

DIVERSIFICATION AS A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY IN A TOURISTIC PLACE OF NEPAL

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ABSTRACT: The main objective of the study is to analyze how the Tharu diversify their livelihood strategy after the establishment of the park and tourism development. This study is carried out in Sauraha, the buffer zone area of Chitwan National Park, where the Tharu, an indigenous and ethnic people of the Terai region, have been living for a long time as original dwellers. This study is based on key informant interviews, participation observations, household survey and the analysis of secondary data taken from a variety of sources. Livelihood diversification is the key concept used for the analysis of the study. The study reveals that the Tharu diversify their activities to support their livelihood according to their ability and capacity as an adaptive strategy. Due to the lack of opportunity and wage differentiation on farm activities, Tharu are pushed into the non-farm activities after the development of tourism. This study also observes that the ability and capacity are varied within the Tharu intra community to determine their necessity and choice. **Keywords:** Diversification, Livelihood Strategy, Tharu, Chitwan National Park, Nepal.

RESUMEN: El objetivo principal de este estudio es analizar el modo como la comunidad Tharu diversificó su estrategia de sobrevivencia en la secuencia de la creación del parque natural y del desarrollo turístico. El estudio tiene como foco el área de Sauraha, zona tampón del parque Nacional de Chitwan, habitada originariamente por los Tharu, grupo indígena de la región de Terai. El estudio recurre a entrevistas a informadores clave, cuestionarios al domicilio, observación participante y análisis de datos secundarios obtenidos a partir de distintas fuentes. La diversificación de los modos de sobrevivencia es el concepto clave usando en el análisis. El estudio muestra que los Tharu diversificaron sus actividades como estrategias adaptativas, para garantizar su sobrevivencia en función de sus habilidades y capacidades. Con el desarrollo del turismo, y debido a la falta de oportunidades y la escasa diferenciación salarial de las actividades agrícolas, los Tharu fueron forzados a actividades no agrícolas. Este estudio revela aún que entre los miembros de la comunidad Tharu, hay distinciones en términos de capacidad para determinar necesidades y efectuar escojas. **Palabras clave:** diversificación, estrategia de sobrevivencia, Tharu, Parque Nacional de Chitwan, Nepal.

RESUMO: O objetivo principal deste estudo é analisar o modo como a comunidade Tharu diversificou a sua estratégia de sobrevivência na sequência da criação do parque natural e do desenvolvimento turístico. O estudo tem como foco a área de Sauraha, zona tampão do parque Nacional de Chitwan, habitada originalmente pelos Tharu, grupo indígena da região de Terai. O estudo recorre a entrevistas a informadores chave, inquéritos ao domicílio, observação participante e análise de dados secundários obtidos a partir de diversas fontes. A diversificação dos modos de sobrevivência é o conceito chave usado na análise. O estudo revela que os Tharu diversificaram as suas atividades como estratégia adaptativa, para garantirem a sua

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sobrevivência em função das suas habilidades e capacidades. Com o desenvolvimento do turismo, e devido à falta de oportunidades e à escassa diferenciação salarial das actividades agrícolas, os Tharu foram empurrados para a actividades não agrícolas. Este estudo revela ainda que, entre os membros da comunidade Tharu, há diferenças em termos de capacidades para determinar necessidades e efectuar escolhas. **Keywords:** diversificação, estratégia de sobrevivência, Tharu, Parque Nacional de Chitwan, Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Nepal joined hands with international communities and embarked on the modern era of bio-diversity conservation in the 1970s (DN-PWC 2001). Establishment of the national parks and other forms of protected areas has been considered as a key conservation strategy to protect the natural heritage (MFSC 2002). National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (NPWC) Act was passed in 1973, which led to the establishment of the Chitwan National Park, the first national park of Nepal.

Indigenous people (*Adivasi*) of Nepal are often dependent on natural resources for living. Their livelihoods have been affected by the fashionable concept of bio-diversity conservation. Traditionally used resources and the rights of the indigenous people have been limited by the National Park Act, 1973. Some scholars insist that the livelihood of indigenous people have been threatened because of restrictions on the use of their traditional practices and evictions from their ancestral lands (Upreti & Adhikari, 2006). The regulation of the state has not recognized their traditional rights on the resources that are useful for their occupations. These people were basically fishermen, gatherers and shifting cultivators, who used the forests located in their culturally defined territories.

