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MONEY SPEAKS: EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND FACING DEVELOPMENT IN RASUWA

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MONEY SPEAKS: EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND FACING DEVELOPMENT IN RASUWA

By Ariel Murray

(Fig. 1: three of the six hotels in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa)

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Abstract

In the Rasuwa district of Nepal, an area affected profoundly by the 2015 earthquake, development and infrastructure have been fast growing both since the natural disaster and the opening of Rasuwa Gadhi as the more formal trade route to and from China. For those in the district, a race has commenced building as much as possible in anticipation of an influx of tourism and business opportunities from both the border and new trekking in the area, though at varying expectations for both. With all this change on the rise, a big question is how are local efforts – like local schools and local radio stations – informing people of this change and how to manage it, if at all, and how are they responding to it? For the villages of Thuman, Nagathali, and Brenthang, how can efforts by both outside forces and locals themselves bring opportunity for awareness and education now that their socio-economic status is changing and more opportunities present themselves. Also, even when they have changed, how are they handling it in the face of an intergenerational lack of education, with fading tradition and out-migration in the present day? The rate of development in the district, while happening at a speed which delights many, could prove too fast in building a unified community. Through a series of interviews with locals from these three villages, the radio outlets of the region as well as media outlets in Kathmandu, a picture of education and awareness in Rasuwa is presented, drawing from factors pertaining to Nepal in its entirety.

Methodology and Limitations

The interviews ranged from twenty minutes to over an hour. I would always ask to record the interview, as well as take their photograph after we finished, as well as if they wanted to remain anonymous or not. The major limitation of this project was the actual time spent in Rasuwa. Due to personal injury and illness sustained traveling down from Thuman to Syabru Besi, I had to return to Kathmandu a week early. Even though we interviewed a variety of people in that time in five separate locations, one could say that drawing so many conclusions after only one week of observations would be lacking in more substance – which would be sound. Given that I went to Rasuwa hoping to focus both on development and radio, the added factor of education came in tandem and, in my opinion, deserved more time and research. Though the topics I discuss in the essay – the development, education, tradition, and radio politics of Rasuwa and greater Nepal – attempt to weave together a picture of all the factors going into decision making in Rasuwa, they at times, in my opinion, seem only to scratch the surface. There is no doubt that every topic intertwines with the others, so I try to provide enough context both through interviews and scholarly information to present how all of it can fit together. As far as other limitations, the language barrier always played a part. Though I had a wonderful co-researcher, some questions are almost always bound to be lost in translation, especially if the question is not worded as clearly as possible – which falls on me, the one asking the question. There were also issues of how long the interviewee was able to sit and take questions since many had some work to do. Figuring out questions, therefore, had to be quick, and at times not all I wanted to ask was put forward to them. Some aspects of Thuman were off limits as well, including interviews at the local school. While this would have been essential information concerning education, both the locals and my co-researcher knew that asking too many questions would likely bring some retaliation both for the school and for the local people, since it was a government school. For those reasons, we chose to avoid it.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to Nazneen, who first introduced the importance of radio in Nepal to me, and Isabelle Onians, our Academic Director, for suggesting Rasuwa as a place for study on the subject – even though the studying did not go according to plan.

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To everyone in Thuman, Nagathali, and Brenthang who were willing to be interviewed even for a short while, despite their busy schedules or need to do work. To Penpa and Jampa in Thuman especially, who allowed up to keep the majority of our things while we went around the village and up to Nagathali.

Many thanks to the women of Radio Langtang and Radio Rasuwa who took time away from their programming to discuss their respective stations with me; especially to Anu Acharya at Radio Rasuwa, who managed to both answer my questions and write a script for an upcoming program simultaneously.

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Introduction to Rasuwa

Rasuwa is one of eight districts in the Bagmati zone of the Central Development Region. Northeast of Kathmandu, five of its Village Development Committees – VDCs – are on the border with Tibet (China): Gatlang, Chilime, Thuman, Timure, and Langtang. Historically, there were two routes used to get from Lhasa to Kathmandu, one through Kodari and the other through Rasuwa Gadhi. Both roads, relatively treacherous, were used in the invasions of Tibet in 1788 and 1791 by the recently formed Gorkhali state under the orders of Bahadur Shah, son of Prithvi Narayan Shah the first king of modern Nepal. The Manchu armies of the Qing dynasty also used it in their counter-offensive of the attack in 1792, and later in 1855, Jung Bahadur Rana, another king of Nepal, built the Rasuwa Gadhi fort in preparation for another invasion of Tibet.

In 1961 – very soon after the invasion of Tibet – the Chinese government proposed a road to connect Lhasa to Kathmandu with both Gyirong (near Rasuwa Gadhi) and the more eastern Kodari as serious contenders. China now shares 1,000 km of the border along the Himalayas with Nepal. The ruler of the time, King Mahendra, went on a 17-day state visit to China and outer Mongolia, hoping to sign a boundary agreement with the government. His journey ended with the signing of a deal of road construction through Kodari, making it the official trade route. Mahendra, who was known for playing both China and India to the benefit of Nepal, likely chose Kodari since it was farther from Kathmandu, therefore prolonging construction and keeping Indian anger over the agreement at bay. It was in the end completed ahead of schedule in 1966.  

In cooperation with the Chinese government, the Nepali Government’s Department of Railways is planning for the Qinghai-Tibet (or Xigatse) railway to connect through Gyirong on the Nepal-Tibet border by 2020. Since the railway tracks are still under construction, whether or not this deadline will be met is yet to be seen. The decision on China’s part to make Gyirong and therefore Rasuwa Gadhi the new trans-Himalayan gateway has several motives. Its role as a passageway increased quite a bit after the 2015 earthquake damaged the road at Kodari, and the blockade with India gave the Nepali government even more of a reason to invest in speeding up infrastructure construction to be ready for when the train tracks reach Gyirong on the China side. The development of this border infrastructure is hoped to pave the way for a railway between India and China. With Prime Minister KP Oli urging China to help build the rail network, the China Railway Construction Corporation approached the Nepali government with plans to study the feasibility of a train route from Rasuwa Gadhi to Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Lumbini.  

On the earthquake

On April 25th, 2015, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit Nepal, killing around 9,000 people and causing much damage. Narratives around this damage and the disaster as a whole had a habit of getting skewed both by Nepal’s inhabitants and outside or international actors. With more attention on the Kathmandu Valley, particularly its sacred sites, access to relief was privileged to some while leaving others out of the spotlight or even the peripheral scope of attention. With the international media majorly covering only Kathmandu, Everest and then the vague entity of

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1 Kafle, 2010
2 Cowan, 2013
3 Nepali Times, 2016
greater Nepal, the latter was given little attention by comparison, mainly as the areas were home
to “marginal Nepalis.” In the case of Rasuwa, it was one of the most affected areas after the
earthquake and its aftershocks, particularly for the Langtang Valley region, home to a
community of pastoralists culturally akin to Tibetans – the Tamang – and a popular tourism
destination. Avalanches and landslides plagued the valley, including one avalanche coming off
the southern slope of Langtang Lirung which released half the force of the Hiroshima bomb,
destroying the village of Langtang. It was the most concentrated loss of life during the quake –
between 300 and 400 people, as some bodies were never recovered – with evacuation not coming
until April 27th, two days later. Survivors were taken to an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)
camp at the Phuntsok Choeling Monastery near Swayambhunath. What played, in part, to
Rasuwa’s semi-isolation during this period was that the region is ‘centrally isolated between the
‘humanitarian hubs’ established in the Gorkha and Sindhupalchok districts, cut off from
Kathmandu by the more politically dominant Nuwakot district and issues around road access and
maintenance. Based on some reconnaissance by American scholars in the days following the
earthquake, relief efforts had yet to reach the more northern areas of Rasuwa (i.e., Thuman,
Timure, Bridhdhim, Langtang and others). What NGO and relief tents they had seen in abandon
nearer to the floodplains in Betrawati – near to the border of Nuwakot – became more and more
sparse and eventually disappeared altogether once they got further and further north. Many from
the more northern villages came down to Syabru Besi, hearing rumors of roads widened for aid
and it coming in waves – when in reality it consisted of small teams from Tibetan Buddhist
monasteries in Kathmandu, trekking agencies and even youth groups on motorcycles.\(^4\)

Both the history and planning around Rasuwa Gadhi and the 2015 earthquake plays
heavily to the ensuing development of the region, even in the more rural areas like Thuman.
With both an expectation of increased tourism, employment opportunity and infrastructure,
mentality around work, its results and its gateway to something more have shifted, or at least
become more prominent than previously expressed.

(Figs. 2,3) Chinese border patrol building at Rasuwa Gadhi (left) (source: The Himalayan Times);
Langtang Village before and after the earthquake (source: Indiegogo Projects)

\(^4\) Lord and Murton, 2017
Local development

On the local level, the changes at the border have sparked interest in development, especially road infrastructure, for the villages of Rasuwa. A project on road construction with the goal of alleviating poverty in Nepal’s northern district was first proposed by the Asian Development Bank in 2004, still during the Maoist conflict (1996-2006). Part of the project included connecting the mountain tracks of the district to the road network of China. Development of this kind often presents as giving options for change and a voice to the poorer people of the region, and with it, their lives would improve. Many in Rasuwa – notably the village of Thuman – are no strangers to change in lifetime, though not within this same vein. Phumo Nyingma, 80 years old, like many of her generation and even those younger did not receive an education. While she was growing up, there were no foreigners, and reaction to difference was much more extreme then: if they saw people who looked like them but wearing even slightly different clothing they would run away. Back then, Thuman and its people fully invested in agriculture. Phumo grew staples like barley and maize. With no tourist or hotels – and therefore no industry around either, farming was the only way. She now lives in Nagathali and has for the past two years with her husband who looks after the yaks around the village while she stays at home. Nagathali is a smaller village of greater Thuman, located to the west and up the side of a small mountain, and also subject to the wave of building hotels in central Thuman. Nyima Tseden Lama, 66, a self-studied lama, noted quite a lot of change as well, saying that they used to go all the way to Trishuli to get rice rations and carry it all back on their backs. Now Thuman has a school and even a bridge at Lingling, on the way to Briddhim across the Trishuli river.

