Working Paper No 195

Transnational Community Development Projects and the Micro-Politics of Social Life in the Borderlands, Nagaland, Northeast India

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In this paper I touch upon two aspects of development presented through my ethnographic study of the Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development (NEPED) project using participant observation, recording life histories of respondents, and village-based household interviews. The first is the discursive construction of the project beneficiary as poor, underdeveloped and backward through published literature. The second is the inter-household negotiation of developmental resources as reflected through the circulation of micro-credit as revolving funds in the project villages. I explore the micro-politics of everyday life and project practice using Scott's (1990) idea of 'infra-politics' to reflect on the contest of representation between the beneficiary community and the 'project experts' Pigg (1992), while on the other hand analyze the struggle within the community for resources made available by the project and the ways people capitalize on it. Thus I will highlight the actors, networks and institutions involved in community development programmes and problematize the ideal conceptualization of community as a site for collective participation. Through the study of development institutions and popular polices the paper focuses on the practice of objectification and the creation of populist discourse on participation that overlooks multiple layers of patronage, public and self interest exercised by beneficiaries (the project community) in community development programmes (Mosse, 2005; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Brow 1992).

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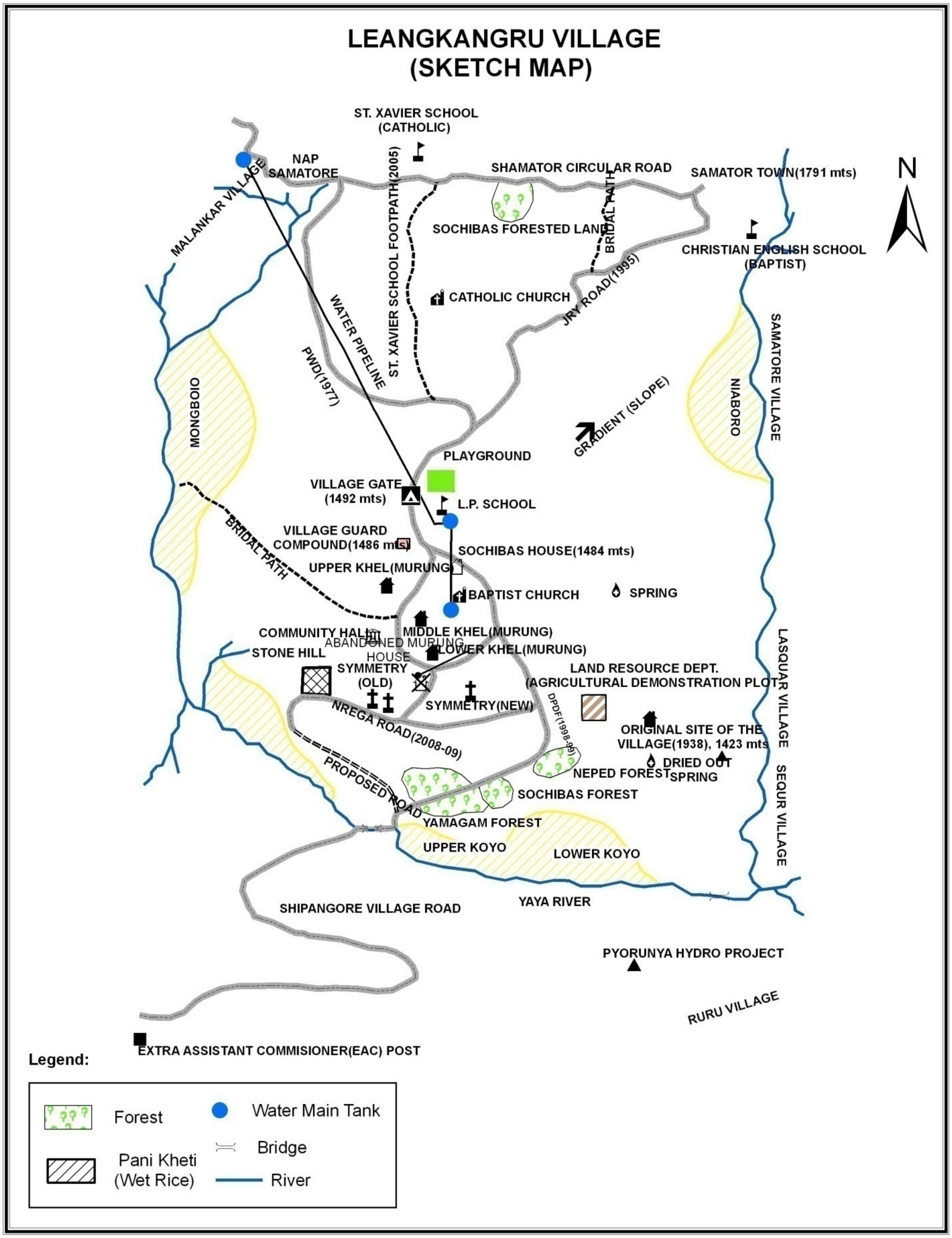
November 2011

Introduction

In this paper I discuss how changes in farming practices introduced by a transnational donor-driven agricultural improvement programme are understood both by village beneficiaries and the project officials through the discourse of ‘representation’ and farmers’ ‘agency’- as beneficiaries in various Government Organized Non-Government Organization (GONGO) operated community development programmes. I locate my study among the Naga tribals in the upland areas of Northeast India (the Naga Hills) that have attracted much scholarly attention in the last decade as a transnational upland massif ‘Zomia’ (Scott, 2009), and a ‘biodiversity hotspot’ region of the Eastern Himalayas (Myers *et al*., 2000). This is evident from the global interest of donors and conservation NGOs in the region, who work to bring about improvement by integrating ‘communities’ social capital with the ‘Indigenous Ecological Knowledge’ of the swidden *(jhum)* cultivators. By engaging with the NEPED project text and the community’s response to particular development intervention - in this case ‘micro-credit’ circulated through the Revolving Fund - I demonstrate the moral economy of households and the micro-politics of everyday life through which the state becomes legible in people’s lives. The study is based on participant observation (ethnographic fieldwork carried over fourteen months in a Naga Village) and reflects on the response of households to community-led development interventions designed by ‘experts’- government planners working to promote sustainable agriculture in the Naga Hills.

