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Localising environment:
Mustang's struggle to sustain village autonomy in environmental governance

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Abstract of a thesis

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Localising environment: Mustang's struggle
to sustain village autonomy in environmental governance

by Shailendra B. Thakali

Decentralisation of environmental governance is a general trend worldwide and its emergence has largely coincided with a neo-liberal shift in policies for the management of environmental resources. Decentralisation is based on an assumption that the participation of the local people in natural resource management regimes will produce better long term outcomes for communities and their environment. There is little concrete evidence, however, on what transpires when local inhabitants are explicitly included in resource management planning and implementation, and more specifically, why and how the environment becomes their domain of concern in terms of environmental practices and beliefs. It was this gap that inspired me to undertake this research.

This qualitative research uses 'environmentality' as an underpinning analytical construct to study the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance. The research was designed to examine the validity of Agrawal's thesis to explain long term shifts in environmental governance by examining the complex relationships between changes in government and related shifts in environmental beliefs and practices of local inhabitants by subjecting it to empirical assessment in the socio-political and historical setting of the Mustang district in Nepal.

My research findings suggest that the configuration of current institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang can be characterised as multi layered and relatively fragmented. Conceptually, the environmental governance institutional framework comprises elements of three inter-related governance layers: the endogenous village governance layer; the central government led development governance layer; and the non-governmental organisation led conservation governance layer. This research suggests that while the concept of 'environmentality' is useful to examine the evolution of environmental governance in Mustang, its basic premise, that the process of governmentalisation has direct bearing on the

transformation of local inhabitants into environmental subjects, is arguably not valid in respect to Mustang. Even when central government had limited jurisdiction over this district, natural resources such as forests, water, land and pastures were not treated as open access resources by the local inhabitants of Mustang. They were locally managed by villagers in the context of an endogenous village governance system under the leadership of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*. This layer of environmental governance, prevalent across Mustang, is a historically rooted phenomenon. It did not emerge as a result of recent governmentalisation processes, but has been invariably shaped by processes of socio-political subjugation, marginalisation and exclusion from the power centres. My findings suggest that the environmental beliefs and practices were, and have continued to be, socially embedded in Mustang village institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya.* The local environmental beliefs and practices have invariably been motivated by a strong local desire to protect the village autonomy, and is inherently linked to village rights over the resources necessary to meet their basic needs.

My case study highlights the local struggles as well as the adaptive capacity of the endogenous village based governance institutions in reaction to different central government policy regimes and allied institutional arrangement over centuries. Thus, arguably, the recent central government environmental and economic development and decentralisation policies coupled with a greatly increased role of non-governmental organisations in implementing central government conservation polices has not necessarily led to dramatic transformation in local environmental beliefs and practices as Agrawal's Indian case study has suggested.

My research also demonstrates that an exclusive focus on environmentality to analyse the effect of central government's power in shaping environmental beliefs and practices has two drawbacks. It underestimates the influence of a wider range of different actors and power relationships. It does not provide adequate grounds to explain how this dynamic of power and power relations at the local level impacts on institutional building and ultimately in shaping people-environment relationships in changing socio-political contexts.

Keywords

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.0   Introduction

The decentralisation of environmental governance is a general trend worldwide, particularly since 1990, and its emergence largely coincided with neoliberal policies for the management of environmental resources(Himley 2008). This decentralisation of political authority displaced earlier hierarchical central government dominated environmental policies in many countries, including Nepal, and shifted natural resource management responsibilities from central to local government, and to local communities (Wells 1993; Sharma 1995; Bajracharya 2005). The new participatory governance policy paradigm has also led to the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and community groups especially interested in environmental issues (Bajracharya 2005) .

The decentralisation of environmental governance is based on several assumptions. Decentralisation aims to strengthen democratic political governance where all the people, including marginal groups, have a say in collective affairs. Practically, it assumes that the involvement of local people in the government of the environment will enable them to identify and prioritise their environmental concerns more accurately; allocate available resources more efficiently; take ownership of decisions made; implement those decisions and monitor outcomes, thus enhancing accountability (Carney 1995; Kaimowitz, Vallejos et al. 1998; Margulis 1999). Linking the decision-making processes more closely to the costs and benefits of resource allocation at the local level would produce better long-term outcomes for communities and their environment (MacAndrew 1986; Manor 1986; World-Bank 1989).

There is little concrete evidence, however, on what transpires when local people are explicitly included in resource management planning and implementation, and more specifically, why and how the environment becomes their domain of concern in terms of environmental practices and beliefs. There is also a lack of analysis of how participatory environmental policies shape or change environmental subject positions. It was this gap in the literature that inspired me to undertake this research to develop an understanding of the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental

governance and related shifts in environmental beliefs and practices in Mustang, Nepal[1]. There are two other reasons that stimulated my interest in this topic. The majority of studies involving environmental governance are concerned with assessing the effectiveness of a particular governance regime such as community forest user groups or conservation area management committees as emerging institutions in the governance of environmental resources (Malla 2003; Bajracharya 2005; Gurung 2006; Pagdee, Kim et al. 20006). These studies do not provide concrete evidence on what transpires when local residents are explicitly included in participatory natural resource management, and, more specifically, why and how management of environmental resources becomes a domain of concern for them. Secondly, the major focus in the literature concerning high mountain regions, including Mustang, is on trade migration, tourism and local culture or the impacts of these on the environment (Vinding 1998; Bajracharya 2005; Byers 2005). This study is based on a 'big picture' perspective of changes in environmental governance in Mustang over the course of three and a half centuries, as explained below.

1.1   Research problem

The majority of the literature concerning the effects of decentralised environmental governance is related to exploring a relatively narrow environmental context from a single philosophical perspective such as community forestry or community-based conservation with an emphasis on clarifying the grounds upon which an individual might build his or her own view of the subject. Only a small section of this literature examines how a particular political philosophy might contribute to practical environmental beliefs that would advance the cause of reconciling decentralised politics and environmental protection (Baber and Bartlett 2005). In recent years the concept of 'environmentality' as an analytical construct has been used to examine the interesting, complex and crucial, but under studied, relationships between changes in government policies and related shifts in environmental beliefs and practices of the local people.

Drawing from Michel Foucault's model of power and building on existing writings by political ecologists, common property theorists and environmental feminists, Arun Agrawal (2005) proposed 'environmentality' as an analytical framework to study changes in environmental politics and related shifts in environmental subjectivities. While acknowledging the influence of this work, I intend to revisit the core argument of Agrawal's model to investigate whether there are causal links between government policies and shifts in local environmental beliefs and practices. It is acknowledged that Agawal's case study, the Kumaon Valley, India, is very different contextually from my research in Mustang, Nepal. These differences include the geographical, socio-political, economic and cultural

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[1] Politically Mustang constitutes one of 75 districts in Nepal. However, geographically, it is akin to a region in Nepal.

settings. I intend to use 'environmentality' as an analytical framework to examine the veracity of the criticisms related to Agrawal's model, many of which are based on the review of his book and not on the grounds of empirical research findings.

Between 1970 and 1984, Michel Foucault coined the concept of 'governmentality' to explain how power is exercised in contemporary societies(Foucault 1991; Foucault [1976] 2003; Foucault [1979] 2000; Foucault [1982] 2000). Governmentality has inspired many scholars and this has resulted in a proliferation of research on governance, particularly during the late 1990s (Barron 1996; Cruikshank 1999; Dean 1999). Foucault (1988[1976]) was interested in government as an activity, practice, or method of disciplining individuals. He understood the power of government not only in hierarchical and top-down forms, but also as an exercise of social control such as in disciplinary institutions and the control of knowledge.

Foucault wrote little about the environment, but his concept of governmentality has been used to develop a critical perspective on contemporary environmental politics and practices and to investigate those forms of power that seek to shape conduct in the environmental domain. Governmentality in relation to the environment has been variously termed as 'green governmentality', 'eco-governmentality' (Danier 1999; Rutherford 1999) and 'environmentality'. I am using the term 'environmentality' as introduced in its political form first by Luke (1999) and later by Goldman (2004) and elaborated further by Agrawal in his book, *Environmentality – Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (2005).

In his innovative historical and political study, Agrawal (2005) uses environmentality as an analytical framework to examine why, when, how and to what degree, people come to see themselves in relation to the natural environment and how they view the environment as requiring protection. He did so by examining changes over 150 years in the Kumaon Valley of northern India in order to understand the transformation of Kumaon villagers from people who burnt 200,000 hectares of forests to protest against the British colonial government's centralised coercive environmental policies into a people who are now working alongside the government to protect their forests. Agrawal considers this transformation related to new environmental positions that emerged from involvement in struggles over resources and in relation to new institutions and a changing calculation of self-interest. By analysing these changes in the state, the forest and the beliefs and actions of local people, Agrawal argues that the policies governing forests, which he terms as the 'government of nature', gave rise to the birth of the 'environment' and the emergence of environmental subjects, in a process involving a complex interaction between the way local residents have understood their relationships with forests and the context within which their understanding became possible.

When Agrawal talks about 'technologies of environmental government' he refers to specific techniques for shaping the politics of environmental policy, particularly focusing on the use of forestry statistics in characterising and reconfiguring forests. He sees policies concerning decentralisation and participation as part of new technologies of government. The core of his hypothesis is that the effectiveness of decentralisation and participation depend on the combination of three different, but connected, changes. The emergence of new centres of environmental decision-making at a local level ultimately changes how central government interacts with local communities, a process he terms 'governmentalisation of localities'. This part of Agrawal's work concerns how local peoples' understanding of, and relationships with, forests changed historically with the extension of centralised rule over forests. Secondly, the emergence of new local regulatory bodies or spaces shapes social environmental interactions in communities, a process he terms 'regulatory communities'. This part of Agrawal's analysis focuses on how the creation of decentralised forest councils and networked forms of power led to significant changes in the relationship of the Kumaon villagers with their forests and their ways of being in them. Finally, the emergence of 'environmental subjects', i.e., people who have come to think and act in new ways in relation to the environmental domain being governed. Agrawal maintains that power as it is practised in the governmentalised localities and regulatory communities also environmentalises subjects by changing how they view the environment and their place in it.

Among these three sets of changes in relationships mentioned above, Agrawal finds the 'environmental subject' formation the most critical one. He concedes that environmental subjectivity can be ambiguous and unpredictable, and for this reason is less well understood and investigated (Agrawal 1997; Warren 1997). Only a few authors have attempted to examine subject formation and its relationship with the government (Moore 1998; Sivaramkrishnan 1999; Li 2000; Worby 2000) . Apart from Agrawal's (2005) study, there is limited literature that examines the links between government policies and subjectivities. There are some studies capturing the experiences of community forestry in the middle hills of Nepal. Their focus has been more concerned with assessing the effectiveness of community forest user groups as emerging institutions in the governance of forest resources (Malla 2003; Shrestha and McManus 2006; Pagdee, Kim et al. 20006). The majority of studies have been concerned with the conservation or restoration of the more fragile mountain landscapes (Zurick and Karan 1999; Byers 2005), reconciling conservation and local livelihood interests or the outcomes of community-based conservation efforts or integrated conservation and development programmes (Zurick and Karan 1999; Byers 2005). These studies deal with similar or parallel issues such as factors contributing to the effectiveness of a particular governance regime or the institutional arrangements put in place. The result is a proliferation of individual findings that are tantalisingly similar, but fail to produce a core of agreed-upon propositions to explain where and how these studies are located in the wider social-political and economic processes. Furthermore, they

provide no analysis of how all these policy initiatives or institutional reforms are changing subject positions. In light of these shortcomings, my research aims to explore the issues concerning contemporary environmental politics in Mustang, Nepal, in a theoretically informed manner. I attempt to study the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance from the perspective of the local people. I explore my topic by locating it within the wider historical, social-political and economic processes and by analysing the effects of power/knowledge on decision-making and subjectivities in relation to the environment. The research questions raised in this study are broad; but I have narrowed the research focus by using a case study strategy to gain the big picture of environmental politics and subjectivities within Nepal by focussing on Mustang from the point of view of selected key stakeholders. My intention is to provide well substantiated policy options which will contribute to the sustainability of mountain regions in terms of development and the environment.

1.2   Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine critically the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang, Nepal, and to explore whether there are links between changing government policies and shifts in environmental beliefs and practices. To achieve this aim, I set out four research questions as follows:

- From a broad political historical perspective, how have the institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang evolved?
- What are the factors that have shaped the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang?
- What is the theoretical significance of the research findings?
- What are the practical policy implications of the research findings?

The first two research questions are interrelated and are jointly addressed in results chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. These questions are used to develop an historical account of the evolution, and the factors that shaped the institutional arrangements for environmental governance in the Mustang district of Nepal. This covers almost two centuries of national socio-political settings and the related shifts in three sequential phases in the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance. Each of these phases was marked by a distinct political regime which came to dominate the remote regions such as Mustang. These processes culminated in what I describe as multi-layered environmental governance.

Thus, I will argue that the foundation that led to the current multi-layered environmental governance system that we see in Mustang today is rooted in the different historical trajectories of the country and in the district itself. I will also argue that long before Mustang became part of Nepal, natural resources

or 'environment resources' in a broader sense were not only important to support the local livelihoods, but were also an integral part of the village identity. Environmental governance was thus embedded in the endogenous village governance system. This system, under the leadership of the *Mukhiya* and *Ghempa* (village heads) in both historical and contemporary times, has been concerned with village survival. For this overriding reason, the endogenous village governance system has continued to adapt to external forces in Mustang and to play a dominant role in both the governance of village welfare and of environmental resources. This is despite recent (post 1990) central government led political and economic changes which have led to a parallel proliferation of non-governmental and community-based organisations and the establishment of a complex network of locally formed institutions with both specific and broad mandates.

Question 3 captures the theoretical significance of my research findings relative to the criticisms of Agrawal's study in the Kumaon Valley of India.

Question 4 emphasises the policy and practical implications resulting from my research findings, and makes recommendations for future research.

1.3   Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into nine chapters.

Chapter 1 sets out the research problems and introduces the four questions this thesis is addressing.

Chapter 2 discusses the methodology used to collect field data.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of Nepal to establish the broad context for the research and introduces and describes Mustang as the case study district and primary focus for my study.

Chapter 4 reviews the theoretical arguments advanced by Foucault's 'governmentality' and Agrawal's 'environmentality' as well as other relevant literature from a diverse field of studies including sociology, human geography, political ecology, anthropology, development studies and political economy. These sources have been essential to develop a broad theoretical perspective to ground this thesis.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the geo-political history of Nepal prior to the 1950s, particularly with reference to Mustang, to illustrate the context which has contributed to the evolution of the village-based governance system.

Chapter 6 examines the role of the village-based governance system within the evolving wider national and international political and institutional settings. It examines critically the introduction of environmental policies and their impacts on the role of village based governance, with particular reference to Mustang, during the period from 1950 to 1990.

Chapter 7 examines the most recent phase in the evolution of local environmental governance in Mustang in the context of the socio-political and economic transformation of Nepal during the period from 1990 to the present. The impacts and implication of these changes and for the village based governance system are described and evaluated.

Chapter 8 examines the impacts and implications of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, a project under the aegis of Nepal's largest environmental NGO, the National Trust for Nature Conservation, on the environmental management in the district of Mustang. It focuses on examining the interface between the NGO as an agent of central government and the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system representing the local endogenous institutions within the broader context of the current institutional arrangement for environmental governance in Mustang.

Chapter 9 summarises and discusses the significance of my research findings; both in terms of their theoretical contributions and in terms of their implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2
Research methodology

2.0   Introduction

As introduced in Chapter 1, environmental subjectivities or environmental subject positions are multi-faceted and complex. The challenges associated with the complexity of this topic call for a sound research approach and a comprehensive method of inquiry. This chapter outlines the rationale for choosing a qualitative research methodology for this thesis and the details the data collection procedures and analytical methods are explained. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first two sections of this chapter I discuss the relevance of using qualitative research and the use of a case study as the basis of inquiry. The third section details procedures for generating data, including techniques used for recruiting participants and conducting semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The fourth section describes the processes and procedures used for data analysis and interpretation.

2.1   The qualitative research approach

Qualitative research is underpinned by a range of closely aligned interpretivist approaches to the examination of social phenomena. All of these approaches emphasise the importance of interpreting the research participant's own perspective of their situation (Babbie 1999; Patton 2002) 'social constructivism' is an important variant of these interpretivist approaches (Neuman 2000; Creswell 2003). A constructivist approach addresses human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds (Charmaz 2003). It also emphasises the existence of multiple views of realities existing in both the 'inquirer' and 'inquired into' at a moment in time (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Appleton and King 1997; Charmaz 2003).

Social constructivists argue that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experience of the world through interactions with others. Interpretation of these meanings is influenced by values, beliefs, life experiences and the way in which the environment has been used by different societies (Spellerberg and Hardes 1992) and is expressed in various ways such as through symbols and language. Meanings are often negotiated socially and historically, depending on the purpose sought (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). A social constructivist paradigm is, therefore, well suited to research that

is issue and policy driven (Tacconi 1998) and one that exposes the multiple views of reality that may exist in the phenomena under investigation (Appleton and King 1997).

Constructivist inquiry begins with the "issues or concerns of participants and unfolds through a dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, that leads eventually to joint (among inquirer and respondents' construction of a case) findings or outcomes" (Schwandt 1994 p 192). Schwandt (1994) also highlights another dimension of the constructivist approach. He argues that the "social construction of views is not fixed but is continuously being tested and modified in the light of new experience" (p 126).

The aim of this research is to examine emerging environmental practices and beliefs, a process which can never be precise and objective. The ontological and epistemological stance of the constructivist paradigm and qualitative methodology is best suited to this research and for the development of this thesis. The qualitative research approach recognises socially constructed reality and is widely accepted in the social science research. This approach seeks participants' views or 'lived experiences' in particular historical and social contexts and particular phenomena in which the researchers are interested (Locke, Spirduso et al. 2000). It aims to generate rich data and provide a more holistic representation of reality (Lofland and Loafland 1995). The focus of qualitative research is on specific situations, and its emphasis is on words rather than numbers (Maxwell 1996). Similarly, qualitative research is flexible. It allows for identification of unanticipated phenomena, contributing to the development of new theories or expanding existing theories as data collection and analysis are pursued (Silverman 1993). The aim of the researcher in this approach is simply to present the views of the participants or the researcher's interpretation of the participants' views.

2.1.1 Validity in qualitative research

Qualitative research has methodological limitations. Criteria to assess validity, reliability and objectivity in qualitative research methods are fiercely debated (Lincoln and Guba 1985) as these aspects are not as well developed as for quantitative research methods. Qualitative research methods are also criticised for lacking scientific protocols as well as being unrepresentative and atypical. Furthermore, qualitative research is criticised for presenting impressionistic, piecemeal and even idiosyncratic findings (Devine 1995). The critics think that these factors make qualitative research findings unreliable as well as difficult to evaluate and generalise (Devine 1995). The critics are also concerned with the role of researcher, the basis of his/her knowledge claims, and the ability of a relativistic perspective to generate solid findings (Altheide and Johnson 1994). They are sceptical about the researcher inadvertently imposing his or her own biases upon interpretations of the participants' views believing that this may obscure realities (Altheide and Johnson 1994). They point out that this kind of subjectivity can occur during the design as well as during the evaluation of the

research project. It is, therefore, important that adequate measures to improve the rigor of the research, both in generating and analysing the data, are explicitly stated.

Authors such as Baxter and Eyles (1997) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue for using criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to provide a reliable representation of the reality of a participants' life experiences. Credibility is defined as "the degree to which the description of human experience is such that those having the experience would recognise it immediately and those outside the experience can understand it" (Baxter and Eyles 1997 p 512). By adopting strategies such as clearly defined processes for selecting research participants, using multiple sources of evidence (triangulation) and 'member checking' to ensure that research participants have the opportunity to check that their views are adequately reported, a high degree of credibility can be achieved. 'Confirmability' means the degree to which findings are determined, by the respondents and conditions of the inquiry, and not by the biases, motives, interests or perspectives of the enquirer (Lincoln and Guba 1985). To establish credibility and confirmability, a 'reflexive' approach was adopted during data collection and analysis. Reflexivity is defined as a self-conscious scrutiny of the research process, informed by a critical analysis of the researcher's own position in time and place, of the study's social setting, and of the political context in which these are situated (England 1994; Schellhorn 2007). This critical perspective recognises three fundamental 'constitutive interests' that motivate human knowledge enquiry: a technical one that seeks control, a practical one that seeks understanding, and an emancipator one that seeks freedom from constraint (Habermas 1971). Habermas argues that the orientation towards one of these pursuits establishes a specific viewpoint or a reality. The researcher needs to be aware of this natural limitation which can be overcome with help of a reflexive mind. Reflexivity, thus, advances autonomy and responsibility. Reflexivity, autonomy and responsibility are important attributes of robust research.

As a result of this emphasis on reflexivity, the research methodology adopted in this thesis transparently incorporates the researcher's subjectivities. "Identification of self" is integral to a reflexive approach (Hall 2004 p 140). To elaborate on this, it is important to define and examine here the reasons why I pursued this topic.

2.1.2 Personal position

I hold an undergraduate degree in natural resource management, specialising in nature conservation and protected area management from Lincoln University, New Zealand, and an MA in sociology and anthropology from the University of Surrey, United Kingdom. During the past two decades, I have also undertaken a number of research projects, academic as well as applied, covering diverse issues and sectors such as tourism, community forestry, nature conservation, mountain development, policies and planning, in Nepal as well as in the South Asia region. I was also involved in the evaluation and

assessment of a number of programmes and projects funded through various sources - government, bilateral and multilateral agencies using questionnaire surveys, meetings, group discussions, workshops, structured and unstructured interviews as methods. For my MA thesis, I chose Mustang as my context to question the paradigm of 'hosts and guests' (Smith 1989) by critically reviewing the notion of tourism 'impacts' on host communities. I argued that the scope of 'hosts and guests' paradigm is too narrow and that this type of discourse obscured the real complexities of the social interaction and processes of socio-cultural change. The 'hosts and guests' idea focuses on the effects of tourism on 'host' cultures and these are often measured and identified as a process of commodification, westernisation, and modernisation. I shifted the focus of analysis from western vs. eastern cultures to those of Hindus vs. Buddhists, or for that matter, Nepali vs. Tibetan and Indian cultural influences. I argued that in the on-going processes of cultural invasion, westernisation is far less important than some other conductors of cultural change, for example the influence of Hinduism on minority cultures in Nepal.

I started my career as a field manager in Nepal's largest protected area, 'the Annapurna Conservation Area Project', popularly known as ACAP, which is managed by Nepal's largest non-governmental organisation, now known as the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)[2]. Over the years, I worked for a number of international organisations and aid agencies, including the British Department for International Development as its Livelihood Advisor. I was heavily involved in programmes and projects of varying scales, both in terms of coverage and funding, and was in the forefront for advocating policies related to decentralisation of environmental governance and the empowerment of local people. I have visited 65 out of the 75 districts of Nepal, and 22 countries (representing all continents in the world). These opportunities have broadened my understanding of environmental issues and stimulated my interest in critically reviewing the notion of decentralisation and its relationship to the emergence of environmental subjects from a theoretically informed perspective.

I was born in Jomsom, the District Headquarters of Mustang. This mountain village used to be an isolated area up until the 1970s. It took six days of hard walking from Pokhara, the nearest urban centre and the road head. Although I have never stayed longer than a month at a time in Jomsom since 1979, until my recent field work for this thesis, I very much consider Jomsom as my village, Mustang as my district, and have continuously taken a keen personal and professional interest in issues associated with this area. I was the team leader in developing a proposal for the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation which led to the opening up of the Upper Mustang region for a restricted number

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[2] The National Trust for Nature Conservation was previously known as the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC). Political change in 2006 abolished the institution of the monarchy and declared Nepal as republican country. The constitution of KMTNC was amended. The name changed and the patron of the trust changed from the king to the Prime Minister. The Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation now served as the chairperson rather than a person appointed by the King.

of tourists with a high entry fee of $ US700 for a minimum ten day trek. I was involved in developing a Sustainable Development Master Plan for Mustang and for its neighbouring district of Manang. The development of these plans was jointly funded by the National Planning Commission, the United Nations Environmental Programme and the National Trust for Nature Conservation and was approved and included in the government's three year interim plans of action.

As a local, and also as a professional involved in conservation and development, I was very much aware of the unprecedented changes occurring in Mustang during the past four decades and which continue today. I was also aware of local struggles over natural resources which over the years have become highly contested domains, involving many agencies and many institutions, each with their own claims, justifications and jurisdictions. I became interested in Mustang as a research context not only because it was my home district, but also because this districts represents the transitory challenges that many mountain districts in the region are facing. I believe that my research has the potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transformation of high mountain regions which are contextually very different from the middle hills and low lands of Nepal that have been a primary focus of environmental studies over the past four decades.

As a 'local' person, I was familiar with the local settings and through my previous work and associations was well aware of the environmental and development related issues requiring further investigation. I knew the majority of people who would become the key informants for my research. Being a local was an advantage in terms of communicating with the people and gaining access to them, however, I had to be aware of the disadvantages this presented. I had to make sure that interviewees did not see me as representing the community I belong to, or a particular programme or project I was involved with in the past, including the National Trust for Nature Conservation that I used to work for. This was particularly important when dealing with sensitive issues relevant to those different representations.

2.2   Case studies as a research strategy

The common strategies of inquiry for qualitative research include grounded theory (Glasser and Strauss 1967; Taylor and Bogdan 1998) and case studies (Stake 1995; Stake 2000; Yin 2003). While grounded theory is a general procedure for developing theory, based on data that is systematically gathered and analysed, case studies which share the main tenet of grounded theory as a strategy of enquiry, focus on contemporary phenomena within a real-life context (Yin 2003). The main point of difference between grounded theory and case studies lies in the role of theory development prior to data collection. Grounded theory based research does not consider any theoretical propositions at the onset of an inquiry, but case studies do. Case studies often start with a preliminary theory generated from existing literature related to the topic of study, which is then linked to the available data (Yin

2003). Because the purpose of my thesis was to test the validity of Agrawal's model for studying environmental politics and changes in different socio-economic, political and geographical settings, using Mustang as a research site, a case study was chosen as the most appropriate method for my study.

A case study is defined as "a holistic investigation of some space and time-rooted phenomenon" (Lofland and Loafland 1995 p 21). Case studies are used to understand complex social and political phenomena involving individuals, groups, communities, and organisations, enabling the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin 2003).The case study allows researchers to collect a substantial amount of detailed and rich data to deepen an understanding, particularly when the researcher has little control over events and when the focus is on the contemporary phenomena within some real-life context (Yin, 2003). Maxwell (1996) uses the term "rich" data to describe information that is "detailed and complete" such as verbatim transcripts of interviews. Such data is essential for qualitative research, since the aim of this form of research is to build "a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Maxwell 1996 p 95). The qualitative case study method is therefore best suited to this thesis. This methodology aims to provide in-depth views of a particular social setting, based on detailed descriptions of the case (Patton 1990; Neuman 1994).

The case study uses many of the same techniques found in historical research, but it adds two sources of evidence; direct observation of the events being studied and interviews with the persons involved in the events. The evidence includes documents, artefacts, archives, interviews, and observations typically in the form of participant observations.

Stake (2000) describes three different case study strategies. An 'intrinsic' case study is undertaken when the researcher wants a better understanding of a particular event or phenomena. An 'instrumental' case study is undertaken to provide insight into an issue, or refinement of a theory. A 'collective' case study is undertaken to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition.

One particular concern with the case study strategy is related to its link with theory. Some methodologists argue that a case study does not represent a broader reality (Stake, 2000). It is used to improve understanding of a single case. However, Yin (2003) disagrees with this proposition. He argues that case studies can be used as a way to generalise from a previously developed theory or proposition by comparing empirical results (Yin, 2003). This is what I intend with this research. I use the theoretical propositions of environmentality to guide data generation and analysis. The next section describes the procedures and techniques used in generating the data to address the four research questions that underpin this thesis.

2.3   Data generation methods

Data collection methods involve a set of procedures and techniques relevant to the research questions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In qualitative research, data is not found in the form of ready-made facts waiting for collection, but needs to be generated and interpreted (Mason, 1996). Mason (1996) prefers using the term data generation rather than data collection in the context of qualitative research. Data is generated through the interaction of the researcher and the research participants to construct knowledge about particular aspects of the social world being studied (Mason 1996). The empirical data for this research was generated from multiple sources of evidence; semi-structured interviews, participant observation and relevant official documents. This data gathering required research ethics approval from the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee prior to carrying out my field work in Nepal.

2.3.1   Sampling techniques

The focus of qualitative research is less on a sample's representativeness or on detailed techniques for drawing a probability sample and is more on how the sample or small collection of cases of activities illuminates social life (Devine 1995; Neuman 2000). As discussed earlier reliability and validity are central concerns of a case study approach (Neuman 2000). Qualitative researchers depend on what respondents tell them (Neuman 1994). The credibility of respondents and their statements become validity considerations. My participants were selected from positions within relevant organisations and institutions for being community leaders, government officials, local leaders, executive members of community- based organisations, and local groups, for example, youth clubs or mothers' or women groups. After arriving in Kathmandu, I prepared a list of organisations and people that I wished to contact and requested interviews.

A purposive or judgmental sampling technique was used. Qualitative research recognises that purposive sampling can add richness to the data (Mason 1996) as it focuses on a sample or small collection of cases that can deepen the understanding sought. The emphasis is on selecting key informants who can provide significant contributions to the issues being researched, i.e., people whose positions or previous experiences give them particular valuable information on a given topic (McKillip 1987; Patton 1990). Participants were also considered on the basis of their association with Mustang, availability for semi-structured interviews, and proven involvement in participatory environmental governance issues. Snowball sampling, a referral technique, was also used to gain wider access to the network of people deemed relevant for the research. In snowball sampling, participants are asked to nominate other people who could be useful for the study. Often interviewees themselves recommended or suggested that I talk to a particular group of people when issues that needed more clarification arose during the interview process. I made this request at each subsequent

interview until no further participants were required or could be identified (Devine 1995; Babbie 1999). Purposive and snowball sampling thus guided the data collection and interview scheduling. My research design ensured that a diverse range of participants were identified (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). This process continued until no more potential respondents were discovered or after I felt I had gathered all the information I needed.

The participants were selected from three geographical areas. The first group of participants were from Kathmandu. They were selected for their association with ACAP in general, and Mustang in particular, and because they were the key players in the environmental aspects of management. They represented government (senior officers from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation), national non-governmental organisations (senior officers from the National Trust for Nature Conservation) and international non-governmental organisations (World Wildlife Fund), bilateral organisations (Department of International Development) and multi-lateral organisations (United Nations Development Programme, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development). The second group of five participants were from Pokhara, the largest city nearest to Mustang and the headquarters of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. This group of participants included senior Annapurna Conservation Area Project's officers, for example, the Project Director, who was directly responsible for overseeing programmes in Mustang. The third group of 70 participants were from Mustang. This group included representatives of government (for example, the District Development Committee, Chief District Office, Land Revenue Office, Land Survey Office, District Agriculture and Livestock Office, Women's Development Office, District Court Office), the conservation agencies and associated community based organisations (examples are Jomsom and Lo-Manthang Unit offices of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and Conservation Area and Management Committees, Heritage Conservation Committees, Tourism Management Committees), the local people (regional council heads, village heads, village elders, women groups, youth groups, Mustang Bus and Jeep Association, religious leaders, politicians) and private entrepreneurs (orchard owners, mule owners, lodge owners, small traders, and traditional medical practitioners).

In total, 89 participants were selected for semi-structured interviews. Table 1 below shows the number of participants and the different categories of organisations they represented.

Categories	Numbers of participants
International non-governmental organisations, bilateral organisations and multilateral organisations	10
Government agencies	16
Non-governmental organisations	17
Community-based organisations, local entrepreneurs, local leaders, village heads and local elders	46
Total	**89**

Table 1: Affiliation of participants

In addition to key participants, I held informal conversations with over 100 people, mainly locals, but also tourists, pilgrims and traders. I found this very useful for developing a broader understanding of contemporary phenomena as well as highlighting issues that I had not previously considered. I became aware, for example, of most local disputes over forests, pasture lands and water resources, in some cases involving many villages or regions within the Mustang district this way. These issues were subsequently included as questions for key participants.

2.3.2   Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews can be time consuming, highly demanding and a laborious method of data generation (Lofland and Loafland 1995), but they allow the researcher freedom to direct the flow of interviews and to control their depth and focus. The face-to-face contact helps generate rich data.

Semi structured interviews are designed to generate understandings from a participants perspective (Lofland and Loafland 1995; Babbie 1999; Patton 2002), shedding light on their thoughts and beliefs in relation to particular events or activities or outcomes in their own language. The thoughts and beliefs of interviewees expressed and explained in their own words are treated as significant realities of how they give meaning to and organise their lives (Minichiello, Aroni et al. 1990). The participant introduces ideas and places emphasis on topics of their choice (Lofland and Loafland 1995). The scope and emphasis of the discussion is nevertheless guided by the interviewer. I conducted the interviews as conversational type interactions.

Initial questions for interviews were formulated from the research objectives and the theoretical framework. I used both open descriptive questions and closed-questions. Taylor and Bogdan (1998)point out that open-ended interviews encourage interviewees to elaborate the form and meaning of incidents that are important to them. Closed questions helped to gather data of a relatively simple nature. Spontaneous questions often arose in reaction to participants' comments and they were encouraged to expand on these.

Initial contacts were made by telephone during which the purpose of research was explained and dates and times for the interviews were arranged. Before scheduled interviews, I collected relevant documents, usually discussion papers or progress reports, to familiarise myself with the work of the organisation and also with current environmental issues. These were helpful to me in developing questions for interviews. I made sure that I arrived at least half-an-hour before the agreed time to prepare myself for interviews and allow for the notorious traffic jams, common in Kathmandu. Most of the interview participants in Kathmandu and Pokhara were interviewed in their offices. I also offered alternative venues such as a restaurant, hotel or private residence.

The interviews in Kathmandu and Pokhara usually started with an informal conversation related to the interviewees' current position, and the issues and challenges they have been facing. As I had known the majority of participants through my long association within the public and NGO sectors, I did not find much need to introduce myself, but needed to explain the purpose of my research. I presented them with the research fact sheet and also the consent form that sought permission to digitally record the interviews. Interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of the information provided. Except for one, all my interviewees provided their consent to be identified, if needed. However, during the interviews some participants provided information and told me not to name them if I found the material useful for my research. I would thus ensure their anonymity, if I chose to quote them. Most of the interviews in Kathmandu and Pokhara lasted for an hour.

I took a slightly different approach while interviewing in Mustang, primarily because I was not familiar with many of the people I interviewed, particularly those who came from different villages than my own. I met all these interviewees at their homes and spent 10 to15 minutes in casual talk that included introductions and building rapport before starting the interview proper. This was necessary to win the participants' trust and to make them feel comfortable before asking for their permission to record the interviews. I sometimes had to change the topic during the conversation if I felt the participants were feeling tentative or concerned about expressing their views on a particular issue, especially when the conversation concerned relationships between villages with which I have been identified or belonged to, or communities with complaints against ACAP, the organisation I worked with 15 years ago. I had to take time to explain my position clearly and reassure them of maintaining confidentiality, before continuing the interview.

Some of my interviewees came from very remote villages and only had basic Nepali language skills (the people in Mustang speak their own native dialects). I had to take careful measures to ensure that I understood them correctly. This required clarification on many occasions, rephrasing my questions, using examples and repeating questions and taking help from other people around who could speak local dialects and also Nepali. I needed to be aware of local protocol, particularly when interviewing

village heads, making sure that I was seated in the right place, offering them a white scarf (to recognise their status) and offering them tea or local spirit (*rakshi*) before starting interviews, or making a small donation to clubs or organisations in recognition of their efforts. I noticed that other people present during the interview would often participate during the conversation if the topic accorded with their interests. In most cases, particularly in the Upper Mustang region, these side contributions helped clarify issues that some of my interviewees had difficulty in expressing. Eight interviews involved more than one person, and in one case seven people all willingly contributed. I treated each of these as a single interview because it represented a particular place and a particular issue or issues related to that place.

2.3.3   Participant observations

Participant observation became an important additional means of gathering information. Participant observation is undertaken to develop a personal feel for, or obtain first-hand information about an area, the people and situations. Such observations allow the researcher to become more familiar with important features in the field such as noting any differences between reported and real conditions (Neuman 2000; Creswell 2003; Yin 2003) and to gain additional information which may not be generated through interviews. This involves the full immersion of the researcher in the lives of the participants. Authors such as Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest that many aspects of social life can be seen, felt and analytically articulated only through participant observation.

Three of the four months of field work were spent in the Mustang district. Numerous trips were made to villages across 16 Village Development Committees, the smallest political units. Jomsom village, my hometown, was the field base and I travelled almost every day, usually on foot to meet my research participants, attend meetings, functions and workshops. The lower part of Mustang has been connected to the national road network so I could take a bus or jeep for making trips longer than two hours. As there are no regular bus or jeep services during the day time, I had to walk most of the time to visit villages that are within two hours of Jomsom. Fourteen villages in Lower Mustang were visited during the field research. Only a very few small villages were not visited.

I carried out a-fifteen-days trek to the Upper Mustang region, which involved crossing several mountain passes of more than 4000 metres above sea level to visit some very isolated villages. One trek involved twelve hours of continuous walking from Chasing to Tangy village without coming across any settlements. There was only one place with drinking water where people either stopped for lunch if travelling on horse- back, or stopped overnight. I counted only two British trekkers with three Nepali staff walking in the opposite direction from us (I had an assistant with me) and two local people from Tangya, one Swiss trekker with three Nepali staff walking in the same direction. I covered 24 major villages during this trek, leaving out only a few very isolated and small villages, to

get information about the local situation, environmental and development challenges, their struggle for survival and their aspirations for the future. Observations were recorded in writing (notes/ memos) as questions and thoughts arose. I also took many photographs.

2.3.4   Other sources of evidence

Patton (1990) suggested that multiple sources of evidence can strengthen research findings by enhancing the likelihood of a more complete answer to the research question. Besides semi-structured interviews and direct participant observation, I searched for other sources of evidence including secondary information such as dialogue with my supervisory team, and other academic staff and colleagues, before and after I completed my field research. My intention was to expose myself to the broadest range of ideas to help develop theoretical understandings relevant to my research topic.

I collected and reviewed various documents such as policy papers, progress reports, status reports and discussion papers produced by different agencies such as the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, the National Trust for Nature Conservation, the World Wildlife Fund, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, the District Development Committee of Mustang, field offices and Mustang based line agencies. These were important sources for corroborating and supplementing data generated through interviews and participant observations. I was given the privilege of access to historical records and archival materials kept by different villages related to forests, pasture lands, village boundaries, court cases, taxation and customs. Information was gained from articles in popular daily and weekly newspapers, magazines and television programmes and radio interviews. Additionally, I participated as an observer in seven workshops/meetings held in Mustang. Two of those meetings involved thirteen members of the Nepalese Constitutional Assembly who were there to learn about the potential impacts of climate change on high mountain areas.

Table 2 shows the different data generating methods used to address the four research questions.

Research questions	Data generating methods
1. From a broad political historical perspective, how have the institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang evolved?	Semi-structured interviews, policy papers, plans, archive materials, literature review, field observation, workshops and meetings.
2 What are the factors that have shaped the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang?	Semi-structured interviews, policy papers, plans, archive materials, literature review, field observation, workshops and meetings.
3 What is the theoretical significance of above research findings?	Summay of key findings
4 What are the practical policy implications of the research findings	Summary of key policy and practical implications of my key findings

Table 2: Research questions and use of data generating methods

2.3.5 Field problems and research limitations

The memory card provided with the Lincoln University digital recorder was 16 megabytes of capacity which gave only about 3 hours of recording. I spent two days searching to find a memory card with one gigabyte capacity, providing over 100 hours of recording time.

Due to political instability I found that most of the senior officers that I approached for interviews were not available to meet at previously agreed to times as they were often called by their seniors (Ministers or Secretaries) for emergency meetings. I had to adjust to this and make another appointment and keep trying. In some cases I needed to find alternative candidates, who were equally informative, to resolve this problem.

While in the field, I needed to be aware of the local seasonal agricultural calendar. This involved interviewing people in the evening or early morning to avoid clashes with agricultural work or other household chores. I had to be patient. Unlike people working in an office or in urban areas, appointments do not mean much to villagers. Their priority is household and community matters, not interviews. I had to make changes which sometimes included finding alternative participants for interviews.

I was required to take a local guide to trek in the Upper Mustang region. It was necessary to send prior information to the Annapurna Conservation Area Project to arrange fieldwork opportunities. Both ACAP staff and local people were very welcoming and helpful. I needed to engage local staff to assist me translate interviews as some of the old people I spoke to preferred to speak in their own local

dialect which was different from my own. The Annapurna Conservation Area staffs were also helpful in introducing me to potential interviewees and in establishing credibility and encouraging a sense of trust.

Most local historical documents (archival materials) were very difficult to read. They were either written in out dated Nepali or Tibetan, or combined Nepali and Tibetan languages, but using Nepali script. Digital photos of documents were taken. The Department of Archaeology was contacted to help with translation. Due to time constraints as well as a shortage of experts, the Department could provide only limited assistance. This did however provide a general idea of the information contained in the documents and their significance for the local people and the region.

Access to some old local documents was not readily available. These documents are only displayed publicly on certain days, particularly when there is a change of village head and accompany the handover ceremony to the newly appointed head, or during certain festivals. Due to time constraints, I could not be there on those dates, but was fortunate to get access to some documents through personal contacts.

2.3.6   Handling and storing data

All collected information was inspected thoroughly. Some findings in the form of memos or marginal notes were made as an initial sorting process. The digital tape recorder was used for semi-structured interviews as well as to record workshops and meeting proceedings. Digital tape recording proved the best way of keeping data in a form that is accurate and retrievable. It enabled me to listen attentively to the participants. Recorded data is reliable and gives the participants security from misquoting. Scholars such as Dunn (2000) suggest that it can also be a barrier to revealing sensitive information making the participants less forthcoming. Experience showed this could be overcome by taking participants into one's confidence through a clear communication of the research purposes. The recordings were downloaded onto my personal computer. Each participant was identified by name except for one respondent. Some asked me not to be named on issues they perceived of as sensitive. Notes were made during the interview to comply with this request.

2.3.7   Transcribing

The taped interviews were transcribed and non-taped interviews were written out in note form, which helped reinforce the message from participants. I personally conducted all interviews and transcriptions. Transcribed materials were saved as word processor files. Back-up copies were stored carefully to ensure data security.

2.4   Data analysis

Data analysis requires a researcher to review their evidence to categorise, summarise, tabulate and recombine the data collected (Yin 2003). Thematic analysis, one of four models of narrative analysis ((Riessman 2004), is a common approach to analysing qualitative data (Luborsky 1994). Narrative analysis is concerned with stories that people employ to understand their lives and the world around them, where the focus shifts from 'what actually happened' to 'how people make sense of what happened. Thematic analysis involves studying patterns of meaning that emerge from the data, focusing on the participants' words, actions and records to understand the research topic (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). The emphasis of thematic analysis is on 'what' is said, rather than on 'how' it is said. Thematic analysis is the chosen method for this research.

For analysis, a simple form of coding was used. Coding is one of the core activities in developing themes (Lofland and Loafland 1995). It involves the application of a word or set of words, to an item of data to summarise the content of the item. In this case, the transcript or notes from each interview were thoroughly analysed for relevant pieces of information and coded using NVivo software. Transcripts were read a number of times to gain an understanding of what respondents were thinking and saying. Searches were made for patterns in transcripts as well as variations that did not appear in the identified patterns.

Different headings were used for the themes and sub themes explored in relation to the research questions. These helped to make sense of the data. The systematic nature of coding also ensured that there was sufficient access to the data (Silverman 1993). An acceptable level of saturation was apparent when themes repeatedly emerged from the interviews and secondary data sources. Themes that emerged from the data analysis were used to help organise the writing process. The results have been presented by selecting excerpts from the transcripts which illustrate key points from the data analysis in order to let the participants speak for themselves as much as possible and allow readers sufficient detail to understand the research findings (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). To enhance the analysis, a table was prepared summarising the key issues of each in-depth interview and reference was made to potentially useful quotations, comparing and contrasting the respondents' narratives.

2.5   Summary

This chapter has discussed the methodological approaches underpinning the development of this thesis. The research goal of exploring whether there are links between government policies and shifts in environmental beliefs and practices meant that qualitative research was the most appropriate methodological choice. Mustang, Nepal, was used as a case study to test the environmentality framework as a model for studying environmental policies and changes in different socio-economic,

political and geographical settings. Empirical materials were generated through multiple sources of evidence including semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and documents, including archival sources, to address the four research questions central to this thesis. Purposive and snowball techniques were used to identify potential interviewees to maximise the richness of the data. Thematic analysis, which involved studying patterns of meaning that emerged from the data, was the chosen method of data analysis. The themes that came out of the data analysis were used to organise the writing of this thesis. The next chapter provides an overview of Nepal to establish the context and settings for my field work and to introduce the district of Mustang as the case study area for this research.

Chapter 3
Research setting

3.0   Introduction

The ancient land of Mustang is located on the northern frontier of Nepal, bordering Tibet, an autonomous region of China. Mustang is one of 75 districts of Nepal and is part of the country's largest protected area system. The entire district of Mustang, covering an area of 3,573 km², was included in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) and comprises 47 per cent of its total area (NTNC/ACAP 2009). Mustang lies in the trans-Himalayan zone and is recognised for its biodiversity richness, which is of regional and global significance. It is a popular trekking destination as well as an important pilgrimage site for both Hindus and Buddhists, drawing thousands of national, regional and international visitors each year (NTNC 2008; NTNC/ACAP 2009).

This chapter has two parts. The first is an overview of Nepal to provide the broader context for the research. The second part of the chapter describes Mustang.
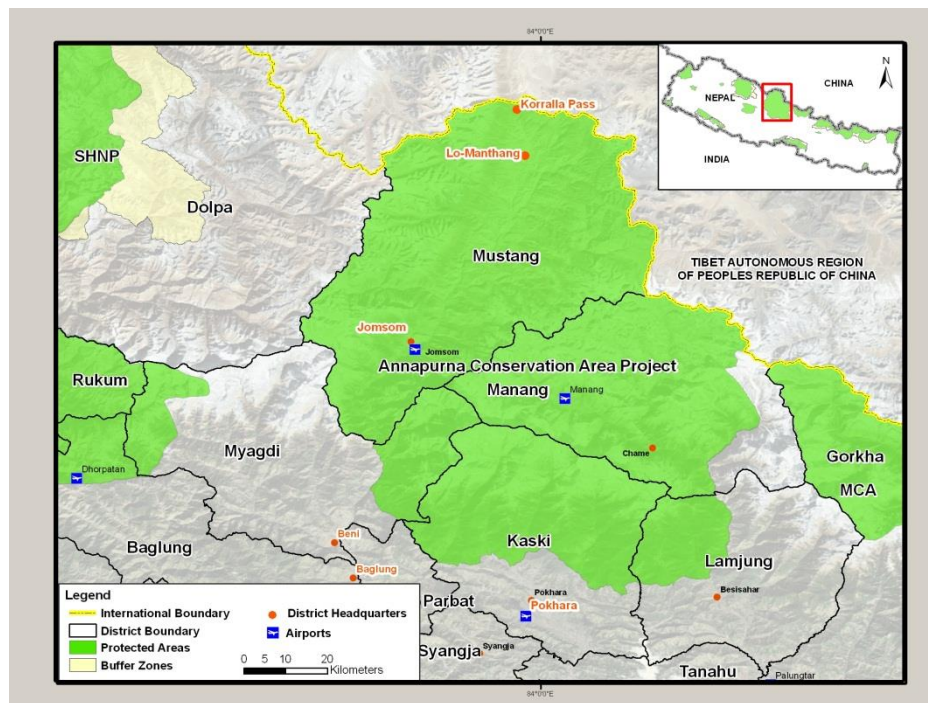
Figure 1: The Annapurna Conservation Area and Mustang (WWFNP, 2012)

3.1   Nepal: an overview

3.1.1   Location and physical geography

Extending over 2,000 kilometres, from Kashmir in the west to Myanmar in the east, the Himalayas constitute the world's highest mountain system (Hagen 1980). This chain of mountains forms the northern boundary of Nepal and includes the world's highest mountain, *Sagarmatha Himal* (Mt. Everest).Nepal comprises one-third, or about 800 km, of the great Himalayan ranges. The Himalayan ranges constitute 75 per cent of the country's total land area.

Bounded by two Asian giants, India to the east, south and west and Tibet to the north, Nepal is a small landlocked country often described as a 'yam between two boulders', metaphorically referring to its strategic significance in regional geopolitics as well as the associated vulnerability(Bhattarai 2003). These two emerging economic super powers with two competing political ideologies for centuries have had significant influence on Nepal's socio-economic and political transformation.
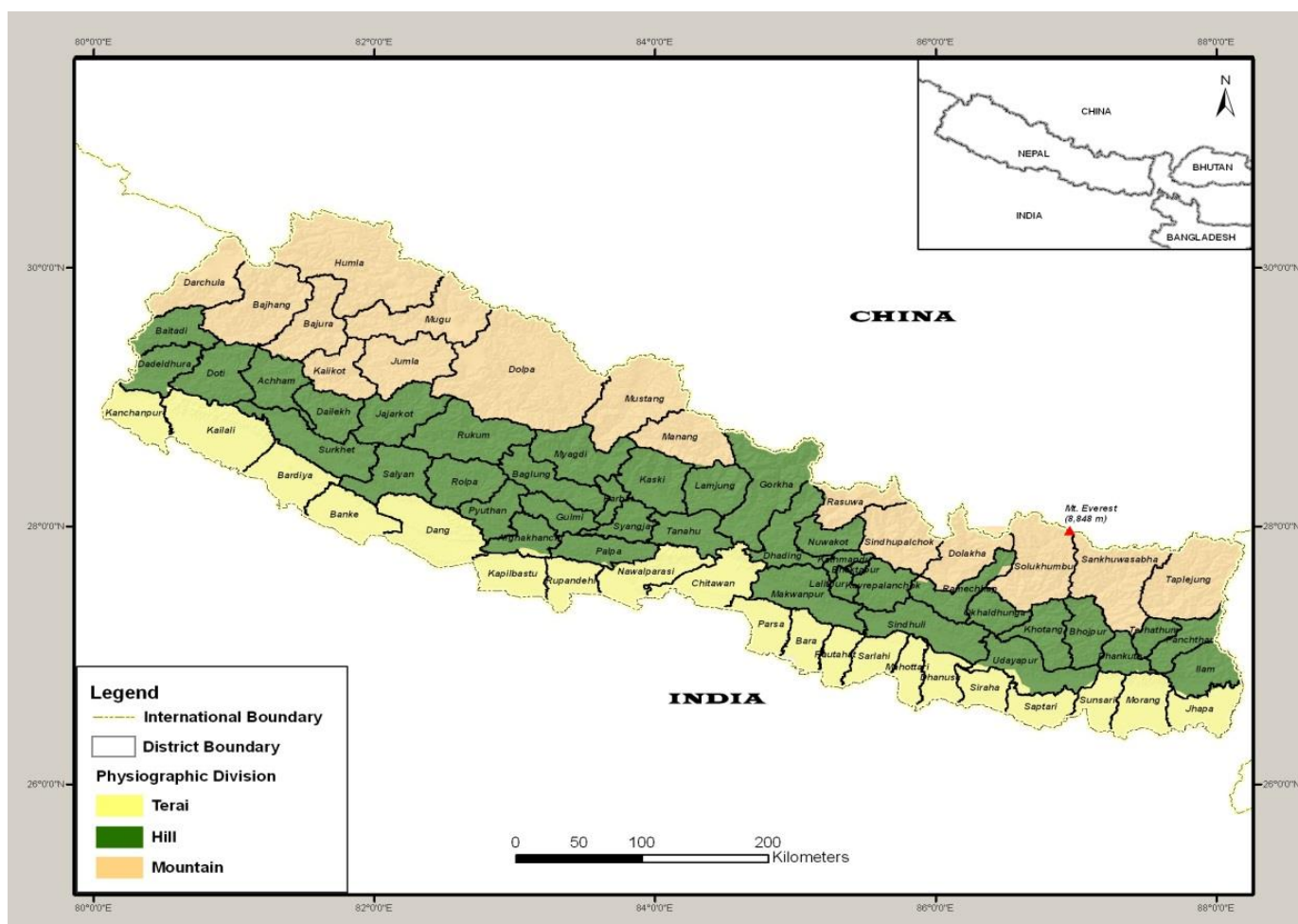
Figure 2: Geographical divisions and districts (WWFNP, 2012)

Nepal covers a total area of 147,181 sq. km^2. Its rectangular shape has an average width and length of 193 km and 885 km, respectively, and a north-west to south east orientation and is located between 80^0 15' and 88^{0}15' longitude east, and 26^{0}20' and 30^{0}10' latitude north (Bhattarai 2003). Administratively, the country is divided into five Development Regions, 14 zones, 75 districts, 58 municipalities and 3,915 Village Development Committees (CBS 2003). Village Development Committees (VDCs) are the smallest political units. Each Village Development Committee comprises nine wards for representational purpose. Of the 75 districts, 16 are officially termed as remote (*durgam*), or mountain (*himali*) districts, including Mustang (see Figure 2 for geographical divisions and districts).

Geographically, Nepal is divided into three zones or belts, the plains or Terai in the south, the hills in the middle area and the high Himalayan mountains in the north, with elevations rising from 70 to 8,848 m, with corresponding climatic diversity from sub-tropical to alpine. The Terai zone has a warm and humid climate with summer temperatures rising as high as 40°C. It represents 23 per cent of the surface area of the country and mostly consists of flat alluvial plains. This narrow belt of low land, stretching from east to west in the south is regarded as the 'food basket' of the country. This was once heavily forested, but now is the most populated zone with 48.5 per cent of the total population of the country.

The middle hills have a mild and pleasant climate with temperatures ranging around 25 to 27°C in summer, and subzero to 12°C in winter. The hill zone includes two abruptly rising parallel ranges of hills, the Churi or the inner Terai and the Mahabharat. Much of the hill terrain consists of complex ridges, mountain ranges, rivers and tectonic valleys (i.e., peaks reaching up to 5000 m, but valleys are less than 500 m asl). With 44 per cent share of the national population, this belt is considered to be the backbone of the country, physically as well as historically, and includes in its valleys urban areas such as Kathmandu, the capital of the country, and Pokhara, the largest urban area near Mustang and the second most popular tourism destination.

The northern mountains have a harsh, cold, alpine climate. Nepal receives widespread rainfall during the monsoon period, i.e., from June to August, but the rainfall varies across geographical zones from around 300 mm in the northern and western areas to over 2500 mm in the eastern region. The northern most geographical belt comprises the inner Himalayas and the Tibetan Himalayas covering 35 per cent of the land area of Nepal. This is a sparsely populated zone with only 7 per cent of the country's population (HMGN/MFSC 2002). Mustang falls within this geographical region.

3.1.2 Socio-political and historical contexts

Nepal is home to around 27 million multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic groups of people who are predominantly of Mongoloid and Aryan ancestry or a blend of both (CBS 2008). The northern high mountain belt of Nepal has predominantly Mongoloid people, the majority of whom practise Buddhism as their major religion. These people share close cultural ties with Tibet. The people of the Terai are of predominately of Aryan descent, practice Hinduism and share close cultural ties with India. The hill people are a blend of Mongoloid and Aryan origins. There are over 100 ethnic groups, which include the *Janjatis* (tribal groups) and the *Dalits* (untouchable or occupational caste groups), speaking 92 different languages and dialects, but Nepali, a derivative of Sanskrit, is the official language and is widely spoken and understood in the country. Some 81 per cent of the population are Hindu, 11 per cent are Buddhist, four per cent are Muslim, 4 per cent are Kirant, and the remaining one per cent are other religions (CBS 2002).

Just over two and half centuries ago, Nepal was divided into small and fragmented principalities known as *Baisi-Chubisi raajya* (22 and 24 states) ruled mainly by high caste Hindus. Prithivi Narayan Shah, the king of Gorkha, a small hilly state in central Nepal, led a campaign to build a larger unified state with two objectives: to prevent British expansion into Nepal from India, and to increase revenue for the new state (Bhattarai 2003). The present modern Nepal was created in 1769 with the King as absolute ruler. The authoritarian king's rule did not last long. Internal feuds, bitter conflicts between the royal courtiers saw Jung Bahadur Rana take power in 1846. The Rana rulers maintained a grip on the power in Nepal by forging a strong political alliance with the British colonial power as well as isolating the country from rest of the world (Regmi 1978). The Rana introduced a rule which made the position of Prime Minister hereditary. This rule lasted for 105 years. Under it, the central government had only two major interests; to protect Nepal's territorial integrity and to collect the homestead tax (*serma*) in peripheral regions such as Mustang (Regmi 1971; Mihaly 2002). All political decisions were centralised. People were largely autonomous in the management of their own affairs, including managing their forests and other natural resources, and development activities within their communities.

The political situation in Nepal changed in the 1950s. India's independence from British colonial rule triggered a political movement in Nepal, terminating both the rule of the Rana regime and the country's self-imposed isolation. Following a brief period of democratic rule, which was largely overshadowed by inter and intra party conflicts and parliamentary horse-trading, the monarch at the time, King Mahendra, turned the deteriorating political situation to his favour. He removed the elected government and introduced the party-less, centralised, unilateral, and hierarchical Panchayat political system which lasted for three decades. This period was significant for two reasons. It re-established the absolute rule of the monarchy, and marked the beginning of the modernisation process in the

country. For the first time, with the help of many donor agencies and their experts/advisors, Nepal embarked on planned development and started investing in infrastructure, healthcare, education, communication, electricity and transport. The mountaineering ascent of Everest by Hillary and Tenzing in 1953 provided worldwide publicity for a little known country, making Nepal an ultimate destination for mountaineering expeditions and trekking tourism. Nepal became the 'Shangri-La' that a British writer had described for westerners still recovering from the Second World War (Hutt, 1993). In its reincarnation as 'Shangri-La', Nepal became an iconic place to experience eternal peace and relaxation. Tourism started to grow in the 1960s, to become one of Nepal's top three economic sectors and the largest foreign currency earner.

In the late 1980s, a worldwide trend for popular democracy and greater human rights was mirrored in Nepal with the emergence of more open and liberal democratic and economic systems. The democratic movement of 1990 produced a new constitution enshrining the sovereignty of the people and established a multi-party political system within a constitutional monarchy. These events profoundly changed the country. It opened up access to political power and resources for the common people. It also brought the Nepali economy closer to the outside world and resulted in greater integration with global markets. The state began to recognise the roles of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector in service delivery, and subsequently created space for them to take a larger responsibility for development. As of 2004 over 30,000 NGOs were registered in Nepal, but only 16,425 along with 107 international non-governmental organizations (INGO) were registered with the government (Kobek and Thapa 2004).

Irrespective of central government's efforts and reform programmes, Nepal continued to remain one of the world's poorest and least developed countries, with around 38 per cent of the population living on less than $1 a day. Nevertheless, a recent survey has reported a significant reduction in the national poverty rate, from 42 per cent in 1995/96, to 30 per cent in 2003/04, to 25.6 in 2008/09, largely as a result of increased remittance income (NPC 2010). Within this positive trend, disparity between rural and urban areas, across different geographical zones, between genders and caste/ethnicities is persistent. The gap between rich and poor is unacceptably high and is ever increasing (UNDP 2008).