(Figs. 4, 5) Phumo Nyingma, in Nagathali; Nyima Tseden Lama, in Thuman

In the case of Rasuwa, Tamang peoples are brought within a frame of being able to participate in business and ventures outside of traditional agriculture, and are often portrayed as

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5 Campbell, 2010
universally open to the idea, which is not always the case. Another factor to this road and the push towards development in general is the Tamang Heritage Trail. Introduced by the government of Nepal as part of the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP) and run through the District Development Committee in Rasuwa starting in 2002, opening a few years later. The route takes a traveler through the villages of Syabru Besi, Goljung, Gatlang, Chilime, Tatopani, Brenthang, Nagathali, Thuman, Timure, and Briddhim.

(Fig 6) Map of Tamang Heritage Trail Route (source: Wilderness Excursion)

By many accounts, the trail which focused on a local and people-oriented approach to the development of business, skills training, increased agricultural productivity, employment opportunities, empowerment and the ability to combat poverty proved successful\(^6\) – but in the case of Thuman at the cost of a lot of its agriculture industry. According to Nyingsamo, a 41-year-old woman in Thuman, it had been only four years since the electricity came, and with the road on the way and the rising investment in hotels and development, locals do not get involved in agriculture anymore.

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\(^6\) Kunwar and Pandey, 2014
Varying views

For some, the coming road will only be positive for Thuman. Pempasang is a woman local to Thuman, and her grandest wish is the completion of the road because it would easier for villagers to come and go. This is not a sentiment shared by everyone. Tseden Lama in Nagathali, 40, too noted that everyone used to be involved in agriculture, including him until the Tamang Heritage Trail was established. His parents grew crops and raised cattle, and he spent a lot of time taking livestock up and down the mountain to graze from 16 to 22 years old – describing the practice as very arduous and time-consuming. His journeys ended when the local tourism affiliates in Rasuwa urged people in Thuman to cater to the tourism possibilities of the district – the Tamang Heritage Trail among them – so he opened his hotel 12 years ago, making his one of the first in Nagathali. Now, there are about six hotels in the village, with no regular homes. A barrier he had was lacking the ability to speak with the foreigners, since he never formally learned English.
He had a multifaceted way of looking at the road development in Thuman. Some locals believe that the road is crucial to the development of Thuman, while others think that it will bode poorly for tourism. In an area which relies on so heavily on trekking, if a road comes in where a trail used to be or could be, it may detract foreigners from visiting it because it takes away a certain quality of the trek. On the other hand, it would be a considerable benefit to locals since most supplies have to be carried from Syabru Besi on horses, donkeys or even on their backs, making it difficult to bring all the way to Thuman, and Nagathali which is even further. The road to Thuman, which should reach the village in four to six months is expected to come through right below the Potala Guesthouse.

Infrastructure around tourism including trails, bridges, signposts, information centers, improved water, sanitation, waste disposal and renewable energy were all introductions, and local ownership has prevailed over larger corporations and institutions taking up space in the communities. Lhakpa, 29, felt that, even if she couldn't open and operate a hotel in Thuman, it was good for the village that others could, and that locals were running them, therefore, benefiting them as a whole. Dawa Tamang – in Nagathali – believes that Thuman has changed for the better, both due to the development and more and more of the younger generation getting

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7 Kunwar and Pandey, 2014
an education. Her parents, who used to work in agriculture, are now in Kathmandu as is her brother; their motivation for moving was the desire for "a better life." She, like everyone in Nagathali, owns a hotel in Nagathali and insisted that more guests and tourists will come with more development.

**Change at unequal times**

All this opportunity, however, does not mean that everyone is benefiting to the extent they could be. Also, even with the creation of Tamang Heritage Trail as a means to alleviate poverty, many people continued to operate as they did despite the presence of tourists. Both behavioral and infrastructural change came after the 2015 earthquake. Batsu Tamang, 66, noted that a significant shift in Thuman was tin roofs since reconstruction post-earthquake. Before, everything was made of stone and wood. Jampa Chenzom Lama, 20, went to school in Kathmandu through high school before marrying and helps her mother run a hotel in Thuman – the Potala Guesthouse – which they have owned for eight or nine years. More than ten hotels were built in Thuman after the earthquake, with locals expecting a rise in tourism as a new source of income outside of agriculture. The guesthouse took almost one year to rebuild, with supplies from Syabru Besi and Kathmandu, which is where most supplies in the area are sourced.

(Figs. 13, 14) Jampa Chenzom Lama (left); the Potala Guesthouse (right)

According to Jampa, development in Thuman since the earthquake has improved the village quite a bit, and the improvement has been the introduction of toilets. When giving out funds for reconstruction, the government made it mandatory for people to build toilets in their homes. Before, human waste would end up in the streets. It was difficult for some to collect the funding for reconstruction since the burden of proof was on them to receive it – i.e., photographic evidence. Thirty-seven people have received no money at all, and others only partially. In total, there are 325 houses in Thuman over its nine total wards – two of which were far from the central cluster – including the hotels. "People are building hotels instead of houses," Jampa said. Tourism has increased in the past year so a hotel venture may pay off in the long run, but since there are so many, it is hard to see how it will pay off for everyone since tourism is
still way down from the years before the earthquake.

Yangchen, the co-owner of the Himalayan Guest House and Lodge in Nagathali has been in the village for the past two years. Most in Nagathali once worked in agriculture in Thuman, purely as a means of survival since it was the only option, and now operates the hotel, hoping for a sustainable income. The guesthouse was finished two years ago, built in part by her husband, Tsering. Yangchen even said that it was better in Thuman before all the building, as people had stone houses with gardens, and how almost every house is built from new wood, including the hotels. She admits that not many foreigners and tourists come through the village, and while the language barrier still poses an issue for interacting with guests, she has had to learn to cook various dishes which she enjoyed.

(Figs. 15,16) Yangchen in Nagathali; the sign for her and her husband’s guesthouse

Before the earthquake, Nagathali – named in part for the snake-like beings which live in Nepal according to Hindu, Buddhist and Jain tradition – was a popular destination due to the trail and its religious significance, hence the hotels. Nothing has changed very much in Nagathali since the earthquake, except for whatever repairs were needed in its wake. The damaged monastery has yet to be rebuilt – and was torn down even more in an attempt to restore it. She had heard that people in the government – likely local – were working on the funding for it, but she was unsure how far they had gotten.
Rebuilding in itself was a challenge not only due to funding, but the government kept changing the requirements for reconstruction. Some of the funding they received went to building the hotel in the end. Apart from running it as income, her husband is also one of the monks for Thuman, along with his father Nyima Tseden Lama, and receives some money from running pujas – religious celebrations.

Nyingma Tamang, 39, is also from Thuman but likes living in Nagathali: the air is fresh, and it is cleaner overall. She does recognize the risks of having a hotel because, as she put it if no tourists come then they are living up high in the cold for nothing, especially since it is the only source of income in the village. For her, a developed area includes proper road access, a steady or sustainable income source, accessible food and accessible education. With all these factors, she does not think that Nagathali will be such a place since it is mostly just for tourists coming along the trail. She did underline her belief that Nagathali is, in fact, better than Langtang – the major trekking attraction across the Trishuli river – because “it is more beautiful here,” though she admitted to having never been to Langtang.
Even with the construction of hotels on the rise, there are areas on the trail which still have yet to recover from the earthquake fully. Dawa Dorjee, 61, was born and raised in Brenthang, while his wife Sarkye, 56, was from elsewhere. It sits on the backside on Nagathali and the stop before it on the Tamang Heritage Trail. The earthquake destroyed all of the houses in the village, and everything else too including the monasteries near their teahouse. Many moved to Tatopani since the destruction was so great, and they are still slowing rebuilding everything as they can. As of right now, there are six houses in Brenthang. Dawa Dorjee explained that the people of Brenthang are not even looking to rely on the government for the funding, but rather foreign actors to give the funding directly or through the government, since that was the only avenue they had hope in and trusted.

(Figs. 20-22) Brenthang from above, walking from Nagathali (left); Dawa Dorjee and Sarkye's teahouse, with the remains of the local monastery in the background (center); Dawa Dorjee in his kitchen (right)

Community difficulties

With difficulties at the communal level, even with opportunity for projects are met with stagnation. In Jampa’s opinion, the main part of Thuman in need of development is peoples’ minds. "[People] want money – write that down." From her observations, people are very money minded, to the point where even if someone brings up an idea for developing the area, neither the individual nor the collective group will mobilize to execute it unless someone puts a financial figure on the table – both the total cost as well as their cut. Using the inclusion of toilets in homes after the earthquake as an example, she described that the only reason they were built is because money was coming in. There was no rousing call for them before the quake, and the only reason they went in afterward was that if they weren’t the money would disappear. Tsering up in Nagathali, husband of Yangchen and son of Nyima Tseden Lama, noted that people never thought that electricity or a road would come to Thuman, that it was close to impossible.
There are many possibilities with the development in the works, he said, but it has been difficult due to the lack of cooperation among the local people, following what Jampa said about everyone being money minded. As another example, they get funding for drinking water and building more infrastructure for access to it, but the funds often come up short since those who are meant to execute the planning which to fill their own pockets first. Either such projects take a long time to finish, or never get finished at all. He still thinks that development is heading in the right direction, and he received what he needed from the government, so no complaints or concerns in that area.

The option for creating a business around tourism poses dangerous for agriculture, as well as those involved in it since it becomes more and more unappealing in the immediate future regardless of the long run. With more and more people staring business and building hotels, agriculture has become the last option in some people's eyes, for when one is unable to accomplish everything else.

**Hopes for the future**

With all this local change on the rise, locals are overall hopeful and positive looking forward concerning how well the village could develop. Penpa, Jampa’s mother and owner of the Potala Guesthouse, has five children, all of whom went to school in Kathmandu, and she and her family lived there for 18 years. All children except Jampa are working outside of Thuman, with three in Kathmandu and one in New York.