The Naga society, unlike caste communities in mainland India, is based on lineage and their social organizations are distinct from the plains peasantry. Here clans (*kuk* in Yimchunger Naga dialect), *Khels* (ward-colony), village headmen and chiefs play an important role in regulating social life through clan and lineage solidarity. In much of the ethnographic literature produced through 'Notes and Queries' style monographs on Nagas (Ao, Angami, Lotha, Sema) are described as undifferentiated and egalitarian. The villagers live by communal household labour and consume surplus through the ‘Feast of Merit’ (Hutton, 1921; Mills, 1922; Furer-Haimendorf, 1939). However, all this is fast changing with the commoditization of social relations and competition for resources as development programmes shape new aspirations for the improvement of swidden households at the present time. My particular focus here is the part of the NEPED project, through which soft loans were provided as a Revolving Fund to farmers in the study village, Leangkungru, located in Tuensang district of Nagaland (see map 1).



Map1: Location sketch map of the Study village

I present case studies of individual loan beneficiaries and explore the implications of the patronage, group affiliation and social stratification that accrue in a lineage-based society between kin members who are now divided between the landed and the landless, the beneficiaries and the non-beneficiary community, and those who have direct access to state resources and those who do not. I thus discuss the struggle within the community for resources made available by the project and the ways people capitalize on it.

The paper contributes to the broader argument I will make on how the agency of the actors who participate in swidden (*jhum*) improvement programmes should not be discounted when discussing development interventions. The villagers, who are represented in the project literature as 'objects of development' – as simple and poor beneficiaries – exercise their agency in ways that significantly shape project outcomes. In this discourse on farmers' development, the project villagers are represented in NEPED publications by emphasizing the outcome of implementation through sketches of poor marginal, 'ignorant' villagers aspiring for 'improvement' (see image 1). These sketches, which are powerful images of 'simple, ignorant villages' as recipients in need of aid, admonishing their rationality, but showing them responding to development also influenced outcomes (Hobart, 1993). The pictorial description of beneficiaries as 'ignorant and simple' displays a representational politics of backwardness and underdevelopment. It has clear parallels with the colonial ethnographic representation of Nagas through photographs as 'noble savages' (see image 2).

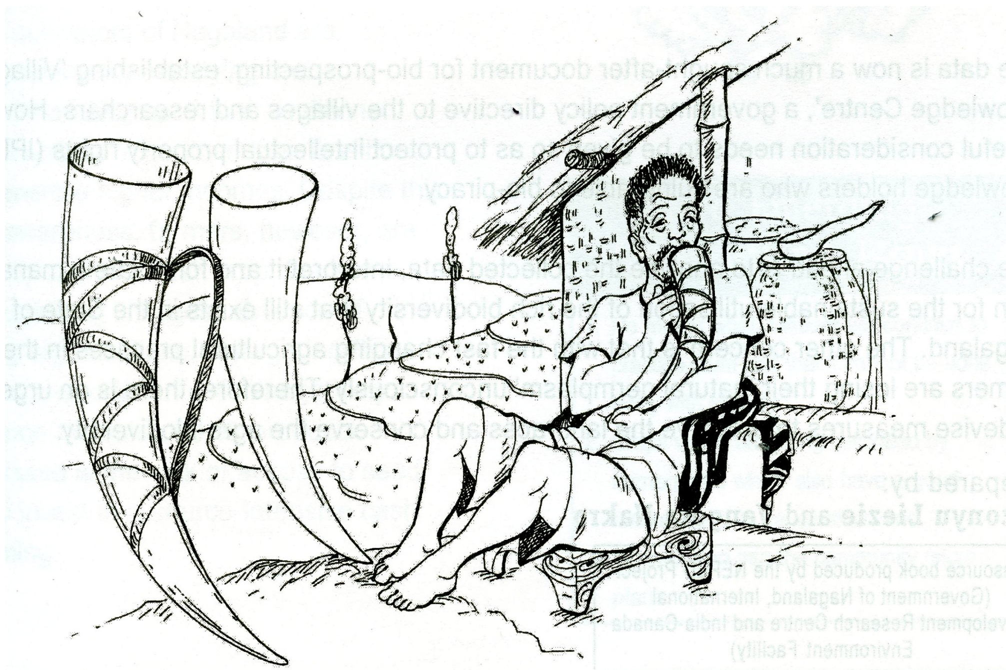


Image1. Naga villagers as represented by the project staff (*Source NEPED, 2007*)

Image 2. Yimchunger Naga taken from Kutur village by Fürer-Haimendorf (1937), source: SOAS Furer-Haimendorf Digital Archives (JICS), PPMS19_6_NAGA_1070.