These contexts provided fertile ground for Nepal's Maoists to launch an insurgency in 1996 known as 'the people's war' (Maharjan 2000) which was aimed at overthrowing the institution of the monarchy, and bringing about a radical socio-economic and political transformation for the benefit of the downtrodden, the minorities, the marginalised, the discriminated against and excluded communities (Karki and Seddon 2003). During the decade long insurgency, 13,347 people lost their lives (Maharjan 2000). The political situation deteriorated further in the aftermath of the royal massacre on the 1st June 2001 in which the entire family of the reigning king was killed. Against this backdrop,

Nepal's new king took all executive power in 2004, but the move backfired as the Maoists and six main political parties signed a 12-point agreement to protest jointly against the King's absolute rule. Together they successfully led a movement popularly known as 'people's movement two' in 2006 which ended 240 years of monarchy in Nepal resulting in the restructuring of a 'new Nepal' into a secular and federal democratic republic. The election for the Constitutional Assembly was held in 2008 with 601 members, 60 per cent of whom were elected through direct voting and the remaining 40 per cent through proportional representation. The Maoists emerged as the largest party in the Constitutional Assembly. For the first time, Nepal elected a significant number of women, *Janjati* (indigenous people), *Madhise* (lowlanders) and *Dalit* (occupational castes) in national politics. The country currently embraces two major challenges: to draft and adopt a new constitution and bring the peace process to a logical conclusion; and to immediately address the issues of poverty and disparity, the underlying causes of the conflict, so that the peace can be sustained. All policies whether related to the environment or development should be seen within this broader context..

3.1.3 Environmental policy and responses

Nepal represents a meeting point or transitional zone of two realms - the Palaearctic and the Indo-Himalayan. It is at the cross-roads of the south-east Asian, north-east Asian (Chinese) and the Mediterranean tracts. While its northern part, consisting of mixed high mountains and highland ecosystems lies within the Palaearctic realm; the tropical, deciduous and monsoon forests and croplands of the southern Terai plains fall within the Indo-Himalayan realm. These diverse geo-physical and bio-geographical features have endowed Nepal with a diverse flora and fauna of regional and global significance (HMGN/MFSC 2002). Conserving biodiversity richness against a growing population, rampant poverty, and growing desire for modernisation has become the most daunting challenge for Nepal since 1960s.

By the early 1970s, fuelled by a worldwide environmental movement and neo-Malthusian ideas of population growth, an alarming rate of forest destruction in Nepal attracted regional and international attention (Eckholm 1976). Between 1947 and 1980, Nepal's forest cover had declined from 57 per cent to 23 per cent (Myers 1986). Deforestation was believed to cause massive landslides resulting in a further reduction of forest cover and increased soil erosion from mountain hillsides. It was during this time the 'Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation' (Eckholm 1976) emerged to become embedded in broader global discourses on development, environmental change and population in Nepal (Guthman 1997). The theory squarely blamed poor hill famers for the rapid depletion of forest resources resulting in an acceleration of flood incidents in Bangladesh. Since the 1980s, the theory has been challenged, particularly for failing to pinpoint the nature and extent of the environmental degradation (Messerschmidt 1987; Thompson and Warburton 1988).

Nepal responded with two major policy initiatives to address national and international concerns for its deepening environmental crisis. The government implemented community-based forestry programmes in 1978, considering it one potential mechanism through which the supply of basic forest products for subsistence needs could be increased, and ecological degradation abated. The government adopted these decentralised and participatory approaches to address increased deforestation problems, firstly with the introduction of Panchayat forestry, and later through the community forestry programmes. After the political change of 1990, the Panchayat forest programmes were terminated. The Community Forestry Act was subsequently introduced in 1993 to institutionalise a participatory forest governance system that has been hailed as one of the Nepal's most successful environmental initiatives to halt forest degradation and its associated problems (Thapa and Weber 1990). Since then, the community forestry programme has evolved continuously under the aegis of supportive forest policies and legislation, and financial and technical support from the World Bank, the FAO, Australia and Switzerland (Gilmour and Fisher 1991). Most community forests are located in the middle hills, where several studies argue that these programmes have been successful in improving the conditions of the people and their forests (Gautam, Shivakoti et al. 2004). However, the same cannot be said about community forestry in the Terai and to some extent in the mountain areas (Hobley1996). By this time, academics as well as practitioners, including donors, started to recognise the existence and importance of indigenous forest management systems in many parts of the country (Molnar 1981; Messerschmidt 1987; Fisher 1991; Gilmour and Fisher 1991). I believe this recognition did not go far enough in terms of strengthening and empowering the endogenous environmental governance systems.

Parallel with community forest initiatives, Nepal embarked on developing a network of protected areas across all geographical belts and ecosystems. The first wildlife sanctuary was established in 1958 to protect flagship species, such as the one-horned rhinoceros, tigers and Asiatic elephants (*Elephas maximus*), in the Chitwan valley, which was upgraded to a national park after the introduction of the Wildlife Conservation and National Park Act in 1973 (Maskey 1998). The national park was based on the 'Yellowstone National Park' model, i.e., the local people living around protected areas were either relocated or excluded from the park's management. This was reminiscent of the Forest Nationalisation Act of 1957 which had restricted the access and rights of the people over forest resources. These restrictions led to conflicts between the parks authorities and local communities and led to calls for a new approach. Following the success of community based approaches to forestry, Nepal experimented with a participatory conservation model in 1986 and established the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in western Nepal. ACAP covers 7,629 km^2, 57 Village Development Committees, and five districts, including Mustang.

3.2   Mustang

Located on the northern frontier of Nepal, Mustang appears in the map of Nepal as a thumb-like projection extending into Tibet and covers an area of 3,573 km^2. It is the country's second least populated district. It is one of 16 mountain districts and one of 8 northern frontier districts sharing a border with Tibet.
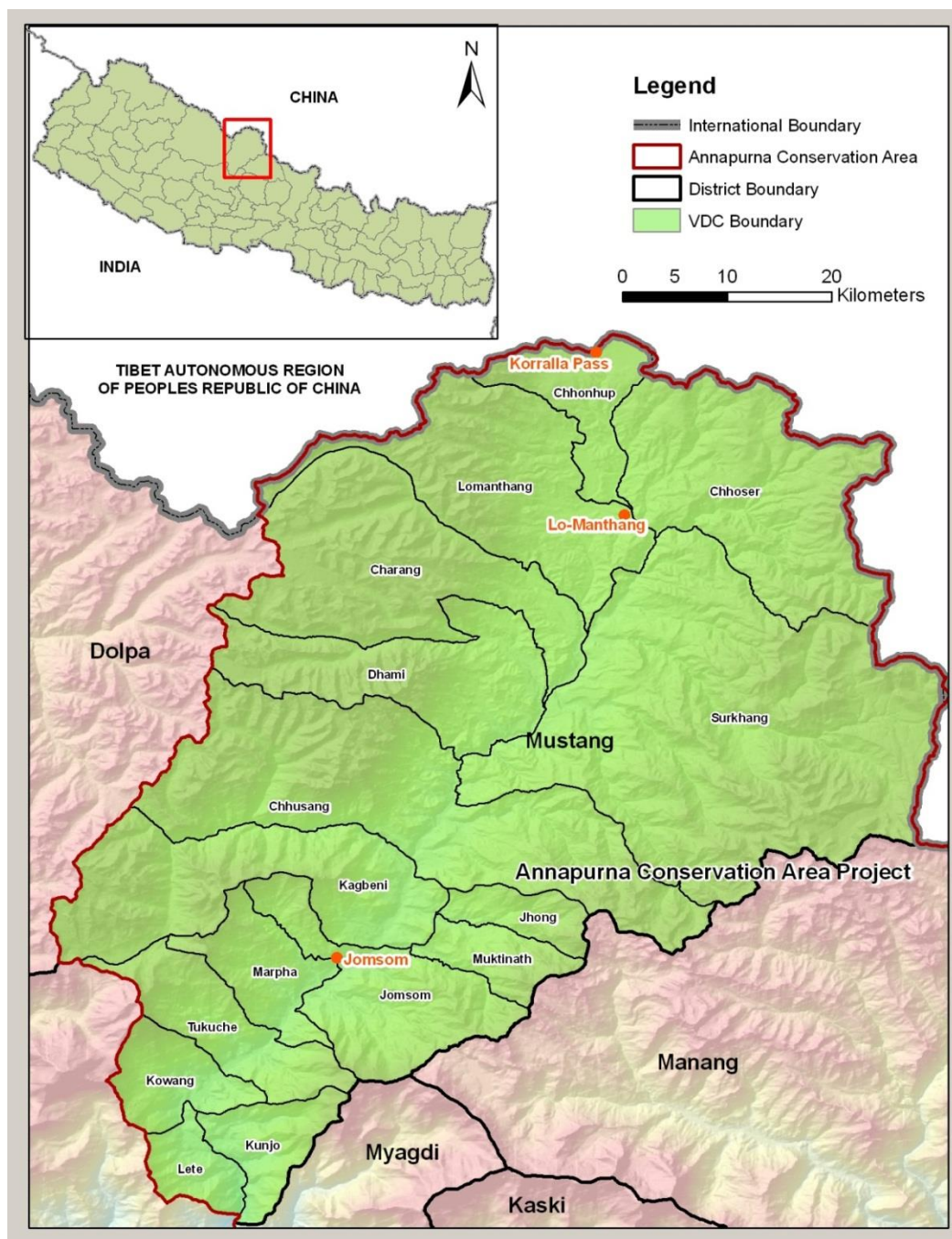
Figure 3: Mustang District with VDCs (WWFNP, 2012)

Administratively, Mustang is divided into 16 Village Development Committees. Each Village Development Committee is further divided into nine wards, each of which is the smallest political

units. Above this, there are *elaka chhetra* or regions. Each *elaka* is made up of one or more Village Development Committee(s), depending on the population size. Mustang consists of eight *elaka* which are mainly used for planning purposes, but also for electing members to the District Development Committee. They do not have a day-to-day function. At the top of the district political hierarchy is a District Development Committee. The District Development Committee and Village Development Committees make a two tier local governance system under the government's decentralisation and devolution policies. Since the introduction of the Local Self Governance Act, the District Development Committee has played a leading role in the district by identifying, planning and implementing central government funded development activities in coordination with the Village Development Committees and the district-based central government's line agencies.

Prior to the 1950s, the Mustang region was characterised as a remote, inaccessible and underdeveloped high mountain district with rampant poverty. Natural resources such as forests, pasture areas, water sources and land, were local life lines. Even when there was no government presence, forests, pasture areas, water sources and land were not treated as open access resources or 'commons' by villagers. Every village had developed strong village-based rules and regulations to govern and regulate these resources under the leadership of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* to ensure the welfare of the village and villagers. This endogenous system, which can be characterised as the essence of environmental governance, has a long history, and its origins predate the emergence of Nepal as a unified country in the 17th century. The positions of *Ghempa and Mukhiya* were not hereditary, but were democratically nominated by the village assembly or shared on a rotational basis. Under the village governance system, each village in Mustang continues to operate like an autonomous and independent socio-political unit.

Historically, the current Mustang district was divided into four distinctive socio-political and cultural regions – the Lho-Tso-Dhium, the Baragau, Paachgau and Thaksatsai (see Figure 4). Each region was dominated by a particular ethnic group who consider it as their homeland. These regions vary from one another in terms of socio-economic and demographic character, and the availability of environmental resources. The section below provides an overview of each region to establish the research setting.
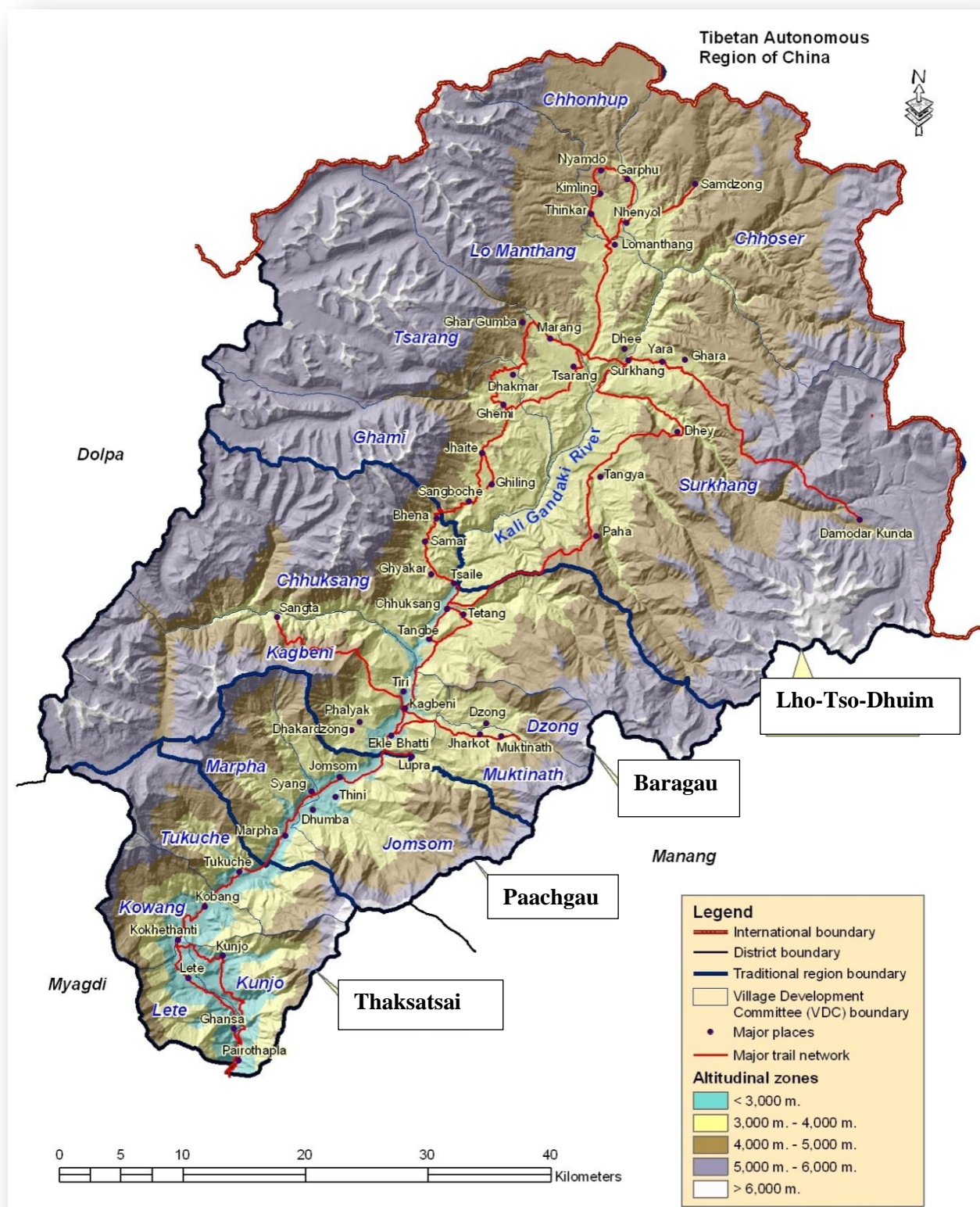
Figure 4: Four regions in Mustang (NTNC/ACAP 2008)

3.2.1 Lho-Tso-Dhuim region

The Lho-Tso-Dhuim, or the Lo region, is located in the north of Mustang and shares a border with Tibet. Lo-Tso-Dhium literally means the six districts of Lo, an ancient kingdom. Lo-Manthang, the

only walled village in Nepal, was the capital of this region. It is still the home of the *Raja* of Mustang, the former King of Lo, who now holds no official position, but is still considered an influential regional leader and presides over regional issues, including mediating disputes between villages over the use of natural resources.

3.2.1.1   The land and villages

The Lo-Tso Dhium region includes six Village Development Committees, and is the largest region within the Mustang district. It covers an area of over 2,024 km^2 which is almost 58 per cent of the district's land area. The region has 36 villages. Villages are clustered and located near rivers or water sources. Lo-Manthang is the largest village in this region with 122 households. The smallest villages have 14-17 households (see Table 3). Depending on the size of the village, each represents from 1 to 8 wards of a Village Development Committee.

Village Development Committee	Major settlements	Village size	Total households	Total population
Chhunup	Namgyal, Phuwa, Thinker, Kimling, Namdo, Chumjung	Thinker and Namdo are largest villages with 40+ households. Namgyal is the smallest with only 17 households.	197	1,240
Chhoser	Gharphu, Niphu Dyakya, Sekang Dhim, Shijadha Yechembuk, Dhuk Varcha Aarja Nenyol Samjung	The first four villages are collectively known as Chhoser and they have 37 households. Yechembuk and Samjung are the smallest villages with 15 and 14 households, respectively.	155	848
Lo-Manthang	Lo-Manthang and Chhyuro-Dhokpo	Lo-Manthang is the largest village in this region with 122 households. Chhuro-Dhokpo has 28 households.	148	800
Charang	Charang Marang	Charang has 80 households and Marang 51.	131	786
Surkhang	Dhi, Yara, Ghara, Tangya, and Dhe	Yara and Dhi are largest villages with 27 and 25 households. Ghara and Dhe are smallest villages with 17 and 19 households.	110	627
Ghami	Ghiling, Ghami and Dakmar	More or less similar size villages with 50+ households.	164	910
		Total	**905**	**5,211**

Table 3: Village Development Committee profile of Lo-Tso Dhium Region (NTNC/ACAP, 2010)

3.2.1.2   The people

The people of the Lo region are referred to collectively as Loba (people of Lo). Unlike other villages in the Lo region, households in Lo-Manthang village are socially stratified into three groups – *kutak* (noble class) who these days use Bista as their surname, *phalwa* (commoner class) who use Gurung and *ghara* (the low class) who use Bishwokarma or Bikka as their surnames. In Lo-Manthang, this social stratification is used to determine roles in the village governance system. Only Bista households are eligible to hold the position of *Ghempa* in this village.

Loba people have strong cultural and economic ties with Tibet. The language they speak is similar to the main Tibetan dialect. Lobas are predominantly Buddhists, but they also practice pre-Buddhist traditions known as *Bon-Po* or Shamanism. Lo is strongly influenced by the Shakya-pa tradition, but other Buddhist traditions such as Ningma-pa and Karkyu-pa are also practised. This region has many monasteries, caves and monuments that have high historical and archaeological significance. They have become major attractions for international visitors.

Plate 1: Lo's rich cultural heritage is the major tourism attraction
Photo by Author (2009)

Plate 2: Barren Mountains dominate the landscape of the Upper Mustang region. Photo by Author (2009)

3.2.1.3 Environmental resources

Forest and shrublands: Lo is in a rain shadow area so does not receive much rain. The region is characterised by an arid desert-like landscape with little vegetation. Except for Chhoser and Surkhang, which have 6.6 and 12.9 km^2 of shrub forest respectively, other Village Development Committees in this region have neither forest nor shrub lands (see Figure 5). The shrub lands in both Village Development Committees are owned by individual villages and they are located four to five hours walk from the village. The people of this region depend on dried goat pellets, yak dung and thorny vegetation such as *Caragana geraldina* and *Hippophae tibetana* as fuel for cooking and heating. The local people plant trees, mostly poplar (*Populus ciliata*), for timber and firewood on their private land, near water sources or river beds. Establishing plantations has become popular in recent years with financial and technical support from the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (NTNC, 2009).

Pasture areas: This region is dominated by large alpine pasture areas, whose condition ranges from poor to moderate. There are some good pasture areas, for example, near Damodor Kunda in Surkhang Village Development Committee, but this is also a prime habitat for many endangered species such as wild donkey, Marco Polo sheep and Himalayan brown bear (NTNC/ACAP 2009). These areas are quite inaccessible and far from villages, thus reducing the grazing pressure. Each village has its own system of rotating animals for grazing.
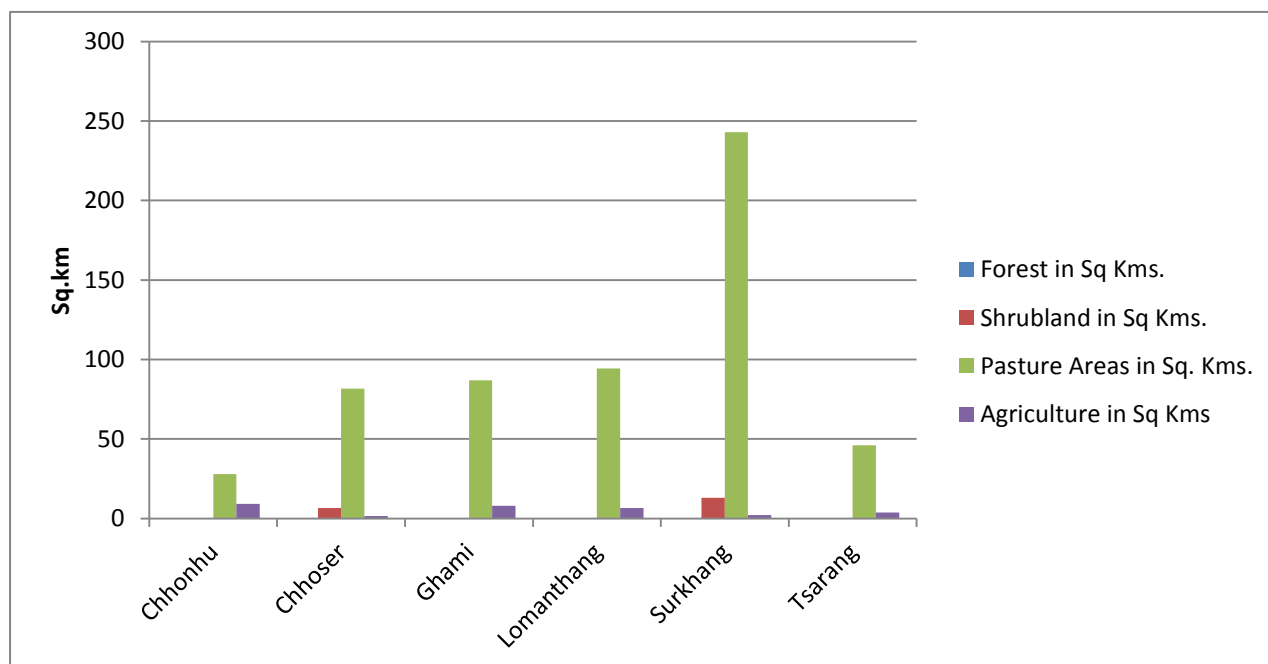
Figure 5: Environmental resources in Lo Region (NTNC/ACAP, 2009)

Water: The availability of water for irrigation is a major issue. Each village has developed a water sharing system which is strictly enforced. Some of the villages in this region such as Dhe and Samjung are located almost 3,900 m above sea level and face acute water shortages.

3.2.1.4   The local economy

Agriculture: Agriculture is the predominant local occupation. Most villages in this region get only one harvest. Wheat, buckwheat and naked barley are the main crops. They also grow mustard and peas. The local produce is sufficient for about two months. They depend on imported food such as rice, wheat and buckwheat flour to balance this food deficit. Since 1990, villagers have started growing fresh vegetables for local consumption.

Animal husbandry: Animal husbandry is another important local occupation. Goats are common. Yaks are popular in Chhunup, but overall the number of yaks in the region is declining due to the shortage of grazing lands and herders. The local people also use *jho* (a cross breed of cows and yaks) and horses for transporting goods. Horses are also used for riding and transport. However, the numbers of *jho* and horses are declining due to the development of the motorable road network.

Trade, employment and tourism: Trade with Tibet is an important source of income for the local people, particularly for villages above Charang. This trade increased after the construction of the road from Tibet to Lo-Manthang via the Korolla pass. Chinese goods, electronic as well as food items are popular in Mustang. The quality of these goods is often questionable, for example, expired food items and sub-standard building construction materials such as cement. Overseas employment has become a popular choice with young people in the Lo region. Since 1992, the people of the Lo region have been involved in running lodges, camping sites, selling souvenirs of Tibetan origins and providing horse riding services and local guiding. Only a small group of people are involved in local tourism related trades.

3.2.2   Baragau region

To the south of the Lo region lies the Baragau region. It comprises four Village Development Committees and covers an area of 882 km^2 which constitutes approximately 24 per cent of the district's land area (NTNC/ACAP, 2009).

3.2.2.1   The land and villages

Baragau literally means '12 villages', but presently there are 19 large and small villages settled along the Kali Gandaki River banks and on the upper reaches of its tributaries. Kagbeni and Chhusang are largest villages in this region with 71 and 69 households, respectively (see Table 4). The smallest

villages, Tiri and Samar, have only 12 households each. This region has a total of 634 households with a total population of 3,502. It is windy and the temperature can be as low as minus 20°C. The region is dominated by windswept, dessert-like and sparsely vegetated valleys (NTNC/ACAP, 2009).

Village Development Committee	Major settlements	Village Size	Total Households	Total Population
Chhusang	Chhusang, Tangbe, Tetang, Tsaile, Gyaker and Samar	Tetang is the largest village with 69 households and Samar the smallest with only 12 households.	173	964
Jhong	Chhungor, Jhong and Putak	Jhong is the largest village with 36 households and Putak is the smallest with 15 households.	71	525
Muktinath	Purang, Jharkot, Khinga and Lupra	Purang and Jharkot are largest villages with 50+ households, and Lupra the smallest with only 16 households	165	1095
Kagbeni	Kagbeni, Sangta, Dhakarjung, Phalek, Pagling, Tiri	Kagbeni is the largest village with 71 households and Sangta and Tiri are smallest villages with only 12 households each.	225	1188

Table 4: Village Development Committee profile of the Baragau Region (NTNC/ACAP, 2009)

3.2.2.2   The people

The majority of people in the Baragau region use Gurung as their surnames. Besides Gurung, there are a small group of Thakuri, descendants of the people from Jumla when this region was under Jumla's control. This region also has a small population of Bishwakarma and Damia (low caste Hindu). Villages in this region are located between 2,900 and 3,600 metres above sea level.

Lobas and Baragaus share many cultural similarities and they inter-marry. The people of Baragau appear to be a homogenous group, but in practice they are not. There are distinctions of social status and class between nobles, commoners and occupational castes which are strongly expressed in societal roles and matrimonial restrictions (Haimendrof, 1966). The Baragau are predominately Buddhists, but the *Bon-po* tradition is also practised.

3.2.2.3   Environmental resources

Forest and shrublands: The Baragau region is in the rain shadow area and has very low precipitation. The region is dominated by semi-arid desert covered with thorny vegetation. *Caragana geraldina, Hippophae tibetana* and juniper species such as *Juniperus indica and Juniperus squamata* are common in this region. The first two species are used as fuels, but juniper species are protected by

villages. Villagers are allowed to collect green leaves only during a prescribed period to make incense for religious purposes. Like in the Lo region, planting poplar (*Populus ciliata*) near the village or on private land near water sources is very popular. This region has no forest cover, but it has shrubs (see Graph 3.2). The forest in this region was heavily denuded during the Khamba occupation in Mustang between 1960 and 1975 (see chapter 6 section 6.2.2-6.2.5). Some previously destroyed forests are now regenerating well, but because of the slow growth rate it will take several decades to have a good forest cover in this region.

Plate 3: Forests denuded during the Khamba occupation showing signs of recovery
Photo by S. Thakali, 2009

Pasture areas: The Chhusang and Kagbeni Village Development Committees have extensive pasture areas. The Muktinath and Jhong Village Development Committees have common pastures. Kagbeni shares its pasture as well as its forest areas with Tiri and Phalek villages. The higher alpine areas of Baragau are rich with aromatic and medicinal plants, including *yarsagumba*, which are fungi (*Cordyceps* and *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* that parasitise the body of a moth caterpillar*)*, and mammalian wildlife such as the blue sheep and the snow leopard. Wildlife populations are increasing because there is no hunting and minimum competition from domestic animals for grazing (Gurung, N. pers. comm., 2009).
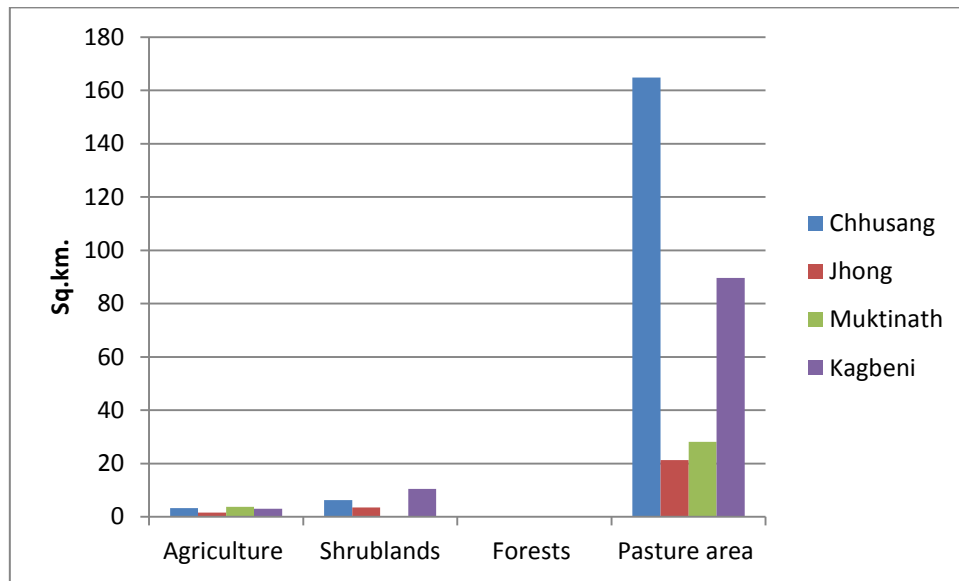
Figure 6: Environmental resources in the Baragau region (NTNC/ACAP, 2010)

Water: Water is a scarce commodity in this region. Most of the villages do not have enough water to irrigate their fields. The combination of water scarcity and out-migration has resulted in the abandonment of agricultural fields in this region. Some villages such as Tangbe came up with an innovative idea to draw water from the Kali Gandaki River to irrigate a new cooperative apple orchard. Despite this one-off local initiative, water from the Kali Gandaki River is not used for irrigation, mainly because it flows below the villages.

3.2.2.4 The local economy

Agriculture: The predominant local occupation is agriculture; however, this is limited by a lack of suitable land. Unlike Lo, this region has two harvests per year. Barley, naked barley, buckwheat and potatoes are the major crops. There is also a food deficit in this region. All agricultural fields are irrigated and every village has strict regulations to share water amongst the villagers. The local people also grow fresh vegetables, mainly for household consumption. With the construction of the road apple orchard development is becoming popular in this region with over 26,000 apple trees planted (Gurung, P., pers. comm., 2009).

Plate 4: A birdeye view of Kagbeni village in the Baragau Region
Photo by Author (2009)

Animal husbandry: The people of the Chhusang and Kagbeni Village Development Committees raise more goats than others in this region, related to their extensive areas of pasture. They also keep *jho* and horses for transportation and agricultural work. Mules were very popular animals to transport goods for the people of Baragau, but their numbers are dwindling because of the recent road connection to markets. The number of horses is also dwindling as motor transport increases in the area.

Trade, employment and tourism: The majority of young people in this region are engaged in petty trade; the garment business in India, or buying and selling household items in the south during the winter season. Overseas employment has become very popular especially in the last two decades with more people working in the USA compared with the other regions of Mustang. There are few households in this region that do not have family members working overseas (Gurung, pers. comm., 2009). Kagbeni and Muktinath are the two most popular villages for international and domestic visitors. Both villages are regarded as sacred sites by Hindus who visit at least once in their life time to make offerings for dead family members. Chhusang, Tsai and Samar have also become popular among tourists visiting the Upper Mustang region.

3.2.3 Paachgau region

South of Baragau lies the Paachgau region. It is windy and receives little rain. The maximum temperature in this valley can reach 26°C in summer and can go as low as minus 10°C in winter. Paachgau includes only two Village Development Committees: Chimang village, which is also a part of Paachgau, is included in the Tukuche Village Development Committee of the Thaksatsai region. Paachgau literally means 'five villages' referring to Thini, Syang, Marpha, Chhairo and Chimang, but now there are eight villages in this region. It is the smallest region within the district covering only an area of 275.7 km^2, constituting eight per cent of the total land mass of the district. This excludes Chimang village which is covered by the Tukuche Village Development Committee.

3.2.3.1 The land and villages

Villages in this region are clustered together like in the Baragau and Lo regions. Jomsom, the Mustang district headquarters, is located within this region. Marpha is the largest village with 189 households followed by Jomsom and Thini with 124 and 113 households respectively. Puthang village which is near the airport has more than 40 households - mainly lodges and shops. It is a new village and economic centre which emerged in the late 1970s after the construction of the airport and the advent of tourism in the district. Dhumba and Samley are the smallest villages with a total of 31 households. Most of the villages within this region are located between 2,800 to 3,200 metres above the sea level. With 558 households and 3,151 people, it is Mustang's most populated region (see Table 5).

Village Development Committee	Major settlements	Village Size	Total Households	Total Population
Jomsom	Jomsom, Thini, Dhumba and Somley	Jomsom and Thini are largest villages with 124 and 113 households, respectively. Dhumba and Somley have 31 households.	268	1288
Marpha	Marpha, Syang, Puthang, and Chhairo	Syang and Marpha are largest villages with 189 and 140 households. Chhairo is the smallest with 42 households.	290	1863

Table 5: VDC profile of the Paachgau Region (NTNC/ACAP, 2010)

3.2.3.2   The people

The people of Paachgau use Thakali as a surname. Thini is considered an historical village. The ruined fortress opposite of Thini was once the capital of the Lower Kali Gandaki valley (Vinding, 1998). Jomsom was created as an outpost to control the salt for grain trade passing through the area. In the past four decades Jomsom and Puthang have emerged as villages with a high number of immigrants both from within and outside the district. Jomsom has a high population of people from the Baragau region. Puthang has a high population from the Thaksatsai region, the majority of who run lodges.

Among the Paanchgau Thakali, the Marphali Thakali are considered to be an endogamous group with four sub groups (Hirachan, Pannachan, Jwarchan and Lalchan), each representing a separate lineage. As in the Baragau and Lo regions, the people of Paachgau follow Buddhism and Bon religion and practices. They speak Thakali as their local language. Unlike in the Baragau and Lo regions, the people of Paachgau have no social stratification. They are predominantly an egalitarian society and this is reflected strongly in the way they nominate their village head, known locally as *Thuimi* or *Mukhiya*.
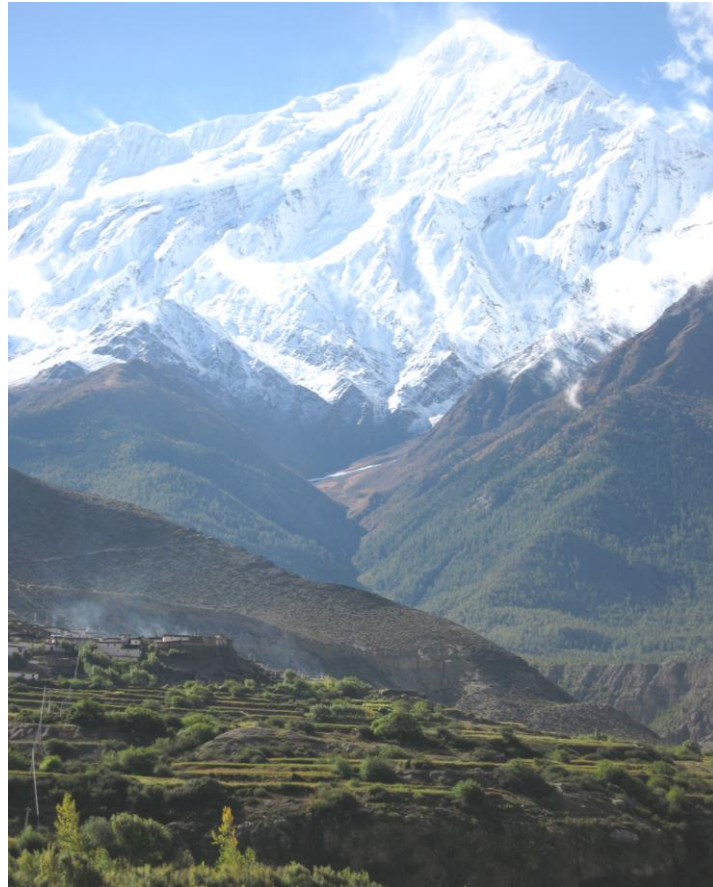
Plate 5: Thini Village in Paachgau

Photo by Author (2009)

3.2.3.3   Environmental resources

Forest and shrublands: The Paachgau region has a good cover of forest and shrub lands (see Figure 7). Except in Chimang and Chhairo, forests in this region are located on the high mountain slopes, 3-4 hours of walk from the villages. Pines (*Pinus wallichiana*), birch (*Betula utilis*) and junipers (*Juniperus wallichiana* and *J. squamata*) are common species. These forests contain a good number of musk deer. While people depend on forest for firewood, alternative fuels such as kerosene and LPG gas are becoming popular, as they are cost effective, particularly since the district has been connected to the national road network. The region also has a large tract of forest located above Chhairo village jointly owned by the five original villages (see Plate 6). The Council of Paachgau is largely responsible for managing this forest and all five original villages are represented. This region has the highest concentration of government officials, more than 1,000 including the army and police personnel, who all depend on forests for firewood (NTNC/ACAP, 2010).

Plate 6: Paachgau Forest above Chhairo Village
Photo by Author (2009)

Pasture areas: The pasture in this region is considered good, although the area is comparatively small. The pasture is rich with aromatic and medicinal plants and for the past five years, their collection has become a popular, if controversial, enterprise (see Chapter 8). The pasture areas are the main habitat for wildlife such as blue sheep and snow leopard, which are found in abundance in this region. Their population increased significantly after Mustang became part of the Annapurna Conservation Area when hunting and other wildlife related offences were banned.

Water: Water for drinking and irrigation appears not to be a problem in this region. All villages within Paachgau are well irrigated with well-maintained irrigation systems, and village rules to distribute and share the water.

	Agriculture Lands	Shrublands	Forests	Pasture area	Total lands
Jomsom	2.6	29.6	20.2	49.5	184.2
Marpha	3.5	6.5	16.2	31.6	91.5
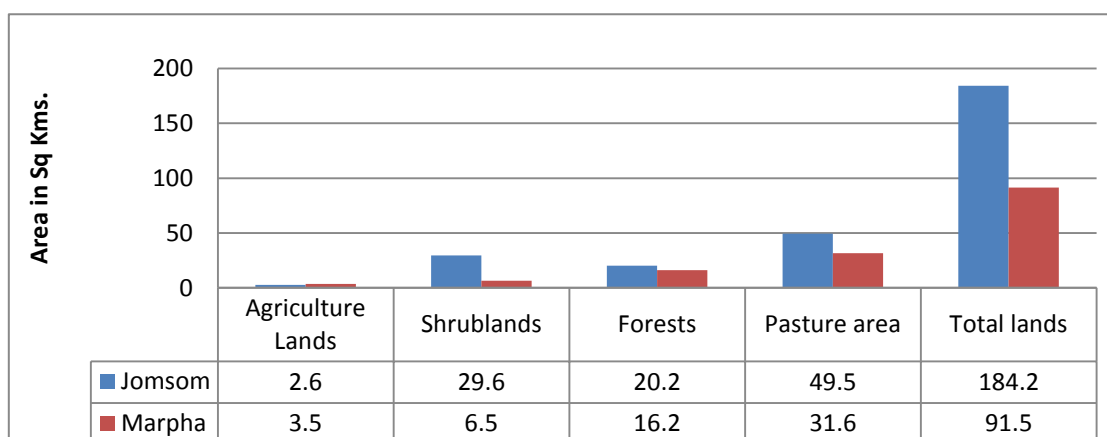
Figure 7: Environmental resources in the Paachgau region (NTNC/ACAP, 2010)

3.2.3.4   Local economy:

Agriculture: The main occupation for the majority of people in this region is agriculture. They grow two crops a year, including wheat, naked barley, buckwheat, maize and beans. Again, this region has a food deficit, but less so than the previously described two regions. In recent years, the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants such as *akarkara (Anacyclus pyrethrum), chiraito (Swertia chirayita), lauth salla (Taxus baccata), kutki (Picrorbiza kurroa), padamchal (Rheum emodi), jatamashi (Nardostachrys jatamansi)* and *kuth (Saussurea lappa)* has become popular among local farmers. Fresh vegetables, apple orchards and their related enterprise are on the increase. There are over 38,000 apple trees, making Paachgau the largest apple growing region in Mustang (DADO, 2009)**.**

Animal husbandry: The number of livestock, mostly goats, in this region is comparatively high. *Jho*, horses and mules are kept, but their numbers have declined in recent years due to the road. There are a few yak herds, but overall the amount of yak herding is also declining.

Trade, employment and tourism: The people of this region are not engaged in the garment or petty trades as are the people of the Lo and Baragau regions. Marpha village has the highest number of people employed overseas, and other villages have comparatively few. Puthang and Marpha are popular as tourism destinations and consequently have the highest number of lodges in the district. The Jomsom airport provides a daily service to Pokhara which has contributed to the popularity of Puthang as a destination. Since the linking with the road, Jomsom village has also become popular among domestic tourists and pilgrims who stop there to change buses network for Muktinath, Kagbeni or Beni.

3.2.4   Thaksatsai region

Thaksatsai is the southernmost region in Mustang. It comprises four Village Development Committees, covering an area of 328 km^2 which constitutes 10 per cent of Mustang's land area.

3.2.4.1   The land and villages

Thaksatsai literally means the '700 households of Thaksatsai' referring to its 13 original villages with 700 households. While the numbers of villages has increased from 13 to 22 over the years, households have declined from 700 to 650. The total population of this region now stands at 3,102 (see Table 6). The decline in numbers of households and a high immigrant population indicates a high out-migration rate from this region. The largest village is Tukuche with 109 households. This used to be the trading centre and the most powerful village during the peak of the 'salt for grain' trade (Vinding, 1998). It has many small villages, for example, Chokhopani with only seven households. Chokhopani has a

hydroelectric power station producing 240 kV. There are several villages with less than 20 households.

3.2.4.2   The people

The Thakali of Thaksatsai region consider it their original homeland. They, however, use Sherchan, Bhattachan, Gauchan and Tulachan as surnames and are referred to as 'Tamang Thakali' or 'Chan Thakali' (Vinding, 1998). Each surname represents a separate lineage. Due to high migration, the Tamang Thakali have become an ethnic minority in some of their original villages such as Tukuche and Kunju. Kunju also has a high number of *Bishwakarma*, Hindus of lower caste status. The Tamang Thakali are predominantly Buddhists, also practice Shamanism, and have been most influenced by Hinduism.

Village Development Committee	Major settlements	Village size	Total households	Total population
Tukuche	Tukuche, Chokhopani and Chimang	Tukuche is the largest village with 109 households. Chokhopani village is the smallest with only 7 households. Chimang village belongs to Paachgau region, but is included in the Tukuche VDC. This village has 39 households.	155	719
Kobang	Naurikot, Bhujurngkot, Nakung, Larjung, Kobang, Khanti and Sauru	Larjung, Kobang and Naurikot are the largest villages with 30+ households. Bhurjungkot is the smallest village with only 7 households.	179	722
Kunjo	Tiri, Taglung, Parsyang, Kunjo, Chhayo, Jipra Deurali/Pairothaplo	Parshayng, Chhayo and Jipra Deurali are the largest villages with 25+ (NTNC/ACAP 2010)households. Tiri is the smallest village with 13 households.	153	762
Lete	Ghasa, Lete/Kalopani, Dhapu/Kokhethanti/Lharkyu	Lete/Kalopani and Ghara are the largest villages with 77 and 50 households, respectively.	163	899

Table 6: Village Development Committee profile of the Thaksatsai Region (NTNC/ACAP, 2010)

This region has a Council of 13 Mukhiya, the 'Thakali Sewa Samiti Thaksatsai Chhetra' (Thakali Service Committee Thaksatsai region), with responsibility for overseeing all socio-political and cultural issues concerning Tamang Thakali living in and outside the region. They nominate a chief, referred to as '*Mir Mukhiya*' who serves on a rotational basis. However, for the past 10 years, this position has been held by one person.

Plate 7: Forests are denser and closer to the villages in the Thaksatsai region

Photo by S. Thakali, 2009

3.2.4.3   Environmental resources

Forest and shrublands: Thaksatsai receives more rain than any other region in Mustang, consequently has good forest cover (see Figure 8). Villages in this area are either situated close to, or are surrounded by, forests. Forests of this area are predominately coniferous with birch and broad leaf species in the lower belt. The forests are fragmented in terms of use and ownership. Each village owns their own patches of forest, and these are not generally shared with neighbouring villages. Like all other villages in Mustang, villages in this region enforce strict rules and regulations to govern their forests. The region also has a good area of shrub lands, indicating regenerating forest. The forest and shrub areas are good habitats for musk and other deer species.

Pasture areas: Pasture areas in the Thaksatsai region are shared by all villages. Some traditional 'outsider users' graze their animals here, mainly sheep, and are subject to a tax levied by the Thakali Sewa Samiti Thaksatsai Chhetra (the Council of 13 Mukhiya*)*. Villages collect the levy, paying 25 per cent of income to the council. The pasture areas of the Thaksatsai region provide good habitat for many wildlife species such as blue sheep, thar, and pheasants. Previously these animals were hunted

by locals, but hunting has largely been prohibited with the establishment of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project.
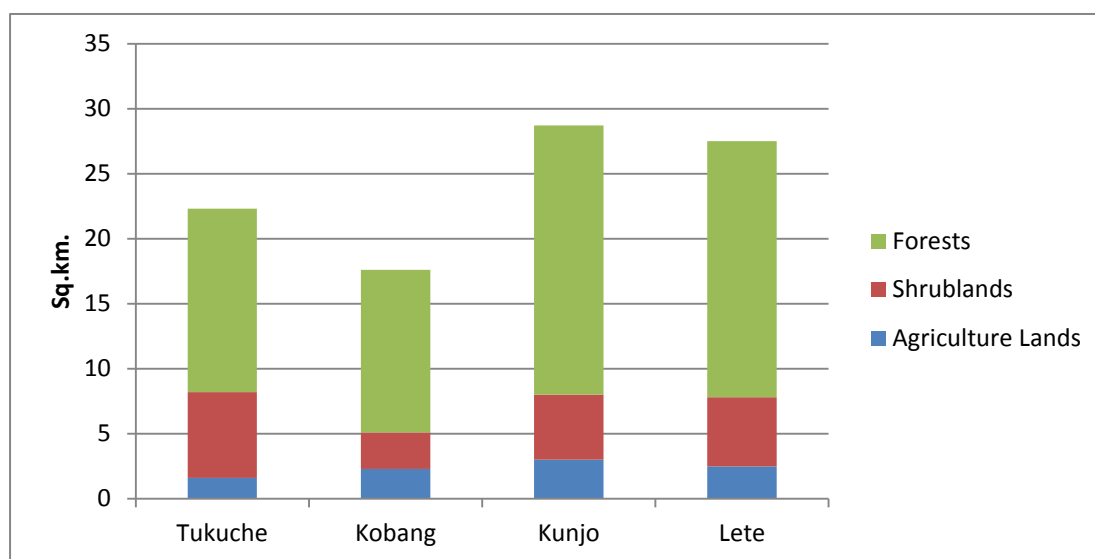
Figure 8: Environmental resources in the Thaksatsai Region(NTNC/ACAP, 2010)

Water: Water does not appear to be a problem in the Thaksatsai region as it is in the Lo and Baragau regions. The majority of villages do not use irrigation, but depend on rainfall for their crops.

3.2.4.4 Local economy

Agriculture: The main local occupation is agriculture. Crops such as buckwheat, naked barley, maize, potatoes and beans are grown in this region. The Kunjo valley is considered the most productive land and was known as the 'food basket' of the district. The local people also grow vegetables. Apples are popular crops in Tukuche with over 17,000 trees. The local farmers also grow carrots and grass for seeds.

Animal husbandry: Sheep and yak rearing is popular. Villages in the Kobang Village Development Committee have the highest yak population in Mustang. Mules were popular animals for transporting goods, but their number has declined dramatically due to the newly constructed road from Beni.

Trade, employment and tourism: The people of this region are not involved in petty trade, but contracting to build infrastructure projects or supply food to the government officials is popular. After the road construction, many bought vehicles and converted from operating a mule service to providing mechanised transport. The number of people working overseas in this region is increasing, with Middle Eastern countries popular, particularly among the *Damai* and *Bishwakarma* (lower Hindu castes). There are a high number of Chan Thakali working in Japan and the USA. Villages such as Ghasa, Lete and Tukuche are popular with tourists. These villages are not a destination in per se, as

are Jomsom, Muktinath and Lo-Manthang, but are used for lunch stops or overnight stays for trekkers or travellers on their way to Jomsom. Both prior to and following the construction of the road, some international tourists and interested NGO's voiced concerns about the new infrastructure, but the full scale of the impacts of these developments has yet to be understood.

3.3.   Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of Nepal and the region in which my research takes place. It provides historical, socio-cultural and environmental factors within a series of contexts and broad settings. It also describes the socio-economic and environmental settings of the district of Mustang as a context for my research. Some of the issues raised in this chapter will be elaborated on and discussed further in my result chapters. The next chapter will review literature relevant to my research, particularly focusing on the concept and application of environmentality as an analytical construct.

Chapter 4
Literature review

4.0   Introduction

This thesis explores the concept of 'environmentality' recently proposed by Agrawal (2005) to explain long term shifts in environmental governance by examining complex relationships between changes in government policies and related shifts in environmental practices and beliefs of local inhabitants. My thesis examines the extent to which this argument can explain the link between the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in the Mustang region of Nepal during the last three and a half centuries and shifts in environmental practices and beliefs of local inhabitants.

This chapter provides theoretical grounding for this study by reviewing the debate in the recent literature relating to the concept of 'environmentality' as an analytical construct to study links between changes in institutional arrangements over time and environmental subject formation. The chapter is framed as follows. First, it briefly explains the link between the theoretical constructs of environmental governance and governmentality (4.1). This is followed by a discussion of environmentality as a cross-disciplinary approach to investigate environmental politics and governance (4.2). The chapter then describes Arun Agrawal's work in the Kumaon Valley, India, underpinned by the concept of environmentality. (4.3). This is followed by an overview of three more case studies which examine the application of environmentality as an analytical construct to study environmental politics in different contextual settings (4.4). The final section provides a critique of the concept of environmentality (4.5). Section 4.6 highlights how the proposed study will contribute to the concept of environmentality, based on a case study in Nepal.

4.1   Environmental governance

The widespread use of the term 'governance' in itself and in relation to environment is a recent phenomenon with a multitude of perspectives and interpretations depending on disciplinary and ideological contexts (Rosenau, 2002). In general the term governance refers to the fundamental question of how organisation, decisions, order and rule are achieved in heterogeneous and highly differentiated societies (Bridge and Perreault, 2009). It implies a focus on systems of governing, and the means for "authoritatively allocating resources and exercising control and co-ordination" (Rhodes, 1996, P. 653) in which the government and non-governmental organisations play a variety of roles (Bulkeley, 2005). Governance arrangements, thus, can be private, public or private-public hybrids.

They can involve substantial delegation of functions or reflect the desire not to create or empower independent bodies. They can involve many stakeholders in decision-making processes or convey overwhelming power to a few. These heterogeneous and at times contradictory characteristics of governance present a challenge to any attempt to understand its operation and evolution in theoretical terms (Koenig-Archibugi, 2002).

Recent trends in environmental governance indicate a worldwide shift from a centralised, techno-centric and government driven/led approach to a more holistic, inclusive and scientifically open minded approach (Wilson, 2009). This shift in approach primarily resulted from increased understanding of complex interactions between economic activities and ecological systems with three significant implications to study environmental governance. It sought to redefine the role of the government. The government is regarded more as a partner/facilitator/educator rather than as an administrator or a regulator (Cortner and Moote, 1994; Gandey, 1996; Peet and Watts, 1996; Wilson, 2009). Secondly, it calls for more comprehensive and cross-disciplinary methods to study human-environmental interactions and to look beyond westerns science for answers to address current environmental problems by improving understanding of the complex drivers of environmental change and community resilience as well as the importance of understanding complex stakeholder demands/interests and their subsequent impacts on environmental resources (Cortner and Moote, 1994; Wilson, 2009; Brunyeel, 2009). Thirdly, it calls for a political will and effective institutional arrangements to address emerging concerns and issues resulting from the increasingly globalised nature of environmental problems. Environmental governance, thus, has emerged as a key theme in environmental politics since the 1980s (Paterson, Humphreys and Pettiford, 2001). In recent years the application of ideas of 'governmentality' to investigate the transformation in governance of the environment has been termed as 'environmentality'. The next section examines key concepts and arguments underpinning governmentality before examining the theoretical propositions of environmentality in detail.

4.1.1   Governmentality –a new theoretical approach to study 'governance'

Michel Foucault defined and explored two seemingly disparate new domains of research. He was interested in government as an activity or practice and as the state methods for disciplining the individual by calculated means (1988 [1976]. He investigated these themes in a series of lectures between 1970 and 1984, focusing on political rationalities and genealogy of state and advanced the concept of 'governmentality' as a theoretical construct to study government (Foucault 1991; Foucault [1976] 2003; Foucault [1979] 2000; Foucault [1982] 2000). His concept of governmentality was elaborated further by authors such as Peter Miller, Nikolas Rose and Mitchell Dean (1999) and inspired many scholars to study to research on governance (Barron 1996; Cruikshank 1999; Dean 1999).

The term 'governmentality' conceptualises the state and community/society as separate entities tied together closely through regulation. It is such regulatory actions, or strategies of government, that enable the government to achieve its objectives. The significance of this new theoretical approach is that it urges us to study the socio-political functions of governance in their own right, and seeks to enquire into their rationality as governmental practices. Foucault argues that the government actions are designed to target populations, individuals and communities that in turn have their own regulations, cycles and effects (1991). The concern of the government is "welfare of the populations, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health *et cetera*" (Foucault, 1991a. p. 100). As it is not possible to coerce every individual and to micro manage their actions, the government strives to achieve its goals through the use of multiple strategies, institutions and processes that aim to reshape practices and behaviour of individuals and communities, leading to the govermentalisation of society and the state. A focus on 'governmentality' as a theoretical approach, therefore, implies at least three things (Foucault, 1994a, p. 219-220):

1. It is aimed at investigating the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has the population as its target, political economy as its principal form of knowledge, and the apparatus of security as its technical means. The focus of investigation is on specific practices and techniques of governing as an empirical phenomenon, rather than on institutions.

2. It is aimed at identifying the 'mentality' or 'rationality' that characterises the systematic thinking and knowledge that is integral to and renders possible, different modes of governing. The semantic linking of governing and modes of thought indicate that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationalities underlying them.

3. It is not aimed at replacing 'sovereignty' or 'discipline', each of which represents distinct forms of power (Gordon 1991, p. 7; Dean 1999). Rather than displacing discipline or sovereignty, "the modern art of government recasts or reconfigures them with this concern for the population and its optimization (in terms of wealth, health, happiness, prosperity, efficiency) and the forms of knowledge and technical means appropriate to it" (Mitchell Dean (1999, p.:20). The essential aspect of government for Foucault is the introduction of economy into political practice,

The concept of governmentality has been widely used in liberal democracies to trace the profound transformation in the mechanisms of power of modern government (Foucault 1991; Foucault [1976] 2003; Foucault [1979] 2000; Foucault [1982] 2000), including to investigate the nature of institutionalised power outside western modernity (Lemke, 2002).

4.2   Adaptation of 'governmentality' to the environment

Drawing from Foucault's model of power, authors such as Agrawal (2005a and b), Brosius (1999) and Luke (1995) have coined the term 'environmentality' as a conceptual framework to investigate environmental politics. Scholars of environmentality claim that this framework to study changes in government and related shifts in the environmental practices and beliefs of local inhabitants has led to a breakthrough to study the complex and dynamics relationships that exist between people and environment. Using Arun Agrawal's book - *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (2005)' and his article - 'Environmentality, community, intimate government, and the making of environmental subjects in Kumaon, India' (2005) –, the theoretical proposition of 'environmentality' is explained and critiqued in the rest of this chapter.

The framework of environmentality builds on existing writings on political ecology, common property theory and environmental feminism (Agrawal, 2005a). There are at least three themes common in this cross-disciplinary approach to environmental politics. First the environment is treated as a domain in which traditional conflicts unfold, between rich and poor, the state and communities, indigenous and outsiders or men and women (Bates, 2001; Herbst, 2000). Second, environmental political changes are largely framed in terms of loss and recuperation, appropriation and resistance, ignorance and enlightenment (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Lynch and Talbott, 1995). Third, they are concerned with examining how institutions, politics, and identities affect environmental processes and outcomes. This form of analysis is more focused on transformation in existing forms of environmental governance such as changing centralised, state driven, and non-democratic control over resources.

This cross-disciplinary analysis provides a way of viewing changes in environmental politics. Building on this analysis, the concept of environmentality takes the environment seriously and advances an approach that focuses on politics, institutions and subjectivities as the foundation on which to build an analysis of changing environmental relationships, and examines how these concepts shape each other and are themselves in turn constituted. The following sections explore the specific focus of each of these cross disciplinary approaches.

4.2.1   Common property resources: focus on Institutions

By critiquing the dominant environmental writings, Ostrom (1990) pioneered and synthesised a theory on the importance of common property resource regimes in which the state and the market are the appropriate institutional avenues through which to address conservation failures (Shapiro 1989). Institutions are the focus of common property resource analysis with social practices, especially those related to environmental regulation, as typically the consequence of institutional transformations (Ostrom, 1990; Agrawal, 2001).

Common property resource theorists make two important contributions to the theoretical debates concerning environmental resources. They argue that variations in institutional arrangements for environmental goods can have a marked effect on their disposition. They claim that the success of governing common property resource depends on the level of cooperation among users. The distribution of resources is more equitable under a common property resource regime, and thus can be an efficient solution to problems related to public goods, compared with private or state ownership. Secondly, they recognise that concepts such as private, public or common goods are necessary to account adequately for the massive variations in institutional forms that environmental subjects deploy to govern their resources (McKean, 2000).

Common property resource theorists have only recently begun considering politics in their analysis, tracking the effects of institutional politics on resources. They have begun to acknowledge the critical importance and impact of the larger political-economic and social context on institutional outcomes. Contextual variables clearly affect the ability of specific groups to use and govern their resources. However, because of their primary focus on institutions, they lag behind in explaining how political relations, or changes in the relative power of different actors, affect the environment even without institutional changes.

4.2.2   Political ecology: power and politics

Political ecology essentially describes the politics of common property resources with the focus directly on questions of power and politics in relation to the environment (Wells and Lynch, 2000:93; Agrawal, 2005: 208). Political ecology is more concerned with global environmental processes and the erosion of the global commons. While common property resource scholars are looking at rules and institutions for the disappearance of global commons, political ecologists focus on the politics inherent in the erosion of the commons, and the changing forms of access to environmental resources (Peet and Watts, 1996).

Political ecology theory during the 1980s and the early 1990s (Bryant and Bailey, 1997) was primarily concerned with three broad issues: social marginality and access to resources; attention to the cultural and socioeconomic spheres; and the political contexts or political economies that control the use of resources. Engagement with these three issues highlighted the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and within societal classes and groups (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987).