(Fig. 23) Tsering with his youngest son in Nagathali
Last May, Penpa was elected as a VDC official for Thuman, a position with many responsibilities including mediation among locals, voicing concerns to the government, creating an effort to protect and preserve local tradition in Thuman, overseeing local education execution of development and reconstruction plans. She hopes that, once the road to Thuman is finished, the monasteries in both Thuman and Nagathali will be able to be fixed, and a VDC office will get built. With an office, she would have a space to conduct business, as would an official from the central government in Kathmandu if necessary. Plans for its construction are still unknown, but she hopes it will be built this year or maybe the next. Since returning from Kathmandu, the most significant change she noticed was the sanitation – not only the welcome presence of toilets which keeps the streets cleaner, but people would also use the same dishes over and over again without washing them. It may be possible to bring the road all the way through Nagathali, which has been circulating as a possibility, to the Taruche viewpoint – about two hours walk from Nagathali – which is due to have a view tower soon.
Even with all the hope, some leave room for caution. Pema Dendup, 22, who lives in Nagathali to help his parents run the Great Wall Hotel and Lodge, has not noticed, in his opinion, much change to Thuman in his lifetime, and hopes that standard of living will increase in Thuman, but he remains skeptical since he has had high hopes for that his whole life and they have yet to come to fruition.
Border developments

As of 2013, the road from Rasuwa Gadhi to Syabru Besi had been built entirely by Chinese labor. There is no question as to China’s level of commitment to making Rasuwa Gadhi the new trade route and dry port between Nepal. In the wake of the 2015 earthquake, the Kodari route was severely damaged, and due to the long-time frame needed to repair it thoroughly, it will not be the fully functioning route it once was for the foreseeable future. With railway investment for a track to Gyirong, as well as the roadwork mentioned, China has already spent a lot of money to convert it to a full-time route – and that was even before the earthquake. Increase in investment also has a lot to do with China’s efforts to weaken India’s dominance of Nepali affairs, though they are aware that shared history, culture, religion and language can impede and work against that goal. To work around it, they supplied and therefore increased consumer dependence on Chinese goods to ensure they are given more strategic weight in Nepali government affairs, particularly on the Tibetan issue. Investment on China’s part has grown from merely restaurant investments to hospitals, hotels, construction, hydropower, airports and software companies in the past fifteen years. In fact, Nepal has a lot of potential in water resources, investment and development of hydropower plants have become extraordinarily viable both financially and in solving energy crises. According to both a coordinator at BBC – who provided all information regarding BBC Nepali and wished to remain anonymous – and Tsering in Nagathali in February of 2018, there was an IPO for Rasuwa Gadhi Hydropower, giving priority to locals in the Rasuwa district and then the general public. In the case of the plant in Chilime, there is much effort to make it run to its fullest ability – likely as they will need to accommodate the growing energy needs of the region as it continues to develop. It is still assumed, however, that investment is mostly foreign and likely Chinese.

Reliance on China has come down even to the fundamentals: “Chinese exports to Nepal have exploded in the past ten years. Affordable Chinese apparel has transformed the way Nepalis dress, and Chinese electronic goods and vehicles have flooded the market.” A Chinese delegation came to in 2013, expressing interesting in investment in mining, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and tourism – as well as conditions surrounding speeding up the construction at the border at Gyirong-Rasuwa. The Chinese government even provides annual support to the 14 districts of Nepal which share their border, including Rasuwa.

Looking from Thuman

Though an opening border with an influx of Chinese tourists would seem beneficial, many in Thuman do not think they will benefit Chinese tourism. Even with the border opening up, Jampa noted that she and her mother had not hosted many Chinese tourists, so in that sense, the effects or benefits of the open border as far as tourism goes not felt as much as it could be by her standards. As far as she knew, the majority of them go to Pokhara or other places. Since most of

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8 Cowan, 2013  
9 Kumar, 2013  
10 Kumar, 2013  
11 Cowan, 2013  
12 Kafle 2010
the tourists they do see are from Europe, they expect more income from that source rather than those from China.

Yangchen in Nagathali believes that the border opening is suitable for development, for Rasuwa as a whole and Thuman especially. Since many have the option of going across the border to a very close country to work and earn money, they can still have the opportunity of going abroad to work without traveling very far and can even send money back, helping those at home. However, it has not been personally beneficial to her and her family, though she knows many who have already gone over to work. She worked in Kuwait eight years ago but returned to Thuman for marriage and children. Nyingsamo, like Yangchen, worked in Kuwait for three and a half years. She estimated that maybe forty or fifty people from Thuman have gone to work across the border, while Penpa at the Potala Guesthouse estimated more than two-hundred in the greater Thuman area. Karpo Sonam in Brenthang does not see the benefit of the border opening for his village or this area as a whole. As far as people looking for work across the border, in his opinion people could always find a job and make money even if the border was closed or harder to move through.

Working abroad, either near to or far from Nepal, has its benefits for people in more rural areas. Lower income youth have a better chance at increased earning capacity by working abroad, despite whatever local development efforts. Often working as laborers, many go to countries like India, Malaysia, China and the Gulf states and send back money in remittance. As of 2015, remittance income from working abroad – as in sent back to families in Nepal – amounted to Rp617 billion (USD 5.8 billion), 29% of Nepal’s GDP.13

According to Tsering in Nagathali, with the border opening, came hydroelectric power plants and investment as mentioned earlier with the IPO. Many of the roads under current construction are funded by the hydropower investors and companies, as was the monastery constructed in the central village area of Thuman after the earthquake. If anyone is sick in Thuman – to the point of an emergency – they can call one of the plants (likely one in Syabru Besi), and they will send a car up as far as it can go. Run by private companies and funded by foreign nations, those at the plants make quite a bit of money from the hydropower sources in Nepal.

Similar difficulties face people across the Trishuli river in Briddhim, another village on the Tamang Heritage Trail. Dawa Tamang, from Briddhim, noted that even those hotels are on the rise as they are in Thuman – Dawa owns one with his wife as well as working as a trekking guide – income generation is still an issue, with many still working in agriculture. Some have gone abroad for work, or at least out of Briddhim, and he estimated maybe 90 live in the village now. He did note that the border has become an income generator for those in near Rasuwa Gadhi and Timure as the worth of their land increased quite a bit with the road construction.

13 Manandhar and Maharjan, 2017
Education

In the face of development, employment and infrastructure change, mentality around education can be subject to shifts. As some view it as a gateway for wealth or benefit to the community, the amount of weight put on education in a family can fluctuate due to community pressures, as well as those engrained generationally within the family.

The education system has nationally begun to reinforce a growing wealth gap in Nepal between the wealth and the very poor. Education is often very politicized, especially the government schools and the teachers in them, as testing comparisons often appear in the news. The most common comparison is the testing rates of English and Nepali: students are low in English scores in the government schools, while children in private or sponsored schools are weak in Nepali. With so many issues within education in Nepal, from elementary and secondary schools, the universities, to the English and Nepali instruction, and the policies which dictate their direction, no one part can be reformed without the others.

Education statistics and mentality pertaining to rural families

The government invested heavily in the expansion and construction of education facilities from 1950 to 1980. At the start of this timeline, there were 320 elementary schools and 11 secondary schools, and by the end of 1980, there were 10,130 primary schools and 785 secondary schools. The school in Thuman – which is an elementary school – was built within this time frame (Nepali year 2019; around 1962 A.D.). This effort caused literacy rates to jump from 1% to 23% by 1980 and continues to climb if not slowly. However, even with these efforts, many adults today who were children during this period are still illiterate due to limited if not complete lack of education in their youth, despite the presence of the schools. Factors around whether a not a child receives an education in a rural area are multifaceted, often determined by the family’s economic status and how much or well the child can contribute to it by starting work at a young age. Other limits include limits on buying supplies for school, the distance the child would have to travel to attend and the value of education placed on the child, which could be dependent on if the parents went to school or not. Even with local elementary schools, some students would need to travel farther for secondary school, as is the case in Thuman, which might be made easier in the future with the road coming to the village.

Strategizing education for children directly correlates with an overall plan for securing the family’s financial needs and welfare. Evaluating costs and returns – direct expenses for schooling, the lost opportunity of labor – is of constant concern. The number of children also poses an issue, since more children would mean less spent on education, as well as value in the labor of the older ones. Some view schooling as a way to later become employed outside of agriculture, especially for households possessing the little land, limiting agricultural income options and ventures. In this line, it could be a way out of the village to seek employment elsewhere, as an urban center or abroad, still benefiting the family finances from afar. It could secure both one’s parents or elders, as well as future children in later years. The question is

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14 Shrestha, 1986
15 Ashby, 1985
that, if socio-economic change does occur, whether it be to a particular household, their neighbors, or the overall area, providing more opportunity to each resident, how do factors around education change, and how do they stay the same?

Schooling in Thuman

Even though he was born before it was built, Batsu still did not attend the government school built in Thuman 56 years ago, since people did not go to school and lacked the drive to pursue education not knowing its full potential or importance. Even now, most go to Kathmandu for school or a monastery in Nepal or India. Nyingma Tamang in Nagathali never had any education either; her parents did not send her to the school in Thuman because they, according to her, did not understand the importance of having an education. As a child, she learned to raise cattle, collect firewood and do agriculture, which was how she spent most of her time. She now considers education to be vital, equating not having one to not having eyes. Karpo Sonam in Brenthang said that if he had had schooling, he would have been able to do better for himself other than agriculture.

Those who can afford it send their children to Kathmandu, as both she and Yangchen and Tsering do. Since the school in Thuman is a government school, and therefore regarded as poorly organized with bad teachers, those who can avoid it do not send their children. Nyingsamo, who does not have children, has still taken note that the school in the village has not had the positive effect it should for those who have gone there and given how long it has been since it opened. Two of Nyingma’s children are in Kathmandu, and the third eldest should be there as well, but unfortunately, there is no one to look after her there. Even if she sent her children to school in Thuman, they would need to live with a family member, which puts a burden on the other family and the requestor in a sort of debt to them. When the children are in Kathmandu, there is an expectation of being treated well by the hostel hosts, without an added strain of providing for yet another child as there would be in local accommodation and care. The issue of care is one of many barriers which puts people off from sending their children to the local school, or even school outside the village as well if they cannot afford for their child to stay in a hostel. Even with an increase in income with hotels and other business ventures, money can still be scarce. Some people who have left for school – Kathmandu or elsewhere – have returned to Thuman and become teachers in the school, but most have stayed out of the village; and still, the majority of the area population is uneducated, especially within Nyingma's age group.

Historically in the village, there was still more weight put on work and financial security than education, even for the young people in the village. Lhakpa had some schooling in Thuman until class 2 and thinks that the school is a good one – if only because it is in their village, therefore it must be. Her best friend went through the school in Thuman and then on to Syabru Besi. Lhakpa herself left school due to financial troubles, and never ended up returning due to wanting to work abroad and to earn more money than she could otherwise – she also worked in Kuwait for three years. As far as she knew, most of the people who leave for school stay in Kathmandu – or elsewhere – and find a job, not returning to the village. She, like others interviewed, understands the importance of education, saying that one can't achieve on a large scale anything without it. Its lack of value Pema, already married at 22, went through primary school but had to drop out of school due to a family financial crisis. As the eldest child, a certain
amount of responsibility fell on him to provide for the family. His two younger sisters, one 15 and the other 11 years-old, both go to school in Kathmandu. He is hopeful that, if the school improves, there will be a positive change in the community, but has not seen one up until this point. Still, in the way most view schooling, it is a path to wealth, and those who can walk the path are respected more in their community, whether they received education or if they have children who did. As an example, all of Penpa’s children received an education during their years in Kathmandu, and with one in America sending back money, all of this no doubt played into her winning in the election for VDC representative. This is not to say that she is not smart or qualified for it, but local perception contributed.