My aim in this paper is to engage with the moral economy of development that never fails as projects continue to build on their failures and successes through a discourse of 'improvement'. As David Mosse has argued, project success and failure are more a practice of interpretation (2005:18). I amplify this case by looking at the NEPED intervention in Leangkangru, and thus see my analysis as adding to the arguments made by (Mosse, 2005; Pigg, 2002) that community development projects have an inbuilt rationale of progress and moral improvement that are cast through the objectification of beneficiaries as 'primitive and backward' and as recipients of aid and subsidies (see NEPED, 1999, 2007). In development projects that are driven by 'experts', elite 'indigenous knowledge' keepers act as brokers by influencing project outcomes that expose not only the ideologies of donor-driven, 'top down' approach to development but also make us think about the agency of the individuals (beneficiaries) who act as project recipients (Green, 2002).

In measuring the success and failure of its project intervention, the NEPED team relies extensively on participatory research appraisal (PRA), a methodology which is widely used in development programmes and widely criticised as a technical and managerial approach that is incapable of recognising the power of the local elites in managing development projects and hence the social shaping of development practice and its outcomes (Mosse, 1994; Cook and Kothari, 2001). Similarly, they also discount the moral economy of the household as it shapes inter-household relationships built through consumption, the spending of cash earned from labour contributions, and soft loan programmes floated for community development programmes as is the case of the NEPED project.

I will approach this paper through a case study of inter-household responses to development programmes in order to show how technocratic and managerial approaches followed by the development organization, such as PRA- (used extensively in the NEPED project in Nagaland) underplay the social processes that shape development practice in a community fractured by interest groups and emerging factional elites who maintain patronage with the political class through brokerage in development programmers and re-inscribe states' control over people through these programmes.

The project

The NEPED project started in 1995 as a *jhum* (swidden) development and alternative livelihood regeneration programme based on community participation and the local knowledge of the farmers. It was supported by IDRC (Canadian International Development Research Centre) and ICEF (India–Canada Environment Facility). The Nagaland Government was the local body that oversaw the project by providing manpower and infrastructure to set up the office and by establishing NEPED as a GONGO (Government Organized Non Governmental Organization). There were other stakeholders in the project who, in different project phases, provided technical support and their 'expert knowledge'.[2]

[2]These institutions were UN sister organizations and Conservation NGO and specialized agricultural support institutions. The IIRP, UNEP–SENA and WWF became part of the project in its various phases.

Leangkangru, the study village, had already become a successful pre-project model village taken up for project implementation in phase I and II (1995-2005). At the successful completion of phases I and II, the NEPED project staff prepared reports in which they highlighted how participatory development in the project site was carried out, the tools that were used, the way the project was implemented and the outcomes and lessons learnt (NEPED, 1999, 2007). The project's ultimate goal was to bring economic and social development through the diversification of subsistence farming. It was assumed that the introduction of cash crops, soft loans (in the form of the village revolving fund) and the Self Help Group (SHG) would lead to settled cultivation and empowerment and replace the practice of 'slash and burn' with sustainable agriculture.

The NEPED project had two phases. The first phase lasted for five years, from 1995 to 2001. During this period, the project officials claimed to have planted six million trees in *jhum* fields covering 854 villages (NEPED, 1999). The thrust of the project shifted to provide better livelihood through economic empowerment programmes like micro-credit and the formation of Self Help Groups during the second phase. The idea of micro credit was tested in the form of the Revolving Fund that was introduced to wean people away from a 'subsidy culture' and to induce agricultural activities such as the cultivation of cash crops like ginger, cardamom, passion fruit, chillies and other horticultural crops (NEPED, 1999: 99-123). The fund was offered as a loan with a soft rate of interest and was managed by the Village Council (VC) and Village Development Board (VDB) members.[3] With every new phase the project came up with new ideas and agendas for improvement as the funding priorities and project planning shifted to proliferate in new sectors of development.

The NEPED project was one among many such programmes designed in the past that was constituted with an elaborate administrative structure and the programme was implemented through the decentralized administrative set-up with the support and cooperation of the VC and VDBs, who worked in liaison with Project Operation Unit (POU) members, Team Leaders and village level Facilitators of Community Conservation (FCC), who were NEPED staff selected from the beneficiary villages. The project, like many others, heightened people's expectations of more loans and cash as disposable income, which beneficiaries rationally used to satisfy pressing family needs rather than farm improvement. It was only in a few plots that farmers experimented with the newly introduced crops. The crop that was successful was grown by a few farmers who received constant support from the agency, had built market links with town merchants and had enough food crops and farming plots to satisfy their family needs. In the fields of other farmers, it was associated with crop failure. While many used NEPED's Revolving Fund (soft loan scheme) for nonfarm activities which they expected to recover at the end of the five year period through interest they would earn from re-loaning the money to fellow villagers and traders who could not become beneficiaries as they lacked goodwill with the village elites. I will discuss the consequences of these initiatives later in the paper.

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[3]See NEPED. 2007. 'Adding Value to Shifting cultivation in Nagaland',Volume 2. Nagaland Environment Protection through Economic Development.

The NEPED model village

During my first visit to Leangkunger (also pronounced as Leangkungru in Yimchunger dialect) in 2009, I was not aware of the fact that it was a model village presented by the POU team as a success story in the transition from swidden farming to more sustainable relay cropping (farming in which leguminous crops such as French or long beans locally known as *kholar* are grown in combination with soil exhaustive crops like corn), (See image 3 on Leangkunger's success story with *kholar*- French bean's).

Transition Story: Leangkunger's Local 'French' Connection

Leangkunger Village in Tuensang District is located in a remote corner of Nagaland bordering Myanmar. Although the farmers were traditional shifting cultivators growing maize and paddy, their primary crop has now become the French beans (locally known as *kholar).* The beans were generally grown for home consumption but it spread through occasional visitors or relatives to other areas. The increasing demand from other areas for *kholar* made the farmers realise that their humble backyard French bean variety was a hot marketable commodity. They increased their crop area under this variety.

