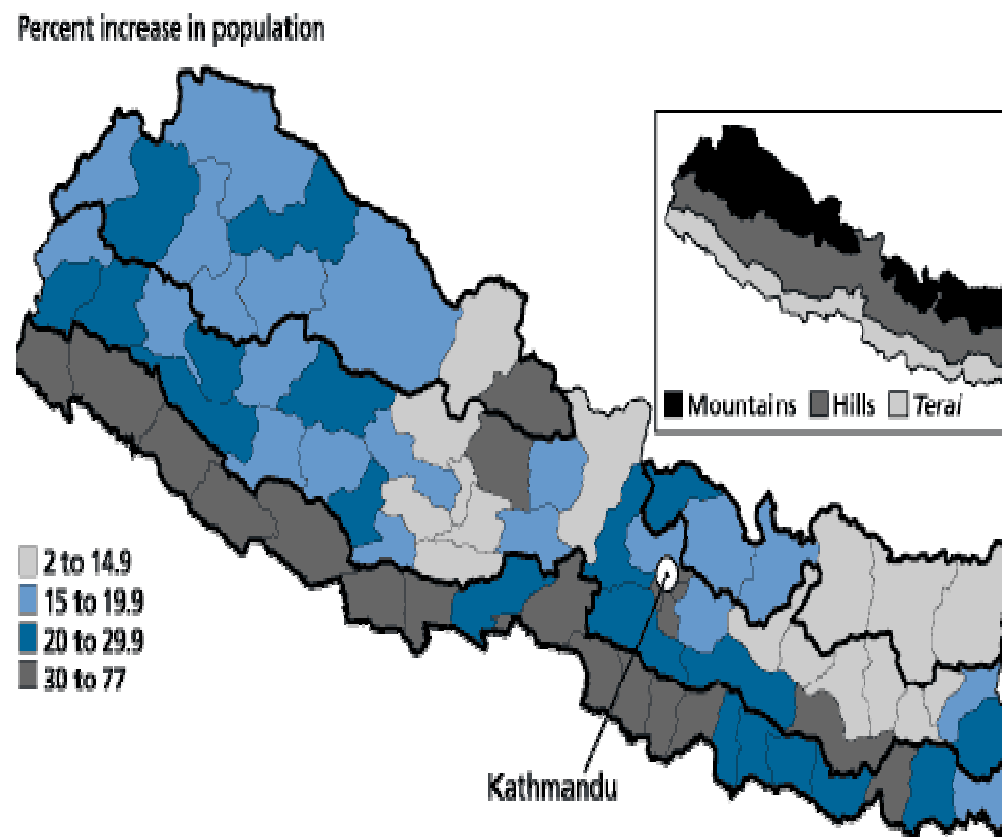


800 – 1200

Regions: 5
Districts: 75
High risk districts: 23 (20 Terai + 3 Kathmandu Valley)

Population source: HMIS, MOH
Data as of 14 June 2004

Population Growth by Bioregion



Environmental Factors

- ❑ 20% of land arable; 78% of population depends on agriculture
- ❑ Land scarcity is a serious issue compounded by economic inequality—top 5% own 37% of land; bottom 47% have less than 15%
- ❑ 90% of energy comes from wood—forest cover is declining (from 37% in 1990 to 29% in 1995), leading to severe soil erosion and flooding

Overview of complications and conflict over Natural Resources/Environment

Issues	State position	Maoists position
Land	Property rights legally guaranteed but weak in practice	Seizing of lands off landlords and absentee landlords, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •no property rights granted in natural resources, •'Ownership for tiller' in operation.
Taxation	Weak enforcement,	Imposition of tax
Institutions (organisations)	Staff leaving rural areas and concentrating in district headquarters, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Weak in functioning, 	Janasarkars, peoples' court active and openly implementing their policy and programme, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •damage of government offices
Local security	Security forces leaving rural areas, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •curfew, check posts, •destruction of crops and encroachment of farm lands 	People's Liberation Army and Militia dominating local areas, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Blockades, strikes,

Overview of complications (contd...)