**Education and the future**

Even though Penpa’s top priority at the moment is to see the road construction finished, as the VDC leader, she is also keen on extending the number of grades available at the local school from 7 to 10. In his opinion, it is not as easy for locals to send their children to the school in Thuman as once might think. Tseden has seven children, all of whom are in Kathmandu. He has not noticed any positive change in Thuman from having the school there, despite its presence for the past 50 years. Pempasang, a 40-year-old woman in Thuman, has one daughter in school while all the other elder ones have married. She was the first to bring up Syabru Besi as a place where people of Thuman go to school, as everyone else just talked about Kathmandu. Her daughter is in class 12 in Syabru Besi and went to school in Thuman until grade 6. Going from Thuman on to Syabru Besi for school is also another option for young students. By her observations, the school in Thuman has indeed gotten better in more recent years. Still, in most people’s eyes, sending their children to Kathmandu is the better option. Dawa Tamang – in Nagathali – also had no school and has children who are still very young so they have yet to start school. She very much wants her children to receive an education – "so they won't end up like me." She intends on sending them to Kathmandu as well. There can also be ease in sending one’s child away, in that as mentioned before, their hostel or host would take care of them, while the parent here could focus on working without having to worry about feeding or carrying for the child.

(Fig. 30) Dawa Tamang and her daughter in Nagathali

Tseden got in touch with foundations and managed to send all of his children to "a good school, a proper school." His children come back to Thuman maybe twice a year for festivals
like Losar. Yangchen travels to Kathmandu to pick up her daughter five or six times a year, and just came and went in early April. He has high hopes for them, wanting them to become doctors or engineers. Though he knows it is tough work – both for them in studying and staying focused, and on him for providing the funds to send them to higher education institutions – he is ready for it. It is his lifelong goal. He also does not have an extreme desire for his children to return to Thuman, both because he recognizes that they are in control of their own lives and futures, and there is a general sentiment that once you leave and finish your education, there would be no reason to return. Having not had been to school himself, he feels it is imperative – as most parents his age do, he said – and he wants to prepare his children in ways which his parents could not. When they do finish school, whatever they want to do for a profession, she will be ready for, though they are still too young to predict what that will be. Still, the future is of some concern. Once her daughter finishes school, Pempasang only wants her daughter to find a job, which to her is the most important thing one can do.

Only those who went to school both in Syabru Besi and Thuman can be a testament to their viability. Tsering, 24, also went to school in Thuman and later continued school in Syabru Besi, finishing class 10 before getting married and returning to Thuman. Now, she has one child who is still very young. She though the school in Syabru Besi was alright, as she earned science and math, but in the end, learned very little English – this is very common with government school, which often promote more of a focus on learning Nepali than any other language. She explained that it was why her English wasn't quite right. She was one of many who finished class 7 in Thuman and then went onto Syabru Besi. She has two brothers who are still in school. The most significant change Tsering is most thankful for, other than the presence of toilets in homes since the earthquake, has been that more and more children are going to school – at least that she had observed over her life.

(Fig. 31) Tsering in Thuman

Even with increased opportunity through foundations and locals being able to send their children due to business changes, there is still room for unfair selection in who gets to go to Kathmandu and who is left behind or overlooked. Phurba, 47, has one child in Syabru Besi in
grade 8, one in class 4 in Thuman, and another who does not go to school. According to him, children of wealthier children or those with sponsors go to Kathmandu, and others go to Syabru Besi. However, there were cases which Dawa Tamang – in Briddhim – described with sponsored children going to Syabru Besi and Dhunche as well. Aside for this, Phurba implied that it is the more impoverished people in Thuman who don't know about the opportunities with foundations and their children are more often the ones to go to school in Thuman. Because there aren't many students anyway - both due to sponsorships and not believing the school to be useful – was the reason behind the lack of proper teachers or teachers in general. When foundations reach out or come to the village, the wealthier families of the area aware of their arrival get the spots and send their children off to Kathmandu, leaving those with less stuck between a rock and a hard place. Even though the foundations often mean well and come looking for the more disadvantaged, it does not end up balanced. A lack of proper connection between those who represent the community and the foundation people is also an issue, likely influenced by the families with more. Still, he believes that even with this disparity, education had become more affordable or at least accessible for more people, both rich and poor; this, being a significant change from the mentality of the past, which severely devalued it.

Others along the Tamang trail deal with similar issues. In 2011, Dawa Tamang founded Help Rasuwa Nepal in his home village Briddhim, across the Trishuli river from Thuman. As a child, his parents divorced and could therefore not provide him with an education, locally or elsewhere. The organization was set up to advise on relief efforts in Rasuwa, specifically Briddhim, Lingling, and Pelko. However, he has not been able to run it in more recent years due to the lack of government funding – or cooperation even locally – so they could not build the network they wished to, especially in the aftermath of the earthquake. While Briddhim is on the Tamang Heritage Trail, it is still considered very rural, so fundraising is difficult as was raising awareness about the organization, another reason it has become defunct. He would like to continue but doesn’t have the network. By his knowledge, education has gotten better in the area, if only by the sponsorships which come with tourists. By providing case examples of local children in need, they can receive scholarships. As of now, there is no government school in Briddhim, and no definite plans in the future to build one, so any chance for education would involve leaving the village. Around 20 children have sponsorships to attend school in Dhunche, Syabru Besi, and Kathmandu. Those without aid are often forced to go to a monastery in either Nepal or India. Dawa still keeps in contact with sponsors he met through the organization and even found sponsors for his two younger sisters who now live in Kathmandu.

In Keeping with Tradition

Given the development efforts presented earlier, when it comes to education, there is no widespread drive to improve or keep education local in Thuman. There is a particular idea of what a good or worthwhile education is – one in Kathmandu or abroad – and breaking from that by providing aid and proper schooling through the school which has seen poor results and stagnation for more than 50 years will take time; if it is successful at all. With schooling in Nepal reinforcing a wealth gap between wealthy and the extremely poor, local education may be a way to combat it. Still, it may not be feasible, since teaching in a rural location can be difficult for more teachers, especially if those around them have no interest in bolstering its effectiveness. As
wealth and development opportunities continue to rise – or reach the point of a bubble ready to burst – more emphasis will be to send children away for schooling, resulting in a vacuum in the younger generation. This generational gap between village elders and the youngest of children has begun to lead to an identity crisis – a crisis of loss, an unfortunate sacrifice to increasing development.

**Tamang history and tradition**

The Tamang people are considered descendants of those who settled around the Kathmandu valley and up nearer to the Tibetan plateau in northern Nepal, though many have also migrated to the Tarai, Kissim and Darjeeling, India. The Tamang – though better categorized as those who speak the Tamang language – are viewed historically as groups who moved from Tibet during the formation of the Gorkhali state, and this link through identity is present to this day. Much later in 1932, the groups Bhote, Lama, and Murmi were combined to form the Tamang and enforced by the government. The term Tamang has been found in 13th century Tibetan texts, but its use and application remain somewhat of a mystery. Practicing a form of Buddhism sourced from Tibetan Buddhism, and similar to that practiced by Sherpa and Gurung peoples, there is a unifying factor of religion across the landscape, but local connections are held much higher socially as “a circle of kin restricted to a number of neighboring villages” determines social hierarchy and norms.

Historically, there is a legacy of social and spatial exclusion of the Tamang population in Rasuwa, subject to centuries of marginalization, corvée labor, and caste-based discrimination and remained underserved, overlooked and overshadowed to their urban and valley region countrymen. 16

**Tradition in the face of change in Thuman**

In Phumo's eyes, the local cultural practice has changed quite a bit, especially since the times of running away from those in different clothing. Cultural dance and dress are not as regularly practiced or worn as they were when she was younger, due to some factions including out-migration and changing income goals. Like most local women, however, she wears a chupa – traditional dress of both Tibetan and Himalayan peoples – and variations of traditional hats.

Yangchen's husband Tsering acts as a village monk, though not following any particular sect or lineage, but conducting rituals within the Kagyu school. He built the hotel after the earthquake because his own house was destroyed by it, so he figured, “why not build a hotel up in Nagathali?” Tsering explained that the road to Nagathali initially begun due to the popularity of the hot springs in the village, but the hot water has since run out – this also contributed to a decrease in tourism. He described Nagathali as a very religious place, especially for Buddhist pilgrims. It is believed that Guru Rinpoche was there for a time, as well as Atisha, a great Buddhist teacher of the 11th century spreading Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, writing "om mani padme hum" in Tibetan script on a rock face near the village's edge. The head Rinpoche of the White Monastery in Boudha meditated there for a time as well.

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16 Lord and Murton 2013
The small village monastery near to the guesthouse with a slew of statues for different deities including Guru Rinpoche. The now-ruined monastery is ancient, and no one knows when it was built. Many of the figures and their ornaments were stolen even before the earthquake and were replaced and reconstructed. However, since its further destruction, reconstruction has been difficult to organize since the people of the community are not getting together and putting a collective effort into rebuilding it. From his religious point of view, Tsering believes that since Nagathali is such a prominent place, if the community set in the time to promote it as such, the funding could come through, but the proper information to do so has not been related well to the appropriate tourism boards. He believes that building a monastery in Nagathali will be of great help to the community. Religious staples like monasteries are considered essential for communities with a deep seeded history of it. In keeping with tradition, Dawa Dorjee, desperately wants their local monastery rebuilt in Brenthang. As mentioned earlier, even though in his opinion the government has a responsibility to pay for it, the government looks toward foreign aid for funding such projects, so unless foreign assistance comes which can be dealt out to different villages looking to do the same thing, it will never come to pass. An institution like a monastery can underscore that for the general public – especially tourists – so they will know it is a sacred place. It would serve as a different sort of attraction aside from the hiking trails, mountains, and surrounding views. Since both Nagathali and Thuman are on the Tamang Heritage trail and represented as religious and culturally rich destinations, it would not be the most outlandish plan.