The demand for the beans increased the interest in *kholar* and soy bean cultivation in Tuensang District thus leading to diversification of crops and the gradual transition from subsistence to cash crop farming. Encouraged by their success with *kholar,* farmers have also taken up maize and local potato cultivation in large areas.

While the initial push for transition from subsistence to market-based farming was because of demand for local crop varieties, the rapid transition and shift towards cash cropping came as a result of project interventions (revolving funds, marketing know-how and raised awareness about marketing). The Government of Nagaland, after seeing the success of this local French Beans (*kholar*), declared the entire Tuensang District as a "*kholar*" district.

Image 3: NEPED handbook showing Leangkungru success story.

As a result of the POU report, (see image 1) the village became a major recipient of a development grant during the second phase of the NEPED project (2001-2006). The village was already a success long not much before any development intervention had taken place. However, during the third phase (2008-2012), funding was withdrawn as project officials on the ground became aware that their loan grant had not made a significant impact and had failed to bring about the expected results from the relending of the Revolving Fund among beneficiaries. Villagers reported that the POU members who monitored the programme were not co-operating and were unwilling to visit the village at the end of the second project phase. The POU, on the other hand, realized that the farmers had failed to achieve the desired goals and were not repaying the loans; nor in many cases had they succeeded in growing cardamom (introduced as a cash crop) for the market, thus failing the project mandate.

The newly-introduced ginger crop also failed, while cardamom was successfully grown by some farmers who were nonetheless having difficulties protecting their crop from the vagaries of weather and marketing it. The 2009 dry season almost wiped out the remaining cardamom plants. When interviewed, farmers reported that they were 'lazy' to grow cardamom as they had more important food crops to sow and harvest during the crop season. The incentive from the market was low due to the weak link established between the farm and the place of sale. Only farmers who regularly visited the towns and had built good networks with local merchants sold a few bags of cardamom annually at very low prices as they had very little opportunity to bargain. Another aspect of the narrow incentive to grow cardamom that farmers cited was the Revolving Fund which was used to purchase seeds, which they received as part of the loan package. The uncertainties of cardamom crop production had forced many families who were beneficiaries in the NEPED cardamom plantation project to become loan defaulters. The project officials branded the villagers 'lazy and corrupt', as was revealed by farmers, who said saying this was the reason for the demise of the revolving fund and to cardamom plantation. This was how the NEPED project was phased out in the village.

The picture as presented by recipients and donors is complicated. I was not in a position to unfold why cardamom plantation failed whereas farmers were successfully growing long beans (*kholar)* as a commercial crop for many years. Indeed, it was based on this success that the village had been selected for cardamom and ginger plantation. Twenty families were identified as beneficiaries in the cardamom plantation programme between 2003 and 2007. However, only a few had been able to continue the project on their individual farms by the end of the project phase. The village agrarian economy was dominated with relay cropping of maize and long beans (*kholar*). There was no trace of the newly introduced crops except in a few plots where farmers struggled to grow and maintain their cardamom plants. The failure, I later discovered, was due to the planners' 'expert' understanding that had discounted farmers' needs and local networks of demand and supply. Farmers cared least for the new crop, cardamom, as they found it hard to grow, nurture and care once there was no incentive in the form of loans. They had no previous experience of cultivating and selling cardamom. The vagaries of weather was a further contributory factor, turning initial experiments into failure in many plots as farmers complained of a high sunshine factor, implying there was no shade to protect the young cardamom plants. The NEPED soft loan scheme that placed its faith on the Revolving Fund automatically suffered a setback. The POU members who were excited by the villager's innovative crop rotation with *kholar* as the cash crop soon realized that the aid recipients had mismanaged the loans by not using them efficiently. This led to retrenchment of support and subsequent loss of interest on the part of the farmers who were struggling to increase the production of *Kholar* in their *jhum* plots to maximize cash income.

Leangkungru is located at an elevation of 1300m above sea level, and was already popular in the district as one of the best long bean (*kholar)* producing areas among the Yimchungru villages (see image 4). Long bean production has revolutionized farming and in recent years it has become one of the staple food crops of the village, replacing Job's tears (*Coix lacryma-jobi*-buckwheat) and millet in their diet. The intensification of long bean and relay cultivation of maize has established a healthy *jhum* cycle in several farms where farmers could now work in a single plot of land for several years without shifting their fields. Fields close to the village settlements were already becoming permanent sites of cultivation with multiple agro-horticultural plantations and belonged to powerful households in the villages which were beneficiaries in multiple rural agrarian diversification programmes.

In Leangkungru, my study village, the rural kulaks are the village headmen and political party intermediaries who claimed to be the *Khel* heads. The Village Council registered 198 households for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) man days (work days for wage labour), while according to the electoral roll, there were only 159 households. In my study I recorded only 140 households of which I carried out my base line survey, among 106 households. These 106 households became the sample size of my interviews.[4] The variation in household numbers is based on the manipulation of figures while reporting to state officials on family size of households. During my fieldwork the village was divided for the MGNREGS man days programme into nine units (wage groups), each of which had a *khel* head and a *khel* secretary, who were responsible for overseeing and ensuring the participation of their *khel* household.

Image 4: Maize and long beans relay cropping in Leangkungru

[4]The difference in household numbers comes from the overrepresentation of population size in census data.

