

Decision-making among Farming Families

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This article introduces the topic of decision-making among farming families. In the first section, the general idea of people's participation in agricultural development is touched upon. The second section briefly describes the geographical, social and economic context in which decisions are made by farming families in the area of Palpa District selected for study. In the third section, an example of decision-making is given and analysed. The final section raises a few uncomfortable questions and ends with a suggestion.

I. Like many excellent ideas, the idea of people's participation in development may be suffering the fate of becoming a slogan. The words are repeated so often that the mind becomes dulled to their content. For the purposes of this article I understand people's participation to comprise four inter-related processes in addition to the goal of participation in benefits. These 4 processes are planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation (APROSC 1978). Full participation would mean that the people are involved in all four processes. When development projects claim to include people's participation, it is useful to examine which of these processes is meant. If the development project is to construct a road within the panchayat with the people's participation, does this mean that the people merely contribute their labour, i.e., the aspect of implementation only? Have the people been consulted about the desirability of the road? Have they had the opportunity to voice their approval or disapproval in a decisive way? Is there any way by which they are drawn into the evaluation of the project both during and after its implementation? People's participation that means just taking part in the work of digging and carrying is surely a dubious privilege. Full participation is the ideal and within full participation the key element, the pivot, is obviously decision-making, along with the planning process which leads up to it.

Of special importance to Nepal is agricultural development. Increased production is urgently needed not only to bring about a degree of prosperity for the 96 percent of the population who live in rural communities but to keep pace with the growing population and to prevent a worse slide into sub-human conditions.

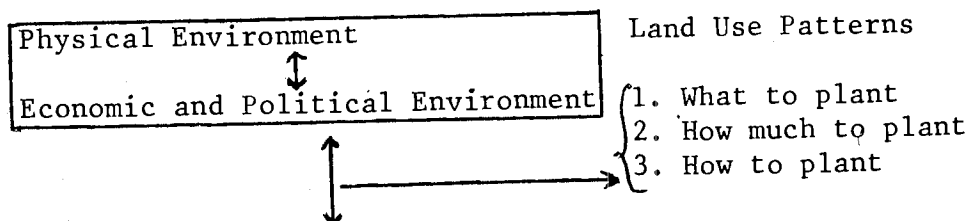
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People's participation in agricultural development leads directly into the question of farm management. The key element, decision-making, is farm management.

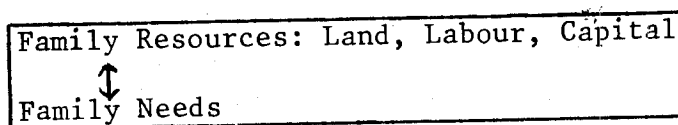
In her critical survey of the literature on farmers' decision-making, Barlett isolates the three basic questions that farmers ask themselves in regard to land use decisions: what do I plant, how much do I plant, how do I plant it (Barlett 1978: 1). "When development planners and workers talk about changing agriculture or bringing about agricultural development, the focus is changing one or another of the above three parts of a farmer's land use decision. ... To bring about change, we need first to know what the current results of these decisions are, and then how the decisions are made. That is, we need to have a description of current land uses and we need to know what determines those decisions" (Idem). Barlett answers the question of how the decisions are determined in a diagram which shows land use options interacting with household needs and resources. Land use options themselves are the result of an interaction between physical environment and the economic and political environment.

Diagram: The Decision-making Process

I. What are the land use options?



II. What are the Household Needs and Resources?



(Barlett 1978: 2)

To illustrate what she means by Economic and Political Environment, Barlett names colonization programs, land registration and warfare as examples of political factors and credit programs, price supports, and marketing facilities as examples of economic factors. All of these factors, along with the physical environment, combine together to define the possibilities for land use decisions in an area. "These possibilities are then weighed by each household or family unit. Each family has a series of needs to be met through agriculture and also a group of resources with which to meet them. Household labour, land, and capital are

invested in the final agricultural decisions. ... At each stage in this process, the farmer's perceptions, intelligence, and past history are also a factor" (Barlett 1978: 3).

From Barlett's analysis two points emerge clearly: agricultural decision-making is a complex process and this process takes place on the family level. The determining factors in the lower half of her diagram vary from family to family. Agricultural development, though of national importance, takes place or not, depending on what individual families decide to do.