The monastery would also serve as a community center for Thuman, which could, in turn, stimulate cooperation among the people, resulting in further development projects and efforts. Within the community center, younger people could maintain a connection with their cultural and religious routes, rather than keeping it in the privacy of their own homes. While the monastery could serve as a formal place of learning for both monks and tourists, it would reinforce it unofficially in those who came to gather with the community.
Some of the younger locals think that tradition is being passed down as well as it can be. For Pema in Nagathali, simple practice is enough to maintain tradition. In Lhakpa’s eyes, the younger people in the village were making a point of learning traditions and what the elders knew of its history. Tsering in Thuman noted that she thinks the traditions are being passed down well and hopes that the culture and tradition of Thuman will continue to pass to future generations without much change, in tandem with people continuing to pursue and receive opportunities for formal education. Elders in Thuman, like Batsu, on the other hand, do not feel that local tradition and cultural customs are being handed down well to the next generation. By his observations, most people listen to English or Hindi songs and don't sing their own anymore – to name one contributing factor. Pempasang pointed out that, many of the younger generations, like her daughter, end up leaving Thuman for school one way or another, so traditions are not passed down well since very few are in Thuman to learn them. Penpa stated that many know teaching and learning tradition will become more difficult with increasing development, and already has since people have less and less of a drive to learn them in the face of making money and doing business. Both she and Jampa explained that in the first week of May, amchis – traditional Tibetan medicine doctors - were coming to Thuman to teach the locals about local herbs, what to look for in the forest, how to collect them and what to do with them – so there is still effort put into keeping with traditions even outside of religion. Amchis, using both traditional and ‘western’ medicine practices cared for more than 1,000 patients with varying conditions from skin infections and GI distress to depression and PTSD – through the organization of a specific aid relief effort. Keeping with local tradition and knowledge even during the tragedy proved helpful, and will hopefully be taken as such for the continuing future.

The development could also prove helpful in maintaining religious landmarks in Thuman and the surrounding area, though still at a price for motivation in keeping with the local culture. Nyima Tseden Lama's hopes for reconstruction are entirely tied in with funds to rebuild the monasteries which have been in ruin since the earthquake, both in Thuman and in Nagathali. With the road on the way, he hopes that more and more people will come to the villages and – ideally – they will finally get the funds for rebuilding both, whether it be from the government or private funding. He is also keen on fixing a retreat center up near Nagathali, just off the path to the Taruche viewpoint. Nyima Tseden feels that there is a change occurring around local tradition and culture in Thuman, saying that because so many children as getting set abroad or even to Kathmandu, it may be lost some day and soon – "[Thuman] is on the verge of losing its identity." He also underscored Tibetan as "their own language" and losing the ability to speak it upon living outside the village. He considered learning Tibetan to be related more to religion – Buddhism – and less to do with identity, though the two are undoubtedly interconnected. Since Tibetan is such an integral part of Buddhism in that area – i.e., texts and mantras – and fears that local traditions around both may be lost by not learning or teacher Tibetan. Some children, when sent to Kathmandu, go to Tibetan government schools where they do get to learn Tibetan, but this is not the case for everyone. He pointed out that local education would, therefore, have several benefits. Parents would not need to spend money on travel and accommodations to get to Kathmandu – as his son did two days earlier in taking his daughter back to school – and the journey can be strenuous and expensive. With a school in Thuman, they would live at home and eat local food, have more exposure to local culture and tradition, especially regarding religion.
The Role of Radio in Rasuwa

Within the last decade, community media in Nepal, as well as other South Asian nations, has seen rapid growth. Statistically, even with the rise in television and internet use, it is still the best way to inform, educate and communicate not only with locals within their target area but external agencies with interest in the happenings of the region. Aside from a formal education, radio is the most widespread means of general awareness for the Nepali people. For those in Rasuwa who do not or have never received one, radio could be a vital tool in awareness and some level of education, formal or not. However, even in the face of change, radio as a local institution is still relatively new and, while helpful in particular times of crisis, is not appreciated to its fullest by many.

On (community) radio in Nepal

Radio Nepal, the state radio service, began broadcasting in 1951, starting FM transmissions in 1995. Most of their programming is in Nepali, with some in English and other local languages of Nepal. In 1997, Radio Sagarmatha established itself as the first independent community radio in Nepal. Their establishment followed the 1995 change in broadcasting regulations in response to a movement towards a more democratic state, allowing the establishment of private FM stations and thus ending Radio Nepal’s 46-year monopoly on the medium. Initially, the government forbade the airing of news on private FM stations, but this was overturned in 2005. Radio also played a role in the Maoist conflict from 1996 to 2006, with Maoists operating some radio stations which were later made legal. After the dispute, radio stations began to appear all over the country – “it is more difficult to get a driver’s license in Nepal than it is to get a radio license.” While some larger stations based in Kathmandu (Radio Kantipur and Image FM) reach most areas of Nepal, many areas rely more on the local radio, which is seen both by locals and media persons as the most effective form of outreach. There used to be a considerable reliance on these larger stations for content at the local level, but many community radios have moved away from this practice in recent years. Access on the local level has remained easy, listening on radio transmitters – either Nepali-made (Rp500) or Chinese-made (Rp160) – or on a mobile phone. The Chinese produced radios have helped with access, as has listenership over mobile phones, especially with young people. FM stations are often classified – unofficially – as either commercial or community radios. The government does not label them as either one when granting the licenses, so the stations themselves do this.

Since radio gained its popularity due to a widespread lack of electricity, there was never an option for television or the internet. Radio is also more mobile than TV, though that is changing with the use of mobile phones. Even with TV on the rise, there are certain trends around radio which have yet to change or be replaced by television – i.e., listening to the radio in the morning/television in the evening.

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17 Infoasaid, 2011
18 BBC Media Action, 2016
19 Infoasaid, 2011
20 Interview with Mr. Gopal Guragain at Ujyaalo, 2018
Community radio has universally played the role of facilitator in promoting social accountability across all fields. Because local officials are more likely to respond to criticism, or at least a story concerning them, faster than an official on the national level, it’s much more of a failsafe. With the help of organizations like ACORAB (the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), connections in research and programming have connected station all over Nepal with similar programs designed to promote this goal. The definition of “community radio” can be broken up and defined in three separate parts:

- Community: “(a) a geographically based group of persons and/or; (b) a social group or sector of the public who have common or specific interests”
- Community radio, as defined by ACORAB in 2009: “National association of community radio broadcasters in Nepal has defined community radio as radio station that has received license of operating from the authority prescribed by government of Nepal; run by non-profit sharing local organization or cooperative; producing and broadcasting informative programs on education, health and development for at least 40 percent of its airtime; and producing and broadcasting 60 percent of total programs locally”
- Community radio, defined by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters in 1998: “community broadcasting which is referred to as a broadcasting service not for profit, owned and controlled by a particular community under an association, trust or foundation.”

Radio Local to Rasuwa

Both Radio Langtang and Radio Rasuwa spout desires of bringing about social awareness to their home district. Both stations began airing relatively recently – Radio Rasuwa in 2012; Radio Langtang in 2015, three months before the earthquake – but have strived to make an impact in the lives of the people of Rasuwa though various types of programming, especially in the wake of the 2015 earthquake.

Radio Langtang – the station

Having studied some journalism in school in Kalikastan, Kabita Shyanba at Radio Langtang, 20 years old, produces programs on education, health, and more commonly on reconstruction since the earthquake. She has quite a bit on her plate. As one of two radio jockeys with the station, she decides which programs to produce, where to go for stories, who to talk to on the subject – whether it be lay people or experts – prepare the script for the program, and even go on air herself to read it. Kabita admitted that she did not even know what a radio jockey was until she saw a one-week training program for it and decided to sign up with a friend of hers. Before, she was not a very talkative person, but after the training, she began writing scripts and ended up on the air soon after. She used to walk from her village every day but has now lived at the station full-time for about a year since, according to her, there is so much to do that at least one jockey needs to be at the station at all times.

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21 ACORAB Nepal, 2012
Programs begin at 4:00 in the morning with prayers, news, greetings, songs, and even horoscopes. Of the seven staff members there, four of them are full time, and all of them are women. At the time of the interview, the station was running a program on folk songs – local, national and even international – and said that they sometimes bring on local singers and celebrities for dedications, though that was not the case that day. Since their target audience is those in the Rasuwa district, their stories and fieldwork reflected that making most locally based; Kabita noted that Rasuwa is very big, so there is a lot to research and she mostly stays in the district for research and otherwise. They will often get their information in the field – at the site of the incident – in letters locals have mailed to them, by telephone, or even some people coming in-person to the station to report on what they know. Since their primary focus is Rasuwa and its neighboring district, they rarely focus on national news, making their local sources more of a priority. In a region which is majority Tamang from Kalikastan up until the border, with some minority Brahmin, Newar and Chhetri areas, concerns of the locals are the primary concern. As a local community-based radio, they have a target audience of one million people and estimate that 800,000 listen, with regular listeners in Rasuwa, Dhading, and Nuwakot, though the station also reaches Chitwan, Gorkha, Sindhupalchok, Kathmandu, and Lalitpur among others. Since they do not have a way of knowing the actual number of listeners, it is a rough estimation. Their live programs are also accessible on the internet via their website, but even their listenership is indiscernible. For maintenance, they take whatever is in need of a fix to Kathmandu, which often occurs with their power backup during the summer due to the excessive monsoon rains and takes between two to three days during which time they cannot air anything. Kabita was not entirely sure how the radio gets money for the employees, only that she knows she gets paid. Likely the local advertisements cover part of it, as well as the ministry of education and health in Nepal which allocate money to sponsor programs on different subjects.
Programming

Specific programs produced for people to call in extend their public interaction outside of Rasuwa, receiving calls from Nuwakot, Makwanpur, and Dhading to name a few. Call in programs can occur for several reasons, including on memorial days like national democracy day – honoring the late King Prithvi Narayan Shah on February 19th – or republic day – the commemoration of establishing the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, beginning on May 28th, 2008. They also arrange them for when there is a community program on a health or education related subject, especially when they invite a guest on the show like a government representative, but they usually come when talking about the earthquake. In its wake, Kabita assumes other radio stations in Rasuwa received training from organizations on how to handle reconstruction on the air, how to report on it and how to educate listeners on what to do in the future in case of aftershocks and another full one.

