

Congratulation! MS President Nima Lama receiving 'Youth Entrepreneurship Award' at the function organized by Nepal Youth Society

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Dear Mountain Spirit members, partners, friends, and well-wishers,

Greetings from Mountain Spirit!

It is our pleasure to share this issue of Mountain Spirit's quarterly e-newsletter, *Mountain Trail*. This issue includes articles from our members and updates of our activities from the past three months. We would like to thank Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, Mr. Ang Rita Sherpa, Mr. Gelu Sherpa, Ms. Jemima Diki Sherpa and Ms. Yangji Doma Sherpa for contributing to this issue. We are also thankful to Ms. Jemima Diki Sherpa for editing support. We will be publishing the next e-newsletter in mid-March, and we request all our members contribute by sending in articles.

As life is a combination of happiness and sorrow, we have both good and sad news to share with our members. First, we express our heart-felt condolences to our Advisor Mingma Norbu Sherpa and members Pasang Yangji Sherpa and Kunjang Chhoti Sherpa for the loss of their relative Lama Chhiri, a well known Lama from Ward No. 1, Monjo, in the Pharak region of Chaurikharka VDC, Solukhumbu. Lama Chhiri passed away in early December, and he will be greatly missed in the community.

In happier news, Mr. Nima Lama, President of Mountain Spirit recently received a 'Youth Entrepreneurship Award' from Nepal Youth Society. We would like to congratulate him on this achievement and extend our best wishes for his future success.

Finally, we wish all our members and well-wishers a merry Christmas, a festive New Year 2013 and a very happy Losar for the year of snake 2140. May the coming year bring peace, prosperity, and happiness in your family and society.

Lhakpa Tenji Lama (Sherpa)  
General Secretary/Executive Director

Mountain Spirit has been an implementing partner in the 'Community-based Land and Forest Management Project' in the Sagarmatha National Park since February 2010. The Project has been funded by the European Union, and MS has worked in partnership with Italian NGO CESVI to implement it on the ground.

Although the project was originally intended to finish in March 2012, due to a variety of circumstances the EU granted no-cost extensions until 31 December 2012 to complete the project activities. The main priorities during last three months of this extension period included the preparation of two operational plans for Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) in the Chaurikharka VDC, international exposure visits, institutional capacity building of the Sagarmatha National Park unit in Lukla, management training for CFUGs, and a national-level workshop to discuss the outcomes of the Project. Some of the Project activities conducted since our last update in the September issue of *Mountain Trail* include:

#### *Survey of Non-Timber Forest Products*



Workshop participants in Thamo

Due to the diversity of forest ecosystems in Nepal, sustainable harvesting and use of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) has great potential to improve local incomes and livelihoods. The Project included a scientific study of NTFPs in the Sagarmatha National Park and its Buffer Zone. A team documented NTFPs found in the region, and assessed their status, ecological habitat, flowering time, life form and abundance. They also recorded local indigenous knowledge about these plant resources, as well as information about how they have been traditionally collected, processed and used. At the end of the survey, training workshops were organized in the villages of Khumjung (8 September), Thamo (10 September), and Chheplung (12 September). The objective of these workshops was to share the findings of the study with local people and to encourage sustainable methods of using NTFPs.

#### *Distribution of fire fighting equipments*

In order to enhance the capacity of local communities to control fire, comprehensive Fire Control Kits were distributed to the Buffer Zone User Committees (BZUCs) of the Chaurikharka, Namche and Khumjung VDCs. The kits are valued at a total of about Rs. 4.2 million, and included water pumps, back pack water pumps, fire suits, axes, rakes, drip torches, pruning saws, GPS systems and first aid kits. Handover functions were held on 30 September 2012 for Chaurikharka BZUC and on 2 October for the Namche and Khumjung BZUCs.



Representatives of Chaurikharka BZUC with fire fighting equipments

#### *'Lesson learned' workshop*

A one-day national level workshop was organized in Kathmandu on 2 October to share the lessons learned from the project. Representatives from Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal, and other partner organizations attended the workshop.



### *Preparation community forest user group operational plans*



Participants during participatory workshop for operational plan development

The operational plans of nine Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) in Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) are outdated and in need of review in order to ensure effective natural resource management. The Project has collaborated with Sagarmatha National Park staff to assist the Red Panda Buffer Zone CFUG and the Muse Buffer Zone CFUG, both in Chaurikharka VDC, in preparing new operational plans.

### *International exposure visits*

A team of six Nepali delegates visited Malaysia's Kota Kinabalu National Park in October. The visit aimed to foster an exchange of knowledge around topics of tourism, community participation and biodiversity conservation. The team included Mr. Ramji Shivakoti from the Ministry of Forests, Mr. Barna Bahadur Thapa and Mr. Hari Narayan Balbase from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Mr. Ram Chandra Kandel from Sagarmatha National Park, Mr. Sonam Gyalzen Sherpa from the SNP Buffer Zone Management Committee, and Mr. Nima Lama Hyolmo from Mountain Spirit.