The Project Operation in the Village: Patronage and Privileges

The POU member who initiated the project in Leangkangru was connected to the village as he had married one of the women from the *Jangra* clan. His father-in-law, Mr Antham, was the link man in the village and was made responsible for the implementation of the programme. As I discovered during my stay in the village, Antham had a vibrant history: in the 1960s, he had lived in a neighbouring village, served as village pastor, and later joined the Naga National Movement for a few years and went underground. Dissatisfied with the struggle for independence, he returned to his village. Then, on becoming a government primary school teacher, he was posted to Leangkangru. After a few years of service, he had to take voluntary retirement and became a member of the village citizen group. In the past decade, he had been involved with Rural Development (RD) department and acts as the manager in charge of the distribution of CGI (Corrugated Galvanized Iron) sheets in the village under the *Indira Awas Yojana* (IAY) housing schemes. His children (nine daughters and three sons) were all grown up and had mostly migrated to the cities and towns. One of his daughters was married to a Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) in Kohima, and this son-in law was the person in charge of implementing the project in Leangkangru. The officer visited his father-in-law's home annually and was himself a Yimchunger Naga and knew the village well.

The NEPED project planning unit entrusted him with the job. In his interviews, Mr Antham proudly claimed that the cardamom project was initiated by him in the village. The loan offered to each project beneficiary family was Rs. 20,000. The Village Council, along with the VDB members, selected 20 beneficiaries. Among them, there were three *Gaon Buras* (headmen), Mr. Antham himself, the ex-village pastor, and the Village Guard commander, among others who were also beneficiaries of the project. The villagers were given training in Zhonoboto district on how to plant and grow cardamom before the seeds were dispersed. The subsidies of Rs. 20,000 were given to buy seeds, manure and farm implements. Mr Antham's farm became the test plot and focal point for dissemination.

My interviews with beneficiaries revealed that the crops had failed in their individual plots. The plants survived in only two plots, one in Mr. Antham's plot and the other in the second *Gauh Bura's* plot. In 2009, the lack of rain meant a bad production of cardamom. Equally, farmers like Mr. Antham could not sell the cardamom even in Tuensang market, which lay some sixty-five kilometres away from the village. The limited production also meant that it was not profitable to sell the produce in such distant markets. The NEPED POU member who oversaw the project complained that the farmers were not as enthusiastic in the cultivation of cardamom as with long beans. They further clarified in my interviews that the villagers' lack of attention and care to the crops had led to the failure of the programme. These remarks were the same as what NEPED bosses told me in their headquarters in Kohima, the state capital. For every success story the NEPED officials took full credit for their intervention, while failures were attributed to the farmer's laziness, corruption and inability to improve.

The POU members in their interviews did not reveal who benefited from the cardamom project and how they were selected for the project. The micro-politics of selection is central to understanding project failure. For any mode of farming to succeed, labour contribution is required. Interviews with the beneficiaries revealed that their interest in the plantation was due to the (diverse) circumstances and conditions in which they were living and not necessarily for farm improvement and diversification of livelihood. For the ex-village pastor, gaining access to a NEPED loan was a means to redeem his debt and to procure food for his family. For the Village Guard (VG) commander, these were added funds to invest in new property in the village, while for others, the money was important to meet their immediate household needs and for investment in tangible assets like buying agricultural plots, a house and a gun. Those who had genuinely invested in the cultivation of cardamom could not maintain their fields as there was no immediate return in the first year and it was thus too costly to engage the labour that was involved in other staple food crop production. For the second *Gau Burah* and Mr Antham, their role as brokers had facilitated the patronage they had built with clan and lineage members, who, in return for becoming beneficiaries were obliged to offer free labour to them. Their social position in the village as brokers in development project had many supporters who were ready to lend help in return for subsidies and financial benefits. Brokerage entailed both material and symbolic benefits, which they enjoyed with villagers as experienced in other parts of South Asia (see, for example, Mosse and Lewis, 2005[5]). By the end of the second project phase in 2006, the cardamom plantation in the village had been reduced to only a few plots of land.

The beneficiaries also complained in their interviews that the POU members were not very happy with the villagers at the end of the second phase due to the project's poor performance. The POU members restricted their visits to the village after 2007, when the final review of the second phase was completed. The last time they visited the village was in 2009 when I was in the field. This time the POU staff came with a grand new idea of conserving biodiversity through spreading awareness of endangered species among villagers and making provision for its conservation.

The use of the Revolving Fund gives an important insight into how funds are managed by village beneficiaries who are also responsible for implementation of the programme along with NEPED staff and their village co-coordinators.

The predicament of project implementation and its outcome

I conducted fieldwork among 106 households in Leangkangru, who responded to my base line household survey. Based on the survey I marked the household in each *khel*. Although the number of total households in the village is a little higher, I could not cover all households as in some families people were living in the nearby town and seldom visited the village. According to my sample survey there were 140 households in the village, divided in nine *khels.* Leangkangru had five clans, among whom the *Jangra* clan had the largest number of households. The clan division was an important aspect of identity formation and group affiliation. The numerically bigger *Jangra* clan had four divisions within it and seven *Gau Buras* (headmen) who were members of the village council. Similarly the *Jangra* clan members had within them political party workers and government servants who acted as middlemen in

[5]There is a long standing discussion on 'cultural brokers' in anthropological literature following Geertz (1960) and Wolf (1956). I follow Mosse and Lewis (2005) to define brokers as intermediaries in development projects, - people who by virtue of their education and social status establish patronage with village people.

development projects. During elections the *Jangra* clan played a decisive role as they were numerically the largest. Anybody who could garner the *Jangra* vote won the election.