Since the earthquake

After the earthquake, the reconstruction of houses throughout Nepal required the stamp of approval from a government-appointed local technical engineer, following policy which the government enforced. The station would, therefore, produce programs in which they invited the locally elected officials as well as the engineers to sit in with them for call-in programs, allowing the people to talk directly to both, conveying their concerns and continued issues in the aftermath of the earthquake. In the Shelter Recovery Assessment done in 2015 post-earthquake, 57% of people reported learning public information through the radio, which likely included aid relief. Their most recent program on this subject, though unknown if it was in the vein of a call-in program, was as current as a month ago. With five development committees in Rasuwa, the engineers usually do not go to each one at their own volition, instead waiting for concerns to be raised, which is where the radio programs prove their usefulness since the people calling in can voice their issues, thereby bringing the engineers to their area. With the engineers spread out
among the villages and traveling accordingly, in total, there are 25 total government-approved engineers in Rasuwa, leaving them a bit of ground to cover. According to Kabita, 35% of people, spread across the district rather than in a specific village or area, have still not been able to reconstruct their homes fully. Kabita herself was not harmed during the earthquake while her house was moderately damaged, and even laughed a bit at her reflection of the event. Just as she was sitting down to dinner, the shaking began, and she was so alarmed that she ran out of the house, only to realize she still had her plate and spoon in hand. The government gives money for rebuilding homes destroyed or damaged by the earthquake – if they are in line with the engineering regulations – but many in Rasuwa have yet to receive the 2nd and 3rd installment of the payment, both around 100,000 rupees each. Another facet of the programs on reconstruction involve instructions on applying for and receiving the installments, running the programs in both Tamang and Nepali given their diverse audience. The 1st installment comes after the construction of the house's foundation; the 2nd after the doors and window frames; the 3rd once the house is completed. Whether or not some people will ever receive payment is debatable since many did not wait and rebuilt homes or any building out of line with the government regulation – according to Kabita, this occurred in the Langtang area.

(Figs.37-40) Foundations and temporary housing on the road to Dhunche
The border eclipsed

Even in the years passed since the earthquake, it has remained one of their priority concerns, since it was so devastating to the area. With its effects lingering, they at times eclipses other subjects including the open border with China, though this occurs for a slew of reasons other than merely focusing on the disaster. The news they do cover regarding the border most pertains to proper tax collection or whether it has become open to various imports or exports. Some do call in about the border opening, both regarding its status in development and their general sentiments around it. The most common reactions are positive since there is nothing but financial gain to be had by its opening. More and more Chinese tourists have come through, but her particular area has not yet been helped by the open border since it is so much farther down than Syabru Besi, Langtang and Thuman – not that is felt very heavily there either. The sentiment is as lackluster as it is in Thuman, only here they are still waiting for it to affect the locals while those in Thuman doubt it will happen in the long run. The only benefit has been the occasional hotel stay and restaurant bill, which certainly helps the proprietor. Prosperity due to the border is possible, however, in the wake of the railway under construction to come in from China. She said may take five to ten years to finish, but she is optimistic for less than five since people will be able to travel around much faster – one could get to Kathmandu in an hour from Kalikastan instead of the current five to seven by bus depending on external conditions. Given the time it has already taken to get where it is today, five years is still a short timeline, it seems. There have been very few conversations about the railway on their air, but it will likely get more airtime closer to its finishing date, or whenever construction on the Nepal side begins.

On development

That being said, even with all the opportunity for development in the area, it might still come slowly due to a lack of community cohesion and cooperation, along with what Tsering and Jampa detailed regarding Thuman. She noted that if people came together and worked, any place could be improved, and even with a road and other so-called developed amenities, it can still not be considered as established. As an example, one must walk for two days uphill to get to Langtang, but once you get there, it's very developed. Likely that will change in the coming years since they are making a road up to Briddhim near the bridge in Syabru Besi and another new way started to reach Thuman – which as mentioned is going quickly. Even she noted that the main issue is the mentality of the people, jealousy for the success of others which overwhelms any desire for collaboration for the public's benefit. However, this is slowly beginning to change with the presence of organizations, non-profits, and NGOs coming in and teaching people skills for sustainability and business in some areas. Though accompanied by the idea that the organization will later provide them with something or benefit them in a personal way, the knowledge again indicates a change for the better. An example of this sort of sustainability training would be the amchis planning to teach in Thuman mentioned previously. Still, development is still occurring as a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that because people think Rasuwa is rapidly developing, they build better houses on purpose to keep up with the wave, which in turn increases development in the overall district. Hotels, homestays and guesthouses, and even some schools are springing up in the more touristy areas like Kalikastan, Syabru Besi, Dhunche and even Syaubari where the station is located, which gets its name as an apple farm,
trees for which are now being replanted for its expected tourism as a picnic spot. Kabita noted that at least 2 or 3 groups come there daily for picnics.

Radio Rasuwa – The station

Anu Acherya, 23, the station manager at Radio Rasuwa has worked for the station for five years. She and another station reported had just returned from the field and were preparing a script on the recently completed section of road from China to Nepal; the control of said road was in the process of being handed over to the government by the military, which oversaw the construction from Mailung to Syabru Besi. Further infrastructure for the roadway, which plans to link Nepal's northern border with China to Thori in southern Nepal, began in April, and once finished would allow travelers to go from Gyirong (border region in Tibet (China)) to Kathmandu in 4 hours. For advertisements, they have quite a wide range, including ones from outside the Rasuwa district, as well as government notices from time to time. They also have sponsored programs on health, education and even political debates – the latter sponsored by a political party. The station covers developments along the border, as well as other news and events of Rasuwa. Anu travels around Rasuwa quite a bit, not letting her position as the manager make her sedentary, interviewing as many people as she can on as much as possible. She estimated that 10,000 people listen to their station every day, but like Radio Langtang they don't have a way to confirm that. She desires to go even further into Rasuwa to the more remote areas to alert people of various aid they could access, and hear the issues particular to their region.

(Figs. 41,42) Anu Acherya, Radio Rasuwa station manager; Radio Rasuwa’s control board and recording booth

Since it is a “community” radio, like Radio Langtang, in place to related to the people in the area on issued around reconstruction and transportation, to name two, part of her job she takes very seriously is listening to the problems of the people, trying and hoping to find solutions

22 The Kathmandu Post, 2017
to them. "The purpose of the radio is here to make the voice of the community strong," she said. They also received information from friends in the district who call in if something occurs, in addition to the six staff members – three men and three women – who work for the station. She does wish that they were able to hire more staff members to cover more ground and topics in Rasuwa, but the money is not there. Granted that the station had changed quite a bit since she started out – initially when she began working there, it was just her and another reporter, but they left due to disagreements regarding salary as money was and still is tight.

On the border

Anu underscored that the border is not just a topic in Rasuwa, that it is being talked about all over the country since the job and business opportunities resulting from it weigh on people's minds. Likely since they are local to Rasuwa the issue may be augmented, but discussion if anything is more on increasing trade with China than the border itself. She has noticed an increase in Chinese tourists and, since seeing the border with China, with their big border building on the other side while Nepal's in run-down by comparison, it highlighted very well the wealth gap between the two countries, as well as the poor border management on the Nepali side by comparison. According to her, since Nepal has gone many years without proper representation in government, it depends entirely on the recently elected government how well or poorly developed in the area will go in the wake of the open border and – ideally - increased tourism. Since development can only increase, if it is done well and managed correctly, it can be positive.

Aid during the earthquake

When people do call in, during programs for that purpose or otherwise, it often has to do with aid relief, and sanitation needs that the government has yet to provide since the earthquake or otherwise. Men and women call in at an equal number since all concerns are around development and general care for one's community. They have had some programs on women's health - trafficking and child marriage within the same vein – but like at Radio Langtang, information on those who do it is insufficient, and in their opinion, likely won't reach them over the radio. Though she did not precisely detail which programs involve guests, they have had a full spectrum of them, from chief district officers, lay people, or even ministers from other districts. Since the earthquake, its aftermath has, too, taken up quite a bit of their airtime, including programs on earthquake awareness, where to hide and how to protect water sources. With the station's building destroyed in the earthquake, so the crew had to broadcast from a tent for about 15 days afterward. Now they are in a small two-room office with a tin roof on rented land. If equipment is down or broken, they can often fix it themselves or enlist the help of a local; only once those options are exhausted do they send it to Kathmandu. For the days in the tent, equipment was lent to them by First Response Radio. The organization, which started working disaster areas after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, underlines its mission has an assistant to areas in need of recovery in the wake of natural disasters using radio as a means of communication within the community itself rather than as a news source for the outside world. Radio Rasuwa had the equipment for about a year before they were able to return and replace it with a newer set. Around the earthquake, and even until this day, people in the very remote areas of Rasuwa did not and have not received the full amount of aid relief promised by the
government, so the only way to hear their concerns, needs, and complaints was by calling into the radio. The station, therefore, arranged, several times, to have the government representatives for Rasuwa and the more remote areas to come on the radio to hear what they had to say – some of this still while they were in the temporary tent.

**Radio in Thuman – tuning in and out**

The topic of radio had a slew of mixed reactions in Thuman, Nagathali as well as Brenthang. With people young and old listening for various reasons and different content, or not listening at all, it shows that even if something meant for public consumption is there; it is not always taken advantage of in the way those who put it out intend. Jampa only sometimes listens to the radio, specifically Nepal FM 98.5 for music and occasionally news. She had heard of Radio Rasuwa but not Radio Langtang. When she does tune in, she finds the news about greater Nepal helpful, as well as the health and baby care programs which sometimes air – these are both important to her since she gave birth to a baby girl six months ago. Her mother, Penpa, also listens for the programs on women’s health, women’s rights and the development plans for the area and greater Nepal. Programs regarding health – and education – were lauded as the most important by those who listened to them. Pasang, 19, a native of Brenthang. She listens to the radio for the news, songs, and other programs they offer including those on health and education. She prefers both Radio Rasuwa and Langtang over other stations, though she has never called into any of the shows. She does think that the radio programs talk about essential subjects relating both to her and to the development of the area by discussing it and that what they do talk about is helping people everywhere, not just her village or the Rasuwa district. Karpo Sonam in Brenthang listens to the radio, to pretty much everything that is available, while Pema listens to the radio at times, mostly for the news and at times poetry programs, but he does not have a particular favorite.

