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Livelihood Strategies of People in the Himalayan Region of Nepal: A Study in the Villages of Eastern Manang

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Livelihood Strategies of people in the Himalayan region of Nepal:

A study in the villages of Eastern Manang

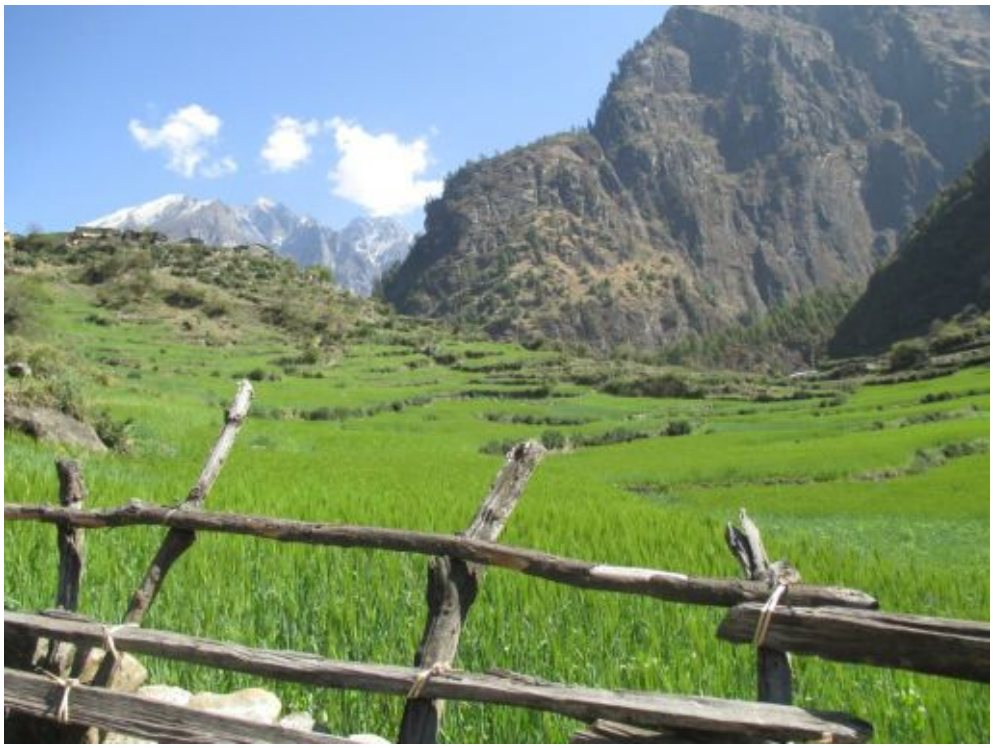

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Table of Contents

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For this research, I have taken guidance and advice from Mr. Jivan Poudel, who teaches anthropology at Tribhuvan University and is also conducting Ph.D. research on climate change in Manang district. He has lived in Manang for over a year, and has a good social network with the people there. My advisor was with me at the research site during my first week of research (April 7 to April 13). Because of this, a lot of my research time was saved in a sense that I was able to find people of various age groups and occupations more easily, and they were more willing to take part in the interview.

During the interviews, which generally took place indoors, the people were very willing to converse about my research topic without any kind of hesitation, and also showed good hospitality. Because of the presence of my advisor, who had worked with some of these villagers before, it became possible for me to find key-informants for specific topics like salt trade, yarsagumba picking, and the selling of dzhopas.

The people I met gave their consent for interview, and also for pictures to be taken of their house structures and kitchens. However, I was asked by the villagers to withhold from giving out any of their names; for this reason, I have kept all names of the people whom I interviewed anonymous in this paper.

I am sincerely grateful towards each and every villager who took part in this study; without their cooperation in my work and contribution in the form of providing information/data in response to my queries, the writing of this paper could not have been possible.

Abstract

This is a study on the changing livelihood strategies of people in Manang -a district that lies on the northern side of Annapurna Himals. I have focused my study on the villages in the eastern part of lower Manang. Primarily, my study has been done in these villages: Besisahar, Khotro, Nachai, Tachai, Tilche, Dharapani, Yak Kharka, Surki Khola and Bhimthang. As defined locally, these villages fall under the region of Nyishang and Gyasumdo in the Manang district.

In this paper I talk about the shifts made by the people in their livestock keeping/raising from yaks to dzhopas to mules, depending upon what became most strategic to keep in the changing economic scenario of Manang. Moreover, there is a section in this paper about the crop rotation strategy that was locally developed many generations ago and is still in place today. There are tables showing which vegetables are planted and picked in which months. A section is devoted to talking about the trend of collecting yarsagumba in the recent days. Another section has been devoted to highlight the impacts of tourism on the economic state of the people of this region.

In order to conduct my research, I travelled to the site and conducted interviews with the villagers. Most of the interviews were with people that were met at random in the villages that I visited. There were also many key-informant interviews where a specific person was sought after to gather information on a specific topic. Besides these interviews, much data for this paper has also been collected from group discussions.

Chapter I: Introduction

Researchers have identified a number of shifts within the past 100 years or so in the livelihood strategies of the people in Manang district (see Spengen 2010; Rogers 2004). Manang district lies in the Trans-Himalayan region of north-western Nepal. Most of the villages in the district experience harsh climatic conditions. In this high altitude zone, people grow few agricultural crops in "largely unproductive rugged terrain" (Rogers 2004). Manang is also a district with the smallest total population among the 75 districts of Nepal. Its total population according to the 2011 Census report is only 6,538 (CBS, 2013). Gurungs constitute the numerically predominant ethnic group in the district.

Manang is reported as one of the main corridors of salt and wool trade route until the early 1960s. After the closure of salt trade, the people of Manang were involved in international trade (in Hongkong, Thailand etc.) in order to earn a living. Recently, after 1980, tourism in Manang has provided another option for earning a livelihood. It is these changes in opportunities and options for livelihoods for people of Manang (of Gyasumdo in particular) that is the focus of my study. How people have managed to eke out a living in such shifting contexts over the years is a question I have tried to answer in this paper.

This paper examines the various livelihood strategies of the people of the Manang district of Nepal. The primary question examined for my study is: "What are the livelihood strategies of the people of the eastern part of the Manang district?" The more specific objectives are: to understand how the crops and vegetables are cultivated in cycles or rotations; to understand the role of livestock in the lives of people today; to study the role played by livestock before the 1960s when the salt trade was happening; to compare how the role of agriculture has changed between the days when the salt trade was prevalent and today; to observe if there are separate gender roles in household works and in certain occupations; to study the recent increase in the trend of picking a rare medicinal plant called yarsagumba; and to indentify how tourism has impacted the culture and economic conditions of this place and the people.

While conducting my study in the eastern part of lower Manang, I learned that a lot of changes in livelihood practices have taken place over the last few decades. Ever since the salt trade stopped in the 1960s, the practice of growing crops in the steep hill slopes of Manang was reported to

have declined. The steep land areas in particular are used nowadays for grazing cows, mules and dzhopas (see Picture 1).

When the salt trade was happening, every steep land needed to be cultivated for the maximum possible yield of naked barley and wheat. The people of Manang needed to produce surplus cereals to be able to barter with salt brought by the Tibetan traders. After obtaining enough supply of salt from the Tibetans, the people of Manang later bartered it with rice at Besisahar (of Lamjung district) and adjoining villages in Lamjung district. Nowadays, however, while it is true that people are still involved in agriculture and in keeping livestock, the extent to which this practice is carried out is lesser than before. Moreover, the motivation behind these practices has shifted; today, people do agriculture for domestic consumption, and keep livestock for selling these animals. Crops and vegetables are grown only for domestic consumption, not for selling in the local markets (and not for trading with salt either, since this practice is not happening in this region anymore).

Most of the people have now shifted from keeping dzhopas to keeping mules because most of the goods come from the lower districts nowadays (mules fare well in lower altitudes also). Also, new kinds of goods are being introduced. There is an increasing demand for products like gas cylinders, soaps, noodles, biscuits, beer, canned juice, and such, all of which come from the lower districts carried either by vehicles or by mules.

The need for keeping dzhopas was more pronounced when the people needed to travel from lower parts of Manang up to Bhimthang, where there was a salt depot, and where the Tibetan traders came in their yaks to trade wool and salt for the naked barley and wheat of Manang before the 1960s. However, the practice of keeping dzhopas has not entirely vanished from this region yet. In fact, there are many people who still keep dzhopas, and there are some people at Nachai village who keep yaks (at Donakharka) even today.

The crop rotation or cycling strategy, which was locally developed many generations ago, is still in place today. The villagers reported that by adopting this strategy in their fields they are able to maximize the yields and also grow variety of crops every year.

It has only been about five years now since the road from Besisahar to Khotro (and further to Dharapani and Chame) has been constructed. Along with the construction of this road, the efficiency with which one could travel between many villages of Manang and the lower districts

like Lamjung has improved. As such, the access to these lower districts via road has had a large economic impact in the entire region of lower and eastern Manang. The number of tourists that go to Manang is more than what it was five years ago; in order to meet this demand, new guest houses have been built and are still being built. Construction materials such as bricks, iron rods and cement are being used by many these days. Previously, the houses of Manang were made out of the locally found wood, mud and stones.

Moreover, a new variety of food products (mostly 'junk foods' like chips, chocolate, and drinks like beer and canned juice) which were previously unseen in places like Bhimthang have now been introduced. The hotel owners of this place clearly understand that the demand for beer, canned juice and bottled water will only go higher up as the flow of tourist increases.

Furthermore, a lot of effort is now being placed in the opening of local home stays in places like Nachai, Tachai, Surki khola and Dharapani (see Picture 12) so that the families that do not have the resource necessary for opening a guest house or hotel can also benefit economically (and culturally) from the arrival of tourists.

Another recent trend in Manang nowadays is of young people collecting a rare medicinal plant called yarsagumba, which is only found at a very high altitude. Many people from other lower districts come to Manang during the months of Baisakh and Jestha (mid April to mid June) when this medicinal plant can be harvested. The demand and market value of this plant has rapidly gone up over the last few years; as such, the people of this region are taking more economic interest in the practice of picking yarsagumba, and have included this practice as part of their overall annual livelihood related activity.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Nyishang forms a part of the present-day Manang District, situated north of Kaski and Lamjung districts (see H.B. Gurung 1980:223-240). The area is surrounded by high Himalayan mountains and covers in effect the headwaters of the Marsyangdi river and its tributaries (Spengen 2010). Depending on altitude, amount of precipitation, and to a certain extent cultural identity, three micro-ecological zones may be distinguished within the [Manang] district: Gyasumdo (Tingoan), Nar Phu and Nyishang (Pohle 1986, 1990:3-8).

Gyasumdo, or lower Manang, covers the area along the Marsyangdi river and its tributary the Dudh Khola (see Spengen 2010). The Nar Phu valley is an extremely isolated place where the inhabitants earn a living by raising large yak herds on high Himalayan pastures and growing some barley on a few stretches of riverine terraces (Furer-Haimendorf 1983).

Nicely tucked away beyond Annapurna Himal and with no direct exit towards Tibet, lies Nyishang – or Manangbhot – the most western part of the present-day Manang District in North-Central Nepal (Spengen 2010:146). Characteristic of Nyishang is a mixed type of agriculture, in which sedentary farming is combined with a certain amount of pastoralism. Variations of this type are commonly found in other high valleys of the Nepal Himalaya (Haimendorf 1975:42-59 (Khumbu), Sacherer 1977:99-111 (Rolwaling), Goldstein 1974:259-267 (Limi).