There were many brokers in the village who were government employees or political party actors. They often contested the traditional authority of the village headman and influenced his action. As they knew better the rules of governance and public policy on rural development they had established patronage over the village. They acted as influential people in the village and held responsible posts, such as Village Council Chairman. However these posts were highly contested and abused by the men in power. During fieldwork the post was held by the second *Gau Burah* as the person who was formerly holding the post was charged with corruption. The NEPED project came to the village council through the SDO father-in-law who was also the village facilitator for the CGI sheet scheme under the *Indira Awaas Yojana*. He informed me on several occasions during leisure talks in confidence that the villagers were ignorant, illiterate and poor. People who knew government rules could easily benefit from government programmes while others would not know about it.

According to my baseline household survey there were 28 households who were beneficiaries in the NEPED project during the various project phases (phase I and II). All these villagers got Revolving Funds between Rs. 5000 and Rs. 20000, to be repaid at the end of the term with an annual interest rate of 5%. Of the 28 households, the church pastor was one of the beneficiaries. He received Rs.1lakh (one hundred thousand rupees) of the total fund (10 percent of the total grant). The villagers undertook the revolving fund scheme in an innovative way. The Pastor re-loaned the money among town businessmen and some Muslim shopkeepers in the village at 10 percent compound rate of interest per month (120% annually). It proved to be a failure as re-loan beneficiaries could not repay such high interest. The pastor in his interviews reflected that he was not interested to re-loan the money among villagers as they had no cash income at hand and would soon default in payment. Many of his borrowers (mostly migrant grocery store owners and petty businessman) ran away with the loan money and never returned to the village. At the end of the project the pastor was unable to repay even the principal amount. However, his social position as religious head meant that beneficiaries did not dare to question his integrity. His social capital and support within the council as one who would rescue villagers when in need reinforced his social position and prestige.

I now present some household case studies to show how the NEPED fund was utilized as a measure to materialize well being and social protection through micro-finance by the NEPED team. It must also be highlighted that 48 households, nearly fifty percent of the village, did not receive any funding from any of the government programmes running during my fieldwork and hence were excluded from loans and subsidies.[6] Public service employees were denied loans on the grounds that they had a fixed source of income and were also eligible for loans from their service department. However, there were exceptions. The person through whom the NEPED cardamom plantation subsidy was received in the village was a government employee but, because he facilitated the whole process (as a go-between), he became the beneficiary in the cardamom plantation through the NEPED loan and training-capacity building programme.

[6]As revealed from my baseline household survey. The beneficiary community was thus very small and nucleated from the village community as conceived in development project.

Household No. 5 in the Upper *khel* was selected as one of the beneficiaries in 2000.[7] He received Rs. 10,000 as loan money and used it for his immediate family needs, in this case to build a house. He could only repay the loan with interest in 2008. The NEPED project ended within five years but he, like many beneficiaries in the programme, was unable to repay the loan on time. The revolving fund based on interest generated out of the initial allotment of fund never materialized in practice. In order to get these loans, people had to show collateral in land and household assets. Despite failing to repay the loan money on time, the household was lucky not to have faced confiscation of their property as they were on good terms with the village council members. For many farmers the loan money was a resource to build new assets, buy land and send their children to better schools.

The overall mandate of the project was thus reworked by the villagers through their individual and pressing financial needs. This highlights how project policy and practice are influenced by recipients and how it is often unhelpful to clinically divide the two actors (donors and recipients) in aid driven community development. As Rossi (2006) has emphasized, we need to think less in terms of interfaces between separate worldviews and more in terms of positioned strategies and perspectives while thinking in terms of donors and recipients in development programmes. Some household heads (household 13 for example); were not in a position to get an NEPED loan as they had limited collateral and very little social capital to convince the village council that they could repay the loan amount. Farmers like my host, Nikon, did not bother to associate with the programme as it was managed by another influential villager who had all the resources to mobilize labour and NEPED benefits for his farm. Instead, Nikon nominated his brother, the Village Commander, and his sister's husband (the former village pastor) who were enrolled as beneficiaries in the NEPED programme. With this he established his social position as benefactor and strengthened kinship ties with his blood relation.

For the cardamom plantation, the village council formed a group of twenty farmers under the NEPED scheme. Thirteen farmers received a sum of Rs. 20,000 while the remaining received Rs. 10,000 each. For two years, from 2006-2008 Household No. 17 sold cardamom and made profit. In 2009 all the cardamom bushes were destroyed by strong sunshine and there was no prospect of growing them anymore, even for the most prosperous farmers who had maintained the plots with the NEPED loan and farm labour offered by the beneficiaries. The cardamom produced was sold to a local merchant from Kerala who fetched them Rs. 55 per kilogram. The household was able to sustain cardamom plantation as his farm was selected as the test plot. Farmers who joined the project were obliged to work on his farm during the initial period in order to receive pullies (seedlings) in return from the test plot. They devoted a portion of their weekly work towards the maintenance of cardamom. Once the bushes were ready for transplantation in the field, the loan beneficiaries cooperated with the household in his farm. The obligation remained one way as the beneficiaries could only get the saplings when they participated in Antham test plot field. Once the saplings were distributed by individual participants to their farms, they failed to take care of the plantation as it had limited marketing opportunity. Their own farm work for food crop production was more important than these new plantations that required enormous attention and

[7] I use household number to morph the identity of my respondents as they can be under potential risk of being exposed. The village settlement map can be used to locate the relative position of the villagers in the study area. The readers can also relate to the morphology of the village and the nature of people who could become beneficiaries in the project based on the local condition.

often conflicted with their own crop cycle and labour supply in the village. They were encouraged to maintain the plantation with the subsidies. Once the NEPED fund was distributed and there were no avenues for fresh subsidies farmers stopped bothering with their cardamom plantation. Furthermore, the expected price of the produce fell and few individual household took the initiative to sell their produce in the market. These outcomes disappointed the POU members and they claimed that the villagers were 'lazy' and had misappropriated the funds. For the next phase, the NEPED project staff did not shortlist Leangkangru as a project village, while before the start of the programme the village had been presented as a success story given its transition from *jhum* based millet and Job's tears cultivation to long beans based relay cropping.