Hagan insists on the same point for Nepal in his 1971 report: "The primary thesis of this paper is the contention that a successful planning program in the agricultural sector must start with the individual farm units of which it is composed. It is further emphasized that most farmers need assistance in planning, evaluating, and developing more productive and profitable systems of operation. Those who assist must become acquainted with the farmer's resources, his family goals and the problems which impede his progress and must have sincere compassion for improving the family's economic welfare" (Hagan 1971: 1). It could be noted here that if Hagan is correct in his insistence on an extension program that is highly personalized and imbued with the human virtue of compassion then Nepal's extension program must be seen as woefully inadequate. In 1976 there were only about 800 Junior Technicians (JT) and Junior Technical Assistants (JTA) in the country, a ratio of extension agent to farm household of 1:3000 (Yadav 1976: 5).

From Barlett's description of the decision-making process, one might get the impression that each farming household takes an explicitly or solely rational approach to farm management and goes about the business of making agricultural decisions in a coldly calculating way. This may be near the truth in countries where farming is conducted as an agri-business. But Hagan seems to be closer to the situation as it exists in Nepal when he writes: "All farmers ... conduct their operations by some kind of plan. Perhaps, the general plan is a traditional one handed down from generation to generation. Quite often, any changes from the usual pattern are the result of fortuitous circumstances - such as severe drought, too much rain, livestock diseases, etc. Likewise, operating plans and day-by-day work procedures often become habitual and the manager rarely takes time to question what he is doing, how the work is performed, and whether or not some other way would be more productive and profitable for the time and effort applied" (Hagan 1971: 10-11).

But something is missing in all this discussion, something very important. Both Barlett and Hagan neglect to emphasize or even explicitly to include socio-religious factors and kinship relationships as major elements in the decision-making processes leading to agricultural development. Barlett does speak of the natural environment interacting with the social environment to create the various options available to farmers in any given area. But she reduces the social aspect to its political and economic dimensions in her diagram. Hagan does speak of the role of tradition when he discusses farm management. But he makes it clear that he is speaking of traditional methods of agriculture and not to broader meanings of the term. In any attempt to understand the decision-making process among farming families, in Nepal or anywhere, formal recognition should be given to the role of socio-religious tradition and to kinship structure as major elements. After describing what she believes to be the major factors contributing to farmers' decisions, Barlett adds that "at each stage in this process, the farmer's perceptions, intelligence, and past history are also a factor" (Barlett 1978: 3). I would qualify that statement by eliminating "also" and replacing it with "especially". His intelligence is native to him, but the farmer's perceptions are to a large extent the result of the socialization process he has been submitted to since infancy by his family and village society. His past history is not only a personal one but the past history of the culture into which he was born, a socio-religious culture as well as an economic and political one. In my treatment of decision-making among farming families, I wish to give emphasis to this. In my methodology I wish to give emphasis to actual observation of how any and all decisions are reached in these farming families.

II. An area of West-Central Nepal, the Tinau Khola watershed, became the site for my participant-observation of decision-making. Of the 22 panchayats in the watershed, five were selected to be the object of special study by the Research Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS). The object was to provide the Tinau Watershed Project (TWP) with social, economic and ecological background for the planning and implementation of development activities. My own research centred in Jhadewa Panchayat in the easternmost section of the watershed. The modern administrative unit, the panchayat, takes its name from the Jhadewa Phant, a flat alluvial valley floor ringed with hills. Villagers say that it was once a lake and no doubt they are correct. They also add that in legendary times the god Ram Chandra visited the lake for fishing and from his footprint sprang up the local variety of rice called Jhandewar.

The level floor of the Jhadewa Phant is extensively and intensively cultivated. Farmers have left little space even for

the streams which drain the valley, and in the rainy season their swollen waters must sometimes struggle their way through precious rice fields, leaving devastation and hopelessness for the cultivators along with their rocks and gravel.

Villagers have built their houses on the hillsides and spurs jutting into the Jhadewa Phant. Not only is the flat land of the valley floor much too valuable as paddy land to be used for homesteads, but until recent times this area was malarial. Malaria control programs have now eliminated that risk, and some people have begun to move down, not into the rice-growing area, but into a rocky corner of the valley where only maize is cultivated.