In the name of development and conservation, the state usually adopts a policy of “territorialization” (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). State uses “technology of power” (Keyes, 1995) to control space. The state adopts various strategies in order to control space i.e., establishing national parks and tourism development, etc. The livelihoods of the Tharu have been changed drastically after the establishment of Chitwan National Park. The Tharu are the largest indigenous and ethnic group of the Terai region of Nepal. They have lost their tradition of shifting cultivation. The loss of a semi-nomadic life-style has forced them to stay in one place. Moreover, they do not have an easy access to natural resources for their subsistence. Since they were closely associated to nature, they have been left helpless after the establishment of the national park. Similarly, they are not adequately represented in the policy making and implementation process that affect their daily lives. Their lives and existence were challenged and changed.

According to Timilsina (2007), Chitwan National Park is famous for unique bio-diversity of flora and fauna and outstanding natural features. Wildlife tourism is increasingly viewed as an option to justify protected

areas, particularly in developing countries (Curry et al., 2001). Tourism is mainly based on wildlife in Chitwan National Park. As Chitwan National Park has the potential for wildlife tourism, State has adopted the strategy of tourism development in the park. Throughout the world, the most compelling reason for pursuing tourism as development strategy is its alleged positive contribution to the local or national economy (Sharpley, 2004). The livelihood of the Tharu has been diversified after the establishment of the park and tourism development which is the necessity for most of the Tharu. Therefore, this study will explore how the Tharu diversify their livelihood strategy, which is stimulated by the tourism development in Chitwan National Park.

Theoretical Concepts of Livelihood Diversification

The livelihood strategies are dynamic systems rather than static units. Local people choose livelihood strategies which are feasible with their own livelihood resources in specific situations. There are two kinds of strategies i.e., coping and adaptive strategies. Niehof (2004) contends that coping strategies are medium-term strategies that anticipate a foreseeable crisis or stressful situation in the immediate future. This strategy is generally adopted during the period of disaster. Helmore & Singh (2001) argue that the adaptive strategies are “the changes and adjustments people make in their livelihood strategy in order to cope under difficult circumstances.” Adaptive strategies are based on local knowledge. This knowledge is a combination of traditional knowledge with appropriate elements from contemporary or external knowledge assimilated into the community over time. Meanwhile, Davies & Hossain (1997) point out that livelihood adaptation is a continuous process - “changes to livelihoods which either enhance existing security and wealth or try to reduce vulnerability and poverty.” Further, Davies & Hossain argue that adaptation may be positive or negative: positive if it is by choice, is reversible, and increases security; negative if due to necessity, is irreversible and fails to reduce vulnerability. Negative adaptation occurs when the poor can no longer cope with adverse shocks.

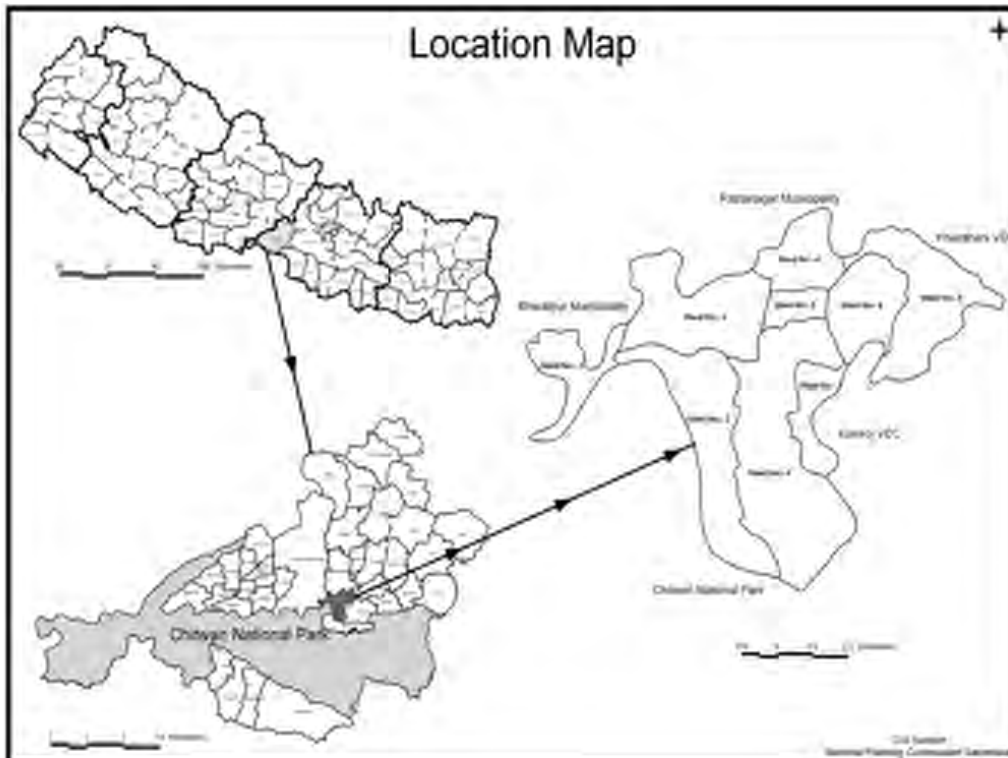
Ellis (1998) advocates that livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve standards of living. The level of diversification of a household depends on life-cycle, family characteristics and the objectives of the household and individuals. According to Ellis (1998), diversification on an individual or household level strategy does not fit well into the conventional picture. He argues that there are different motives and pressures for livelihood diversification. For poor people, diversification is a strategy for survival, whereas for the better-off or the rich, diversification refers to accumulation.