In Nyishang, wheat and buckwheat are the main crops which may be successfully grown under irrigation. Complementary to this sedentary agricultural practice is the breeding of yak, which sustains the local community in an important way by providing not only meat, milk and skins, but above all manure for the fields, as well as occasional transport (for details, see Spengen 2010: 158, Rogers 2004).

A careful reading of recent literature on Manang reveals that the people of Manang have adapted to various economic constraints and opportunities at different time periods (see Rogers 2004, Spengen 2010, Schrader 1988). In spite of the steep slopes and harsh climatic conditions, agriculture and pastoralism have remained necessary elements of the household economic strategy for most of the people in the district. The winters are very cold and only one crop can be grown per year in many of the villages here in contrast to lower living areas in nearby Lamjung district or other parts of Nepal where two or more crops can be grown in a year. Due to climatic

constraints, the food crops grown here are varieties of potatoes, wheat, naked barley and buckwheat that are suitable for cultivation in high altitude zones.

Before the 1960, Manang's people, just as those in Dolpo and Mustang, were also involved in salt trade with Tibet (see Fisher 1986, Furer-Haimendorf 1975). But after 1960, when the Indian salt became easily available in Nepal, this trade came to a halt. After this, Manang's people were involved in international trade (see Spengen 2010). People from the district also migrated to cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara during the 1970s in order to continue with newly found opportunities in Hongkong, Thailand etc. However, this trend changed in the 1980s when Manang was opened up for tourists again. At present, therefore, the people of Manang are able to once again combine agriculture, animal husbandry and business (hotels, restaurants, shops, trade) for livelihood.

Chapter III: Research Methods

This section gives an outline of the methodology I have used for conducting this research on the livelihood strategies of the people of eastern Manang.

Use of a Checklist

Although I did not feel it would be effective to hand out a questionnaire and ask people to fill that out, I found it useful to refer to the checklist (which was prepared prior to the interview) to check if I was covering the topics I had aimed to cover during the interviews. The information used in this report was collected by means of field observation and interviews. Information from secondary sources (i.e. published literature) is also used as needed.

Interviews

i.) Informal interviews

Interviews were conducted by walking to people's houses and asking for their consent if they would be willing to participate in my research.

ii.) Key-informant interview

After learning about some specific people who are/were involved in certain occupations (such as yarsagumba picking, selling dzhopas, keeping yaks at Donakharka, opening the first school in the Manang district, and doing salt trade before the 1960s), I went to their houses and requested if I could interview them. All of them gave their consent.

iii.) Group discussion

During some of the interviews (done outdoors), many other villagers would gather around and give their contribution as well. We would soon end up discussing about certain topics in the form of a group discussion.

iv.) Interviewing people of different age, gender, occupation etc.

I tried to find people of different age groups (young people, and old people; but due to the sensitivity of some topics, I did not include children in my interview), of different genders, and of different occupations.

v.) Interviewing people more than once

I interviewed people more than once (whenever possible) for consistency of information. This was done especially for some of the key-informant interviews.

Ethical Considerations

All names have been kept anonymous because of being asked to do so by the people whom I interviewed. I have also discussed about the anonymity of names with my advisor, who has further suggested that it is best to keep it that way.

Consent has been taken for the pictures that have been included here. When people were unwilling to be photographed (and there were very few such instances), pictures or videos were not taken at all. Apart from taking consent for photographing people, consent was also taken for taking picture of places, livestock, houses, kitchens, people at work, and such.

Although I came across many children in the villages, my interaction with them were only to express friendly gestures of exchanging greetings (as one does upon entering someone's house or upon arriving at a new village). However, this research does not involve interviewing or taking photos of children (who are less than eighteen years old).

Whenever a sensitive topic was involved (like the picking of yarsagumba, its cost; concerning the difficulties involved in the salt trade), care was taken when phrasing questions. Instead of directly asking the price of yarsagumba, the price of another more common medicinal plant such as nirmashi was asked. As the conversation flowed, people would by themselves start to talk about the cost of yarsagumba. Instead of directly asking how the salt traders took the path along steep cliffs, questions were phrased differently, such as: 'What do you recall and what would you like to share about the days when the salt trade was happening?' By doing so, people were willing to share their stories and gave consent to record this information.

Travel to the site, and the setting

It takes about eight hours by bus to reach Besisahar from the capital, Kathmandu. From there, it takes another four hours drive along a very rocky path that winds around steep cliffs to reach Khotro. It has only been about five years since this road from Besisahar to Khotro (which goes further towards Dharapani and then up to Manang's district headquarters at Chame) has been constructed; and this year, this road is being repaired.

After the vehicle stops at Khotro, technically, one must still cross the Marsyangdi river on a long suspension-bridge (called 'jholunge pul,' literally meaning 'swinging bridge'), in order to enter the village of Khotro. At Khotro there are about 15 households, most of which have now been turned into 'home-stay' or guest houses.

From Khotro to Nachai, it is a two hour walk uphill towards the North. There are 37 households at the Nachai village (see picture 3) and the current estimated population of this village is 200 (including those family members who are currently studying or working in other cities; otherwise, the number of people currently living at Nachai is not more than 100).

From Nachai to Tachai, it is a three hour walk downhill. There are about 50 households in Tachai. (see picture 4)

From Tachai, the walk is all uphill to Ghowa, Surki khola, Yak-kharka and finally to Bhimthang. Bhimthang is at an altitude of 3700m; above Bhimthang is the Ponkar lake at an altitude of 4700m. During this research, I travelled from Kathmandu up to the Ponkar lake, above which is the Larke pass which meets the trekking route that goes towards the Gorkha district.

I attempted to take pictures trying to cover the entire village area of most of the villages where I conducted my research. For this, I often had to travel slightly away or slightly higher from the village in order to cover a larger area in the picture. Some of the pictures of the places such as: Nachai village (picture 3), Dharapani village (picture 2), Tachai village (picture 4), Yakkharka (picture 15), and Bhimthang (picture 18) are given in this paper.

Chapter IV: Research Findings

Livelihood strategies today: at the Khotro village

My first research site was the Khotro village. There are less than fifteen households at Khotro. It is a small village where most of the houses have now been turned into 'home-stay' or guest houses for tourists; extra rooms are added in the second storey, extra cooking utensils are bought for the kitchen, and a sign board saying 'guest house' is placed on the gates. Since this is a fairly recent development in this region, there is much talk about how the guest houses might become profitable in the near future, especially since the road from Besisahar towards Khotro is now being repaired.

During my interviews with some of the guest house owners (whose ages were more than 50 yrs.) at Khotro, they talked about how their fathers had done more agriculture and had kept more animals as part of their livelihood. Now, however, many people in this village have shifted to running guest houses as their primary source of income. Some of the guest house owners (who were born in Manang) had finished their schooling and had been working in Kathmandu prior to settling again in Manang after marriage.

Almost all houses have a small land area around them where seasonal crops are grown. These crops are not grown at a scale sufficient for selling at the market in Besisahar, but rather grown for domestic consumption only. One can also notice that alongside these lands where crops are grown, some land is also allocated for growing vegetables, especially potatoes and garlic. The crops that were being grown here at the time when I did my research (in April), were wheat and naked barley (locally known as 'karu') and the vegetables being grown were potatoes and garlic.

There are months when edible mushrooms can be found in abundance in the hills around, and months when they do not grow. So, the people have learned to dry these mushrooms when they are available in plenty, and keep them stored (mostly in plastic bottles nowadays) for use later. The people here refer to the months when certain crops or vegetables don't grow as the 'off-season' month for that crop or vegetable. The main reason why dried up mushrooms are stored for off-season months is so that this will bring a variety to the meal during these months, especially since there are some tourists who travel in the off-seasons and make a stop at their guest house.

The same process of drying and storing is carried out for radish, which makes what they call a radish pickle. The reason for storing mushrooms and radish in this way is that they usually do not go bad for many months. While it is true that one can find the practice of keeping dried vegetables in various other parts of Nepal, including the Kathmandu valley itself, this practice is done in Manang more out of a necessity, than for the sake of luxury, because the cold seasons do not allow much growth of any vegetables here.

Livelihood strategies today: about how crops are rotated or grown in cycles

In the following table, the cycle of growing wheat, naked barley, corn and potatoes is shown. In general, the villagers are able to do three cycles in two years.

For ease of reading the table, entries have been labeled with a number and a letter. 1a is harvested in 1b, 2a is harvested in 2b, 3a is harvested in 3b and 4a is harvested in 4b. These three crops (wheat, naked barley and corn) and potatoes is what is mostly grown in most of the agricultural land areas, leaving some small land areas aside for growing other vegetables.

If wheat (or naked barley) was harvested in the previous year, the same land area is used in the following year to plant corn or potatoes. In this way, the farmers alternate their crops from one year to the next so as to have a variety of crops.

Table 1: A way to rotate or cycle various crops (and potatoes)

Month name		Crops (wheat, corn, naked barley) and Potatoes			
Nepali month name	Corresponding English month (approximate)	Wheat (or naked barley)	Corn	Potatoes	Naked barley
Baisakh	Mid April to mid May				
Jestha	Mid May to mid June	1b) Harvest from 1a			
Ashad	Mid June to mid July				
Shrawan	Mid July to mid August				4a) Plant
Bhadra	Mid August to mid September		2b) Harvest from 2a	3b) Harvest from 3a	
Ashoj	Mid September to mid October		2b) Harvest from 2a		
Kartik	Mid October to mid November				
Mangshir	Mid November to mid December	1a) Plant			4b) Harvest from 4a
Paush	Mid December to mid January				
Magh	Mid January to mid February				
Falgun	Mid February to mid March				
Chaitra	Mid March to mid April		2a)Plant	3a) Plant	

Since the growing season for crops is longer at high altitudes (and more so during the cold months), the villagers have developed a strategy for rotational cropping cycles. According to my informants, this practice has remained in place for many generations and the villagers have found that by adopting this strategy they are able to produce a good yield and variety of crops (and potatoes). There are only slight variations to this practice. In some lands, where either wheat or naked barley was grown last year, it will be used for growing corn or potatoes this year. Whereas in some other lands, where corn was grown last year, it will be used for growing wheat or naked barley this year (see picture 14).

One must not mistake the blank boxes in Table 1 to mean that the fields are empty during those months. Instead, a study of the table shows that if wheat and naked barley is in the field this year

(year 1) from Shrawan to Mangshir, the field will have either corn or potatoes in the following months from Chaitra to Ashoj (year 1 to year 2). In year 2, from Mangshir to Jestha the field will once again have either naked barley or wheat.

Which vegetables are grown in which months?

Alongside the major cereal crops, the villagers also grow many vegetables. However, most of the land area is allocated for growing cereal crops, and only some land area is set aside for vegetables. The months when vegetables are grown is given in Tables 2a-c. Some of the information presented in these tables comes from USAID's poster that was found displayed on the inner walls of some houses in the villages. The same system of growing vegetables is practiced in the field.

In the tables (2a-c), "Seed" refers to planting seeds in the field; "Seedling" refers to planting the young seedlings in the field; "Harvest" refers to picking the fruit or vegetable when it has grown.

