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8 April 2021

### Nijgadh International Airport: Why Destruction of Forest is Justified

When I first heard that a new international airport was going to be built in my home country, Nepal, in the Nijgadh forest, I was, like the majority, against it as it would result in the destruction of at least two million trees. Only when I started to research it in-depth, I realized that this airport could be a stepping stone for a developing country like Nepal. Though there will be the destruction of the forest, the importance of building this airport outweighs the destruction.

Currently, Nepal has only one international airport located in the capital, Kathmandu. In an article written in *The Kathmandu Post*, one of the leading online news outlets in Nepal, named “Nepal Needs Another International Airport. So Why Is Nijgadh Being Held up?” Laxmi Sah states, “In Kathmandu, the country’s sole international airport has reached its saturation point as it handles more than 7 million domestic and international passengers with nearly 130,000 take-offs and landings annually” (Sah). Furthermore, the topography of the bowl-shaped Kathmandu valley makes it very difficult for an aircraft to land causing the airport in the valley to have a bad reputation (Bhattarai). So, an alternative airport near the capital makes the most sense in a country with only one international airport that is deemed bad. Also, Nijgadh only being 28 miles from the capital and having plain lands all around makes the construction of the airport both cheaper and logical from a topographical perspective (Poudyal).

Nepal is a developing country with not much infrastructure being developed. Nearly one-third of the population lives on the poverty line (World Bank). This huge project of Nijgadh

International Airport will employ nearly 100,000 people through direct and indirect jobs (Sah). This will give a huge boost to the economy and help uplift so many lives from deprivation. Availability of jobs and labor in the country would also mean that the number of people going to gulf countries, like Qatar and UAE, would also decline. These countries have been in controversy for so long for treating their labor forces from countries like Nepal in an inhumane way and providing a very low quality of life with the latest controversy being the death of 6500 migrant workers to build stadiums in Qatar (Pattisson). So, the construction of this airport can result in the improvement in the quality of life of so many Nepalis because of good employment opportunities in their own country.

The other economic benefits of building this airport are immense. The airport would be the biggest in South Asia when completed (Sah). The government plans to use it as a hub airport linking it with 28 cities. (Bhattarai). In a journal named “Airports Driving Economic and Tourism Development”, authors Dr. Cristureanu and Ana Bobircă talk about how airports with good connectivity act as a powerful magnet for companies as trading and transportation become easy. They also talk about how tourism gets promoted as it gets more exposure and easier access to tourists from all around the world. This would be of great value for a nation like Nepal that is so dependent on tourism for its income and growth. As a land-locked country, the importance of this airport could be massive in the economic development.

Numerous protests and petitions have been done against the construction of the airport saying that the destruction of 2 million trees and the wildlife residing there is just not worth it (ABC News, Pradhan). This resistance has kept the project away from running at a fast pace. While the criticism is valid, in a poverty-stricken country like Nepal, we cannot go on closing all the big projects for the sake of environmental conservation. Especially, considering that most of the

natural resources are still untouched in Nepal, it makes no sense to stop this project. There will always be some trade-off when it comes to development and environmental conservation.

Even though the development aspect of this is huge, it surely does not justify the unplanned and unnecessary destruction of forests and the wildlife it holds. So, instead of fighting against the construction of this airport, the main focus should be on how can we minimize the damage. “The Forest Ministry has presented a condition to the Tourism Ministry that the project executing agency will plant 25 saplings for every tree that is cut down” (Sah). Alternatives like this should be the main focus while building something of such colossal economic significance in a developing country instead of fighting against the construction of the airport. The cancellation of a huge project like this would mean the loss of so many economic boons for a country suffering from poverty.

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