Participants of international exposure visit in Kota Kinabalu

### *National-Level Workshop in Lukla*



From left: Tika Ram Adhikari, Pashupati Nath Koirala, Dr Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, Manij Upadhyay and other participants

Mountain Spirit in collaboration with CESVI and the Sagarmatha National Park organised a national-level workshop in Lukla on 14 December 2012. The workshop focused on community-based natural resource management in Sagarmatha National Park.

Mr. Tika Ram Adhikari, Chief Warden of Bardiya National Park discussed practices of non-timber forest product use in high altitude areas; Mr. Manij Upadhyay, District Forest Officer of Solukhumbu, made a presentation about the status of forests in Solukhumbu district; and Mr Pashupati Nath Koirala, Forest Management Officer of the Department of Forest, talked about community forest development in Nepal. Mr. Sonam Gyalzen Sherpa, Chairperson of Sagarmatha National Park Buffer Zone Management Committee (SNP BZMC), and Mr. Nima Dorjee Sherpa, Chairperson of Chaurikharka Buffer Zone User Committee shared their thoughts on the experiences, achievements and challenges of Buffer Zone management. Chairpersons of various Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) shared their experiences, practices and challenges. Mr. Giovanni Malavasi, Project Manager of CESVI gave a talk about the major achievement and lessons learned from the Community-based Land and Forest Management Project. Mountain Spirit advisor Dr. Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa was the chairperson of the workshop and he provided closing summary remarks and also shared his experiences regarding Buffer Zone and Community Forestry User Group management in Sagarmatha National Park. Mr. Ram Chandra Kandel, Chief Warden of Sagarmatha National Park delivered welcome speech and also shed light on the objectives of the workshop. Mr. Lhakpa Tenji Lama, Senior Field Coordinator of the project was a workshop facilitator.

*Re-granting scheme projects*

**Local people in Khumjung participating in plantation program**



**Ghang Lha landscaping and plantation program in Namche**



**Kerosene depot in Khumbu Multipurpose Cooperative in Namche**



**A metal bridge built in Chaurikharka - 4, Musey**

The project implemented nine re-granting schemes based on the proposals received from local user groups and community based organizations. Out of an initial total of 20 proposals, 14 passed the first screening and were admitted for grant evaluation. In a two-day meeting between CESVI, Mountain Spirit and Sagarmatha National Park representatives, these proposals were evaluated against a scoring sheet with criteria which aimed to determine which projects were most suitable to receive funding. Nine of the proposals passed this final screening process, and were granted approximately 10,000 Euros each to accomplish their proposed activities. Each group provided 10 percent local contributions to the project in order to ensure their participation and ownership in the project. Proposals included activities such as establishing nurseries and kerosene depots, constructing a metal bridge, and reforestation and tree plantation. The nine final projects were:

### **1. Chhutawi Lo Tree Plantation, Khumjung**

Implementing group: Khumbi Yulha Buffer Zone User Group, Khumjung VDC

Project activities:

- Planted 6000 trees of diverse species in the area covering 3000 sq meters.
- Plantation fencing completed using metal poles and wires

### **2. Ghang-La Landscaping, Namche**

Implementing group: Namche Youth Group, Namche VDC

Project activities:

- Ghang-La grounds levelled/landscaped after extensive stone mining for Namche construction
- Mani wall painting
- Fencing around the landscaped area

### **3. Plantation project in Ghang-La, Namche**

Implementing group: Namche Women's Group, Namche VDC

Project activities:

- Plantation of pine trees
- 3500 seedlings produced for plantation
- Maintenance of Phurte nursery staff quarters

### **4. Alternative Energy for Conservation, Namche**

Implementing group: Khumbu Multipurpose Cooperative Limited, Namche VDC

Project activities:

- Kerosene depot established
- 40 stoves purchased for distribution to financially disadvantaged families
- 3000 litres of kerosene purchased

### **5. Metal Bridge Construction, Musey**

Implementing group: Musey Buffer Zone Community Forest User Group, Chaurikharka VDC

Project activities:

- Two metal bridges constructed





Fixing fencing materials in Namche—8, Thameteng

## 6. Restoration of High Elevation Ecosystem, Thameteng

Implementing group: Himalayan Buffer Zone User Group, Namche VDC

Project activities:

- Plantation of 4500 trees covering approximately 4 hectares in Nam Tshiri-La, Thameteng
- Plantation fencing using wire and metal poles completed

## 7. Forest Management, Ghat

Implementing group: Dudhkunda Buffer Zone Community Forest User Group, Chaurikharka VDC

Project activities:

- Planting, pruning and fencing conducted
- Fire control water supply system built with water tanks and supply points located around the settlement
- 20 metal flag poles distributed to local residents to reduce wood use

## 8. Multipurpose Nursery Establishment and Seedling Production, Chhuserma

Implementing group: Chaurikharka Buffer Zone User Committee, Chaurikharka VDC

Project activities:

