

INTRODUCTION

General Perspective

It has been found that the size distribution of human settlements and the market centres/central places in developing countries are not conducive to fostering development or for distributing economic benefits in a more equitable way. A closely interlinked hierarchy of central places without leaving spatial gaps in urban functions has been regarded as a necessary prerequisite for economic development and equitable distribution of economic benefits and services.

In Nepal, however, some areas do not have market towns with adequate populations to support the necessary functions; other areas are prevented from offering many services and facilities because of inadequate investment and a low level of development; and still others are not physically and economically linked with each other, with their hinterland, and with larger cities. Simply, lack of a well developed and integrated hierarchy in central places has deprived a larger number of people of the services, facilities, and opportunities offered by urban areas. Thus, a well-developed and integrated hierarchy of market towns could provide access to many functions to a large number of people without each town having to provide them all. So, to develop a well integrated hierarchy and to enable market towns to function efficiently, investment in facilities and infrastructure is an imperative. But it is important to identify gaps in urban functions, facilities, and infrastructure as well as market towns with high growth potential for investment. A careful selection of market towns for further development will therefore 'maximise' efficiency, equity, and production. The present work is intended to present a critical analysis of the settlement system, with reference to market centres and towns, and to identify gaps in the provision of basic services and market centres.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are given below.

1. To map and assess the distribution and structure of functional settlements (small towns, market centres, and bazaars) in the Bagmati subregion in terms of
 - infrastructure and accessibility and
 - distribution of population resource endowment and provision of central services.
2. To examine the present role of each existing small town and market centre and to identify factors influencing/inhibiting their potential growth.
3. To develop criteria and bases for identifying small towns and market centre locations as priority areas for development.
4. To identify and map spatial gaps in the provision of basic services and recommend guidelines at the policy level to address the problem.
5. To look at institutional arrangements that could facilitate the growth of small towns and market centres in the Bagmati subregion.

Methodology

The study was based both on secondary information and on a field survey.

Voters' lists of 1991 were used to identify settlements and to estimate the population of the settlements. A total of 10,671 (including 77 market centres) settlements were identified, of which 2,220 were settlements with less than five households. From the total of 1,414 rural settlements with more than 49 households, it was possible to locate 826 settlements only on the map. Location of settlements was carried out with the help of the School Location Map (1: 125,000), Ministry of Education and Culture, HMG/Nepal, District Maps (1:125,000), Survey Department, HMG/Nepal, and Topo sheets (1:50,000).

The initial identification of market centres with more than 19 functional units was carried out on the basis of available information derived particularly from the Central Services' Maps (1:135,000), Suspension Bridge Division (including the market centres' study of the Kathmandu Valley sponsored by ICIMOD and an unpublished Ph. D. dissertation - "Hierarchy of Urban Centres in the Arniko Rajmarga Area", T.U., and the field survey). A total of 77 settlements with more than 19 functions were finally identified and located on the map by making necessary field checks.

A recording schedule was developed and used to enumerate the functional units and infrastructure of all 77 market centres (Annexes). Recording of the functional units of 55 centres was carried out by means of a field survey. Other sources were the works of C.B. Shrestha, Central Services' Maps, M.A. Thesis of Madhav Karki, Geography Department, T.U., 1989, and MSTP/MSUD Reports, Department of Urban Development, HMG, Nepal. Field checks, wherever necessary, were carried out.

Four different questionnaires were developed, one each for commercial units, industrial units, administrative units, and professional service units. Purposive sampling of the functional units was carried out in such a way that all types were included in the interview sample. Necessary information was also collected from local resource persons. In addition, information on service areas of schools, health centres/hospitals, and banks, was collected on the basis of registers. Similarly, information on vehicular traffic was also obtained.

The data were analysed by preparing a series of maps and scalograms.