Political ecologists see power and politics as the prime movers for resource management and allocation, and take subject formation largely for granted, but the exercise of power and politics are themselves a consequence of many different processes and can be understood only historically. For

example, Bryant and Bailey (1997) examined states, multilateral institutions, business interests, NGOs, and grassroots actors. They assumed that the interests of each of these actors were fully formed and omitted examining the emergence of the relationships of subjects to the environment. Attention to relationships among interests is important, along with imagination and the production of subject positions, including the careful investigation of processes associated with changes in interests and mechanisms relating to social-structural locations on the one hand and to practices on the other. Environmentalists argue that to pursue the making of environmental subjects, it is necessary to give up the concept of subjects and interests that are always already given by their social-structural locations, and instead, examine how they are made (Agrawal, 2005).

4.2.3   Feminist environmentalism: focusing on gender

Environmental feminists claim that politics and injustices around gender are closely related to and parallel those around the environment (Gaard, 1993 p. 1). They are concerned with investigating how economic processes, social practice**s** and political relations are instrumental in producing gender-related inequalities. There are serious disagreements about what contributes to gender inequalities and injustices in environmental practices and outcomes and also how to study them (Mies and Shiva 1993). There is however a consensus that gender relationships in households within communities, and around the environment, are historically and contextually variable and socially and politically complex (Jackson, 1993). There is no deterministic relationship between the interests of women and the conservation of the environment. The assumption that women are somehow closer to nature and act as its custodians and trustees can lead to policy designs that allocate women additional tasks in the protection of forests and the environment. But this is without commensurate attempts to change the political relations that marginalise them (Jackson, 1993).

Although environmental feminists have successfully contested the superficial treatment of women in the environment, and forcefully point to the regressive potential inherent in such naturalised relationships, they have been less successful in examining the role of power in producing women as environmental subjects (Agrawal, 1992, Alaimo, 1994, Warren, 1997). The exercise of power is what excludes already constituted women from possible participation and access to or control over environmental resources. Agrawal (2005b) points out that differentiated environmental experiences create gender-related subjects, and they affect environmental outcomes, are still inadequately explored. He argues for greater emphasis on practice rather than on the social identities or categories such as gender, caste and ethnicity. He argues that the relationship between subjectivity and gender or caste is simplistically correlated and argues that these social identities play an insignificant role in shaping beliefs about what one considers to be appropriate actions (Agrawal, 2005). He claims that the involvement of individuals and villages within specific regulatory practices is more likely to

correlate with their enhanced environmental subjectivity than their structural-social location in terms of caste or gender.

4.2.4 Agrawal's adaptation of governmentality to study environmental politics and changes

Arun Agrawal (2005) adopted the theoretical propositions of governmentality in relation to the environment to describe and explain a radical transformation in the environmental beliefs and practices of the local residents of the Kumaon valley in northern India. He described how the people who once burnt 200,000 hectares of forests to protest against the government's centralised coercive environmental policies became the people who are now working with the government to protect forests. His term for this radical transformation was 'environmentality'.

Environmentality comprises knowledge/politics, institutions and subjectivities as three key conceptual elements that come to be aligned with the emergence of the environment as a domain that requires regulation and protection. Agrawal argues that regulation demands new knowledge, but the production of new knowledge is intimately connected to the shaping of practices and human subjectivities in relation to the environment. Similarly, politics always implies interactions and negotiations, involvingh the mutual constitution of fields of action related to regulation and practices. Agrawal (2005a. and b.) points out that the emergence of new forms of knowledge should be examined along with changes in political relations and institutional arrangements, and the development of new ways of thinking about the objects of knowledge, the human subjects. Based on these arguments, Agrawal proposes environmentality as a lens for analysing environmental politics rather than denoting a particular form.

To sum up, environmentality constitutes a way to think about environmental politics by paying careful attention to:

1. The formation of new expert knowledge;

2. the nature of power, which is at the root of efforts to regulate social practice;

3. the types of institutions and regulatory practices that exist in a mutually productive relationship with social and ecological practices and that can be seen as the historical expressions of contingent political relationships; and

4. the behaviour that regulations seek to change, which go hand in hand with the processes of self-formation and the struggles between expert or authority-based regulation and situated practices.

4.2.5   Kumaon Valley, India, a case study

Using environmentality as an analytical framework, Arun Agrawal investigated how the relationships between the changing technologies of government and the production of environmental identities have changed over the last century and a half in the Kumaon Valley of northern India. By examining these changes, he sets out to explain why, when, how and in what measure, people come to develop an environmentally-oriented subject position. He points out that "these questions, provocative for both their practical import for conservation and their theoretical relevance to discussions of identity, require a historical examination of different technologies of government" (Agrawal, 2005, p. 3).

Agrawal's arguments and the concerns he raised in the Kumaon case study are based on the shifting grounds of politics, institutions and subjectivities that together characterise government in the sense of the 'conduct of conduct (Foucault,1991). The 'conduct of conduct' i.e., the government's attempt to shape human beliefs and practices by calculated means, can be inspired by many sources, formal institutions such as state agencies, informal regulatory norms and institutions that affect the very thoughts and experiences of communities, families and individuals. Through his case study Agrawal illustrates how generation of specific kinds of knowledge is contingent on and goes together with important political, institutional and subjectivity shifts. He argues that an understanding of how one of the elements of environmentality changes requires a consideration of its relationships with other elements. Agrawal also argues that new environmental subject positions emerge as a result of involvement in struggles over resources and in relation to new institutions and changing calculations of self-interest and notions of the self. To substantiate his arguments, he proposes three conceptual elements – politics, institutions and subjectivities (identities) - and points out that these are intimately linked and should be explored together. He suggests that exclusive focus on "politics, institutions or subjectivities is likely to lead to lopsided analysis of environmental politics and change" (Agrawal, 2005a, p. 3).

The next section explains and discusses each of the conceptual elements underpinning environmentality drawing mainly from Agrawal's study in the Kumaon Valley, India.

4.2.6   Technologies of government and environmental subjectivities

Agrawal examines the strategies of knowledge and power and their relation to the creation of forested environments as "a domain fit for modern government", focusing especially on the role of statistics, calculation and numbers as basic parts of technologies of government in characterising and reconfiguring forest resources in the Kumaon valley. His case study focuses on examining "the ways in which local residents came to understand their relationship with the trees and the government" during the colonial rule in India (Agrawal, 2005a, p. 58). Armed with these government technologies,

the colonial rulers, he argues, "institutionalised the science of forestry through new organisational mechanisms and technical refinements that continue today" (Agrawal, 2005a, p. 58).

Agrawal notes that the centralised policy of forests helped shape the views of forest staff during the first two decades of the twentieth century. By then the value of forests had changed. Forests had become important for timber and resin for the colonial power and an important sector of the Kumaon regional economy. Statistics, calculations and numbers were used to categorise and manage forests for sustainable yields and profit maximisation. The locals, however, depended on forests for firewood and fodder to sustain their livelihoods. These seemingly conflicting interests and values over forest resources resulted in a range of struggles between different forest and revenue departments of the colonial state as well as among local officials and local residents. These struggles ultimately forced the colonial government to devise new strategies as part of new government technologies in order to shape individual behaviour and beliefs in relation to forests. Decentralisation and participation have thus constituted parts of new technologies of environmental government in the Kumaon valley since the 1930s. Agrawal suggests that effective decentralisation processes involve transformations in three different but connected changes in relationships between the government and the local residents - each of which is discussed below:

4.2.6.1 Governmentalised localities

The first of these relationships concerns the ways in which the government interacts with the local people in their own places referred as localities. Decentralisation of regulation and shifts in the relationships between the government and localities produce what Agrawal terms 'governmentalised localities', i.e., referring to the emergence of new centres of environmental decision-making that ultimately would change their interaction with the government. Agrawal points out that processes that reshaped forests and related institutions, practices, and subjectivities in the Kumaon valley, are examples of what he refers to as the 'govermentalisation of the environment'.

4.2.6.2 Regulatory communities

The second of the relationships concerning technologies of the government is the emergence of new regulatory spaces or bodies within localities which shape the social and environmental interactions amongst local residents. Agrawal terms these as 'regulatory communities' which are seen as the counterparts of governmentalised localities. This set of transformed relationships concerns how identifiable locations of power, decision-making, and representation redefine the interactions between decision-makers and residents in communities. The power that decision-makers exercise in communities is highly dependent on the people who are subject to their decisions. The effectiveness of the decision-making depends on a range of social, economic and structural relationships between the newly powerful decision-makers and those affected by their decisions. Agrawal points out that on

the one hand through regulation there is the creation of new relationships between locality and the state, and on the other, there occurs a transformation of the relationships between decision-makers in localised communities and ordinary members of those communities.

4.2.6.3 Subject formation

The third part of new the technologies of the government, particularly when viewed in the context of environmental management, is also linked to the development of new environmental subjects; i.e., the people who have come to think and act in relation to the environmental domain being governed.

Agrawal (2005) sees that transformation of power/knowledge, institutions and subjectivities is crucial to the character of the emerging environmental politics. Agrawal claims that transformations of communities as a result of institutionalised practices within which they are located are strongly linked to understanding changes in subjectivities. He, however, warns that not all the people of Kumaon have become environmental subjects and examines the reasons that account for the variable relationships between different communities of the Kumaon and their environment as they see it. Agrawal argues that variability in subjecthood is related to different types of participation in regulations, different forms of involvement in councils, and different levels of benefits from forests.

The subject formation as Agrawal has admitted, is the 'most critical but ambiguous and unpredictable and, perhaps for these reasons, the least well understood and investigated' (Agrawal, 2005, p. 16). This part of Agrawal's work in Kumaon concerns how the people's understandings and relationships with forests changed historically with the extension of centralised rule over forests and later with the emergence of the governmentalised localities and regulatory communities. He analyses how the creation of councils and more networked forms of power led to significant changes in the relationship of the people of Kumaon to forests and their ways of being in them. Agrawal maintains that "power as it is practiced in the governmentalised locality and the regulatory community environmentalises the subjects by changing how they view the environment and their place in it" (2005, p. 17). He concludes that "the emergence of environmental subjects in Kumaon is similarly about a process whereby local residents come to think about and define their actions, positively or negatively, in relation to the environment" (Agrawal, 2005, p. 17).

Agrawal provided a new interpretation of governmentality in relation to environment. His study of transformations in politics, institutions and subjectivities in the Kumaon valley is considered a milestone in the study of environmental politics. The earlier studies based on Foucault's ideas about governmentality are mainly concerned with exploring the meaning of the term. These studies provide little or no indication of how government shapes subjects or how to explain variations in the transformation of subjects which was the major focus of Agrawal's work in the Kumaon valley.

Agrawal's contribution, therefore, is significant in this regard. It was this facet of Agrawal's work that inspired me to use the conceptual framework of environmentality to investigate whether the overwhelming process of governmentalisation and participatory approaches in the past four decades is linked to the creation of environmental subject positions in high mountain regions such as Mustang, which is very different, in terms of social-political and economic settings, from the Kumaon valley.

Sections 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 discuss how the environmentality framework has been used in three environmental case studies.

4.3   Environmentality in urban settings

Mawdsley, (2009) tests Agrawal's 'environmentality' framework using Delhi's Bhagidari scheme as a case study to analyse changing environmental beliefs and behaviour among India's middle classes. She examined whether shifts towards plural, decentralised and participatory regulation in urban contexts might also foster the environmental subjectivities that Agrawal identified in the Kumaon valley, India.

In keeping with the global trend towards a neo-liberal paradigm of governance, India has been experimenting with participatory and decentralised forms of governance at the state, local and municipal government levels (Bardhan, 2002, Veron, 2006). These newly institutionalised, devolved, decentralised and participatory regimes focus on a variety of environmental issues, from solid waste management to the development of green spaces (Mawdsley, 2009, p. 241).

Mawdsley (2009) argues that Agrawal's concept of environmentality and his argument that environmental subjectivities can arise from new practices, rather than preceding them, can be explored in the urban context of India. However, she identified two particular problems with Agrawal's arguments. The first was the need to define collective goods in a far more heterogeneous setting such as the urban slums of the various micro-geographical communities of India. Secondly, she found the social settings of Kumaon comparatively far less socially differentiated, in terms of class, caste and ethnicity compared with the diverse needs, outlooks and occupations of urban communities, and less likely to challenge the identification and reality of mutual interests, as well as the means of negotiating them.

Similarly, Mawdsley (2009) sees a problem with Agrawal's notion of environmental subjectivity which refers to people who care about the environment or someone having progressive environmental values'. She points out that the notion of what is a good environment can be vigorously debated between different actors. She questions whether what constitutes a collective environmental good is perhaps even more open to ontological and epistemological uncertainty in urban contexts. Using the

example of the Delhi air pollution reduction policies she points out that these are badly affecting the poor and represent the needs of the middle classes. Mawdsley argues that Agrawal appears to have taken for granted that greater environmental awareness and practice is desirable, despite the fact that regressive and authoritarian environmentalism has always been the core of green theorising and politics.

Unlike Agrawal's case study in the Kumaon valley, Mawdsley (2009) encourages us to look at the different dimensions of environmental subjectivity. She revisits the assumption that environmental subjectivity will promote the care for environment which is at the core of Agrawal's thesis. Her Bhagidari scheme case study shows that "the new participatory spaces, or the World Bank style decentralization agendas in urban governance, are generally dominated by, and act in the interests of the wealthier and more elite factions of society, contributing thereby to an anti-politics" (p. 243). She finds that the scheme is limited to authorised colonies and not the unauthorised colonies and slum areas in which the majority of Delhi's poor reside, benefitting only the wealthier sections of Delhi Society.

4.4   Environmentality and REDD

Chacon's (2009) tests the environmentality framework and its relevance to explore the impacts of the increasing commodification of forests, focusing on the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) initiative. She finds 'environmentality' a useful framework to analyse the links between the environment and power/knowledge formation, where "international discourses, regarding climate change and deforestation are in fact defining, creating and enforcing discursive regimes of disciplinary truth" (Luke 1995, p. 59). Her study also focuses on identifying the opportunities and threats of REDD by analysing a process that involves tracking the notions, discourses, institutions and subjectivities linking to deforestation and climate change governance.

4.4.1   Expert knowledge and power:

Chacon (2009) examines the role of expert knowledge and power in the emergence of climate change as an environmental issue, and links environmental threats with forests and the problems of deforestation. She illustrates how power is generated and located in the different strategies of government, which are traced through the different dominant and alternative climate change and deforestation discourses as well as the main arguments that have emerged to articulate the climate change-deforestation nexus.

Chacon (2009) makes a point that "forests have undergone a long governmentality process, which implies the formation of governmental apparatuses and complex knowledge in order to manage

forests as strategic resources of the state" (Chacon, 2009, p. 18). Historically, forests were valued mostly for the resources they provided such as timber and firewood, but more recently they have been valued for a wide range of environmental services, from protecting watersheds to sequestering and storing carbon by photosynthesis. The increasingly market-based approach reflects the prevailing Western resource managerialism approach to nature, which has influenced how forests and global climate change are being defined. Forests have thus experienced increased commodification (Chacon, 2009).

Understanding an environmental problem, such as climate change, involves understanding natural science as well as social, economic and political discourses (Hajer, 1995; Adger et. al. 2001). Chacon (2009) points out wide variations in the conception, definitions and causes of climate change and deforestation at an international level. She shows that these variations are related to the particular interests of institutions. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), for example, defines climate change in its article 1 as "a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activities that alter the composition of the global atmosphere and which are in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time period". This definition, as does that of the International Panel on Climate Change, does not emphasise the role of anthropogenic emissions when it is "precisely the high concentration of greenhouse gases due to the human activity that have led to current global warming and climate change" (Chacon, 2009, p. 21).

Chacon (2009) argues that the definitions given to both climate change and forests include only certain aspects of environmental issues and omit other issues. This indicates that various actors are likely to hold different perceptions of what the problem really is (Hajer, 1995). Chacon (2009, p. 26) concludes that "this will affect the solutions proposed to cope with climate change as well as the role that deforestation could play. In turn, this could also influence the way subjects imagine and relate with forests nowadays".

4.4.2   Institutions and regulatory practices:

Institutionalisation takes place when "a certain discourse is translated into concrete policies and institutional arrangements" (Hajer, 1995, p. 57). In the 1990s, as the result of both scientific advances and the institutionalisation of climate change issues, the major environmental discourses have increasingly accepted climate change as a reality and as a significant global environmental problem (O'Riordan and Jager, 1996). The international communities negotiated with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and produced the Kyoto Protocol as a legally binding commitment to reduce greenhouse gasses. This provided the institutional framework and the technical infrastructure that define the current international solutions regarding climate change (Scholz and Streck, 2006).

REDD has been presented as a low-cost option under the post-Kyoto climate change regime to protect natural and degraded forests for their carbon sequestration function. By putting a value on the carbon in standing trees, proponents of REDD claims that it would reverse the current economic incentives for deforestation (Saunders and Nusssbaum, 2008) as well as delivering enormous benefits in terms of sustainable rural development and improved natural resources management (Scholz and Schmidt, 2008).

The implementation of REDD is not without its problems and challenges with statistics and numbers playing a key role to determine the deforestation-climate link. Deforestation results in the release of the carbon stored in trees as CO_2, accounting for approximately 20 per cent of the annual anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (Scholz and Schmidt, 2008). A key decision regarding REDD made in Bali in 2007, acknowledges the deforestation-climate link and officially incorporated deforestation as a key climate change issue to be discussed and institutionalised in the post-Kyoto regime. Chacon (2009) points out that "apparatus and techniques will be needed to govern the deforestation-climate change nexus. In this respect, a governmentality process has already started taking place for specific REDD cases, where a series of regulatory practices are institutionalising forest management to avoid emissions due to deforestation" (p. 46). She stresses that "the institutionalisation of climate change governance has widely influenced the dispersed forest regimes, and increased forest commodification and argues that a new set of carbon experts are now shaping our perception of forests." (p. 64).)

4.4.3   Forest commodification and the formation of environmental subjects

Chacon (2009) argues that a key aspect of REDD's impact is to determine who will receive the benefits of either the carbon credits or the international funds. "Depending on the power and knowledge relations of different subjects, the REDD initiative could be seen by members of a forest community as a significant opportunity, or rather compromise the sustainability of their forests by changing behaviour towards nature" (p. 64). She suggests that this may require a revision of property rights as different stakeholders may perceive impacts in diverse ways, depending on their power/knowledge relations. Hence, it is important to recognize how these strategies and their effects on flows of power shape subjects, their interests and their agency (Agrawal, 2005). Subjects may respond differently to REDD; some may perceive it as an opportunity and while others may perceive it as a threat; creating a continuum of environmental subjectivities.

Chacon's study clearly demonstrates the usefulness of environmentality as an analytical tool to analyse how the REDD initiative can affect and be affected by the notions, discourses, and institutional practices regarding deforestation and climate change and how this will also have impacts on environmental subjects, issues Agrawal investigated in the Kumaon valley. But her case study is

used to clarify the impact of technologies of government that promote a market approach to forests, and imply a variety of environmental subjectivities amongst stakeholders. Like Agrawal (2005), Chacon (2009) outlines how power/knowledge, institutions and subjectivities, are interwoven and how they constitute part of an interrelated process to influence one another. Chacon admits that she did not choose a particular location nor did she spend a significant period of time conducting an in-depth study. This explains why her study provides limited evidence on environmental subjectivity creation in the context of forest commodification and highlights a difficulty in ascertaining changes in the subject position.

4.5   Environmental politics and UNESCO Biosphere Reserves

Mark Hebden (2006) uses the 'environmentality' framework to analyse contemporary environmental politics. He focuses on the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) as an emergent enviro-political institution operating at a local level but transcending traditional notions of political space being integrated into a global network. Using the Dyfi Biosphere Reserve in Wales, he explains how Biosphere Reserves have emerged as key sites for political and multi-agency cooperation to protect biodiversity of regional significance, contributing to the production of networked forms and technologies of environmental governance in which NGOs, such as UNESCO, have central roles in producing nature/state relations and promoting cooperation both to govern and regulate socio-economic spaces of conservation. He clearly sees links between various strategies, techniques and technologies within political spaces, which enable the governmentalisation of nature (the ways in which the government interacts with the local people in relation to the environment), and the production of environmentally conscious subjects.

4.5.1   Producing space and knowledge

In 1968, UNESCO sponsored a meeting in Paris committed to creating an important global network of biosphere reserves for the conservation and utilisation of global natural resources. Four years later, the United Nations Conference on Human Environments held in Stockholm, known also as the Biosphere Conference adopted a series of recommendations concerning environmental problems (UNESCO 2002). This conference, the first worldwide scientific meeting at an intergovernmental level, addressed wider political, economic and social questions resulting in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme. The Man and Biosphere's push for an interdisciplinary research agenda laid the foundation for the articulation of sustainable development. Twenty four years later at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, sustainable development goals were adopted as the priority political agenda. The same conference also ratified the United Nations Convention of Biodiversity with over 175 counties as signatories.

UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves is fundamentally concerned with processes that occur at a broader landscape scale to protect threatened landscapes and biodiversity, and include both protected and unprotected areas, and partnerships that are central to the United Nations' strategic organization of which UNESCO is only one part (Reinicke, 2003). The World Network of Biosphere Reserves represents a fluid and de-territorialised network where local, national and global scales are inextricably linked (Hebden, 2006) and recognises that people are an essential part of the fabric of landscapes along with their socio-economic and cultural values which also need to be conserved (Hebden, 2006).

World Network of Biosphere Reserve sites are established as "learning places" or "sites of knowledge production" (Hebden, 2006 p. 36). In this case, the Biosphere Reserve Integrated Monitoring is promoted as its means of producing and disseminating standardised scientific data via computer databases and international networks of information exchange (Scott, 1998). The use of standard methodologies such as the Biosphere Reserve Integrated Monitoring (UNESCO 2005, Schroder et al., 2006) is UNESCO's attempt to produce and validate standardised environmental monitoring from a broad spectrum of biological, socio-economic and political phenomenon seeking uniformity as well as comparability. This standardisation of monitoring systems has political significance as it is required to produce impartial data applicable across national boundaries. Maps have been used for producing commitment in others supporting and reinforcing a re-territorialisation of place (Rose, 1999).

4.5.2   Politics and institutions

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves is at the forefront of the changing nature of political boundaries and notions of state-defined space (Hebden, 2006), by promoting cooperative efforts between historically or ideologically different entities to address environmental concerns. These networked forms of governance which have expanded in recent years, are promoting change within institutional cultures by providing equitable representation and the participation of diverse and often unheard of interests. Hebden's case study of the Dyfi Biosphere Reserve illustrates the spatial embodiment of an emergent systematic engagement between the Welsh state, its populace and nature. It shows the natural environment is employed within state strategies to meet national objectives.

4.5.3   Biosphere reserve and subjectivities

From an environmentality perspective, Hebden (2006) argues that geopolitical spaces such as biosphere reserves have become repositories for modern forms of power. Like in the Kumaon valley, the local people are implicated in "the control of nature and have been co-opted into becoming willing participants of a local state power formation, redefining their needs as being consistent with the interest of the state"(p. 75). He points out "while this suggests the exertion of power from above

because it also provides a potentially positive benefit in that it provides the individual with power to act for their own good" (p.75). He concludes that individuals that participate in new regulatory communities are likely to adopt more sustainable practices, emulating Agrawal's argument of the making of environmentally aware subjects in the Kumaon valley.

4.6   Critical review of environmentality

Agrawal's environmentality framework to study changes in government and related shifts in environmental beliefs and practices has stimulated a lot of interest since the 1990s. A number of scholars have, however, questioned the theoretical underpinning of Agrawal's model, particularly that part associated with the fostering of environmentality and the extent to which it contributes to environmental sustainability and environmental justice. Criticism is particularly directed to Agrawal's deployment of Foucaulian ideas of governmentality (Gupta, 2005) and methodological techniques (Goldsworthy, 2006). Agrawal's work has also been criticised for not embedding his analysis in a fuller history of forest policies and cultures in Kumaon (Narotzky, 2006; Sundar, 2005) and making no reference to a huge body of work in the West and elsewhere which has sought to define, elucidate and explore the nature and formation of environmental values and behaviour (Mawdsley, 2009). It should be acknowledged that the great part of this criticism of Agrawal's environmentality model is based on reviews of his book, not on attempts to test his thesis in empirical settings.

Conceptually, environmentality has been criticised for its inherent ambiguity while interpreting and adopting Foucauldian ideas of power relations in relation to environment (Raymond, 2010). He argues that if Foucault's model of 'power' is used, it can be interpreted that environmentality is another way for authorities to gain support of local people for their agendas such as managing valuable forest resources and ultimately to capture the revenue derived from forests. From this perspective, Raymond (2010) argues that Agrawal's finding that participation in forest councils leads to stronger environmental beliefs suggests the concept of adaptive preference formation as described by Elster (1982). Raymond points out that Agrawal does not clearly explain whether participation in forest councils, as seen in Kumaon, is contributing to stronger environmental beliefs or that people are changing their values and desires to adapt to changing circumstances. He is not saying that villagers' environmental beliefs are unreflective or dysfunctional or even that adaptive preferences are undesirable (Raymond, 2010) but tend to suggest that beliefs rooted in new practices may have multiple interpretations, not all of which are entirely positive. Agrawal's work has been further criticised for not fully explaining "whether the autonomy reported as devolved from the central bureaucracy to the local people of the Kumaon valley is a laudable innovation or the deceptive product of new technologies of the government" (Raymond, p. 264, 2010).

Technologies of government are characterised as being founded on some combination of knowledge, knowledge-based regulations and practices that regulations seek to govern. The institutionalisation of new strategies of power and regulation is also linked to changes in conceptions of the self. In this way, 'environmentality' as a form of power analysis of both how 'conduct of conduct' is shaped, and how it is connected to the political-economic aspects of institutional and organisational shifts, focused on transformations in subjectivities in the context of the environment. Raymond (2010) points out that Agrawal's normative position on the idea of environmentality remains ambiguous. He argues that Agrawal does not explain clearly, for example, whether the villagers' efforts to protect forests and control illegal practices of harvesting or extraction are in pursuit of goals that they either imagine as their own, or are goals guided by something else. What is not clear is whether these changes can be explained solely in terms of the availability of the institutional platform, or whether they reflect increased dependence on the public forests (Gupta, 2005).

Another criticism is that Agrawal's analysis of the effects of power/knowledge on decision-making and subjectivities regarding the environment do not extend beyond central government level (Goldsworthy, 2010). Goldsworthy argues that there is little discussion of power/knowledge at the local level or their effects in shaping environmental subjectivities following the changes in regulatory power. He further argues that for many villagers in Kumaon their subjectivity in relation to the environment is decided for them based on factors beyond their control and is not necessarily dependent on their concern for the forests. Goldsworthy points out that although Agrawal asserts that some, but not all villagers became more environmentally conscious following the creation of forest councils, he fails to provide an in-depth explanation of why variations remained in the different levels of subjectivity.

Agrawal makes no reference to the power/knowledge that international and national organisations bring into the complex interplay of technologies and their dynamic relations with norms, interests and possibilities. For example, Birkenholtz (2009) points out how under the influence of donor agencies the government seeks to gain the consent of people on proposals through both outreach and coercion. This has led to decentralisation of the government controls rather than decentralisation of decision-making processes at the grassroots. The decentralisation policy in this case has not led to creation of self-conducting and willing subjects as Agrawal has argued. Salfa and Wada (2008) share similar observations. They point out that despite widespread support for community-based conservation agendas, it is the government and international agencies that retain the authority over key decisions about natural resource management and use and allocation. Irrespective of rhetoric, Salfa and Wada seem to suggest that the decentralisation process and participatory approach have treated the local people as objects to be acted upon rather than as subjects with rights and power to act in relation to the environment.

Further criticism is expressed by Mawdsley (2009). She argues that the notion of environmental subjectivity refers to good environmental values, but defining what constitutes a good environment is debatable. She suggests that despite expectations that the new decentralised and participatory form of governance may create greater numbers of environmental subjects, the outcomes are "socially and geographically uneven, divisive and environmentally and ecologically unjust" (Mawdsley, 2009, p. 245). Supporting her argument, Acciaioli (2008) makes the point that villagers may choose to participate in environmental conservation on the basis of other motives such as to secure access to forest resources. He warns that a strong orientation of care for the environment shown by villagers (indigenous people) can be a second order strategy, the first being reasserting control over natural resources. This may be true in some cases, but villagers' assertion of rights over natural resources need more careful examination to understand the socio-political and historical settings within which such claims are made and the implications of these for environmental governance and environmental subject positions. This is the focus of my thesis and the basis of my investigation in Mustang.

Agrawal's main argument in terms of the environmental transformation in Kumaon rests on the causal path, initiated by changes in regulatory structures of government introduced by British colonisers, to changes in villagers' beliefs and behaviour. This argument assumes that prior to the changes in government; the villagers in Kumaon had little or no concern for their forests. Severin (1997) disagrees with this assumption by making the point that the traditional orientation of villagers was based on a more profound sensibility and environmental custodianship. He argues that Agrawal's assumption is problematic in that it disregards indigenous resource management systems, many of which predate the formation of the centralised government.

4.7   Summary

In summary and taking account of these criticisms of Agrawal's work, the purpose of this thesis is to test the validity of Agrawal's thesis to explain long term shifts in environmental governance by examining the complex relationships between changes in government and related shifts in environmental practices and beliefs of local inhabitants in the geographical setting of Mustang, Nepal. The thesis examines the extent to which this argument can explain the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance during the last three and a half centuries.

As argued in the rest of this thesis, the village-based governance system that evolved during the course of Mustang's long history has been invariably focussed on the management of environmental resources. Based on an analysis of institutional arrangements during three and a half centuries, it is demonstrated that environmental concerns and practices had been integral to the overall well-being of the villages and villagers. The origins of village governance institutions can be traced to the pre-unification period. Following the unification of Nepal, environmental concerns and practices were,

and have continued to be, socially embedded in Mustang village institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* (village head). These findings question the universal validity of Agrawal's model.

The next chapter is the first of four result chapters and provides an overview of the geo-political history of Nepal prior to the 1950s, with particular reference to Mustang, in order to understand the context in which the village-based governance system under the leadership of *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* has evolved and endured through trials and tribulations during the course of its history. This chapter occasionally extends in the post-1950 period for reasons of continuity, but the main discussion of the post-1950 period will occur in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter 5

Politics, governance and environment
in Mustang prior to the 1950s

5.0   Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the genesis and evolution of the endogenous village-based governance institutions in Mustang, within the wider context of the geo-political history of Nepal prior to the 1950s. This chapter occasionally extends into the post-1950 period for reasons of continuity, but the in depth discussion of the post-1950 period will occur in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

This chapter examines the historical roots of local institutions and the roles of emergent national and regional power politics, particularly the capacity of the former to subjugate and rule the people of Mustang, who had virtually no political role beyond their village level. Historical narratives have been collected from research participants to investigate the links between the past and present, and to the evolution of the village-based system of governance, particularly its roles in the management of environmental resources. This chapter argues that environmental concerns and practices have always been integral to the overall well-being of the village and villagers, even prior to the emergence of Nepal as a state. Environmental concerns and practices were, and continue to be, socially embedded in village institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa/Mukhiya* (village heads) in Mustang.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. Section 5.1 provides a brief overview of three pre-1950s governance regimes: pre-unification (prior to the 19th Century), unification (1800 to 1846), and the Rana autocracy and oligarchy (1846-1951).

Section 5.2 examines the impacts of Rana policies, from the perspective of the marginalised remote districts such as Mustang, on the village-based system of governance, particularly the institution of the *Ghempa* and the associated local leadership framework.

Section 5.3 examines in more detail the different attributes, functions and roles of the village-based governance institutions, for example, the village governance structure, nomination processes, eligibility criteria, household representation and the roles of the village council. It examines the function of the village assembly and formulation of village laws, in order to understand their

legitimacy and authority and the role bestowed on the *Ghempa* and associated institutions. This section then examines the roles of the *Ghempa* and related local institutions in managing the four critical elements of the environment: land, water, pasture areas and forests, including the issues of local ownership, rights and access over environmental resources, and village rules and regulations.

Section 5.4 examines the roles of *Ghempa Chhe* and *Chikyap* which are higher tier village level institutions responsible for coordinating and managing wider socio-economic and political relations. Likewise, Section 5.5 examines the roles and significance of the *Paachgau* and the 13 *Mukhiya* in relation to management of 'common resources', the forests and pastoral areas. Section 5.6 summarises this chapter.

5.1 Three sequential political regimes: an overview

5.1.1 War ravaged past and fragmented Mustang: prior to the 18th Century

For much of its history Mustang remained a frontier land between Tibet, Ladhak, Jumla and Parbat (Map 5.1). It was a major transit point for the salt-grain trade in the Trans-Himalayan region until the 1960s. The trade required arduous journeys through the world's deepest valleys onto the Tibetan plateau to barter salt, wood and animal hides from Tibet for rice, barley and wheat from Mustang in the south. A desire to control trade routes was a major incentive for both local and regional rulers to wage wars. The outcomes of these wars profoundly shaped and reshaped the political relations and socio-economic dynamics of Mustang. It ultimately fragmented Mustang into four socio-politically distinctive regions (Dhungel, 2002; Haimendrof, 1975; Jackson, 1978; Vinding, 1998). These four regions provided the basis to levy a homestead tax in the post-unification period, and to develop regional level cooperation, associations and institutions.

Until the 10th Century, Mustang was under the control of Western Tibet, but when Tibetan rule weakened, two separate kingdoms emerged, Lo to the North and Serib to the South (Jackson, 1978). Lo controlled much of the land of the present Lo-Tso-Dhium region, the kingdom of Serib included the present territories of southern Lo (Gyling), Baragau, Paachgau and Thaksatsai and Manang in the west. By the 12th Century, three important powers surrounded Mustang; Lhadhak to the far north-west, Gunthang to the northeast, and Jumla to the west. Jumla split Baragaun from the Serib and controlled Lo. Two centuries later, Lo, with the help of Gunthang made a political comeback. The grandson of a Gunthang army general, who liberated Lo from Jumla, founded the royal household from which the present Raja of Lo (king) is descended (Jackson, 1978). When Gunthang's influence over Lo waned in the 16th century, Jumla regained control. The kingdom of Serib ceased to exist. Jumla sent Thakuri (ruling caste) to rule the Baragau region. By then, Parbat in the south had emerged and become a major influence over the Thaksatsai and Paachgau regions.

Figure 9: Regional powers in ancient Mustang
Adopted from on-line maps of Nepal (2010)

By the end of the 18th Century, soldiers from Gorkha under the command of King Prithivi Narayan Shah, the founder of modern Nepal, defeated Jumla, Parbat and another 58 principalities to unify Nepal, ending the long period of conflict described above. These historical events split Mustang into four distinctive socio-political regions; the Lo-Tso-Dhium in the north (the area of Lo), Baragau and Paachgau in the middle and the Thaksatsai region in the south.

5.1.2 Powerful kings and subservient subjects (1800-1846)

In the post-unification period, the king was at the apex of the power hierarchy in the country. All executive, legislative and judicial powers were vested in him. The government was characterised as highly centralised and autocratic. The people of conquered territories were treated as 'subjects' and were exploited politically, as well as economically, often beyond their means, to maximise state revenues. The king of the nation was the lord of the land (Burghrt, 1984) and as such he had proprietary rights over lands as well as all productive resources within the territory. The king had the right to impose taxes for use of the resources. The major types of land tenure were: *raikar,* the crown land, for which tenants had to pay rent to the King; *birta*, tax-free grants of land usually given to priests and members of nobility; and *jagir*, temporary assignment of lands to government employees in lieu of cash remuneration (Regmi, 1976). All land, unless granted as *birta* or *jagir,* required the

people to pay a homestead tax referred to as *serma* in the Nepali language for the right to cultivate it. To maximise revenue, an *ijara* system of tax collection was introduced and the task of revenue collection was entrusted to contractors *(ijaradars)*. Given the subsistence nature of the local economy, the rate of s*erma* imposed on the local people was very high. It could change without any justification of, or consultation with, the people. For example, the *serma* for the Thaksatsai region, which literally means 700 households of Thak, was Rs. 6,900 in 1802 and was it increased to Rs. 13,000.00 in 1811 (Regmi, 1978). The *serma* used to be the major household expense for local people and they were compelled to migrate from the regions when they failed to pay their share of the tax.

Other national revenues were raised by taxing trade. The government was particularly concerned about the advances the British colonial power was making in India. It adopted a protective economic policy, which subsequently closed all the access routes between India and Tibet in the sub-Himalayan hill areas, in a bid to preserve Kathmandu's monopoly as an *entrepôt* for Indo-Tibetan trade. Mustang continued to maintain its strategic importance in trans-Himalayan trade until the 1960s. There was a customs office at Daana, about two to eight days walk, depending on where one is in Mustang, to collect customs duties on goods such as salt, wool, sheep and goats imported to Nepal from Tibet (Vinding, 1998).

While the local people of the southern regions were required to pay a high homestead tax, the new regime was more lenient to the Raja of Lo and his region. The rulers wanted to reduce the administrative burden in these new territories without losing their grip over them. In a shrewd strategy, the regime continued to uphold customary rules and regulation in exchange for absolute loyalty from the people or local rulers of the new territories. This seemingly decentralised policy had two effects: it enabled the local people to identify more easily with the new rulers, than would have been the case if the Government were conceived of in terms of a more distant seat of authority; and it allowed people to maintain their traditional governance system to manage their local affairs (Mahat, 2005).

The new ruler recognised the role the Raja of Lo had played during the 1788-90 war against Tibet in which he fought on the Nepalese side. He was charged to defend the northern border which was more than a month by foot from Kathmandu at this time. As a reward he was given the territories of lower Lo, Manang, Nyishang, Dolpo, amongst others. He was allowed to collect the annual tribute and other occasional fees from these territories (Dhungel, 2002). The Raja of Lo signed a treaty of dependence with Nepal and was required to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 929 and five horses. He continued to pay tribute until 1870. This sub autonomous status brought prosperity to the Raja and the Lo region. Other regions in Mustang had no regional leaders comparable to the Raja of Lo, but they had their village headmen. The new rulers made them responsible for collecting *serma,* which was based on the

household numbers of that time and remained unchanged, regardless of changes in household numbers in years to come (Regmi, 1976; Vinding, 1998).

5.1.3 Rise of the autocratic oligarchic Rana Regime (1848-1951)

In a significant political development in 1846, Janga Bahadur Rana took power from the king and designated himself as the prime minister of the country. This was a major event in Nepal's history as it ushered in the era of Rana oligarchic and autocratic rule and relegated the King to a figurehead role with no political power (Pradhan, 1991).

In marked difference from the previous rulers, the Prime Minister, Janga Bahadur Rana, developed a more conciliatory and supportive policy towards the British Raj (English, 1985). He offered the Nepali troops to serve in India, and made a historical visit to Great Britain and France. Nepali troops helped the British Raj to quell the Sipoy Mutiny in 1857. In return for his support during the mutiny, the British Raj returned part of the Terai, which Nepal had lost in the war with British India in 1815. With the help of the British, the Rana maintained the virtual isolation of Nepal from the world until 1951. These policies, in effect, protected the regime, but also promoted indirect political and economic subjugation to the dominant British colonial power (Bhattarai, 2003) and were also responsible for economic stagnation and the poor development of infrastructure and other services in Nepal.

While Nepal's relationship with the British Raj in India was improving, its relationship with Tibet was at an all-time low. Both countries were at war from 1854 to 1856 over the control of Trans-Himalayan trade. Janga Bahadur Rana visited Mustang to lead the war against Tibet. Unlike previous rulers he did not did not trust the Raja of Lo. He was a staunch Hindu, but the Raja of Lo was a devoted Buddhist with strong socio-cultural ties with Tibet. The loyalty of the Raja of Lo to Nepal was questioned, and in his place, Rana used a Thakali named Balbir from Kobang to act as a bilingual interpreter during the war. Balbir won the confidence of the Rana ruler through his exemplary service. This later helped him in 1870 to secure the customs contract for the 'salt for grain' trade and the title of *Subba*, an office bearer with limited administrative and judicial powers relating to tax collection, law and order (Bista, 1971; Dhungel, 2002). Thereafter customs contracts were awarded to the highest bidder, but with his close connections to Rana, Balbir managed to keep the customs contract and the title of *Subba* exclusively in his family (Bista, 1971). The families of customs contractors generated both political power and enormous wealth, and established themselves as the *de facto* rulers of Mustang, undermining the power and influence of the Raja of Lo and the village heads (Vinding, 1998). The *Subba*'s ascendency also undermined regional and sub-regional level institutions in the Paachgau and Baragau regions. Mustang largely continued to remain a remote and marginalised

district of Nepal. The role of *Subba* as *Chikyap*, an institution above the village level, will be discussed in section 6.5.

5.2   Impact of Rana policies on Mustang

5.2.1   Centralised and coercive Rana rule and environmental policies

After assuming power, Janga Bahadur Rana promulgated a civil code called 'Muluki Ain', which was governed very much by Hindu beliefs and administrative arrangements (Whelpton, 1992). This civil code institutionalised ethnic groups such as Thakali and Gurung into the fold of a Hindu based hierarchical caste system and translated diversity into inequality (Hachhethu, 2003). The code had several provisions for land rights. The King had power to transfer these rights to his subjects. After relegating the king to figurehead status, the Rana hereditary prime minister effectively became the new owner of the land. The Rana rule was highly centralised, feudalistic and autocratic (Pradhan, 1991).

Muluki Ain made no particular reference to environmental resources, but like previous rulers, the Rana regime upheld the customary laws (Hachhethu, 2003). The allocation, use and distribution of water and other natural resources were included broadly under these customary laws. The Rana regime considered the lush green forests of Nepal to be a prime source of capital. The government's forest policy was very much focused on exploiting forests to increase state revenue, particularly in the lowlands. Forests were also extensively used a*s birta* and *jagir* by the rulers to buy the favours of family members, relatives, trusted friends and service holders to help them to stay in power. The conversion of forests into agriculture lands was priority in the hills to boost the state economy and generate revenue (Bajracharya, 1883; Blaikie et. al., 1980; Mahat, 1986). Unlike today, the government had no institutional mechanisms at the district and village levels to manage forest resources.

By the end of the 19th Century, forests in the Terai (low land regions) faced severe destruction. British India had extended the railway networks along the Nepali borders and this had created a very high demand for quality timber for railway sleepers, particularly that of *Shorea rubusta.* Later, in 1927, to capitalise on a flourishing export market in India*,* the Government introduced forest plans which opened the Terai (lowland) and Siwalk (high low lands) regions for forest exploitation (Malla, 2002). Nepal lacked forest-related knowledge and skills, and forest plans and priorities. Forests suffered widespread degradation and exploitation. By 1950, one-third of the country's agricultural and forested land in the Terai was owned by private individuals. The majority belonged to the Rana families (Malla, 2001).

The Rana regime divided the country into 32 administrative districts, mainly to collect taxes and customs duties. In the provision of judicial services, Mustang was part of the much larger Baglung district. People from the ruling Rana family were appointed as 'Bada Hakims' (governors) and charged with maintaining law and order, and revenue collection. Various posts were created to employ family members and trusted friends for government services who were paid with *jagir* and *birta* lands (Panday, D, 1989). Through these networks, close relatives and senior civil and military officials both engaged in this monopolistic trade and maintained the state's monopoly over it. A culture of unprecedented personal enrichment of the ruling family began and was institutionalised at the expense of the majority of people who had to struggle day-to-day for survival.

Unlike in the Terai, no lands or forests in Mustang were given as *birta* or *jagir*. Mustang simply had no cultivable lands other than those already owned by the people. Mustang was not considered an attractive place for rulers and high-ranking government officials. Even traders from the south would not travel beyond Tukuche or Jomsom to barter grain for salt. Those few who braved travelling beyond these villages were pilgrims. There was, however, a long history of migration from the north, Tibet. Many of the new immigrants arrived to protect their old religious orders such as the *Bon* which is considered to be a pre-Buddhist tradition (Jackson, 1984; Vinding, 1998). They intermingled and blended with the people who came before them and contributed to the socio-cultural and religious diversity that we see in Mustang today.

The local people considered forests, pasture areas, water and lands to be the four pillars of local livelihoods and the four critical elements that constitute the village environment. Every village in Mustang was governed by an age-old system referred to in this thesis as the 'village based governance system', comprising the institution of *Ghempa* (Tibetan or local term for the village head) or *Mukhiya* (Nepali term for the village head). Environmental resources were treated as 'commons' instead of open access, and the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* were the legitimate authority to manage these under the regime of the village based governance system. This system is still prevalent in Mustang. The next section will examine the attributes of the village based governance system.

5.2.2   Impacts of Rana policies on village governance institutions in Mustang

Mustang, throughout its history, remained very much a frontier land between regional centres of power. It was considered the most remote (*durgam*) and backward (*pichhadiyeko*) region of Nepal until recently. It is still listed as one of the 17 most remote districts of Nepal and one of eight districts that share the northern border with Tibet.

It was more than nine to ten days from Lo-Manthang, or five to six days from Jomsom, to reach the nearest major town, Pokhara, the gateway to the Annapurna region. The precarious trails cut through

steep mountains and narrow valleys with roaring glacial-fed rivers and a loss of concentration by travellers could mean death. Kathmandu, the country's centre of political power and capital, was almost a months walk away. Communication between Kathmandu and regions such as Mustang was difficult. Apart from a customs contractor who had limited administrative authority, Mustang had neither government offices nor any government officials. The local people were very much on their own in the management of their day-to-day affairs, safeguarding short and long term socio-economic interests, protecting and managing natural resources, and defending the village territories. The people were required to participate and to contribute free labour, sometimes over a month each year, to perform different village-related tasks. These included repairing irrigation channels, managing the distribution of water, maintaining or constructing new trails between villages or to forest and pasture areas. Other typical tasks would be to maintain or construct bridges and monitor fields and forests. Unlike today, support from the Government, donors and non-governmental organisations was neither available nor thinkable. One of my interviewees, a local from Syang recalled *we were on our own ... unlike today there was no support from any organisation. We had to develop rules and regulations, codes of conduct through consultations and discussions, to govern our village and to maintain peace and cooperation.*

Situated within the above geo-political context, a local village based system of governance, headed by the '*Ghempa* and *Mukhiya,* evolved during the long course of Mustang's history. This age-old system of governance is still being practiced, to a greater or lesser extent, in the majority of villages in Mustang, albeit with some adaptations to suit socio-political and economic changes.

The next section describes the present day village-based governance system in Mustang.

5.3   Village governance institutions

5.3.1   Attributes of village governance system and institutions of Ghempa and Mukhiya

The following account of the village governance system in Mustang is based on information collected during my fieldwork in Mustang. In the main, the villagers do not make a distinction between the past and the present day forms and functions of village governance institutions. For this reason, the following discussion is reported in the present tense.

At least four different terms - *Ghempa* (Tibetan meaning the village head), the *Thuimi* (local term meaning the village head)*,* the *Thalu* (Nepali term meaning the village senior) and the *Mukhiya* (Nepali term meaning the village head) - are used to describe the central institution of the village head system of governance in Mustang. The term *Ghempa*, is more commonly used in the Lo and Baragau regions. The local people, however, use the term *Mukhiya* instead of *Ghempa* to communicate with

people from other regions. The term *Thuimi* is popularly used in the Paachgau region. The term *Ghampa* (similar to *Ghempa*) was used in the past in this region to refer to a higher position than *Thuimi.* The majority of villages in Thaksatsai use the term *Mukhiya* to refer to their village heads. I have used the term *Ghempa* to refer to the village head in this thesis, unless making a particular reference to a region where *Mukhiya* and *Thuimi* is the preferred usage.
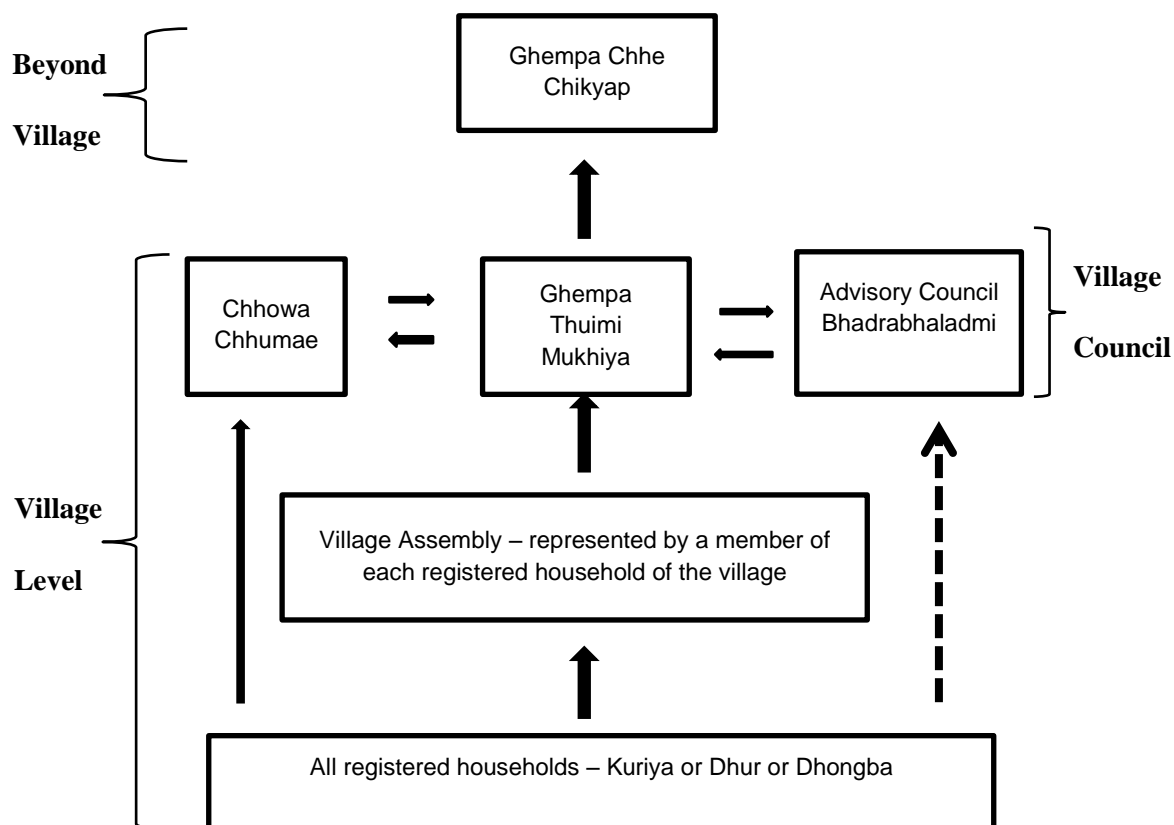
Figure 10: Dominant village governance system prior to the 1950s

Lo-Manthang village, the capital of the Raja of Lo, has both *Ghempa* and *Mithui* and these are important positions in the village governance. The *Ghempa* is considered the village chief and the *Mithui* as the second in command. The Raja of Lo is the supreme chief, referred to as the *Ghempa Chhe* not only for Lo-Manthang, but also for most of the major villages in the Lo region. Despite the recent political change which has removed the Raja of Lo from his role as one of five honorary kings of Nepal, his influence and importance in regional and village affairs has not dwindled. The King and his palaces and monasteries, built by his ancestors, have become major tourist attractions since the

opening of the Lo region to tourism in 1992. These recent developments, in fact, helped to maintain, and even elevate his importance and influence in the region.

The *Ghempa* is considered to be the village chief executive officer, and is the village head. The nomination process, eligibility criteria, terms of service, the formation of the council and the administrative structures associated with the village based governance system varies widely from village to village. The *Ghempa* is assisted by a group of *Chhowa* or *Chhumae* (village foremen) who have day-to-day roles and duties. The number of *Chhowa* varies from village to village depending on village size. Thini and Jomsom villages, for example, have eight *Chhowa* whereas small villages such as Tangya, Dhee, Yaara and Ghara have two *Ghempa,* who also work as *Chhowa.* Because these villages have less than 30 households, the roles of the *Ghempa* and the *Chhowa* are not differentiated as in bigger villages. The authority and roles of the *Ghempa* also vary from village to village. The *Ghempa* of Lo-Manthang, for example, has wide discretionary powers, but in other villages, the *Ghempa* is mainly responsible for enforcing and monitoring rules and regulations that are agreed and approved by the village assembly. Beside the executive duties, the *Ghempa* is responsible for providing judicial services. The *Ghempa* appoints advisors to the village council, which is consulted about all village-related matters such as turns for fixing irrigation, opening pasture areas for grazing, fixing agricultural calendars, calling for village labour contributions for repair and maintenance of village infrastructure and so on. The village council adjudicates inter and intra village conflicts and other grievances that the villagers may have brought to the attention of the *Ghempa.*

The next section examines the processes involved in the village governance.

5.3.2   Nomination process of Ghempa/Mukhiya

The process to nominate the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* and other village level officials varies widely from village to village. Reasons for such variations are not consistent, but appear to depend mainly on two factors; the size of the village and population, and the history and socio-economic characteristics such as the presence of dominant families or a strong social stratification, which is prevalent in most major villages in the Lo region. The *Ghempa* is not a hereditary title, but a consensually nominated position. However, in villages such as Ghasa, Lete and Kobang of Thaksatsai where the title *Mukhiya* is more commonly used to refer to the village head, sons of the previous the *Mukhiyas* hold the *Mukhiya* position in their respective villages. In one case, a *Mukhiya* from Lete who had emigrated to Tatopani, a village in Myagdi district, returns to his village twice a year to chair the main meetings. He has appointed a junior *Mukhiya* who carries out routine village tasks in his absence. The *Mukhiya* remains in the position unless they wish to resign or villagers decide to change them. There were no reports of the latter case. Despite this seemingly hereditary system, a local informant claimed that *it is a democratic process* and further justified his statement by saying *villagers have the right to change the*

Mukhiya, if he is found to have made mistakes. If he continues to do good job, we see no reason to change him and have no problem in transferring the position to his son after he dies.

In villages such as Kunjo, Taglung and Tukuche in the Thaksatsai region, the *Mukhiya* position is held only by 'Chan Thakali'. Chan Thakali used to be the dominant group of people in the Thaksatsai region, but they are now in the minority in Kunjo, Taglung and Tukuche villages. *Mukhiyas* in these villages are therefore treated more as figureheads. They perform village rituals (*pujas*) to local deities, and coordinate with the Council of 13 Mukhiya, representing the original 13 villages in Thaksatsai region on socio-cultural matters. The council only acts for Chan Thakali only which includes four patrilineal clans - Sherchan, Bhattachan, Gauchan and Tulachan. As the people of Paachgau consider the Paachgau region as their 'original homeland', Chan Thakali consider the Thaksatsai region as theirs. Regional institutions and their importance in maintaining regional identities and relations, and protecting resources within their territories will be discussed later.

Marpha village has a very different system of nominating the village head, referred as the *Thuimi*. Unlike other villages in Mustang, the council of Thuimi in this village comprises eight representatives, two each from four patrilineal clans of the Marphali Thakali. The four patrilineal clans are Hirachan, Jwarchan, Pannachan and Lalchan. All households of patrilineal clans must volunteer to serve in the village council on a rotational basis. Even those householders who have emigrated, but have maintained household status in the village, must take their turn. Marpha villagers nominate the senior most among the *Thuimi*, by age, as the head *Thuimi*. The position rotates every three months, i.e., the youngest being the last one to take up the position. The *Thuimi* of Marpha serves for two years. Marpha villagers also nominate a treasurer, responsible for keeping the village accounts, and a secretary, responsible for keeping village records. These positions are also shared on a rotational basis.

In the majority of villages in the Baragau and Lo regions, the village head is commonly referred to as *Ghempa*. Only *Dhongba* households are eligible to become *Ghempa* on a rotational basis. *Dhongba* is linked to a land inheritance system, referring both to land allotments and the households who hold these allotments. Usually the eldest son becomes the *Dhongba* of that particular household. Parents who bequeath property to eligible sons are referred as *Ghenchang*. Male siblings who do not inherit parental property are referred as *Farang* and daughters are referred to as *Marang*. Each household is allocated a certain number of *Dhongba*, usually between one and three, proportionally increasing their contribution to village work. For example, if a village requires work to repair irrigation channels, the household counted as two *Dhongba* has to provide two workers for it. Similarly, the household needs to serve as *Ghempa* and *Chhowa* twice. In return, it is allowed two turns to irrigate its lands compared with one turn for a one *Dhongba* household.

In Lo-Manthang only Bista households are nominated for the *Ghempa* position. Unlike in other villages in the Lo region, social stratification in this village is still strongly observed. Households in Lo-Manthang are divided into three groups; *kutak* (noble class) who use Bista as their surname, *phalwa* (commoner class) who use Gurung as their surname and *ghara* (the lowest class) who use Bishwokarma or Bikka as their surnames. Other village positions such as *Mithui and Chhumae* are held by the Gurung and Bikka. The latter group live outside the main village near the river and are referred to as *khola* (river) people.

5.3.3   Representation and eligibility criteria

All villages in Mustang have a system of registering households, referred to as *dhur* (in the local dialect) or *kuriya* (in Nepali). To qualify for the *Ghempa*, one must come from a *kuriya* (registered household) in Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions. In Paachgau villages, the *Thuimi* (a popularly used term in this region) are nominated through the village assembly attended by all household members. In the Thini and Syang villages of Paachgau there is no tradition of rotating *Thuimi* positions, they are nominated by two neighbourhoods referred to as *phopen thowa* (big neighbourhood) and *phopen chyangba* (small neighbourhood). *Phopen thowa* nominates Thuimi from the *phopen chyangba* and vice versa. *We tried to maintain a balance, for example, if phopen chyangba nominates a sojo (gentle) Thuimi the phopen thowa would nominate a chalakh (clever) Thuimi* said a villager from Thini. In the majority of villages in the Baragau and Lo-Tso-Dhuin regions, the *Ghempa* position is shared on a rotational basis and only *Dhongba(s)* are eligible for the role.

In the Lo and Baragau regions, villagers are divided into two groups; *Dhongba* in one group and *Farang-Marang* and *Ghenchang* in another group. *Dhongba* wield considerable power and influence in these regions, compared with other groups of people, because they hold more water shares for irrigation. Unlike in Paachgau where the water for irrigation is distributed from one sub-division of fields to another, in the Baragau and Lo regions they irrigate their fields on a rotational basis, regardless of where their fields are located. The date and turn for irrigation are fixed in advance for a household. No other households are allowed to irrigate their fields during someone else's turn unless there are prior arrangements between users. This system explains why households with large landholdings can be accounted more than one *Dhongba*. *Farang-Marang* and *Ghenchang* households have to contribute less to village work compared with *Dhongba*. Depending on the type of village work, the *Ghempa,* in consultation with his advisors, decides whether to involve all households in the village or only *Dhongba* to perform specific tasks.

In some villages such as Chhusang and Tsaile, all households have to take a turn to serve as *Ghempa*; even immigrants if they are staying in a house belong to an absentee *Dhongba* and cultivating the associated lands. In most villages, such entitlement is not available to immigrants. This relatively

recent change in village level institutions is linked to socio-economic and demographic changes where Mustang as a whole is facing increased out-migration of local people, making it difficult to find a local person willing to serve as the *Ghempa*. The out-migration of local people is also the reason for introducing a rotational system of appointing the *Ghempa.*

Lo-Manthang has a slightly different system of village governance. The Raja of Lo, who has a palace there, is considered the *Ghempa Chhe* (the supreme chief) of the village. He intervenes in village matters only after all other authorities down the chain fail. The position of *Ghempa* in Lo-Manthang is rotated annually among 12 households of Bista (increased from eight households to 12 in the last 25 years). The *Ghempa* is the executive officer of the village. Lo-Manthang also has two *Mithuis*, one nominated by the Raja of Lo and the other nominated by the *Ghempa*. *Mithuis* mediate to disputes within the village. Matters not resolved at their level are referred to the *Ghempa*. The *Mithuis* are also responsible for keeping all the village's important documents. The village nominates six *Chhumae* (village foremen), one of whom is referred as the *Chhumae Ama*, the head *Chhumae*. The *Chhumae* consult on the day-to-day village operation and issues with the *Mithuis*, and if these are not resolved at this level, they are referred to the *Ghempa.* Unlike other villages in Mustang, in Lo-Manthang only Gurung households serve as *Chhumae*. If issues and problems are not settled at the *Ghempa* level, they are referred to the Raja of Lo whose verdict is considered final.