- Built green houses in Chhuserma. Currently growing tomatoes, green house plastic purchased but not yet replaced.
- Established nursery beds

## 9. Use of Alternative Energy (Gas and Kerosene)

Implementing UG: Lukla Buffer Zone Community Forest User Group, Chaurikharka VDC

Project activities:

- Gas and kerosene depot established
- 100 gas cylinders and 2000 litre of kerosene purchased



Fire control system built in Chaurikharka - 6, Ghat

## Business Plan workshop for community-based organizations

Mountain Spirit member and business lecturer Mr. Lhakpa Gelu Sherpa facilitated business plan writing workshops on 11 and 13 December 2012. The main objective was to help the kerosene and gas depots established as part of the re-granting scheme by the Lukla BZCFUG and the Khumbu Multipurpose Cooperative in Namche become viable business operations with a strong social responsibility component. During the workshops these two groups prepared business plans to help them achieve their goals.

## Workshop on Basic Management Skills for Lodge business

A one-day workshop on Basic Lodge Management Skills was organised for the lodge owners of Lukla on 14 December 2012. MS member Mr. Lhakpa Gelu Sherpa volunteered as a facilitator for the event, which was organised by the Himalayan Club Lukla in collaboration with Mountain Spirit. 20 local lodge operators attended the workshop.



Gas depot in Chaurikharka - 9, Lukla

## SUSTAINABLE LIVING IN THE MOUNTAINS

DR LHAKPA NORBU SHERPA, ADVISOR, MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

Mountain Spirit's goals are to develop mountain communities, advance mountain cultures and conserve mountain environments. Over the years, many of our members have contributed to these aims by travelling, living and working in the mountains, and hopefully many more of us will do so in the future as well.

Four Mountain Spirit members (Lhakpa Tenji, Yangji Doma, Jemima Diki and I) are currently working on natural resource and tourism-related projects in the remote mountain village of Thamo in Solukhumbu (elevation 3500m).

Mountains regions are beautiful places, but those who live here face a series of challenges. First and foremost is the problem of access. Transportation problems make commodities expensive and difficult to get.

The second major challenge is coping with harsh winter conditions. All over the Himalaya, people leave their villages to spend winters in warmer places. Kathmandu has become one such destination, even though it is neither pleasant nor cheap.

To prevent permanent or temporary out-migration and reduce costs, both simple and inexpensive solutions must be found to solve the mountain people's



Thamo village

problems. The cold drives most people out from their mountain homes because their houses are not adequately insulated. It is vitally important that mountain houses are built with winter conditions in mind. Most Sherpa homes, especially those constructed recently, may seem like palaces in the summer but they become miserable wind tunnels during the winter. Our own place in Thamo is not an exception. It was built in the summer and so far has only been lived in during the warm seasons. This year, we plan to spend many winter months here because the electricity supply is better than in Kathmandu to finish our work. However, after October the house has turned from warm to cool and from cool to cold. Lighting the fire and heaters is of little help, because the heat simply won't stay inside. I needed to find a quick and cheap fix if we were to stay here for longer.

First, I checked the roof. There was only a thin plywood ceiling between the rooms and the space below the roof. There are so many gaps and holes in the rock wall under the roof that wind was whistling through the attic at 100 miles per hour. Any heat generated in the rooms was escaping up into the cold attic and the cold from the attic was descending into the rooms below.

In Khumbu, except for potatoes and some vegetables, most things are flown in from Kathmandu including food, clothing, equipment and construction materials. People accumulate packaging materials and this becomes a big source of pollution. Over the last year or so, we have also accumulated plenty of waste, including cardboard packing boxes and plastic. Being an environmentally conscious person, I refused to throw them over the cliff or burn them like other people do. So they sat accumulating in the corner of the storeroom waiting for a chance to be reused. Suddenly I realized that these cardboard boxes were a source of cheap insulation material. We flattened all





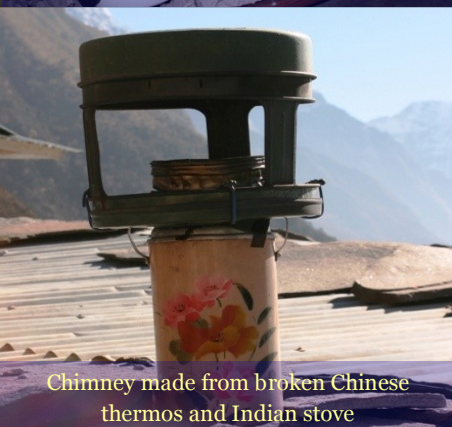
Toothpick holder from Tabasco sauce bottle



Litter bin out of a broken water heater



Egg crates protect pots and shelves



Chimney made from broken Chinese thermos and Indian stove



Cardboard paper as insulation material on top of plywood ceiling

the boxes and laid them on top of the plywood ceiling. On top of that, we added a layer of plastic sheeting that had previously covered the vegetable garden. It was no longer effective as greenhouse because of the advancing cold and wind. The airproof layer definitely improved the temperature of the rooms, but it was still not enough. The large single-glazed windows (*trhama*) were letting out our precious heat and letting in cold drafts. Our flimsy curtains didn't seem to help much. We used the remaining clear plastic sheets to seal the windows from the outside. This seems to have worked, as the cold drafts are no longer coming in and we finally feel the warmth of the little electric heater.