Similarly, rural elites have access to the towns and they constantly bring new ideas luring villagers to new schemes and programmes for agriculture development. For Household No. 21, a NEPED loan was out of question as they were too old to work hard or invest in agriculture to generate repayment of the loan. As one farmer observed, only households that had established trust with the village council members and those who were engaged in village politics had the credentials to get a NEPED loan. The loan distribution was also linked to the personal affiliation of village members and their status within the Church. Deacons who were very close to the church, VC and the VDB members and political intermediaries were the most affluent and influential men who managed these loans and registered as beneficiaries.

For Household No. 40, they had enough resources for subsistence. They received a loan amount of Rs 10,000 and spent the money on the tuition fees of their child who was studying at a Catholic school in a nearby town, which was considered to be better than the Baptist school. They preferred to spend the loan money to provide better education to their children. At the end of the loan period in 2007 they had to sacrifice domesticated animals to pay off the loan amount, which they felt was hard but inevitable to save their agricultural plot from being confiscated by the Village Council.

From the household survey, as described above, it can be inferred how individual households strategized their livelihood priorities in respect to the NEPED Revolving Fund scheme that was primarily advanced to improve livelihood through farm activities. While a few farmers utilized the loan for agriculture, not all were successful in growing cardamom and ginger. For other farmers, building houses, their children's education and investment in more tangible assets were far more important than investment in farming. Further, loan recipients often used the loan money to develop innovative strategies of patronage with fellow villagers; redeploying the rationality of credit (loans), they became village moneylenders. Though unsuccessful in recovering the loan money, they clearly showed how cash could be productively reinvested to earn quick profit. The net result was that investment in cash crop cultivation became the farmers' last choice. Only beneficiaries who owned multiple agricultural plots and were well connected to the market invested the revolving loan amount in cardamom plantation. The vagaries of the monsoon, harsh weather conditions and the low incentive from the market meant that initial interest waned. By the end of 2007, POU members from the NEPED department stopped making regular visits to the village. The project outcomes were far below their expectations since farmers failed to maintain the cardamom plantation. Many of the loan beneficiaries became loan defaulters as they did not invest the money in productive assets that could generate income. The NEPED officials had nothing left to promote in the village. During that period the NEPED phase II had also come to an end and the project staff were gearing up for the third phase, which aimed at a different set of empowerment and livelihood options strategized around conservation and maintenance of biodiversity.

The important questions that arise out of these cases reveal how the 'idealized' notions of 'community' and 'social capital' are mediated by identities, interests and factions within a project site. It also shows how the community actors, beneficiaries, project recipients build their relationships and participate, often rationalizing decisions based on their family needs rather than following the broad policy goals of donors or project planners. While project discourse may fix them as a primitive, lazy, timeless community par excellence and as rural people, the project's 'beneficiary community' presents a more complex history and represents nodes of power hierarchies that destabilize fixed images produced in the project text as idealized tribes and homogeneous non-stratified villagers. This idealized utopia has rationalized the principles of community participation and commoditization programmes in Nagaland.

This draws my attention to what Li (1996b: 502) has highlighted in her study on Indonesian hill people's struggle over resources, which she argues are also 'struggle over meaning' that shape project outcome and help us understand 'agency' and strategies of grass root actors in development work. Programme interventions based on 'rapid appraisal', as was conducted in NEPED project evaluation repeatedly at the end of each project phase, produced lists of typical tasks, assets, outcomes, learning and needs but missed the subtleties of relationships and processes that define projects. They failed to document the strategies adopted by individual households that determined the project outcome. While farmers enthusiastically grew long beans it did not automatically translate into farmers adopting cardamom or ginger as a cash crop to improve household income. The physical isolation, distance and remoteness also made Leangkangru challenging for agribusiness. Nonetheless the failure to grow cardamom had less to do with the sophistication of commercial farming but more importantly the project planners' failure to understand communities' interests, motivation and strategies of action. The contingencies add to the 'high managerialism' of project practice that simplifies community and their 'capital' (Van Ufford *et al.,* 2006).

The fact that some people's action constitutes other people's constraints means that one cannot study individual behaviour in isolation – in the language of economic analysis, one cannot ignore externalities. But there is more to it than that. People's behaviour depends not only on what other people are doing but also on the form and social quality of the social relationship among them (Berry, 1980). Farmers use agricultural loans for ceremonial expenditure in part because such expenditure serves to affirm or enhance their commitment to principles of interaction (among kinsmen and neighbours) (Parker, 1972). These principles, in turn, shape farmers' access to productive resources. Similarly, I have shown in my analysis how farmers utilized the soft loan to re-lend it to kinsmen who could not become recipients but were in desperate need of cash. Thus denial and access to resources were shaped by the unequal power and patronage enjoyed by individuals within the community that also shaped project outcomes. Households that had multiple plots of land enjoyed collateral and those who represented the village church as acting Deacons and well- wishers were also the beneficiaries in government and donor projects.