The white-washed houses of the Brahmans and Chhetris are set off from the red-walled houses of Magars and Sarkis (cobblers). This colour-codes the hamlets of Jhadewa for caste and ethnic group. The economic divisions show up in another "code" that can also be taken in at a glance, i.e., the roofing material for the houses. Tin indicates relative prosperity; thatch suggests an economic condition of no surplus. Thatch predominates.

There are altogether 7 caste and ethnic groupings represented among the one hundred household heads included in the Jhadewa survey. Upadhyaya and Jaisi Brahmans taken together add up to nearly half, i.e., 49; when the 8 Chhetris are included, the number of sacred thread-wearing household heads comes to 57. There are 31 household heads belonging to the ethnic groups known as Matwali jat (alcohol drinking groups): 24 Magars, 3 Ghartis, 3 Newars and 1 Gurung. In addition there are 12 household heads from the Sarki (cobbler) community. When these hundred household heads are thus viewed in the light of the binary opposition of ritually clean/ritually unclean (pani calne/pani na calne), it is seen that the great majority, i.e., 88 percent, belong to the ritually clean category and only the 12 Sarkis are ritually unclean.

Besides the traditional division between ritually clean/unclean, there is another binary opposition operative in village society, the division between the haves and the have nots, the hune and the na hune, literally those who are and those who are not. This terminology of the hune/na hune is in common use among the people of the farming community of Jhadewa. It is heard more often in speech than the ritual distinctions of clean/unclean which are also clearly recognised but hardly ever discussed.

To belong to the hune or "haves" category means to have enough land and livestock to support one's family without having to sell labour or to go into debt; it means to be self-sufficient

from one's own resources. Those who do not produce enough to feed their families and who must therefore sell their labour or go into debt to meet basic food requirements are thus the na hune, the have nots. The opposition is sometimes bluntly expressed in terms of having enough food or not having enough food, khanna pugne/khanna na pugne. Within the hune or khanna pugne category exists a sub-category of those who not only produce sufficient food to fulfill their own requirements but in addition have a surplus to sell. These farmers become by that fact the money-lenders in the village. The loans are most often in the form of grain which they give out with interest.

The economic divisions of hune/na hune can be expressed also in the vocabulary of Large and Small Farmer, with an intermediary group called Medium Farmer. For our research for the TWP a division into Small, Medium and Large Farmer was made on the basis of the value of land and livestock owned. According to information and estimates made by the local farmers, land suitable for rice growing (khet) was assigned the rupee equivalent of Rs.4000 per ropani; land suitable for maize, i.e. bari land, whether sloping or flat, was given the value of Rs.3000 per ropani; sloping land where only thatch grass was grown (kharbari) was valued at Rs. 2000 per ropani. Appropriate rupee values were also used for the animals owned by the farmers. Taking all the surveyed households together, an attempt was made to define three nearly equal sized groups in terms of total value of both land and livestock. Farmers with land and livestock worth less than Rs. 50,000 were classified as Small, those worth Rs. 50,000 or more but less than Rs. 100,000 as Medium, and those worth Rs. 100,000 and more as Large Farmers. The result for Jhadewa's one hundred surveyed households was 28 Small, 36 Medium, and 36 Large Farmers.

In Jhadewa there is a certain amount of cross-cutting of the economic categories of hune/na hune or Small, Medium, Large with the ritual categories of pani calne/pani na calne but there is also a broad correlation between high ritual status and high economic position. For example, 51 percent of the ritually high status Brahman households are Large Farmers, 33 percent are Medium, and only 12 percent are Small Farmers. With the members of the ritually low status Sarki community the picture is reversed; only 17 percent are Large Farmers, 25 percent are Medium and 58 percent are Small Farmers. As for the middle-ranking Magars, 25 percent are Large, 33 are Medium, and 42 percent are Small Farmers.