Additional solutions have included putting double curtains on the inside of windows, and heavy curtains on the doors that lead directly outdoors. An architect friend from USA wrote with some advice: "Plug every hole that you think is allowing air in." I began reusing all kinds of materials (old blankets, rags, perished foam mattresses, styrofoam packaging and forest litter) to pack every hole I could reach. Suddenly, all the material destined to add to the landfill got reused, and we have found a solution that is affordable, environmentally sound and will last for at least a while. Flying in good insulation materials from Kathmandu is costly and difficult, so it is worth recycling and reusing.

We also do other recycling and reusing to deal with waste, which reduces how much we have to throw in landfills to about half a kilogramme of waste per person per month:

We recycled a broken water heater that even the local blacksmith could not make use of to build a robust litter bin that is far superior to flimsy plastic trash cans.

Using a broken Chinese thermos and Indian kerosene stove, we fixed a rusted chimney pipe and minimized the fire danger immediately.

We save glass bottles of all kind to reuse. They can become useful containers for storing milk, alcohol and water for local farmers. Glass bottles are safer than plastics, since plastic bottles degrade faster and can release toxic chemicals into the liquids stored in them.

Even the lowly Tabasco sauce bottle can become a handsome toothpick holder.

Old egg crates can protect our pots and shelves.

Organic waste is much easier to deal with. We accumulate all the organic scraps and turn it into compost fertilizer for the kitchen garden. In the winter cold temperatures make composting difficult, but we continue to collect the organic waste and deliver it to our neighbors, who feed it to their cows.

All these efforts may seem small and very time consuming. But the world's resources are finite and human demands are insatiable. The rich and mindless will continue to over-consume and trash our environment with waste, but poor mountain farmers have more reasons to recycle and reuse. It can not only save the little money they have but also saves our environment. We can follow their example and save the world and the humanity through sensible recycling and reuse. I would like to encourage all Mountain Spirit members to practice recycling and reuse and be a model for your community.

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# COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN IMJA VALLEY

ANG RITA SHERPA, SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER, THE MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

Glacial retreat in high-altitude landscapes is one of the most visible signs of global warming, with important implications for freshwater flow, agriculture, biodiversity, and health. Seventy-five percent of the world's fresh water is stored in glaciers, and there are predictions that climate change will cause some of the world's largest glaciers to melt dramatically in the coming decades. The implications for freshwater availability are significant.

In September 2011, The Mountain Institute (TMI) hosted the first Andean-Asian Glacial Lake Expedition in the Mount Everest (Khumbu) Region in Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone. Over thirty international technical and social scientists took part in three weeks of field-based research in an area where, over the years, global climate change has disproportionately impacted the high mountain environment. The group conducted formal and informal discussions about climate change, glacial lakes, and climate adaptation. The main focus of the discussions was the unprecedented rate of glacial retreat that has been noted by high-altitude mountain communities, causing major concern due to the impact on Himalayan glaciers.



KACC members welcome the scientists at their office in Dingboche



Andean-Asian Glacial Lake Expedition Team at Imja

The Andean-Asian Glacial Lake Expedition's goal was to observe glacial landscape changes in the Imja Valley. During the last two decades, the glaciers in the Khumbu region, particularly Imja Glacier, have provided a unique opportunity to study climate change and its potentially dangerous effects, such as glacial lake outburst flooding (GLOF).



Scientists from different countries at Chukung Resort

The expedition members used community-based participatory research, meeting with local people with the intention of understanding the issues, concerns and solutions expressed by the community. This collaborative approach involves the local communities and other stakeholders who will be affected during the research process, and recognizes the unique strengths and perspectives that each stakeholder brings. The team met with Sherpas from Shomare, Chukung and Dingboche.





Community-based Participatory Research at Imja Lake  
with Scientists

The local community expressed frustration that previous research discussed the potential of a GLOF event of Imja Lake without providing tangible solutions. The community explained that previous researchers had not been responsible in reporting their findings, and had published alarmist reports rather than measured responses that focus on action-based planning.

The community also expressed their desire that no further non-applied research of the lake be allowed in the Khumbu area, instead demanding research focused on practical mitigation options. The community discussed the potential to drain water at the

Imja Lake outlet and to use it to generate micro-hydropower. By developing hydropower from the water outlet of the glacial lake, and through the conservation and restoration of mountain watershed, the community hoped to counter the impacts of warming trends by creating cooler environments, saving biodiversity, protecting fragile alpine ecosystems and protecting water supplies.



KACC members during participatory consultation

In response to the community consultation, the expedition members invited the local community representatives to visit the Imja Lake site for a briefing of the lake conditions. There they discussed the glacial lake's present condition, practical experiences in glacial lake control, risk mitigation and glacier management. The team also maintained a daily blog with photos, videos, and stories to reach a wider audience.