The other point that demands attention here is the role of the brokers and intermediaries who have been involved in implementing the project. These brokers work both within the development institution and the project village. The intermediaries played a very important role in producing a coherent development idea. The development programme staff, as is seen from my case study, intervened in the field as brokers attached to their beneficiaries and the project community through the project. Similarly, village brokers who take part as mediators express a unique relationship. As I have shown, the NEPED project came to the village with the help of the BDO (Block Development Officer) who acted as the POU member and was the son-in-law of an influential villager. His relationship to the village was more than that of a project professional. This case was similar to other project officials who were members from the same community and often citizens of the village who worked for the agency. Project staff members thus have many-fold relationships with the beneficiaries. They also share unique relations of power and patronage that makes them obligatory to reciprocate. In Leangkungru the end of the second phase also marked the termination of the BDO (Block Development Officer) as POU member and he was recalled back from deputation duties by the NEPED team. With a new POU member in place who came from a different district villagers found it less obligatory to co-operate. Thus development brokerage plays a critical role in shaping the inter-personal relationships between villagers and project professionals who were also presenting communities as 'backward' and 'local knowledge keepers' in their everyday talk.

Every farmer who could secure the NEPED grant had their own story of utilizing the revolving fund. Only farmers who have networked with the village Institutions (the Church, Village Council and Village Development Board) and were members of the Village Council managed to become beneficiaries. However, the selection and distribution of grants were influenced by the decision of the village headman and council that judged who could refund the money. During my interviews the council members expressed that large grants could only be given to farmers who could provide collateral and whom the council felt would be in a position to return the money. The risk-taking farmers in the village were council and village development board members who had both access to government programmes and land to show collateral for grants. Although the NEPED action plan was based on participatory development and was decentralized on the ground it has been reworked by village committees who establish their patronage network through government schemes. The bulk of the revolving fund entered non-productive services and added up to the additional cash in the hands of villagers who were wealthy enough to manage their farm.

The distribution of the fund clearly showed that people who were close to the church owned multiple plots of land and shared a good relationship with the village headmen and council members received the grant. The 'project reviewers' hired as consultants were not in a position to take these factors into account when evaluating the project. The main measure used by the NEPED officials was the number of beneficiaries and not how the beneficiaries were selected and how the funds got allocated. They were engaging in narrating project success by describing the success story of relay cropping in Leangkungru as a positive precondition for development intervention. The NEPED revolving fund thus created new avenues of resource appropriation.

Project Outcome and Village realities

Faminow, who served as the director of the NEPED project from 1998-2000, applauded the project success by statistically proving the number of plantations carried out in Nagaland initially in test plots that were later scaled up (Faminow *et al.,* 2001). This was presented as a success of the first phase (1995–2001). The results were, as the authors put it, 'extrapolated' from project villages and they present a sanguine picture of the project success (Faminow 2001: 219). My fieldwork interviews with project beneficiaries in Leangkangru revealed that in most cases village elites relabelled existing forest areas as newly planted forest when the project officials came to notify the test plots. Some farmers who had planted teak and *gamoria* a decade earlier under a different government programme also presented it as part of the NEPED success story of replication and intensifications. Similarly, as the project report authors themselves recognize, farmers ended up planting and adopting commercially profitable trees as opposed to indigenous ones, which they put to everyday use as firewood and for building houses. Their choices were also influenced by the project emphasis on agro-forestry, the planting of commercial crops and the likely economic benefits associated with timber tree plantations. On the downside such rampant forestation has also made planted forestry vulnerable to forest fire and many planters in Leangkangru reported that their plantation was destroyed by *jhum* fire.

In the NEPED project the project officials POU team drew on the pre-project success of farmers in the cultivation of maize and long beans based relay cropping as a successful example of agrarian change and improvement over traditional swidden fallow management that was widely understood as damaging to the environment. The village was presented as a case study of success in the programme literature for major intervention through development grants. As the villagers with whom I conducted interviews noted, PRA (participatory research appraisal) techniques and village resource mapping were carried out to identify the nature of intervention. The project was also conceived to be carried in a decentralized fashion, by closely working with village institutions and empowering them to distribute grants and select beneficiaries. The project outcome overall has been dismal. The formal equality mandated by the project does not work in the face of people's everyday knowledge that decisions are usually made by a handful of village members who have cultivated links with government and development professionals which others have no access to replicate (see also Baviskar, 2004). The Yimchunger Naga lineage-based social systems are networked with clan politics that determine people's choice and social behaviour. The clan heads and the village elites who have control over their clan members manipulate and determine the success of development programmes. Often public good is appropriated as private success through the accumulation of the state's resources. While benefit sharing takes the root of patronage those elite clan leaders maintain with their clan members who possess limited or no land. This is because clan leaders control labour relations that bring agricultural success and contributions to the church. The patronage politics are oriented towards maintaining such relations through the identification of beneficiaries.

For the NEPED team members and their funding bodies, project coherence as 'sustainable, livelihood redevelopment and capacity building' through participation and farmers 'social capital', were coherent-bounded ideas that were to be maintained for future funding. For the project beneficiaries they tailored their needs and aspirations to every opportunity for subsidies, loans and grants in order to secure and build upon their existing personal wealth and patronage. The object of development was thus shaped by the ideological monologue of the funders and the individual subjectivities of beneficiaries who established their 'will to improve' fitting into the mandate of projects and enrolling themselves as beneficiaries.

During the last days of my fieldwork in 2009, the NEPED officials visited the study area flying in on a helicopter with German development Bank staff. On further enquiry from NEPED Village Level Workers, I realized that the project had now entered a new era of funding that prioritised increasing the area of forest under cover in the *jhum* fields through documentation of biodiversity and local knowledge about medicinal plants that would help conservation. This time around the ADB (Asian Development Bank) and GTZ, a German funding agency, had endorsed the project with financial support that would help NEPED to work in new areas of community development through people's participation. Thus, in the planners' discourse the project never failed as in each project cycle its failures and gains were shifted by new priorities and objectives that were set out by conservation donors.

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