Table 2a: Annual vegetable growing cycle

Month name		Vegetable name				
Nepali month name	Corresponding English month (approximate)	Mustard (Rayo)	Cauliflower (Cauli)	Radish (Mula)	Coriander (Dhaniya)	Beans (Gheu Shimi)
Baisakh	Mid April to mid May	Seedling		Seed	Seed	Seed/ Harvest
Jestha	Mid May to mid June	Harvest			Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest
Ashad	Mid June to mid July	Harvest			Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest
Shrawan	Mid July to mid August	Harvest	Harvest		Harvest	Harvest
Bhadra	Mid August to mid Sept.	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Ashoj	Mid Sept. to mid Oct.	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Kartik	Mid Oct. to Nov.			Harvest		
Mangshir	Mid Nov. to mid Dec.					
Paush	Mid Dec. to mid Jan.					
Magh	Mid Jan. to mid Feb.					
Falgun	Mid Feb. to mid March					
Chaitra	Mid March to mid April	Seedling	Seedling	Seed	Seed	Seed

Table 2b: Annual vegetable growing cycle

Month name		Vegetable name				
Nepali month name	Corresponding English month (approximate)	Carrot (Gajar)	Thick Beans (Bakulla Shimi)	Fenugreek (Methi)	Another type of Spinach (Chamsur)	Spinach (Palungo)
Baisakh	Mid April to mid May	Seed	Seed	Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest
Jestha	Mid May to mid June	Seed/ Harvest		Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest
Ashad	Mid June to mid July	Seed/ Harvest		Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest	Seed/ Harvest
Shrawan	Mid July to mid August	Seed/ Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Bhadra	Mid August to mid Sept.	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest
Ashoj	Mid Sept. to mid Oct.	Harvest	Harvest			
Kartik	Mid Oct. to Nov.	Harvest				
Mangshir	Mid Nov. to mid Dec.					
Paush	Mid Dec. to mid Jan.					
Magh	Mid Jan. to mid Feb.					
Falgun	Mid Feb. to mid March					
Chaitra	Mid March to mid April	Seed	Seed	Seed	Seed	Seed

Table 2c: Annual vegetable growing cycle

Month name		Vegetable name				
Nepali month name	Corresponding English month	Pumpkin (Farsi)	Onion (Pyaj)	Buckwheat leaf (Phapar)	Lattay	Sweet Potatoes (Sakharkhanda)
Baisakh	Mid April to mid May	Seed	Seedling	Harvest	Seed	
Jestha	Mid May to mid June	Seed/ Harvest (leaf)		Harvest	Seed/ Harvest	
Ashad	Mid June to mid July	Seed/ Harvest (fruit)			Seed/ Harvest	
Shrawan	Mid July to mid August	Harvest (fruit)	Harvest		Seed/ Harvest	Harvest
Bhadra	Mid August to mid Sept.	Harvest (fruit)	Harvest		Harvest	Harvest
Ashoj	Mid Sept. to mid Oct.					
Kartik	Mid Oct. to Nov.					
Mangshir	Mid Nov. to mid Dec.					
Paush	Mid Dec. to mid Jan.					
Magh	Mid Jan. to mid Feb.					
Falgun	Mid Feb. to mid March					
Chaitra	Mid March to mid April	Seed	Seed	Seedling	Seed	Seedling

Livelihood strategies today: the role of livestock

About dzhopas

A dzhopa is a cross breed between cow and male yak. In general, cows do not adapt well in places over an altitude of 2000 meters, and yaks find it difficult to live in places that are below an altitude of 3000 meters. However, dzhopas have the genetic potential to cover a wider range of altitudes. They can travel in altitudes almost as low as cows, and almost as high as yaks. Moreover, the male dzhopa is as strong as a male yak (in terms of being able to carry weights), and the female dzhopa can produce more milk than either a female yak or a cow. As such, some people have found it beneficial to keep dzhopas as part of their livelihood strategy.

According to my informants, a one year old dzhopa can easily fetch a price of NRs. 22,000 in Manang. A local man who has a breeding 'goth' was able to sell up to 22 dzhopas last year. Apparently, the breeders are able to earn good income, perhaps better than many villagers who have not adopted livestock breeding for income.

Tables 3a-b presented below is based on local understanding, and does not have a scientific evidence to support this. However, it is interesting to note how people have developed a local understanding of each generation of the cross, although in actual practice they have found it most beneficial to stop after the first generation.

Table 3a: Local names of cross-breed animals by their generation.

	Local names of the animal born after crossing		
Cross between these animals	**Male (m)**	**Female (f)**	**Generation**
Yak (m) and Cow (f)	Dzhopa (also called 'Cho')	Dzhoama (also called 'Choama')	first
Bull (m) and Choama (f)	Tolko	Tolmo	second
Bull (m) and Tolmo (f)	male Syocha	female Syocha	third
Bull (m) and Syocha (f)	Second generation of male Syocha	Second generation of female Syocha	fourth
Bull (m) and second generation of Syocha (f)	Bull	Cow	fifth

Table 3b: Local names of cross-breed animals by their generation

	The local names of the animal born after crossing		
Cross between these animals.	**Male (m)**	**Female (f)**	**Generation**
Bull (m) and Yak (f)	male Dimjo	female Dimjo	first
Yak (m) and Dimjo (f)	male Kopya	female Kopya	second
Yak (m) and Kopya (f)	male Sangtolo	female sangtolo	third
Yak (m) and Sangtolo (f)	male Yaktolo	female Yaktolo	fourth
Yak (m) and Yaktolo (f)	Yak (m)	Yak (f)	fifth

From the information presented in Table 3a and b, we can realize how local people believe that the fifth generation completes the cycle. However, there were also others of the belief that it is not the fifth, but the seventh that completes the cycle.

Furthermore, in Table 3a-b above, two chains are missing: the cross between Yak (m) and Choama (f) or Tolmo (f) or Syocha (f) or second generation Syocha (f) is not shown, and the cross between Bull (m) and Dimjo (f) or Kopya (f) or Sangtolo (f) or Yaktolo (f) is also not

shown. The reason for not showing these chains is that there is no practice at all for making a cross between them.

The second generation of dzhopas (namely, Tolko and Tolmo) is considered to be not as strong as the first generation, both in terms of being able to carry weights (for male) and produce milk (for female). For this reason, the villagers usually stop the cross-breeding at the first generation of dzhopa.

About animals entering other people's cultivated lands

If livestock enters the farm-land of another household where crops or vegetables are being grown, the owner of the animal pays a fine to the owner of the land. This rule was made and agreed upon by all members of the Tachai village to ensure harmony in their community. The fine for horse, mule or other large livestock is N.Rs. 100 per entry in the field where someone else's crops are being grown, and similarly, the fine for goat, sheep or other small livestock is N.Rs. 50 per entry in the field. If the livestock belongs to someone from outside the Tachai village, the fine is N.Rs. 300 per entry. Apart from these fines, the owner of the animal is also responsible for compensating for the damage done to the crops in the field. The people here believe that having such local rules in place allows for social harmony and avoids the arising of conflict among members of the community. In a place where food crops cannot be grown any time in a year or where productivity is not very high, the provision of penalty for crop depredation by livestock also functions as a strategy to safeguard the valuable food crops for human population.

Livelihood strategies today: about the yaks kept at Donakharka

Some people from the Nachai village keep yaks at a high altitude pasture called Donakharka. According to local informants, the total population of the yaks at Donakharka owned by the villagers of Nachai is more than one hundred. These yaks start to sell at the age of two or two-and-a-half. The cost of one yak of this age ranges from N.Rs. 50,000 to N.Rs. 70,000 depending upon the looks and health of the animal in question.

The yaks at Donakharka are not looked after by any person on a daily basis. They are left there in the wild. Since predators like snow leopards cannot strangle yaks, the population of yaks there is

not at a threat from predators. Moreover, snow leopards do not hunt in groups, whereas yaks usually stay in groups, thereby ensuring the safety of the yaks.

The people of Nachai village go to Donakharka only once every month to feed salt to the yaks there. This practice not only ensures a regular supply of much needed salt to the yaks but it also helps the owners maintain relations (of remaining familiar) with their animals so that the yaks do not attack or run away at the sight of people. In this way, they keep the yaks only semi-wild and prevent them from becoming completely wild. Each month, these villagers also make note of how many new calves are there. These villagers say that they have not had problems of yaks running away from there, or of other people stealing their yaks.

Traditional livelihood strategies: salt trade and the role of agriculture and livestock before the 1960s

Before the 1960's, the path from Besisahar to Bhimthang to Larke pass and all the way up to Tibet used to be one of the major trading routes (see Spengen 2010). Tibetan traders carrying salt in yaks would come from Tibet to Larke and Bhimthang, where there were salt depots. Here, the traders from lower Manang, from places like the Tachai village, would go in their dzhopas carrying either naked barley (what they locally call 'karu') or wheat to barter-trade with wool and salt. An elderly informant recalls that the path from lower Manang to Bhimthang or Larke was not an easy one, especially in places where it went through steep slopes or cliffs.

During a key-informant interview with an 81 year old man at Tachai village, I learned that he was once involved in the salt trade himself. The salt traders from Tibet used to come down in their yaks to the Larke pass, and sometimes up to Bhimthang. There were depots at Larke and at Bhimthang where most of the trading was done.

If the barley traders of Tachai (or other villages from lower Manang) travelled up to Bhimthang in order to trade for salt with the traders from Tibet or Larke, the exchange rate (barter) was:

10 units/pathi[1] naked barley = 12 units/pathi salt

[1] A Pathi refers to two things: it is a name for a locally made measuring-vessel; and it is also a local unit of measurement. For instance, when this pathi vessel is filled up to the brim with rice, this makes one pathi of rice, and when it is filled up to the brim with salt, this makes one pathi of salt. One pathi is estimated to be around 4 kilograms when filled with rice, salt, naked barley or wheat.

If the salt traders from Larke or Tibet travelled down to Tachai (or to other villages in lower Manang), the exchange rate was:

10 units/pathi naked barley = 10 units/pathi salt (sometimes 11 units/pathi salt)

The Tibetan traders were interested in naked barley for making tsampa (to be eaten as paak— a mix of butter tea and tsampa). The traders from Larke, Bhimthang and Tachai were interested in salt for two reasons; firstly, they needed the salt itself, and secondly, they later exchanged most of the surplus salt at Besisahar with rice (prized locally since it cannot be grown in Manang).

At Besisahar, the terms of barter-trade were: 14 units/pathi of rice (already processed) = 10 units/pathi of salt

In those days when the trade was happening, the hills around lower Manang (including very steep hills) used to be under cultivation for growing crops like naked barley and wheat. Even very steep slopes were not left out. Some of these steep hills are nowadays covered with grass for animals to graze in, and people do not feel the need to grow crops there anymore (see Picture 1).