In response to the community based participatory research in Imja valley, the USAID-funded High Mountain Glacial Watershed Program was established in March 2012 with the objectives of giving people living in remote areas a voice in the



KACC members at Imja Lake visit

current dialogue surrounding high mountain climate change risks; establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) that strengthens communication and collaboration between scientists and practitioners globally; teaching the next generation traditional field-based methods; and increasing global awareness for the importance of high mountain glacial watersheds in general. As part of its Nepal program, community consultations were conducted in three VDCs in the Khumbu region in September 2012 to provide introductory information to local communities on climate change, local vulnerabilities, and adaptation opportunities.

*(Ang Rita Sherpa is a founder member of Mountain Spirit)*

# MARGINALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN NEPAL

GELU SHERPA, PHD. STUDENT, DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS, STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY,  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Language is the medium of communication. It is not only the faculty which differentiates humans from the rest of the living beings, but it also facilitates in our thinking, imagination, and world view. Language relates to education, socio-economics, politics, ecology, culture, and technology. Many countries have been divided due to the culture and languages related issues. For instance, many countries separated from the greater Soviet Union in the early 1990s due to cultural and language issues. Most importantly, language heritage is the main vehicle for the transmission of culture and ingrained endemic knowledge and skills to future generations.

There is no monolingual country where only one language is spoken, especially in today's era of globalization. Multilingualism, or at least bilingualism, is inevitable in most countries around the world. Whenever more than one language exists in a community or country there

*"Multilingualism, or at least bilingualism, is inevitable in most countries around the world. Whenever more than one language exists in a community or country there will be issues of languages policy and planning".*

will be issues of languages policy and planning. Decisions made by governments and institutions play a role in the preservation and promotion of particular languages and the marginalization of others. In this context, Nepal is a multilingual country with 123 languages spoken as mother tongues. Unfortunately, no systematic Language Policy and Planning has ever been made to preserve and promote the indigenous languages of Nepal. On the contrary, policies were formulated and implemented to marginalize and eliminate many of Nepal's indigenous languages.

Historically, the marginalization of Nepali indigenous languages started after King Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification of Nepal around the mid-

seventeenth century. Prior to the unification in 1768/69 many of these states were the homeland of indigenous people with self-rule. The Shah rulers had imposed Khas Nepali language, Hindu culture, and religion on indigenous communities, ignoring their existing distinct language, culture, religion and value systems. There was absolute Shah royal rule from 1768 to 1846, then the autocratic Rana regime took power from 1846 to 1951. The first Rana Prime Minister Jangnga Bahadur Rana issued an order barring the use of languages other than Khas Nepali in government service in 1854. In 1921 Chandra Shamser, another Rana Prime Minister, declared that documents written in non-Khas languages

could not be submitted as evidence in courts. Similarly, after the formation of the 'Gorkha Language Publication Committee' in 1913, genealogies, inscriptions, and about 30,000 manuscripts related indigenous peoples' religion, culture and language were completely destroyed by the rulers. Many poets such as Chitradhar Hridaya, Siddhicharan Shrestha, Phatte Bahadur Singh and other language activists were imprisoned for life and had their property confiscated for composing poems and publishing books in indigenous languages and raising voices for linguistic rights in the 1940s. Nepal's first experience of democracy came between 1951 to 1960. Even during this period of transitional democracy The National Education planning Commission, formed in 1955, recommended the teaching of the Khas Nepali language from primary level in order to promote that language over other indigenous languages. Similarly, the Ministry of Education issued an order to implement the directives to use Khas Nepali



language as the medium of instruction in schools on 12 October 1957. Later the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1959 stated that the Khas Nepali language written in the Devnagari script would be the national language of the country. Then King Mahendra seized the power from elected government in 1960 and introduced the Political Partyless Panchayat System which extended until 1989. Many minority and indigenous languages disappeared during this period because under the Panchayat System, the doctrine of 'one nation, one costume, and one language' was enforced stringently as a nation-building mission. This suppressed and eliminated other languages, causing immense humiliation, indignity, and intangible heritage loss to different indigenous communities. Those rulers just promoted the Khas Nepali language and were very intolerant towards minority and indigenous languages. This nation-building mission of the rulers was enforced through the formation of different commissions. For instance, the Royal Higher Education Commission formed in 1981 recommended for the establishment of separate university for Sanskrit language, despite the language having no native speakers of its own. Based on the recommendation of the commission, Mahendra Sanskrit University was established in 1982 in order to revitalize and develop the Khas Nepali language.