In all localities the *Ghempa* is responsible for overseeing the work of *Chhowa*, enforcing village laws, calling meetings, safeguarding village documents, overseeing forests and pasture area management. The *Ghempa* is also responsible for the oversight of the monasteries and other cultural and religious institutions within the village, including organising regular village *pujas* (rituals or worships) to village deities. All villages in Mustang have deities which are worshipped annually to protect the village from bad spirits and to promote peace and prosperity. Some villages own monasteries. The village assembly appoints a small team, if deemed necessary, to oversee management of the monasteries. The Thini, Syang and Marpha villages, for example, have a separate team nominated every two years who are responsible for helping the head lama (priests) and fellow monks to manage the village monasteries. There are some private monasteries in Mustang, the management of which is not the responsibility of the villagers.

The next section will describe the roles of the village advisory council and the representative structures in relation to environmental governance. A profile of the village-based governance system across Mustang is available in Appendix 1.

5.3.4   Village council and functions

A Village Council is usually made up of a group of people locally referred to as *bhadrabhaladmi* (literally meaning gentlemen or respectable persons) who act as advisors to the *Ghempa*. In most villages, the *Ghempa* uses his discretionary power to nominate these advisors. They usually represent a group of people who are both influential and of a good reputation within the village.

The *Ghempa* may nominate people of his choice, but in most cases he takes a balanced approach to form the council. In the Thini and Syang villages, for example, two advisors are selected from each *tol* (neighbourhood) or ward. In other villages the *Ghempa* invites the people they trust to the meeting as and when needed. There is neither a fixed rule nor a fixed number of nominated advisors. Advisors also have no fixed term or any formal obligation to the village head. In most cases, where there is a need for the village council to meet, the *Ghempa* provides the names of people he wishes to consult to the *Chhowa* who visits the individual households and invites them to the meeting. The *Ghempa* consults advisors on all matters pertaining to the village. There seems to be an unspoken rule that the Ghempa would not make a decision alone. A *Ghempa* of Muktinath told me: *we always consult bhaladmi* (a short term for bhadrabhaladmi) *for all matters that are beyond the day-to-day responsibility of Ghempa. Without consulting them we make no decisions*. The ex-headman of Syang expressed a similar view: *Thuimi do not dare to make decisions without consulting villagers. They first consult mehchans* (local term for advisors, appointed one from each ward). *If the matters are not resolved at this level, they consult bhaladmi (advisors), and if the issue is not resolved at this level, a village assembly is called.*

5.3.4.1   The village justice system

The village council provides judicial and executive functions for the village. The procedure would be for the *Ghempa,* in consultation with the council, to call for a village assembly if there is a need for input and support from the villagers. The *Ghempa* in consultation with the village council makes such a decision and it is then communicated to the villagers by the *Chhowa. The Chhowa* walks around the village calling out the message loudly. Villagers are informed of the date, time, venue and the amount they have to pay as a fine if they fail to attend the village assembly. A local leader of Muktinath told me that w*ithout village consultation no serious decisions would be made*.

The *Ghempa* in consultation with the Village Council is responsible for overseeing village affairs as well as managing wider social-political and economic relations. In this context his main responsibilities include managing inter-village disputes. These disputes generally relate to water shares or turns to take water for irrigation and may involve conflict between neighbours. These may also include taking actions against villagers who have breached village decisions regarding the use of forest resources or pasture areas or have encroached on village lands.

An individual seeking justice for issues related to disputes over water use with neighbours or land boundaries or any grievance can meet with the *Ghempa* personally, if villagers have no other intermediaries such as the *Mithuis* in Lo-Manthang. This involves presenting a white scarf with a bottle of local spirit (*rakshi*) in the Baragau and Lo regions. In the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions the gift is five or ten rupees with a white scarf. Once he explains the issue, the *Ghempa* invites all conflicting parties and council members to meet. All parties are given the opportunity to express their views then the parties in dispute are asked to retire so that the *Ghempa* and the council can discuss the evidence before reaching a verdict. Once all the council members agree on the verdict, all parties involved in the dispute are called back to the meeting. The *Ghempa* serves tea or *rakshi* (local alcoholic drink) to all attending the meeting. He generally gives a long background talk such as telling them the importance of keeping the peace in the village and the importance of working together for the good of the village before delivering his verdict. He also advises them of alternative options for justice if they are not happy with the council's verdict. He makes it clear that if the person chooses to do this, there will be no help from the village as the village will stand by its verdict. If the parties are satisfied with the verdict, they are asked to follow the meeting's decision. This usually involves a fine for the party found guilty. In most cases, fines are levied on all conflicting parties, although the one who is seen as the offender is fined more severely and asked not to repeat such mistake in the future. The *Ghempa* asks them to sign a document referred as a *milap patra* (agreement paper). The fines are used to cover the cost of the meeting and the remaining money is added to the village funds.

5.3.5 Chhowa

For the day-to-day administration, the village head is supported by a team of *Chhowa* (*Katuwal* in Nepali). They are also known as *Chhumae* in Lo-Manthang. *Chhowa* (foremen or village criers) are the frontline village officials responsible for enforcing the village rules and regulations. The number of *Chhowa* corresponds with the size of the village. In small villages, mostly in the Lo region, the *Ghempa* and *Chhowa* positions are shared by the same individuals. Jomsom and Thini appoint eight *Chhowa*, four from each village. These villages have grouped households into *phopen thowa* (big neighbourhoods) and *phopen chyangba* (a small neighbourhood) and appoint two *Chhowa* each. Despite the name big and small, the number of households belonging to each *phopen* is roughly the same. In villages which have more than two *Chhowa*, one of them would be appointed as the head *Chhowa* who is mainly responsible for overseeing water sources and ensuring smooth operation of the irrigation system and to protect the high pasture areas and forests. Other *Chhowa* work under him.

Chhowa are mainly responsible for overseeing the maintenance of irrigation channels, ensuring the equitable distribution of water, protection of agricultural fields from straying livestock, monitoring forest and pasture areas for monitoring, assisting Ghempa/Mukhiya to organize village meetings, and

informing villagers about village council decisions, such as, to call meetings or the voluntary labour requirements or to remind villagers of new bans or restrictions.

All registered households, regardless of whether they become the *Ghempa* or not, have to take a turn to serve as the C*hhowa* for a year on a rotational basis. The village's secretary maintains a record of all households and turns to become the *Chhowa* are signalled well in advance. There is no exception to this rule.

The next section discusses how the village laws are made.

5.3.6   The village assembly and village laws

The village assembly is the legislative body which makes all the important decisions which are treated as the' village laws'. Village council meetings must be attended by a member from all eligible households in the village. Absentees are heavily fined. The village assembly provides an important space for social interaction. This is where villagers are free to express their grudges and even file complaints about their village heads and other village officials. All village officials have to take an oath to fulfil their duties and responsibilities with honesty and to the best of their abilities by touching a religious book (scripture) at the village assembly. The village head monks (priests) perform the oath ceremony. The religious book is also be used to rectify any mistake the village official may have committed during their tenure. They are asked to touch the book and speak the truth to counter charges against them.

Some villages, for example Marpha, have a complaints box, which is opened at the end of the village council term and its contents read out. If the council members are found guilty, they are punished by the village assembly. *We even have a story of killing a Thuimi by throwing him over a cliff for his bad deeds*, said the present *Thuimi* of Marpha village. The village assembly is the venue for social bonding and the creation of village solidarity. The village assembly is organised twice a year – April/May and October/November – before the summer and after the winter harvesting seasons. It provides the source of authority, power and influence for the *Ghempa* and legitimacy for the village system of governance.

. Generally, the village head is nominated at the April/May meeting and the handover takes place at the October/November meeting. At this meeting, the *Ghempa* and his officials are required to present all important decisions and an annual financial report. At the April/May meeting, villagers are required to return the interest on any loans from the village fund, and at the October/November meeting, they have to return the principal with the interest, or failing that, their guarantors have to do

so. The loans can be renewed or rolled over to new recipients, depending on the financial position of the loan takers and their guarantors.

The village assembly is also responsible for reviewing and amending the current rules and regulations. Usually, the amendment of rules and regulations is done every two to three years. Marpha village reviews rules and regulations every three years. Syang and Thini are flexible, but usually review rules and regulations every two to three years. Chhusang village reviews its rules and regulations every 10 years before the next rotation for the *Mukhiya* position starts.

All decisions made at village assemblies are recorded and read out for a final check. Once all agree, they become the laws of the village and any breach of these is severely punished; in an extreme case this may include expulsion from the village or the termination of water use or forest use rights. *Village laws are stronger than the King's laws,* an interviewee from Thini told me. A former *Ghempa* of Dhee pointed out:

> *Our village can function without the King's law, but cannot function without the village laws. How can you ensure there is an equitable distribution of water shares, regular maintenance of irrigation channels, rotational use of pasture areas and barring others from using our pasture land, to fight with other villages to protect our lands and resources? We need the Ghempa and village laws to take care of all these ... and these cannot be done by the government.*

5.3.7 Role of village governance institutions in relation to the environment

In day-to-day conversation, the local people commonly use the term *hamro* meaning ours, or *hamro gauko*, meaning our village's, or *hamro chhetrako*, meaning our region's, to refer to the lands, water, pastures and forests within their territories. The local people believe that each village has full ownership and control over these resources. These beliefs and assertion of ownership and rights are founded on a long history of control, use, association, knowledge, and regulation over these resources. Lands, water, pasture and forests are considered to be the four pillars of village livelihoods, and the four critical elements of the village environment. The management of environmental resources is an integral part of the village-based governance system. The honour, reputation and influence of the institution of *Ghempa* have always depended on how effectively these natural resources are managed for the benefits of village and villagers.

The role of the *Ghempa* in regulating or managing these environmental resources is examined below.

5.3.7.1 Lands

Authority: Under the leadership of the *Ghempa*, the village council is fully responsible for controlling the use and protection of lands within their territories. All villages have their territories

well recognized and in most cases are demarcated using natural features such as rivers, mountain ridges, large rocks or cliffs. Temples and *chhortens* (religious monuments) are also used to demarcate village boundaries. Some villages have erected stones and painted them with white lime to mark their borders, particularly in areas without distinctive natural features with a history of conflicts over boundaries.

Ownership: Every village treats their lands as their indisputable property. Their claim of ownership over lands is based on a long history of use and occupation. Chhusang, for example, was relocated to the present location centuries ago. There are two other villages between their current and previous settlements, but because of the historical tie, the people of Chhusang have retained their ownership over the land located at their previous village. There are presently four tea-houses on their original land and only people from Chhusang are allowed to run them. They pay a small tax to the village for this right.

Every village has kept old documents (*purano kagaaz*) relating to their environmental resources, given to them by different regional powers during the course of their history, some of which pre-date the unification of Nepal. The documents are used to authenticate village ownership. In the Lo region, these documents are marked with the royal seal of previous Rajas of Lo. These are used as evidence to verify their authority and ownership over lands and resources. All lands (pasture areas, forests and non-agricultural lands) within the village territories, except those owned by individual villagers, are treated as village lands.

Rules and regulations: The *Ghempa,* in consultation with the village council, can sell village lands. In most cases, decisions of this nature are made at the village assembly. The village keeps the income from the sale in the village funds. Village lands are sold only to registered household members. In the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions, villagers are free to sell their private lands to outsiders. However, in most of the villages in the Baragau and Lo regions, villagers are not allowed to sell their lands to outsiders, even if they decide to emigrate. They can sell their land only to fellow villagers. *We want to maintain our samaaj* (society). *If outsiders come they would not understand our society, would not follow our rules and regulations and would not maintain our secrets* said a local from Gyaker, explaining the rationale behind the ban on land sales to outsiders. Even people who have emigrated generations ago still maintain their household status in Mustang. A family of Kagbeni, for example, who have been living in India for two generations still maintain *Dhongba* status there and they contribute to village work and affairs as required. This tradition makes it very difficult to estimate the local population size. Even when people are not present in the village, they are counted as active households for village work and other village-related matters.

<u>Access and rights</u>: One of the main jobs of the *Ghempa* is to protect the village territories. Any form of encroachment on lands by neighbouring villages is taken very seriously. When there is a dispute with a neighbouring village over lands, the *Ghempa* asks a member from each household in the village to participate in meetings to decide on actions the village deems necessary. This may involve skirmishing with the neighbouring village. A household which fails to participate in such matters may lose their entitlements as villagers, or may face other serious penalties such as heavy fines. Villagers have to share all costs incurred during the course of protecting territory and it can be quite expensive.

Lands are also owned by monasteries. Monasteries may rent out lands to the village people or they may even sell them. The monastic committee has full rights over their land, but they must consult with the village when they seek to make major decisions such as selling land.

5.3.7.2 Water

Mustang is in a rain shadow area. Except in the southern part, it receives very little rain. Water sources, such as rivers and streams, play a major role in the shape, size and layout and spread of the villages and fields (*khets*). Water gives life and adds dramatic colours to the otherwise starkly lunar landscapes, particularly in the Lo and Baragau regions. Water is the source of village prosperity, but it is also the cause of inter and intra village disputes and conflicts. Water availability and volume are key factors in determining the number of crops in the Lo region. Apart from Dhe and Tangya, all other villages have only one cropping season in the year. However, some villages such as Yara and Ghara believe if they had more water they could grow two crops. Villages such as Dhe and Samjong in the Lo region were facing a major water scarcity during my field visit. A Nepali national daily had recently declared Dhe village as the first refugee of climate change after their water sources nearly dried up (Shah, 2010).

<u>Authority and ownership</u>: Every village claims authority and ownership over all water bodies such as lakes, rivers, ponds and streams within their village territories. The village also claims ownership over water if it originates on their lands, but flows over lands belonging to another village before returning to their land. For example, Lo-Manthang has a water source that originates in their territory, but flows through the adjoining village's territories before returning to its lands. The adjoining village is barred from using this water. Water rights are also claimed on the basis of historical use. The source of the stream that the people of Tetang use for irrigation is located within its territories, but the people of Tangbe use the seepage from the same source for their irrigation. Any attempt to minimise water seepage by Tetang would be fiercely opposed by the people of Tangbe. The ownership of water in such cases is often a source of contention between villages, particularly in the Lo and Baragau regions, where water is a scarce resource.

Access and rights: Water is used for three main purposes: drinking and washing, running water mills and irrigation. Water resources were not used for hydroelectric power generation until the 1970s. As all households in the village are involved in agriculture, managing water resources fairly to meet the irrigation and other needs of people is one the main responsibilities of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*. Mustang does not have landless people. Except for the Raja of Lo, very few people own agriculture lands outside their villages. A person who owns fields outside his village has to become a household member of the village in whose jurisdiction the land lies, to obtain rights and access to water and other natural resources. The access and rights come only if the person contributes to village work and shares other responsibilities, including serving as a *Chhowa*. Difficulty in meeting such obligations has limited ownership of lands outside natal villages.

Rules and regulations: Every village above Tukuche has built elaborate networks of irrigation channels and the land is subdivided for irrigation purposes. Rules and regulation, for rights and access to irrigation water sources, vary from village to village. In Paachgau and Tukuche villages, water is distributed from subdivision to subdivision. People who own *khets* (fields) within subdivisions irrigate them turn-by-turn, and from top to bottom. The *Ghempa* and *Chhowas* determine dates, time and frequency for irrigation and villagers are informed about these in advance. Once a farmer finishes irrigating, they inform the neighbour whose turn comes next. People who misuse water or overflow water into neighbouring fields face heavy fines. The *Ghempa* and *Chhowa* decide the amount of the fines at the village council meeting, depending on the extent of damage caused in the neighbouring field. The *Ghempa,* in consultation with the village council, determines dates for harvesting and other field related activities for the village. No one is allowed to harvest or plough fields before the dates are fixed and notified to villagers by the *Chhowa*.

In the Baragau and Lo villages, *dhongba* status is used as a basis for distributing water shares, which are divided equally among these households. Households, which have no *dhongba* status, have to join with households that do to be eligible for water shares. If a household is considered to have land that may account for a half *dhongba* it has to join a household with similar status or the one which has more than one, but less than two, to meet the deficit and be eligible for the water share. The water shares are also worked out based on crop types with more days for wheat and barley and less for buckwheat. Water is distributed on a rotational basis. Three *paara* (discs) are cast three times in the name of each *dhongba* to fix the turn for irrigation. A *dhongba* with the highest score would get the first turn and so forth. *Dhongba* have full right to use the water on allocated days, but they can share with others. A *dhongba* who gets two days for irrigation, can irrigate its fields irrespective of where they are located for those two days. If there is still water left for irrigation, it can share that with other neighbours. In this system of water sharing, people with less land are disadvantaged. They may have

to contribute labour to repair irrigation channels, but would always have to depend on other households with a larger share to enable them to irrigate their lands.

5.3.7.3 Pasture areas

<u>Authority and ownership</u>: Every village has control over all pasture areas within their territories. Every household has access to, and the right to use, village pasturelands to graze their animals. While animals such as goats and yaks are allowed to graze all year round on a rotational basis, animals such as *jhokyp* or *jho* (a hybrid of a yak and oxen) and horses are allowed to graze in high pasture areas only during the summer time. The village council makes the decision on the dates and duration for villagers to take their animals to the alpine pasture areas. They are not allowed to bring back animals earlier or later than the prescribed dates. Any breach results in a fine.

<u>Rules and regulations</u>: Alpine pasture areas are also sources of many edible, medicinal and aromatic plants. Villagers are allowed to collect these only in specified periods, usually in the summer. Alpine areas are also sites of considerable biodiversity. Villagers do not have any particular rules to govern wildlife. The people of Mustang do not hunt, primarily because only very few possess guns and the areas where game animals are found are very remote and at high altitudes. Previously villagers were encouraged to kill wild animals such as snow leopards, which were considered a threat to their livestock; however, wildlife hunting has been banned since Mustang became part of the Annapurna Conservation Area in 1993.

<u>Access and rights</u>: Villages are not allowed to graze their animals on pasture areas owned by another village. If this occurs and it becomes known the *Ghempa s*ends the *Chhowa* to bring the animals back to the village. Villagers are generally well informed about their village and neighbouring villages' lands so it becomes obvious quite quickly if trespass occurs and where the animals have originated. Once identified, the *Chhowa* sends a message to the owner's village to inform them of the animals' whereabouts. The owners are allowed claim their animals only after paying the fine imposed by the village holding them.

Pasture areas are a key resource for all villages in the Lo region, which has no forests, and where the condition of the pasture areas is poor. Every village owns a large area of pasture and maintaining their rights to graze over larger areas is the way the people deal with the poor grazing condition.

The majority of people in the Lo region keep goats. Yaks are popular among northern villages. Yaks are kept for butter, milk and meat, whereas goats are kept for meat. Goat pellets and yak dung are the major sources of energy for cooking, heating, and fertiliser. Sheep are usually imported from Tibet, particularly in September/October and sold in the south for the Dasai festival. Animals such as horses

are kept for riding, as pack animals, and for threshing crops. *Jho*, mules and donkey are kept for transporting goods. Animal husbandry is integral to the local economy and livelihoods.

The people of Paachgau and Thaksatsai do not use dried dung for fuel as in the Baragau and Lo regions, but keep animals for fertiliser, transportation and agricultural work such as ploughing. Mules in these regions are kept particularly for transportation. As in the Lo and Baragau regions, skilled animal husbandry is foremost. Pasture areas play a vital role in supporting local livelihoods in Mustang and for this reason the pasture areas are strictly regulated and managed through the village system of governance. All pasture areas in the Thaksatsai region are used as a commons by all villages, whereas villages such as Jharkot, Muktinath, Purang, Khinga and Lupra in the Baragau region have common pastures, which are used only by member villages.

5.3.7.4   Forests

Authority: Forests are the main resources in the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions. Forests in Thini, Syang, and Marpha are located on high ridges. It takes seven to eight hours to visit these forests, collect firewood and return home. Chhairo and Chimang have forests very close to their villages. The majority of villages in Thaksatsai either have a forest close by or are surrounded by forests. Pines (*Pinus wallichiana*), birch (*Betula utilis*) and junipers *(Juniperus wallichiana* and *squamata*) are the common species found in Paachgau and on the higher ridges of the Thaksatsai region. The Thaksatsai region has mixed broad-leaved forests including *Acer* species in the southern part.

There are only a few forest patches in the Baragau region and these are located far from the villages. The forest around Venna is owned by Chhusang. The people of Chhusang need to pass through two villages to reach this forest, a journey taking 9-10 hours. The village council fixes dates for the collection of firewood from this forest. The local people take their mules and *jho* and camp there to maximise the firewood collected within the permitted period.

The Lo region is almost devoid of forests. Those few patches that exist comprise mainly of juniper species (*Juniperus indica*) and are located very far from the main villages on high mountain ridges. Thorny vegetation such as *Caragana geraldina* and *Hippophae tibetana* are common in regions above Jomsom. *Caragana geraldina*, particularly its yellow flowers, is considered a very good fodder plant for goats and is found in abundance between Samar and Gyiling villages. For this reason goats from Gyiling village are considered the best in Mustang. Such bushes are also used for firewood, along with goat pellets and yak dung in the Baragau, and Lo regions. Poplar (*Populus ciliata*) is planted along the streams or irrigation channels near Lo and Baragau villages. Timber from this species is used as building materials, especially for roofing. Branches are used for firewood.

<u>Ownership</u>: All forests belong to villages. No forests in Mustang are privately owned or owned by religious institutions. Some patches of forests are treated as sacred, particularly in the Thaksatsai region, but these also belong to the village. The village has full ownership of the forests and controls the access to and rights over forest resources. There are some common forests, either owned by several villages within the region or all villages of the region. Muktinath, Purang, Jharkot, Khinga and Lupra share a common forest. Similarly, the Paachgau region has a common forest shared by the five original villages of Panchgoan.

<u>Rules and regulations</u>: *The protection of forests is the responsibility of all villagers* said a former *Thuimi* of Thini. Neighbouring villages are banned from using forest resources unless they have a prior agreement. Thini and Syang have an agreement made over a century ago whereby Syang people are allowed to use the *Chhapraban* or Chhapra forest that is located within Thini's territories. Syang pays a tribute *(syamal)* of Rs. 301 to Thini for this use right. The people of Syang are allowed only to collect dead wood for firewood from this forest. Both villages have jointly demarcated forest areas by erecting big stones painted with white lime every 3-4 metres on the boundary. Every three years, representatives from both villages inspect the demarcation stones and repaint them. Both villages take turns to establish the boundaries and paint the stones together. A local from Syang told me the reason why the people of Thini allowed Syang to use their forests was: *The people of Thini have a soft spot for us. We are the original villages in this region, belong to the same group of people, we intermarry and have relatives (phope-mahme) on both sides. We have strong socio-cultural ties.*

Forests in Mustang are mainly used for firewood and timber. Only in southern Mustang are forests also used for fodder. Villagers are allowed to collect only dead wood for firewood. They do not need village permission for this. Firewood collection and stacking on rooftops are popular winter activities. It is normal for adults, particularly males, to go to the forest early on winter mornings with *jhopa* returning home by the early afternoon with fully laden animals. Winter is the time to collect dried pine needles, juniper and cypress, which are used for animal bedding and composting. Juniper and cypress are also used to make incense. The village entrusts the *Ghempa* to fix the period when pine needles, juniper and cypress can be collected. The *Chhowa* walks around the village informing everyone of the open day details. Until the mid 1980s, firewood was the only source of energy for cooking and heating in the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions. Resinous pine wood was the main source of lighting. Firewood is free for villagers, but they are prohibited from selling it to other villages. A former *Thuimi* of Syang village told me:

> *We make decisions about our forests. No one is allowed to collect or cut down green trees. There is a village ban (bandej) on it. All village-related rules and regulations are enforced by Thuimi. We change our rules and regulations every three years and we have been doing this since the ancient time. We would review rules (niyam), worthy (jaayaj) rules would be kept*

and najaayej (non-worthy) rules would be abandoned. If there is need to have new rules we discuss about these with villagers and decide on them.

Felling green trees is strictly prohibited. Green trees are used only for special purposes or auspicious occasions, such as to make poles to hoist Buddhist prayer flags or to decorate a wedding ceremony or *puja* (ritual). Villagers have to seek the approval of the *Ghempa* before they are allowed to cut down green trees for these purposes. Villagers also need to seek the *Ghempa's* permission to acquire minor forest products such as bamboo.. This is the general practice in the southern villages of the Thaksatsai region. Forests in this region are rich with bamboo and other minor forest products. Green trees are used for human cremation which does not require permission from the *Ghempa.*

Villages can also restrict the use of forests. Such decisions are usually taken at the village assembly meetings and are enforced by the *Ghempa.* There is a ban on felling trees that are visible from the villages of Jomsom, Syang and Marpha. Villagers are required to go further away to collect wood. The *Ghempa* fix a quota for firewood in Muktinath. Every household is now allowed to collect only 21 *bhari* (head loads) of firewood. The original quota was reduced from 50 *bhari* to 25 *bhari* in 2003/4 due to a firewood scarcity.

In the past the village used to give permission to collect timber for household use, the construction of new or repair of old houses, or the extension of existing houses. The *Ghempa* in consultation with the village council used to grant the permission for the timber with a nominal fee which used to go to the village funds. The right to issue permits now rests with the Conservation Area Management Committee (CAMC) which will be discussed in Chapter 8. The villages still have strict rules about timber. The permit holders must collect the timber and transport it to the village within stipulated dates. The sale and transportation of timber outside village territories was strictly prohibited in the past.

The *Ghempa* is responsible for monitoring forests on a regular basis. A Jomsom villager observed:

> *All our forests are above villages ... it is easier for us to find out if somebody has broken village laws ... the person has to bring wood home and everybody keeps an eye on everyone else, therefore, when somebody is found doing suspicious activities like stacking an unusually high amount of timber at home ... we report to the Ghempa.*

Usually the *Chhowa* is the first person to check on any suspicious activities and are also responsible for checking timber and other forest products to ensure the authorised person has collected no more than the permitted amount. The *Ghempa* check with the council members, and if needed, more people are invited to go on forest patrols, which are usually carried out twice a year, one before the harvest season in summer and the second one after the harvest season in late autumn. According to one of my local informants, these are times when poachers become active, particularly to kill musk deer for their

very valuable aromatic pods or glands. If as a result of these patrols people, either villagers or outsiders, are found violating village rules and regulations, the *Ghempa,* in consultation with the village councils, imposes large fines.

5.4   *Ghempa Chhe* and *Chikyap*

The authority and influence of the *Ghempa/Mukhiya* is very much limited to the village level. During the Rana period, there were several regional institutions, which could deal with inter-village disputes and collect the homestead tax. These institutions in the Baragau, Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions were not as effective as the Raja of Lo in dealing with the wider socio-political relationships. This may explain why the Raja of Lo and his region received favourable treatment compared with the other regions in Mustang in the post-unification period. The influence and authority of the Raja of Lo as well as other regional institutions, weakened after the rise of the *Subba*, the customs contractors, during the Rana regime. The *Subba* used their economic power and political connections to attempt to establish themselves as regional leaders in Mustang after the end of salt trade monopoly in 1940s. The present chairman of the *Baragau Samaj* (society) based in Jomsom provided an insight in this:

> *Baragau had many bandej documents (*documents with village rules and regulations*). They also had tamra patra (*documents with royal seals*). They were all kept in a box. High Lamas from Lupra and Chhungor were given the responsibility to protect the box; one Lama received the box and another received the key. They were considered honest and religious so people trusted them.*

He further added:

> *The council of Baragau used to hold a meeting every year on a rotational basis and go over old documents to resolve disputes between villages. However, during the Rana time, Tukuche became the most powerful village. Subba had good contact with the Rana and they were given the right to oversee Mustang. During that time most of the Baragau documents vanished. I later found Shankarman Subba was a Chikyap (external village chief) of Baragau villages and he had acquired most of these documents. He had a box full of documents. The people used to go to Shankarman with a sheep as a gift, bow down and request him to come to the village with documents to settle their disputes. He ate the sheep but never returned our documents.*

Baragau currently does not have a regional level institution. There are some NGOs registered as Baragau Samaj (society) in Jomsom and Kathmandu, which have been helping fellow villagers in need, who are now living outside their original villages.

The *Subba* clans were wealthy and the local people believe that they were well connected to the rulers in Kathmandu through customs contracts. The *Subba* used these connections to establish themselves as regional leaders and as a new power in Mustang. It was not possible for them to take over the villages as villagers would have opposed that. The *Subba* devised a new strategy whereby they

divided the Baragau and Paachgau villages among themselves and became *Chikyap* (external chiefs) for these villages. The Paachgau and Baragau regions accepted them as *Chikyap* in the hope that they would help reduce homestead tax. Some villages had some success in this regard. A villager of Thini highlighted that:

> *Our village used to pay a very high tax – 18/1900 rupees per year. The Subba and the grandfather of Ram Lal helped us to reduce the tax ... it was reduced to 51.50 rupees. We were so happy and we contributed 19 days of work to build a house for Ram Lal's father and also appointed him as our Ghempa. We also gave land below the CDO office to a person called Govinda Man, who was our Chikyap, for helping us.*

The service of *Chikyap* did not come free. An elder of Thini explained:

> *We had to take five paathi (*measures*) of uwaa (*naked barley*) as a loan from Govinda Man which we were not allowed to return. It was compulsory. His representative in Jomsom used to go around the village asking villagers to return the interest of one paathi (*20% interest*) every year. We were also required to take one bhari (*load*) of dried needles in a big basket tied together either by thakpa (*woollen rope*) or dam (*big piece of cloth*) to him every year for his service.*

The *Subba* tried to influence the nomination of *Ghempa*, which until then were consensually nominated by villagers. They wanted to have their 'men' as the *Ghempa* to consolidate their influence and power in Mustang, and eventually establish themselves as *de facto* local rulers. An elder from Thini told me how the *Subba* used their influence to appoint the *Ghempa* of Thini:

> *Ghempa Saila's father grew up working for a Subba's family in Tukuche. He later returned to Thini and with the help of the Subba become Ghempa. He stayed in this position until he died. Before that we used to nominate the Ghempa for a maximum of three terms, three years for each term. After the death of his father, Saila (*his third son*) became Ghempa of Thini.*

This hereditary system of appointing the *Ghempa* lasted only two generations in Thini. After the termination of the Rana regime in the 1950s, and the subsequent downfall of the *Subba* as the regional power in Mustang, the local people of Thini revolted against the dominance of the *Ghempa's* family at the time. This eventually led to the restoration of the original system of nominating the *Ghempa* through village consensus. These political changes also led to the removal of *Chikyap* that *Subba* family members had held in the Baragau and Paachgau villages.

The nomination of an external village chief *(Ghempa Chhe)* is still being practiced in the Lo-Tso-Dhuin region. Although the current king commands considerable influence in the region, not all villages regard him as the external chief. Ghami, Dhakmor, Dhee and Yara have nominated the Raja of Lo as their *Ghempa Chhe,* whereas villages such as Marang, Ghara, Chhoser and Gyiling regard a noble from the Chhoser village, a nephew of the King, as their *Ghempa Chhe*. As a *Ghempa Chhe*, the Raja is also responsible for nominating a senior *Ghempa* in Ghami. The sharing of the *Ghempa Chhe*

position between the Raja of Lo and other nobles may indicate a rift and power struggle within the region. It illustrates the relationship a particular noble has with the village which has appointed him as a chief. For example, the chief of Marang has a wife from there and a large land holding. He is also the District President of the Nepali Congress, one of the major political parties in Nepal.

Charang village has no external chief, but has a very influential family related to the Raja of Lo, which has institutionalised the position of village chief within their family. The Raja, however, exercises a significant influence in all matters concerning the Lo region. The royal household is generally regarded as the supreme institution in the region and exercises considerable influence over socio-cultural and political matters. Villagers still consider documents provided by the previous and current king as important pieces of evidence to claim their rights over lands or pasture areas when they are in dispute with their neighbouring villages. The locals still approach the Raja for justice when their attempt to solve the issues within the village, or with the help of other external chiefs, fails. The government officials also consult the Raja on any matters pertaining to the Lo region.

5.5 'Common' environmental resources and regional level institutions

Some resources in Mustang, such as the pasture areas in the Thaksatsai region and forest areas in the Paachgau region, are considered a 'common resource' for these respective regions. Pasture and forest areas in Muktinath are shared in common by five villages, including Muktinath, Purang, Jharkot, Khinga and Lupra. There are no other 'common' resources in the Baragau region. There are some examples where one village may allow other villages to use resources without giving up ownership rights. Chhusang village has allowed Tsaile to use its forest, but the ownership of the forest rests with Chhusang. Animals from Dhee, Yara, Ghara and Surkhang villages are allowed to graze on each other's pasture areas on a rotational basis, but they do not see their pasture areas as a commons. The pasture areas within individual village territories are owned by each village. When animals from one village graze on the pasture area owned by another village, they are allowed to do so within the agreed conditions and time frame. Goats are kept in shelters at nights and all dung collected in these shelters is kept by the village who owns the pasture areas. Fertiliser is shared equally among villagers. The sharing of resources such as forests and pastures between villages depends on the relationship between villages. Dhee, Yara, Ghara and Surkhang villages have been settled by the people who share the same village of origin. Luri, a very famous and historical monastery, is jointly owned and managed by these villages. They send their children to, and provide annual contributions of grain for, the upkeep of this monastery. This is indicative of the strong socio-cultural and historical ties between these villages.

The people of Chhusang and Chaile are related through intermarriage. The residents of these villages, thus, share relatives. Chhusang residents have to walk through Chaile to reach their forests beyond Samar village. Chaile has no forest or any other notable natural resources of its own. Even the water source they use for drinking and irrigation originates from the land belonging to Gyaker village. Over the years they have had many disputes over water shares and rights with Gyaker. The disputes have presently subsided, but it would not be surprising if they flare up again.

The sharing of forest resources with neighbouring villages, under the terms and conditions of the village with ownership is also found in the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions. Thini shares a part of Chhatraban with Syang as mentioned earlier. Tukuche shares a forest area with Chimang. Tiri and Chhayo share forests with Kunjo. Marpha and Syang have an overlapped pasture area which is shared by both, but animals from both villages are not allowed to cross each other boundaries. In contrast to individual village resources, Paachgau forest and pasture areas in Thaksatsai are considered regional resources. These are owned and managed jointly by the Council of Paachgau and the Council of 13 Mukhiya, respectively, and all villages within the region have equal rights and access to these resources.

5.5.1   Paachgau and common forests

Paachgau in Nepali means five villages or *Yhulngha* in the Thakali dialect. It refers to the five original villages - Thini, Syang, Marpha, Chhairo and Chimang of the Paachgau region. Presently this region has nine villages – Thini, Jomsom, Dhumba, Somley, Puthang, Syang, Marpha, Chhairo and Chimang. Despites the development of new settlements, the region continues to hold on to its original name. Among the five original villages, Marpha is considered an endogamous group and it is the largest village in the Paachgau. Chhairo and Chimang are the smallest villages. Thini is the second largest and the oldest village. The people of Paachgau are commonly referred to as *Tingau Thakali* (Thakali from three villages – Thini, Syang and Chimang). Chhairo is considered part of Chimang in local historical interpretations. The people of original five villages consider the Paachgau region as their ancestral home land. These regional identities hold strong symbolic and material importance for the local people, even today, constituting the basis for the development of regional cooperation, associations and institutions. While village identity plays a dominant role in village-to-village interactions, the regional identity plays a crucial role in a wide range of interactions.

The Council of Paachgau owns a forest area located on a steep mountain slope above Chhairo village. The Paachgau region considers this as '*paachgau-ko saaja ban*' (a common forest of five villages). The five original villages of Paachgau claim Paachgau forest as their *saaja dhan* (common property) and the revenue generated from this forest since the 1970s has made the Paachgau council one of the richest institutions within the Mustang district.

A villager told me the history of how the Paachgau forest came into existence:

> *During the time of Rana, we had to pay serma (*homestead tax*) to the Government. Chhairo village was small and very poor during that time and failed to pay tax to the Government. All five old villages of Paachgau came together and agreed to help Chhairo. We divided the amount Chhairo owed to the government into 19 shares. Thini and Marpha paid five shares each, Syang paid four shares, Chimang paid three shares and Chhairo paid two shares. In return, we received the forest above Chhairo village, which became a common forest for all five old villages. We have a document written in Tibetan texts describing this event and also the boundaries of the forest. The document also has the government seal on it. I think it was the court in Baglung, which provided this document to us.*

I searched for, but did not find, the document explaining the origin of 'Paachgau' forest that the interviewee mentioned, but found two documents that provided a reference to Paachgau and Paachgau forests. The first document was dated 1887 Bikram Sambat (1830 AD). The document was written in a classical Devanagari (Nepali) script and was not easy to read or understand. Nevertheless, it was significant for three reasons. It provided reference to the Council of Paachgau represented by *Thalu* (village heads) of Thini, Syang, Marpha, Chhairo and Chimang. Secondly, it described the boundaries of both the Paachgau region and their common forests and land. Thirdly, it explained that until 1887 BS. (1830 AD) Paachgau was paying *serma* (homestead tax) of 4,000-*mohar rupaiya* (one mohar is 50 paisa and 100 paisa is one rupee) to the Government of Nepal. *Thalu* (village heads) of the respective villages were responsible for collecting *serma* from their people which was deposited collectively at the government *tosakhana* (treasury) based at Daana, almost two days walk from the Paachgau region.

The first document provided an insight into the hardship villagers faced at that time. It mentioned that a heavy snowfall the year before had killed many yaks in Marpha village, and had forced some of the people of Chimang to migrate. It mentioned the successful petition that the *Thalu* of Paachgau made to the Rana government to reduce the amount of homestead tax from 4,000 to 3,600 in 1827 AD, and to 3,301 in 1830 AD, the date of the document.

The second document was dated 1889 B.S. (1932 AD). This document was significant as it showed that the area covered by the current Paachgau forest was previously much larger than it is now. It told that the Panchgoan sold a part of their common forest and a piece of land to Subba Hitman Sherchan, a former customs contractor and local administrator, for 501 *mohar rupaiya*. The document described the new boundaries of the Paachgau forests and some key decisions relating to the user rights and responsibilities of each village to construct access trails to the common forests and between villages. It mentioned the maintenance of access trails to Terkyu, a place where representatives of all five villages used to congregate for meetings. The historical meeting ground of Terkyu, a moraine plain, is located near Dhumba village within the boundaries of Thini. As the seat of the ancient kingdom of Serib (Jackson, 1978), Thini once ruled the lower part of the Kali Gandaki Valley, including much of

the present region of Thaksatsai, and it may have served as the headquarters of the Paachgau during that period.

It appears that the Council of Paachgau was largely undermined during the reign of the *Chikyap* when they were the authority which controlled village politics. All higher-level issues, particularly concerning inter-village level disputes, were referred to them. The Council of Paachgau was inactive for several decades, but reappeared in 1977 in a new form, in response to soaring demands for timber in the district after the proliferation of development activities. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

5.5.2   The 13 Mukhiya and common alpine pasture areas

The Thaksatsai region has a Council of 13 Mukhiya, representing the 13 original villages, Ghasa, Lete, Taglung, Kunjo, Dhampu, Larjung, Naurkot, Bujrungkot, Kobang, Khanti, Tukuche and Sauru. There are currently16 villages in this region, but only the *Mukhiya* of the 13 original villages are represented on the council. The Council of 13 Mukhiya has a long history; some believe it was started when the region was under the control of Parbat during the 16th century. The current *Mir Mukhiya* shared this history with me emphasising the significance of the 13 *Mukhiya* for Chan Thakali:

> *During the time when there were no government agencies, our ancestors started the Mukhiya system to govern our villages. With the aim of maintaining social harmony and good governance our ancestors also established 13 Mukhiya with a kot (*centre*) at Kobang. The 13 Mukhiya ensured that there were no disputes within the 13 villages, there were no injustices, and peace prevailed. The 13 Mukhiya used to hold meetings from time-to-time to settle conflicts and disputes, collect taxes within the area (tiro/serma) and oversee social and cultural matters, marriages, and funerals and so on. Our ancestors through the 13 Mukhiya system maintained peace, and provided the opportunity for economic development in our region, providing relief for the local people, and opening doors for advancement.*

Like the Paachgau forest, the Council of 13 Mukhiya in Thaksatsai oversee the management of pastures in their region. They term the alpine pasture areas '*panchhi charan'*, literally where 'birds graze' and forests as *machhi charan*, literally where 'fish graze'. While pasture areas are jointly owned and used by all member villages within the region, the ownership of forests (*machhi charan*) is maintained by the individual villages. The Thaksatsai region has a long tradition of allowing herds from outside Mustang to graze on their pasture areas with the payment of tribute, usually involving a couple of male sheep which are used as sacrificial animals at the village *pujas* or rituals. Other villages in Mustang are not allowed to graze animals on Thaksatsai's pastures.

The Council of 13 Mukhiya has the authority to represent and promote Chan Thakali's socio-cultural and political interests not only in Mustang, but also in national politics. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

5.6   Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the geo-political history of Nepal, with particular reference to Mustang, as the context for the current village-based endogenous governance system. Although the governance system varies from village to village, in structure, composition, representation and operation, it is centrally important to the management of socio-cultural affairs and environmental resources within the socio-politically demarcated territories the local people identify as 'our village'.

The village-based governance institutions of the *Ghempa* or *Mukhiya* originated and evolved when Mustang was a frontier land between various regional powers, and a territory remote from the power centre of unified Nepal. The state had only two major goals, to increase the state revenue, and to maintain law and order in remote mountain districts like Mustang. While the government imposed a homestead tax and appointed customs collectors to achieve the first goal, it depended on the loyalty of the regional and local leaders to achieve the second goal. This imposed economic hardship on the local people, but gave the independence and liberty to every village in Mustang to develop a relatively autonomous system of governance at the village level. The imposition of tax provided the opportunity to develop socio-cultural alliances, for example, the Raja of Lo and regional institutions such as the council of Paachgoan and 13 Mukhiya, to manage issues that were beyond the village level, including inter-village disputes and regional level relations.

This chapter has argued that management of environmental resources was the central focus of the village-based governance system. All social relations and sanctions evolved around managing what villagers see as the four critical elements of the village environment: land, water, pasture areas and forests. Every village has asserted its ownership, rights and access over these resources based on a long history of association, use and practice. Village rules and regulations controlled these resources to meet both the short and long-term needs of the villagers. Even when the state had no conservation policies prior to the 1950s, in Mustang, forests and other natural resources such as pasture areas, lands and waters were regulated by village laws. Village laws were made at the village assembly where all household members participated. The village assembly provided the authority and legitimacy to the institutions of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* and village-based governance. Environmental concerns and practices have always been integral to the overall well-being of the village and villagers, being socially embedded in the institutions of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*, which continue to exercise significant influence and power in managing the environmental resource in Mustang.

The next chapter will examine the wider effects of successive central government environmental and developmental policies that evolved from 1950 to 1990 (the post-Rana period during which Nepal embraced modernisation). Those policies which have had significant effects on and implications for

Mustang, particularly on the village governance system based on the institution of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya*, are described and examined.

Chapter 6
Politics, governance and the environment
in Mustang - 1951 to 1990

6.0   Introduction

This chapter will examine the role of the village-based institutions for environmental governance described in Chapter 5, within the evolving wider national institutional settings from 1950 to 1990, with particular reference to Mustang. The analysis of the 1951 to 1990 period is divided into two phases. The first phase, 'transitory politics and the emergence of the modern state' covers the period from 1951 to 1961 (Section 6.1). This regime was characterised by a politically unstable and fragile national polity. Mustang and other peripheral regions had minimal exposure to it. The second phase, 'centralised planning and decentralised administration', covers the period from 1961 to 1990 (Section 6.2). Under the aegis of the autocratic Panchayat regime, new district and village level institutions were established to provide services and support development projects. I argue here that under the new hierarchical, authoritative and top-down Panchayat regime, the district and village Panchayats became the basis of hierarchical local political structures. The village Panchayat emerged as the key institution to enable villagers to participate in local, district and national level political processes, and to access the services and development support from the central government agencies (district based line agencies), beginning the govermentalisation of Mustang.

Within evolving wider institutional settings, the endogenous village-based institutions for environmental governance persisted, albeit with variable degrees of local adaptation, primarily to protect the village's territorial interests and rights over natural resources. This was the period when Mustang experienced the effects of the forest nationalisation policy and confronted the centralised forest regime imposed over forest uses, regulation and authority. This confrontation did not aggravate the deforestation problems in Mustang, but led to a process of adaptation on both sides to manage the forest resources; i.e., the District Forest Office conceded to local demands and consulted with local users about forest-related issues before making decisions (Section 6.3).

The exogenous Khamba (Tibetan rebels) occupation, which occurred during the Panchayat regime, is discussed as a significant interlude in Mustang's politics. Their presence remained a dominant socio-economic force from 1960 to 1974, and led to the extensive use and the destruction of forest resources. Mustang experienced another wave of extensive deforestation after the establishment of the

district headquarters with district based line agencies representing the various ministries of the central government, including the District Forest Office to enforce forest nationalisation policies (Section 6.4). Section 6.5 provides a chapter summary.

6.1 Transitory politics and emergence of the modern state (1951-1961)

6.1.1 National and international setting

The geopolitical situation in south Asia was changing rapidly in the 1940s. India and China had emerged as the two of the most powerful and influential countries with competing political ideologies; India as one as world's largest democratic countries and China as the most powerful communist country. These developments, in combination with India's independence from British colonial rule in 1947, triggered a swift political change in Nepal and ushered in three significant developments: the replacement of the 105 year old Rana autocracy in 1951 by a democratic system with the monarchy as the centre of political power; the end of a long history of isolation from the rest of the world; and the embrace of ideas about the development and welfare of the people, marking the beginning of Nepal's modernisation process. Bilateral agencies from the US, India, China, and the USSR, and multilateral agencies such as the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization, provided much needed financial and technical support to implement the modernisation of the country (Joshi, 1973; Pandey, 1989; Wood, 1986; Pigg, 1992). International aid largely reflected regional politics (Khadka, 1994).

The period from 1951 to 1959 was marked by political instability. There were frequent changes of government that resulted in continual postponements of a general election. The King and the Prime Minister were engaged in a power struggle. Political parties were becoming factious and fragmented. Indian influence on political matters in Nepal, particularly attempts to counterbalance the influence of communist China, was ever increasing (Baral, 1986). India provided the military aid to modernise the Nepali army and established military posts along Nepal's northern borders to monitor Chinese activities, particularly in Tibet.

The first general election was held in 1959. The Nepali Congress emerged victorious with a- two-thirds-majority. Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala (popularly known as B.P. Koirala), the charismatic leader of Nepali Congress, became the first elected Prime Minister of Nepal. He was quick to introduce many reform measures, focusing on the problems of feudal lands, the concentration of land holdings, and exploitation of the tiller. These reforms included the abolition of the *birta* land tenure system and its conversion into the *raikar* system (individual freehold titles). During this time 80 per cent of cultivated lands were worked by tenants, and 95 per cent of people were dependant on the land

for their subsistence (Regmi, 1961). Limited efforts were made to modernise the administration and service delivery mechanisms, particularly to promote agriculture, health and education. This included the promotion of local self-governance at both village and district levels, involving the local people in the planning and implementation of local development programmes (Poudyal, 1994). Paradoxically, the new government's reform measures, particularly the radical change in land tenure and the long-promised reform of the central bureaucracy, became unpopular with some groups. Among these were the traditional centres of power such as the aristocracy, powerful bureaucrats and landlords, who had long dominated the army, and the government institutions (Blaikie et al., 1980). To weaken the elected government, the King formed an alliance with some prominent political leaders who were not elected. Several organisations sprung up overnight inciting nationwide general strikes to protest against the progressive measures of the government, resulting in a deterioration of law and order within the country.

Taking advantage of the political turmoil, King Mahendra, with the help of a loyal army, abruptly dissolved the first democratically elected government. This royal coup d'état ended Nepal's brief 18 month experiment with a multi-party democracy and the country once again returned to authoritarian rule, led by the King. He enacted emergency rule, suspended the 1959 Constitution, banned all political parties and assumed political power.

6.1.2 Mustang: the local response

6.1.2.1 Leadership and development

Mustang's position as a remote and isolated district in Nepal remained largely unchanged during the1950s and 1960s. It could not, however, remain isolated from broader national political and socio-economic changes in Nepal indefinitely. Bolstered by the termination of the autocratic Rana regime, a small group of educated local youth emerged to play an active role in introducing the idea of 'development' *(bikash)* to Mustang. Villages below Jomsom were quick to embrace the new ideas, even without any support from the government and other aid agencies. With the help of these youths, the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* played leading roles to mobilise villagers to establish formal schools to teach the Nepali language along with other subjects, including English. Schools became both the medium and symbol of 'development'.

Tukuche, the home of customs contractors, was the most powerful village during this time and was the first to build a formal school, the *Janata Bidyalaya,* in 1952/53. A former headmaster of Tukuche recalled how the first school was funded:

> *The Janata Bidyalaya of Tukuche was the first school. It was entirely funded and run by the village. Mahendra Sherchan, Nar Singh Bhakta Tulachan (he became the Assistant Minister*

during the Panchayat regime), Yam Bahadu and Mahendra Tulachan, they were our first local teachers. I received my education in Pokhara and Kathmandu. I had my relatives there. I first worked as a volunteer teacher. After that whenever I returned home on holiday [he was pursuing a higher education in Kathmandu], the villagers used to appoint me. I taught at the school on and off as a headmaster for several years.

The establishment of *Janata Bidyalaya* inspired other villages to follow suit. A former teacher of Jomsom reflected on the village enthusiasm for the school: *we had sort of a competition among villages to open a school in the village and making it better than other schools. Such was the spirit.* Within a decade, all major villages in the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions opened schools funded entirely from village sources. Each village had to adopt different strategies to meet the school expenses, including selling uncultivated lands, collecting donations from fellow villagers, and even introducing new taxes.

6.1.2.2 Local economy

Notwithstanding the local enthusiasm for schools, the economic condition of Mustang changed little during this period. An improved section of the once treacherous trail between Ghasa to Daana opened new opportunities for trade and enterprise. The majority of people, however, were still poor, cash strapped and had to struggle hard to survive daily. Improved trails enabled the people to take their pack animals as far as Daana and Tatopani to exchange salt for rice and other crops. They became much more mobile and started moving to the south for three to four months during the winter season, where women would establish temporary teashops, mostly in market centres near highways, to cater for travellers, mostly pensioners and soldiers returning home from India. By the late 1950s, a highway from Bhairahawa to Pokhara was under construction. This highway encouraged Mustang residents to acquire mules which they used to travel to India to both buy and transport trade goods back to the hills of Nepal

It took almost a decade to see the impacts of these enterprises on the local economy. The *Subba* continued to maintain their economic dominance in Mustang during this period stemming from their role as money lenders. A former *Thuimi* of Thini reflected on the difficulties of the past:

> *We did not grow enough to feed ourselves from agriculture. There were 6/7 households who grew enough to feed themselves, but others had problems so used to do everything possible to support our families. During my childhood and youth, we used to grind turnips (maley) and eat that as pumpkin soup. We did not have enough buckwheat to make the porridge (dhedo). Forget about rice. We never had sweet tea and never used tea. We used to roast uwaa (naked barley) or rice until it was black and used it as a tea. We were very poor; even for 500 rupees we had to beg the Subba for a loan with a 10-15 per cent interest rate.*

By the late 1950s, a number of external and internal factors gradually weakened the *Subba's* grip on Mustang's affairs. After the termination of the monopoly over the salt-grain trade, many members of

the *Subba* family had migrated out of Mustang in search of other lucrative trade opportunities. They started to settle permanently in Kathmandu, Bhairahawa and Pokhara and had little interest in Mustang. They suffered from internal feuds, which divided them into two factions. There was also growing local discontent against the *Subba*, particularly for their attempt to monopolise emerging economic opportunities as they had done with the salt trade. The local residents objected to the imposition of the rule of *Chikyap* as supra-village chiefs, akin to the role of a sheriff. Some of the local educated youths, who were working as teachers during this period, were increasingly politically conscious and active, rallying local opinion against the *Subba and Chikyap*. Consequently, Baragau and Paachgau villages terminated the position of *Chikyap*.

6.1.3. Environmental policies and village responses

Forests were the key focus of national environmental policies in Nepal during 1950s. Earlier forest policies were primarily concerned with exporting *sal (Shorea robusta)* from the Terai region to support the expansion of the Indian railways. The highly extractive forestry practices during this period were not perceived of as a problem and there was a lack of 'scientific management' (Grove, 1992). Forests were used as freely available resources with no sound governmental regulatory policy or planning to develop a forestry sector. The local people had free access to forests to meet their daily requirements for firewood, fodder and timber.

During this period, efforts were made to reform the forestry sector. The Ministry of Forests and Revenue was established in 1952. With the help of international advisors, several forest-related reforms were initiated (Bajracharya, 1986). This was when the first published observations of Nepal's environmental degradation provided grounds for soil conservation, forest protection and afforestation measures (Bajracharya, 1983). Following this, the Private Forest Nationalisation Policy 1957 was promulgated. This policy had two objectives: to prevent protected forests from being private property; and to consolidate the government's control over forests as national property (Wagley and Ojha, 2002). Four years later, a Forest Nationalisation Act was introduced to nationalise all forests. The Act also removed local rights and access to forest resources. This exclusionary policy intensified the animosity between the state and the local people and subsequently, in latter decades, led to widespread deforestation in the Terai region (Zaman, 1973).

The Forest Nationalisation Act had little initial impact in mountainous districts such as Mustang. Forests had neither commercial value nor were there government officials or institutions to enforce the forest-related rules and regulations. Forests and other natural resources continued to be managed by village institutions as discussed in Chapter 5 under the leadership of *Ghempa and Mukhiya*. Forests, pasture areas, water and lands continued to be governed and regulated according to village rules and regulations.

Village rules and regulations, however, had little effect on new immigrants such as the Khamba, Tibetan rebels, who arrived in their thousands in Mustang after the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959. Their arrival in Mustang coincided with the period of political instability and change from a democratic polity to unilateral, centralised and party-less Panchayat polity.

6.2   Panchayat politics – centralised planning and decentralised administration (1961-1990)

Under the King's direct rule, the 1962 constitution was promulgated paving the way to introduce the party-less Panchayat polity. The Panchayat regime lasted 30 years and was marked by a long period of political stability which enabled their modernisation agenda for the country.

6.2.1   Key attributes of Panchayat politics and policies

The 'Panchayat' political system was based on participation via a council of elected five *(Panch)* elders, common in the some parts of the Indian sub-continent. The system formalised direct and active leadership of the Hindu monarch by combining it with certain features of other political systems. The Panchayat polity's rationale rested on claims to three interrelated foundations: its indigenous character based on tradition and religion, nationalism and economic development (Khadka, 1986). It was hailed as Nepali in origin and inspiration and presented as being the best suited to the climate and soil of the country to maintain systematic neutrality between two giant neighbours with two great competing political ideologies (Joshi and Rose, 1966; Khadka, 1986; Mahat, 2005).

Notwithstanding the authoritarian, 'top-down' character of the hierarchically structured Panchayat regime, bilateral and multilateral agencies continued to support Nepal's development throughout the Panchayat regime. With agency technical and financial aid, a series of measures were introduced to reform administrative systems, plans and policies, to implement and take forward the modernisation agenda. Key reform measures included administrative reforms (1966), decentralisation schemes (1969), district administration plans (1974), the implementation of small area development programmes (1975), integrated rural development projects (1976), the creation of the Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development (1980), and the Decentralisation Act (1982) and bylaws (1984). Many of the Panchayat period plans and policies failed to deliver as intended. The outcome of economic policy was characterised by the stagnation of per capita income and increased disparity of income and wealth (World Bank, 1985; Mahat, 2005).

The party-less character and the principle of decentralisation of administration remained core features of the Panchayat polity. In 1967 the Local Administration Act was introduced dividing the country into 14 zones and 75 districts in the place of the already existing 35 districts. It defined the roles, functions, organisational structures, and horizontal and vertical relationships within government and

with other agencies. Following this, a four-tier Panchayat political structure was created with some 3,524 Village Panchayat, 75 District (*jilla*) Panchayat, and 14 Zonal (*anchal*) Panchayat. The country also was divided into five regions - Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-Western and Far Western - to promote balanced regional development. Conversely, Mustang was divided into 16 Village Panchayat. A Chief District Officer was appointed for each district as a functionary of central government. District headquarters were established with district line agencies representing the various ministries and departments. The Chief District Officer exercised administrative control over the elected district functionaries and with responsibility for formulating and coordinating district level development plans and activities.

The Panchayat, however, provided for an extremely limited narrow form of political participation. Except at the village assembly level, the election of representatives to the various levels of the Panchayat organisations were largely controlled by extra-constitutional organisations such as the National Guidance Council, later replaced by the Back to the Village National Campaign in 1975. Candidates were nominated on the basis of political beliefs, behaviour, and loyalty to the King and the Panchayat system (Khadka, 1986). After political strife in 1979, which called for the restoration of multi-party democracy, King Birendra was forced to call for a national referendum to choose between a reformed Panchayat system and a multi-party democracy. The Panchayat, with suitable reforms, won the 1980 referendum with 54.7 per cent of the vote.

Following the referendum, three fundamental changes to the Panchayat constitution were made, including an adult franchise-based election system, the appointment of a prime minister based on a recommendation by the legislature, and the council of ministers was made accountable to the legislature for its conduct (Khadka, 1986; Parajulee, 2000). These reforms did not change the one-party character of the Panchayat, and retained the King as absolute ruler (Shah, 1982). It did provide the opportunity for candidates from banned political parties to participate in the election as independent candidates (Baral, 1983). In the first direct election of the Panchayat in 1981, one third of those elected to the national Panchayat were members of the banned Nepali Congress Party. More of their members were elected in the second direct election in 1986 creating rifts among royal supporters and paving the way for further political change in 1990 (discussed in Chapter 7).

The full effect of the Panchayat politics and policies in Mustang, in terms of socio-economic development and related environmental changes, emerged only from the mid-1970s. From 1959 to 1974 the Khamba (Tibetan armed refugees fleeing from China) occupation remained the most dominant influence in this remote district, in terms of both socio-economic development and environmental changes. A combination of the high number of Khamba and their indiscriminate use of environmental resources resulted in widespread deforestation in Mustang.

6.2.2   The exogenous Khamba occupation

In the early 1960s, when Kathmandu was trying to come to terms with the royal coup, the mountainous district of Mustang was overrun by a great many Tibetan refugees fleeing from the Chinese takeover of their homeland in 1959. Among them were thousands of well-armed, trained and funded rebels known as 'Khamba'. Although the information about their number is sketchy, a local leader who had a food supply contract with them estimated that *I provided rashan (*food*) to 5,000 Khamba, but their number I think was much higher, over 8-9,000.* This was a significant number of immigrants in a district with around 12, 000 residents. The Khamba reigned in Mustang for almost 15 years and were a dominant exogenous force with significant impacts on the local economy, society and the environment.