Ellis (2000) points out that individuals and households diversify their livelihood strategy for two overarching considerations - necessity and choice. Necessity is involuntary and desperation, whereas choice is voluntary and proactive reason. Ellis (2000) also argues that seasonality, risk strategies, labour markets, credit market failures, asset strategies, coping behaviour and adaptation are the determinants for diversifying livelihood strategy.

The theoretical framework outlined above will be applied to explore how tourism diversified the Tharu livelihood strategy after the establishment of the Chitwan National Park.

Research Setting

This research was conducted in Sauraha which is the part of Bachhuli Village Development Committee (VDC) and is located in central part of Terai region of Nepal. The distance from Kathmandu to Sauraha is 165 km. The total area of Bachhuli VDC is 23.96 sq. km, its total population is 10443, and there are 1872 households (CBS, 2001). Among them, the population of the Tharu is 5016 or 48% of the total population.



Source: National Planning Commission Secretariat, GIS Section.

Sauraha is one of the main entrance gates that are in very close proximity to the Chitwan National Park. Sauraha is in the buffer zone

area of Chitwan National Park . It was declared buffer zone area in 1996. The total of buffer zone area of the park is 750 sq. km. After the establishment of Chitwan National Park in 1973, the Tharu people that resided inside the park were taken out and compelled to stay in the buffer zone area. Sauraha is the main tourist hub as it is the main entrance point to the park. The main reason of tourists to visit the Chitwan National Park is for wildlife tourism. The park has 50 species of mammals, more than 500 species of birds, 49 species of reptiles and amphibians and 120 species of fish (Nakarmi, 2007). One horned rhinoceros, wild boar, gharial crocodile are commonly sighted wild animals in the park. The park was declared a World Heritage Site in 1984 by UNESCO and it didn't take more time to become famous among tourists. After the malaria eradication in Terai and declaration of the World Heritage Site, this place saw a massive influx of the Hill migrants for settlement and passion of doing business in this touristic place. As a result, most of the tourism businesses were concentrated in Sauraha. The map above shows the location of Chitwan National Park.

Study Methods

Basically, research has adopted two methods of data collection - documentary and field research methods. Documentary research method is applied to get the secondary data from the data that have been collected in the past by some researchers on the history of Chitwan National Park. Further, the study has collected demographic data from Central Bureau of Statistics. The data that I received from different sources provided basic understanding about the local people and locality of my research site.

Fieldwork for this research took place from November 2009 to January 2010 in Sauraha. Household survey was conducted to collect primary data. Household survey helped to understand the livelihood strategies of the Tharu. Moreover it helped to select 44 households out of total households.

Interviews of key informants were conducted with the local Tharu teacher and people. When I talked with key informants, I crosschecked the information that I got from different books and literature journals on different aspects of local people and locality in order to check the reliability of the information. Furthermore, participation observation was mainly conducted to understand the socio-economic life of the Tharu.