The reason why people used to grow more crops in the past was to ensure that they had enough surplus cereals to barter with salt. When their crop was abundant, that meant that these traders from Tachai could bring back a good supply of salt in their dzhopas from the Bhimthang (or Larke) depot. In exchange for their salt, the Tibetan traders got ample supplies of naked barley and wheat. After bringing back the salt (and sometimes also wool), the traders from Tachai (and from other villages in lower Manang) would allocate the amount of salt necessary for their family for a year, and take the remainder to Besisahar where they would barter it with rice. Finally, after completing this trade-circuit (See Fisher, 1986), they would bring as much supply of rice and other necessities as possible back to their home to last their family for that year. Due to the difficulty involved in this practice, during some years, some villagers in Manang only had rice enough to eat during the festival months (they would save rice for festivals like Dashain, and eat 'Dhido,' which is made from locally grown crops, during other months).

At Timang (which is a village across the Tachai village), there used to be only 3 or 4 houses then. Some traders from the lower regions would come there carrying fish and kurauni (prepared by boiling milk until it solidifies), and exchange those items with local products (including barks

of a tree used in making traditional 'umbrellas' called 'ghum') that were in demand in the mid-hill villages.

Even today, there are villagers at Tachai who believe that the himalayan salt that used to come from Tibet had various medicinal properties that the salt nowadays lacks. They believe that a mixture of himalayan salt and boiled water can be rubbed in the body to cure joint pain.

Changes in the livelihood strategies

Nowadays, since roads have been constructed, it is no longer necessary for people to climb steep cliffs and take risky passes to travel across many villages in eastern Manang. It is also not necessary that people grow crops in very steep slopes or terraces. Nowadays, such steep slopes are left for animals to graze in. Finally, the salt trade from Tibet to Bhimthang does not happen anymore.

The place where there used to be a huge salt depot at Bhimthang does not exist now. Instead, this place has guest houses and hotels for tourists (see Picture 18). These hotels make good profit from their business, especially because the tourists trekking on the route from Gorkha to Manang via the Larke pass have no other option but to make a stop at Bhimthang at least for one day. This route from Gorkha to Manang is more famous than the other way round because the government has only given permission for tourists to trek in this route one way. For the other way round (climbing upward from Besisahar towards Bhimthang and higher), the government only gives a five day permission for foreigners (i.e., they cannot travel across the Larke Pass to Gorkha district). Five days is only barely enough for hikers to make it from Besisahar to Bhimthang and back (if they take a vehicle at least to and from Khotro). As such, the hotel and guest house owners at Bhimthang have now begun to collectively raise a voice for the opening of this trekking route both-ways so that more tourists can come into the area.

Nowadays, salt in Manang comes from the lower districts. It is not the yaks of Tibet that bring the salt to Bhimthang, but the mules of Besisahar. A recent shift in livestock pattern has also occurred because of this; in most of the villages of eastern Manang, people are shifting from keeping dzhopas to mules. The reason for this shift is that mules can travel in very low altitudes more easily than can dzhopas. Since most of the daily necessities (such as soaps, gas cylinders, noodles, salt, kitchen utensils, cereals, lentils, vegetables, spices, etc.) come from lower regions like Besisahar, the people of Khotro, Nachai, Tachai and even the people of Bhimthang have

found it beneficial to keep more mules than dzhopas. This change in livestock-keeping pattern from dzhopas to mules is fairly recent (within the last 5 years or so).

However, this is not to mean that there is no one in lower Manang who keeps dzhopas; in fact there still are some people who make a living from selling dzhopas. However, the number of people who keep dzhopas has significantly declined in the last five years; this has happened because many people who used to own a large number of dzhopas have made sales of this livestock and shifted to keeping mules.

Livelihood strategies today: about medicinal plants

It is well known that many medicinal plants can be found at high altitudes. In Manang, among many others, the most commonly recognized medicinal plants are Nirmashi (*Aconitum gammiei*), Chiraito (*Swertia chirayita*), Satuwa (*Paris polyphylla*), Panch aule (*Dactylorhiza hatagirea*), Kutki (*Neopicrorhiza scrophulariiflora*) and Yarsagumba (*Cordyceps sinensis*).

'Nirmashi' is actually the name given to the root of the same nirmashi plant. (see Picture 8).The root tastes very bitter, and it is primarily used as an anti-dote for various kinds of poisoning. It is also used to cure throat related ailments. The cost of nirmashi is around N.Rs. 200 per piece. At the Tachai village, there was a case where a person was poisoned due to eating a frog; luckily, he was fed nirmashi at the right time and because of this he slowly healed; this person now makes a living by working as house construction and repair technician (see Picture 7 where he is repairing the wall of a house).

The nirmashi plant, however, has a look-alike that causes poisoning if consumed; the genuine or real nirmashi can be used as an anti-dote for this poisoning also. The villagers have indigenous knowledge to separate the real nirmashi from its look alike: according to the local informants, the real nirmashi has white flower, whereas the look alike has blue, the real nirmashi's stem is not as slender as that of the other one.

Having a good indigenous knowledge of various herbs and medicinal plants, the people here are able to use or administer herbal medicines for headache, throat related ailments, poisoning and such by using locally available herbs. Moreover, they also know which plant to feed their animals in case the animals get diarrhea, constipation and such.

About yarsagumba

According to villagers, one kilogram of yarsagumba (*Cordyceps sinensis*) costs around N.Rs. 15 lakh (1.5 million N.Rs.). If this plant (which is sometimes referred to as being a caterpillar) is more yellow in color and is slightly heavier, the cost can easily go up to N.Rs. 30 lakh (3 million N.Rs.) per kilogram. The cost given here is from the rate that was established last year during the collecting season for this herb in Manang district. Since the cost of yarsagumba is hiking up very fast, its cost might be significantly different this year. Moreover, the cost of yarsagumba is very different from place to place because the same plant is sold and re-sold at different places by increasing its price.

There is an increasing trend among the young people here to pick yarsagumba. However, this rare medicinal plant is not found easily. It can only be found at a very high altitude (in the base of the mountains) and requires many days of walk along very steep cliffs. During the season of Baisakh and Jestha, there is a lot of competition among young people to be the first to pick yarsagumba. The reason for this competition is that it is easier to find more than one hundred yarsagumba pieces per day (in certain regions which the local people have already identified) for the first few days. After these have been picked out, for those who reach late, it is very difficult to find ten pieces per day.

The people who go for yarsagumba picking pay a local tax (N.Rs. 7,500 per kilogram) and a tax to Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) (N.Rs. 10,000 per kilogram). It was also revealed by some people involved in this practice that the weight of yarsagumba is slightly heavier immediately after its harvest, and it slowly loses weight. Some businessmen involved in buying and selling yarsagumba go along with the local people with bags full of money to the picking site itself, where they immediately buy it. Later, they sell it for an increased price.

Many people here were of the opinion that at Nar and Phu, there are some identified regions where during the second week of Jestha, one can easily gather up to five hundred pieces of yarsagumba in a day for the first few days. But, the tax that needs to be paid to go there is also quite high (about N.Rs. 80,000). There is an immense competition among many young people to be the first to reach there.

About the recent development of Home-Stay places

At Nachai village, Tachai village, Dharapani and Surki khola, people have now opened what is called a 'home stay,' where some rooms from the house is cleared out and turned into rooms for guests. These home stays are different from the guest houses and hotels. At home stays, more cultural sharing between the home stay family members and the tourists happens. For instance, the visitors or guests eat meals (local food) together with the hosts and have more opportunities for conversation. These home stay houses are not expanded to include more rooms for the tourists (as is the case with guest houses), nor is it made with many rooms (as is the case with hotels). Instead, a few rooms from the house itself are emptied and turned into home-stay rooms for those wishing for this experience. For Nepali tourists, the cost for the room is free, only the meal cost (Rs. 150 per meal) is charged at these home-stay places. This is not the case with guest house or hotels which will charge both the room and meal cost for Nepali as well as foreign tourists.

Some elders at Nachai village are encouraging more houses in this area to have home stay facilities, and are trying to post signboards for the same. If this new livelihood strategy is implemented more widely, many families who did not otherwise have the resource to open a guesthouse can also benefit from the flow of tourists. As indicated above, this will also allow cultural exchange to take place between the foreign guests and the Nepali hosts.

Gender roles

During the months when crops are either grown or harvested, both the male and female members of the family spend equal time working in the fields. During other months, the roles are slightly differentiated. When it comes to using mules or riding vehicles for transporting goods, it is mostly the men who do this task. When it comes to handling domestic household activities such as cleaning the house, preparing meals, collecting firewood, and collecting grass for the domestic animals, it is mostly the women who do this task. Among the children, however, both male and female go to school and there does not seem any visible difference in gender roles.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Among the wealthiest families of eastern Manang are those who are either involved in collecting yarsagumba, or in selling yaks and dzhopas. The people who own hotels and guest houses are also now starting to earn more monetary profit because of the increasing number of tourists. In general, most of the families rely on agriculture to make a living in a sense that they grow their own crops and vegetables for food (but not for selling in the market). They also keep dried up vegetables (mostly mushrooms, 'gundruk' and raddish) stored for cold months when growing vegetables becomes very difficult in this region.

Overall, there exists a very visible link between the land and the people; despite the cold climate and the rough terrain, the people have learned to reap the benefits of this place and make a living. The people have ample indigenous knowledge on rare medicinal plants which are typical to this region; they have learned ways to domesticate yaks and dzhopas; they have developed strategies for how the crops need to be cycled to maximize yield and variety; they know how to weave cloths and carpets from the wool of sheep (see Picture 9); they know how to increase the amount of manure needed for their fields by mixing the dung from domestic animals with the pine needles gathered from nearby forests. Furthermore, they know that the wood obtained from the pine with three needles has more raisin content than the pine with five needles, so that they use the three needled pine for building their houses (because insects can't easily damage wood with high raisin content), and use the five needled pine for firewood.

Most of their houses are made from wood and stones; however, nowadays people have started to replace the wooden roof with tin. In some buildings, one can still see stones placed on top of the tin to prevent it from flying away when the wind is strong (see Picture 17). Some buildings, especially the guest houses and hotels, are made with bricks and cement (see Picture 18).

Suggestions for future research

I would like to suggest the following for future researchers who might be interested in studying livelihood strategies in the Manang district:

i.) Have all the dzhopas been sold, and has the livestock pattern 'completely' shifted from keeping dzhopas to mules?

ii.) What have the villagers of Nachai done to their yaks kept at Donakharka? Is it still a profitable practice to keep yaks?

iii.) Has the trend of picking yarsagumba increased? Has the price of yarsagumba increased or decreased in the markets of lower districts? Is the competition to be the first to reach Nar Phu for picking yarsagumba (during the second week of Jestha), and in other regions (during the first week of Baisakh) still existent?

iv.) Have 'most' or 'all' of the wooden roofs of the houses been replaced by tin?

v.) How many new home-stay houses have been opened? Do more tourists stay at these home-stay houses than at guest houses or hotels (keeping in mind that this can help the local community more) or do they prefer to stay in hotels and guest houses?

vi.) Do the hotels and guest houses still find it profitable to bring a lot of junk food, beer, canned juice and such to meet the demand of the tourists, or are they doing something to promote the local food?

vii.) Do the people still follow the crop-cycling strategy?