Within a few years of the Khamba arrivals, the Swiss government funded a small airstrip near Jomsom for single engine aeroplanes *(*Canadian built Pilatus Porter) to supply the Khamba not only with food, but secretly with arms and ammunitions. The Khamba were trained and armed by the US Central Intelligence Agency. A local leader shared his observations from that time: *the Khamba received funds from Americans. Americans used to drop many parachutes on the Tangye area with food, weapons and ammunitions. I saw many empty soft drink cans left by Americans while parachuting stuff for Khamba.* There was a small Indian check-post in Jomsom for border intelligence and security, but by the mid-1960s it was removed. A local speculated: *I think India was also helping the Khamba. They helped the Khamba to fight against China.*

6.2.3   Opportunities and challenges

The Khamba occupation presented both opportunities and challenges for Mustang. The high number of immigrants in the district contributed positively to boost and diversify the local economy, transforming it from that of subsistence agro-pastoral to one that was service oriented. *This district saw paper money only after the arrival of the Khamba,* said a local from Kagbeni. The Khamba occupation provided locals with the opportunity to earn cash in their own backyard. They were able to sell agricultural produce, *chang* (local beer) and *rakshi* (spirit-based alcohol). A local from Jomsom highlighted the difference the Khamba occupation made:

> When the Khamba were around, the price of grain hiked up from 2 rupees to 3; then to 5, and then to 6, then 7 and then 10 rupees per paathi [a local measure of around four kilograms]. *It was an unimaginable amount then. The barley price increased from one rupee to 5 rupees per paathi. Rice used to cost 2 rupees per paathi and it was increased to 4 rupees. The people used to say we were born in anikaal* [an era of starvation]. *Everything became so expensive, and we did not know how much the price would hike up.*

The local people learnt new skills such as carpet weaving from the Tibetans, which later became the main part-time job, particularly for women, to earn extra cash. The number of mules and horses in the

district increased to transport food and other essential supplies to the Khamba, significantly improving the economic condition of many people, primarily in the Thaksatsai, Paachgau and Baragau regions. *During that time there were very few households in Marpha, Syang, Jomsom, Tukuche and Kobang who had no mules,* a local mule owner from Syang told me.

The Khamba occupation had some negative consequences as well. Its impact on the historical trans-Himalayan trade was the most damaging. The Khamba crossed over into Tibetan territories to attack Chinese troops, and to steal livestock and drive them back across the Nepali border. They helped Tibetan refugees to cross the border. As the Khamba's activities increased, the Chinese responded sternly and sealed all border routes into Nepal. This action disrupted the flow of salt and other commodities from Tibet at a time when Tibetan salt was already facing stiff competition from cheaper Indian salt. The Chinese action ended the historical Trans-Himalayan salt trade in Mustang. Chinese actions had other effects. The people of Mustang traditionally used to travel to Tibet to acquire a higher monastic education. With the sealing of the Tibetan borders, this age old practice ended. The Chinese banned cross-border grazing which made livestock herding much harder for the people of the Lo region who depended on the Tibetan pastures for winter grazing. These developments gradually shifted the socio-economic orientation of Mustang, from the north (Tibet) to the south (southern Nepal and India). The importance and dominance of Tibet in trade, commerce and education started to dwindle.

The rule of law and the security of Mustang during the Khamba period were very precarious. There were numerous cases of rape, theft and murder. A local recounted that approximately 20 local people were killed by the Khamba during their occupation, primarily because they were found trading with Tibet/China against Khamba wishes. The difficult security situation resulted in a high level of local out-migration, particularly below Marpha.

6.2.4   Forest use and deforestation

Socially, the Khamba operated outside village rules and norms. They built their camps far away from villages. By and large they were not interested in village affairs. They were not interested in following village rules and regulations regarding environmental resources, nor were they interested in protecting them. *Khamba had guns and they were in their thousands. We were helpless in front of them and could not say anything against them even if we were not happy with their actions ... unlike today there were no government armies or police or even government officials to help you,* a local from Chhusang remembered. A combination of the high number of Khamba and their indiscriminate use of environmental resources resulted in widespread deforestation in Mustang. The problem of deforestation was particularly severe above Kagbeni, where few good forests remained.

A distraught village from Gyaker said*:*

> *The Khamba had a camp in a high mountain area above this village (Gyaker) which had a good forest cover. They destroyed our forests; they cleared our juniper and birch forests to build their camps and used all big trees for firewood. We lost our juniper and birch forests because of them.*

A similar view was shared by a local from Samar:

> *We used to have thick forests around here, my father and grand-father used to say that the forests were so dense that it was not possible to see any animals passing through it. But the Khamba destroyed them.*

A villager from Dhe had a similar story:

> *They cut down our forests. We used to have a dense forest in Goma where the Khamba had their camps. The old people used to say the forest was so thick the yaks used to get lost there. But there is no forest there now. The Khamba built their camps and destroyed the forest.*

The forests between and around Samar and Veena, and between Chhusang and Tangya, were destroyed during the Khamba occupation. Dead stumps and trees are still visible around these areas, but there are good signs of forest regeneration. Khamba troops occupied Kaisang, a forest area near Thini. The local people used to own *ban khet* (fields in the forest) in Kaisang, which were used to grow crops such as potatoes and bitter buckwheat (*tite phapar*). Khamba took over those lands to build their headquarters. Prior to their occupation, villagers never used to buy or sell firewood, but the Khamba created a new demand for fuel wood. Villagers, however, were not allowed to sell firewood or timber outside their village. Villages below Jomsom strictly enforced this rule to minimise impacts of the Khamba occupation on forest resources.

The Khamba were Buddhists, but this did not stop them from killing wild animals. *They used to kill wild animals* said a villager from Chhusang. *They had guns and they were living near alpine areas where there were lots of naur* [blue sheep] *... they used to kill them. We used to hear the sound of gunfire even from our villages,* said a local from Samar. They destroyed many religious monuments such as *tshortens* or *mahnes,* built in the memory of dead priests or local people, to excavate the precious stones and other wealth concealed in them.

6.2.5   End of the Khamba occupation

By the early 1970s, the US policy towards China had changed. Under the presidency of Richard Nixon, the US opened up contacts with Beijing in a bid to develop a more normal and constructive relationship. Around the same period, the relationship between India and Pakistan deteriorated. These new developments in global and regional politics influenced the US support for the Khamba. By this

time, China was exerting pressure on the Nepalese government to take firm action against the Khamba. Nepal had a new leader, King Birendra, who was trying to consolidate his authority through the Panchayat system. He wanted to forge a stronger relationship with China to counterbalance India. *If the government had not taken actions against Khamba, the Chinese would have come inside our district to finish them off*, the former Assistant Minister from Marpha claimed. To make matters worse, Khamba were feuding amongst them.

At this time there were only two important government offices in Mustang. There was a horticulture research farm which was the first permanent government office in the district. It was instrumental in introducing and promoting the cultivation of cash crops such as fresh vegetable, apples and other temperate fruits in Mustang. The other was the Northern Border Security Office in Jomsom with an Assistant Zonal Commissioner, the first time such a high-ranking official was ever posted to the district. By this time, Jomsom already had small army and police posts. Finally, in 1974, the government mobilised a large contingent of security forces under Nepali leadership which subsequently disarmed and relocated the Khamba. After this operation, only a small group of 200 non-combatant Tibetans were allowed to stay in Mustang.

The next section examines the socio-political and economic transformation of Mustang during the Panchayat period and the role of government in this process.

6.3.   Panchayat politics and the governmentalisation of Mustang

It was only after the eviction of the Khamba rebels from Mustang that the Panchayat polity started fully to affect the overall development of this remote mountain district. The government's decision, to open Mustang for tourism and to establish the army units and more than 30 line agencies, substantially increased the presence of central government in the district. The intervention of the state in the day-to- day life of the people, as well as investments in infrastructure development and services, increased sharply. These changes were crucial to promoting a tighter relationship between the people and the state, accelerating the process of the governmentalisation of Mustang.

6.3.1   Tourism

Mustang started receiving a few tourists during the early 1960s, but with the escalation of the Khamba's activities they were banned. After the Khamba's departure, the district faced a severe and widespread economic crisis. A local told me:

> *After Khamba were gone we could not sell our crops, grasses, firewood. Our mules had no jobs. There was hardly anything in Mustang to transport. We had to pay back loans that we borrowed to buy goats and yaks. We ran out of hard cash.*

Another informant said*:*

> *The price of buckwheat plummeted down from 9 rupees per paathi to 2 rupees during this time, but even with such a low price there was no one around to buy it. We inn keepers, mule owners, contractors and local farmers, lost the main source of cash income.*

He further added that *we saw no future in Mustang. We had lost the salt trade, the trade with Tibet, and then lost Khamba all in 15-20 years. We were worried and many people considered migrating* out. A year after the Khamba operation in 1976, the Prime Minister of Nepal, Dr Tulsi Giri, visited Jomsom. A local leader who met him along with other district level leaders recalled the request they made to him:

> *We met the Prime Minister, Dr. Giri, and told him that we are facing an economic crisis. The Prime Minster then asked what the government could do to help the people. We requested that he open Mustang to tourism. He said he would do it.*

The Prime Minister kept his promise and reopened Mustang to tourism. International visitors were not allowed to travel beyond Kagbeni village. The area above this, known as the Upper Mustang, which included seven Panchayat, was declared 'restricted'.

Following the re-opening of Mustang to tourism, the Pokhara-Gorepani-Jomsom route became a very popular trek, that popularity increasing significantly after the opening of the neighbouring district, Manang, in the early 1980s. This made it possible to trek around the Annapurna massif and Lower Mustang became a part of the world famous Round the Annapurna Trek (RAT). Within a few years, tourism was established as an important sector to stimulate the local economy. Tourism created jobs and supported many subsidiary enterprises such as mule transportation, fruit and vegetable production and the small enterprises that sprang up in Mustang during the Khamba occupation.

Catering for visitors was not a new experience for the people of Mustang. They had a long history of catering for the hundreds of *tirthabasi* (pilgrims) who used to make the arduous journey to visit the sacred sites of Muktinath and Damodhar Kunda; and for the *dhakres* (traders from the south) and Tibetan nomads from the north who used to travel together in their hundreds to engage in the salt-for-grain exchange. When tourists started to arrive in Mustang, locals opened their houses to provide them with shelter and food. One of the first lodge owners at the airport commented:

> *We started receiving foreigners, mostly Peace Corps volunteers, in the mid to late 1960s. They used to come here for research and survey. During that time there were no proper lodges. They stayed at our house and ate whatever we cooked for them. When the government opened this district for tourism in the mid-1970s, we started to receive them again and their number grew every year. We realised that tourists liked our area and we needed to provide facilities suitable for them.*

Within less than two decades, the number of lodges had increased to 76 with a total bed capacity of

1100 (ACAP, 1994). The number of international tourists increased from a few hundred in the 1970s to 13,763 in 1988/89, making it the most popular trekking destination in Nepal (Thakali, 1994). With improvements to facilities and infrastructure since the 1970s, the number of pilgrims, mainly Indian nationals but also Nepali, soared.

6.3.2 Army posts

The decision to establish military units permanently in Mustang was significant. According to a local source, the government decision to keep the military post in Mustang was motivated more to help build the local economy than for the security reasons. A local leader claimed:

> *Mustang was the King's favourite district. After the Khamba operation, he instructed an army commander to assess the local situation. He was concerned about the economic hardship the people experienced and asked him to find a way to address it. The army decided to keep soldiers permanently in Mustang so that the locals could continue selling their products and provide services to them as they did during the time of Khamba.*

The government re-deployed a company of more than 250 soldiers to Jomsom and established another post in Kaisang with more than 200 soldiers. The Kaisang unit was turned into a high mountain warfare training centre for Nepali soldiers. During training seasons, the number of soldiers increased to around 400.

6.3.3 Land survey (naapi)

Mustang was one of the first districts in Nepal to have both ordnance and cadastral surveys implemented (*naapi*). Until the 1960s, the land in Nepal was neither surveyed nor mapped. The first *naapi* in Mustang focused on demarcating the Panchayat and ward boundaries, as well as mapping private, public and common land holdings. It provided land ownership titles to individuals. Since the first survey, the boundaries of the district and the Village Development Committees have been revised twice, but available maps have not been updated with these changes. A Land Survey Officer told me *the survey map shows that we still have a Panchayat called 'Mustang' which has now been split into three Village Development Committees* [Panchayat was replaced by Village Development Committee after the political change in 1990].

According to a local informant, the government's decision to select Mustang as one of the first districts in Nepal to be land surveyed was mainly to facilitate local access to credit facilities, and reduce the economic hardships that resulted from the combination of the lost salt trade and the departure of the Khamba. He said, *the government sent naapi so that the people can use their lands as collateral to take loans from the Agriculture Development Bank.*

Another informant added:

> *For loans from banks you could either deposit gold or lalpurja* [the land ownership certificates] *as dharauti* [collateral]. *Lalpurja made it very easy to take loans from the bank. If our lalpurja is not enough for the amount of the loan we would like to take, we can also use the lalpurja of our relatives and friends*.

Lalpurja enabled many local people to diversify their sources of income and enterprise. It enabled them to access loans to capitalise on new opportunities that arose and proliferated after the establishment of district headquarters. Loans from the bank were used to buy mules and goats, start agro-based cottage industries such as distilleries and apple orchards, build or improve lodges and initiate many other small scale enterprises. Residents were also able to bid for different types of contracts such as the construction of offices, irrigation projects, schools, health-posts, bridges, trail improvements, and drinking water projects, and to provide food supplies to the army and the police forces. However, only about 40-50 people from Kagbeni to Lete benefited from these opportunities.

The people from Baragau and Lo regions had very few options in the 1970s and 1980s to earn cash in their homelands. Many of them were employed by Tibetan refugees they met in Mustang as assistants to work in the sweater (jumpers) trade which involved buying cheap sweaters from the Indian state of Ludiana and selling them from town to town in India. For these people this sweater trade became a popular pursuit in the winter season (November-February). A local man from Samar told me *I used to earn enough working three-four months as an assistant for a sweater trader in India to buy food and other essential household items for the rest of the year.* Those who had little money involved themselves in casual businesses in Pokhara or Kathmandu, selling herbs or Tibetan needles (handmade needles that are large and are suitable for sewing blankets or large bags) and buying goods from urban centres and selling them in rural villages.

6.3.4   District headquarters

Within two years of the Khamba operation, the district headquarters in Mustang was relocated from Daana to Jomsom. This decision was probably the most significant development in Mustang in terms of expanding and consolidating the influence of central government and accelerating development activities to improve infrastructure such as trails, bridges, schools and health care.

Prior to this, government assistance for local development was sporadic, ad-hoc and minimal. The former vice-chair of a district Panchayat explained how development projects were identified and funded during this time:

> *We used to send requests for projects to the district Panchayat. The district Panchayat used to get a budget of 1 to 1.5 lakhs* [100,000 – 150,000 rupees] *for the entire district per year. A Panchayat used to get about four-five thousand rupees in a year. The maximum budget in my*

memory that our Panchayat received was 15,000 rupees. It cost only 7,500 to build the old Panchayat building. We cannot imagine building such buildings for 7,500 now. Money then was expensive so we used to make good use of it.

He added:

We had no engineers/overseers or technical people. We used to estimate and prepare projects all by ourselves. When I was the vice-chair of the district Panchayat, our group of 8-9 used to visit different villages in the district to identify projects. During my tenure I managed to get projects for Gyaker, Samar and Mustang – they got 4-5,000 rupees each. People used to be very happy with that support and used to tell us that we are like gods. They used to bring horses to get us to their villages and used to feed us and our horses. [He laughed.] I think the people spent more on welcoming us than what they received for the project.

A similar experience was shared by a Marpha villager who claimed they were the first village to receive government support in the mid-1960s:

We had to work 6 days every year to maintain the village's dam for irrigation during the summer. During the tenure of Chim Bahadur Badahakim we received 3,000 rupees. This amount was beyond our imagination. We used the money to build the dam to control flooding in the village. We said jai, jai [victory] to the Badahakim [district magistrate] for giving the money. Like the Indian Embassy [the Indian Embassy had been providing direct aid to various projects in Mustang for the past three years] is giving money now. The Badahakim used to visit villages and give money for projects.

Within a few years of becoming the district headquarters, the government established all development ministries' major district line agencies in Jomsom. The Northern Border Security Office was replaced by the Office of the Chief District Officer who was made responsible for the formulation and coordination of the district development plans and activities. Other major district line agencies in Jomsom included the District Agriculture Development Office, the District Soil Conservation Office, the District Livestock Office, the Land Registration Office, the District Women's Development Office, the District Drinking Water Development Office, the Land Survey Office, the District Health Service Office and the District Forest Office. Agriculture, Livestock and Health also established service centres, health posts and health centres throughout the district. The District Forest Office had four Ranger Posts to oversee the district's forest management. For the first time since the introduction of the Forest Nationalisation Act 1957, the government took direct responsibility for managing the forests which until then had been vested solely in the village. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

6.3.5   Development projects and international aid

Development activities started to proliferate in Mustang following the establishment of the district based line agencies in Jomsom. By the late 1970s, the Jomsom airport was upgraded making it suitable for Canadian built Twin Otter planes. The Royal Nepal Airline Corporation, the only airline

operating at that time, used to operate regular flights from Pokhara to Jomsom in the dry season. The airport used to be closed for approximately three months during the monsoon season. This airport is actually located on the land of Syang village.

Along with a strong government presence and increased investment, Mustang received support from a number of multi-national and bi-lateral agencies. With financial aid from a Middle Eastern country, the government constructed a 240 kW hydro power plant at Chokhopani. Villages from Jomsom to Lete were electrified in 1983. USAID funded a five-year, US\$ 27 million, Resource Conservation and Utilization Project covering two large watershed areas - the Kali Gandaki in the Mustang and Myagdi districts, and the Daraudi in the Gorkha district. This project was the largest investment ever made by any bilateral or multilateral aid agency in Mustang to that date. The Resource Conservation and Utilisation Project was instrumental in establishing the extant District Office of Soil Conservation in Mustang. (The contribution of the Resource Conservation and Utilisation Project in relation to environmental conservation will be discussed in the next section.) After the termination of the Resource Conservation and Utilisation Project , CARE Nepal implemented the 'Natural Resource Management Project'. CARE focused much of its efforts in the remote villages of Upper Mustang, particularly focusing on village infrastructure development, plantations and improving health and sanitation. These measures are visible even today.

The next section examines the impacts of the Panchayat polity on the endogenous village governance institutions in Mustang.

6.3.6   Local response to governmentalisation

The Panchayat polity changed the political structures, institutional arrangements and the configuration of villages and districts. This change largely focused on consolidating a hierarchical, top down, unilateral, centralised and one party political system of governance based around the absolute rule of the King. This autocratic regime abolished the locally evolved *Mukhiya* system of governance that was common throughout Nepal and replaced it with the village Panchayat which represented the smallest political unit at the bottom of the Panchayat hierarchy. The national policy to abolish local institutions appeared to have no effect in Mustang. The endogenous institutions under the leadership of locally nominated *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* continued to survive during the Panchayat regime, albeit with innovations and adaptations to reflect changing socio-political and economic realities, but without relegating their core institutional features. The degree and extent of adaptation varied from village to village, generally reflecting their distinct socio-political and spatial characteristics. Villages usually espoused parallel concurrent governance structures under which the village Panchayat was considered both an 'official link' to the state, as well as constituting a network of villages. The *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system was considered 'local' and therefore 'internal' to the village. This

current governance system appeared to have emerged to protect village autonomy over their exercise of rights and ownership of environmental resources.

6.3.7 Panchayat local governance institutions: interface with village institutions and adaptation

Under the Panchayat political system, Mustang was divided into 16 Village Panchayat. There could be several villages within a Panchayat depending on size. Each Village Panchayat was further divided into nine wards. Villages in Mustang comprised one to eight wards, depending on their size and population. The delineation of the Village Panchayats and wards, more or less followed traditional village boundaries. The Village Panchayat was required to nominate 11 members for the Village Panchayat Council for a five year term. This included a *Pradhanpancha* (mayor), an *Upapradhanpancha* (deputy-mayor) and nine members, a member from each ward. The *Pradhanpancha* became the Village Panchayat head. They were the first contact person for any official matter or any matter concerning the Village Panchayat. After 1980, membership of the Village Panchayat Council was increased to 47 (five members with a ward chair for each of nine wards, including the *Pradhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha)*.

Panchayat officials represented the villages. They became the key contact to provide access to the government's services and development projects. The positions of *Pradhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha* were considered important. Village Panchayat positions provided stepping stones for the local people to participate in higher levels of the Panchayat hierarchy. The Panchayat system had a policy that only candidates who had served at the Village Panchayat level were eligible for district and National Panchayat positions. Every village vied to have someone from their village elected to these positions.

During the Panchayat period, many villages worked out a 'gentlemen's agreement' to share the *Pradhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha* positions amongst themselves. For example, Ghasa and Lete had an agreement to share *Pradhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha* between them as also did Marpha and Syang. In the Village Panchayat which had a dominant large village such as Tukuche, Kagbeni, Jharkot, Chhusang, Chhoser, and Lo-Manthang, the *Pradhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha* positions were mostly retained by the dominant village. Small villages had to limit themselves to nominating ward members for the Panchayat council. For small villages, ward members were the first contact person to communicate and coordinate with the Panchayat hierarchy when wanting to gain access to the central government support provided through various district based line agencies. Ward members also provided a link between the Village Panchayat and the village based endogenous institutions.

Villages in Mustang responded differently to the Panchayat political structures, using different strategies to adapt to the new political realities. Some villages made minor changes in their existing village institutional arrangements to enable them to both participate in Panchayat politics and to continue with their *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* systems. Villages nominated ward officials to represent them in the Village Panchayat, but made no changes in the local institutional arrangements. Villages which shared resources such as Jomsom and Thini agreed to terminate the nomination of *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* and accepted the *Pradhanpancha* as the new village head. They also agreed to share the *Pradhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha* positions among themselves. They, however, continued to retain the core institutional features of the village-based governance system to take care of village level affairs. This included continuing with the services of *Chhowa,* to manage land and other environmental resources within their village territories as under the system of *Ghempa and Thuimi,* irrespective of the government's forest nationalisation policy which will be discussed in Section 6.4.

In the past Jomsom was considered Thini's satellite village with the function of regulating the salt trade passing through its territories. Thini villagers used to refer to the people of Jomsom as *arangsi-karangsi,* literally meaning 'those who take and follow orders'. A Thini villager told me, *Jomsom people had no right to participate in village meetings and were not involved in decision-making.* He added:

> *After the Panchayat system, we decided to remove the Ghempa system. Thini and Jomsom signed an agreement (kagaj) to work as one village and share all burdens and responsibilities equally to govern the village. Jomsom people were granted the same rights as people of Thini, but they also had to provide Chhowa.*

There was a practical reason that made Thini willing to share power with Jomsom as explained by a local Thini leader:

> *By that time Jomsom people owned more agriculture lands than us. The population there was also increasing every year so it was a good decision to share the responsibilities of Chhowa and also the responsibilities to manage our forests (ban), pastures (lekh), irrigation channels (kulo) and water sources (paani). This meant fewer burdens for us.*

Most of the villages, however, espoused a parallel multi-layered governance structures (see Figure 11). On the left is the endogenous village governance system, and on the right, the hierarchical Panchayat-based local governance system. Under this arrangement the Village Panchayat was considered 'official' or 'formal', and a vital 'link' to the state. All adults were enfranchised to elect officials for their respective village Panchayat. The secretary to the Panchayat was provided by the government. The local endogenous institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* continued to function as 'local' and therefore 'internal' to the village.

1961 - 1990

Endogenous Village Governance Structure	Panchayat Local Governance Structure

Chief District Officer/District Panchayat Chair and Vice Chair

Beyond Village Level

Raja of Lo/Ghempa Chhe/ the 13 Mukhiya council/Paanchgau council

District Panchayat (comprises regional members and Pradhanpancha and Upapradhanpancha from each Village Panchayat)

District-based Government line agencies

Chhowa Chhumae ← Village Executive Ghempa Thuimi Mukhiya → Advisory Council Ward members and other nominees

Village Panchayat Executive (comprises Pradhanpancha, Upa-Pradhanpancha and 9 ward chairs) → Secretary Provided by the government

Village Level

Village Assembly (A representative from each household)

The Village Panchayat Council (comprises Pradhanpancha, Upa-pradhanpancha and 45 ward members, 5 from each ward, including a ward chair)

All registered households – Kuriya or Dhur

Villages divided into 9 wards – all adult are enfranchised to elect the Village Panchayat officials

Local and Internal	Formal and External

Figure 11: Multi-layered village governance structures from 1961 to 1990

The Village Panchayat was responsible for managing wider socio-political processes. Villagers considered the Panchayat officials as 'front-liners', in terms of dealing with the government officials. The *Padhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha* were regarded as a higher village level authority. They were approached for issues that required higher level interventions in the local socio-political structure. In some ways the Panchayat officials took the role once played by the *Chikyap* in terms of managi*n*g inter village affairs within their own Panchayat. The majority of villages in Mustang used the village assembly, made up of a member from every eligible household, to nominate Panchayat officials rather than ballot boxes.

Village Panchayat officials were responsible for Panchayat-related matters. The District Panchayat was responsible for communicating and coordinating with the Village Panchayat. Village Panchayat officials were responsible for nominating the District Panchayat officials as well as a national Panchayat member to represent the district at the national legislative body. While the Panchayat system contributed positively to the development of villages and reduced the burden on endogenous institutions to maintain village infrastructures, the presence of the District Forest Office to enforce the forest nationalisation policy posed a major challenge to their ownership rights over forest resources which will be discussed in Section 6.4.

In this changed institutional setting many villages regarded the *Pradhanpancha* and *Upapradhanpancha* as higher level village authorities. They were approached on issues that required higher level interventions, such as disputes between villages.

6.3.8   Village autonomy

Most villages in Mustang continued to nominate the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* as per the village law. They continued to recruit *Chhowa* or *Chhumae.* These village officials continued to play dominant roles in managing village level affairs perceived of as 'internal matters'. A local leader of Chhusang told me:

> *The Ghempa's main job is to protect the village (gauko sangrashan), to manage village funds, and more importantly to monitor forests, village boundaries (ban chhetra ra afno chhetra) and to oversee fields (kheti nigarani garne) and to monitor the ban on cutting of green trees for firewood (kacho daura). These jobs cannot be done by political appointees or a person from other villages, it can be done only by the people from our own village.*

The local people were able to maintain the village's independence by separating village affairs from the village Panchayat affairs. This separation of roles included adopting some strategic decisions such as banning villagers from approaching the Panchayat officials from other villages to settle village level disputes. *We wanted to keep village matters within our village and did not want representatives from other villages to interfere with our problems* said a former vice chair of the District Development Committee of Mustang. This rule effectively curtailed any vestige of power and influence held by former power brokers such as the *Subba.*

*The Ghempa system is more important for us than any other system*s, said a local leader of Dhee. He further elaborated: *who would look after our agriculture? Who would come to tell us that you would have a turn to irrigate your field today? The village has to manage all these. So we continued with the Ghempa system.*

Similar views were also expressed by a former *Thuimi* of Syang village:

> *We had our Thuimi systems from the ancient times and we continued with them even during the Panchayat time. We had no conflict or overlapping of authority between Thuimi and Panchayat officials. Both performed different roles. Panchayat representatives were involved in Panchayat level issues such as attending government meetings, to contact government officials and to present projects to the government and receive funds for them. Thuimi was responsible for mobilising villagers, implementing the projects, keeping all accounts clear and transparent and to help Panchayat officials to settle financial matters.*

He also stressed that: *both systems worked very well and we never had any disputes between Thuimi and Pradhanpancha or Upapradhanpancha or even ward members*. Most of the villages treated ward members as *bhaladmi,* (village elders) who were invited to the village council, chaired by *Ghempa*

and *Mukhiya,* as members/advisors on village affairs.

In the changed political context, the prime concern of the local people was to protect the villagers' rights and ownership of the natural resources within the village territories. This became possible by maintaining village autonomy where the endogenous institutions have continued to play a central part. The new political context has seen several villages brought together under the umbrella of the village Panchayat, but importantly villages within that regime continued to retain and exercise their individual rights and authority over environmental resources. Villages continued to nominate *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* to oversee village level affairs and to play a central role in maintaining the village identity and retaining control of the village natural resources. Otherwise these resources would have become either 'common' resources for all villages within the Panchayat or would have been nationalised. This local ownership and rights over forest resources became a contested issue after the establishment of the District Forest Office. This will be discussed in the next section, 6.4.

6.3.9   District and regional level institutions

The Panchayat regime influenced regional institutions such as the council of the 13 *Mukhiy*a and the Raja of Lo. New positions such as the chair of the District Panchayat and the Chief District Officer emerged to oversee regional and district level issues. Existing institutions had to innovate to maintain their significance and influence in regional issues.

6.3.9.1   The Council of 13 Mukhiya

In the past the Council of 13 Mukhiya and the *Mukhiya* system in the Thaksatsai region played dominant roles in managing regional affairs. With the emergence of new village and regional level leaders during the Panchayat regime, the council scaled down its responsibilities and became increasingly concerned with the socio-cultural affairs of the Chan Thakali, living both in and outside this region, in order to maintain the influence of their group in district and national level politics.

The Council of 13 Mukhiya predominated in past socio-cultural reforms of Chan Thakali. Chan Thakali is the only ethnic group in Mustang that has been heavily influenced by Hinduism, a conversion that started during the Rana regime to eliminate elements of Tibetan influence from their culture and traditions in favour of the Hindu culture and traditions (Bista, 1971). These reforms were initiated under the leadership of the *Subba* with the two objectives of elevating the Chan Thakali social status in Mustang; and winning the trust of the Hindu rulers in Kathmandu who viewed Tibetan culture and Tibetan looking people as inferior (Haimendorf, 1966; Bista 1971; Thakali, 1994). In the altered socio-political context, the council continued to focus on strengthening the socio-cultural affairs of the Chan Thakali, who regard the Thaksatsai region as their ancestral land. The *Mir Mukhiya* of Tukuche explained:

> *The Mukhiya and Jimbuwal system was officially abolished in our region ... but Mukhiya and communities are one like nails and fingers ... Mukhiyas in this region are representatives of the Thakali community. We have continued with our Council of 13 Mukhiya system to manage our socio-cultural affairs and shared pasture areas. But there are now 16 villages with 16 Mukhiya.*

6.3.9.2   The Council of Paachgau

After decades of hiatus**,** the Council of Paachgau was revived in the late 1970s to manage forests owned jointly by five original villages of the Paachgau region -Thini, Syang, Marpha, Chhairo and Chimang. In its new reincarnation it was renamed *Paachgau Udhar Samiti* (Five Village Welfare Committee), but is more popularly referred as '*Paachgau Samaj'* (Society of Paachgau). The revival of the Paachgau council was a tactical move to respond to the likely pressure the development activities would have on their forest and also to capitalise on the revenue it could potentially generate. It was also revived to protect the socio-political and cultural interests of the original villages within its region.

6.3.9.3   The Raja of Lo

The Panchayat system worked in favour of the Raja of Lo whose influence and authority had dwindled considerably during the brief period of multi-party democracy (Dhungel, 2002). The King of Nepal reinstated some of the traditional rights and practices of the Raja. He was appointed to the Royal Council (*rajyasava)* and awarded the honorary title of colonel in the Nepali Army (Dhungel, 2002). A local from Ghami explained his importance in the local affairs:

> *We find going to the Raja of Lo for justice much more practical than going to the courts. We can speak in our language and say whatever comes in our mind to argue for our case in front of the Raja. It is not the same if we use the government court. We don't fully understand their language; they are also not trust worthy.*

Although the Raja of Lo was not directly involved in district or national level politics, his significance increased after the general election in1980 which enfranchised adults. Following this, the support of the Raja became crucial to win election for the national Panchayat as well as for district level representatives.

6.3.9.4   New higher level institutions

The central government officials, particularly the Chief District Officer, emerged as a new authority in the district. The local people considered the Chief District Officer similar to the *Ghempa Chhe*. He (or she) was responsible for maintaining law and order in the district. This authority gave the Chief District officer the right to intervene in local disputes. For many villagers, the Chief District Officer was seen as the alternative authority to resolve local disputes that the *Pradhanpancha* or even the Raja of Lo had failed to resolve or where there were doubts about their impartiality. When, for

example, the small village of Dhee had a dispute with the more powerful and much larger neighbouring village of Charang over a pasture area during the mid-1980s, it decided to approach the Chief District Officer rather than the Raja of Lo for a ruling. The chief *Ghempa* of Charang was related to the Raja. The Chief District Officer mediated the case in the presence of the Raja ruling in favour of Dhee village. This event cemented the position of the Chief District Officer as an alternative leader in the district with the authority to resolve local level disputes or if the people had doubt about the impartiality fairness of their traditional leaders.

Additionally, in 1980 the reformed Panchayat constitution enfranchised 1,200 government officials who emerged as the group to hold the balance of power to win the 1981 local election (Thakali, 1994). As a government chief executive officer, the Chief District Officer exercised a major influence on government officials to support the 'official candidate'. This became apparent during the first general election held in 1981. A candidate from Marpha was considered to be the 'official candidate' and was backed by both the Raja of Lo and the government officials against a popular social worker who was educated, largely credited for relocating the district headquarters from Daana to Jomsom, and establishing the first high school in the district. Despite all of these achievements, the official candidate won by 700 votes, most of which came from the government officials. A local leader said:

> *The district politics during the Panchayat time was based on four factors: first, the strength of your group; second, the ability to spend money; third, the ability to win the support of Raja of Lo; and fourth, the capacity to win votes from the government officials. During the Panchayat regime, the government officials used to get instructions from the top* [the centre] *to vote for the official candidates.*

6.3.9.5 New leadership

The Panchayat regime changed the political dynamics and leadership at both district and national levels. By the mid-1970s, a group of aspiring local leaders emerged in Mustang. These new political actors were relatively rich, having made their fortunes working as traders, contractors, progressive farmers and tourism entrepreneurs during the Khamba occupation and thereafter. The new leaders united to eliminate the residual influence of the *Subba* family in district and national level politics to advance their own political ambitions.

The next section will specifically focus on the development and implementation of forestry policies during the Panchayat regime. It examines the effects of these policies on endogenous village level institutions, particularly in relation to management of environmental resources, following the establishment of the District Forest Office and enforcement of forest related rules, regulations and policies.

6.4   Forestry policies during the Panchayat regime

The nationalisation of forests dominated the environmental debate for much of the first two decades of the Panchayat regime. Statutes, plans and policies evolved during this period with the aim of consolidating state ownership and authority over forest resources, with a primary focus on sustainably managing Terai forests. With the sharp focus on the problems of deforestation, the emphasis of forest policy shifted from technical, to social, environmental and economic considerations. Environmental conservation increasingly became the focus of Nepal's development assistance agenda from the 1970s. To promote public participation, the Panchayat Forest and the Panchayat Protected Forest policies were introduced. They were heralded as ground breaking initiatives to promote decentralised and devolved control over environmental resources in an effort to combat the issues contributing to deforestation. These policies however, limited the participation of local people in decision-making and planning. In another significant development, the government established District Forest Offices throughout the country to consolidate state authority over forests. Their presence and corrupt practices were to provoke discontent among local people. This further aggravated the problems leading to deforestation.

6.4.1   Forest nationalisation and bureaucratisation

Forests continued to be a major focus of environmental policies during the Panchayat regime. The combined effects of the state's policies of forest nationalisation and the conversion of forests into agricultural lands to resettle an exodus of new immigrants from the hills to the Terai, was disastrous. Deforestation occurred at an alarming rate during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It was estimated that Nepal lost 25 per cent of its forest cover between 1950 and 1975. This was among the highest rates of deforestation in tropical south and south East Asia (Thapa and Weber, 1990).

A special Forest Act was introduced in 1967 to address the increased rate of deforestation (Malla, 2001; 2003). The Act had two goals: to protect forests and to promote better forest management. Forest plans included goals to harvest the Terai forests on a sustained yield basis (Kerry et al, 1994). All forest related offences, including forest encroachment, were considered crimes against the state. In 1973 the government created two departments, the Department of Forests and the Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, with a network of district based offices. The District Forest Officers were empowered to take strong actions against forest regulation offenders in their districts. This devolved authority was simply abused by forest authorities for their own gains, provoking discontent amongst local forest users (Wagley and Ojha, 2002, p. 32,). While the Act was significant, in terms of consolidating state ownership and authority over forests, it fell short of addressing issues related to environmental degradation.

By 1973, the destruction of forests and the related soil erosion was becoming all too apparent. A year later, German Oversees Technical Aid sponsored a meeting on 'the Himalayan problem'. At this meeting Eric Eckholm, a New York Times reporter, used Nepal as the quintessential example for deteriorating mountain environments, creating a seminal text on Nepal's environmental problems. The devastating floods in the Ganges plains during this period were believed to be more severe and extensive than had previously been recorded (Mayers, 1986). This was a turning point in Nepal's environmental politics. The floods provided much needed evidence to support the belief that 'upland deforestation, as a result of population growth, agriculture practices and poverty, was causing flooding and affecting downstream agriculture (the so called Himalayan-Ganges link) on a regional scale' (Guthman, 1997). This theory, which became popularly referred to as 'the Himalayan degradation theory', explained the human-environmental relationships and changes in the Himalayan region significantly shaping environmental policies and programmes thereafter. Nepal began to take environmental degradation seriously. Environmental conservation started to become a focus of Nepal's development assistance agenda.

6.4.2   Forest decentralisation and local participation

The initial response to this environmental crisis was a new forest policy in 1976, introduced to institutionalise scientific forest management systems across the country. By this time, the rhetoric of political decentralisation, popular participation and collective action was gaining ground. The emphasis of forestry policy shifted from technical solutions to social, environmental and economic considerations with decentralised and devolved control over environmental resources. The strategy of local participation became a cornerstone of the government's forest policy (HMG, 1978). The Forestry Plan recognised that forests were integral to rural communities and acknowledged the role of forests in economic development (Bajarachaya, 1986; 1993).

Internationally Nepal was identified as one of the twenty-five 'least developed countries' (Blaikie et al, 1980), making it a target for international development assistance. Development agencies started to play a major role in the country. A new development paradigm emerged where the focus shifted from a discrete-sectoral to a multi-sectoral integrated approach. Agricultural and rural development programmes were prioritised to promote equitable regional development (Blaikie et al., 1979), extending the development measures beyond the Kathmandu valley and the Terai region in order to reduce regional inequalities (Khadka, 1994; Pant, 1991; Pandey, 1983; Wood, 1986).

To devolve forest management at the local level, Panchayat Forests (PF) and Panchayat Protected Forests Regulations were introduced in 1978. The main thrust of these regulations was to delegate the forest management authority to the village Panchayat, and promote local participation (Messerschmidt, 1987). This 'state sponsored participatory forest policy' was considered ground-

breaking at the time, irrespective of the fact that it was limited in terms of reaching out to and including local beneficiary groups to involve them as local stakeholders/users in the decision making and planning process (Joshi and Pokharel, 1998).

It was during this period that USAID invested US$ 27.5 million, in addition to US$ 5.1 million from the Nepalese government, to implement the Resource Conservation and Utilization Project. This was the largest technical and institutional building investment in natural resource management in Nepal covering the period from 1980 to 1988. Designed as an integrated conservation project, the Resource Conservation and Utilization Project covered two major watershed areas; the Kali Gandaki covering the Mustang and Myagdi districts, and the Buri Gandaki covering the Gorkha district, (Simons at el., 1983; Chew, 1990). As in other developing countries, this integrated project failed to achieve its project goals, a result attributed to a lack of effective and well-coordinated institutional support to implement programmes (Chew, 1990).

The Resource Conservation and Utilization Project however, played a significant role in promoting soil and watershed conservation measures through support for the promulgation of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management Act and the establishment of a District Soil Conservation Office. This office and the District Forest Office acted as constituents of the Ministry of Forest, albeit, with two separate authorities. The Ministry of Forest was later renamed the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation. Currently there are five departments under this Ministry: the Department of Forests, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, the Department of Forest Survey and Research, the Department of Soil and Watershed Management, and the Department of Plant Resources.

6.4.3 The impacts of the District Forest Office in Mustang

The District Forest Office of Mustang was established in 1975. It was the most important and the only district-based line agency with responsibility for day-to-day management of environmental resources, i.e., the forests. There were three other offices responsible for managing lands, water sources and pasture areas, but they had specific and limited authority over these. The District Livestock Office, for example, had a pasture development section which was more concerned with providing research and extension services. It had no role in the management of pasture areas, which continued to be managed as per village rules and regulations. The Land Revenue and Land Survey offices were responsible for maintaining records of land ownership and the transfer of records, but with no day-to-day management responsibilities over the lands. As previously, the village continued to exercise its right to sell, control and manage all productive and marginal lands within its territories. Similarly, the District Drinking Water and Irrigation Development offices were responsible for new and old drinking water and irrigation schemes, but they had no authority over the water resources in the

district. The presence of these offices has had no significant impact on the local perceptions of ownership and authority over pasture, water and land resources. Villages have continued to exercise their right to use and manage these resources as in the past. The local authority and associated rights over forest resources however, were challenged after the establishment of the District Forest Office.

6.4.3.1 Forests – a contested resource

For the first time since the promulgation of the Forest Nationalisation Act and the presence of the District Forest Office, the local people confronted the state's authority over forest resources. The Forest Office was dismissive of local authority, ownership, rights and access to the forest resources, and undermined the locally held socio-political and economic values associated with these resources. The local residents were marginalised and isolated from their forests. Regular activities such as collecting timber were labelled as 'illegal'. The forests became a contested resource, leading to a confrontation between the local people and the Forest Office staff. What is important to note here is that this apparent shift in the institutional management of the forests did not force the local people to destroy the forests as reported widely in the literature concerning the deforestation problems in Nepal (Messerschmidst 1987; Malla 2001). Instead, the local people used the forest related problems to confront the state's authority and make it aware of local concerns, and ultimately to come up with acceptable resolutions. To some extent the resolutions helped to reduce the detrimental impacts on the forests, but more importantly they retained local authority over the forest resources.

6.4.3.2 Forest authority

When the forest office came, we were told that we have no authority over forests, said a local Thini leader. *The forest office told us that forests belong to the government and only they had the authority over forests and we did not* said another villager from Tukuche. *The Forest Office destroyed our forest* was a common opinion expressed by almost all interviewees.

A local leader from Thini could not conceal his anger when he told me how the forest in Jomsom was destroyed during the DFO's tenure:

> *In the past Thini used to control all forests. We used to fix dates for people to collect pine needles. People were allowed to go in forests to collect pine needles only for 15 days. They were allowed to collect these only in the designated forest area. We made this decision to reduce forest fires. Dried pine needles are also used for composting. We used to fix dates to open forest areas. We had a system of using forest areas on a rotational basis to save forests and to allow regeneration. We had a ban on the felling of green trees. Green trees were allowed to be cut only for timber to build houses. But the Forest Office came and told us that we have no right over our forests. They issued permits as they wished to cut green trees for timber. They did not consult us. They just came and destroyed our forests. They issued permits to build RCUP (the Resource Conservation and Utilisation Project) buildings in Jomsom, Muktinath and Kagbeni. Our chhatraban [forest area] was wiped out (ujad) completely during that time. It was a very dense forest, but the Forest Office destroyed it so much that it became possible for us to count trees from afar.*

6.4.3.3 District Forest Office rules and regulations and local discontent

The District Forest Office introduced seven major changes to enforce government rules, regulations and policies, in relation to forests. It initiated a forest demarcation process to separate the forests from the settlement areas (*aawadi*), a process that alienated the local people from their forests. In some villages, barbed wire fences were built to restrict the villagers' access to their forests. None of these fences exist today. Villagers ignored the forest demarcation, which had no meaning to them.

A permit system was introduced with a royalty fixed for the quantity of timber harvested. The royalty was deposited in the government's account and went to the central treasury. Prior to that, particularly after the introduction of Panchayat, villagers either used to get a permit, from the *Pradhanpancha* (in the case of Jomsom/Thini) or the *Ghempa and Mukhiya,* for a nominal payment. A villager from Jomsom told me: *In the past we were allowed to cut timber only when we were building or repairing houses. We used to go see the Pradhanpancha and pay four rupees as a royalty to obtain the permit. The money was kept in the village account.*

The forests became national property and all people had the right to use them with the approval of the District Forest Office. This meant that the people, who had permits, were allowed to cut trees in forests belonging to other villages. The name of the forest area had to be mentioned on the permit. This new rule contradicted the existing village rule whereby non-villagers were barred from the use of forest products. A villager from Marpha told me, *in the past only our villagers were allowed to cut trees in our forests. The Forest Office said that they have the authority to issue permits for timber from any forests. They changed it and we were angry with them. We could not protest against this decision in the beginning because they were the government.* The District Forest Office decision was not based on the capacity of forests, but rather depended on the influence of people who approached them for permits. The fact that forests in the Thini-Jomsom Panchayat were used more than any other forests in the district supports this claim.

The Forest Office allowed people with permits to transport timber from one village to another. This rule also contradicted the village rule. No one was allowed to transport timber outside the village territories unless there was prior agreement between villages to do so.

The Forest Office introduced a system of measuring timber in cubic feet. The permit clearly specified the amount of timber in cubic feet a permit holder was allowed to cut from the forest. Prior to this, the village used the number of trees as the basis to grant permission. Depending on the need of a villager who had requested the timber, the village council used to decide how many trees they should be allowed to extract from the forest. A villager told me this new system of measuring timber, which was supposed to be more accurate and scientific, was flawed and contributed to forest destruction. He

explained:

> *If you are allocated two trees for timber for building your home, you would carefully think about your needs and select good size trees. Because you have been given a fixed number of trees you would make sure that you choose trees that give you enough timber for your work. But when you are allowed to collect timber in cubic feet, you would not worry about number or size of trees, you would cut more trees or cut trees near your village that may not be of the right size to get the cubic measure of timber you have a permit for ... people, especially contractors, did not give a damn about the tree size and cut as many trees as possible to meet their cubic measure. They also used outsiders to cut trees and they had no respect for the village forests.*

The Forest Office did not assess whether people really needed timber. People who knew the District Forest Office staff never had any problem obtaining a permit regardless of whether they needed timber or not. They collected timber for business purposes. A villager told me:

> *The Forest Office did not consult us about forest related issues in the beginning. We used think it is a very powerful office. They allowed people to cut green trees. They gave permits to people they knew or who entertained them and they were allowed to collect as much timber as they wanted. They had no proper monitoring.*

Another villager told me:

> *When the people from our village made a request for timber it would not be difficult for us to estimate how much timber the person would need. We would know him and know what he would be asking timber for ... this is not a big town like in Pokhara or Kathmandu where you would not know even your next door neighbour ... here we know each other very well and we also know who would be doing what.*

Finally, the Forest Office gave permission to operate saw mills in Mustang. By the 1980s, as mentioned earlier, there were six saw mills operating in Mustang. They were given permission to collect a fixed amount of timber, (about 500 cubic feet), every year to run their enterprises. But a local said: *these people used to get much more than that that.* This was the first time Mustang had enterprises based on forest products. A villager said, *at one time it was fashionable for us to have big cabinets with glass window to display our utensils and keep our clothes. The furniture factories had problem to meet local demands because of inadequare timber supply.* The use of cabinets, tea tables, chairs and other household items became popular.

6.4.3.4 Confrontation and adaptation

Within a few years villagers gradually confronted the Forest Office and challenged both their decision-making process and their authority over the forests. Despite the increased District Forest Office interventions in forest-related matters, villagers never gave up their claims of ownership and authority over the forests. Quotations used in this chapter repeatedly reinforced the idea that the local people continued to believe the forests were their own resource, irrespective of what the prevalent act

or policies may have stipulated or what the Forest Office attempted to enforce. Villagers particularly resented the Forest Office's prerogative of issuing timber permits to non-villagers. They were also concerned with the way the Forest Office staff had made decisions over forest related matters. A local from Ghasa village told me:

> *Forest staff used to listen to a few influential people, mainly contractors. These people used to get as much timber as they wanted ... the Forest Office would just issue permits to them ... for us it was difficult even to get timber required for building a house. We had to go to Lete to get the permit and it was not easy to get the permit unless we, or someone else we knew, knew the Ranger there and could ask for help.*

Villagers started to rebel against the District Forest Office. A local leader from Marpha recalled a particular incident, which forced the Forest Office to backtrack on its decision:

> *Ananda Sherchan (from Kobang) had a contract in Muktinath. He came with a permit to get timber from our forests, but we stopped him. We asked him why we should give him timber when he had a contract in another village. He later came with the police to cut down trees, but we stopped them. We then decided to take a delegation to the Forest Office. One representative from each household joined the delegation. We surrounded the District Forest Office and questioned the Forest Officer what right he had to issue the permit for our forests? We told him if the project had been in our village we would not have any problem with the permit the office had issued to collect timber from our village forest. We said to the staff that the village could even waive the royalty for the project. We questioned the District Forest Office why should we accept the permit issued by his office for a project that is not located in our village?*

The incident described above was probably a major turning point in shaping the relationship between the District Forest Office and the local people in relation to the forest resources. This incident may also have encouraged other villagers to follow the same path and become more assertive over forest matters by confronting the District Forest Officer and his staff. The people of Jomsom and Thini were also becoming resentful towards the forest staff whom they saw were *spending more time in the office and not really interacting with the local people*. A local informant from Marpha pointed out, *the forest office could not take full authority over forests in Mustang. They had an office but no programmes so the forest protection was not fully effective. Forest staffs were also lazy. They spent most of their time in the office and did not talk much to the people about the forest.* Another informant commented, *the Forest Office had strict rules and used to send forest guards and rangers for patrolling on a regular basis ... but if you pay them they would over-look whatever you did in the forests. Many contactors did exactly that,* he claimed. A similar view was shared by a Jomsom villager:

> *Forest staff were useless. They had a system to visit the forest with a permit holder to mark the trees for felling. But they never did that properly. They used to leave their office with contractors to visit the forest, but instead of going to the forest to mark trees, they would stop at Somley and Dhumba. The contractors used to buy chhyang* [local beer]*, rakshi* [alcohol]

and kukhura [chicken] ... they used to feed themselves and get drunk and returned back to their office without visiting the forests ... [he further added] ... we learnt that there were some people who had permits for only 100 cubic feet, but had collected 500. The Forest Office was not really interested to monitor this kind of discrepancy. We visited the houses of those people and counted their timber. We confiscated the excess timber; we auctioned that, and fined the culprits for destroying our forests. When this kind of problem started to increase, the Pradhanpancha and some leaders from Jomsom and Thini went to see the Forest Officer and told him that they should not issue permits other than for Chhataraban. If they do, villagers will take action against the people who come with the permit.

A local leader from Thini confirmed:

We stopped the Forest Office issuing permits for forests near Thini otherwise these also would have been destroyed. We told them that they could not give permits for these forests. We warned them that if they issue permits there would be a major conflict, we would resort to violence and people could die (maaramaar catacat hunchha). So we allowed them to issue permits for Chhatarban only.

After this event, the District Forest Office issued permits only for the *Chhatarban* forest. This was the same patch of forest that Thini had allowed Syang village to use. The people of Thini-Jomsom Panchayat later went to the forest areas along with the people from Syang. They demarcated the forest boundary in Chhatarban. While the Syang people were allowed to collect only firewood and dried pine needles from these forests, the permit holders were allowed to collect timber, but not firewood and dried pine needles. A Jomsom leader described Jomsom's position as the district headquarters: *Jomsom is the district headquarters. RCUP built many houses for the government staff here. It was not possible for us to stop timber extraction as much as other villages in the south were able to do so. This was the best we could do to protect the remaining forests.* Another villager told me *government officials send their peons* [lowest ranking staff] *to collect firewood from our forests every day. We can't really stop them.* Consequently, the *Chhatarban* area, located on the other side of the Kali Gandaki River in the Thini/Jomsom territories, became *naked (bungaa).* Other forested areas around Jomsom had to endure the pressure arising from the increased number of government staff and lodges.

6.4.3.5 Local reservations towards following the state policy and programmes

The District Forest Officer made an attempt to introduce the 'Panchayat Forests' and the 'Panchayat Protected Forests' schemes in Mustang whereby the management rights of planted forests and natural forests were transferred to the village Panchayat. Very few villages participated in these schemes, only those with minor forests. A local from Tukuche told me that *only small villages who had small forest or no forests participated in Panchayat forest programs. We did not participate in this program because we did not trust the government staff.*

A similar view was expressed by a local leader from Marpha:

When the District Forest Office was in Mustang our forests were divided into different regions (elakas). We did not fully understand why it was done. The Forest Office asked us to participate in the new forest policy [referring to Panchayat forest policy] *but we became suspicious that if we participated we would lose our forests to the government*.

6.5   Summary

The roles of village-based institutions in Mustang's environmental governance during the period from 1950 to 1990 were examined in the face of externally imposed socio-political and economic changes. It is argued that these exogenous changes had limited impacts on the way local households and communities managed their village resources such as pastures, land and water sources and ultimately, the forests. The autonomy of the village-based *Ghempa* system has proved resistant to the state's authority. The drive to retain autonomy was motivated by a strong desire to protect village rights over the resources necessary to meet their basic needs. Chapter 6 supported the argument that environmental concerns and practices have always been integral to the overall well-being of the village and villagers in Mustang. At the same time, Chapter 6 demonstrated the inherent vulnerability of the village-based system of governance in the face of wider political and economic changes as exemplified by the impacts of the short term Khamba occupation and, more significantly, from a longer term perspective, changes in the management of forestry resources under the authority of central government. The latter changes were undertaken by the parallel district-based central government line agencies who worked through the Panchayat local governance structure. The local institutions for environmental governance thus can be characterised as multi-layered.

In Chapter 7 I will examine the most recent phase in the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang from 1990 to the present.

Chapter 7

Polities, governance and environment in Mustang
from 1990 to present

7.0   Introduction

The aim of Chapters 7 and 8 is to examine the most recent phase in the evolution towards a multi-layered environmental governance system in Mustang. This chapter will focus on the development of parallel endogenous and exogenous environmental governance arrangements from 1990 to the present as the first two layers of environmental governance. The following chapter will then focus on the third layer of environmental governance to highlight the emergence of non-governmental organisations as a significant partner working with central government and local communities.

I argue in this, and the next, chapter that during the post-1990 period to the present, the endogenous village governance institutions have continued to perform an important role in promoting village environmental wellbeing, particularly the village ownership rights over environmental resources. This role has however been increasingly circumscribed by the growing dominance of central government and local government and the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and allied community-based organisations. These have all increased their stakein local development and environmental matters.

Chapter 7 is divided into nine sections, as follows**:** Section 7.1 provides an overview of the national political setting, dominated by deep-seated conflicts and interludes of political instability during the period from 1990 to the present. During this period, wide ranging neo-liberal policy restructuring took place to modernise central and local government, within the framework of a multi-party democratic system. This period also witnessed the rising influence of non-governmental organisations working in partnership with central and local government and local communities.

Next section 7.2 examines the implications of central government led modernisation reforms for the role of local government, particularly highlighting the impacts of decentralisation and local self-governance policy reforms, to strengthen the roles of the District Development Committee and Village Development Committees to undertake development activities in Mustang. This is illustrated by a major road construction project which was undertaken in face of strong environmental opposition and outside the purview of statutory requirements for environmental assessment.

Section 7.3 examines the impacts of central government modernisation reforms on endogenous village governance institutions. Section 7.4 examines the implications of overseas employment migration for village governance institutions. Section 7.5 examines the growth of NGOs and their interface with the endogenous village governance institutions Section 7.6 examines the proliferation of community-based organisations. Section 7.7 provides an overview of the role of the NGOs as a new layer of environmental governance. Chapter 7.8 provides a chapter summary.

7.1   The national setting

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s created geo-political tensions in neighbouring areas including South Asia. The relationship between India and China, for example, was strained and both countries increased their border military presence. In Nepal, these tensions led the Nepali Congress Party and left wing parties to launch nationwide demonstrations calling for the restoration of multi-party democracy. There was widespread support from Nepalese of all walks of life and also from the international community. In 1990, in response to this popular pressure, the King dissolved the Panchayat regime, lifted the ban on political parties and restored a multi-party political system. Thus, a new era of more open and liberal democratic politics was introduced in Nepal.

The new constitution introduced a parliamentary system based on the British Westminster model with the king as the head of the state and a prime minister as the head of the government, and two houses: the House of Representatives (*Pratinidhi Sabha*) and the National Council (*Rashtriya Sabha*) (Mahat, 2005). These reforms increased the dominance of neo-liberal ideologies and policies (Bhurtel, 2009; Mahat, 2005). Unfortunately, the reign of the new parliament was very short and was followed by several years of political instability and insecurity precipitated by a period of Maoist insurgency. It is only since 2008 that a fragile peace has been restored in the country and a legitimate government elected. The monarchy is no longer a political force. Notwithstanding potential for improvements from the recent political accord, Nepal continues to remain one of the World's poorest and least developed countries (UNDP, 2008). The country thus faces two major challenges. The first is the need for constitutional arrangements that will bring the peace process to a logical and complete conclusion. The second is to overcome the continuing difficulties associated with poverty, caste, gender and ethnic inequalities which are the underlying causes of conflict. Discussion of the changing role of village environmental governance during the 1990s should, therefore, be considered relative to these imperatives.

7.1.1   Local government reforms

A first reforming step of the new central government was to restructure the district and village political structures by enacting the Village Development Committee, Municipality and District

Development Committee Act in 1992 (Bhurtel, 2009). The Act created a two-tier local government structure. The District and Village Panchayat were replaced by the District Development Committee and Village Development Committees which formed the higher and lower tiers of the local governance system. The Act increased membership of the executive bodies of the District Development Committee and Village Development Committees with additional members representing women, *Dalit* (low caste Hindus) and *adibahsi Janajati* (indigenous nationalities) to address gender, caste and ethnic inequalities. But what radically transformed local government was the promulgation of the Local Self Government Act in 1999 and the Decentralisation Rules a year later (Bhurtel, 2009; Dahal, 1996). This Act and Rules represented an unprecedented shift in policy by legally endorsing the concept of self-governance and devolution of authority to District Development Committees and Village Development Committees. It guaranteed the devolution of fiscal authority and the transfer to local government of basic service delivery functions such as schools, health posts, postal services, rural roads, agriculture and small irrigation projects (Pandey, 2009). For the first time, efforts were made to link accountability of the line agencies to local government (Hachhethu, 2004).

7.1.2 Non-governmental organisations and new partnerships

The neo-liberal approach of central government reforms increased the involvement of international and national non-governmental organisations as key development partners (Brurtel, 2009; Dahal, 1996; Fisher, 1991; Maskey, 1998). The prominence of non-governmental organisations reflected broader shifts in governance that stressed decentralisation and broad based participation in decision-making. Non-governmental organisations were perceived of as more efficient in delivering public goods and services, and were therefore, the preferred conduit for development interventions (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002). Consequently, the number of non-governmental organisations in development and conservation programmes has proliferated since the 1990s. As of 2004, over 30,000 non-governmental organisations were reported to exist in Nepal, but only 16,425 along with 107 international non-governmental organisations (INGO) were registered with the government (Kobec and Thapa, 2004).

7.2 Strengthened role of local government as an agent of central government

This section examines the implications of central government modernisation reforms for the role of local government, particularly highlighting the ways in which decentralisation and local self-governance policy reforms affect the roles of the District Development Committee and Village Development Committees in undertaking development activities in Mustang.