Traditional Livelihood Strategy of the Tharu

In the past, Tharu people mostly resided in close proximity to forests and rivers. They were dependent on forest for products such as firewoods and medicinal plants used to cure diseases. Fishing was

their main source of income. Their lives were semi-nomadic. As time changed, they started practicing shifting cultivation. They have gained enormous knowledge on a large number of plant species on which they have depended for centuries.

Until the 1950s, the Tharu's economy was based on *sari kheti*, a short fallow shifting cultivation system supplemented by collecting wild plants and fishing (Muller-Boker, 1990). Singh claims that "the historians of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have stated that the Tharu were the primitive hunter-gatherers by merely observing the socio-economic condition of that period" (Singh, 2006). One of my key informants confirmed that the main occupation of Tharu people was fishing and hunting in the past. They wanted to live near river banks and in the jungle. The Tharu communities adopted fishing as a major occupation and were considered one of the most skillful people in the profession. Apart from the economic benefit, fish was also one of the major dishes in the Tharu diet. Fishing activity was usually conducted in groups and sometimes alone. Various kinds of fishing materials were used.

According to my informants, *Guran* (priest and healer of the Tharu) and *Mukhiya* (head of the Tharu society) are the responsible people to choose the place for settlement in the forest. The *Guran* had knowledge about the cons of the current place and decided on the next suitable place to live. *Mukhiya* was responsible for making a decision in order to solve any problem in the society. Everyone were supposed to obey the order of *Mukhiya*.

In the past, Tharus were experts in capturing wild animals, as well as in fishing. They really loved to fish. They used various traps, tools and natural poisons while fishing in rivers and ponds. Culturally, fish played a very important role during auspicious occasions, such as wedding and ancestral worshipping ceremonies. Without fish, wedding negotiation could not take place and marriage ceremonies could not be performed well.

Tharus applied primitive methods of cultivation in the past. However, well-to-do Tharus use tractors for cultivation nowadays. Paddy, maize, wheat and mustard were the major cash crops that were cultivated. In addition, they grew vegetables. Apart from agriculture, the Tharu's occupation was livestock rearing. They raised cows, buffaloes, goats, chickens and pigs. Goats, chickens, pigs and buffaloes were used for their religious ceremonies. They also raised animals to produce organic fertilizer. In the past, when irrigation facility was unavailable, they were dependent on rainwater for farming.

During paddy season, the farmland was ploughed by bulls to make it ready for plantation. Even nowadays, the poor Tharu use bulls for planting. During plantation in the past, women sang songs in traditional

tunes to make the activity more joyful. Morning and evening meals were prepared in the field in the past. Nowadays, these traditional activities are declining in the Tharu villages. Recently, Tharus are not limited to their traditional occupation.

Contemporary Livelihood Strategy of the Tharu

Nowadays, the Tharu are neither practicing shifting cultivation nor hunting. Their lives are not semi-nomadic after the establishment of Chitwan National Park, which restricted access to the use of natural resources. Tourism sector in Nepal is known as a labour intensive industry. It has created a lot of employment in Sauraha. The Tharu have been following adaptive strategy to reduce the vulnerable situation which is created by the conservation strategy of the state. They have changed their strategy by diversifying their livelihood to adapt with the situation that was created by the tourism development and establishment of the national park. Depending on their ability and capacity, they have adopted various livelihood activities, as seen in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Livelihood diversification of the Tharu in Sauraha

Livelihood Activities	No. of Household Involved	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	14	31.82
Small Grocery Shop	9	20.45
Remittance	6	13.64
Tourism	6	13.64
Chicken Fresh House	3	6.82
Carpentry	3	6.82
Mahout	3	6.82
Total	44	100

Source: Household Survey, December, 2009.

According to table 1.1, it indicates that the Tharu are not only involved in agriculture but also other activities. They are encouraged to diversify their livelihood strategy after the establishment of the Chitwan National Park. As demanded by the State and time, they have used the adaptive strategies to support their livelihood. Their livelihood decisions are strategic and dynamic, which are stimulated by the establishment of the national park and tourism development. However, by the establishment of the Chitwan National Park, the Tharu's traditional livelihood had been disturbed. The Tharu were encouraged to diversify their livelihood strategies in order to support their lives. Tourism development has also provided them an opportunity to adapt to the new situation.