(If needed, the contact[2] details of the researcher is given as a footnote)

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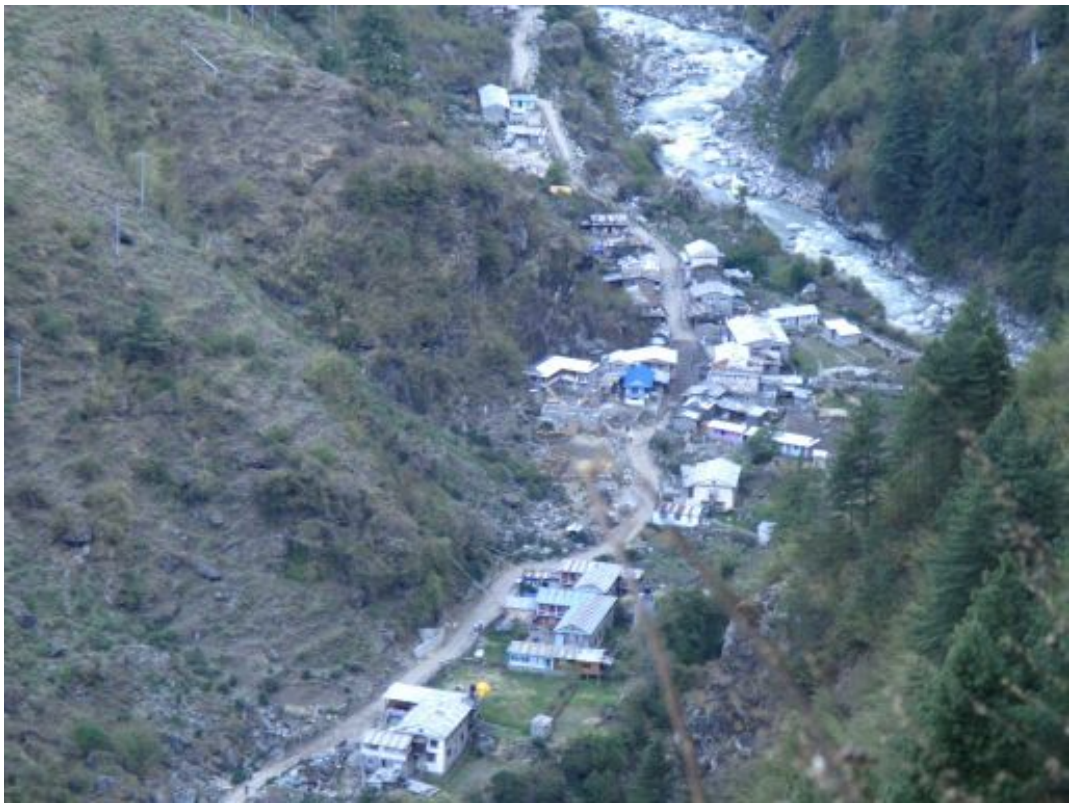
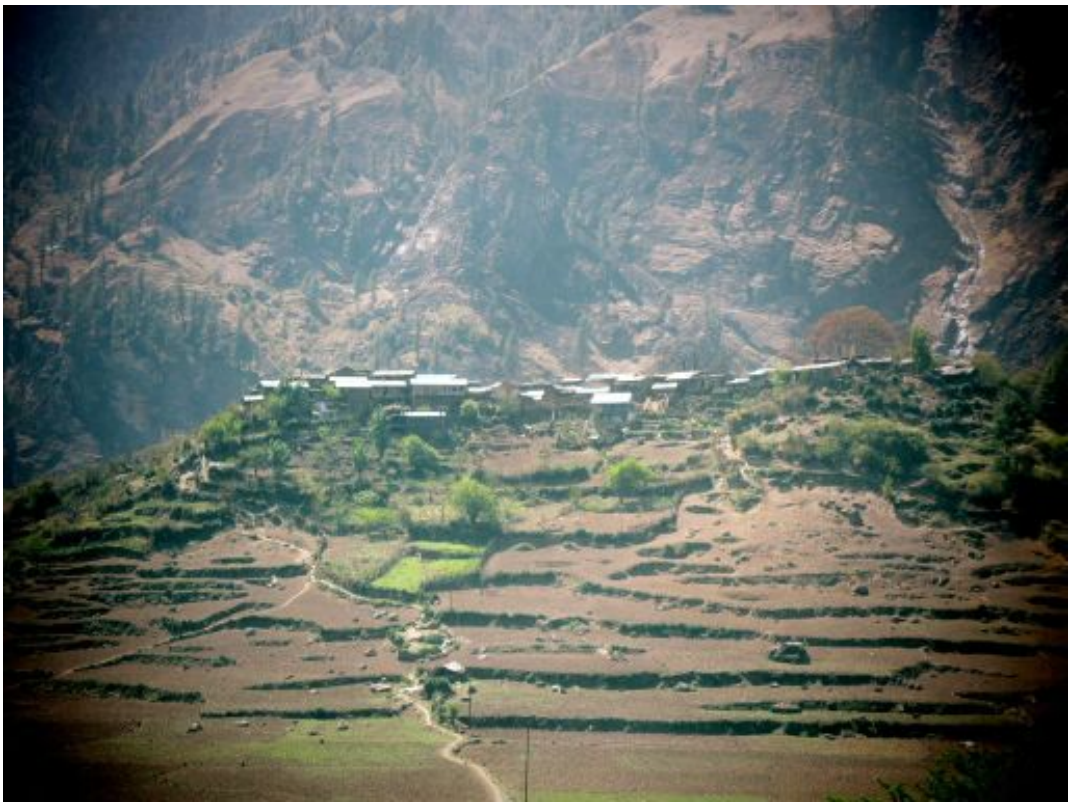
Annex: Photos from the field

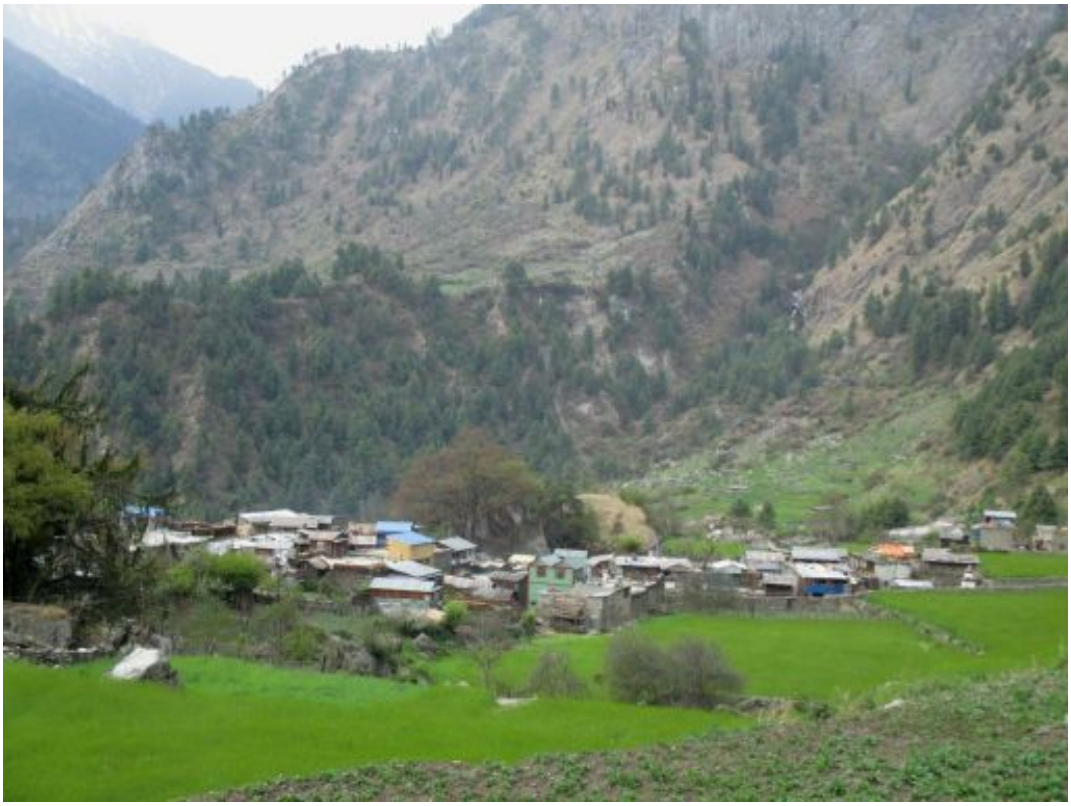
Picture 1: Cows and dzhopas grazing in a steep slope