The restoration of a multi-party democratic system and the policy reforms that followed since the 1990s triggered a wave of dramatic changes in Mustang. First, the responsibility to coordinate and monitor development activities in the district was transferred from the Chief District Officer (a central government official) to the District Development Committee. As the most senior representative of central government, the Chief District Office had wielded enormous power and influence. By transferring the power from the Chief District Office to the District Development Committee, locally elected members became more accountable for the overall development of the district and the influence and power of local governance increased substantially.

Secondly, the formation of user groups or committees to implement development projects, whether small or large, meant that all district-based agencies were required to coordinate with their District Development Committee and Village Development Committees to identify and implement development initiatives. Prior to this the district-based line agencies, representing various ministries of the central government, used to implement development projects relatively independently.

Thirdly, the local bodies were entrusted to collect taxes through revenue sharing. Under this arrangement, the District Development Committee was allocated 50 per cent of the royalties from hydro power, 30 per cent of tourism fees, 50 per cent of royalties from mining, 10 per cent of the revenue from forest products, and five to 90 per cent of land registration fees. The District Development Committee for Mustang received significant sums as a result. In addition, since 1996 Village Development Committees have been receiving direct budgetary support from the central government currently ranging from 1.9 to 3 million Nepali rupees per Village Development Committee, depending on its size and population. This is in addition to a lump sum annual budget allocated to the District Development Committee to implement various centrally funded programmes and local development projects. All these have substantially increased the District Development Committee's resources and expenditure in Mustang (Figure 12). A former District Panchayat Vice-chair compared the resources of the District Development Committee with the District Panchayat:

> *The District Development Committee is very rich now and has more money than it can spend. During the Panchayat* we *used to get around one lakh rupees* [100,000] *annually for the entire district, out of which each village Panchayat used to get about 4-5 thousand rupees.*

DDC Mustang Budget (in '000 NRs)
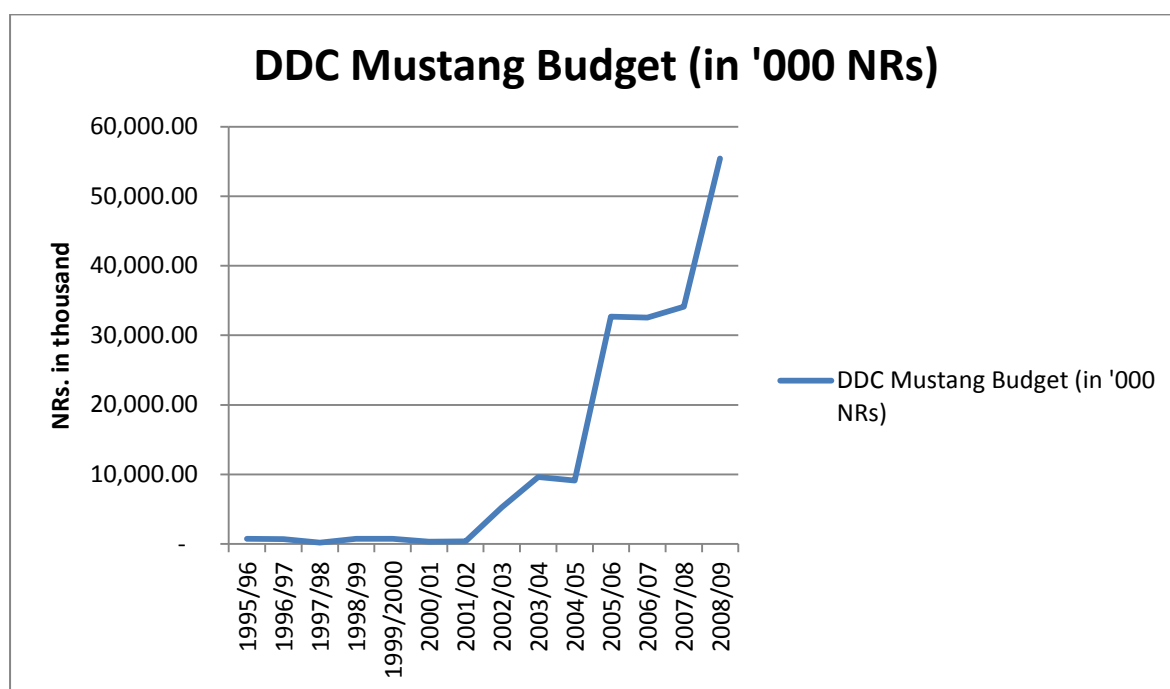
Figure 12: Annual development expenditure of Mustang District Development Committee, 1995 -2009. (DDC, 2009)

The fourth major change was that the District Development Committee became responsible for undertaking an elaborate planning process, involving fourteen different stages at five different levels – village, ward, Village Development Committee, *elaka* (region) and district, to identify and prioritise local projects. Of all the reforms, this one has been least successful. Not all phases have been strictly followed in Mustang as confirmed by a District Development Committee planning officer:

> *Mustang has a low population so not all phases of planning would be followed. We may hold informal meetings with village representatives to prepare plans and budgets. The elaka meeting would separate projects and those that could be funded by Village Development Committee funds would be sent to the concerned Village Development Committees to be approved by their councils. Those which could be funded by District Development Committee funds would be forwarded to District Development Committee meetings.*

The District Development Committee holds planning and council meetings every year. All Village Development Committee chairs and representatives of community and NGO groups are invited to participate. The District Development Committee council is responsible for consolidating, prioritising, finalising and approving the district annual plan and budget for the next fiscal year and also to review the progress of the current year. The approved programmes and budget are then sent via the line ministries for central government funding support. In theory the central government provides the funding based on the District Development Committee annual plan and budget in the light of national priorities. In practice the outcome may differ, as an official told me:

The central government would slash annual programmes and budgets without consulting us. The government usually based its decision on the expenditure records of preceding years. Unless there is a major capital cost, for example to construct an office building, the annual programme and budget would not be changed much. Preparing a programme and budget for us is routine work. We usually inflate our budget in the hope we would receive enough to do the work we would like to do. In most cases the government would provide a tight budget and over 70/80 per cent of that would be spent on covering our salary and administrative costs. Only 20-30 per cent would be used for development activities. Because of this you may find that many offices spend their money on the same project year after year.

Most Village Development Committees consider the planning process as a formality. There is an issue with the timing of the planning cycle. Planning starts in October during which approximately 70 per cent of the people from Baragau and Lo regions start migrating to the south. This means that there are few participants and little commitment to the planning process by local residents in the regions.

The discussion above demonstrates that the new local government agencies had the potential to provide useful input into prioritising the allocation of central government development expenditure. However, they undertook this role as agents for central government and not as an autonomous self-governing entity.

7.2.1   Role of local government in linking Mustang to national road network

A vitally important insight into the strengthened role of the local government layer in Mustang during the 1990s relates to the way the district has been linked to the national road network and integrated with the national economy. The development of the proposed link road from Mustang to Pokhara has been a top priority ever since the production of apples and fresh vegetables exceeded local demands. A local farmer recalled that:

We used to sell apples for five rupees for a kilo. Apples from India used to cost about 30-40 rupees for a kilo during that time. Because we had problems selling apples we used to feed them to our animals or use them for making brandy. We had to get sugar for brandy from Pokhara so it was not that profitable, but was better than wasting apples.

In the mid-1980s, a highway was built from Pokhara to Baglung and then extended to Beni, the nearest major market centre and the road head for Mustang for almost a decade (Figure 13). The construction of the Pokhara-Beni road encouraged Mustang to initiate its own road development project.
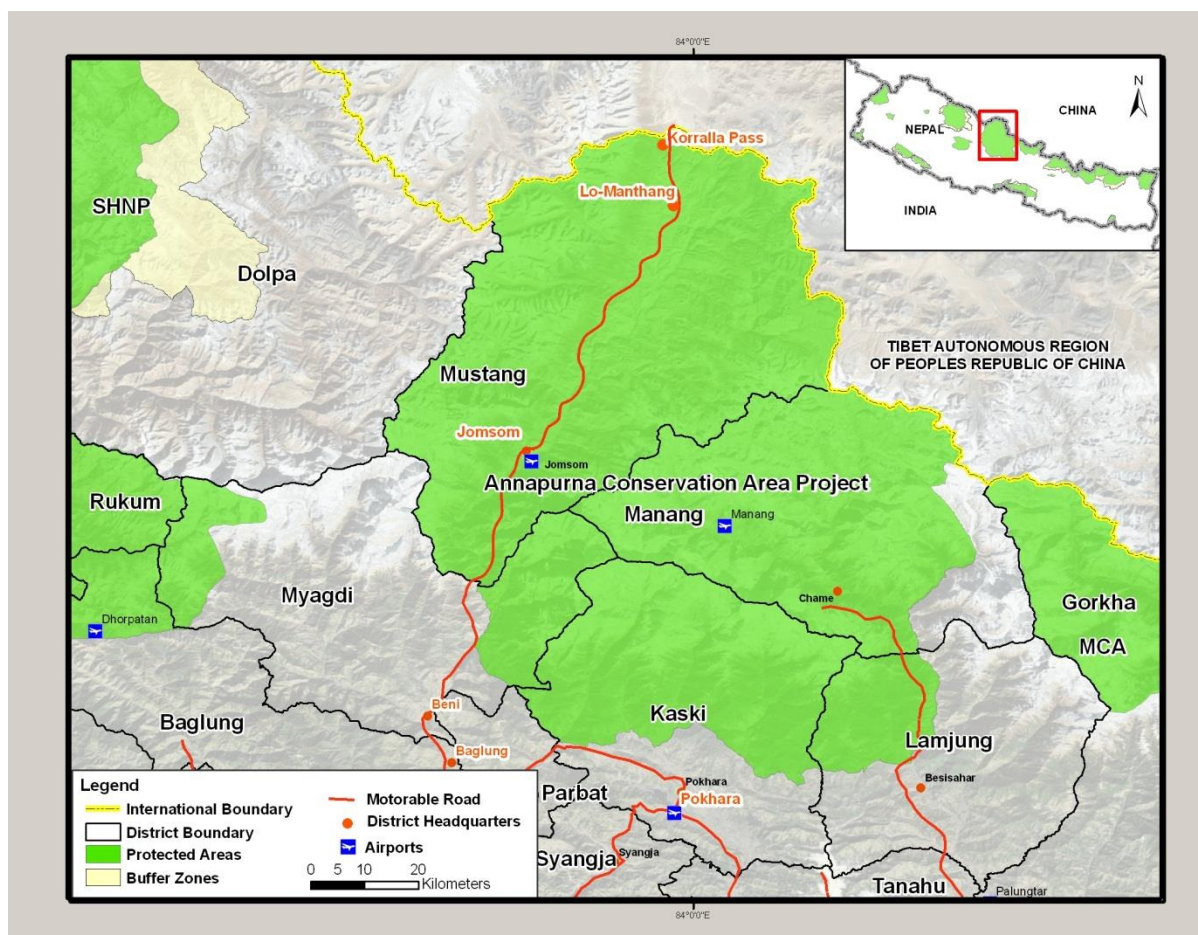
Figure 13: Road to Mustang (WWFNP, 2012)

Supported by the direct budgetary funding of the Village Development Committees, the District Development Committee of Mustang, in consultation with all 16 Village Development Committees, decided to use the local grants and most of its own funds to start a road construction project. The road became the most controversial issue concerning the development of Mustang. Many international organisations and westerners, who had an interest in Mustang, were outraged by the prospect of encountering modern symbols such as vehicles in the region they considered 'a mystical land' and 'the last refuge to experience the Tibetan culture in its purest form' (Greenwald, 1999). The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) even hosted a web-based discussion about the pros and cons of the road, mostly from the perspective of outsiders. A participant warned that the road would 'reduce tourism benefits', and 'increase ecological and socio-economic blight' (ICIMOD, 1999). While the discussion indicated an increasing interest by international organisations, particularly of those westerners who have a strong interest in Tibetan issues, it also showed the limited influence they actually have had on local matters. Mustang continued to pursue the road development project.

By early 2004, trucks loaded with Chinese goods started to arrive in Lo-Manthang village bringing clothing and food, and many household items at reasonable prices. In 2009, Lo-Manthang and Charang villages had eight and four shops, respectively, all selling Chinese goods. The opening of the road once again fired local businesses to trade with Tibet which had been severely restricted since the termination of the salt-for-grain trade. Interest from Chinese, Indian and US diplomats in Mustang has also increased sharply since 2007. India has spent millions of rupees via the District Development Committee to fund schools in Lo-Manthang, Jomsom and Kobang, a rest-house for pilgrims in Muktinath, and a library in Kagbeni. The Chinese Embassy has shown interest in developing hydro power generation in Ghami and in funding the second phase of the Beni to Jomsom and Jomsom-Coralla (also spelt as Korralla) roads. The growing interest of these other countries has been a matter of concern for China which is politically wary of a potential increase of international support for the 'free Tibet' movement which began during the 1960 and the early 1970s.

The road network in Mustang was developed without an environmental impact assessment. The Government, under the prevailing laws, should not have funded a project of this scale without an environmental impact assessment. An Annapurna Conservation Area Project officer told me:

> *We raised the importance of environmental impact assessment every time we attended the District Development Committee council meetings, but our plea was just ignored. There was high local interest for the road and the political situation was very fluid. If we had pressed harder for an environmental impact assessment as a precondition to start the road, villagers would have revolted against us. We were not against the road. We wanted to enforce Annapurna Conservation Area Project rules, regulations and policies and promote a green road. But in the current political situation we find ourselves helpless.*

7.3   Impacts of central government reforms on endogenous village governance

The discussion in this section demonstrates the resiliency of the village-based governance institutions in Mustang in the face of the dramatic socio-political and economic transformation of local government brought about by the central government reforms during the post-1990 period.

As discussed below, villages have adopted different strategies to respond to the impacts of the multi-party polity, as well as political uncertainties that have dominated national politics in recent years. The local aspiration to continue with the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system appears to have been motivated by their interest in maintaining village independence over local affairs as well as maintaining village unity and social coherence. This was irrespective of the fact that during the period of the Panchayat regime, the local level governance system was not officially recognised in the multi-party polity.

The most striking change experienced in Mustang, as in other parts of the country following the restoration of a multi-party democracy in 1990, was a dramatic proliferation of political parties. Political parties did not exist in the district during the Panchayat regime, but it did not take long for the people of Mustang to embrace the multi-party system. Within a short span of time, the Nepali Congress and Nepal Communist Party (the United Marxists and Leninists) established themselves as major political forces in the district. As the multi-party system consolidated its grip on district politics, the majority of the former Panchayat leaders either retired, or joined one of the two factions, or became politically marginalised. The last District Panchayat Chairperson reflected on the impact the political change had had on his political career:

> *I did not join any party after the political change so it is natural that I don't get invited by any party to their meetings. I speak my mind and parties don't like people who do this. I am not involved in the decision-making of this district anymore.*

The multi-party system changed the nomination process of candidates for general and local elections. Villagers were no longer involved in nominating their candidates for Village Development Committees. The district party officials held that right. Party officials nominated their candidates to contest the Village Development Committee and District Development Committee elections. Similarly, the Kathmandu-based party hierarchy controlled the nomination of party candidates to contest the general election. This made it possible for anyone resident outside Mustang to represent Mustang in the national legislature. This became clear during the second general election, held in 1997, when the Nepali Congress nominated a member of a *Subba* family who was living in Kathmandu.

Villages responded variably to reduce the impacts of the multi-party democratic system on the endogenous village governance system. Villages in the Baragau and Lo regions were successful in building a village consensus to nominate District and Village Development Committee officials during the local elections held in 1992 and 1997. They used the village assembly to nominate the Village Development Committee officials as they did during the Panchayat period. Village Development Committee officials were regarded more as independent candidates in their effort to avoid disunity among villagers. Some village assemblies even made a decision to split their votes evenly between the Nepali Congress and United Marxists and Leninists during the general election in an effort to protect village unity as well as to win the support of the two major political parties which were important to access the government's support for development projects. A local from Gyaker told me:

> *When the general election came and candidates asked for votes, our village held a meeting and decided to split our votes evenly between Nepal Congress and*

> *Yemale (the United Marxists and Leninists). We need the support of both to get projects for our village.*

While the local election in the Baragau and Lo regions became a low key affair, the local response to the general election was different. The candidates for the general election were nominated by political parties so their influence prevailed.

Irrespective of these village-specific responses to multi-party democratic politics, the majority of villages continued with the current village governance arrangements that had emerged during the Panchayat regime (see Figure 14). They continued to nominate *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* to manage internal affairs as per village laws. Like during the Panchayat regime, villagers regarded Village Development Officials as their representatives to participate in wider political processes, and as the link to the state to access the central government financed projects and services.

Villages such as Thini and Jomsom, which had voluntarily terminated the nomination of Ghempa and *Mukhiya* during the Panchayat regime, decided to restore it to reduce the influence of political parties on the village's affairs. A former village head of Jomsom explained:

> *We restored the Mukhiya system to protect our village, our forests, pastures, lands and water. We restored the old system to protect the village from party politics.*

Some villages, particularly in the Thaksatsai region, however, changed the focus of their endogenous governance system. They became more concerned with maintaining the dominance of Chan Thakali in their original villages, especially where they were outnumbered by other ethnic groups. A local *Mukhiya* of Kunjo village explained:

> *Mukhiya in the Thaksatsai regions are representatives of the Thakali community (Chan). They are mainly responsible for protecting monasteries, protecting old documents, papers, maintaining peace in the communities, reviewing and revising social and cultural rules and sanctions.*

1990

Endogenous Governance System	Exogenous Governance System

Beyond Village Level

Chief District Officer/District Development Chair and Vice Chair

Raja of Lo/Ghempa Chhe/ the 13 Mukhiya council/Paanchgau council

District Development Committee (comprises regional members and VDC Chair and Vice Chair from each VDC)

Village Level

Chhowa Chhumae ← Village Executive Ghempa Thuimi Mukhiya → Advisory Council Ward members and other nominees

VDC Executive (comprises VDC Chair, Vice Chair and 9 ward chairs) → Secretary Provided by the government

Village Assembly (A representative from each household)

VDC Council (comprises VDC Chair, Vice Chair and 45 ward members, 5 from each ward, including a ward chair)

All registered households – Kuriya or Dhur

VDC divided into 9 wards – all adult are enfranchised to elect the VDC officials

Local and Internal	Formal and External

Figure 14: Layered endogenous and exogenous local governance arrangements
1990 to present

A local from Tukuche also confirmed the earlier statement:

> *Our Mukhiya has been telling us that this system is only for chanwaalaa Thakali (Chan Thakali). This village now has more bechan Thakali* [Thakali with no chans] *so we don't accept Chan Mukhiya as our Mukhiya.*

In the changed political and socio-economic contexts, endogenous regional institutions, such as the Council of Paachgau and the Council of 13 Mukhiya, become more active in protecting the interests of the various ethnic groups in their original villages. For example, the current *Mir Mukhiya* (Chief Mukhiya) explained the reason for the reorientation of their council:

> *There are now 18 villages in our region. We have our headquarters in Kathmandu. We have renamed the Council of 13 Mukhiya as Thakali Sewa Samiti Thak Satsai Chhetra (Thakali Society of Thak Satsai Region) and all village Mukhiya work under this umbrella body.*

The *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system has recently been facing major opposition from Maoist supporters, mainly Dalit members of Mustang. The *Mir Mukhiya* (the chief) of Tukuche said:

Maoists are not happy with the Mukhiya system. They think we are trying to continue with a system that was long dead.

The Maoist party became active in Mustang only after they joined mainstream politics in 2006. Despite being a new party, they did well in the constitutional election in 2008, and became established as a major political party in Mustang. The party has been able to draw support from Dalits (low caste Hindus), the most marginalised group, whose socio-political and economic improvement was the main focus of their insurgency. A local leader pointed out:

Apart from Damai and Kaami (also low caste Hindus), those who were known as useless and not trustworthy have joined Maoists in this district.

Maoist supporters see the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system as a remnant of the feudal system. They have also been questioning the exclusion of Dalits and women from the Mukhiya system, and the dominance of particular groups and local elites, especially in Lo-Manthang village, where only Bista households are eligible to hold such a position. However, local women from Muktinath disagreed with this Maoist view on women and said:

In the past only men used to participate in the village assembly, but now we all participate. When the turn to head the village as a Ghempa comes for my household, I share the responsibility with my husband. We did not participate in the village meeting in the past because we thought that was a man's job.

Another women activist from Jomsom said:

Our village never took women seriously in the past. Men did not like to have women attending the village meetings. But now we are consulted on village matters. The Mukhiya invite us as advisors to their meetings and we offer our suggestions to them.

Similarly a local from Lo-Manthang village said:

The Ghempa needs to be trusted by villagers and should know how different systems in the village work. The Bista households have been running the village as Ghempa for generations; they are experienced and know exactly how the village systems should function to the satisfaction of most villagers. If you are a member from another group you may not be able to get the same respect and command from fellow villagers. This may create larger problems and the village may fall apart.

Recent political change appears to have posed new challenges to the endogenous institutions. Villages appear to be under pressure to make their endogenous institutions more inclusive and reflective in order to address the effects of demographic and socio-economic changes, and new political aspirations, particularly those promoting participation of the previously excluded groups in the management of village affairs. Overall, the significance of the village institutions to oversee local

affairs does not appear to have diminished. In fact, the prominence of the endogenous village governance system has increased in order to manage village affairs in the absence of elected representatives and regional institutions to oversee inter-village affairs in the current period of dramatic socio-economic and political transition. This will be the focus of the following sections.

7.4 Migration and overseas employment: implications for endogenous village governance institutions

Out-migration is not a new phenomenon in Mustang. However, migrating overseas for jobs is a relatively recent phenomenon. Overseas employment has been the most sought-after opportunity among the local people in Mustang since the mid-1990s, depriving some villages of their young people, with serious implications for village leadership and the continuity of the endogenous governance system.

Four major factors contributed to the growth of overseas employment among the local inhabitants in Mustang. The democratic government decentralised the distribution of passports from Kathmandu, making the Chief District Office the responsible issuing agency, improving accessibility and making their acquisition easier for locals. Some Tibetan refugees were involved in sending people from the Baragau and Lo regions, particularly to the USA. The brokers used their old contacts in Mustang to recruit local aspirants for overseas employment. During the 1990s, it was easier for Tibetans to get US visas as refugees. Many people in Mustang disguised themselves as Tibetans or Tibetan monks with the help of brokers and got a US visa. Some local businessmen worked together with Tibetan brokers to recruit local people from their own or neighboring villages through their relatives. They even arranged loan money, although, the interest rate was high, and some had to work for years to pay back debts. As the number of immigrants from the Lo and Baragau regions increased in the USA, they started *dhikuri*, a revolving credit system, to help their relatives and friends to finance overseas employment. It could now cost up to 2.5 million rupees to get a visa for the USA. Normally, the person paid the agreed amount only after they landed in the destination country. A local from Kagbeni joked: *borrowing money to pay for a passport is a problem, but once you have the passport, borrowing money to go overseas for work is not a problem.* Overseas employment has become a very profitable venture for brokers although the risk is also very high. A local from Jomsom told me:

> *A guy from Purang, who now owns a house and supermarket in New York, wanted to take 350 people to the USA a few years ago. Some of them had already got visas, but when the Visa Officer at the US embassy got a bit suspicious of such a large number of people from around the same area he told one of the guys who had applied for the visa to tell the truth and only then would he be issued with the visa. He told him everything including who was taking him and how much he was paying. After this all applications were cancelled and since then it*

> *has become difficult to go to the USA. However, there are still quite a few people who have managed to get a visa and go.*

The full impact of overseas employment on the local economy is difficult to estimate. The district has not kept up-to-date records of overseas employment. A report produced by the Marpha Society in Japan in 2000 mentioned almost 200 people from Marpha village alone working there. This figure, however, also included the people who had originated from Marpha, but had left to live in other parts of Nepal. A former District Development Committee chair estimated, as a result of his trip to the USA in 2002, that about 1,000 local youth from the Baragau and Lo regions alone were working in New York. A local from Lo-Manthang village estimated that:

> *There are about 30 people from Chhunup, 25 from Chhoser, 60 people from Charang-Marang, over 100 from Lo, and 30 people from Ghami working currently in the USA.*

Another local, this time from Muktinath estimated that:

> *There are 400-500 people from Baragau working in USA. Some of them have got green cards and have taken their whole families.*

Similarly, a local from Chhusang told me:

> *There are no households in this and neighbouring villages which have not got a member working overseas.*

Similarly, around 8 or 9 people from every major village in the south are working in the Middle East. Acquiring a work visas for Middle Eastern countries is relatively easy and also costs less (50-60 thousand rupees). These countries have become favoured by low income groups, mainly Dalits. Additionally, besides Marpha, other villages in the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions have an average of 9-10 people working in Japan or the USA. Some villages such as Chhunup, Chhoser and Dhe do not have anyone working overseas. A local youth from Chhoser told me:

> *We don't have people (afno manchhe) who can help us to find overseas employment and who we could fully trust (bhar parne). We also don't have people who could lend us money. You need money, and the people to arrange everything for you, to go overseas for jobs. We are unfortunate people.*

The district does not have records of the volume of international remittances. The local bank officials I interviewed told me that most of the international remittances in the district come through informal channels and they are mostly invested in real estate in urban areas such as Kathmandu and Pokhara. There are about 8 or 9 families from the Baragau region who have returned with overseas money and migrated to Jomsom, bought land and built large houses. Some have also used their overseas earnings to build lodges and houses in their own villages, particularly in Kagbeni and Muktinath. The trend of

improving local houses and building new lodges is increasing following the road development. There is a general local feeling that, as a result of overseas remittances, the economic condition of the people in these regions has improved dramatically over the years. A local from Jomsom told me:

> *We used to get people from the Baragau and Lo regions looking for causal work during the harvesting seasons. Now they have become rich people. They don't come anymore.*

An old man from Muktinath summed up the changes he has experienced in his life time:

> *Life was very hard in the past. We used to change into new clothes only when the clothes we were using became old and useless. We used to go to forests to collect fuel wood every morning. We used to take jhos and horses down to Tatopani to get rice in the winter. We used to work hard, but could not grow enough food to feed our families. We used to collect animal dung for fertiliser. We used to collect goat pellets one by one. But now we use gas for cooking, we have electricity, we wear clean and nice clothes, our grandchildren study in boarding schools, we have a phone, television, mobiles, and nobody works hard these days. Our children send money from USA and we can live happily on that. No worry ... the only thing that worries me now is whether I will be able to see my sons before I die.*

Overseas employment has created some social problems in villages which have a high out-migration rate. *You don't see that many young people in Marpha and Baragau villages* a local told me. Another local youth shared the impact on the psychology of local youth:

> *A*ll *young people want to go overseas for jobs. Those who are left behind are frustrated to see their mates go off overseas to work and feel there is not much they can do here or they think the people really don't value them.*

An old man from Chhusang describes the problem arising from the absence of young people from the village:

> *All the young people are either studying or have migrated overseas for jobs. We are old and officially retired* [people retire from social work after reaching 60 years in some villages and 50 in other villages] *but still have to do village work. Sometimes we have to work on behalf of our sons and sometimes we have to get involved in village work because there is no one around to lend a hand.*

Some of these villages were forced to change their village laws to respond to these new socio-economic realities and demographic change. A *Mukhiya* of Chhusang told me:

> *We have a problem finding people willing to serve as a Mukhiya for the village because there aren't that many young people left in the village. They are all out studying or working overseas. We changed the village law and made it compulsory to serve as a Mukhiya on a rotational basis. Even new migrants who have a registered household in this village have to serve as if they were old residents.*

The *Mir Mukhiya* of Tukuche was concerned, saying that: I *don't see a future for the Mukhiya system. Young people like you are not interested in it at all*. His concern, however, is not shared by most people I interviewed. A local leader of Marpha said:

> *The Mukhiya system is vibrant and strong, but the government system is weak, especially in implementation, but our village system is not. The Mukhiya has to be answerable to villagers; he cannot make decisions by himself and implement them. The village makes decisions and he oversees the implementation of them. That's how we function and that is the reason why our village is strong.*

While out-migration has contributed significantly to improvements in local incomes and living conditions, it has also led to depopulation in some major villages. This situation has created extra burdens for the remaining villagers. To overcome this, many villages have become more accommodating and flexible, particularly by including new immigrants in village level affairs, and also sharing the responsibility of becoming *Ghempa* or *Mukhiya* on a rotational basis.

7.5 Growth of international and national non-governmental organisations and their interface with the village governance institutions

During the Panchayat period international non-governmental organisations had to work through government line agencies. The Government used to scrutinise and monitor their activities and funds strictly. This mode of operation was changed after the restoration of multi-party democracy. International and national non-governmental organisations were given more independence to work in Nepal as long as they were affiliated with the Social Welfare Council, an independent government organisation based in Kathmandu, established to guide and monitor the activities of national and international non-governmental organisations.

In another development, the government decentralised the authority to allow the registration of non-governmental organisations by the Chief District Office. This provision made it easier for the local people to form such groups and get them registered. As a result of these changes, the number of international and national non-governmental organisations, and philanthropic organisations, proliferated all over Nepal. The records of the Chief District Office of Mustang show that there are over 100 such organisations registered in Mustang. This increased presence led to dramatic changes to the local institutional landscape because of the emergence of interest groups and community based organisations largely funded by them. As an illustration, international organisations such as the US-based American Himalayan Foundation and a Japan-based Mustang Development Service Association each started working in Mustang in the early 1990s. The American Himalayan Foundation concentrated its effort in the Upper Mustang region from the very beginning. It provided support to run health and education initiatives, infrastructure development, micro-hydro development,

and income generating programmes initially through the National Trust for Nature Conservation/Annapurna Conservation Area Project. For the past decade, it has been channeling its support largely through the Jigmi Foundation, a local NGO founded by the son of the Raja of Lo with help from other local elites.

The American Himalayan Foundation played an important role in gaining access to the United Nations Development Programme's Global Environmental Fund to implement Biodiversity Conservation Projects with a total value of more than US$2 million. The American Himalayan Foundation, the National Trust for Nature Conservation and multilateral organisations such as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development provided co-finance for this project. Similarly, the Mustang Development Service Association started working around the Jomsom area initially, but later began focusing its activities in the Upper Mustang. It established a hospital and a horticulture farm in Ghami and provided support to a number of local schools. Besides these organisations, there are numerous individuals and philanthropic organisations that have been providing funds through various local groups, individuals and organisations, mainly in the education sector. Information on these individuals and organisations is not easily available as they have been operating informally through private contacts in Mustang. The impacts of all these support groups however, are visible in the Upper Mustang. An Annapurna Conservation Area Project officer shared his observations of activities in Lo-Manthang:

> *When I first came to Lo eleven years ago, there were no donors, but now every household seems to have at least one donor. Elite families have more donors. There is a sort of competition among themselves to attract more donors; each wants to outdo the others in this game. The middle income people also have links to individual donors. They may not have any project to run, but have been receiving support to educate their children. Individual donors seemed to trust the local people more than the organisations like the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. So you find many individuals benefiting from donor assistance. There are only four or five organisations working at community levels. The increased presence and interests of donors is the big change I saw in the Upper Mustang region in the last decade.*

As an example of the effect of these donors on education, the walled city of Lo-Manthang alone has four boarding schools to cater for a population of less than 700, about 45 per cent of whom are school age children. The first is a private boarding school, which also owns millions of rupees worth of land and buildings in Pokhara. Students attending this school, around 100, have been sponsored by individual donors. The second is a private medical school teaching traditional medical practice known as *Amchi* and is the only one of its kind in Nepal. Students attending this school have been fully funded by private contributions. The third is a monastic school owned and managed by the largest and most active monastery inside Lo-Manthang village. Novices attending this school have been fully funded through private contributions. This school received 26.7 million rupees from the Indian

Embassy in 2008 for new school buildings and a library. The fourth boarding school is government funded. Students attending this school have received 1,500 rupees per month stipend from the government since 2007.

Additionally, Lo-Manthang village has a brand new community library, day care centre, and micro hydro-electricity generation plant, funded by international organisations which have also provided finance to restore two historical monasteries. Not all villages in Upper Mustang have received levels of support similar to Lo-Manthang, and this has created friction and conflict between villages, particularly when sharing District Development Committee and Village Development Committee funds. Despite this limitation, there is a general consensus among the local people of Upper Mustang that the development situation in the region has improved remarkably since the opening of the area.

The increased presence of international non-governmental organisations has had two significant impacts in Mustang. It highlighted their growing interest in local development and conservation activities and making them important players. While their influence on day to day matters appears to be limited, the resources and support they have provided has increased opportunities and livelihood options, particularly for the people of the Upper Mustang region. Secondly, the advent of international non-governmental organisations has led to a dramatic growth of community-based interest groups, making village governance much more complex and at times challenging. The roles and impacts of community-based interest groups are examined in the following section.

7.6   Proliferation of community-based organisations

The combination of open politics and the Government's policy to involve local people in all levels of the decision-making process has led to the increasing popularity of participatory approaches in environmental and development programmes. Participatory approaches made headway in the mid-1980s within government agencies, but were limited to encouraging people to contribute as a pre-condition to funding for projects. A former Panchayat official told me:

> *The District Panchayat or the government office used to send a letter to the Village Panchayat informing it about the project and what and how much was expected from us, usually as a labour contribution. We used to hold a village meeting to discuss how to match the contribution. In most cases, we used to include around 30-40 per cent of the total budget as a labour contribution from us.*

Following the emergence of democracy, this participatory model changed. The new model involved forming user groups or committees from the community of local beneficiaries to implement projects. This new user group model has not only become popular among international non-governmental organisations, but also among government line agencies. As a result, user groups and committees have

proliferated in every village for almost everything, offering both opportunities and challenges. This was highlighted by a local leader:

> *The fundamental challenge we are facing now is how we can mainstream specific interest groups into political processes. This is the only way to fulfill the rising aspirations of different interests groups, Janjati, women and Dalits. The government needs to listen to their voices and develop policies to address their grievances. If we fail to do so the people will resort to violence and there will be no lasting peace. We are now at a very crucial juncture of our history and the outcome will determine the future of this country.*

In every village it is common to find at least a dozen user groups formed by various organisations to run or manage various schemes or projects as illustrated in Appendix 2. There are drinking water user groups to implement water schemes, irrigation channel improvement groups to repair and maintain irrigation channels, school management committees to run schools and a health management committee to run health posts. Similarly, there are groups to manage a plethora of activities and functions including monastery management, bridge building, trail improvement, micro-hydro management, goat raising and road building. Most of these user groups or committees terminate after the completion of the projects, but some continue to function, albeit minimally, to look after the management of their schemes.

Apart from project specific user groups responsible for infrastructure development, a number of specific interest groups have also been formed with the financial support of various organisations. For examples, there are *Dalit* groups (low caste Hindu) and Women's Groups in most villages. The government has earmarked 10 per cent of Village Development Committee funds for socially disadvantaged groups. These include women, *Janajati* (different ethnic groups) *Dalit*. As the majority of local people of Mustang are categorised as *Janajati* the budget allocated for socially disadvantaged groups is mainly used to help *Dalit* and women groups.

Women's groups are also known as Mothers' Groups and became popular throughout Nepal after the introduction of women's development programmes in the early 1990s. The roles women can play in environmental management have been well recognised and this has encouraged many environmental organisations to adopt strategies to increase women's participation in their programmes. Women's groups have been playing leading roles in saving and credit schemes, village clean ups, and controlling social problems such as gambling and the sale of alcohol. In Mustang they have been central in managing LPG/Kerosene depots to reduce the dependency on forests for fuel wood and in promoting plantation programmes. *Contact mothers' groups (aamaa samuha) if anyone has a problem that needs to be resolved* is a common phrase one hears in the villages today. Besides mothers' groups, youth clubs are also popular in most of the villages of Mustang. Some of these clubs, especially in Lower Mustang, have been in existence since the 1970s, but the emergence of

youth clubs in Upper Mustang is a relatively new phenomenon. Most of the youth clubs in this region were formed through local initiatives to manage tourism sites. Youth clubs in general are responsible for organising and participating in sporting events and cultural programmes. In recent years the youth clubs of Upper Mustang, particularly of Lo-Manthang, have adopted social media such as Facebook and have been contributing to regional issues. They have formed a club for organising inter-village sports and other heritage conservation programmes which are funded by the Jigme Foundation.

The proliferation of these community-based organisations is not without its problems. *There are too many projects, too many organisations and too many groups* is a common complaint. *We don't have enough time,* said a villager from Lo-Manthang. *There are too many meetings called by too many different organisations. We are fed up with too many organisations and too many meetings* said a local from Kagbeni. Active local people are involved in every committee or group possible. A local youth from Jomsom told me:

> *I am secretary for the village, a secretary for the sand and aggregate committee, a member of library committee, chair of community building construction and a vice-chair of the river control committee. I don't have time, but villagers ask me to serve in these committees and groups. We don't have that many educated youth living in the village so those living here are overburdened with community responsibilitie*s.

There is also a lack of transparency in decision-making by community groups, as well as limited information on project activities. These deficiencies have damaged trust and credibility. This problem is linked more to the absence of elected representatives in the local governance bodies. A local from Marpha said:

> *I don't have any evidence and am not sure how much of this is true, but I heard that because there are no elected representatives and user groups there is no formal consultation with villagers. The District Development Committee and different organisations give projects to the people they know in the village, they form user groups who, with the help of bureaucrats, provide false project completion reports and take the money themselves. This means the village will lose.*

He also explained how Marpha had overcome this problem:

> *We call village meetings; we discuss the projects in a very transparent and participatory way. Now people are saying we do not need to save money for the village funds; the priority should be given to have quality work. In the past, the village used to use 50 per cent of the money for the project and save the other 50 per cent for the village. Now we are giving more priority to the quality of the work although the village is losing money.*

Some villages such as Tukuche, Marpha and Syang have formed new committees, to work alongside village institutions, to handle the growing number of projects in their villages which otherwise would

have been the responsibility of the Village Development Committees. A villager from Marpha told me the reason for creating new committees:

> *As we had no elected Village Development Committee representatives, we formed the Marpha Village Improvement Committee (Gaun sudhar samiti) with a chairperson and four members, representing each clan. We also have two advisors to the committee. We have a separate committee to handle all development activities (bikash nirman), and represent the village in a wider forum. The village affairs would* [normally] *be handled by our old system but the new committee represents the village outside the village. We may continue with this until we have elected members.*

Many villages, however, have not made such new arrangements. These villages increasingly depend on user groups, formed directly by line agencies or via *Mukhiya,* to implement development projects. The outcome is a lack of information sharing about project funds and status, resulting in suspicion and conflict among villagers.

Since 2002, the government has failed to hold local elections in Mustang owing to the political instability. The failure to have elected members has constrained many of the reforms envisioned in the Local Self Government Act. Currently the decentralisation and devolution policy has been overshadowed by the state restructuring process. At the time of this research, there was little in the way of clear directions on the larger issues such as new political structures and systems, power and resources sharing arrangements between the central, federal and local governments, and the core principles and features of the new constitution to protect the political gains of 2006. In the absence of elected members, currently the District Development Committee and Village Development Committees are run by government employees. The Local Development Officer, who is the chief executive officer of the District Development Committee, oversees its affairs and also chairs the District Development Committee council meetings. Both District Development Committees and Village Development Committees invite former officials to council meetings. Village Development Committee secretaries tend to consult former Committee officials on official matters, but mostly rely on the user groups to implement approved programmes. Most of the Village Development Committee secretaries are junior government officials with limited capacity and authority to oversee Village Development Committee affairs. The Government has not been able to fill the Village Development Committee secretary positions as required in Mustang.

After the constitutional assembly election in 2008, the Government formed a high level multi-party political committee (*rajnaitic sanyantra*) to guide and provide leadership on the work of local government, particularly of the District Development Committees. This powerful political mechanism in Mustang has been represented by three major political parties: the Nepali Congress, United Marxists and Leninists and the Nepal Maoist Communist Party. The mechanism was primarily

responsible for monitoring development projects in the district and as such it holds a considerable influence on the allocation of project funds. Typically, funds flow to those districts that have the most political influence.

In the absence of elected members in the Village Development Committees, most villages relied on the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* to manage both village affairs and external relations. A local said:

> *Our Mukhiya system is like a house keeper (gar kuruwa). When there are enough people to look after the house it keeps quiet, but when there are not enough people around, then it becomes active and takes on larger responsibilities to manage village affairs.*

The Thuimi of Thini explained the importance of the traditional village governance system in the current situation:

> *Now we do not have elected local representatives so the Mukhiya is responsible for taking care of all work and village affairs. Now the Mukhiya is responsible for all work, even the work that would have been done by elected representatives.*

The line agencies and Village Development Committees have also recognised the existence and importance of the traditional local institutions in villages and have been contacting them and working through them to implement various projects in villages. A Village Development Committee secretary of Jomsom told me:

> *The Mukhiya is the first contact person now to communicate about village projects. The Mukhiya informs the village and calls a meeting and then we start implementation. The Mukhiya is also responsible for forming user groups and also informs Village Development Committees* [about village needs].

The *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system is yet to be formally recognised. The current government continued with the Panchayat anti-endogenous village governance policy, but similar to the outcome during the village Panchayat regime, this policy appears to have had a marginal effect in Mustang. Villages have continued to manage their local affairs and environmental resources, albeit with some changes in institutional arrangements to work alongside government and non-governmental environment-focused organisations. The local people's belief in old village governance systems appears to have been further enforced by recent policy reforms that have led to the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations, and the political instability that resulted in the absence of elected local government representatives. The local people seemed to trust the locally evolved governance system to protect their interests in local affairs and provide continuity and stability in the face of wider socio-economic and political changes.

7.7 Environmental conservation: emergence of a new layer of governance institutions

The northern border regions, such as the Upper Mustang, were considered 'security sensitive' during the Panchayat period; hence, they were designated as 'restricted regions'. No major development projects were allowed in such regions and no foreigners were allowed to visit. The democratic government lifted the restricted status of the northern border regions in 1992. This decision was monumental for the region in terms of tourism development. The number of international tourists was restricted, but irrespective of the low volume, the opportunities that followed from tourism development greatly transformed the formally restricted regions. The outcomes from this will be examined more fully in the next chapter.

With the government's decision to include the Upper Mustang region in the jurisdiction of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, Mustang became the largest district, covering almost 47 per cent of the conservation area. This change had two immediate institutional implications. It led to the closure of the District Forest Office in Mustang. Secondly, the National Trust for Nature Conservation/Annapurna Conservation Area Project was established as the main organisation responsible for managing environmental resources, mainly focusing on forests and biodiversity conservation, in Mustang. The National Trust for Nature Conservation had to fast-track the second phase expansion of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project as a result of this change.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project became the most important manager of protected areas in Nepal, in term of its geographical coverage, biodiversity richness, and population size. This also made the National Trust for Nature Conservation/Annapurna Conservation Area Project the largest non-governmental organisation ever to work in Mustang, in terms of mandate, programmes, finance, and staff. The roles and significance of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, from an environmental governance perspective, will be discussed in the next chapter.

7.8 Summary

Chapter 7 examined the most recent phase in the evolution of multi-layered governance during the period from 1990 to the present. It characterises the emergence of contemporary environmental governance institutions in Mustang. I argued in this chapter that while the village-based *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* has continued to play important roles by adapting to concurrent village governance arrangements, particularly to ensure the village ownership rights over environmental resources, its roles have been circumscribed by the growing influence of the local governance institutions, and the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and allied community-based organisations who in recent years have increased stakes in local development and environmental matters.

The next chapter (Chapter 8) will examine environmental governance during the post-1990 period after the implementation of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Mustang. It will focus on the role of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and the impacts it has had on the development of conservation-focused local institutions and their interface with the local people. Chapter 8 will examine the impacts and implications of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's sustainable tourism development in Mustang. It highlights the roles of the different institutions formed to regulate and manage tourism-related activities, both to reduce environmental degradation as well as to maximise tourism to benefit to local people. It examines the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's natural resource conservation programmes, highlighting the interface and interaction between Conservation Area Management Committees and the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* in relation to local participation and empowerment, including ownership and authority, rules and regulations, authority and decision-making, forest funds and utilisation, and monitoring.

Chapter 8

Institutional arrangements for the Annapurna Conservation Area Project as a participatory environment governance initiative in Mustang - 1990 to present

8.0   Introduction

Chapter 7 examined the evolution of local governance in Mustang, against the backdrop of pervasive socio-political and economic transformation in Nepal, during the period from 1990 to the present. I argued that while the village-based *Ghempa* institution has proved resilient, its role has been circumscribed by competing layers of governance which have emerged during this period. Under the government's decentralisation policy, the role of the Panchayat has been replaced by District Development Committees and Village Development Committees which now exercise an important role in prioritising, funding and implementing infrastructure and related development projects. The third layer of local governance in Mustang comprises non-governmental organisationss whose primary role is to promote environmental conservation, and social and economic well-being. While a number of these non-governmental organisations are international and nationally based organisations, the most influential of them in the Mustang setting is the National Trust for Nature Conservation, an autonomous non-governmental organisation responsible for managing the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, of which Mustang is a key part.

This chapter looks at the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, and the impacts it has had on the development of conservation-focused local institutions and their interface with the local people, in relation to the management of tourism development and related environmental resource issues. I argue that in this new institutional setting, the endogenous village governance system has remained central to the survival of the village as an entity against wider ranging socio-political and economic changes. The local concern to protect their environmental resources is very much linked to this survival instinct. In cognisance of this, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's community-based participatory approach to implement sustainable tourism development and natural resource conservation programmes has been flexible, accommodating, and to some extent consultative, in stark contrast to the centralised top down approach implemented as part of the forest nationalisation policy during the tenure of the District Forest Office. The *Ghempa/Mukhiya* system has adapted by forging links with this emergent consultative network of new institutions.

This chapter is divided into five sections, as follows: Section 8.1 provides an overview of conservation policy in Nepal, highlighting the shift from a top down state-managed model to a community-based participatory model including the role of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and programmes in Mustang. Section 8.2 examines the impacts and implications of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's sustainable tourism development in Mustang, highlighting the roles of the different institutions it has formed to regulate and manage tourism related activities in order to reduce environmental degradation as well as to maximise tourism benefits to local people. Section 8.3 examines the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's natural resource conservation programmes. It highlights the interface and interaction between the Conservation Area Management Committees and *Ghempa* in relation to local participation and empowerment. Section 8.4 provides a chapter conclusion.

8.1   Evolution of conservation policy in Nepal

This section reviews the history of conservation policies, including the evolution of protected area management systems in Nepal and the rise of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, within a broader national conservation policy framework.

The conservation movement in Nepal started in the late 19th century with the protection of the Chitwan Valley to maintain the population of one horned rhinoceros, which were considered 'royal animals' and protected by the law (Mishra, 2008). The valley was a prime hunting ground for the ruling elites and their foreign dignitaries and it was formally declared a Wildlife Sanctuary only in 1957, making it Nepal's first protected area (Bajracharya, 1986).

During the 1970s, the global environmental movement gained strength, particularly after the UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. This was followed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora a year after. Both events marked a major turning point for the environmental movement worldwide. Many international organisations emerged to provide financial and technical support to develop a network of protected areas around the world, including in Nepal. Under the leadership of King Birendra, Nepal enacted the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973. In the same year, the National Park office was established and the management of protected areas was formally separated from forestry management. The Chitwan Wildlife Sanctuary was upgraded to National Park status, primarily to protect three major flagship species - tigers, one horned rhinos and Asiatic elephants - whose numbers were dwindling rapidly due to the influx of immigrants from the hills and widespread encroachment of forested lands (Maskey, 1998).

8.1.1   State controlled, top-down and exclusionary conservation policy

Nepal's national parks and reserves, established during the 1970s, were based on the Western 'Yellowstone' and 'fines and fences' model (Wright and Mattson, 1996; McNeely, 2005). 'Preservationist', 'state controlled' and 'top-down' was the dominant approach to conservation globally during this period, one which Nepal initially followed. These approaches widely perceived people as the 'threat' to the environment (Nicholson, 1981). Within four years of establishing the first park, Nepal established four additional national parks and two wildlife reserves, extending the protected area system from the lowland Terai to the high mountain regions such as Mt. Everest (*Sagarmatha*) and Langtang. The Nepali army was deployed to protect parks and reserves. Taking a similar approach as that adopted by the forest nationalisation policy, people living on the periphery of the park were banned from their traditional user rights such as the collection of firewood, timber, grass and grazing animals in the park. These erstwhile user rights were deemed 'illegal' and transgressions subject to punishment. Parks and reserves provided no benefits to the local people (Gurung, 1989; Heinen and Mehta, 200; Spiteri and Nepal, 2006).

Beside the direct interest of rulers to protect wild species, the growth of protected areas in Nepal was closely linked to the growth of tourism and its impacts on fragile environments, particularly in the mountain regions. Tourism in Nepal has grown significantly since the 1960s. Several successful accents of the world's highest peaks such as Everest (8,848 m) , Dhaulagiri (8,167 m), Annapurna 1 (8091 m) and Kanchenjunga (8586 m) between 1950 and 1960 inspired hundreds of mountaineers from around the world to repeat the same mountaineering feats. They were later joined by thousands of trekkers who travelled beyond the Kathmandu Valley to enjoy the natural splendour and experience the exotic socio-cultural settings of rural Nepal. By the mid-1970s, the Everest, Langtang and southern Annapurna regions became the most popular destinations for mountaineers and trekkers.

Environmental degradation and the socio-cultural impacts of tourism have become more visible (Sharma, 2002). The Everest region lost more forests during the first two decades of tourism development than it had in the preceding 200 years (Hinrichsen et at., 1983). There was a general consensus that tourism was a significant contributor to the acceleration of deforestation in remote mountain regions (Banskota and Upadhyay 1989; Stevens et al., 1991). Similarly, pollution was highlighted as another significant environmental problem. The Everest and Langtang regions were infamously referred to as the world's 'highest junkyard' and 'the garbage trail' (Sharma, 1995; Shrestha, 1989). Within a decade, tourism was perceived of as 'a goose that lays golden eggs', but also with a high potential to 'foul its own nest'. Tourism, thus, was seen as a major external threat to the environment, particularly in the mountain regions.
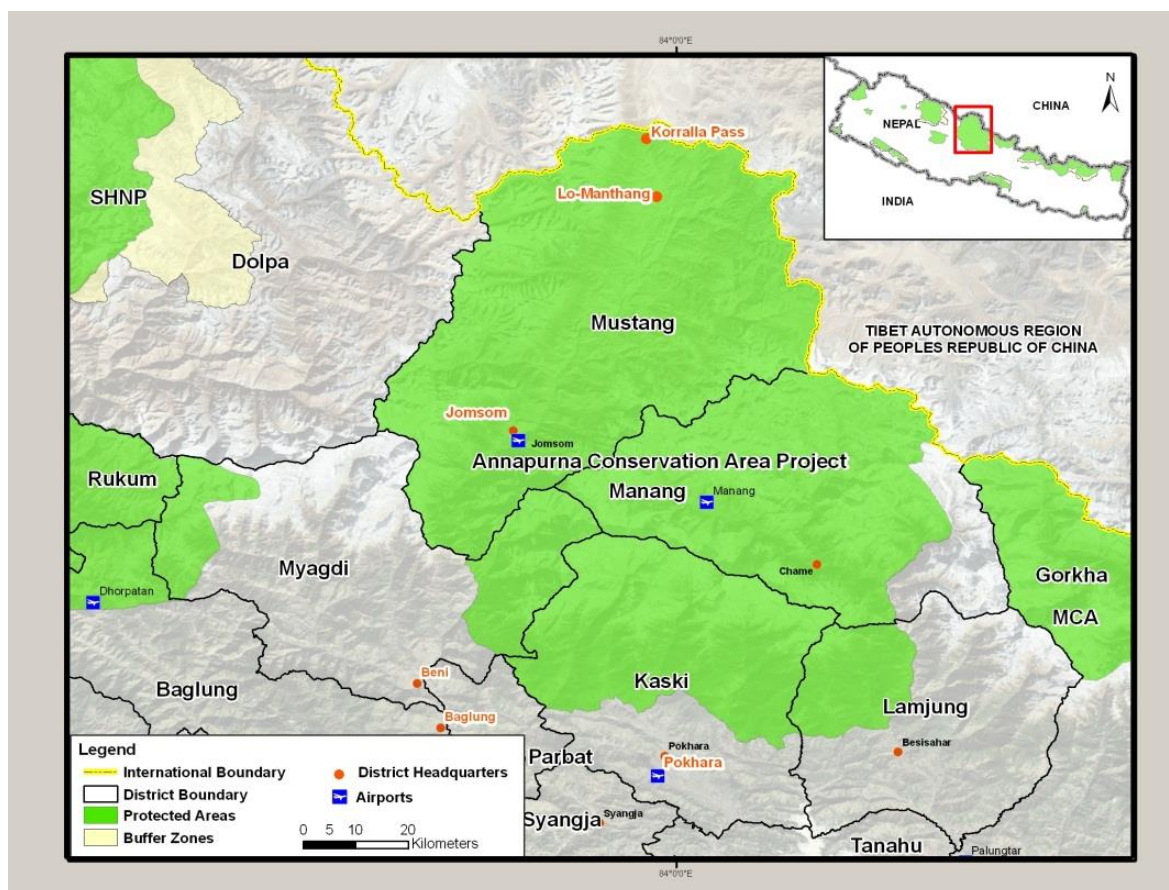
Figure 15: The Annapurna Conservation Area Project and Mustang district (WWFNP 2012)

8.1.2 Towards neo-populist and neo-liberal conservation policy

By the 1980s protected areas, such as Sagarmatha (Everest), Langtang and Chitwan, drew approximately 45 per cent of tourism arrivals in the country. The number of tourists continued to increase over the years and posed a major challenge for the park authorities (Wells, 1993; HMGN/MESC, 2002). A new worldwide conservation paradigm was evolving during this period, which changed the roles of local people in two important ways. In contrast to the previous narrative, it was not the local people, but poverty that was identified as the principal agent of environmental destruction (Brandon and Wells, 1992). Addressing poverty, therefore, became an important issue in conservation policies and programmes. The focus of conservation programmes in recent years has been on improving local livelihoods with a twin objective of reducing poverty and achieving conservation goals. Secondly, the roles traditional natural resource management systems have played in conservation was increasingly recognised (McNeely and Pitt, 1985).

The new paradigm recognised that indigenous people had been 'living harmoniously with nature for generations', emphasising the importance of local people's participation in the achievement and sustaining of conservation objectives. These evolving neo-populist and neo-liberal perspectives not only reshaped conservation initiatives in favour of 'integrated and holistic' programmes, but placed

conservation policies within the context of broader socio-political and economic changes (Igoe and Brockkington, 2007; IUCN, UNEDP and WWF, 1981; 1991; Jeanrenaud, 2002). Subsequently, the focus of conservation moved away from saving flagship species to protecting 'ecosystems' and 'biodiversity', and from exclusionary policies to linking biodiversity conservation with socioeconomic development. Another important change was from 'top-down' authoritarian state-driven approaches to community-led 'bottom up' approaches (Geoghegan and Renard, 2002; Nepal 2005).

This re-conceptualisation of the people-environmental relationship profoundly changed conservation policy with an increased focus on participation, empowerment, and public-private partnerships. Consequently, non-governmental organisations, national and international, as well as community-based organisations have emerged as key players to drive the conservation agenda (Blaikie and Jeanrenaud, 1997; Roper, 2000; Ipara et al., 2005). Local participation in conservation initiatives received further impetus from the 1992 World Congress on National Parks, held in Bali, Indonesia, and the International Labour Organisation Convention 169, highlighting indigenous rights. The latter was particularly significant in its advocacy for the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples in environmental resource management.

Responding to these international pressures for new approaches to conservation, Nepal enacted a special act of Parliament to establish a non-profit non-governmental organisation under the patronage of the then King Birendra. Named after the late King, it was called the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation. The Act empowered the Trust to mobilise resources from within the country and internationally to support the government's conservation policies and programmes (NTNC, 2008). Within a few years, it established international chapters in the UK, USA, Japan, Netherlands and France to raise funds to support Nepal's conservation initiatives. The Trust has developed into the most influential and powerful national conservation institution in Nepal. After the recent political change, which declared Nepal a democratic republic federal county, the Trust has been renamed as the National Trust for Nature Conservation.

8.1.3 The Annapurna Conservation Area Project and its significance in participatory conservation initiatives.

The opening of the Manang district to tourism in the early 1980s enabled international tourists to pursue the Round Annapurna Trek, making it one of the most popular trekking pursuits in the country. By this time, the Annapurna region received nearly five times more trekkers than Sagarmatha National Park, the next most popular trekking destination (Sherpa et. al., 1986). There were 700 teashops and lodges operating in the region that depended on wood from the forests for cooking and heating to cater for an increasing number of trekkers (Gurung, 1993). As in the Everest and Langtang

regions, tourism was a major contributing factor to the accelerated deforestation and pollution problems in the Annapurna region (Sherpa et. al., 1986).

7In 1985, in response to the growing national and international concerns for this region, King Birendra issued a royal directive to the then King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation to investigate protected status for the region. The Trust hired a team of three experts to conduct a feasibility study for the Annapurna region. The team found that the local people were neither happy with the District Forest Office for its heavy handedness in forest matters nor supportive of the proposal for a 'national park' designation for the region (Sherpa et. al., 1995). They therefore proposed a new model 'conservation area' based on the principles of multiple land-use, local participation, sustainability and the role of Lami (match-maker)(see Appendix 3). The cabinet approved the proposal and directed the Trust to implement it. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project, covering an initial 200 sq. km[2,] was launched in 1986 as a pilot programme, nominally under the Ghandruk Village Development Committee. After a decade of operating, the Conservation Area Management Regulation was enacted in 1996. While the regulation curtailed some of the powers, such as local rights to take action against those who had breached their sanctions against forest resources and wildlife, it was considered a landmark development in 'participatory conservation' initiatives in Nepal. The regulation also expanded the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation's authority in legal matters relating to the Annapurna Conservation Area, resulting in the Department deputising a small team, under the leadership of a Liaison Officer, to handle all legal issues in the conservation area.

The launching of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project was a major milestone in Nepal's conservation history and its development reflected the new conservation paradigm that was evolving around the world (McNeely et al., 2005). It was the first protected area in Nepal to be managed by a non-governmental organisation, and the first protected area to avoid use of the army for protection. Instead, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project involved the local people through a number of locally formed organisations such as Conservation Area Management Committees and sub-committees. This participatory approach was perceived both as cost effective and also the key to strengthening local institutions, thus increasing the probability of sustaining conservation efforts in the long run (Wells, 1993). Similarly, this project was the first protected area to levy an entry fee on international and regional visitors. The National Trust for Nature Conservation has been delegated the right to collect and keep the entry fee which has been ploughed back into the Annapurna region to support conservation and small scale development activities. Donor agency support notwithstanding, the entry fee policy to sustain conservation efforts was regarded as an innovative financing mechanism. The entry fee currently constitutes a major source of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's funds (Gurung, 2009, pers. comm.).

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project experiment has provided an additional category in the IUCN typology, i.e., 'conservation area', which was recognised as category VI along the continuum of protected area categories for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems (IUCN, 1994). This new designation was argued to be less restrictive compared with national parks, and, therefore, more acceptable to the local people with the potential to reduce existing conflicts between the park and people. It was also argued to have greater potential to reconcile competing conservation and local interests and to adopt a balanced approach for strengthening a country's network of protected areas (Gurung, 2006; McNeely et al., 2005; Spiteri and Nepal, 2006).