During my fieldwork in a village that is adjoining to a major tourist hub, it was found that the Tharu men have gone to the countries in the Middle East for employment opportunities. Most of the young people are interested in working in the Gulf-coast countries after completing their education. Many of them even start searching for jobs while they are studying. They think that it is very difficult to get job in Sauraha or any part of Nepal. Even if they get a job in Nepal, the salary is quite low. One local Tharu male teacher (Mr. KK) who is the original dweller from this village told me that:

“Right now, more than 30 young Tharu people are working in Gulf countries. Young people are interested to work in Gulf countries. It is difficult to get a job here. Salary is also higher there than in Nepal. If they have no money to go to Gulf countries, they take loan from *Jimindar* and other Hill migrants with high interest rate. Generally, about Rs. 70,000 is required for going to Gulf countries. In this village, two young Tharu people are in the USA and Australia. They are pursuing education. They are from rich family.” (Personal Interview with Local Tharu Teacher: December, 2009).

In my observation, most of the young people are interested in migrating to the Gulf countries for employment purpose not only in Sauraha but throughout the country. It is very difficult to get job here. The unemployment rate is quite high in Nepal. Generally, the young people go to the Gulf countries as unskilled laborers. In case of Sauraha, young Tharu people go to Gulf countries as unskilled workers because most of the young Tharu have no sophisticated. Because they lack skills, they are not able to get good jobs in tourism industry and other fields even in Sauraha and within Nepal. Besides, if they want to work in Sauraha, they are hired in lower positions and receive low salary that is not enough to sustain their livelihood.

From overall analysis of the study, the main reason for young Tharus to migrate to the Gulf countries is the difficulty in getting a well-paying job in Sauraha or within Nepal. This has forced the poor Tharu to ask *Jimindar* and Hill migrants for loans at very high interest rates to go to Gulf countries. This is a similar case within the whole country that compels poor people to take loans from the rich at high interests. Authorized banks do not easily grant loans to the deprived people in Nepal. On the other hand, some of the Tharu people are able to migrate to big countries like the USA and Australia because they are rich. As we know people born in a rich family will have access to all the basic needs, which will help in guaranteeing them a good future.

I talked to one of the horse cart drivers who is a Tharu (Mr. MH), the original dweller from a few miles away from Sauraha. Here is his story:

“I am local Tharu and my village is little bit far from here. I have not studied much. I have my horse cart. My profession is horse cart

driver. This is my life. My wife is a housewife. She is illiterate. I have two sons. I wake up at 5:00 am and start my work at 7:00 am, and work until 7:00 pm. I earn 500 Nepali Rupees per day during the tourist season. During off season, my income is lower. My daily life is not easy. I have to work very hard. I have a small garden which is not sufficient for my family for food. I have to buy rice and other things from the market. I like to be a horse cart driver because the income is higher than working in agriculture. However, with this income, it is hard to support my children's education and our lives. Tourism has increased my income and diversified our livelihood." (Personal Interview, December, 2009)

In my observation, tourism development has offered the employment opportunity in Sauraha that encouraged the Tharu to diversify their daily lives. In case of Mr. MH, he has a small piece of land which is not sufficient to support his family. It is necessary to involve in non-farming activities for the Tharu. However, since his job is seasonal, based on tourism, the income is not regular. During off season period, there are no more tourists in Sauraha and the Tharu have to get involved in farming activities. Those who have no land or a small piece of land have to work in somebody else's farms as laborers and receive low salary.

Similarly, I talked to one Tharu married woman (Mrs. SK) who has been displaced from the major tourist hub. I spoke with her about her family and their occupation. She said:

"I am local, work as a housewife and literate. My husband is a tourist guide and he is also literate. I have one son and one daughter. We live in an extended family. My father-in-law is also literate and he is working as a mahout. My mother-in-law is a housewife. My sister in law is working as a cook and she is also literate. She has one son. Her son is studying in class 1. We do not have any land. We rent a house. We have to buy everything from the market and we have no agricultural production to support our livelihood. We are very poor. It is not so easy to support our lives." (Personal Interview January, 2010).