The preservation, promotion and development of languages mainly depend on favorable political system in the nation. The data in the following data shows the impact of politics on the indigenous languages:

Census	Mother tongues	Ethnic languages	Political system
1952/54	44	29	Transitional democracy
1961	33	26	Panchayat system
1971	17	12	Panchayat system
1981	17	13	Panchayat system
1991	20	15	Constitutional monarchy
2001	92+	70+	Constitutional monarchy
2011	123+	—	Democracy

**Table 1: Mother tongues and Ethnic languages**

(Source: Population census 1952-2011)

The first population census was conducted during 1952 to 1954 in Nepal in order to find out about the social-economic structure of the country. More systematic census has been conducted every ten years since then. This data shows the due to more favorable political system after 1990s the identity of more indigenous communities and their languages were recognized in the country. Even after the restoration of democracy in 1990, the constitutional bodies have made very unpleasant decisions regarding indigenous languages. For instance, based on the provisions stipulated in the constitution 1991, the local bodies of Kathmandu municipality, Dhanusha district, Rajbiraj and Janakpur municipalities made decisions to use Nepal Bhasa (Newari) and Maithily Language as an official language in addition to *Khas Nepali* in these regions respectively in 1999. But those decisions were challenged legally and cases were filed in court. The Supreme Court of Nepal gave its final verdict on those cases on June 1, 1999 stating that the decisions made by the local bodies were illegal and unconstitutional. That decision not only created great resentment and negative attitude against the Khas Nepali language among the indigenous communities, but also raised serious questions about the governments' sincerity and commitment to preserve, promote, and develop indigenous languages as per the provisions in the constitution. Therefore, indigenous communities remember June 1 as 'black day' in the history of indigenous nationalities in Nepal.

Mountain communities in Nepal are almost always small minority groups with their own language and linguistic history. Official policies regarding language in Nepal have a great impact on our language and on our culture. Therefore it is important to make the effort to save our languages within our own communities and also understand and act on a policy level so that we can create a positive environment for minority and indigenous languages.

(Gelu Sherpa is a general member of Mountain Spirit)

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## SHERPA CULTURE: WHO WRITES IT?

JEMIMA DIKI SHERPA, MEMBER, MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

In the final year of my Anthropology undergraduate degree I took a class in which there was only one assignment: to design, research, prepare, and write a 10,000-word mini-thesis on a topic of your choice.

Until that point, I had never focused any assignment on Sherpa culture. Historically, the Anthropology discipline had developed with the idea that only someone who came from outside a culture could truly see it with fresh, unbiased and scientific eyes and study it seriously. It was assumed that if you studied a culture you were part of, you would fail to see many things because they seemed so normal or even just natural to you. For a long time, this idea of only studying other peoples' cultures was central to all Anthropological work. However, in recent years this idea has been challenged a lot. People began to realize that not allowing people to speak academically about their own cultures meant that interpreting and representing that culture is left to an outsider. This means that the most respected source of information about many cultures, particularly small non-European minorities like Sherpas and other ethnic groups in Nepal, are written by scholars who come from outside. Most outside scholars do their best to make fair, well-informed observations, but at the end of the day the final decisions of how to present a culture is in their hands. The resulting books and papers and articles are always in English or another globally dominant language, and usually do not reach back to the communities they talk about. This takes the power of having a voice on that level away from the communities being studied. As a result, there is now a movement to let Anthropologists study and write about their own cultures, but it is still not very common.

Because I was so far away from Nepal, conducting first-hand research for a small undergraduate paper was out of the question. I decided instead to do a review of published academic literature on Sherpa culture, and analyze them against the major Anthropological theories that had dominated at the time when they were written. I began collecting all the books and papers I could find on Sherpa culture. Furer-Haimendorf, Oppitz, Ortner, Brower, Adams – the last names of all the foreign academics who had produced major works about Sherpas were already familiar because I had seen their books on my parents' bookshelves for most of my life. I had picked up most of them at one time or another, but usually only read a few paragraphs before stopping because I didn't really understand what the authors were talking about. However, after several years of Anthropology study finally I could understand the language that they used, the theories that they quoted and the ideas behind their pages. I added in some of the more popular-style books and magazine articles about Sherpas, piled them up in a huge stack on a table, and began to read.

One thing I really didn't expect was to find reading these books an intensely emotionally challenging process. Furer-Haimendorf's *The Sherpas of Nepal* is the very first book published on Sherpa people and is considered to be the cornerstone of all social science-type academic research into our culture. In it, I immediately found a description of my grandparents from the 1950s, where aspects of their way of life were presented in a similar tone to the one you hear in National Geographic documentaries describing a particularly strange sea-dwelling creature. I could almost picture Furer-Haimendorf's excitement as he 'discovered' them and wrote them into his book as just another example of the strange Nepali natives that people in Europe could read about for education or entertainment.



Throughout the reading material I found references to other family members, or pictures of people I knew. People who I knew as living, breathing individuals became disturbingly nameless and fixed in time forever.