It must be obvious that the division of households into Small, Medium and Large Farmers is a rough and ready sorting out of the population with a certain degree of arbitrariness

about it. For one thing, significant variations in the quality and location of land within the broad categories of khet and bari have not been taken into account. But even more importantly, it should be pointed out that the local criterion of relative wealth is not simply the amount of land owned but the amount of rice land owned. Some of the Magar, Gharti and Sarki farmers have ended up in the Medium Farmer category because of the amount of bari and kharbari land they possess, but in their own view and in that of their neighbours, they are poor, na hune, precisely because they have no rice land at all. When we consider the total number of farmers with rice land, i.e., 69 out of the 100 in the survey, and examine the proportion of owners according to their membership in the various castes and ethnic groups, the correlation between the ritually higher castes and higher economic status is clear. The percentage distribution of farmers owning rice land, according to caste, shows that 79 percent are Brahman-Chetri, 11 percent Magar and Newar (10 percent Magar, 1 percent Newar), and 10 percent Sarki.

III. With this brief description of the geographical, social and economic context, let us examine one example of the decision-making process as observed in Jhadewa and submit it to analysis. The example comes from a Jaisi Brahman family that was my host family during the year of field work for the TWP. Living in their house, sharing their meals, listening to their conversations, I had ample opportunity to observe hundreds of decisions, big and small, being made. I even participated in many of them once I was accepted as part of the household. Analysing the process to see the underlying principles at work reveals some of the strengths and weaknesses that must be understood and appreciated before people's participation in agricultural development can become effective. I am convinced that even a trivial-seeming incident of decision-making can lead into a deeper understanding of society and culture and vice versa.

Starting right from the beginning, I choose an example from the first afternoon I spent in the village. Arrangements for my stay in the household had been made a few months earlier with the middle-aged wife and mother of the family at a time when her husband was away; now on my arrival, with her husband present, she welcomed me and showed me the section of the house which I would occupy, a two-storey extension with its own entrance. Everything was to my satisfaction except for the fact that there was no latrine. My Nepali companion and guide from the TWP office in Tansen brought this to the attention of the landlady at once. Without hesitation she agreed in principle that a pit-latrine could be dug for my use but for her the location was the key factor. The latrine should be out of sight of the neighbours, it must not be visible from the public path, for, as she

explained, "If people can see that we have a latrine here they will despise us; they may know that we have a latrine, but they must not see it."

After some looking about, we found a mutually acceptable location for the latrine in a corner of a maize field, not too distant from their house and out of the view of the neighbours and passers-by on the path. It seemed settled then and there but while returning from the field to the house my landlady said, half to herself, "I should ask my husband." When she arrived at the house, "asking her husband" took the form of telling him to call the Sarki carpenter first thing next morning to come and start digging. This her husband did.

I was to learn from this experience and from many others to follow that in this household it was the woman who made most of the decisions. She was effectively in charge. And yet, even in this family where the wife's assertive personality dominated the quiet retiring nature of her husband, a cultural principle of male authority was given recognition, even if it usually amounted to only lip-service, as in this case: "I must ask my husband."

As my field work progressed, I observed a similar relationship in other Brahman families, though normally the wife displayed more subtlety than my forceful landlady in the role of an effective decision-maker who yet knows how to remain in the background and defer outwardly to her husband. The somewhat ambiguous picture of household authority is the result, I believe, of a tension between the patrilineal virilocal family structure and the actual situation in many families of men being absent from the farm for extended periods for the purpose of earning cash while the women remain behind in de facto control of the household and farm management.

This was the case with my host family. Though now belonging in the Large Farmer category and considered by all to be among the hune, they had begun married life with a very small inheritance. The husband's army savings and then his employment for 18 years with the Bombay Municipality resulted in the family's gradual acquisition of excellent rice land in his home valley of Jhadewa but also in his loss of effective control of the family. For the wife divided her time between Bombay and Jhadewa, residing for months and years at a time in the village. It was she who used the husband's savings to purchase the land for rice and maize, who was on the spot to make the farm management decisions, who hired the plowmen and other workers, who supervised the construction of their large house, who selected and purchased the livestock. When the husband finally returned to live in Jhadewa, he came as nominal head of the family and thus the official farm

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manager, yet he lacked the experience of his wife, experience that made her the real head of the household in regard to most of the decisions that had to be made. An awkward situation, an ambiguous situation, causing difficulties for them both. Society says the man is in charge. "I should have been a man", she complained one day to one of her neighbours after relating her efforts to locate a milking buffalo at a good purchase price.