Issues	State position	Maoists position
Agriculture	<p>Not able to protect farmers,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Security forces get priority in budget, security forces encroaches farms, cultivated areas•failed to ensure marketing of agricultural products and supply of agricultural inputs	<p>Maoist started collective or cooperative farming in their core areas. In other areas, they have encouraged farmers to cultivate in the lands of land lords and stopped to pay rent to the land lords. Most of the tenants did not pay the share to the landowners .</p>
Forest	<p>Tension between the government and Users federation in controlling forest resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•No control of government over forest resource	<p>Used as a regular source of revenue to run the armed insurgency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Used as means for hiding and training•Mobilisation of forests users in their support and political programmes
Water	<p>Not able to smoothly implement hydropower projects, construction of irrigation projects but able to operate small drinking water project</p>	<p>Big projects as source of money from extortion and tax</p>

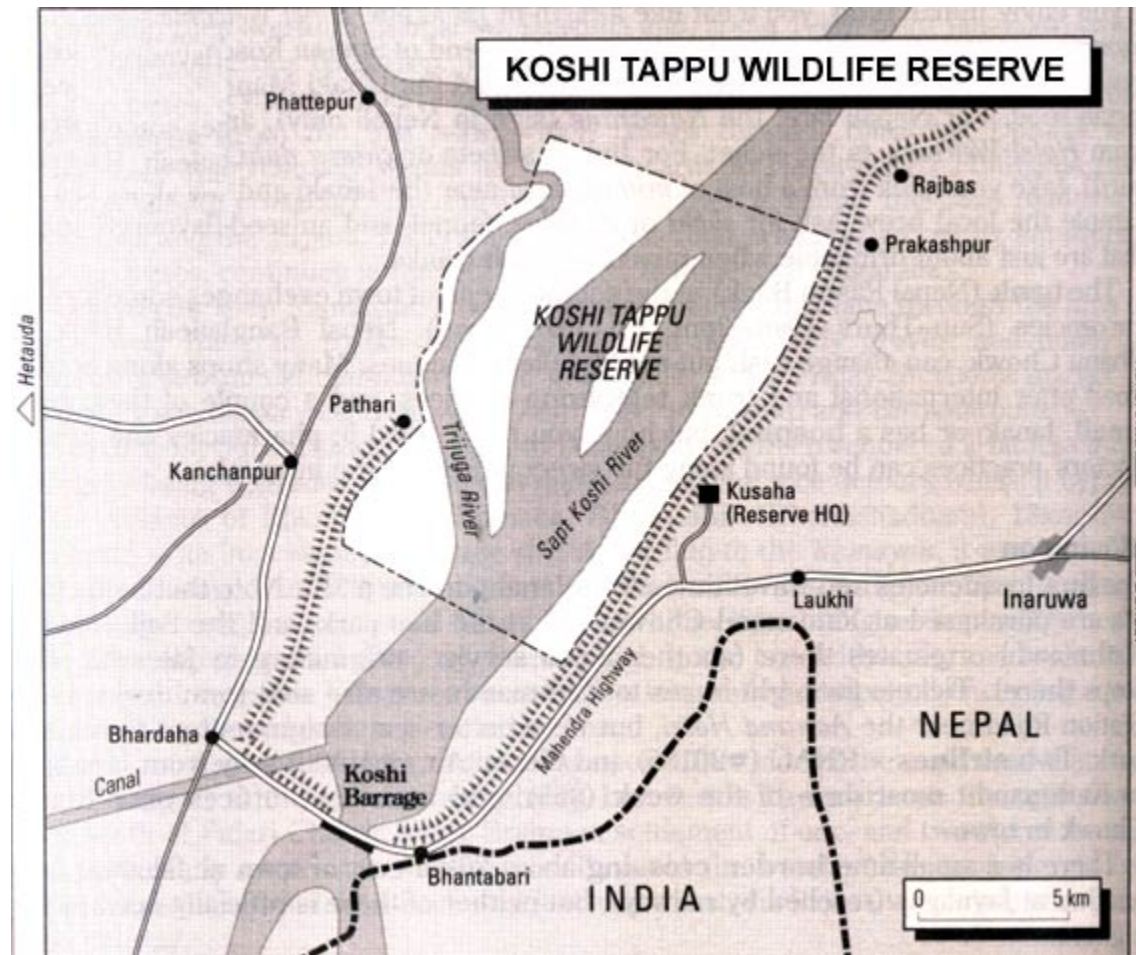
Conservation and Conflict

- ❑ Demographic pressure on the environment has led to a series of measures to protect ecosystems—a threefold increase in protected land from 1995 to 2004
- ❑ Poor people denied access to resources or displaced without compensation have engaged in poaching and illegal land use in many protected areas

Case Study: Koshi Tappu

- ❑ 2004 IUCN Research team, part of a 4 country study in South Asia of resource rights and conflict in wetlands and forested areas, both of us (Matthew and Upreti) included,
- ❑ Government encouraged hill people to move into KT in 1950s to balance demographic composition in terai
- ❑ 5000 ha of wetland leased to India in 1954 for dam construction
- ❑ Wildlife reserve established in 1976; expanded in 1979; classified as a Ramsar Site
- ❑ Household surveys revealed customary access to resources has been curtailed or denied