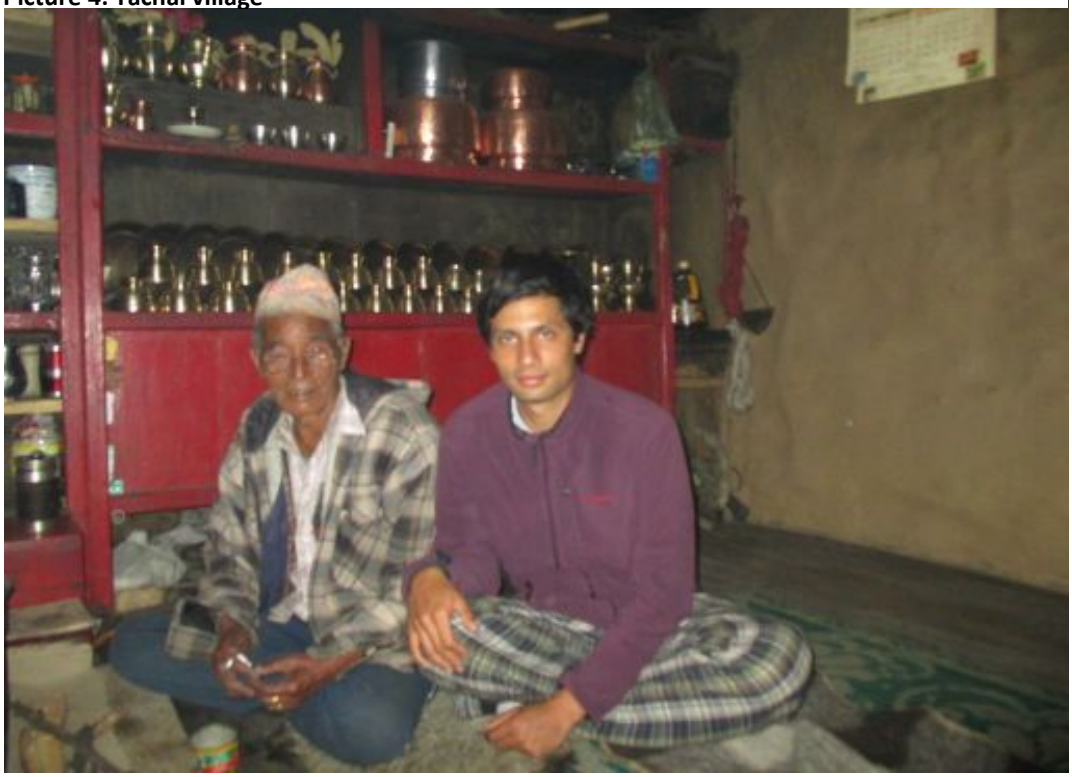
Picture 2: Dharapani Village



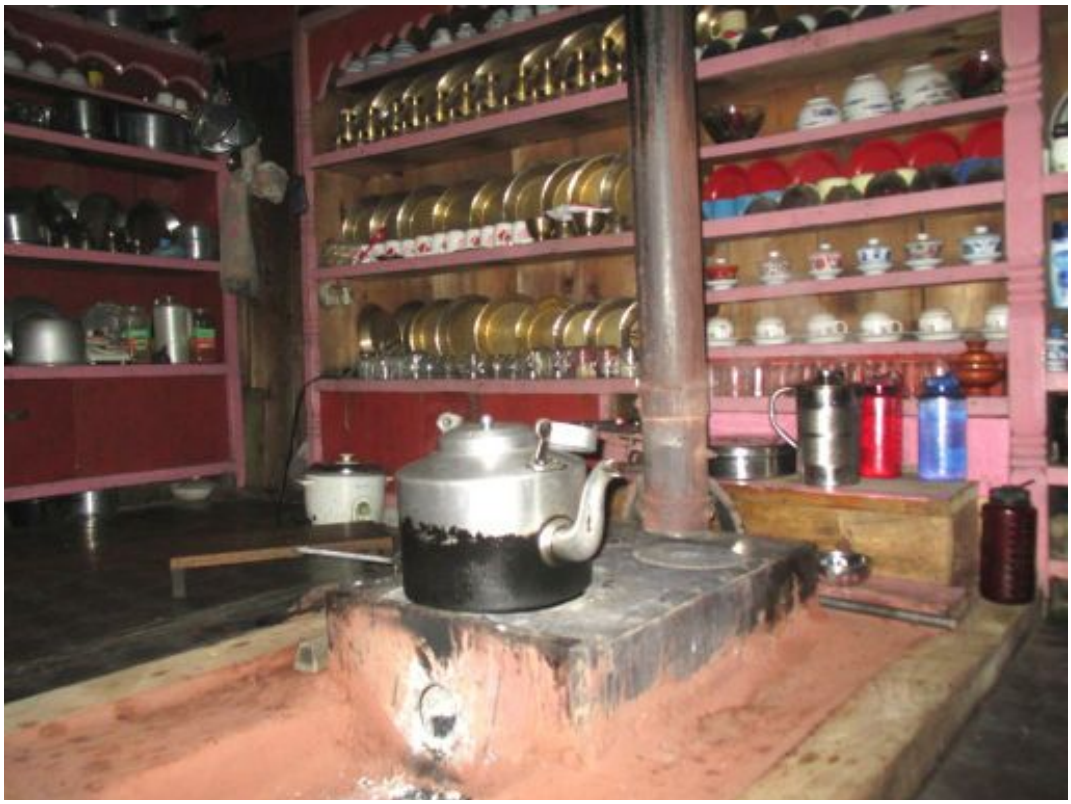
Picture 3: Nachai village



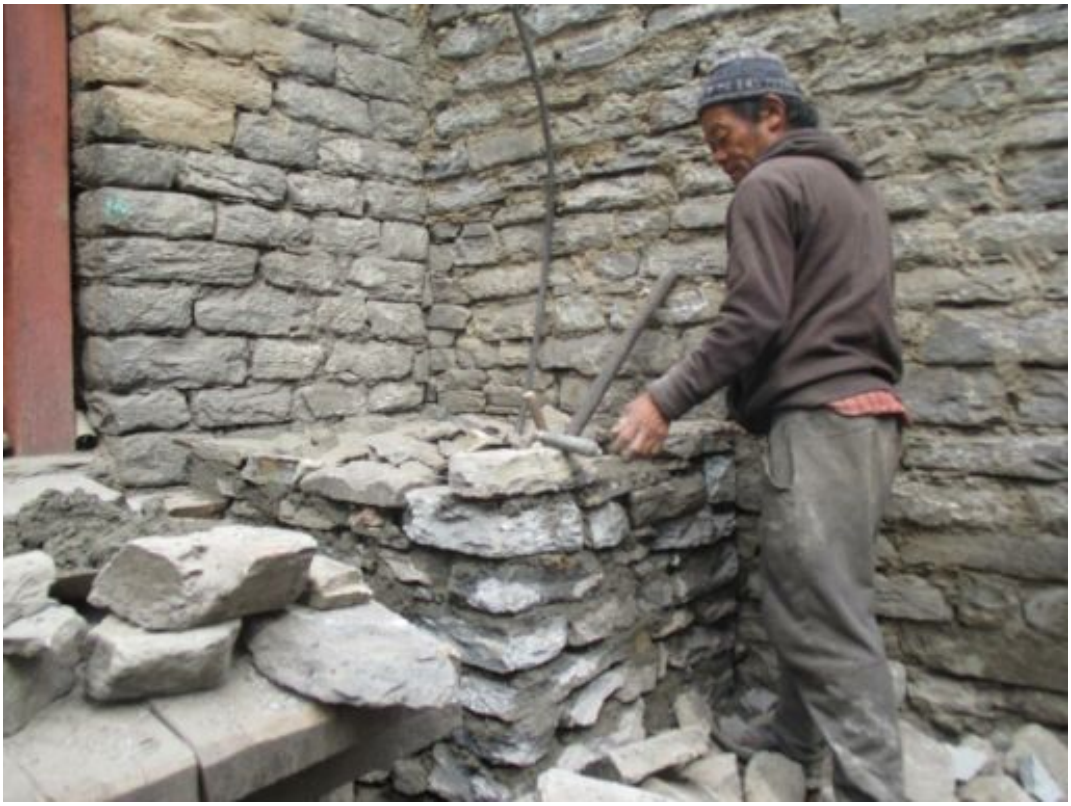
Picture 4: Tachai village



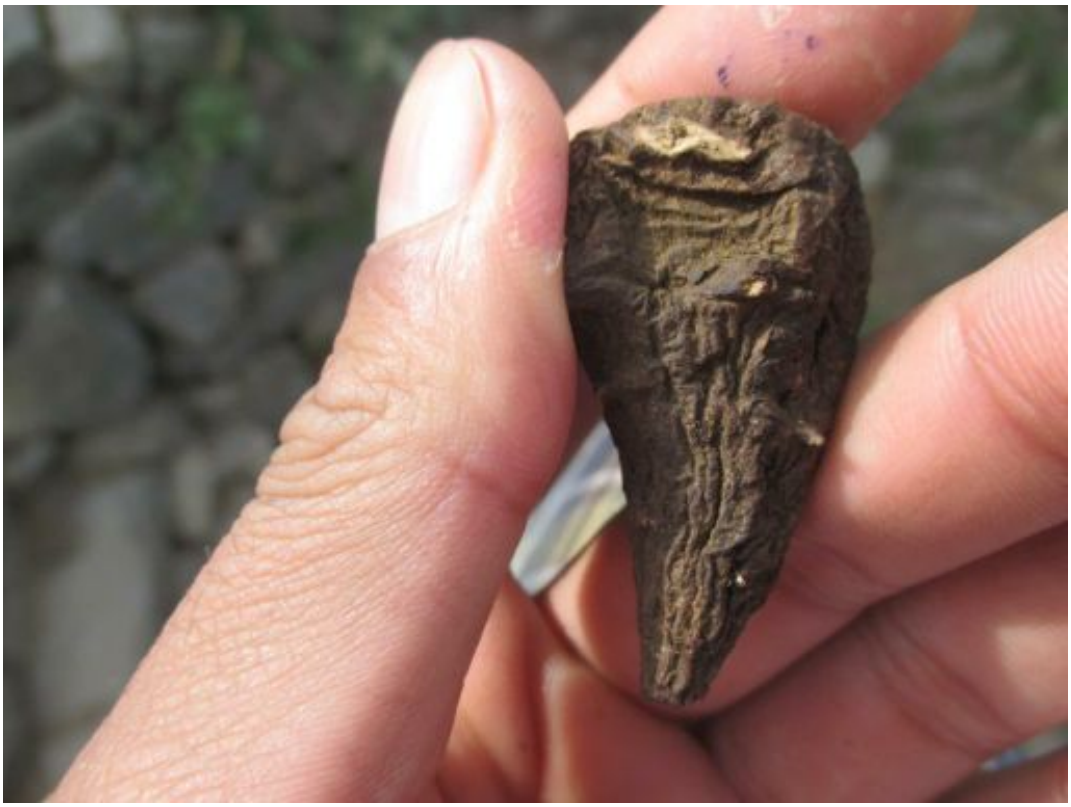
Picture 5: Researcher interviewing an elderly informant



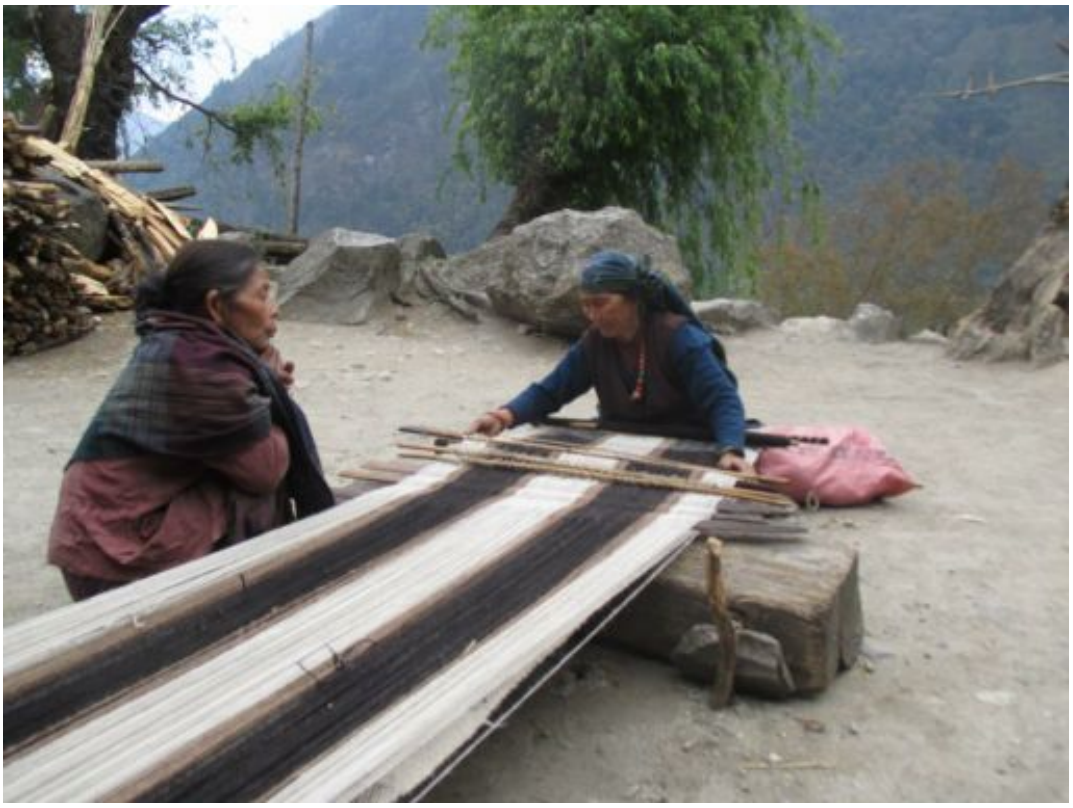
Picture 6 Kitchen utensils: a recent practice of displaying wealth