Looking back again at the example of decision-making given, we can see an important value at work, shaping the decision, viz. the value attached to reputation, ijjat. What people will think, especially what people will say. For my landlady, the fact of people merely knowing about the latrine is not a serious objection to constructing one. There is also no question of trying to keep it a secret. The impossibility of secrecy and the lack of privacy are among the first principles of village life, as I quickly learned. Rather what she is concerned about is people being able to see the latrine, to see it and thus easily make it a topic of discussion among themselves. "People will despise us." Her aim is not secrecy but invisibility. Having a latrine in a visible place is inviting unfavourable attention, unfavourable comment. Avoiding such comment is a value. The decision about the location of the latrine was clearly made on the basis of ijjat.

I hope I do not offend anyone's sensibilities by dwelling thus on the subject of a latrine. For there are indeed questions of sensibilities here. Though sanitation is a basic issue for development, it is hardly a straight-forward issue that can be viewed simply in terms of health and hygiene. It contains implications of a spiritual and ritual nature. Just why will "people despise us" if we use a latrine for defecation instead of the jungle? To understand this I suggest a consideration of Dumont's theory concerning the Hindu attitude to the organic, an attitude that is an element in the understanding of the caste system itself. In Homo Hierarchicus Dumont argues that the caste system is based on the principle of the opposition of the pure and the impure. This hierarchical structure of ranked hereditary groups marked by separation and a division of labour resulting in interdependence can be understood when it is seen as a whole which "is founded on the necessary and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites," the pure and the impure (Dumont 1972: 81). Dumont does not claim that this opposition is the cause of caste society but that "it is by implicit reference to this opposition that the society of castes appears consistent and rational to those who live in it" (Ibid: 82). After examining the Code of Manu with its norms governing purity and impurity, Dumont concludes: "It can be seen that impurity corresponds to the organic aspect of man" (Ibid: 88). In other words, greater purity and correspondingly higher status

depends on greater distance, greater separation from the organic aspects of human life, especially from the secretions and excretions of the human body.

For me a latrine meant sanitation, cleanliness and privacy; for my high caste landlady it very possibly meant something quite different: a concentration of dangerous pollution. Defecation in the jungle, under the wide sky and in the open air, away from the areas marked out for human society, is understandably preferable to anyone whose implicit thinking is based on an opposition between the pure and the impure.

To realize more vividly that the notion of the organic as spiritually or religiously impure is somehow special to the Hindu view of the world, it is useful to contrast the example of China and the attitude of farmers there to human excreta. In Fanshen, a study of land reform in a north China village, Hinton describes the physical lay-out of the village of Long Bow: "Both sides of this gully-like main street were lined with mudwalls six to eight feet high, broken here and there by covered gateways that led into the courtyards of the people. Beside each gate was the family privy, hopefully placed at the edge of the public road in anticipation of a contribution to the domestic store of fertilizer from any traveller who might be in need of relief" (Hinton 1966: 19). He goes on to emphasize the economic importance of this fertilizer, "The crops grew only on what was put into the soil each year; hence manure was the foundation of the whole economy. The chief source of supply was the family privy, and this became, in a sense, the center of the household. ... Legendary in the region were the landlords so stingy that they would not allow their hired men to defecate in the fields but made them walk all the way back to the ancestral home to deposit their precious burden. Other landlords would not hire local people on a long-term basis because local people were wont to use their own privies while a man from outside used that of his employer" (Ibid: 23).

Unlike Jhadewa where privies are almost unknown and certainly hidden out of sight, this village in north China gave privies a prominent location and made sure that everyone used them. Even more unlike Jhadewa, in Long Bow Village the night soil was valued in itself; it was collected in privies in order to be used. Hinton describes in detail a day he spent working with an exchange-labour group in extracting the so-called "black gold" from a privy and carrying buckets of it to the fields about to be planted with corn (Ibid: 428-9). Family privies in Jhadewa, for the purpose of sanitation and health, is a not inconceivable development goal. But a decision to use the collected night soil on the fields to achieve a goal of greater agricultural production does seem inconceivable

here. Agricultural decision-making can only operate within the boundaries that socio-religious tradition has set up. If it is true that the opposition of the pure and the impure is the intellectual foundation of caste society; its ideological basis and form, then it will endure as long as the society endures and will be the background for decisions of all kinds.