Koshi Tappu Reserve



Case Study: Koshi Tappu

❑ Problems:

- People did not benefit from dam construction
 - Migration into area has continued
 - Little or no compensation as area was protected
 - Reserve wardens have introduced corrupt practices
 - People have used resources illegally facing fines
- ❑ As in other protected areas of Nepal, the Maoists have sought to mobilize support by promising to restore access to the wetland resources (e.g. water, trees, fish, grasses)

Examples of specific impacts on natural resources and bio-diversity

- ❑ Users Groups are not allowed to harvest in their forests. Government staff are confined in district headquarters.
- ❑ Military took office buildings
- ❑ Disturbance on estimated annual transaction of around 2.5 billion rupees from approximately 166 types of mountain medical herbs,
- ❑ Irrational exploitation of the expensive medical herbs e.g., *Yarsagumba* (*Cordyceps sinensis*), *Chiraito* (*Swertia Chiraita*), *Jatamasi* (*Nardostachys grandiflora*), *Kutki* (*Picrorhiza scrophulariiflora*), *Bikhama* (*Aconitum palmatum*), *padamchal* (*Rheum emodi*), *Panchaunle* (*Galearis stracheyi*), *Sunpati* (*Rhododendron anthopogon*), *Sughandhawal* (*Valerina wallichii*), etc. by smugglers by paying tax to the insurgents
- ❑ State is not able to regulate and control NR, they are controlled by Maoists.



Photo: Knut-Erik Helle



Nepal: From Civil War to Sustainable Peace? Review of Nepal's Peace Process

- ❑ Seven Parties Alliance (SPA) and CPN (Maoist) signed a 12 Point Understanding on 22 Nov, 2005.
- ❑ SPA declared a Non-violent peaceful Movement on 6 April, 2006 against the autocratic rule of the king (1st February 2006 took over) and Maoist declared to support the movement in a peaceful manner.
- ❑ Royal address of April 21, 2006 asked the SPA to form the government. SPA rejected the Royal offer.
- ❑ The 19 days peaceful and Non-violent Movement turned successful on 24 April, 2006 when king surrendered with people's power, fulfilling the demands of protesters by reinstating the House of the Representative, handing over the ceased power, and recognizing the sovereignty of people.

Peace Process continue...

- ❑ Ceasefire continued since 26 April 2006
- ❑ The reinstated House of Representative unanimously passed the motion of Constitutional Assembly on 30 April, 2006.
- ❑ The Government withdraws the Terrorist Tag and Red Corner Notice to Maoists.
- ❑ Peace Dialogue Team, Peace Committee, and National Monitoring Committee on Ceasefire Code of Conduct (NMCCCC) operational to facilitate peace process
- ❑ The House of Representatives declared itself a sovereign body
- ❑ First High level Peace Talks on 16 June, 2006 ended with an 8 point agreement
- ❑ Interim Constitution Draft Committee submitted draft Constitution

Peace Process continue...

- **Intense negotiation going on**
 - On the position of Monarchy (decision by CA v/s referendum, suspension of the king at present)
 - Separation of arms from Maoists before power sharing arrangement with them in interim government
 - Interim Parliament
 - Modality of the structure of the state (federal, decentralised, etc.)
 - Security sector restructuring
 - Procedures on holding Constituent Assembly Election in June 2007 (numbers of members, mode of constituency, etc.)

Conclusions

- ❑ A large pool of undereducated and underemployed youth in Nepal have now experienced ten years of brutal conflict, addressing their concerns is major challenge
- ❑ Previous attempts at economic and political reform in Nepal have not provided much opportunity to these growing and discontented groups
- ❑ As the environment degrades, and the population continues to grow, the prospects for a sustainable peace decline.

Conclusions ...

- Breakdown of community NRM and environmental systems,
- The armed conflict has not only caused negative impacts, it has also positively contributed to alter the unequal social relations, especially empowerment of women, socially excluded and marginalised section.
- Diverse impacts on
 - Natural resources and environment,
 - Livelihoods and economy,
 - development

Conclusions ...

- Success of peace process mainly depends upon the willingness of major political parties to fundamentally restructure the feudal, top-down exclusionary state into a modern inclusive one
- Role of international community particularly India and USA is crucial in making peace process successful
- If negotiation fails, only the palace will be winner and both the Maoists and political parties will lose, international community will face dilemma as experienced between February 1, 2005 to April 2006

Signs of Hope



Signs of Hope: People's willingness and cooperation



Signs of Hope: Potentials of Terai



Signs of Hope : Potentials of Mountains

Best Photo - Mountain Environment

A Himalayan Mountain Environment Transformed, Kakani, Nepal.
Photographer: © Jack Ives, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