Most importantly, unlike national parks and reserves which predominantly focus on saving flagship species and their habitats at the expense of the local people, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project promoted an integrated and holistic approach to achieve conservation goals, by addressing the socioeconomic development needs of the people. It has been implementing integrated conservation and development programmes (ICDP) covering multiple sectors such as natural resource management, alternative energy, sustainable tourism or ecotourism, conservation education, health care, community development and gender mainstreaming (see Appendix 4). While some scholars have been critical of the Integrated Conservation and Development Programme approach, there are many who have claimed that the Annapurna Conservation Area Project has been the most successful example of integrated conservation and development programmes within the country and abroad (Keiter, 1995; Gurung, 1998; Bajracharya et.al., 2005; Robinson and Redford, 2004; Wells et al., 1999).

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project's participatory conservation model was later replicated in other parts of Nepal; in the Manaslu, Makalu-Barun and Kanchenjunga regions. Encouraged by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's new approach to financing the operation of protected areas, the central government enacted the Buffer Zone Regulation in 1996, significantly reshaping the relationship between parks/reserves and the people living around them. The regulation allows 30 to 50 per cent of park revenue to support the Buffer Zone development and conservation activities (HMG/NPC and UNDP, 2005). The Conservation Area and Buffer Zone regulations have been major statutes to institutionalise and take forward participatory conservation practices in the protected area management of Nepal (Heinen and Shretha, 2006). Currently, there are nine national parks, three wildlife reserves, one hunting reserve, three conservation areas and 11 buffer zones, covering 19.7 per cent of Nepal's total land mass. This figure excludes watershed areas, community forests and other categories of protected lands (CBS, 2008). The participatory conservation approach has continued to remain the major thrust and focus in protected area management since the 1990s.

8.1.4   Expansion of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Mustang:

The decision, in 1999, to formally lift the restricted status imposed during the Panchayat regime on the northern mountain districts of Nepal, opened Upper Mustang to tourism. Within a few years, tourism emerged as the most significant development in this region. Because of the poor condition of the forests in the Upper Mustang region, local people mainly use dried yak or other animal dung for cooking and heating purposes. This region had neither the basic infrastructure such as lodges and teashops, nor was there local expertise or experience with tourists prior to 1990. For these reasons, the central government introduced an exclusive tourism policy intended to protect the fragile natural and cultural environments, both of which instantly became major draw cards, particularly attracting wealthy European and American tourists. The policy included allowing access to only 1,000 trekkers annually who were to pay a minimum of US$700 for a 10-day trek, and US$70 per day for additional days. They were also required to trek in a group using registered trekking companies. They had to be self-sufficient, carrying their own food, fuel, and other essential supplies. Similarly, trekking parties were required to 'carry out everything they brought in' and had to be accompanied by a government appointed Liaison Officer. To enforce this, central government decided to include Upper Mustang within the jurisdiction of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and delegated the management responsibility of the entire conservation area to the National Trust for Nature Conservation for 10 years in 1992. With this expansion, the Annapurna Conservation Area became the largest and most populated protected area in Nepal, covering an area of 7,629 sq. km^2 , including 57 Village Development Committees spread across five districts and with a total population of over 88,000 (NTNC/ACAP, 2009). The management tenure was extended for another 10 years in 2002.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project established two Unit Conservation Offices, one in Lo-Manthang and another in Jomsom, to implement its integrated conservation and development programmes, of which sustainable tourism development and natural resource management have been of highest priority. Its conservation and development programmes in the Upper Mustang region have been receiving an annual budget from the central Government and support from a number of international organisations, the most important being the American Himalayan Foundation which has been a major donor from the beginning (see Appendix 5).

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project's Jomsom office covers eleven Village Development Committees below Kagbeni. Unlike Upper Mustang, this region has not been able to attract international organisations to support its programmes, using internal funds, generated largely through entry fees, for its programmes in this region. The Jomsom project office has established a check-point and tourism information centre at Puthang, near the airport, which is used to monitor tourists and the transportation of timber from the south. It also has established an information check-post at Ghasa.

8.2   Local Responses to tourism development

This section examines the impacts and implications of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's sustainable tourism development in Mustang, highlighting the roles of local institutions it has formed to regulate and manage tourism related activities in order to reduce environmental degradation as well as to maximise tourism benefits for the local residents. Sustainable tourism development in the Annapurna region has remained the key component of the project's participatory conservation initiatives since its inception.

8.2.1   The Annapurna Conservation Area Project's roles in sustainable tourism development

Tourism was identified as a major factor contributing to deforestation during the inception of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. Despite this fact, its tourism policy was not aimed at controlling the number of tourists/trekkers or tourism-related enterprises in the region. Its efforts were focussed more on reducing impacts on forest resources by introducing alternative energy sources such as kerosene and electricity and promoting the use of fuel efficient technologies such as solar heaters, back-boiler water heaters, and improved burning technologies to reduce the use of firewood. Its efforts also focused on pollution control, the development of tourism infrastructure such as camping sites, trails, drinking water systems, sign-posting, information centres, and heritage conservation related to restoration and repair of dilapidated monasteries and temples. The Project has formed a number of local sub-committees for these purposes. As tourism is a relatively new activity, its interface with the village-based governance system has been limited. The Project's staff has taken a more hands-on approach to mitigate tourism impacts. In most instances local sub-committees are not fully responsible for managing tourism programmes and activities. The central government appears to be more influenced by specific interest groups, other than the Project or the local people, in developing new tourism policies for Mustang (Gurung, pers. comm., 2009).

After the designation of the Conservation Area, the number of trekkers to the Annapurna region almost tripled, from around 25,000 a year during the 1980s to 73,407 in 2000. The tourist arrivals in the Annapurna region, however, dropped to a record low of 30,237 in 2007 (ACAP, 2008). This downturn was not related to the Project's policies, but to the escalation of the Maoist insurgency and the resulting political instability during the period from 2001 to 20007. A year after the signing of the peace accord between the seven political parties and the Maoist rebels, the number of tourists, rose again to 72,175 in 2008 (NTNC, 2009). Mustang experienced a similar trend in tourist arrivals from 2000 to 2008. It received 21,568 tourists in 2001, but these dropped to 14,815 in 2002, mainly due to the negative publicity resulting from the royal massacre in June 2001. Tourism numbers picked up again to 17,698 in 2003, but dropped to 15,013 the next year due to the declaration of emergency in

the country. It bounced back again from 2005 onwards with the highest arrival figure of 27,796 in 2008. During this time the number of lodges in the lower Mustang region increased, from 76 to 138 with a total bed capacity of 2,845 in 2009 (Thakali, 1994; NTNC/ACAP, 2009). Upper Mustang has 23 lodges and 31 camping sites (NTNC/ACAP, 2009). These remarkable developments, that had occurred in less than two decades of tourism, are described by an ex-trader from Marpha:

> *In the past if you had no nechangs* [host family] *in Upper Mustang you would not get food or a place to sleep or grass for your horses. The quality of food and sanitation conditions in most villages was very poor, but that did not matter much because finding a place to eat and sleep was more important. Now it is just like Lower Mustang, there are lodges with clean bathrooms and toilets. They provide delicious food and provide reasonably clean beds. If tourism had not developed there, the Upper Mustang region would not have been changed this much.*

Trekking in the Upper Mustang region is popular from April to September which is the lean season for Lower Mustang due to the monsoon rains in the south. Tourism development in Upper Mustang has therefore complemented the overall growth of tourism in Mustang. The majority of trekkers fly to Jomsom to start their trek to Lo-Manthang. Trekking parties to Upper Mustang employ porters and mules in Jomsom to carry food, kerosene and other supplies. While the local people provide the mule services, porters jobs are often taken by new immigrants whose numbers have increased sharply in the last decade due to the increased development activities and tourism. A local told me there are hundreds of immigrants working in Jomsom, Marpha and Tukuche villages during the summer. There are also hundreds of them working in the Upper Mustang region. I met only one local from Lete, a Dalit man, who was working as a full-time professional guide.

Despite entrusting the Annapurna Conservation Area Project to manage tourism in the Annapurna region, central government does not appear to be involving or consulting it on regional policy issues. The government, for example, made two important policy decisions for Upper Mustang in 2007. They reduced the entry fee from US$700 to US$500 for a minimum of ten days trekking and US$50 per day for extra days. They also abolished the requirement of a Liaison Officer. The latter change provided trekking companies an opportunity to run tea house trekking, i.e., trekkers who travel in a group but stay at local lodges and eat local food. Similarly, the government has not enforced the 1,000 trekkers per year quota. Upper Mustang received 1,282 international visitors in 2007 after the initiation of the peace process, rising to 1,659 in 2008 (ACAP, 2009). An officer from the Conservation Area Project confirmed that all these changes were made under pressure from organisations with vested interests:

> *The Trekking Agency Association of Nepal took advantage of the fluid political situation. After Maoists came into power, they lobbied hard, they surrounded the ministry in the night, and demanded that either the government reduce the entry fee to restricted areas or they would take groups without paying the fee. They neither consulted the Annapurna*

> *Conservation Area Project or the Chief District Officer or the local people, nor were their recommendations based on any study. They also pressured the government to remove the provision of a compulsory liaison officer. We came to know about these new changes only after the decisions were made.*

While these events highlighted the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's limitations as the agency responsible for tourism policy in the region, the local people seem to be content, particularly with the change that allowed tea-house trekkers. A lodge owner of Samar commented:

> *The number of tea house trekkers this year doubled compared with last year. We have now been getting these types of tourists for three years. They are good as they stay in our lodge and eat our food. The group trekkers only pay for use of a kitchen, camping sites and sometimes buy food. We don't make much money from group trekkers.*

8.2.2 Local participation in tourism programmes

8.2.2.1 Tourism management sub-committees

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project has formed several sub-committees, specifically to regulate and monitor tourism activities, to check environmental degradation, and to ensure a wider distribution of tourism benefits. The most important tourism committees are the Tourism Management sub-committees, the Heritage Conservation sub-committees and the Community Resource Action Joint sub-committee. The latter sub-committee has a wider mandate: it is considered a tourism institution because its main mission is to manage the income from their 60 per cent share of the tourism revenue from central government; and to support tourism and related conservation and development activities in Upper Mustang. Apart from these committees, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project has also formed and supported a number of community based organisations such as women's or mothers' groups and local youth clubs, some of which are also involved in tourism activities.

In Lower Mustang there are Tourism Management sub-committees in Muktinath, Kagbeni, Puthang, Marpha, Tukche, Kobang, Lete and Ghasa villages. There are also tourism committees in Lo-Manthang, Ghami and Chhusang villages in Upper Mustang. All lodge owners are general members of the Tourism Management sub-committees of their respective village. They nominate a maximum of nine members to the executive committee for a four year term. These committees are responsible for implementing the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's tourism programmes. The Project provides small grants to these committees to organise various programmes, such as clean up campaigns and tourism day celebrations. It has also been providing subsidies to install back-boiler water heaters, solar heaters, smoke heaters, and support to print menus for lodges including the environmental code explaining the do's and don'ts in the conservation area. Similarly, the Area Project has been providing small grants for the construction of incinerators, rubbish pits, toilets and

bathrooms at camp sites, and sign posts. Despite the Conservation Area Project's support, the Tourism Management sub-committees, have appeared to be less active in recent years. A vice chair of the Samar Tourism Management sub-committee told me:

> *Our tourism committee is doing nothing, the* [Project] *office has not called for a meeting. We were formed five years ago and supposed to have monthly meetings. The committee was supposed to review menus, but it has not been done so for some years so we do it ourselves.*

The current chair of the Puthang Tourism Management sub-committee claimed:

> *You find none of the committees are active in Mustang. In the beginning we had our own rules and regulations and all members used to follow them. But now nobody follows them. They don't even come to meetings; everybody is doing things as they wish. You find this kind of problem everywhere.*

He also pointed out the reason for the local apathy towards the tourism committees:

> *I think people are too busy. Another reason is that people think we are in the people's democracy and people are free to do whatever they wish to do. You call a meeting, but people don't turn up. You have a problem getting the minimum numbers* [quorum] *to attend meetings without which we cannot make any decisions. The committee also needs to be re-elected. The term of current officials expired more than a year ago.*

All lodges/hotels are required to register with the Conservation Area Project to operate in the Annapurna region. This provision was intended to ensure their environmental compliance regarding toilets, proper waste disposal systems and the use of fuel efficient devices or alternative fuels for cooking and heating, but in practice, the enforcement of it appears to be weak. The current chair of the Puthang Tourism Management sub-committee again highlighted that:

> *We have to get a licence from the Department of Cottage Industries to operate a hotel, but now we also need to register it with the Conservation Area Management Committee and it has to be renewed every year. I don't understand why a licence given by one department of the government needs to be renewed by another department or organisation. There is overlap in our present rules. The application for renewal is lengthy and time consuming, it comes to us first, then to the Conservation Area Management Committee; from there to the unit office, and from unit office to the project headquarters, and only then will it be renewed. I gave my application for renewal more than a year ago, but I have not heard any progress about it. This is not helping the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and that could be one of the reasons why people are losing interest to participate on committees.*

Another lodge owner from Puthang had a similar view:

> *If the Annapurna Conservation Area Project takes action to stop lodges that do not follow the committee's rules and regulations, the situation may change. Lodge owners may take the committee seriously. But you find that the Project does not do that. The hoteliers haphazardly change prices of the menus and rooms. They think if the price is lowered they would attract more tourists. Because of these kinds of problems which the Tourism Committee has not been able to solve, its members are not active.*

Both of the above accounts indicate that while the Conservation Area Project wants to see sub-committees taking more active roles in resolving tourism issues in Mustang; the sub-committees in return want the Project to be more proactive and assertive in imposing its authority so that lodge owners would follow the tourism rules and regulations.

Besides these issues, many people think the Project's programmes are only benefitting lodge owners. A local from Khola settlement (near Lo-Manthang) listed the benefits for rich lodge:

> *The Project gives solar heaters, smoke heaters, bins, training, money and so many things to lodge owners; they are rich while we are poor, but we are getting nothing. We get support for establishing plantations, but we don't have land. The land we used for the plantation belongs to the monastery. We have to share the trees with them.*

A Project officer also admitted:

> *I agree with him. Although we want to work for the benefit of the poorest of the poor, the policy is that we have to treat everybody equally. For example, we distribute cast iron stoves and provide the same subsidy to the rich as we do to the poor people. A stove costs about Rs. 5,000 rupees. The person who wants to buy it has to pay 2,500 rupees. It is not a big amount for a rich man, but it is a big amount for the poor. So the rich people end up getting our subsidy.*

He also pointed out the reality of implementing policy:

> *We cannot have people's participation if we focus only on the poor people who have to work every day for their survival. We have realised that we need to develop a separate package for the poorest of the poor. When we work in the village, we always have to seek the support of key persons and they happen to be rich or local elites.*

The issue of socio-economic disparity that tourism has heightened is deep and complex. It may be beyond the capacity of the Project's current programmes to solve. Its sub-committees also seem to be ineffective in addressing this pressing problem. This issue has particularly been intense in the Upper Mustang region. *Only a few Bista households in Upper Mustang have benefited from tourism development there,* said a Puthang local. Indeed, most of the lodges and camp sites above Samar in the Upper Mustang region are owned and run by them. They are known as the local elites. The only local trekking agency operating in this region is owned by the family of the Raja of Lo. There are other people who do not share this narrow view. A local from Lo-Manthang said:

> *Many people are getting direct benefits from tourism development in Upper Mustang. There are many boarding schools and monastic schools. Tourists are giving money to these schools and students study free. The American Himalayan Foundation is providing funds for restoration of our monasteries and chortens. We also have the Lo Gelpo Jigme Foundation*

helping us with schools, day care centres and medical care. These are all results of tourism development.

Another local from the same village added his observation: *all the people who are running different organisations in this region are influential people. Donors trust them fully. On their recommendations, donors even help the people to find jobs abroad.*

Within Upper Mustang, villages beyond Lo-Manthang think the tourism policies have not been fair to them. A local from Chhoser complained:

> *Lo-Manthang is the last destination of the Upper Mustang trek for over-night stays. Only the people of Lo-Manthang are getting benefits from tourism, they rent out horses, sell Tibetan souvenirs and gifts, run lodges; all tourists want to help them, but not many people come to our village so we are not benefitting.*

The benefit sharing from tourism has also been the key issue in Lower Mustang. The new road proposal provides a good example of conflicting costs and benefits. When the proposal for the road was being discussed, most of the lodge owners were against the road construction, but the rest of the people were supporting it. A local farmer highlighted the tension during that time:

> *The airport people* [hoteliers] *wanted to stop the road building. They feared that this would kill tourism. But the majority of us wanted to see the road. We had problems selling our apples and vegetables. We used to feed our animals with carrots and apples. We were also spending lots of money to import food on mules or aeroplanes.*

Another local farmer said:

> *Tourists to Upper Mustang come during the harvesting season. All of those people who come looking for jobs in Mustang choose as a first priority to work for trekking companies. Failing this, they will work for us as agricultural labourers. They bring their families with them, mostly their wives and children; some are as young as 13/14 years old. These are the ones who you find in the village looking for jobs during the agricultural season. They don't work hard, but we are compelled to hire them as there are no other alternatives. We hope that now we have the road we may be able to find more labourers.*

Many lodge owners in Lower Mustang think the local people who do not have lodges or other tourism businesses are benefitting as well. A lodge owner of Puthang, for example, pointed out *we buy most vegetables, beans, potatoes, flours and rakshi (spirit) from farmers. They are making good money.* Another lodge owner from the same village said:

> *The people from Syang used to sell us firewood in the past. I used to buy 200-250 mule loads of firewood each year. Now I use kerosene and gas so I don't buy as much. I still buy 25-30 mule loads of firewood to make rakshi. But I also buy lots of rakshi from the villagers. Lodge owners in Puthang do not have fields so they depend on villagers to buy local food items.*

Besides Tourism Management sub-committees, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project has also

formed and has been supporting the Heritage Conservation sub-committee, mothers' groups and youth clubs. While the heritage committees are more active in the Upper Mustang region, mothers' groups and youth clubs are found in all major villages in both regions (as mentioned in the previous chapter). The Heritage Conservation sub-committees are primarily responsible for overseeing the restoration or repair of monasteries, and other cultural monuments. Most of the monasteries in Mustang are owned by villages. The committees therefore have to work closely with villagers to initiate any repair work on the monasteries. They have to consult the *Ghempa/Mukhiya* for all important decisions concerning monasteries. This seemed to be the only common area of interaction between tourism related institutions formed by the Project and traditional decision making institutions. While the heritage committees are responsible for overseeing the funds and the implementation of repairs and renovation work, the *Ghempa/Mukhiya* is responsible for ensuring the support of the villagers and addressing any issue that may arise during the project period.

In Upper Mustang, mothers' groups and youth clubs are more involved with village clean ups and managing access to specific tourism sites such as caves or monasteries. Both groups are involved in organising cultural programmes for tourists. The mothers' groups in Lower Mustang are responsible for managing the safe drinking water units which the Project has installed in all major villages to reduce the use of bottled mineral water. The Heritage Conservation sub-committees, mothers' groups and youth clubs thus target specific tasks and as a consequence, their influence in tourism-related issues seemed to be fairly limited.

8.2.2.2 Community Resource Action joint sub-committee

At a higher level, the Project has formed the Community Resource joint sub-committee as a part of an exit strategy during the period that the Global Environmental Fund/United Nations Development Programme funded the Upper Mustang Biodiversity Project. The Project implemented this programme from 2000-2006. The Community Resource Action joint sub-committee has now been registered with the Chief District Office as a non-governmental organisation, and within a short span of time, has emerged as an important institution with potential to play a significant role in promoting both the long term and strategic interests of Upper Mustang in conservation and development matters, particularly in the regulation of tourism related activities in the future.

The Community Resource Action joint sub-committee has 12 members on its executive committee. It is the only sub-committee in Upper Mustang chaired by the Raja of Lo. His leadership of this committee has raised both its profile and importance in local affairs. Besides him, it has seven members, representing the 7 Conservation Area Management Committees operating in the Upper Mustang region. Conservation Area Management Committees are the main bodies responsible for implementing the Project's programmes and policies at the Village Development Committee level.

Additionally, it has four nominated members, included a Village Development Committee secretary for Lo-Manthang and three members representing the three main political parties, the Nepali Congress, the United Marxist and Leninist, and the Maoists. This essentially makes the Community Resource Action joint sub-committee a higher level authority, above Conservation Area Management Committees, but under the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's institutional framework, as specified in the Conservation Area Management Regulation, it is regarded as a sub-committee. For administrative purpose, this committee has two full time staff and it shares an office with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Lo-Manthang. The Project also has been providing a regular budget as well as channelling most of its conservation related programmes through this organisation for the past two years. Their roles and significance in terms of natural resource conservation will be the focus of discussion in Section 8.3. The current coordinator of the Community Resource Action joint sub-committee told me:

> *This organisation was established as recommended by the evaluation of the Upper Mustang Biodiversity Conservation Project. We work under the direction of Conservation Area Management Committees. We received two million rupees the year before to implement various activities from the National Trust for Nature Conservation. We received 3.6 million last year from the Trust but because it was received after the approval of our programme and budget we could not use it.*

One of the missions of the Community Resource Action joint sub-committee was to pursue the 60 per cent of the tourism entry fee to Upper Mustang which the central government promised to provide but failed to deliver. The government, however, provided an annual budget to the Annapurna Conservation Area Project as mentioned earlier to support various conservation and development activities. The government's contribution was sporadic. It ranged from four to twenty per cent of the entry fee from 1993 to 2005 (NTNC, 1997-2006). After recent political change, the government renewed its pledge of 60 per cent, and provided 10 and 12.6 million rupees in 2008 and 2009, respectively, which was divided equally between the District Development Committee and the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. But the local people and District Development Committee officials seemed to have no information about the source of these grants as its Planning Officer pointed out:

> *We don't know if these funds came from the tourism fee for the Upper Mustang or from the general entry fee for the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. We don't have any specific information about this fund and how it was estimated. All we know is that this fund came from trekking fees. When we received funding last year we did not have projects to spend money on. We held a meeting of all parties to allocate funding for various projects and to spend it accordingly.*

Many local people in Upper Mustang are not happy with the way tourism revenue has been shared and this has been a bone of contention between Upper and Lower Mustang. A local leader of Ghami pointed out his frustration: *we heard that the District Development Committee received 12.6 million*

this year. But Upper Mustang has not received a penny. The money came for our region and we are neither informed nor consulted about it'.

A similar view was also offered by the principal of the monastic school in Lo-Manthang who is a monk:

> *The government is treating us like a zoo. People come here to see us, take photos, write books and they make money out of these. The government charges the entry fees for them to come and see us. But we are getting nothing in return. We have to look for kind hearted tourists to help feed and educate our young novices. We don't know how long they are going to support us. If the government gives us the money they promised we may not have to look around for support; we would become self-sufficient and independent and this would help conserve our cultural and religious heritage.*

A Community Resource Action joint sub-committee's coordinator shared the monk's sentiments:

> *We discussed our financial status with our members at the recent meeting which was chaired by the Raja of Lo. The members decided that in the winter we would go to Kathmandu and take a delegation from the ministry to put pressure on the government to provide the promised sixty per cent of tourism revenue.*

He stressed that, *the Project may not be able to put pressure on the government because it works for it but as an independent organisation, the Community Resource Action joint sub-committee can.*

8.3   Local responses: the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and natural resource conservation

This section examines the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's natural resource conservation programmes. These programmes are wide ranging, and include forest, wildlife, alpine pasture areas and water bodies within a broad concept of 'biodiversity' or 'environmental conservation'. Of these, the forest has been the dominant focus of its work, and the primary domain for day-to- day interaction with the local people. Of prime significance, the impacts and implications of the Project's natural resource management committees are examined. The interface and interaction between Conservation Area Management Committees and *Ghempa* is highlighted. I argue that while Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management Committees have been in the forefront of implementing the Project's resource management policies and programmes, it was the endogenous village governance system which operated in the background to ensure village authority and ownership over environmental resources as per the traditional village rules and regulations.

After the inclusion of Mustang in the jurisdiction of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, the central government closed the District Forest Office and Ranger-Posts. The Project took over the responsibility of forests and other natural resources. Unlike during the tenure of the District Forest Office, the Project's natural resource programmes were widened to include wildlife, alpine pasture

areas and water bodies within a broader concept of 'biodiversity' or 'environment'. Despite this broader environmental perspective, the forest remained the main focus of the Project's work, and became a primary domain for frequent interaction with the local people.

8.3.1 Local participation and empowerment:

In contrast to the District Forest Office which was directly responsible for enforcing the forest nationalisation policy, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project formed various committees and sub-committees to implement its integrated conservation and development programmes. While the District Forest Office attempted to limit and isolate the local people from their forests, the Project's participatory approach played an important role in restoring the responsibility for managing forests to locally formed committees. A local told me: *we had very strong rules about our forest from the very beginning and because of these rules we were able to protect our forests. The DFO tried to weaken our rules, but we did not give up. But after the Annapurna Conservation Area Project came, we haven't had such problem*. Another villager highlighted the difference the Project has made: *we now have a legal framework to manage our forests. ACAP was helpful to generate local awareness particularly about wildlife. We now know which wild animals are protected by the law and the provision for legal action if someone kills them. We did not hunt much in the past, nor did we know much about the modern conservation concepts such as biodiversity before ACAP'*.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project has formed two main institutions primarily responsible for environmental resource management. The main local institution responsible for forestry and the broader environmental issues is the Conservation Area Management Committee which is supported by a number of Forest Management sub-committees in the villages below the Kagbeni Village Development Committee where forests are abundant. The Conservation Area Management Committee is the Village Development Committee level institution with a broader mandate to implement and oversee the Project's supported activities. Technically, Conservation Area Management Committees are responsible for forming the various sub-committees to assist in implementing the various conservation and development activities, but in practice, the Project has been taking the leading role in forming both the Conservation Area Management Committees and all sub-committees operating within the Village Development Committees.

The roles of Forest Management sub-committees and Conservation Area Management Committees to manage natural resources, particularly forests are now described. I examine the impacts and implications of these new institutions on the local natural resource management regime, particularly highlighting the interface and interaction between outside and local institutions, and the significance of these in the environmental governance of Mustang.

8.3.2   Ownership and authority

8.3.2.1   The interface between old and new institutions: confrontation and adaptation

Forests were a contested resource during the tenure of the District Forest Office in Mustang and that led to many confrontational incidents between the state and the local people. Although the confrontation did not develop into full-fledged conflicts due to some flexibility on the District Forest Office's part to meet local demands, the relationship between the Forest Office and the local people was far from cordial. Initially there was a high degree of local scepticism over the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's roles. This became apparent when the Project tried to form Forest Management sub-committees from village to village. While villages, particularly those which did not have good forest cover, participated in this initiative hoping that they might be able to claim more forest areas, those villages which had good forests showed no interest. The latter villages were concerned that by participating in the new forestry programme they would lose their rights over their forest resources. This local scepticism led to many conflicts between villages, especially in the Thaksatsai region, where abundant forests are located near villages, but the original ownership is controlled by different villages. A local from Kobang told me: *we had conflict with our neighbouring villages over forest boundaries before the Annapurna Conservation Area Project came, but it was not active. When the Project tried to form sub-committees all the old conflicts flared up again. We were concerned about losing forests to neighbouring villages.'*

Another local added:

> *One of the problems with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's work during that time was that they consulted the people of one village and did not involve the people of another village to form committees and demarcate forest boundaries of the village. Some small villages which do not have good forests misled the project staff by claiming forest areas that belonged to their neighbouring villages. So we had conflicts between villages over forest boundaries for some years.*

A local from Kagbeni also recalled their first reaction to the Project's forestry policy:

> *Tiri, Pagling and Kagbeni have a joint forest area, and Phalek and Dhakarjung have another forest area within the Kagbeni Village Development Committee. We did not want to share our forests with other villages. ACAP said all five villages should have common forests and when they wanted to form a forest committee we opposed it. This created a conflict between us and ACAP at the beginning. Now there is no conflict. We have a Forest Management sub-committee. We manage and use our forests as per our village rules.*

Forest boundaries and the local ownership of forests still remain highly contested issues in Mustang. Even now, villages frequently clash over these. A Nakum Forest Management sub-committee member joked:

> *Our conflict over forest boundaries with Bhurjungkot has not been resolved. We make sure that we don't appoint lean and thin people on our forest committee; you never know when you have to fight with your neighbouring villages.*

The Project seemed to have learnt from these earlier conflicts. As a result, the formation of the current Forest Management sub-committees is based on local use and ownership of forest resources. For example, forests are shared by all villages within Jomsom Village Development Committee's area of responsibility, and for this reason there is no Forest Management sub-committee. Marpha Village Development Committee has three original villages, Marpha, Syang and Chhairo. Forests in these villages are governed by old rules and regulations. Syang and Marpha own forest within their villages which are governed by their village rules. Chhairo village in the Marpha Village Development Committee area of responsibility has a small patch of forest and it has formed a separate Forest Management sub-committee to oversee its management. Most forest in this village belongs to the five original villages in the Paachgau region as a common forest. This will be discussed later.

Forest Management sub-committees cannot issue permits for timber and other natural resource extraction. Only Conservation Area Management Committees have such rights following recommendation from the respective forest sub-committees. Forest Management sub-committees, however, have the rights to keep the forest revenues. Over the years, forest sub-committees have generated substantial funds through sale of timber and other forest products (see Figure 16 below). They are required to provide 25 per cent of the revenue to their respective Conservation Area Management Committees. In practice this has not been strictly enforced. A Conservation Area Management Committee member from Kobang told me: *Forest Management sub-committees who have lots of income are not really happy to share 25 per cent of their income with CAMCs. We have received an average of around ten per cent. This issue has also been raised in our joint meetings every time, but nothing has been done*. Village Development Committees such as Marpha and Jomsom do not have such issues.

8.3.2.2   The Council of Paachgau and common forests:

A large tract of forest above Chhairo continues to be managed by the Council of Paachgau as a common forest. This council has not been formally recognised by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, but it appears this has not made any difference to its roles in relation to the common forest. The executive body of the council is formed by participating villages themselves. It was recently re-formed with 21 members representing five villages proportionately according to their original shares; that is, 5 members each from Thini and Marpha, 4 from Syang, 3 from Chimang and 2 from Chhairo. They also appoint a chair and vice-chair on the rotational basis.

The council has appointed women representatives, two from each village, to attend its meetings. The council organises regular monitoring visits involving representatives from all member villages, makes decisions on sale of timber and manages funds. The council was able to generate substantial funds for the past 10 years, primarily by auctioning trees that were destroyed by an avalanche. It currently has a fund of 2.6 million rupees which is distributed among member villages proportionate to their shares plus a 10 per cent interest rate. The council meets every year to settle their accounts during which they also review old policies and make new ones, if deemed necessary. The current chair of Paachgau told me:

> *If there are important things to do we use our funds for this, otherwise, we give them in loans. Our main goal as a council is to maintain our traditional systems and socio-cultural rules and regulations; and work together to defend our territory if somebody challenges us or applies unnecessary pressure. One of our main jobs is to manage our common forest; we go patrolling, we ask villages to send people, proportionate to their shares, to participate in various activities to improve our forests. We have also been using the interest from our funds to provide a scholarship to the top student and for community projects. We provided relief funds to a flood victim of Chokhopani and also a fire victim of Syang. We also provide timber for the repair of monasteries free of cost.*

8.3.2.3 Conservation Area Management Committees

Conservation Area Management Committees are considered the main local institutions with a broad mandate to manage conservation and development activities within the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. These committees have two major responsibilities, to issue permits for timber and to carry out wildlife monitoring. The executive body of the Conservation Area Management Committee has 15 members, including a member from each of the nine wards of the Village Development Committee, five members nominated by the Project and the Village Development Committee's Chair (mayor) as an ex-officio member. The Project has been nominating women, disadvantaged groups (Dalits in Mustang's case) and social workers to the committee to ensure the representation of special interest groups. Conservation Area Management Committee members serve for five years. The members are responsible for electing a chair and a secretary from amongst themselves.

Conservation Area Management Committees are responsible for holding regular meetings where decisions are made by a simple majority. They are also responsible for appointing and mobilising forest guards. While most Conservation Area Management Committees have used village *chhowa* or *katuwal* (village criers) as forest guards and paying them a daily wage, some have appointed separate forest guards. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project provides a regular annual budget of 38,000 rupees to each Conservation Area Management Committee to cover the costs of forest guards and general administration. Forest guards work under the direct supervision of Conservation Area Management Committees. Additionally, the project has provided a one-time seed grant of 50,000

rupees to each committee. The grants from the Annapurna Conservation Area Project are the main source of income for all Conservation Area Management Committees in the Upper Mustang region.

8.3.2.4   Thakali Sewa Samiti Thak Satsai Chhetra:

Besides these forest related institutions, the Council of 13 Mukhiya, which has been renamed as Thakali Sewa Samiti Thak Satsai Chhetra (Thakali Service Committee of Thak Satsai region), continues to remain dominant in the management of the common property high pasture areas in the Thak Satsai region. Thaksatsai villages sharing borders with high pasture areas are responsible for collecting grazing tax from users other than the people from their member villages. Of this money, 25 per cent goes to the Thaksatsai council fund and the remainder is kept by the villages. This is probably the main factor in the effectiveness of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's Pasture Development sub-committees in some villages of the Thaksatsai region. As pasture areas are common property in the Thaksatsai region, rules introduced by one Pasture Development sub-committee may not necessarily be accepted by other villages.

The influence and dominance of the Thakali Sewa Samiti in pasture related matters is also linked to the maintenance of their traditional regional boundaries. This became obvious during recent conflict over a pasture area between Tukuche and Marpha which had dragged on for almost nine years. It was the Thakali Sewa Samiti which played a crucial role in resolving it. The Mir (chief) Mukhiya of the Samiti explained:

> *We have a legal document received from the Rana government to prove our ownership over the disputed pasture land. We had given a permit to a herder to take his animals to our pasture land, but Marpha stopped him and asked him to pay taxes. The herder told Marpha that three generations of his family had been paying taxes to the Thaksatsai region to use the pasture area. He told them that it is Thaksatsai land and he would not pay tax to Marpha. The Marpha people took him into custody, tied his hands, and treated him very badly. When we learnt about it we had a big conflict with Marpha over this incident. We even imposed a blockade on Marpha under which Thaksatsai villages were not allowed to sell forest products such as bamboo and timber to them. Marpha later apologised to the herder, paid 35,000 rupees as compensation, and we lifted our blockade. We have had disputes with Marpha over boundaries and land for a long time.*

The local leader of Marpha also admitted that:

> *We even took this case to the court and it cost both villages a lot of money, but even after four to five years of court battles we had no resolution. So both villages decided to settle the case and signed an agreement of understanding. We agreed to keep the land under dispute as it was and use the forest above that jointly.*

This region is currently involved in another dispute with the neighbouring Chim Khola Village Development Committee over the ownership of another high pasture area. The conflict appears to be more linked to the collection rights of *yarsagumba (Cordyceps sinesis),* a fungus that invades

subterranean caterpillars, which is known for its aphrodisiac properties and may fetch over US$1,000 per kg in the international market. The Chim Khola Village Development Committee falls outside the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's jurisdiction. The Lete Conservation Area Management Committee chair told me:

> *People are blaming ACAP for this conflict, because when the Annapurna Conservation Area Project prepared the conservation area map it used the mountain tops* [catchment area] *to demarcate its boundaries. The disputed pasture area is called the Kalimara area. We have been collecting taxes from outsiders who want to use this area for grazing their livestock for centuries. We are also responsible for organizing pujas* [religious ceremonies] *in this area every year. Now because this area has lots of yarsagumba, the people of Chim khola want to control it, and are threatening our people, usually herders, not to use the area without their permission. They are taking advantage of the current situation* [referring to the political instability].

He also indicated that this conflict is having a wider impact on the Thakali Samiti's ability to manage pasture areas in the region:

> *Because of this conflict, some other villages in Thaksatsai such as Tukuche, which has many other ethnic groups, is refusing to pay 25 per cent to the Thaksatsai region as they think this is more to do with Chan Thakali's authority than for the region. So Tukuche is not paying 25 per cent of the pasture revenue to us. This has encouraged other villages to keep the revenue for themselves. We had collected Rs. 2/3 lakh rupees (2 to 3 hundred thousand) from pasture tax last year and the year before but neither has our village paid the 25 per cent to the Thakali Samiti. Due to the current conflict we have not been able to issue permits for yarsagumba collection this year. We had collected around 30,000 rupees last year. But the people who visited pasture areas to collect yarsagumba were driven out by the people of Chim Khola. We could not call for a tender to contract out yarsagumba collection this year due to this problem.*

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project also formed several Pasture Development sub Committees in Upper Mustang to regulate grazing practices, and more importantly to make herders more aware of biodiversity hotspots which are also important pasture areas. Like in Thaksatsai their efforts did not seem to work well. A Conservation Area Management Committee chair from Surkhang told me:

> *The Annapurna Conservation Area Project formed a Pasture Development sub-committee, involving people who raise goats. This committee had many conflicts over enforcing their rules and regulations like imposing fines on those who breach the rules. Decisions they made affected Yara, Ghara and Dhi villages, it became difficult for us to enforce the committee rules. As each village has their own pasture and their own rules and regulations, they don't care about the committee's rules. So we decided to allow each village to manage their pastures according to their rules.*

He added, *each village in this VDC has their own rules regarding pastures. The Conservation Area Management Committee has no role in village rules. Our Ghempa system is more important for us than any other system.*

8.3.3   Rules and regulations

After the formation of the Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management Committees, most of forest related decisions imposed during the District Forest Office tenure were reversed. Although forests were not officially handed over to the local people, or for that matter to villages, Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management Committees have been given the right to manage forests and other natural resources as long as their actions do not conflict with conservation goals. Villages were able to retain their forests as in the past and exercise their access and user rights over forest resources without consulting the Project on a day-to-day basis. The Project has provided guidelines to Conservation Area Management Committees to fix royalties on forest products. These committees have also been given the right to issue permits, collect royalties and generate their own funds. Compared with the District Forest Office's tenure, this was a remarkable change, as previously the locals had to pay for timber, and royalties went to the central coffers.

Under the Conservation Area Management regulations, the Project was required to prepare a-five-year-plan for each Conservation Area Management Committee, to be submitted to the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation via the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation for approval. The plan was supposed to help Conservation Area Management Committee's identify conservation priorities, develop programmes and identify resources to address both short and long term measures to achieve and sustain conservation goals and objectives. The Project prepared the first series of five-year operational plans for all the Conservation Area Management Committees in Mustang six years ago, but had a problem securing approvals from the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation. A Project officer explained:

> *It took us almost three years to develop the first five year plan for each Conservation Area Management Committee. There were issues related to field inventories and other field related information which took a long time to collect. We sent the final plans to the project headquarters and were told those had been sent to the Trust, but we never received any feedback. We don't even know if they were approved by the ministry or the department. There is a provision in the regulation that until the plans are approved we can implement activities with the approval of the Project Director so with his approval we were able to implement our annual programmes. We are now in the process of developing another series of five-year plans.*

A Conservation Area Management Committee secretary from Lo-Manthang confirmed the problems associated with the process of planning:

> *We prepared plans, but we neither received funds as specified in the plan nor did hear anything about the plan. We don't use our plans to prepare annual programmes. ACAP invites us to planning meetings every year. We discuss various projects and request ACAP for help. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project would inform us whether our requests have been met or not and give funds for projects accordingly. We do not have a plan now.*

A similar view was also expressed by the Conservation Area Management Committee chair from Ghami: w*e prepared a-5-year plan but it was not implemented. We get projects that ACAP want us to implement. It is like following their rules. We don't get the projects we asked for. Sometimes we get projects that we have no idea about.*

There are 11 furniture factories (saw mills, but they also make furniture, and thus are known as furniture factories) operating in Mustang which were all licensed during District Forest Office tenure. Furniture factories are now required to register at the Annapurna Conservation Area Project unit office and renew their licence every year. Furniture factories need to secure permits for timber from the Conservation Area Management Committee for which they need to get a recommendation from the concerned Forest Management sub-committees. They also need to get approval from the Conservation Area Management Committee to transport timber from one village to another. The Conservation Area Management Committee's rules regarding timber sales vary from village to village. For example, Tukuche village has its own furniture factory. The sale of timber to other villagers is strictly controlled. They buy timber only from the furniture factory. This factory, which was established in the mid 1990 to support a community library and a day care centre, is the richest organisation in Tukuche with funds of over 2.5 million rupees. Similarly, Jomsom's Conservation Area Management Committee has a fixed quota for furniture factories operating within its Village Development Committee's area of responsibility. They are mostly allowed to collect windfall trees or trees killed by heavy snowfall or avalanches. Unlike in the past, furniture factories do not appear to have freedom to collect timber from the forests. A furniture factory owner of Syang complained:

> *We don't get enough timber from the forest. But there are individuals who have received permits from Conservation Area Management Committee's in the lower regions for more timber than they need and selling it to others. ACAP has not been able to control this and we are worried this may affect our trade.*

In most Village Development Committee areas where there are Forest Management Committees, Conservation Area Management Committees do not have much control over fixing the quantity of timber harvested or any other forest products. But in villages where there is no Forest Management sub-committee, such as in Jomsom, Kagbeni and Muktinath, Conservation Area Management Committees seemed to have more say over fixing the quantity of timber before they issued a permit. A meeting minute of Jomsom's Conservation Area Management Committee, for example, records that it approved only 300 cubic feet of timber for a local person who had requested 500 cubic feet. Similarly, another decision involved approving only 70 cubic feet of timber for repairing a house despite the initial request being for 100 cubic feet. It also decided to withhold a decision on an application requesting timber because it had information that the applicant had not yet started building his house. Besides exercising the authority to issue permits, Conservation Area Management Committees seemed to have no role in making major decisions on forest harvesting and management

without consulting, or in agreement with, the *Ghempa/Mukhiya*. For example, when the Jomsom committee made a decision to ban the local people from using the Chhahara forest after a big forest fire in July 2009, it invited the *Mukhiya* to discuss the proposal and sought his consent on the matter. Similarly, the Conservation Area Management Committee of Muktinath, involved the *Mukhiya* of all major villages, made the decision to reduce a local quota for firewood collection from 25 to 15 loads, and only allowing the local people to collect 10 sacks of dung per household. A local told me, *only a few people go to the- forest these days. More people are using gas. We have planted trees and although we can use branches for firewood, such use is declining. People don't collect even their allocated 15 loads of firewood from forests.*

There are indications that the local dependency on forests for firewood is showing a downward trend linked to wider socioeconomic changes that Mustang has experienced in recent decades. A local man from Marpha pointed out: *unlike in the past you don't find people stacking heaps of firewood on their rooftops. Firewood is expensive. People can now make more money growing vegetables or cultivating herbs than collecting firewood. They use the income to buy gas and kerosene.* A local from Tukuche offered his opinion on the state of the forest resource: *Forest areas around Chokhopani, above the Chimang, Chhairo, Jomsom and Marpha areas, which had suffered most during the construction of the hydro power and the Resource Conservation and Utilisation Project period, are recovering well. The overall forest condition has improved and they look denser now.*

Another lodge owner agreed with the previous observation and said:

> *It is cheaper to use kerosene and gas than firewood for cooking. You have to pay 200/250 per jhopa* [cross breed of a cow and a yak] *load of firewood. The gas is much cheaper than firewood. You find many people are switching to gas because it is easy, clean and has no smoke. Even ordinary household are using gas during the daytime or when they receive visitors. It is easier, faster and cheaper to make tea or warm rakshi (local spirit) using gas than making a fire for these.*

The people of the Upper Mustang region have also reduced the use of dried dung or thorny bushes (*caronova*) as firewood. Most lodge owners either use kerosene or gas for cooking these days. Trekking companies in this region have to become fuel efficient. The Project office in Kagbeni is responsible for checking that they carry enough fuel to fully meet their needs. A lodge owner from Ghami told me:

> *I use three different fuels for cooking. I use dried dung when I don't have much cooking to do. I use gas and kerosene when I have many guests. We have learned to use the stoves and found that using kerosene is very easy and fast. After the road was constructed, gas has become cheap so we prefer to use gas. The use of gas is increasing in this village. People have money now and they can afford it.*

8.3.4   Authority and decision-making:

In most villages in Thaksatsai, it is still common to find that the day-to-day decisions relating to forests are still made by the *Ghempa/Mukhiya*. Villagers continue to seek the approval from *Mukhiya* to collect minor forest products such as bamboo or small trees to make poles or use green juniper/pine/cypress for special occasions. Green poles are used for hoisting Buddhist prayer flags, and cypress/pine branches are used for decoration purposes at marriages or other special ceremonies. Villagers also inform the *Ghempa/Mukhiya* of the need to cut green trees for cremation purposes. This is the only time green trees are allowed for firewood in most villages. These practices show that the authority of indigenous institutions over environmental resources has not diminished even though they are neither recognised by the Local Self Governance Act 1999 nor by the Conservation Area Management Regulations 1996. These institutions have continued to play dominant roles in maintaining village authority and ownership over environmental resources.

As mentioned earlier Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub-committees do not make any major decisions without consulting their respective *Ghempa/Thuimi/Mukhiya*. A former *Mukhiya* from Marpha explained:

> *Most of the rules regarding forest use are made by our village. It is a village rule to ban (bandej) felling of green trees. Our Mukhiya is responsible to enforce village rules. We change our village rules and regulations every three years and this has been the tradition from time immemorial. Village rules (niyam) will be reviewed this year, and worthy (jaayaj) rules will be kept and najaayej (non-worthy) rules will be abandoned. If there is a need to have new rules we discuss them and decide.*

A local youth from Jomsom told me*:*

> *The Conservation Area Management Committee represents the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. It oversees its rules and regulations, but it cannot make decisions on the village forests, pastures, water system and land. If the Conservation Area Management Committee makes decisions on forests or pasture areas we would not accept or follow them as they are not village rules or regulations. But if the village makes a decision we all agree and comply with them. Village rules are more important than ACAP rules. The Project's rules may not be applicable after it terminates, but village rules stay as long as villagers want them.*

A similar view was expressed by a Conservation Area Management Committee's secretary in Lete:

> *Although we are on the committee and we have committees and sub-committees, our village Katuwal (kundals) are responsible for monitoring our forests. It is the village which made a rule to ban even cutting of kukaath (poor quality timber trees). Under the instruction of our Mukhiya, village Katuwals monitor that ban and if somebody is found cutting even a small piece of kukaath that person will be fined 2000 rupees. We have had this rule for the last two years. We used to collect kukaath for firewood in the summer. Now because of this new village rule you don't see any firewood stacked on the rooftops as in the past. The dried wood is collected only in winter. We may have to lift the ban on use of kukaath after some years.*

> *But this is just my personal thought, I haven't talked about this with the Mukhiya yet, but I am thinking to bring this up with him this year.*

In the Upper Mustang region, the role of Conservation Area Management Committees seemed to be limited to implementing the Annapurna Conservation Area Project funded programmes and activities. This was confirmed by a Lo-Manthang Conservation Area Management Committee's secretary:

> *We don't have forests in our area. We, the Conservation Area Management Committee members, don't have many roles in this region. We call meetings when ACAP asks us or when there are projects to discuss. One of our main tasks is to oversee plantation management. We have encouraged people to plant trees. Some plantations are done in groups and some are individually. For us our Ghempa is the most important system to take care of villages.*

A local of Tangye had a similar opinion:

> *The Conservation Area Management Committee cannot resolve disputes in the village. It cannot take care of water distribution or the irrigation systems we have. There are no forests so we have no funds as do the villages in the south. But whether we have the funds or not is not that important. What is important for us is that we cannot run our village without Ghempa/Mukhiya. We cannot look after our pastures, fields, irrigation and lands without our village rules.*

A local youth from Ghami added :

> *Our Conservation Area Management Committee becomes active only when the Annapurna Conservation Area Project provides inputs, but when there are no inputs they become passive. But our Ghempa continues to work. If there is a fight between two people, he goes and tries to understand why the fight broke out. He takes his role seriously. If there is a natural calamity or if there is a crisis, the Ghempa tries to understand it and consults people. Nobody needs to push him, it happens automatically. Village Development Committees do not work until District Development Committees back them up. Conservation Area Management Committees do not work until ACAP backs them up but the Ghempa system does not need any backing.*

A Project officer admitted, *the northern region has fewer resources, in terms of forests. The Ghempa system has a strong influence in this region. Ghempa controls all aspects of village life in the northern region. The local leadership is very strong.*'

There seemed to be another reason for villagers to trust more in their own endogenous system rather than in Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub Committees. Villagers think these committees are the Project's committees', some even told me they are 'Village Development Committees' (referring to ward representatives). They tend to believe that these committees may not survive beyond the Project period. Like Village Development Committees, the villagers seemed to be pragmatically taking the view that Conservation Area Management Committees are formal forest-related institutions to deal with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, and are necessary to gain access to technical and financial support to implement various

conservation and development projects. On the other hand, they view the endogenous system under the leadership of the *Mukhiya* and *Ghempa,* incorporating their authority over forests, pastures, lands and water bodies within their village area, as more concerned with the survival of their villages. It is for this reason that the *Mukhiya / Ghempa* system has continued to prevail in Mustang, and has continued to play a dominant role in both the governance of village welfare and the environmental resources of each and every village. This is in spite of recent socio-political and economic changes which have led to the proliferation of non-governmental and community based organisations and a complex network of locally formed institutions with both specific and broad mandates.

8.3.5 Forests funds and utilisation

Forest committees are rich, said a local from Kobang. *Forest income is the main income for the village not only in Lete but in all villages in the Lower Mustang,* confirmed a Conservation Area Management Committee member from Lete. A villager from Kunjo highlighted the difference between the present situation and during the tenure of the District Forest Office:

> *We all know each other in the village so it is much easier for us now to approach our forest committee to request timber. We can see them any time and whenever we need timber. Although we have to pay, it is much easier now and the money stays in the village.*

Under the Conservation Area Management Regulations 1996 and the Conservation Area Regulations Directive 1999, the Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management Committees were supposed to deposit all their funds in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's account. This new provision almost undermined the Project's efforts to institutionalise participatory conservation in which the local freedom to generate and retain funds from forest products has always been a major incentive. A Project officer told me that: *we had thought that once the regulation comes into effect it would help us greatly to work in community-based conservation. But when it came we were struck by the complexity of the regulations, especially related to the Conservation Area Management Committees' authority*. He further explained, *the local people were not happy about the requirement to transfer funds to ACAP's* account. *We also thought that was a silly provision. Every Conservation Area Management Committee and Forest Management sub Committee had worked hard to collect funds and that was one of the major incentives for their involvement.* The Project later used a provision in the regulations to delegate the right to individual forest committees to keep the funds collected.

Figures 16 and 17 show funds held by different Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management Committees in the Lower Mustang region during the fiscal year 2007/2008. These figures show cumulative funds over the years which were audited in 2009.

In the absence of an approved plan, Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub-committees have been using their funds to support various small scale projects as requested by villagers. These include support for plantations, repairs and maintenance of monasteries, trails and field walls, and small grants to various other community based organisations active in the village. The Conservation Area Management Committee Chair in Tukuche told me on the day I interviewed him, *we had received an application for help from a local farmers' group to repair a 61 meter long wall that they had built to protect a seabuckthorn (Hippohae tibetana) plantation. The flood this year had destroyed it. Today we had a meeting to discuss this application and we decided to give them 30,000 rupees.*

In most cases, Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub-committees appear to be saving more funds than they are spending on projects. They have also been using funds to provide loans, primarily to their members, with interest rates of 12 to 15 per cent. Fellow villagers can access loans from Conservation Area Management Committees or Forest Management sub-committees, but need to provide guarantors. One of the reasons for using funds for loans instead of depositing all of them in the bank is that *we have about 1.3 millions in our fund. We have deposited 50 per cent of it in the bank and the other is given in loans with 15per cent interest. The bank gives only 4 per cent interest so we have given some money in loans. We made this policy to increase our income*, said the Tukuche Conservation Area Management Committee Chair.

A local from Syang described the difference community funds are making in the village.

> *We don't need to go to banks or local money lenders to borrow a few thousand rupees as in the past. Our village in total has around 9/10 million rupees in various village funds. We borrow money from them. The bank charges a high interest loans but gives little interest on the saving. The rates we charge are lower compared with the bank loans'*

A local from Marpha shared a similar view. *We have more than 10 million in our village funds. We don't deposit them in the bank. We give them out in loans. We even give loans to Kaami and Dami (Dalits) of this village with a cheap interest rate if they wish to go overseas for jobs.*
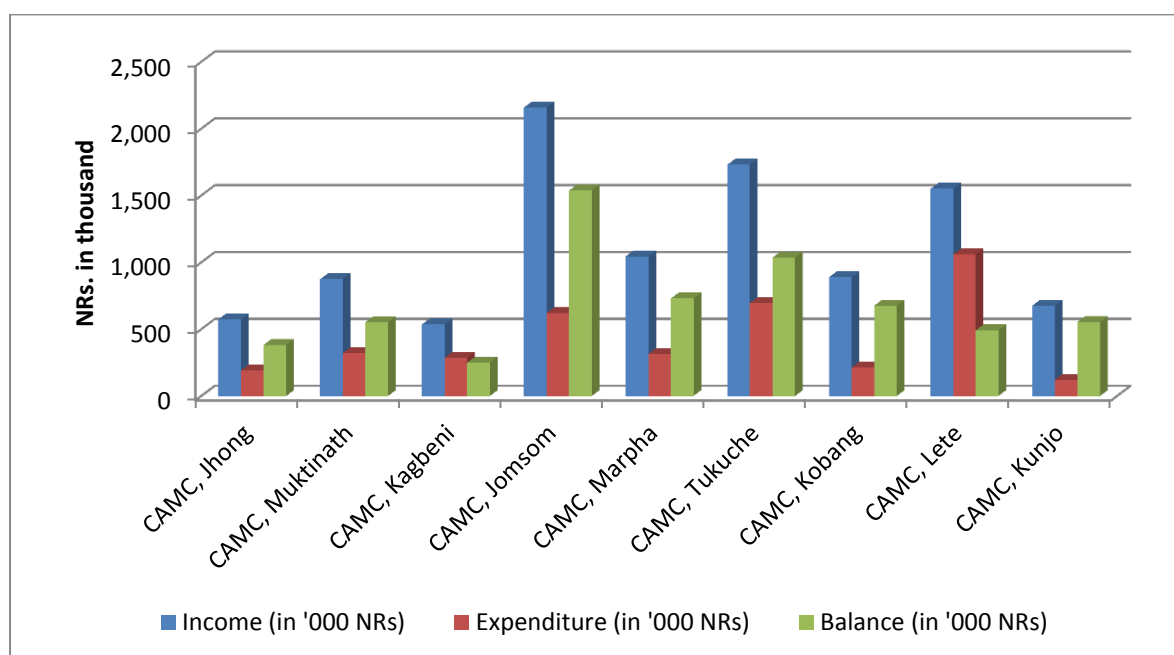
Figure 16: Conservation Area Management committees' funds and utilisation, 2007/08 (NTNC/ACAP 2010)
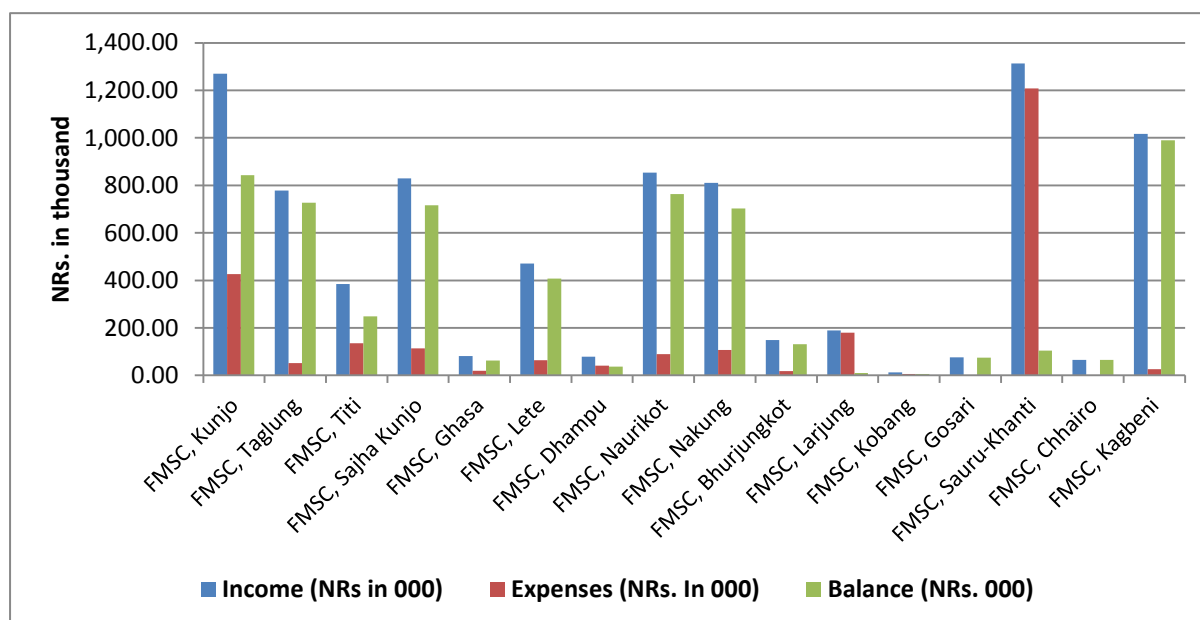
Figure 17: Forest Management sub-committees' funds and utilisation, 2007/08 (NTNC/ACAP 2010)

8.3.6 Monitoring:

One of the primary responsibilities of the Conservation Area Management Committee is the monitoring of harvesting and other environmentally related practices carried out at different levels. At the village level, the Conservation Area Management Committee has been using forest guards for this purpose. As mentioned earlier, in most villages, Conservation Area Management Committees, in consultation and agreement with the *Ghempa/Mukhiya*, have been using *chhowa* or *katuwal* for this purpose. The regular budget from the Annapurna Conservation Area Project has been used to cover the travel expenses of the monitors. The Conservation Area Management Committee shares this budget with villages within the Village Development Committee's area of responsibility. Monitoring tasks also include identifying and marking trees, either fallen or standing, for permit holders to collect them for timber.

Besides regular monitoring visits, Conservation Area Management Committee members also visit forests twice a year in a small group during April/May and August/September. A Syang Conservation Area Management Committee member pointed out the reason for such visits:

> *Ashoj and Kartic (August/September) are peak months for poaching. During these months most villages hold different festivals like phalo* [yak dance festival] *and dhekyup* [mask dance festival]. *Poachers become active during these months to hunt musk-deer. Another season is Baishak and Jestha (April/May). Days are longer during these months so poachers find it easy to escape taking routes through high mountain passes with their trophies.*

A former chairman of Marpha village recalled:

> *During one of our monitoring visits a few years ago, we managed to catch poachers red handed. We recovered hides and snares, and handed poachers and other stuff over to the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. We were awarded 10,000 rupees for our work.*

In 2008 the Annapurna Conservation Area Project formed a higher level committee, the Forest and Wildlife Monitoring and Observation Joint sub-committee for wildlife monitoring purposes. The new committee involved seven Conservation Area Management Committees and was made up of nine members, one each from seven committees plus a coordinator and a Dalit member. The Conservation Area Management Committees of Jhong and Muktinath have not joined this committee as the forests in their Village Development Committee areas are insignificant. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project has been taking the lead to organise and finance the twice-yearly monitoring visits of the Wildlife Monitoring Committee. The Project staff, as well as representatives from the district police office, have been participating in these high level monitoring visits. It had completed two monitoring trips in the Kunjo/Lete Village Development Committee forests since its formation, but nothing significant was reported.