According to the plan of this article, I have given only one example of decision-making at the village family level. Undecided myself as to which example to choose, I took the course of chronology and chose the first instance of decision-making that I encountered. It is an example of a decision that was not only observed by me but one in which I participated. To have a latrine or not was clearly not an issue with the family until I came on the scene. Since I wanted one, the wife decided to have one built. During its construction and after, I made efforts to educate them on the value of a covered pit latrine for health and hygiene. It was easy to illustrate during the mid-day meal in May and June as we ate with one hand and constantly brushed away the flies with the other. I was pleased to notice after some weeks that first the school-going sons and later their parents began to make use of the latrine themselves. The boys did so explicitly for reasons of sanitation and health; the mother and father followed the lead of their children and presumably for the same reasons, though they never discussed it. Besides, it was there. Without denying the power of ideological objections, we can also admit the power of practical convenience, especially during the monsoon rains.

To end the account of this little drama, it can be noted that after I left the village several days of heavy rain caused a landslide that swept away the section of the maize field where the pit latrine and its thatch-roofed shelter had been built. The family regretted the loss, so they told me on a visit to the village some months later. But they had not attempted to rebuild it or to construct another one. The original reason for having a latrine at all, that an outsider like myself wanted it and was willing to finance its construction, was no longer operative. I was gone and, though they could have afforded to build another, that particular use of their resources did not have priority. Sanitation reverted to its pre-Tinau Khola Project state. That too was a decision.

IV. In conclusion, I would like to share with you a temptation I experience when I consider the question of decision-making, especially agricultural decision-making. Seeing the meagre landholdings of so many farmers and the burden of debt and dependence they labour under to maintain an undernourished existence, I am tempted to think that discussing agricultural decision-making in

most cases is merely an academic exercise. What scope does the small farmer have for farm management? It presupposes a farm, a decent farm. Land decisions presuppose land, sufficient land for the farmer to experiment. For the na hune, the have nots, farm management decisions must give place to daily survival decisions. They have no elbow-room, no space within which to manoeuvre.

The have nots in Jhadewa have no elbow-room even in regard to credit. Borrow they must, but government loans are denied to them on the basis of their poverty since they lack sufficient land to stand as collateral. But the large farmer is on hand to give them loans of foodgrains; the wealthy shop-keeper is there to give them credit for cloth. Basic needs for survival are met but at the price of dependence and the loss of human dignity. There is another alternative, to leave Nepal, to take what the villagers call the "nun khande bato", the salt-eating road. But this alternative merely makes the dependence a larger problem, a dependence of one nation on another, not merely of one individual on another. That such a dependence actually exists is the thesis of the authors of Nepal in Crisis (Blaikie et al. 1980).

The landless and the small farmers know very well what their basic needs are. They have been telling the government for a long time. Nearly thirty years ago a visiting expert from India reported to HMG that "wherever we went, whether in the Pokhara valley, Kathmandu valley or the tarai, the first demand of the people was always for land and for water for irrigation and for water for drinking" (Seth 1953: 2). Land reform legislation has not been lacking but its implementation has been unsatisfactory, as is clear from the reports of ILO advisor Kuhnen (1970) and FAO expert Zaman (1974). The connection between development, people's participation, and land reform is made explicit in Zaman's comment that "it is naive to expect modernisation of Nepal's agriculture with the voluntary participation of 88 percent of the farmers, when there is such serious disparity in holdings between land-owners and between land-owners and tenants" (Zaman 1974: 11). In other words, government decisions about land reform condition the kind of decisions farmers can make.

A brief look at such a government decision concerning land, though somewhat bewildering, may also be instructive. During the Workshop on People's Participation in Rural Development in Nepal, held in 1978, the Chairman and the then Minister for Food, Agriculture and Irrigation gave the following example: "There was an irrigation project which needed people's participation in its construction. But only a limited number of people owned land. Only they would benefit. How could we involve people who didn't possess land? There were 20 families who had no land, so to involve them, land was given to them to bring participation" (Sharma 1978: 15).

