

GEFONT on Food Sovereignty

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Globalization and Nepali society

Globalization as such is not a terminology that should worry the working class and the people in peasantry both in urban and rural structures of society. With the development of human civilization and with technological advancement, globalization of mankind is necessary and inevitable. In fact, the process of globalization is in continuation from the past hundreds and hundreds years. But the present nature of globalization, which is based on an uninterrupted flow of capital and restricted labour mobility, has caused an incomparable degree of imbalances and disharmony in the society. A fast process of class transition is also going on in our society, as in other parts of the least developed world. Globalisation of the day has, appallingly, resulted in unequal changes with the widening gap between the rich and poor.

The present day globalization led by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization is in favour of the Multi National Corporations (MNCs) and Giant Business Houses of the developed world. With WTO in action, particularly in agriculture, the issue of food security and food sovereignty has become highly relevant.

Now, MNCs have been intensifying their profiteering activities in agriculture, forestry and other natural resources. As such, their adverse effects have been flowing towards rural life and indigenous life of the people. The trend of consumerism is expanding fast in all classes of people, even in stagnant rural society. If the long-frozen stagnation, now coupled with globalisation dictated consumerism, is to break, it will create disasters in our rural society and entire national life as there is no productivity; unionisation-organization and equitable system of distribution which may otherwise help check frustrated expressions.

Land is the major form of asset in our national socio-economic life. Without an effective programme of land reform to back-up the changes in consumption patterns and consumerism with productivity improvements and just distribution, the explosion from the stagnation will not at all be positive.

Restructuring of our rural society is therefore a major agenda in our socio-economic development strategy. Hence the intervention of MNCs in rural agricultural life has to be taken seriously by the nation and responsible organizations.

Poverty and landlessness

The number of landless families in Nepal is very high, approximating one million out of a total number of families estimated to be 5 millions. Poverty is very high. Even official statistics indicate the number of people below poverty line to be 38 percent of the total population. This phenomenon clearly signifies that 'hand to mouth' has been our basic problem. The single objective of our ninth five-year plan was poverty alleviation. At present, the planning process for the formulation of 10th plan is going on through a series of consultations and discussions with the single objective of poverty reduction in the name of Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

On the other hand, a high majority of Nepali population is dependent on agriculture. Approximately 80 percent of the workforce in Nepal is engaged in farming and related occupation whereas the workforce is only 3 percent in manufacturing and 17 percent in services. Agriculture covers almost 39 percent of GDP also. But unfortunately, Nepal is facing food deficit. Increasing cash crop tilt (like tea plantation), very limited amount of arable land, subsistence nature of agriculture, poor irrigation access and absentee ownership are some of the causes of low land and labour productivity in agriculture. Increasingly, the hectare coverage of land under food crop production is diminishing. Therefore, the adjustment between demand for and supply of food grains through domestic production has become difficult. As a result, import of food grains and other processed food items that started mainly from 1980s is routine. To sum up, the issue of food security and food sovereignty are of a high significance for us.

What we think

Within these circumstances, as a landlocked country, we need to fight the adversities created by globalization and WTO within the same structure of globalization and WTO. Lip service opposition in isolation cannot solve the problem of food sovereignty. National resistance movement is necessary, with sub-regional and regional alliances against the adversities. There should also be initiative in favour of creating secured food environment for the people. The collaboration of trade union movement with peasant and women movements, NGOs, people's organizations, mass organizations and partnerships with like-minded and friendly political parties is necessary.

In the name of TRIPs and trade in agriculture, the traditional ownership rights of the people to technology and crops cannot be violated and destroyed. For this, the governments should be persuaded by the people's unified movement to fight the adversities unitedly within the WTO structure. A concerted movement of agricultural workers, in collaboration with every category of workers and national trade union centres, is necessary. And GEFONT is committed towards this kind of concerted movement from the very beginning, basically from 1995. GEFONT has been continuously lobbying and interacting with other actors, singly as well as in collaboration with others, in favour of working masses. GEFONT is of the view that this initiative should be extended towards the development of alliances in sub regional and regional levels to fight against growing inequalities of income and wealth, multinational exploitations and attacks on the social, economic and cultural rights of the working people.

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