In case of Mrs. SK, I observed that she lives with an extended family and most of her family members have jobs. However, their income level is low and it is difficult to support their daily lives. They are landless and they stay in a rented house that is not in good condition. They are original dwellers of this place but they are landless. They became landless because of the market mechanism and land policy of Nepal. Tourism development and establishment of the national park also play vital roles in this. After the tourism development in Sauraha, the price of land increased a lot. This encouraged the Tharu to sell their land to the Hill migrants. This is happening to many Tharus who eventually become landless and get displaced from the main tourist hub.

Similarly, I talked to the Tharu widow (Mrs. KB) who is from main tourist hub during my fieldwork about her family and their livelihood strategy.

“My husband already passed away. I am illiterate. I have five sons and one daughter. First son is working as a driver and has his own tractor. He has passed class 7. Second son is in Norway and he is working there. He has passed B.Sc. Third son is working in Saudi Arabia. He has passed SLC. Similarly, fourth son is also working in Saudi Arabia. He has passed class 9. The youngest son is a student and he is studying in class 12 now. My daughter, who is literate, is already married. She is now a housewife. We have some land. We use tractor in the field for farming. I am satisfied with the income. It is enough to support the livelihood. Sometimes, my sons send money”. (Personal Interview: December, 2009)

In my observation, Mrs. KB is a rich Tharu widow; she owns a tractor and some of her sons are working abroad. Her family used tractor in her field for agricultural production. Mrs. KB's family uses modern technology for agricultural production. They are from rich Tharu family and her sons sometimes send money from abroad. I observed that not all the Tharu are marginalized and poor. There is social differentiation within the intra Tharu community.

When we compare between two Tharus, Mrs. KB and Mrs. SK, the economic condition of Mrs. KB is strong as she has more land and more income than Mrs. SK. Mrs. SK is landless who is displaced from the main tourist hub and stays in a rented house. Mrs. KB's son is working in a European country and her family owns a tractor, which is used for agricultural production.

In summary, tourism encourages the local people to diversify their livelihood strategies in order to support their daily lives. It is the strategic decision to diversify their livelihood according to their necessity and choice. Some of the Tharu are landless since they had to sell their land to sustain their lives. Tourism development marginalized the Tharu who were already marginalized due to ability and capacity. This largely breeds social differentiation within intra community of the Tharu. Some of the Tharu are successful and economically strong as their family members are in the European countries. Moreover, some family members are pursuing education in the USA and Australia. It is not fair to generalize that all the Tharu are backward and marginalized. Tourism development also provided them an opportunity to diversify livelihood strategy in a new situation. Presently, Tharu are not only dependent on agriculture but also work in off-farm activities. In some cases, there is wage differentiation between on-farm and off-farm activities after the tourism development. Due to this, the Tharu are encouraged to work in off-farm activities.

CONCLUSION

The Tharu are diversified in the context of tourism development in Sauraha. They are adopting different livelihood strategies in the new situation that is stimulated by tourism development and establishment of the Chitwan National Park. Due to tourism development, they are engaging in different activities beyond agriculture to support their livelihoods. From the households' survey, it is reflected that the Tharu's livelihoods are diversified and tourism has encouraged the Tharu to diversify their livelihoods in Sauraha.

The Tharu have adopted non-farming activities due to the wage differentiation between on-farm and off-farm activities. This decision is tactical as the wage is higher in off-farm activities. In the case of Sauraha, there is social differentiation within the Tharu intra community; some of the Tharus are rich while others are landless. Ellis (2000) points out that people diversify their livelihood strategy due to two reasons: choice and necessity. It is observed that some of the Tharus who are landless have no option but to diversify their livelihood in order to support their daily lives. Furthermore, the Tharus who have more land and are rich have the choice to diversify their activities in order to accumulate wealth. The Tharu diversify their activities according to their ability and capacity. As a result of tourism development, the Tharu were pushed into the non-farm activities due to lack of opportunities and wage differences between on-farm and off-farm activities.

The Tharu have been diversifying their livelihood as needed, after the tourism development and establishment of the national park in Sauraha. However, ability and capacity are varied within the Tharu intra community to determine their necessity and choice. The powerless Tharu have been diversifying their livelihood as an adaptive strategy for decreasing livelihood vulnerability which was induced by the restriction of the access to natural resources of the national park. But in the case of well-to-do Tharu people, it is the choice and tactics to gather wealth, which is the alternative strategy not a necessity.

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