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BOOK REVIEW

Unleashing Nepal – a review

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This book, which is dedicated 'To all who believe in the possibility of a transformation of Nepal and the unleashing of its potential' is a great read particularly for all *bideshis* who come here with great optimism and dedication to contribute to the development of the country. Looking at Nepal from the somehow naïve perspective of a foreigner, it seems that technically Nepal's potential would be very easy to unleash. However, after *Namaste* and *Dhanyabad*, the fatalistic *ke garne...?!* becomes one of the first terms we learn in



the local language and we are quickly informed about all the problems, challenges and hindrances to unleashing Nepal. Often, this is where the information ends and where one's mind starts revolving about ifs and buts and current stalemates. This book however takes us back to history and explains the socio-economic background and past style of political leadership that still seem to have an immense influence on how things are happening (or not so) in Nepal.

Let us take up the example of the current employer-employee relations: the book describes the *jagir* mentality as one of the reasons why people take jobs for granted regardless of performance or efficiency. It also gives insights about the reasons behind the lack of education and the fact that labour unions have often been misused for political reasons instead of promoting workers' rights

and development. At the same time, the reader learns about the arbitrage-orientation, lack of good business practices and the strong alliance of business with politics which hamper the development of modern management systems. Together with other factors outlined in the book this provides a good insight in how the current conflicts developed and why substantial changes in attitudes, regulation and mentality are needed to not only cure the symptoms but the cause. It is made clear that apart from more technical aspects like education, management systems and regulatory reforms soft factors like new partnerships, cooperation and trust as a precondition for that have to be developed.

Linked with the importance of good labour relations to unleash the potential for economic growth and development is Shakyamini's persisting concern of channelling the potential of Nepal's

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youth into productive sectors and activities. Everyone living in Nepal can easily recognise the power of Nepali youth. Uncountable examples of great youth initiatives notwithstanding, often, unfortunately in a way that is counterproductive to fostering their future prospects. The risk of growing unemployment among youth (due to sheer population figures and returning migrant workers) and the cost of potentially increasing conflict pose a massive threat to the development of the country. Targeted to productive activities however the power of young Nepalis carries almost unlimited opportunities for development. Shakyamini therefore rightfully elaborates about the importance and moreover the possibilities to unleash this potential in the right direction.

Many particular traits of doing business in Nepal find their explanation in the systems of the past which Shakyamini describes with the

knowledge of an insider but the objectivity and critical perspective of someone who has looked far beyond national boundaries. Reading the book one gets the impression that many of the challenges can be attributed to the fact that the faith of the Nepali people has somehow always depended on the goodwill of either feudal rulers, some influential families or later foreign aid. This mode of dependency of the Nepali psyche as Shakyamini puts it (or the perception thereof) seems to be one of the biggest hindrances to unleashing the great potentials of individuals and the country in general. Even though one can find (and Shakyamini describes) immense business opportunities, natural resources and ingenuity in every corner of the country it seems that far too many individuals are still stuck in this perception which prevents them from taking their faith in their own hands

instead of waiting for someone else to do it.

The real beauty of the book therefore lies in part three where Shakyamini explores the opportunities and potential which lie right in front of the country and all its citizens, being seemingly covered only by the difficult political situation. These opportunities and potentials are indeed abounding. From infrastructure to hydropower, from tourism to health care, from ICT to remittances and from community based organisations to international branding Nepal he outlines the existing potentials. Many of them – one has to admit – are not even a hidden secret. If only all Nepali citizens could recognise them. And if each Nepali would realise that it is not THE government, not A party, not anyone else but each individual that can and should unleash its own potential to unleash Nepal's. This book is an important step in this direction.