I confess to a kind of morbid fascination with the Minister's example; it causes a certain mental vertigo. Is it not all backwards? A project must be completed, participation must be achieved, and so the landless are bestowed with land. If land is available for the landless, why must the decision to construct an irrigation project with people's participation be necessary before they get access to the land. They have had the need all along. Is there perhaps an indication of a lack of understanding and compassion for the human suffering that landlessness necessarily involves in Nepal? Has "People's Participation" truly become a slogan to which lip service is paid and in the name of which isolated gestures are performed?

Perhaps what is needed is a study of decision-making not just among farming families but among city-based government bureaucrats too. It might be easier in their case to identify the basis of the development decisions, especially in regard to participation in the benefits of development. A trivial example comes to mind. Much-travelled roads in Patan are badly in need of maintenance and repair and yet, at the same time as these needs were neglected, an out-of-the-way lane in a residential area was metalled last year. It will come as no surprise that the little-used lane led to a then full Minister's residence. Another trivial example. While most people more or less patiently endure the inconveniences of load-shedding, an official of the Electricity Department enjoys 24 hours of uninterrupted electricity daily. Though no one would want to be petty and quibble with the decisions of the Roads Department or Electricity Department, still the examples serve to remind us that many decisions in regard to the benefits of development are made on the basis of privilege. We have perhaps become used to it.

But what do the examples given above in this section of the paper have to do with decision-making among farming families. The direct connection between land reform and farm management has already been pointed out and needs no further emphasis. But to see how privilege, or the use of power to attain personal benefits, affects the little people on the farm we have to return to the first part of this paper and its diagram. We recall that the family with its resources and needs interacts with the political environment. Now privilege permeates that environment. We are faced again with the presence of a hierarchy, but not a hierarchy of values, as in Dumont's scheme of a spiritual ranking of the pure above the impure, nor an economic hierarchy as such; this is rather a hierarchy of power, understood as a control over men and material resources. Economic prosperity is an excellent base for building power, and yet, though usually overlapping rather neatly with the economic hierarchy of haves and have-nots, this hierar-

chical opposition of powerful and powerless, of Big Men and little men, is really distinct.

To recognise a hierarchy of power at work in Nepali society, at city and village level, is not to deny the validity of Dumont's insight into the meaning of society but to acknowledge its incompleteness. The development of a larger understanding that will include not only all kinds of hierarchies but also illumine their relationships to each other is still, as far as I know, an unfinished task in social anthropology. But whether it all fits together neatly or not, the man with power, the Big Man, the leader, is a structural element in society that should not be ignored. Certainly the little people in Jhadewa are aware of it. They see that certain men in the village have the power to manipulate resources, institutions and events to their personal advantage. In addition to their solid economic base, the village leaders possess advantages like literacy or education, plus the all-important ability to deal with other powerful men at higher levels than the village, e.g., development agents and government officials. The leaders, the neta, know how to speak - this is a skill that all the villagers recognise. In Jhadewa the Big Men have used their advantages and their power to monopolise for themselves the services the government provides to increase agricultural production. For example, the JTA in that area deals exclusively with the strongest political leader and a handful of his associates. Being powerless, the other farmers' scope for farm management decisions is severely limited.

However much one may deplore it, an attitude such as privilege in the political environment cannot be uprooted or attacked directly. Besides, the little people too practise their petty exploitations on those even less powerful, both inside and outside the family, and can be quite as manipulative in small ways as any Big Man. The solution is not to deplore but to explore ways in which selfishness can be counteracted and privileges can be more widely shared. If the powerful get privileges, then let the weak find a way to acquire the power that will bring them their rightful share too in the benefits of development.

There is a way. To conclude this reflection on decision-making among farming families, I submit that the most significant, break-away, creative decision a low-income family could make is to decide to go it alone no longer but to join together with other low-income families in an upward movement, such as in a Small Farmers Development Group (Joshi 1980). Experience shows that a group of powerless "have-nots" can be transformed mentally and economically into a new phenomenon in Nepal: a group of "haves" who have become so not by competition or exploitation but by

cooperation and mutual support, a group of citizens with enough power to reach up and pull down what have been formerly the privileges of the powerful few, a group of farming people who truly participate in development.

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