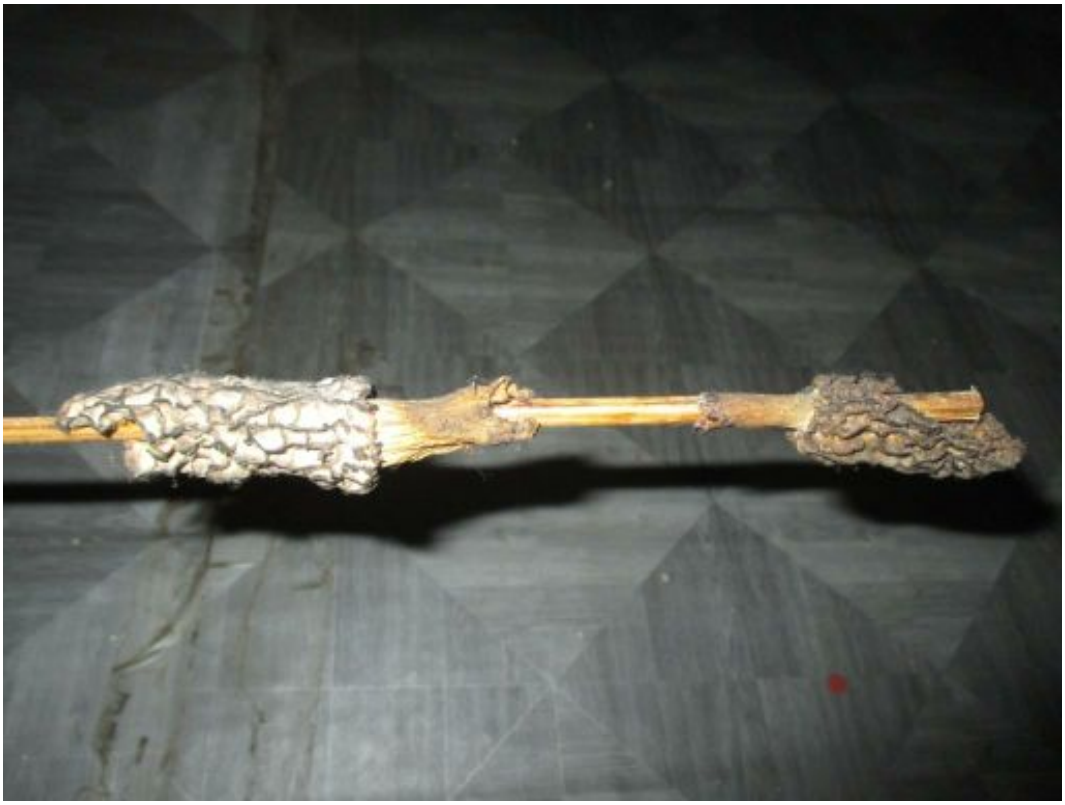
Picture 7: A villager repairing a village house



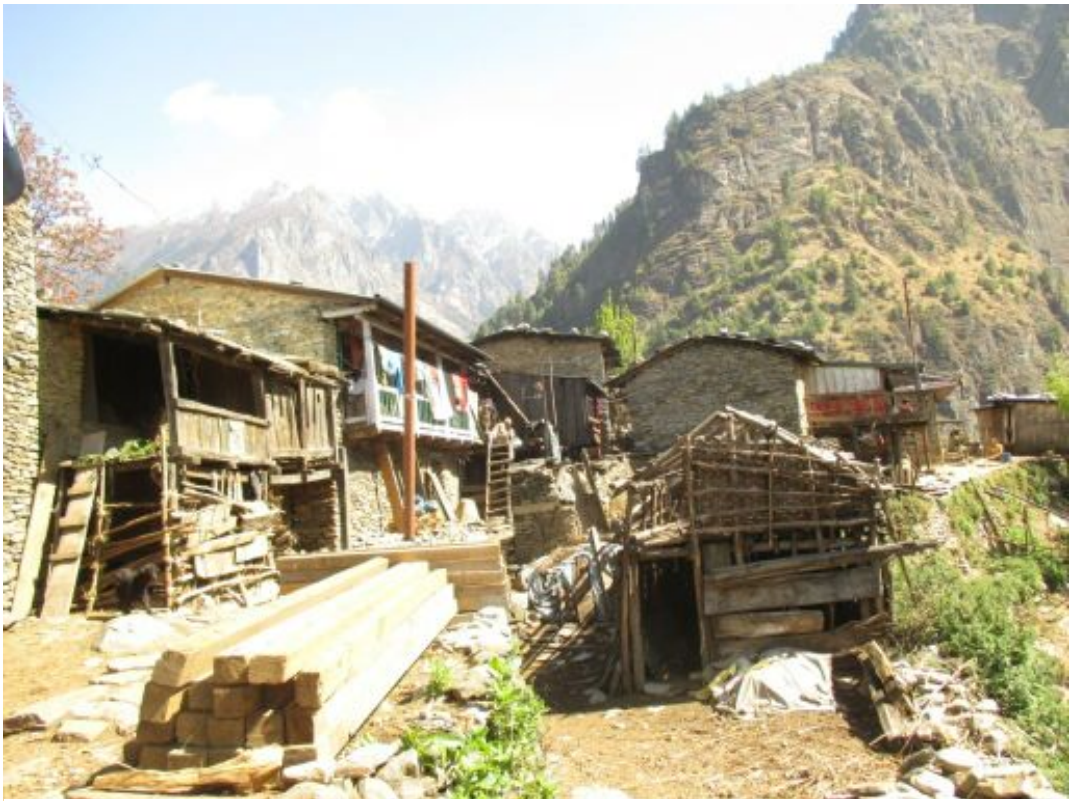
Picture 8: Nirmashi (*Aconitum gammiei*)



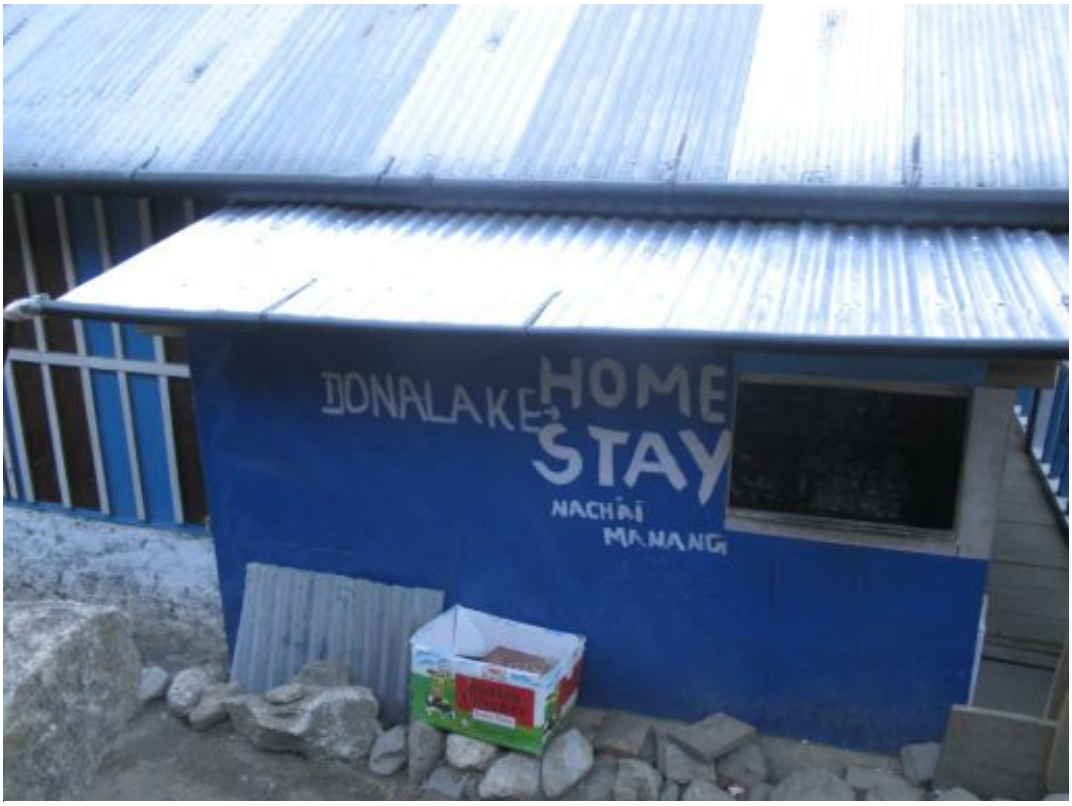
Picture 9: Village women weaving a carpet (locally called, 'radi') from sheep wool



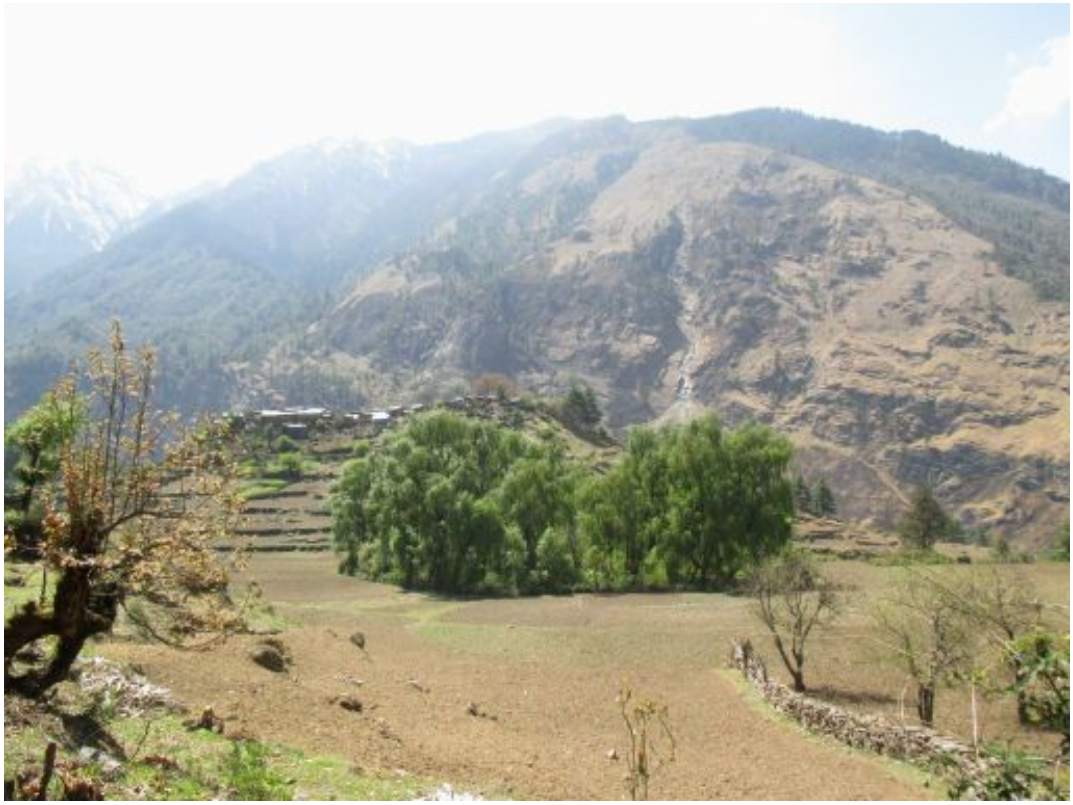
Picture 10: Wild mushroom (edible)