Batsu does, at times, listen to the radio, keeping up to date with the news or just listening to whatever is on. If he does have the opportunity to listen – and if he can understand what is on the air – he does end up feeling more updated and educated on the state of Nepal. Dawa Dorjee and Sarkye do listen to the radio on a small device hanging near to their wood fire stove but do not know which specific stations. They listen to the news the most often in Nepali, and when it is in English, their son translates it for them. What news they heard regarding getting funds from the government for rebuilding after the earthquake was very helpful over the radio, though they never called in about anything. They were able to receive the installment to rebuild their home. As mentioned previously, both stations heavily featured content on the earthquake and how to get aid in its wake.

Jampa described only listening about once a week when around her father-in-law – "only old people listen to the radio." If she consumes any media, it consists of movies on television. By her knowledge, others in Thuman did the same thing, only on their mobile phones. Whatever news she does end up learning is enough for her, and does not seek any further. Yangchen has similar mentality for how much she knows of the news in greater Nepal. She doesn't listen to the radio, nor does she have one. She has a phone but only uses it for calls since it doesn't have internet – and likely she doesn’t know about the radio feature. In greater Nepal, people – especially of the younger generation – have begun to listen to radio through their phones rather
than a transmitter. Whatever news she does get is from people nearby, both in Nagathali and in Thuman, who have the internet or listen to the radio. She feels that she has enough information about news in Rasuwa as well as Nepal as a whole, and does not actively seek out too much. She said she would only like to know if it is good news, but nothing good would come of learning of the bad. Nyingsamo, who does not listen to the radio, laughed when asked the question, saying that only the younger generation listens to the radio. However, there were clearly both old and young in Thuman who listened, so regardless of what either Jampa or Nyingsamo believed, the age demographic was not that skewed – backed up by national data collected by BBC Media Action. The universal age demographic is part of what makes radio nationally still the top medium for disseminating information. Aside from this, for many in Thuman, it is thought of as a leisurely activity. Lhakpa doesn't listen to the radio, saying that she is too busy with work, and can't sit down and only listen to the radio since she does agriculture. Tsering was the most vocal within this vein. He used to listen to the radio when in Thuman, but no longer since he is too busy with work on a day-to-day basis, and doesn't have a strong drive to listen anymore. He used to listen to the news – and had even heard of Radio Rasuwa – but did not indicate an interest in any specific content. In his opinion, most people who listen to radio have the time to be concerned about things outside of their own life, implying that there is some time for leisure to sit down and listen – “people in Thuman are too busy with their lives” to do so.

Radio as educational and for awareness – national ventures

At Ujyaalo, Gopal Guragain, the executive director of the media outlet, focuses primarily on news bulletins both local and national. They do in part have content which concerns the daily life of the average citizen – like prices of commodities and transportation – created to help people understand their lives and surroundings and make it easier to go about in the world. They also produce content on economic issues, migration, air and sanitation conditions and agriculture, though most of it is online. While they have no specific programs regarding education, Mr. Guragain underscored that they always consider what underlying faction a consumer will learn and take away from the content – “presenting information, awareness, and education in interesting ways.” As far as content goes, by his understanding local and national stations face the same problem, which is a lack of skill in human resources and therefore content production. The government allows so many stations to run, but there is little to no training in schools for human resources in journalism. The effectiveness of the programs as educational therefore entirely relies on the station and its staff. Some produce innovative content while others do not. In the case of a radio station in western Nepal, the station organized a question and answer program from students right before their final exams. Like other education programs, the effort was likely initiated or proposed by those providing funding.

Projects for education on radio have not only included material for students and the general public to learn but to train teachers as well. The Radio Education Teacher Training Program (RETT) was a project conducted in the 1980s sponsored by USAID and run in collaboration with Southern Illinois University, the government of Nepal’s Ministry of Education and Culture, the Institute of Education and Radio Nepal. Aired all over Nepal, the goal of RETT was to improve the teaching skills of primary school teachers who had themselves not completed secondary school. Weekly programs were aired with corresponding written materials for joint
review. The program paid particular attention to women teachers and made a point when writing the scripted programs, also written by women, to include the voices of men and women to dispel the idea of men as the only ones educated. The special programming included classroom scenarios with women as teachers, as well as soap operas on the legal rights of women under His Majesty’s Government – as Nepal was still a monarchy during this period.\textsuperscript{23} The program also discussed “traditional training,” including how to how to build a pit latrine, preventing infectious diseases, screening for malnutrition, oral rehydration therapy, proper methods of food preparation, safety and first aid, the role of local agricultural workers and maintaining a plantation. The programs consisted of majority lecture-style programs.\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, it was a fairly individual process for those in the program, meaning that the teachers would sit and practice alone every week. This was due to the sheer distance between schools since in rural areas almost everything is spread out, so a lack of a community in learning from the programs played a part in its decline and lack of impact. Therefore, at the time of its end, it was not seen as a successful effort in teacher training over the radio, since the results were “mildly positive.” Verifying who listened in the end, how well they paid attention, the broadcast quality – which was not as good as it is now – was unquantifiable.\textsuperscript{25}

BBC Media Action came to Nepal in 2007 – back when it was named BBC World Service Trust – with the hope of bringing media assistance and mentorship to the country in the wake of the Maoist conflict when ended the year prior. With a worldwide network and vast expertise on media production, it was believed that input on their part could be extremely beneficial to the nation, with uniting people and stimulating conversations to prevent a similar conflict emerging from ideological isolationism. With training and mentorship – both in person and online – their goal is to enhance the media capacity of local media actors. For them, local media is the more potent than their national and broader counterparts, in the cases of both radio and television. Mentorship occurs at every production stage and on a continuous timeline, from working with them in the station, audience and programming researching, producing, technical work and editing – from beginning to end. For considerable influence to occur, it was vital that topics the audience was looking for were available, both for listening as well as participation. \textit{Sajha Sawal (Common Questions)}, a program both aired on television and over the radio weekly providing a forum for political questions and debate with state holders and is one of their most popular programs. According to their researchers, the organization has conducted research, as well as programs, on the effect of radio and how stations manage education and public awareness efforts. They described cases of increased awareness and knowledge in reaction to listening or watching \textit{Sajha Sawal}, including locals demanding aid from locally elected officials, and women discussing sexual harassment in the forums of their village. Research in this vein can then determine what is needed by the public, or at least the audience in that particular area. \textit{Milijuli Nepali (Together Nepal)} is one result of such research and attention, as a program created to advise those affected by the earthquake with topics including accessing aid, rebuilding homes, finding shelter, sanitation practices, food and water storage and health. The program airs on Radio Nepal as well as other stations. It was initially an evening lifeline program started at BBC Nepali even before the earthquake, replacing the news for a while until it was taken over by BBC.

\textsuperscript{23} Goodman, Wagley, 1983  
\textsuperscript{24} Goodman, 1983  
\textsuperscript{25} Moulton, 1994
Media Action in mid-May 2015 and BBC Nepali went back to the daily evening news. At the moment, researchers are designing a survey on the impact of radio on the 14 districts most affected by the earthquake, and will then choose 11 of them at random to explore. These two example programs air nationwide and similar programs produced are either done by BBC and aired at local stations, or created locally with BBC supervision. Radio Langtang is one of the local cooperatives – as mentioned by Kabita, she received some training from BBC but did not detail to what extent.

(Fig. 43,44) Logo for Sajha Sawal; logo for Milijuli (source: BBC Media Action)

BBC Nepali, unlike Media Action, is not research and charity based, mostly creating and translating global content produced by BBC for consumption in Nepal. Having been in Nepal since 1969, they also have programs on local news and issues, including some about indigenous peoples. Admittedly, the coordinator indicated they lacked on the local level, unable to report much – like the Rasuwa Gahdi border – due to a lack of resources. Regular news programs air for 15 minutes twice a day on through partner stations – which both Radio Langtang and Radio Rasuwa are – since they do not have a frequency of their own. According to the coordinator, their audience – for the global news – majorly consists of those people above 35 who are looking for government jobs, or at the very least past high school.

Since more than 100 radio stations were affected by the earthquake – including Radio Rasuwa – BBC Nepal wanted to assist these local stations, but since they receive money from the parent BBC corporation, which is their license payer, there was a question of the availability of funds to do the training. When the board decided against it, the station went to BBC Media Action for help and to run it, since they act more as a charity than an official outlet. However, the coordinator told me that another manager – also an engineer – in their office went to Rasuwa himself, having connections with both Radio Rasuwa and Langtang, offering aid and expertise to help the stations continue programming and fix their equipment. Training by the affiliate had ceased a few years prior in 2013 when BBC funding priorities for it shifted to Africa. There may be a shift back in coming years, but it is still uncertain. Funding for stations is also uncertainty, though that does not mean there isn’t a market for it. Though competition is very tough for radio stations, there are opportunities for government and INGOs (international non-governmental organizations) – likely why both Kabita and Anu were limited in their description of where the station received funding. Partnerships with BBC also come with financial gain. Though program airing is free for BBC, ad revenue for the station always increases once they become affiliated.
since advertisers know that people listen for BBC. In the wake of the earthquake, it was assumed at Ujyaalo that radio would be the only media capable of operation – television antennae were down as was the internet in some areas. Ujyaalo, a media company producing both radio and online content based in Patan, began discussing it on air 30 minutes after it occurred. Their building was not affected since they intentionally built it to earthquake standards as a precaution to when one would hit the country. One of their projects was finding the families of migrant workers abroad. They would receive phone numbers to contact from people around the world, and if they could reach them, they would interview them on their air so whoever supplied them with the name would be at ease. The outlet also had several PSAs – public service announcements – on health and sanitation, and traveled to other more ruined districts to broadcast on their conditions, allowing government agencies in Kathmandu to get the full picture. They produced programs on the accountability of the government on earthquake-related aid for two years after, and still occasionally do it.

Judging by BBC Media Action’s research, many people in Nepal listen to the radio on their mobile phones – either through apps or an FM function – rather than on a stand-alone transmission device. With programs with the specific purpose of increasing public awareness on topics like child health, maternal health, nutrition and education, there is plenty out there. For many, friends, family and local chiefs and elders remain the most trusted source of information – 96% and 93% respectively, with radio coming in third at 90%. According to their research, as of 2015, 90% of the country had access to radio, but whether they are tuning in or not is the more significant question. Radio plays a more substantial role without the presence of a television in the home, which has become more and more accessible in recent years especially in areas coming to rely more on tourism. With 96.5% having access to a phone, 90.2% to a radio, and a slightly lower 83.3% to television, 67% are still getting most information they receive from the radio as their 2015 study, as the data was not skewed heavily by age. Though some research data implies that television has begun to overtake radio, they still very much insist on radio programming as a leading form of media connectivity and awareness in Nepal since it has remained steady over the past eight years, even with more and more people listening on their mobile phone.