Even more disturbing was that each of these authors, none of whom were actually from the Sherpa community, seemed convinced (or at least tried to sound convincing) that their book or article was *the* definitive truth about Khumbu Sherpa life and culture. There was confidence and arrogance in the way that they wrote, because there is no market for an academic or author who is unsure of what they are saying. Often, these authors drew long, complex conclusions based on a single incident they had witnessed or a phrase that someone said to them - usually a phrase that had to be passed through at least one interpreter. At times, their observations and conclusions directly contradicted each other. In most of them there was the assumption, either hidden or stated clearly, that writing these books and documenting our existence is important because Sherpas, our language, our identity and our culture are destined to disappear completely into the waves of modern, globalised life.

I disagreed, of course, but I also began to question myself intensely. My father is Sherpa, but my mother is not; I was born in the mountains, but grew up mostly in Kathmandu. I understood only a little Sherpa language and spoke even less; I had gone to festivals and ceremonies but never bothered to learn much about what they really meant. Was I any more qualified to say anything about Sherpa people than a foreign researcher? Did I really have the right to feel offended, even violated by the way that some author wrote about our community and history when I had never made the effort to learn and write about it myself? After all, I was a perfect example of the 'destruction' of Sherpa life that Furer-Haimendorf wrote about in his second book about us.

All of this personal connection to the material made the process of writing the mini-thesis extra challenging, but I managed to turn it in and fortunately my professor liked the final product. However, unlike every other assignment, I didn't forget about it as soon as I received my grades. Even now, I still think about the questions

that came up; I don't have any real answers, but I do have a collection of some thoughts:

The academic work that exists is valuable, but only up to a certain point. As with the documentaries and articles and countless other documents that have been made about us in the last five decades, we need to be aware of what they say but cannot simply let them tell us who we are. We need to write, both informally and academically, and talk and make films and take photographs ourselves, because our cultural narrative is too important to leave to other people who may or may not get it right.

A culture is like a movie, not like a single photograph. One of the key ideas in Buddhism is that of accepting impermanence. Because everything always changes, from frame to frame the movie of our culture is different and no two moments are exactly the same. However, we are a culture because we share and trace a common history, a common story. The idea that our culture is 'dead' if we wear pants, use smartphones and travel around the world is not true. However, our story *will* be dead if we stop telling it, or tell it as if it is already finished.

The key to being able to continue telling our story is to use the language that stores our history, our environment and our values. My biggest regret is not being able to speak the Sherpa language. I am trying to learn it now, but as an adult it is difficult and I will never be able to have the ease and understanding of an adult speaker.

I am fortunate that even though it is late in life, I have the chance to listen to my dad and aunts and other Sherpa relatives and friends, to watch them and learn and ask questions if I need to. However, we all need to learn and remember as much as we can, and cannot assume that these opportunities to know ourselves will be around forever. If I have children, I fear my grandchildren won't have anyone who still knows what it means to be Sherpa to teach them. My greatest worry is that if they have a question about their great-great-grandparents and want to know about our history and lives, the only thing they'll be able to find will be that passage in Haimendorf's book.

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN NEPAL

LHAKPA TENJI LAMA (SHERPA), EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have a significant role in Nepal's development sector, mainly in areas of resource mobilization, social mobilization, awareness raising, skill development, community infrastructure development, human rights issues, education, economic development and so on. Many national and international NGOs are involved in different sectors. NGOs are the organizations that work at the grassroots level with local communities in remote areas where government services are not able to reach effectively. There are approximately twenty

*NGOs are the organizations that work at the grassroots level with local communities in remote areas where government services are not able to reach effectively.*

eight thousand NGOs in Nepal, although not all of them are actively involved in the development sector.

Although many national and international NGOs have been contributing to development work in Nepal, their intentions,

transparency, accountability, commitment, and capability of independent action have been questioned at various levels. NGOs are always blamed for corruption and not performing their activities transparently. Due to a lack of strong monitoring systems, there is a higher chance of misusing NGO resources. Many NGOs are established without clear vision and objectives, and such organizations definitely cannot develop plans and policies for program implementation. Some NGOs are even intentionally created by certain groups or families as an earning opportunity rather than with social service goals. The intention of

these types of NGOs is only earning dollars and majorities of NGOs in this category are depending on donor agencies to sustain. Unfortunately, due to the negative performance and actions of a few NGOs that operate like this, all other organizations also develop a bad reputation.

Another reason why non-government organizations are viewed negatively is because many International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) have very high administrative costs which become the major portion of their program costs. INGOs also often allocate large amounts to pay consultants from foreign countries, which means that the funds are being taken back out of Nepal. Most INGOs also have long bureaucratic processes, and their inflexible nature can create problems in practice.

Keeping in mind the significant role that NGOs have in Nepal's development, there needs to be improvements in certain areas so that the work of NGOs and INGOs can be more transparent, effective and sustainable. First and foremost, there needs to be restructuring on the policy level to streamline official processes and ensure coordinated government oversight. Currently, the Social Welfare Council (SWC) regulates NGOs and INGO activities in Nepal; all organizations are required to register with the SWC. However, local NGOs are also required to register at the District Administration Office (DAO) under the Organization Registration Act 1977 where they need to produce their annual progress and financial reports. This means that they need to submit documentation and report to both organizations, which makes work confusing and consumes



valuable time and resources, especially because there is lack of coordination between these two government institutions have been given the responsibility to regulate NGOs. The government needs to develop a 'one window' policy to manage and control INGO and NGO activity in Nepal. A governing body with strong management is essential to control the negative aspects and strengthen the positive aspects of NGOs/INGOs in development work.