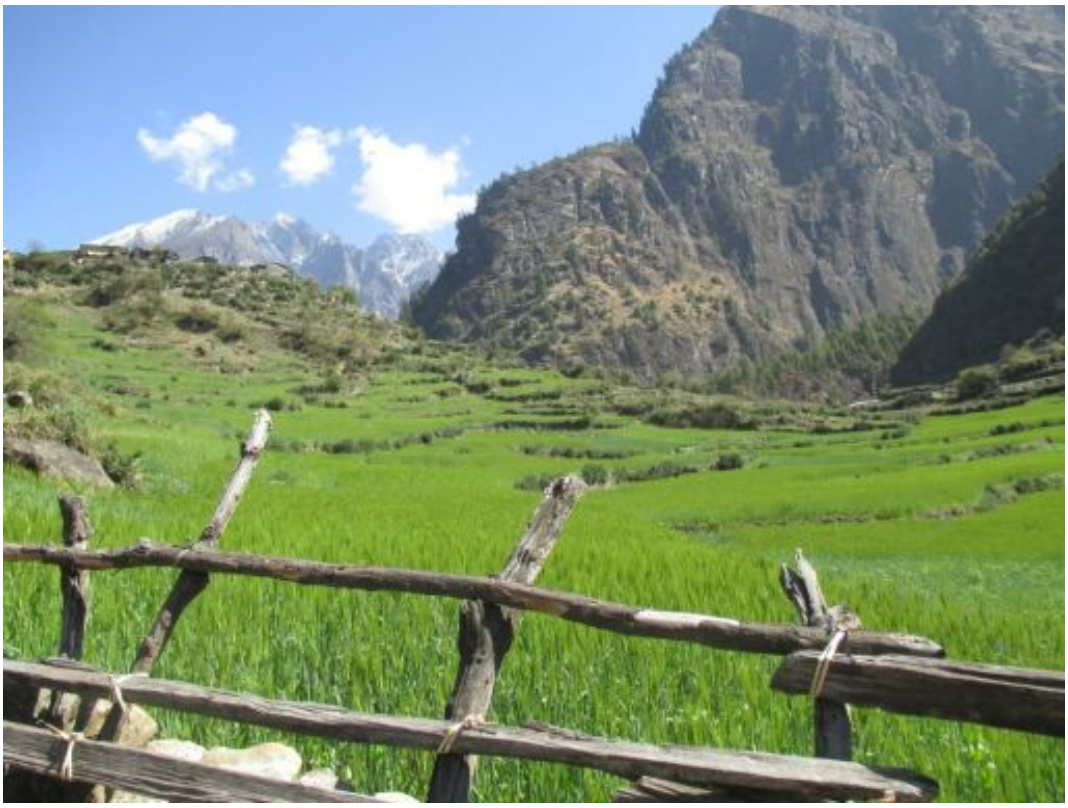
Picture 11: Houses at the Nachai village



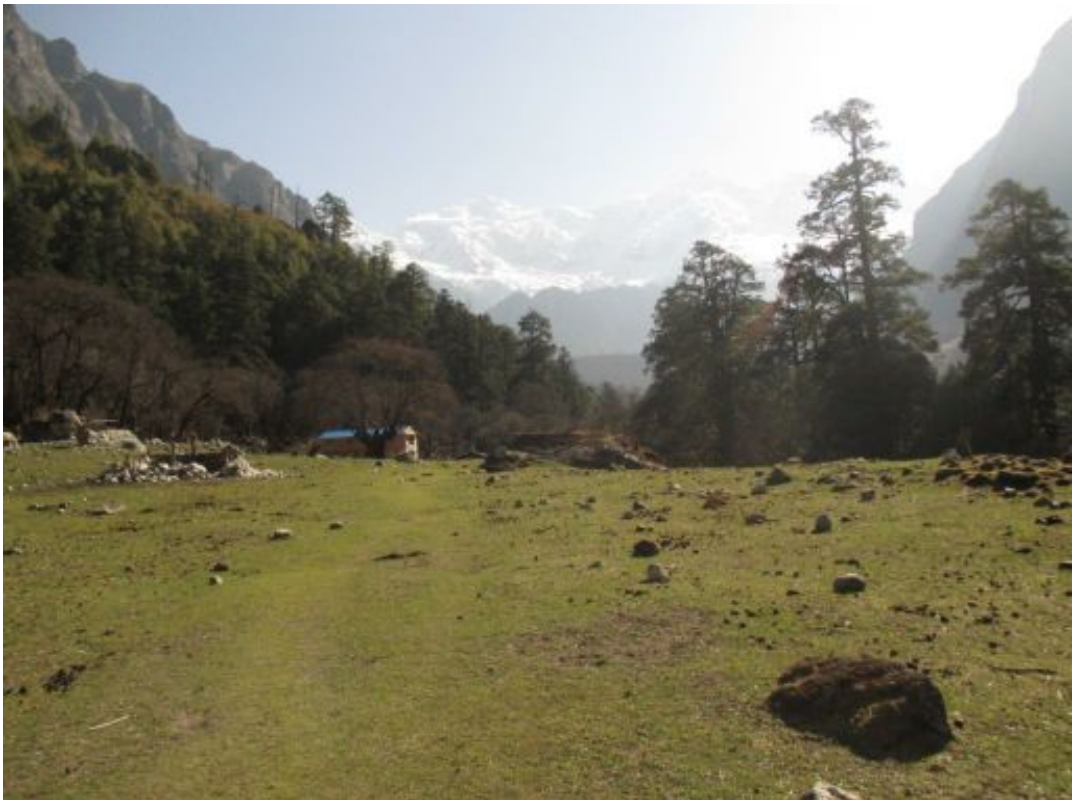
Picture 12: Home-stay place



Picture 13: A willow grove surrounding a local shrine in Nachai

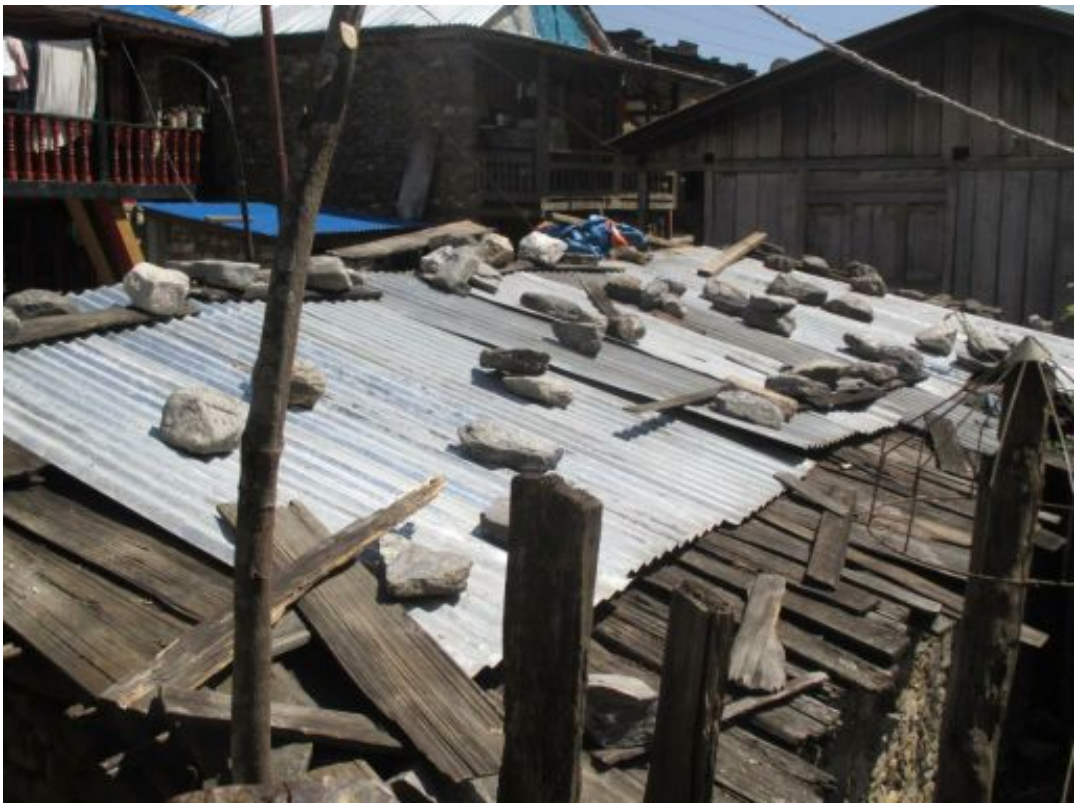


Picture 14: Barley fields at Nachai

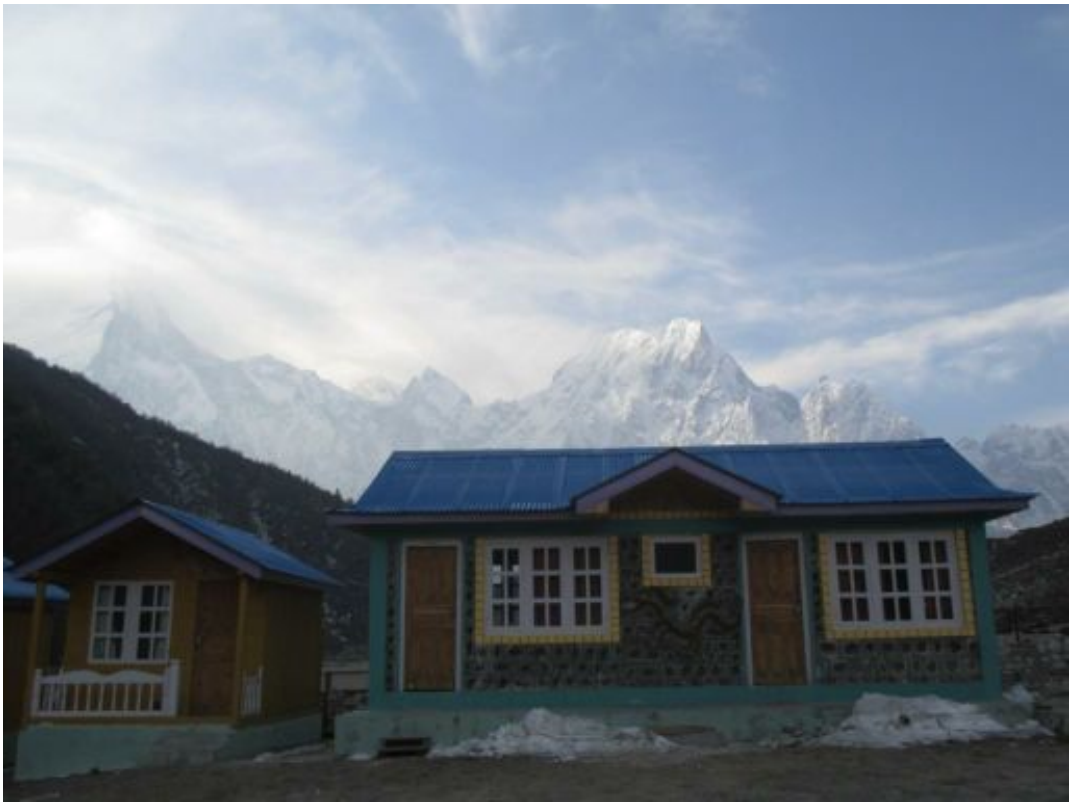


Picture 15: Yakkharka above the Tilche village

Picture 16: A black yak and a white yak



Picture 17: Tin roof held in place by rocks



Picture 18: A hotel in Bhimthang