The future of radio is a tricky subject to tackle. Since media is very congested in Nepal – with 700 radio stations, all with varying labels of commercial, community and private stations – all putting out a variety of content in a slew of different languages. In the end, the sheer amount is sustainably unrealistic, especially with regards to funding. 80% of advertising revenue in media is held by Kantipur Publications, spreading the other 20% over all other media houses and operations very thinly. Journalists then ended up with a minimal salary – an issue run into by Anu and her former coworker in Rasuwa – which can result in working for a platform for one’s own beliefs or reported with a vested interest in politics or business. These kinds of motivations can produce limited or skewed facts in their reporting. One of the researchers noted that some hosts have to reflect on what that means for their content and how their audience views them because of it. Since stations can only survive with monetary backing, where it comes from always ends up influencing content in some way; so the question becomes are they merely disseminating information vital to the public’s education, or are they mouthpieces for private companies and political parties? These are the sorts of politics which turn people away from the news, resulting in further isolation and consequential ignorance. Whatever its future, the BBC
Media Action researchers see it, perhaps, morphing into something more content and audience-specific, like podcasts or phone apps. Tuning in for any particular material will change its operations. However, some think that part of radio’s importance is that it provides a broad spectrum of content and ideas for the public. A young man in Thamel used the premiere of *Avengers: Infinity War* as an example. With everyone using their mobile phones or even watching television, they are aware of the film’s premiere but are they now as aware of global, or even Nepali, politics. Mobile phones and the internet – or specifically Facebook, which according to one researcher at BBC Media Action was all some used to get information – allows people to pick and choose what news they want to read, hear or see. Radio can offer an alternative to this as a way forward for education as well as public education. The other issue is if people in areas more isolated from varying media sources – or any – could view it that way, which was not necessarily the case in Thuman.

The BBC Nepali researcher did agree that, with television gaining popularity, radio will need to change. Last year, upon visiting around 50 partner stations from eastern to western Nepal, the coordinator found evidence which points to radio not being on the downtick at all, and there they can sustain themselves by different measures. Estimating that 45-50% of the population listens to the radio, the affiliate wants to conduct a survey of their own on the subject, but it is still a question of money. Because Nepal has not become fully “developed,” radio is still the best way of disseminating information. However, there is still a lot of room for bias in content. By the coordinator’s standards, BBC Nepali by comparison to most other Nepali material is unbiased. When visiting the stations, through questioning they realized all the stations in the east and the Tarai – plain lands – were supported by political parties, and yet some still claimed to be unbiased. There is also an issue of constant content, as well as quality content. With television, internet news and research, and even internet podcasts, there is a growing drive for on-demand content for whenever people have the time to focus on it. Despite this, the coordinator does not wish, at the moment, to change their radio operations, if only to maybe expand and develop a television program – which is barely in its development change. As of now, 5.6 million listen to the BBC programming every day. It could still be as popular and well-functioning within ten years – though this is a personal opinion. The same question comes, if like in Thuman some consider listening to the radio to be leisurely meaning they have nothing else to do, televisions would be in the same vein. Though areas with increasing tourism – or hopes for it – are outfitting homestays and guesthouses with TVs for this purpose, time is still a factor, though it is more on the side of “on-demand.” Regarding producing content which will get people, specifically younger people interested in listening will also take time since an audience cannot spring up overnight. They have a program, hopefully, to air mid-May, about women in entrepreneurship, and in the future want to do more on health to start generating a wider audience.

**Relating back to Thuman**

The mixed reactions to radio listenership in Thuman present a divided mentality. On the one hand, some find it useful for their health or casual education, as well as staying current in national affairs. On the other, it is seen as a luxury for those who have enough time to sit down and listen. Since radio local to Rasuwa – and therefore local and relatable content – is relatively new to the district, there is no particular audience, yet, for what they are producing. As
mentioned previously with the radio stations, many of their call-in programs were related to the earthquake, which undoubtedly affected most. That content was relatable to the locals, who were in dire need of aid. Still, the people of Thuman are not necessarily used to hearing about issues pertaining specifically to them on the radio, hence listening to it would be considered pointless. That is increasingly becoming false, as both Radio Langtang and Radio Rasuwa are seeking to produce more content based on local information, opinion and needs, so this may change in the coming years. A crucial aspect is being able to understand the material – as Batsu mentioned – so airing content in multiple languages as both the stations do is essential. The flip side to this issue is that, with many of the younger generation leaving for school or going abroad to work, building an audience with content regarding education, health and local issues, may fall on covered ears with the elders. Some like Penpa would likely appreciate it, but she did live in Kathmandu for quite some time, and was probably exposed to content over the radio and knew how important it could be. For others, like Yangchen and even Jampa who do not actively seek out to learn more, it may be difficult. Though statistically, radio is still the best way to deliver information, when a region does not have grounded history of local radio and lacking in a desire to learn outside of a formal education – which is regarded as the only legitimate means to learn – the knowledge gap widens, even with increasing development. Even with the many efforts described previously in the urban centers, a mental block is more potent than any level of noise or its many means of access. Hopefully, with efforts to make more content relatable to the listeners in Rasuwa, this will change, but still the issue of who is there to actually listen poses a dilemma.

**Conclusion**

Presented with opportunities for socio-economic advancement by over-catering to tourism and road infrastructure, the people in Thuman, Rasuwa could end up in an unwinnable situation. At the moment, there is a continuous effort to build hotels, invest in businesses reliant on the road and build other fixtures which cater to tourism. Within this line, the more money people make, the more likely they are going to send children to Kathmandu, seen as the only legitimate path to an education, and making money on a decent enough scale to justify all the effort put into getting the child there. Unfortunately, with an already growing age gap in the village due to this out-migration for education – or work in general – preservation of local tradition and religious customs fade. This fading is due not only to a lack of people to teach them to, but a lack of interest to carry on with them when options for making money are much more enticing. Change to socio-economic status could also improve mentality around education, or at the very least being aware of life outside of one’s world and one’s work. If education was seen more as a tool not only for self-improvement but to the benefit of the community outside of being driven purely by money, there might even be more of a hope of returning to better the community. At the moment, that is not as much the case since parents want their children to get a job immediately after they finish schooling, and do not see the viability of their children then returning to the village.

When education has a particular goal accompanied by a particular view of what a legitimate education is, any tools for awareness or education outside the definition are often rejected. For some, parents know their children will not be able to finish or continue school and do not bother to send them in the first place, but that has begun to decrease. For tools like radio, programming focused on local people and local issues is the most potent form of the medium. However, when a community is not necessarily used to relating to programs of that nature, a
habit around dismissing it forms. For many in Thuman, they explained not having time to listen to the radio, which could go hand in hand with not seeing its potential benefit even by listening while they work. Despite the efforts of local stations and organizations all over Nepal, if an area is so used to being isolated – culturally, politically, physically, etc. – any attempt at inclusion will no doubt take some time to implement. Local efforts like radio programming could, in fact, provide considerable aid for education, from bolstering local schools and improving infrastructure to creating both a local and tourist base around the religious aspects of the region (i.e., in Nagathali). The trick is bringing the focus back to Thuman, where for so many years despite the presence of the government school, any chance for an education and making money is presented within a dichotomy of leaving the village or staying and accomplishing very little by comparison. Though Penpa (the VDC leader) wishes to improve the school, there is already an institution around sending one’s children away which will be difficult to break. Even those who did stay, and either opened business and hotels or remained in agriculture, felt that education is the ultimate gateway to wealth, and felt at a loss themselves for having never received one, despite the current opportunity for them, though at times limited. Education running in tandem with development can benefit a community, but when development leads to whatever money they have getting spent on sending people away, the community as a whole loses pieces of its identity and any experience to be gained from that education. Stepping out of one’s world is part of education and awareness, but as development progresses, people’s mentality around both likely do not go at the same speed. Time will only tell for Thuman, whether attitude to improve the community as a whole will overcome over benefit solely for the individual through discussion and cooperation, and pop the ideological bubble home to still for many.
Interviews by Author

Kabita Shyanba at Radio Langtang, Lahrepauwa, Rasuwa – April 13th, 2018
Anu Acherya at Radio Rasuwa, Dhunche Rasuwa – April 13th, 2018
Jampa Chenzom Lama in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 14th, 2018
Yangchen in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa – April 15th, 2018
Tsering in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa – April 15th, 2018
Karpo Sonam in Brenthang, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Dawa Dorjee and Saryke in Brenthang, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Pasang in Brenthang, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Nyingma Tamang in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Phumo Nyingma in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Tseden Lama in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Dawa Tamang in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Pema Dendup in Nagathali, Thuman Ward 6, Rasuwa – April 16th, 2018
Batsu Tamang in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 17th, 2018
Pempasang in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 17th, 2018
Nyingsamo in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 17th, 2018
Phurba in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 17th, 2018
Lhakpa in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 17th, 2018
Tsering in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 17th, 2018
Nyima Tseden Lama in Thuman – April 17th, 2018
Penpa in Thuman, Rasuwa – April 17th, 2018
BBC Media Action research team in Patan – May 3rd, 2018
Dawa Tamang – Briddhim – in Kathmandu – May 3rd, 2018
BBC Nepali coordinator – May 4th, 2018
Mr. Gopal Guragain, executive director at Ujyaalo – May 7th, 2018

Bibliography


Suggestions for research in Rasuwa

To anyone going to Rasuwa for an Independent Study Project, I would encourage them to go not only to Langtang which is the more popular destination but around the Tamang Heritage Trail as well. The area is very beautiful, and the people who look to Langtang across the river will likely have quite a bit to say about the publicity differential. I am not the most outgoing when it comes to pushing myself physically, and while I am glad I went to Rasuwa and experienced what I did, I would rather have gone into it knowing more about the landscape. It is good to push yourself, but it is also good to recognize when to stop or when the limited is fast approaching. Do not worry about planning too far ahead either, though leaving some room for the unplanned can always help. Keeping a steady, consistent pace in research is key because an off-day can significantly set back one’s pace and work. In the end, Rasuwa is not as “remote” as other areas of Nepal, since it is in such close proximity to the capital, so it is a safe distance away in the case of an emergency.

![Tenzin Ghaphel and I upon reaching Nagathali](image)

It is a beautiful place going under a fascinating shift, so I would definitely consider it for a place of study. Even if a topic does not pan out as planned – which I can relate to – there is still so much to research and dissect that it might even augment what was originally planned or set out.

For advice or references:

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