There is a lot of potential for the government to mobilize NGOs and INGOs to work together on important issues, particularly by encouraging them to extend their programs into remote areas where government services are not accessible. However, to do so would require formation of clear policies about partnerships between the government and NGOs/INGOs. Currently, the government allocates budgets for various development programs and implements them through Village Development Committees (VDCs) at the grass-roots level. However, often NGOs and INGOs are involved in the same areas with similar work, their efforts overlap in ways that could be avoided with better

coordination. One major criticism of NGO/INGO programs is that a lot of programs collapse after the termination of the project period; the sustainability and effectiveness of their efforts could be improved considerably if it is complimented by government efforts.

Finally, there is a great need for a regular monitoring system in order to control corruption, as well as ways to reward and encourage the best NGOs. This will encourage NGOs to follow the best practices of development. It is the government's responsibility to encourage those who work for the nation's development and penalise those who work against the rules and regulations of the country.

Most NGOs are established with positive intentions of social service; however, many are in critical situation struggling to sustain their organisations. Since NGOs are contributing to the development our nation, the government needs to take its responsibility towards these NGOs seriously. Government should support in NGOs through having helpful policies and providing capacity building opportunities for NGOs. This will ultimately benefit the entire nation.

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Namche Bazar

# LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS: EXPERIENCE FROM THE HIGH ALTITUDE RESTORATION PROJECT IN THAMETENG, KHUMBU

YANGJI DOMA SHERPA, MEMBER, MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

Local participation is an essential component for the successful implementation of community-based resource management projects, as it ensures transparency, builds trust and local capacities, incorporates local knowledge, and increases community acceptance of the project. Recently, Mountain Spirit and CESVI were joint partners in implementing the European Union-funded Community-based Land and Forest Management Project in the Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone. Under this initiative, several community-based resource management projects were designed and implemented with the direct participation of local organizations and communities.

The High Altitude Restoration Project in Thameteng was one successful example of such community-based projects. The project proposal was designed by a local expert in direct consultation with the local people, and aimed to restore the high altitude ecosystem and increase its carrying capacity for the benefit of the people and the Sagarmatha National Park. It involved planting and fencing 4,500 tree saplings to restore a degraded hillside

landscape near the Thameteng village. It also included a vegetation survey of the site, which collected baseline data that will be useful for future studies of the area and for developing a deeper understanding of alpine landscapes.

The local Himalayan Buffer Zone User Group (HBZUG) worked in partnership with the Khumbu Mountain Center (KMC) and the Thamichho Youth Group (TYG) to lead the implementation of the project, while representatives of the Mountain Spirit and CESVI provided full assistance and monitoring.

Local people participated in this project at all different levels, including consultation meetings, the project design and planning phase, surveying, and

carrying out plantation and fencing work. I was also involved as part of the local team in the project implementation phase, particularly in assisting the local organizations with reporting and handling financial expenses. As a team member, I had an opportunity to have a hand-on experience managing the budget, keeping records, and preparing financial and project progress report.

From the project developer and donor perspective, this project has been successful in creating ways to devolve responsibility to the local communities to design, implement and manage their own community-driven projects. The local community has also benefited in many direct and indirect ways. Participation in the project has helped increase local capacities and develop confidence and a sense of ownership, all of which will be crucial for the long-term management of this project. Despite the many unexpected challenges we faced during the project implementation, the lessons we learned from these experiences will definitely motivate and help us design and implement other community projects in the future.

In my opinion, this project has been a good exercise in teamwork for the local organizations and individuals. The task of involving the local communities in any project might be challenging and time consuming. However, donors, the government and I/NGOs should prioritize it as a major component of their projects, as it is a good platform for sharing knowledge, building trust and providing valuable learning experiences for both the project developers and the local communities. From my perspective, for the success of any community-based project depends on local interest, initiative, and participation. However, initially the local communities might not have the required knowledge, skills and expertise. Therefore, the project developers and experts must provide training and assist the local communities to design, implement and manage community-based projects as it has been done in the case of this project.



Project site at Thameteng



Locals involving in installation of fencing materials





## ABOUT MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

Mountain Spirit is a non-government and non-profit organization registered in 1996 under the laws of Nepal. The organization is formed by a group of like-minded people from different mountain communities and their friends. The organization aims to improve livelihoods, protect environment and conserve mountain culture through capacity building, empowerment, awareness, and sustainable development initiatives with participation of local communities.

This organization has dedicated the first decade of its work in the areas of health, education, eco-tourism, gender sensitization, social mobilization, participatory planning, conflict resolution, social empowerment and institutional capacity strengthening in different mountains regions of Nepal.



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