Conservation Area Management Committee members think monitoring visits have become increasingly dangerous in recent years. Many believe that wildlife populations in general have increased significantly over the years. A local from Muktinath told me, *we have more gorals* [blue sheep] *grazing on our high pasture areas than goats. They have become so tame. They are not afraid of us*. However, there is also concern that poaching activities are on the rise because of the road network and that it is likely to get worse. A Marpha Conservation Area Management Committee member said:

> *Our forest areas have three main trails. We travel in groups of five to six members to cover all three trails. Poachers these days are well armed. It was quite risky to go about monitoring on your own as in the past. We raised this issue with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project office many times. We even requested that they provide one gun for each Village Development Committee so we can protect ourselves, but there has been no progress.*

A similar view was expressed by the Conservation Area Management Committee's Secretary in Muktinath: *we have used the funds from ACAP to pay to three forest guards who have to visit our forest and pasture areas together. They need to visit twenty two times in a year and report to us of any unusual activity.* Most villages, however, continue to depend on their own villagers to monitor activities in the forests. A Syang villager told me:

> *We live in a small village. We know who is doing what in the village. If there is something unusual going on around in the village or in forest areas, we inform our Thuimi. He will send Chhowa to find out about it or call a village meeting if things are serious. He would ask villagers to visit forests or he would form a team to investigate further. Nobody can really do anything without the knowledge of villagers.*

Prior to the formation of Conservation Area Management Committees, monitoring was as an essential part of the village governance system. *Ghempa/Mukhiya* were responsible for overseeing and enforcing village rules and regulations for forests, pasture, water resources, agriculture fields and land. They were responsible for mobilising *Chhowa/Katuwal* on a regular basis for monitoring. They also used to mobilise villagers for monitoring as and when required. A villager from Marpha explained:

> *When the Forest Office was here they did not protect our forests, we protected it as per our village rules and laws. Even now our forests and pasture are protected by our own village rules and regulations. Conservation Area Management Committees are there to help us, but it is the village that is responsible for monitoring even now.*

A local youth from Jomsom saw the current monitoring situation a little differently:

> *The Conservation Area Management Committee is keeping all funds from forests. They also receive support from ACAP. They should be spending the money to protect our forests. But because they are not doing their jobs well, we have to be vigilant about the situation in our forests and high pasture areas all the time.*

He pointed out further:

> *The committee has hired three forest guards for this Village Development Committee; one of them had a reputation of stealing timber from the forest in the past. We never see them visiting our forests. We get information about forests and pastures from our villagers who visit forest areas to collect firewood rather than from forest guards. We don't know what forest guards are doing and what sort of reports they have been providing to the Conservation Area Management Committee chair. We, therefore, have to be alert about what goes in our forests and pasture areas all the time*

The local's reservations about Conservation Area Management Committees, and their roles and effectiveness in terms of managing and monitoring forest resources in Jomsom came to a head during a recent forest fire which destroyed a large tract of natural forest above Jomsom. The fire was believed to have been started by *yarsagumba* collectors. The Jomsom committee had given a contract for 275,000 rupees to a person from Thini to issue permits for the yarsagumba collection. A total of 279 people, mostly outsiders, paid 2,000 rupees each to obtain a permit. Unfortunately, there was not enough *yarsagumba*. So they combed through thick pine leaves in the *Chhahara* forest in the hope of finding more. They also camped there. They were using firewood for cooking. The fire went out of control and set the forest alight. An Annapurna Conservation Area Project staff member recalled the incident:

> *We heard there was a small fire at the beginning, but we were not informed about it. A few days later the fire became big. Some villagers who saw the fire informed the Conservation Area Management Committee, and they informed us. The Conservation Area Management Committee told us that villagers were busy with agriculture work* [this incident occurred in July which is the peak agriculture season]*, so asked the army for help. They sent 100 men to fight the fire. They made fire breaks and left. There were only a few people with us and they were mostly wage labours. The wage labours told us if villages whose forest was burning do not care about it why should they alone fight the fire so they also left. We consulted the Mukhiya the next day, and he asked one person from each household to come to fight the fire or they would be fined. Finally, we had the army, policemen, and local people to control the fire and after fighting for 3 or 4 days we managed to control it. The fire destroyed 55 hectares of forests and we lost millions of rupees. It was a virgin pine forest and was very thick, but the fire wiped it out completely.*

After this incident, the local people have been questioning the effectiveness of the Conservation Area Management Committee to protect their forests. A local from Jomsom angrily told me:

> *The Conservation Area Management Committee failed to control the forest fire. They did not arrest anyone and they did not carry out any investigation. The Conservation Area Management Committee made over two lakhs rupees by giving a contract for yarsagumba, but did not spend a penny on monitoring the forest condition. If they had spent some money on monitoring the activities of yarsagumba collectors, there would not have been a forest fire.*

A similar view was also expressed by a local leader of Thini:

> *The Conservation Area Management Committee has just created confusion in this village. They are neither looking after our forests well nor letting the villagers do so. We are now seriously considering taking back responsibility from the forest committee. We will ask them to hand over all the funds and then we will keep the money and also look after the forests.*

He further said:

> *When the village looked after the forests we also protected wildlife. The village used to impose hefty fines on the people who were guilty of setting fires or cutting green trees and killing musk deer. The offender had to sell all his property to pay the fine and leave the village. The villagers used to take the village law seriously. Now ACAP says the CAMC is responsible for protecting forests, but no one has been arrested or fined for destroying millions of rupees worth of forest. If you walk through our forest during the summer – you find forests covered with snares. Our villagers who go to collect firewood collect them and bring them back. But we never hear of forest guards doing the same.*

The Conservation Management Regulations 1996 does not provide the authority for either the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's officials or Conservation Area Management Committees to handle wildlife related cases. The government has deputed the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to oversee wildlife related offences. The local people find handing over poachers to the Liaison office for legal actions cumbersome, and this has discouraged them from catching poachers. A Conservation Area Management Committee member from Muktinath speculated that if the villagers have to hand over poachers and other offenders to the government officials the local people may become less interested in arresting them. An Annapurna Conservation Area Project officer told me of an incident about a decade old:

> *Marpha village arrested some musk deer poachers with snares and handed them over to us. We sent them to the Liaison Office in Pokhara for legal actions. The team decided to put them in prison. But three-four months later, a politician from Dhading became Home Minister. The poachers were also from Dhading. The minister asked the police network all over Nepal to find out how his district people are doing in other districts. He learnt about these poachers and took their case by himself to the cabinet meeting. The cabinet decided to set them free.*

A Conservation Area Management Committee member added, *although the Annapurna Conservation Area Project had no role in this incident it is this type of behaviour from the government that de-motivates the local people to arrest poachers*.

During my field visit, the Conservation Area Management Committee in Muktinath had received a letter from the Liaison Office asking them to visit Pokhara to give evidence against a poacher in whose arrest they had played an important role. The letter warned that if they did not turn up at a stipulated date the office would take action as per prevailing law. The Conservation Area Management Committee's Secretary apparently refused to accept the letter and remarked:

> *When some committees arrested poachers in the past they were rewarded. But now instead of rewarding us for the good work they are threatening us. Why should we risk our lives to*

arrest poachers if they treat us like this? I think the project needs to think this over and change this policy. If we have the power we would have made him pay so much that he would not dare to return to this district again for poaching.

8.4   Summary.

This chapter examined the roles of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and its contribution and significance in the conservation movement of Nepal, particularly in terms of the institutionalisation of a participatory and community-based approach in Mustang. It also interpreted the impacts and implications of participatory conservation initiatives on the endogenous village governance system, highlighting interactions with the new participatory governance institutions that the Annapurna Conservation Area Project has formed in order to govern.

The chapter illustrated that while locally formed institutions were integral to pursue the Project's participatory conservation programmes, they continued to work together with *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* to establish their roles, influence and legitimacy on natural resource related matters in the villages. This chapter supports findings of earlier chapters that the endogenous governance system has remained central to the survival of the village as a socio-political unit, against wider socio-political and economic changes, many of which were beyond its control.

Villages under the leadership of *Ghempa and Mukhiya* have continued to remain resilient and relevant even in the changing socio-political context. They are playing decisive roles in the management of disputes and resolving conflicts with their neighbouring villages within their Village Development Committee, and outside it, where the Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub Committees, or, for that matter, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project appear to have no roles and influence. *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* have continued to remain 'local' and 'internal', in terms of relevance, importance and influence, as opposed to government and NGO formed institutions which the villagers considered 'external' and 'official' and unlikely to survive beyond a programme or project period. This is the most likely reason why the local people believe in their own systems to manage environmental resources. These have evolved with their villages, unlike the exogenous systems and associated institutions which have been imposed on them as part of the policy changes accompanying the new regime.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project's approach has been more accommodating and flexible compared with the centralised top-down approach implemented as part of the forest nationalisation policy when the District Forest Office was working in Mustang.

Chapter 9
Discussion and Conclusion

9.0   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise and discuss the significance of my research findings in terms of their theoretical contribution and implications for policy and practice.

This research was aimed at critically examining the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang, Nepal, with a particular focus on the successful survival of endogenous village governance institutions. To achieve my aim, I identified four research questions:

1.   From a broad political historical perspective, how have the institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang evolved?
2.   What are the factors that have shaped the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang?
3.   What is the theoretical significance of the above research findings?
4.   What are the practical policy implications of these research findings?

In order to frame these research questions, I used the concept of 'environmentality' as an underpinning analytical construct to examine the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang from a long term socio-political and historical stance. Environmentality as a theoretical construct focuses on examining emerging technologies of government and their relationship with changes in people subjectivities in relation to environment. As discussed in Chapter 4, environmentality draws its theoretical approach from Michel Foucault's 'governmentality', a model of power to explain how government attempts to shape the beliefs and practices of its population by calculated means in order to improve their wellbeing at large (Li. 2007). Agrawal (2005) adopted the governmentality approach to explain a remarkable transformation in the development of environmentally-oriented subject position in the Kumaon Valley of India. He identifies politics, institutions and subjectivities as the three key conceptual elements of environmentality and argues that they are intimately linked, and should be explored together to understand the creation of new subjects concerned with the environment. The intention of this thesis was to test this core argument by subjecting it to empirical assessment in the socio-political and historical setting of the Mustang district in Nepal.

I conducted empirical field research in Nepal from August to December in 2009. The research was based on a qualitative methodology using an open ended interview technique. Eighty nine participants, including local inhabitants in Mustang, government agencies located in Kathmandu and Mustang, along with national and international non-governmental organisations were formally interviewed. My informants also included approximately 100 additional people from all walks of life that I spoke to and interacted with during my field work. Each of these contributed to the development of a deeper understanding of the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in the broader context of the dramatic socio-political and economic transformations that have unfolded both in Nepal as a whole and Mustang in particular.

This chapter is organised as follows:

Sections 9.1 and 9.2 provides a summary of key findings relating to research questions 1 and 2, informed by the key themes in the literature on institutional arrangements for environmental governance as reviewed in Chapter 4.

Section 9.3 highlights the theoretical contributions of my research findings.

Section 9.4 highlights the policy and practical implications of my research findings in terms of designing institutional arrangements for environmental governance in the high mountain regions in Nepal and more generally in Asia.

Section 9.5 provides recommendations for future research.

9.1 Research question 1: summary of key research findings

The configuration of current institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang can be characterised as multi layered and relatively fragmented. Conceptually, the environmental governance institutional framework comprises elements of three inter-related governance layers: the endogenous village governance layer, the central government led development governance layer; and the NGO led conservation governance layer, as portrayed in Figure 18 and discussed below.

9.1.1 The endogenous village governance layer

The first layer is represented primarily by the endogenous village-based governance institutions (column 2 in Figure 18) under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya*. These village governance entities are primarily responsible for protecting water sources, overseeing allocation of water for irrigation; protecting user rights and access to forests and pasture areas; and overseeing the day-to-day management of village affairs such as protecting agriculture fields from straying animals, monitoring forest and pasture areas, and maintaining irrigation channels and village infrastructure. They are also responsible for resolving disputes within the village and advocating for the village during the conflicts with other villages.

Besides those of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*, there are three other related important endogenous institutions: the Council of 13 Mukhiya now renamed as *Thakali Sewa Samiti Thak Satsai Chhetra,* the Council of Paachgau, now renamed as *Paachgau Udar Samiti,* and the *Ghempa Chhe.* Their authority extends beyond the village level. Each of these higher level endogenous institutions has specific areas of responsibility. The major role of the Council of 13 Mukhiya, in terms of natural resource management, is to oversee the management of the high alpine pasture areas in the Thaksatsai region which are shared by all villages located within the region. The Council of Paachgau is primarily responsible for overseeing the management of a forest area above Chhairo which is a common forest belonging to the five original villages, Thini, Syang, Marpha, Chimang and Chhairo. Besides these specific roles, these two councils have strived to advocate for the socio-cultural interests of Chan Thakali and Paachgau Thakali in their respective regions, considered their original homelands. These institutions have no roles in, or influence on, the day-to-day environmental affairs of the villages. These roles solely rest in the village-based institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*. The *Ghempa Chhe* has no direct role in the day-to-day management of either village affairs or environmental resources. They are approached for inter-village disputes, mostly related to ownership rights over natural resources such as water sources, pasture areas and land.

9.1.2   The central government led development governance layer

The second layer comprises the local governance institutions such as the District Development Committee and 16 Village Development Committees (column 3 in figure 18). The District and Village Development committees are represented by locally elected members. Since 2002, the government has failed to hold local elections; therefore, there are currently no elected members in the local governance institutions. In their absence, the District Development Committee is chaired by the government appointed Local Development Officer. Likewise, the Village Development Committees are run by the government appointed Village Secretary. The local governance institutions are supported by over 30 various district based line agencies (column 4 in Figure 18). The most important and influential district line agencies, in terms of development activities and service provision, are the following offices: that of the Chief District Office, District Agriculture Development, District Livestock Development, District Water Supply, District Education and District Health. While the primary role of this group of institutions is to promote modernisation through economic growth, they are expected by law to give consideration to avoiding, remedying and mitigating adverse environmental impacts. Their roles include prioritising and mobilising resources for development activities, mainly infrastructure related projects. In general, these governance layers do not interact with the endogenous village-based institutions, unless their development projects involve the use of lands for forest plantations or other purposes such as land for building houses for which approval from the village, through the *Ghempa and Mukhiya,* is sought.

This layer also includes a plethora of community-based organisations that assist central government to implement development projects. The list includes famers groups, construction committees and women's groups formed and supported by the local government and the district line agencies. The number of such groups has significantly increased since central government adopted a participatory policy to implement infrastructure programmes and projects. These groups are funded by district line agencies or the District Development Committee. Village Development Committees form user groups to help implement central government funded programmes and projects.

District line agencies do not have direct interaction with the endogenous village governance institutions. They do, however, interact indirectly with them through local governance networks in matters of mutual interest, especially in projects that have implications for village resources such as irrigation and drinking water schemes, use of fallow lands for planting trees, and building construction projects that require the use of water, land and forest resources.

9.1.3   The NGO led conservation governance layer

The third layer comprises an assemblage of non-governmental organisations, national and international, as well as numerous community based organisations formed and supported by them (columns 1 and 5 in Figure 18). This layer also includes self-help groups and organisations (columns 6 in the Figure 18), formed by the local people themselves, to promote initiatives that often combine development with conservation elements. The most important is the National Trust for Nature Conservation, a national non-governmental organisation, responsible for managing the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, of which the Mustang district is a key part. As a conservation authority, the Project has two main areas of responsibilities: to help avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse impacts of tourism activities on the natural environment; and to promote biodiversity conservation.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project has adopted a participatory approach to implement its programmes. With the financial and technical support of the project, a network of locally formed Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub-committees have been actively participating in conservation programmes since 1993. While the Conservation Area Management Committees are formed at the Village Development Committee level, Forest Management sub-committees are formed at the village level. Additionally, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project has formed and provided technical support to two higher level committees, named as the Community Resource Action joint sub-committee, representing seven Conservation Area Management Committees in the Upper Mustang, and the Wildlife Monitoring and Observation Joint sub-committee representing six Conservation Area Management Committees in Lower Mustang. The Community Resource Action Joint sub-committee has a broader mandate to represent the conservation and development issues, including accessing and utilising the tourism revenue from Upper Mustang. The Wildlife Monitoring and Observation sub-committee has specific duties to monitor pasture areas in Lower Mustang and to check on wildlife poaching and other potential environmental treats.

Beside these natural resource related organisations, the Project has formed many other community based organisations to implement specific programmes. The Tourism Management sub-committees, for example, are responsible for encouraging and facilitating low impact tourism through activities such as promoting alternative fuels to reduce the use of firewood, waste management, and menu printing. Similarly, the Heritage Management sub-committees are responsible for implementing the restoration and repair of historical and cultural monuments such as monasteries, caves, and *chhorten*. There are women's (mothers) and other user groups to implement various conservation and development activities such as planting plantations, clean-up campaigns and the management of safe drinking water depots to reduce use of bottled water. These groups are also involved in savings and credit programmes and various small scale income generating programmes.

While the Forest Management sub-committees interact directly with the endogenous village-based institutions, when there is a need to make major decisions related to forests and pasture, other institutions appear to have limited interaction with them. They do however, seek the approval of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* when their decisions or actions have implication for the use of land, water sources and forests.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Central Level	MoFSC DNPWC NTNC		Multi-Party Democracy Political Parties	Line Ministries	Multilateral Bilateral Agencies	
District Level	ACAP		District Development Committee Local Development Officer	District Line Agencies	INGOs/NGOs	
Regional Level	CRAJsC WMOJsC	Ghempa Chhe Council of 13 Mukhiya Council of Paachgau	Ilaka	Service Centres		Mustang Jeep and Bus Association Mustang Volleyball Association Baragau Samaj
Village Development Committee Level	CAMCs		Village Development Committee			
Village Level	FMsCs PMsCs	Ghempa Mukhiya	Ward Members Ward Council	User Groups, Farmer Groups, Construction Committees; Management Committees	Mother Groups, User Groups, TMsCs, HMsCs	Philanthropic organisations Youth Clubs
Areas of Responsibilities interactions and overlaps	Forests, Forest Revenue, Pasture areas, Water Sources, Wildlife Monitoring, Forest Monitoring Forest Nurseries Plantation Alternative Energy Income generation	Forest, Pasture, Water user rights, access and distribution and protection Field Protection, Village Rules and Regulations, Monitoring Maintenance of Village infrastructure Conflict and Dispute resolution	Project Planning and Implementation User Group Formation, Bridges Drinking Water Irrigation Roads Land Tax Sand and Pebble Tax Social Services Record Keepings	Project Planning and Implementation User Group Formation, Infrastructure Development Horticulture Livestock Schools Health Care Watershed management River bank protection communication Law and Order Justice System	Plantation, Income Generation, Infrastructure Development, Heritage Conservation, Tourism Waste Management Tourism Information Tourism revenue Management, Savings and Credits Scholarships	Transport Social Welfare Sport and Heritage Scholarships Libraries Day Care Centres
	Protected Area NGO/CBOs	**Endogenous Village Governance**	**Local Governance**	**Line Agencies**	**I/NGOs and CBOs**	**Local self-help groups**

Figure 18:   Multi-Layered environmental governance institutional arrangements in Mustang, 1990 to the present

Legend: ⟶ ⟷   **indicates direction of key interaction pathways**

Abbreviations: **MoFSC**: Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation; **DNPWC**: Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation; **NTNC**: National Trust for Nature Conservation; **ACAP**: Annapurna Conservation Area Project; **CRAJsC**: Community Resource Action Joint sub-Committee; **WMOJsC**: Wildlife Monitoring and Observation Joint sub-Committee; **CAMCs**: Conservation Area Management Committees; **FMsCs**: Forest Management sub-Committees; **PMsC**: Pasture Management sub-Committee; **NGO**: Non-Governmental Organisation; **I/NGOs**: International and National Non-Governmental Organisation; **MsCs**: Tourism Management sub-Committees; **HMsCs**: Heritage Management sub-committee

9.2 Research question 2: factors that have shaped the evolving configuration of institutional arrangements

Based on my research findings the following section will discuss the key factors that have shaped the evolution of the above institutional configuration for environmental governance in Mustang from a political and historical perspective. I discuss this evolutionary outcome as a three phase process covering almost two centuries of national socio-political transition. Each of these phases was dominated by a distinct political regime.

9.2.1 Phase one: powerful rulers and subservient subjects - the emergence of an independent, autonomous village governance system

The origin of the village-based governance institutions in Mustang predates the 17th Century emergence of Nepal as a modern state. Until relatively recently, this remote mountain district remained a frontier land between the various regional powers which rose and fell during the course of its history. It was a major transit point for the salt-grain trade in the Trans-Himalayan region until the 1960s. A desire to control trade routes was a major incentive for both local and regional rulers to wage wars. The outcomes of these wars profoundly shaped and reshaped the political relations and socio-economic dynamics in Mustang and ultimately fragmented it into Tso-Dhium in the north (the area of Lo), Baragau and Paachgau in the middle, and Thaksatsai in the south, representing four distinctive socio-political regions. These regions served as entities to collect the homestead tax in the post-unification period, and gave rise to regional institutions such as the Council of 13 Mukhiya and the Council of Paachgau and the *Ghempa Chhe,* which have continued to influence the management of common pool resources such as water and manage inter-village affairs within the region.

The geopolitical position and strategic importance of Mustang as a main Trans-Himalayan trade route remained unchanged during the period of the highly centralised, autocratic and oligarchic Rana regime which ruled Nepal from 1848 to 1951. Mustang was considered a far-flung territory, distant from the centre of power which had only two major interests; to increase the state's revenue, and to maintain territorial control. The rulers imposed a homestead tax on the local people delivered by customs collectors handpicked for this purpose. With the help of the British colonial power, which was ruling India during this period, the regime virtually isolated Nepal from the world. This coercive policy was responsible for local economic hardship and stagnation. It also served to shape the roles of local institutions and gave room for every village in Mustang to continue a relatively autonomous system of governance at the village level (see Figure 19).

Central		Autocratic Rana
District Level		Subba[3]
Regional Level	Ghempa Chhe 13 Mukhiya Paanchgau	Chikyap
Village Level	Ghempa and Mukhiya	
Areas of Responsibilities Areas of Interaction	Forest, Pasture, Water user rights, access and distribution and protection Field Protection, Village Rules and Regulations, Monitoring Maintenance of Village infrastructure Conflict and Dispute resolution Schools	
	Endogenous Village Governance	

Figure 19: Environmental governance institutional landscape in Mustang > 1960[4]

Legend: ⟷ ⟶ indicate key interaction pathways.

Political subjugation, socio-political marginalisation, and geographic isolation played pivotal roles in shaping the village-based institutions prior to the 1950s. During this period, the only government representative in Mustang was the customs collection contractor (*Subba)* who had limited administrative and judiciary authority. The government did not have any institutional mechanisms or programmes in peripheral regions, such as Mustang, to support local development initiatives or to manage natural resources.

Forests dominated the government's natural resources policy. The aim of their policies was to increase state revenue. Rulers used the forests extensively for personal profit and to buy favours to stay in power. Forest-related activities were largely concentrated in the low land areas of the Terai,

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[3] *Subba* were custom contractors with limited administrative and judicial power vested in them by the central government
[4] From 1950 to 1961 Nepal had a decade of a multi-party democracy, but this failed to establish as a political system.

consequently, the government had little interest or policies regarding forests or other natural resources in the high mountain regions such as Mustang. The local people in high mountain regions such as Mustang were autonomous in the management of their day-to-day affairs, short and long term socio-economic interests, protecting and managing natural resources and defending their village territories. Every village in Mustang had acquired documents from various regional powers during the course of its history which legitimised the social and institutional structures and responsibilities, including the management of their natural resources. The village-based institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* evolved in all villages, regardless of the settlement size and population. They oversaw village level affairs, both day-to-day and long term, and regulated the use of natural resources. Villagers restricted non-villagers from using natural resources unless there was a prior agreement and a history of resources sharing mutually accepted by and between villages.

The village governance system that evolved during this time was relatively simple. Every village functioned as a relatively autonomous socio-political unit with fixed boundaries. There was no additional layer of political structure imposed on them by the central government until the 1960s. Villagers used the village assembly to nominate the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* according to their own village rules. The nomination process, the criteria for eligibility, and roles and duties of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* varied from village-to-village, but in general they were consensually nominated, the village authority and legitimacy being vested in this institution. The village assembly also nominated other village level officials, required to assist the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* in running day-to-day matters. Villagers were required to participate in and to contribute free labour in order to perform different village-related tasks, sometimes for over a month each year. These tasks included maintaining or constructing irrigation channels, managing the distribution of water for irrigation, and maintaining or improving access between villages or to forest and pasture areas within the village. The village-based institution was also responsible for managing the forests, pastures, lands and water resources, the lifelines of the village economy. This included regular monitoring of pasture and forest areas, primarily to protect these resources from the use of non-villagers and their straying animals. One of the major roles of the village institution was to manage conflicts and disputes within the village, whether related to use of natural resources or any other problems within or between villages. The *Ghempa Chhe,* or the regional institutions such as the Council of Paachgau or the Council of 13 Mukhiya, were approached for any issues beyond the village's authority, or related to common resources such as the pasture areas in the Thaksatsai and the common forest in the Paachgau regions. The *Subba* and *Chikyap*, the latter being appointed by the former, could also be requested to arbitrate intra-village disputes. They acted as an intermediary to approach central government on issues such as the reduction of local taxes. These seemingly higher level institutions had no influence on the running of the village affairs or the management of village resources.

9.2.2 Phase two: decentralised administration and centralised planning (1960s to 1990)

The termination of Rana regime in 1951 had two significant impacts on national politics. It heralded the introduction of a multi-party democratic system, and secondly, it ended a self-imposed isolation which had limited the country's contact with international communities. For the first time the government started to invest in the welfare of the people, and with financial and technical support from many bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies, initiated many reforms to modernise the country. The decade that followed, however, was dominated by political instability and a power struggle between the king and the elected prime ministers. The political dramas that unfolded eventually encouraged the king to overthrow the first elected government in 1961. The king introduced a Panchayat political system and established direct rule answerable to him. This was the period of dramatic changes in regional politics which saw the emergence of China and India as the most influential countries in south Asia.

The absolute rule of the monarchy and the decentralisation of administrative functions remained core features of the governmentalisation process initiated by the Panchayat regime. It introduced new administration structures dividing the country into 14 zones and 75 districts and created a four-tier Panchayat political system with the national Panchayat at the apex followed by zonal, district and village Panchayats. A village Panchayat with nine wards became the smallest unit of local government political representation. The political and administrative structures established during the Panchayat regime also served as the foundations for the current District Development Committee and Village Development Committees.

The Panchayat brought together the four regions, Tso-Dhium, Baragau, Paachgau and Thaksatsai, to form a new political district, 'Mustang'. All villages, large and small, within these regions, were combined to form a total of 16 village Panchayat, profoundly shaping the relationship between the central government and the local people. The central government used the Panchayat hierarchy for official contact and communication for any matters concerning the district and villages. For the first time the local people were given the opportunity to participate in the political processes of the country by electing their representatives at the different levels of the Panchayat hierarchy.

The full impact of the Panchayat polity on Mustang was only evident after the mid-1970s. In the early 1960s, Mustang was pretty much on its own in dealing with the arrival of thousands of Tibetan refugees resulting from the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959, including Tibetan freedom fighters, the Khamba. The Khamba occupation remained the dominant socio-economic force in this district from 1959 to 1974. The occupation created new opportunities as well as challenges in this remote district. Economically, it created new demands for local goods and services. Within a decade it transformed

the local economic base from a subsistence to a cash-based economy and helped reduce local economic hardship. In terms of day to day practices, the Khamba operated outside the law of the country. The legal and security situation in Mustang during this time was precarious, triggering out-migration of the local people. The most damaging impact of the Khamba occupation was on the forest resources. They were largely blamed for causing extensive destruction of the forests, particularly in the villages above Kagbeni. While every village in Mustang had strong rules and regulations to control the exploitation of their forests and other natural resources, these had little effect on controlling the activities of the Khamba. They lived in high mountain passes, far from villages, and had no regard for village rules and regulations, or for that matter, the laws of the state.

After the departure of the Khamba, the government decision to establish district headquarters in Jomsom, with over 30 district based line agencies representing various ministries and departments, played an important role in shaping the socio-economic transformation of Mustang and its relationships with central government. This began the process of the governmentalisation of Mustang in earnest. Within a few years, the government decentralised the administrative functions of central government by establishing all major line agencies of the development ministries in the district, including the District Forest Office. This influx of over 1,000 officials was a significant development, both in terms of increasing the presence of central government and attracting support from a number of bilateral agencies and international NGOs. During the Panchayat regime all support from donor agencies was channelled through the district line agencies. They were largely responsible for implementing development projects with minimum input from the local people. The district and village Panchayat largely depended on the support of central government to implement projects. They had limited influence and resources to plan and implement projects on their own. Irrespective of these limitations, the development activities, that occurred in Mustang within the decade following the departure of the Khamba, profoundly improved the district infrastructure and diversified the local economy. Increased development activities, in turn, increased demands for timber and firewood, exerting significant pressure on forest resources.

9.2.2.1 Local adaptation to the process of governmentalisation

The advent of the Panchayat polity had significant impacts on the institutional arrangements for the endogenous environmental governance at the village level (see Figure 20). The enhanced governmentalisation process that followed saw increased intervention from the central government in all spheres of district and village affairs. Legally, central government abolished all elements of the village governance system that existed during the Rana regime, including the endogenous village institutions in Mustang.

Central Level			Absolute Monarchy	Line Agencies	Multilateral Bilateral INGOs
	MoFSC		Partyless Panchayat		

	DISTRICT FOREST OFFICE		District Panchayat	CDO District Line Agencies
District Level				
Regional Level	Range-Posts	Ghempa Chhe 13 Mukhiya Paanchgau	Ilaka	Service Centres
VDC Level			Village Panchayat	
Village Level		Ghempa Mukhiya	Ward Members Ward Council	

Areas of Responsibilities, Interactions and overlaps	Forest Management Forest Royalties Forest Monitoring	Forest, Pasture, Water user rights, access and distribution and protection Field Protection, Village Rules and Regulations, Monitoring Maintenance of Village infrastructure Conflict and Dispute resolution	Project Development and Implementation Infrastructure Development Schools	Project Planning and Implementation, Infrastructure Development Horticulture Fresh Vegetable Livestock Schools Health Care Law and Order Justice System
	Natural Resource Management	**Endogenous Village Governance**	**Local Governance**	

Figure 20: **Environmental governance institutional arrangements in Mustang from 1961-1990**

Legend: ⟷ ⟶ indicates key interaction pathways.

The Panchayat political structure and the abolition of the village governance system posed a new challenge for the local people to protect village autonomy in managing their affairs. The majority of the villages in Mustang responded by adopting concurrent governance systems at the village level as illustrated in Figure 21. Under this *de facto* arrangement the village Panchayat, as the local governance body, was responsible for managing the wider socio-political processes. It became the front-line institution in terms of dealing with government officials. They were recognised as the 'formal' medium to link the village with the state or the government. As the government's investment in development projects increased, the Panchayat officials became more involved in management of government funded projects, but consulted the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* to identify, plan and implement government funded projects.
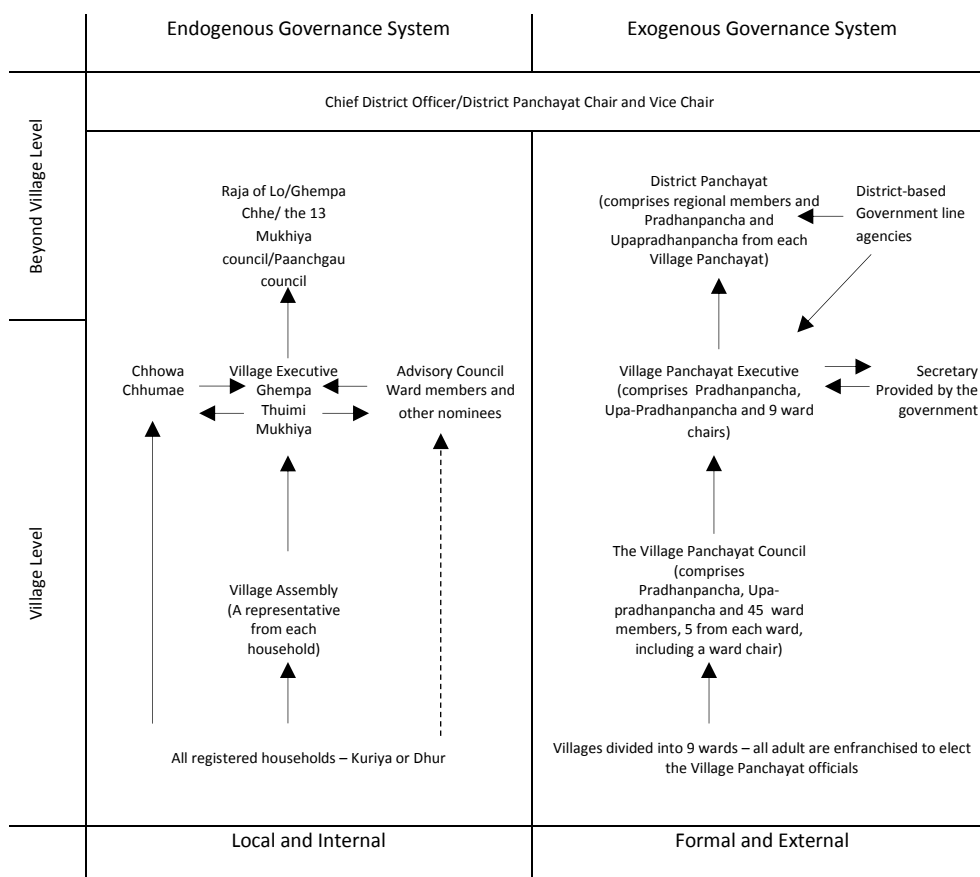
Figure 21: Village-based governance adaptation - Phase 2

Apart from this *ad hoc* role with Panchayat officials, the endogenous village governance system continued to exist and function as the 'local' institution primarily responsible for managing 'internal' affairs. It was not officially recognised, but this made no difference to the villages. Villagers continued to nominate the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* as per village traditions. The endogenous system continued taking care of the day-to-day affairs of the village. Panchayat officials did not have any influence or say in the internal affairs of the village. They nominated a ward chair and members as per the Panchayat policy that provided the village link to the Panchayat. The majority of villages invited the ward chair and members to represent them at the village council, especially when dealing with local disputes and conflicts. Ward officials were used as first contacts by the village Panchayat for official matters, who in turn consulted the *Mukhiya* and *Ghempa* for any major decisions. Under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya*, villages continued to provide basic services such as overseeing irrigation systems, monitoring the use of pasture areas, protecting fields from straying animals, overseeing the distribution of water rights and managing inter-village disputes and conflicts.

9.2.2.2 Forest nationalisation and local adaptation

With the establishment of the District Forest Office in the mid 1970s, central government expanded its authority over forest resources in Mustang. Forests were nationalised as were all lands that had no

individual title, water bodies, and pasture areas. Natural resources effectively became the government's property. The nationalisation of natural resources posed a major challenge to traditional beliefs. Local beliefs, rooted in a long history of struggle and accumulated knowledge, gave them a strong sense of ownership and the motivation to manage and protect these resources with robust village based rules and social sanctions. The nationalisation policy was thus seen to exclude villagers from their traditional rights to manage their natural resources. Forests became the main source of disagreement and had the greatest potential for generating conflict between the local residents and the District Forest Office and Range Posts under it.

By the late 1970s, the District Forest Office emerged as a new forest authority in Mustang. Its efforts were largely focused on enforcing the Forest Nationalisation Act and associated policy which categorically overruled the village's ownership, authority, access to, and rights over forest resources. This Act had two-objectives: to protect the forests from becoming private property, and to consolidate the government's control over forests as national property (Wagley and Ojha, 2002). The Act was largely based on the knowledge and experience of forest conditions in the Terai, the low land region of Nepal, and had little relevance to the realities of the mountain forests in the Mustang. This made no difference to the determination of government officials to enforce centralised rules over forest resources.

Under the centralised rule of the District Forest Office, forests effectively became a contested resource in Mustang, and this led to confrontation between the local people and the District Forest Office staff. The confrontation, however, did not compel the local people to destroy their forests as reported widely in forestry literature on Nepal. Instead, the local people used the potential threats to their forest resources to strategically confront the District Forest Office to make them aware of local traditions of ownership, rights and concerns.

Of particular concern with some of the new rules and regulations, was that they were out of line with long held practices. The District Forest Office efforts, for example, to demarcate forest boundaries failed primarily because villages did not cooperate with them. The new forest boundaries violated the traditional demarcation of village boundaries which were important to maintain village ownership and authority over historical forest resources. The District Forest Office imposed royalties on forest products and reserved the right to issue permits to any forest areas. The decision to issue permits or identify forest areas for logging was done on an *ad hoc* basis which infuriated villagers who would not allow non-villagers to collect timber from their forests. The District Forest Office also allowed people with permits to transport timber from one village to another. This practice was banned under the village rules. The District Forest Office used cubic feet to measure timber in contrast to the village practice of allocating a number of standing trees or dead trees for timber. Most importantly, the

villagers were disappointed with the misconduct of District Forest Office staff who showed little interest in field monitoring, and favoured those people, especially contractors, who supported them.

It was during the reign of the District Forest Office that Mustang experienced extensive deforestation owing to three large development projects: the construction of a hydroelectric power plant at Chokhopaani; the construction of over 70 modern buildings funded by the Resource Conservation and Utilization Project; and later, the construction of a building complex to establish the Dhaulagiri Hotel Management and Tourism Training Centre at Kalopani. The District Forest Office made *ad hoc* decisions such as issuing permits without assessing the condition of forests and overruling village traditions of ownerships and rights. During the reign of the District Forest Office, permits were issued to operate eleven commercial timber mills. Despite the District Forest Office's intervention in the day-to-day management of the forests, villagers did not give up their claims over their forest resources, nor did they share their resources with other villages located within the same village Panchayat with whom they had no prior arrangement for sharing. Eventually, villagers confronted the District Forest Office to challenge its handling of forest related issues, especially for issuing timber permits to non-villagers without consulting the local people, permitting haphazard logging of timber and the lack of proper monitoring. Foreseeing the increasing demand for timber and the likely pressure this would have on forests, the five original villages of Paachgau revived the Council of Paachgau (which had become inactive particularly after the termination of collection of land tax) to manage the common forest. The council maintained its right to sell forest products from the common forest and generate funds without consulting the District Forest Office. The people who had timber permits from the District Forest Office were required to obtain permission from the council and to pay fees before they were allowed to collect timber in the Paachgau forest. For other forests, the District Forest Office agreed to issue permits only after the permit seekers had obtained a recommendation from the concerned village from whose forests the logging of timber was proposed. These examples confirm that unlike other places across Nepal, the confrontation between the District Forest Office and the local people did not aggravate forest related issues, but led to negotiation and adaptation on both sides to manage forest resources within mutually agreed terms and conditions. The institution of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* was at the forefront of reshaping this relationship.

9.2.3 Phase 3: towards multi-layered institutional arrangements for environmental governance

The restoration of a multi-party democratic political system in 1991 ushered in a new era of more open and liberal policies in the country. To this effect, the Local Governance Acts introduced in 1992 and 1999 were significant in terms of strengthening the process of decentralisation and in shaping the local government system in Nepal. A two-tier elected local government structure was introduced by replacing the district and village Panchayats with the District Development Committee and Village

Development Committees. In practical terms, this change in the name made no difference to the political boundaries of the district and village development committees. Representation from women, *Dalit* (low caste Hindus) and *Adibahsi Janajati* (indigenous nationalities) in the executive bodies of the District Development Committee and Village Development Committees was increased to broaden the participation and inclusiveness of formerly marginalised groups in the political processes. Unlike during the Panchayat regime, the district-based government line agencies were made accountable to elected local representatives by transferring the roles of coordination and monitoring of development activities in the district from the Chief District Officer to the District Development Committee chairperson. This change significantly increased the influence and power of the local authorities. The formation of user groups to implement local level projects became mandatory. This was intended to empower local communities and to make the development processes more participatory, transparent and accountable. The outcome was a proliferation of user groups and committees, each with specific interests and roles.

The empowerment of local authorities enhanced their ability to mobilise resources to meet district development goals and targets. They were entrusted to collect local taxes through revenue sharing, which included 50 per cent of the royalties from hydroelectric power, 30 per cent of tourism fees, 50 per cent of mining royalties, 10 per cent of forest products revenue, and 5 to 90 per cent of land registration fees. The increase in revenue meant that the District Development Committee and Village Development Committees were able to generate their own internal resources. Since 1996 the government has provided direct budgetary support to the Village Development Committees ranging from nearly two million to three million rupees per Village Development Committee in 2008, depending on its size and population. This was in addition to a lump sum annual budget provided by the central government to the District Development Committee which increased substantially following the 1999introduction of the Local Self Governance Act to implement various infrastructure related programmes and projects. The Mustang District Development Committee used a large proportion of its direct funding to build road networks within the district, connecting Mustang to the national road network in 2008.

After the restoration of multi-party democracy, the Upper Mustang region was opened to a limited number of trekkers. The government introduced a special tourism policy designed to protect the rich cultural heritage and fragile natural environment of this region. Subsequently, both Upper and Lower Mustang were amalgamated with the Annapurna Conservation Area. With the inclusion of the entire Mustang District, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project became Nepal's largest Conservation Area and a significant part of its protected area network system. The consequential committees and sub-committees, formed to promote its participatory conservation programmes, added an important third layer to the institutional arrangements for environmental governance.

9.2.3.1 Multi-party democracy and local adaptation

The restoration of a multi-party democracy made local politics much more open and competitive. Political parties emerged as the key political players in local politics. The political change posed a new set of challenges to villagers. They became particularly concerned about the impacts party-based politics could have on their village level cooperation and social cohesiveness. Villages adopted various strategies to counter the impact of party politics. Official positions for Village Development Committees were contested in the Paachgau and Thaksatsai regions during the local elections held in 1992 and 1997. In the Baragau and Lo regions village assemblies were used to unanimously nominate candidates for both their Village Development Committee and the District Development Committee positions, just as they did during the Panchayat regime. They considered these committee officials to be independent candidates and integral to their effort to maintain village unity and social cohesiveness. Some villages even made decisions such as splitting their votes evenly between the Nepali Congress and the United Marxists and Leninists, to ensure the support of the two major parties in order to enhance their influence in accessing development projects for their village. Despite these different approaches to local elections, the majority of villages continued with concurrent governance systems at the village level as during the Panchayat regime. The multi-party democratic polity did change the local level political structure and village level representation. This made it easy for villagers to continue with the governance systems they had devised during the Panchayat regime. Villagers continued to nominate the *Ghempa and Mukhiya,* as per the village law, to oversee internal affairs. Likewise, Village Development Committee officials replaced the Village Panchayat Officials to take care of external affairs and wider socio-political relations, as illustrated in Figure 22.
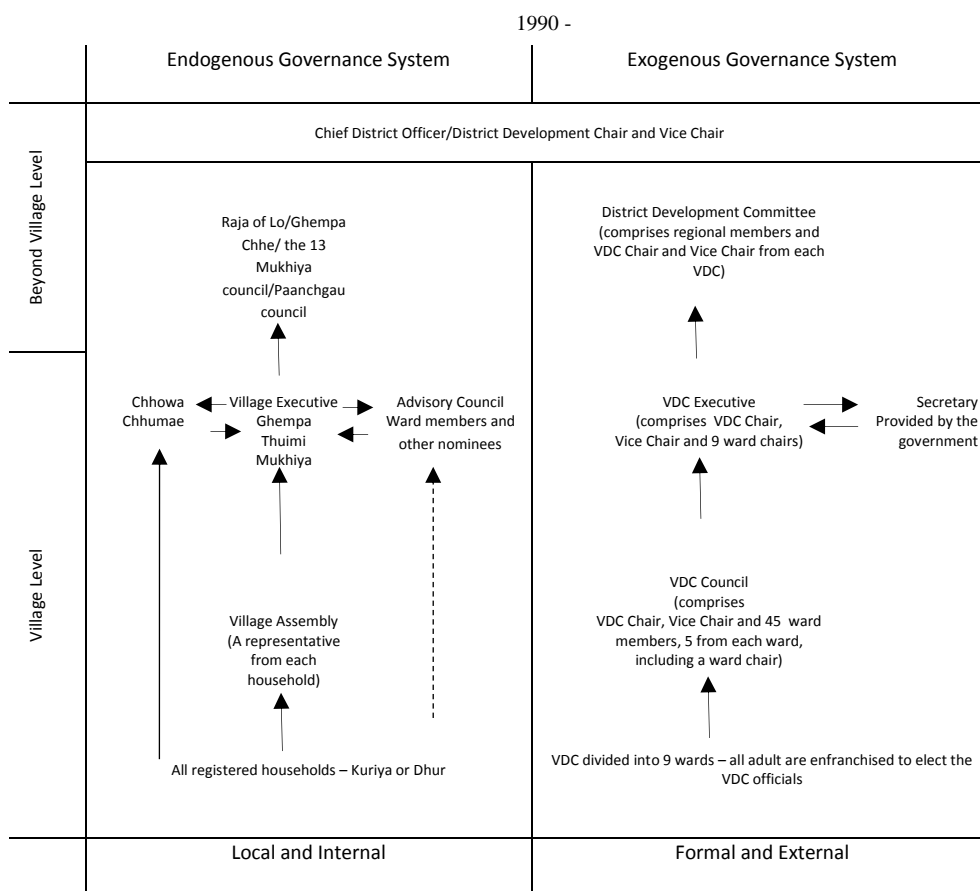
1990 -

| Endogenous Governance System | Exogenous Governance System |

Beyond Village Level

Chief District Officer/District Development Chair and Vice Chair

Raja of Lo/Ghempa Chhe/ the 13 Mukhiya council/Paanchgau council

District Development Committee (comprises regional members and VDC Chair and Vice Chair from each VDC)

Village Level

Chhowa Chhumae ← Village Executive Ghempa Thuimi Mukhiya → Advisory Council Ward members and other nominees

VDC Executive (comprises VDC Chair, Vice Chair and 9 ward chairs) → Secretary Provided by the government

Village Assembly (A representative from each household)

VDC Council (comprises VDC Chair, Vice Chair and 45 ward members, 5 from each ward, including a ward chair)

All registered households – Kuriya or Dhur

VDC divided into 9 wards – all adult are enfranchised to elect the VDC officials

| Local and Internal | Formal and External |

Figure 22: Village-based governance adaptation - Phase 3

Surprisingly, despite the increased roles of the Village Development Committee to plan, prioritise and implement development activities funded by the central government through the District Development Committee and district based line agencies, the role of village governance, under the leadership of *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*, has changed relatively little. The endogenous village governance system has continued to maintain its interests and has played an important role in protecting the wellbeing of the village, which is very much linked to protecting its user rights, access to forests, water sources, and pasture areas within its territories. The local government bodies (Village Development Committees) do not interfere with the place of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* to make village rules and regulations (laws) and enforce them. The Local Self Governance Act has entrusted the local bodies, such as the Village Development Committees, to manage and impose local taxes on natural resources such as stone, sand and aggregate which do not directly fall under the jurisdiction of any government line agency. Irrespective of this national policy, these resources are controlled by the majority villages in Mustang. They impose taxes on sand, aggregate and stones and keep the revenue as village funds. The *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* oversee the utilisation of village funds. It appears that besides promoting local participation and representation in village, district and national economic development planning and

political consultation processes, the local government bodies are primarily concerned with the implementation of government funded programmes and projects.

9.2.3.2 Conservation area policy and local adaptation

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project replaced the District Forest Office and Range-Posts. Unlike the previous regime, it widened its natural resource programmes to include wildlife, alpine pasture areas and water bodies along with other priority programmes such as sustainable tourism and small scale community development activities within the broader concept of 'biodiversity' or 'environmental conservation'. Despite this broader environmental perspective, the forest remained the main focus of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's work, and became a primary domain for frequent interaction and interface with the local people and their village-based institutions.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project's participatory conservation approach proved to be more flexible, accommodating, and to some extent more consultative, compared with the centralised top down policy implemented as part of the forest nationalisation policy during the tenure of the District Forest Office. In contrast to the District Forest Office, which was directly responsible for enforcing the forest nationalisation policy, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project provided an opportunity for the local people to participate in conservation programmes through locally formed committees and sub-committees. This change enabled a significant reversal of many forest related decisions imposed during the District Forest Office tenure. While the District Forest Office attempted to limit and isolate the local people from their forests, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's participatory approach played an important role in reinforcing the concept of local management of forests through locally formed institutions such as Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub-committees. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project responded to local grievances over forest boundaries and resolved these to their satisfaction. Current forest boundaries, within which Forest Management sub-committees operate, are based on local use and ownership of forest resources, thus, villages retained their rights over village forest resources without having to consult the Annapurna Conservation Area Project on a day-to-day basis.

My findings suggest that the institutional innovation for participatory natural resource governance that emerged from the inclusion of Mustang in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project made little difference to the roles of the village-based governance in terms of managing these resources at the village level. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project supported the Conservation Area Management Committees and the Forest Management sub-committees to manage these natural resources. They were entrusted with legal rights to issue timber permits, to collect forest revenue and use it to create funds to support small scale community development and conservation initiatives. These committees tend not to make major decisions concerning forests, pastures and water sources

without the consent of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* and the village assembly. Committee members are fully aware that unless they receive the full support of villagers they would not be able to enforce any decisions. They do not tend to challenge the authority and rights of the endogenous institutions over their natural resources.

The endogenous village institutions, under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* and regional institutions such as the Council of Paachgau and the Council of 13 Mukhiya have continued to play a dominant role in all major decisions concerning forests, land, water sources and pasture areas. There are several reasons that help explain the dominance of the village governance systems over Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub Committees on natural resource related issues. Conservation Area Management Committees in Mustang do not have forest areas under their direct command. In terms of timber, the prime role of Conservation Area Management Committees appears to be to issue permits on the recommendation of respective Forest Management sub-committees. Timber permits are important for transporting timber from one village to another. For pasture management, the majority of areas are still managed either by individual villages or groups of villages, or the region in the case of Thaksatsai. Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub-committee members are local and nominated by villagers. As locals, they understand both the socio-political and historical context within which the local governance system has evolved and the basis for the legitimisation of village rights and ownership over natural resources. They are socially obliged to follow village rules and safeguard the inherent village interests and social cohesiveness while participating in these new institutions. The committee members are aware of their limitations in village affairs and know that unless they get the full support of villagers through the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya,* they would not be able to enforce their decisions. These local beliefs and practices show that the authority of endogenous institutions over environmental resources has not diminished, even though they are not recognised by either the Local Self Governance Act 1999 or the Conservation Area Regulations 1996. Despite being prepared to operate in the background, these institutions have continued to play dominant roles in maintaining village authority and ownership over environmental resources.

There also seems to be another reason for villagers to trust more in their own endogenous system rather than the Annapurna Conservation Area Project supported committees and sub-committees. Villagers do not seem to believe in the viability of projects supported by donor institutions beyond the funding period. They often refer to Conservation Area Management Committees and Forest Management sub-committees as the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's committees. The primary motivation for participation in the project's programmes and their allied institutions seemed to be to get access to the financial and technical support of the project. They also seemed to enjoy the legal right to issue timber permits and generate funds from the sale of natural resources which was not

thinkable during the tenure of the District Forest Office during the Panchayat period. They seem to believe that the projects institutions (committees) are more concerned about biodiversity, mainly wildlife, in contrast to the interests of their endogenous village governance which are more concerned with the survival of their village. It is for this reason that the *Mukhiya* and *Ghempa* continue to prevail in Mustang and continue to play a dominant role in both the governance of village welfare and environmental resources. This is despite recent political and economic changes which have consolidated the process of governmentalisation and have led to the further proliferation of non-governmental and community based organisations and a complex network of locally formed institutions with both specific and broad mandates.

9.2.4   Reasons for the endurance of village-based governance

My findings have highlighted the following five interrelated factors that have contributed to the endurance and continuing importance of the village based governance system.

9.2.4.1 Village autonomy and independence

The original villages of Mustang are considered by the local residents as their homelands or ancestral lands. Most of these villages are dominated by particular ethnic groups. The ethnic composition in some of these villages has changed, particularly since the late 1960s. In some villages the original inhabitants have been outnumbered by new immigrants. Irrespective of this demographic change, they have continued to maintain their rights to govern village affairs through the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system. To ensure their influence and control over village affairs, the locals who have migrated out have maintained their household status in their respective villages, and have continued to share responsibilities for village affairs as per the village rules or law. When the Panchayat political system was introduced, protecting their village autonomy and independence became the villagers overriding concern. This was important to avoid sharing scarce natural resources with villages located within the same village Panchayat and with whom they did not have any social obligations or agreement to this effect. This local concern remained unchanged during the political changes in 1990 and it remains the same currently during this current period of political transition and uncertainty. The local people tend to believe that the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* system is not only important to maintain their village autonomy and independence over natural resources, but also to provide continuity and stability for their village's wellbeing.

9.2.4.2 Village authority and ownership

Village authority over local affairs is vested in the village governance system. The village assembly is responsible for appointing the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*. The *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* continued to be the first village officials for the local residents to approach for all matters concerning the village. These

include resolving disputes between neighbours, seeking justice for personal grievances, or to request permission to collect forest products. The *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* reserve the right to decide on household access and rights to forests and pasture areas according to village law. Since Mustang was included in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project they do not issue permits to transport timber outside the village or extract timber from forests for building purposes. Villages in Mustang have continued to exercise their authority and ownership rights over natural resources despite the forest nationalisation policies in the 1970s and 1980s, and conservation policy since the 1990s.

The local belief of retaining authority over natural resources is not without an historical basis. Every village in Mustang has accumulated stacks of documents, mentioning their rights over lands and natural resources, received from various rulers during the course of history. These documents may not hold any authority under contemporary laws, but they are still being used as a legitimate basis to resolve local disputes over village boundaries or to assert claims or counter claims over particular natural resources. Connected to this acceptance of authority is the local recognition of village ownership over all environmental resources, forests, water bodies (lakes, rivers, ponds and streams located in or flowing through the village territories) pasture areas and land. It is this sense of local authority and ownership that has empowered each village to develop and enforce their own rules and regulations, suitable for their local conditions, as well as to determine access to, and rights over, environmental resources. It is this strong sense of authority and ownership that has made local residents concerned about their environment. It has inspired them to take collective action against the government officials or non-governmental officials when the decisions imposed on them by these authorities have been against village interests and law.

9.2.4.3 Rules and regulations

Every village in Mustang has developed strong rules and regulations. The *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* and other village officials such as *Chhumae* or *Chhowa,* who constitute the executive body for the village, are responsible for enforcing them. While *Chhumae* and *Chhowa* are responsible for day-to-day enforcement of village rules and regulations, the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* intervene only when issues are not resolved at *Chhowa/Chhumae* level. They seek the help of the village council to resolve local level disputes and conflicts as needed. The village council may include ward members and inhabitants who are known within the village for their leadership skills, have good reputations and are trusted by villagers.

Village rules and regulations are made at the village assembly meeting which acts as the legislative body. In most villages, this is the body which has the right to remove, change or approve new rules and regulations, providing a strong sense of local accountability and credibility to the process as well as to the outcomes. Many government rules or acts are imposed without taking account of local socio-

political and economic realities. This is the reason why villagers think their rules are stronger than the government rules.

9.2.4.4 Participatory and place (village) based governance

The village governance system is based on the full participation of local people. The village assembly, compulsorily represented by a member from each household in the village, nominates the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya* from amongst themselves. Although the process to nominate village heads and the eligibility criteria for this leadership role varies from village to village in Mustang, other village positions such as *Chho*wa or *Chhumae* are shared on rotation by registered households, locally known as *Dhongba, Kuriya or Dhor*. My findings suggest that there are no definite reasons to explain why such variations exist. The eligibility criteria for the village head positions appear to be determined mainly by two factors: the size of the village and its population; and historical and socioeconomic characteristics such as the presence of dominant families, or the strong social stratification prevalent in most of the major villages in the Lo region.

Despite these differences, there are some common features that have made the village governance system participatory. The system is village-based, and represents the smallest socio-political unit. All households in the village are members of the village assembly which acts like a legislative body. The village assembly is responsible for nominating all village officials, including the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*. It is also responsible for fixing their terms and conditions. The assembly is responsible for reviewing old rules and regulations, amending them if required, or abolishing them and promulgating new rules and regulations. The village officials are required to take an oath by touching a holy scripture to assure the villages that they would carry out their responsibilities with sincerity, and to the best of their abilities. This system has established a very strong sense of both accountability and credibility to the village governance system and to the positions of *Ghempa and Mukhiya*. The issues of accountability and credibility appear to be the major concerns with many of the new institutions, particularly the so called 'community based organisations', which have proliferated in Mustang as well as throughout Nepal since the 1990s.

9.2.4.5 Environmental beliefs and practices embedded in village governance

The village governance system in Mustang fundamentally evolved to manage environmental resources. As my research has illustrated, the government's environmental policies, that came into effect prior to the 1970s, did not have any significance or impact on the way Mustang's people perceived of and managed their natural resources. Villages continued to exercise their authority over forests, pasture areas, water sources and land within village territories, using local knowledge, technical know-how and history, just as they had been doing for centuries, even under the watch of autocratic rulers. My informants repeatedly stressed that these resources were the basis for their

livelihoods and survival. It seemed that the local people were aware of the limitations within which they had to operate in terms of using natural resources. The fact that they have developed strong rules and regulations to govern their forests, pasture areas, land and water sources is indicative of the effectiveness of this local level knowledge and understanding. The village based rules and regulations have been strictly enforced under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya*. These rules not only strongly regulated the use and the protection of natural resources, but enabled villages to identify legitimate users and thus provided them with the basis to protect them from non-villagers.

9.3 Theoretical contribution of research findings

The following section reviews the theoretical significance of my research findings.

This research used the concept of 'environmentality' as an underpinning analytical construct to study the changes in institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang. As mentioned in Chapter 1, my research was inspired by Agrawal's path breaking study of the long term changes in environmental governance in the Kumaon region in India. Agrawal argued that the growth of environmental subjectivities amongst local inhabitants can be explained by examining the emerging technologies of central government and their relationship with changes in people's environmental beliefs and practices. My research was designed to examine this core argument by subjecting it to empirical assessment in the socio-political and historical setting of the Mustang district in Nepal. The theoretical significance of my research in relation to Agrawal's argument is highlighted below.

9.3.1 Regulatory communities existed prior to governmentalisation of Mustang

Agrawal's case study of the Kumaon Valley assumes that prior to central government intervention in forest resource management, the local people of Kumaon did not practise forest management nor were they concerned about forests. He credits the central government's decentralisation policy for creating new regulatory space within which the local people could participate and make decisions in relation to their environment. This process of governmentalisation transformed them into regulatory communities, and ultimately into people who were concerned about their environment. Based on my research findings, Agrawal's conceptualisation of how the process of governmentalisation transforms local inhabitants into environmental stewards is arguably invalid in respect to Mustang.

Historically, every village in Mustang was governed by strong village-based institutions that had evolved over centuries as a system of self-rule to oversee village welfare and the management of natural resources such as forests, pasture areas, water sources and land, all of which were and still are integral to the village inhabitants' well-being. My findings demonstrate that forests and other natural resources were not treated as an open access resource by local communities, nor were there reported

cases of massive deforestation until the arrival of the Khamba, Tibetan rebels, who occupied the district in their thousands and destroyed the forests. Forests and other natural resources such as pasture areas, water sources and land were the local life-line, so they were highly regulated by the village-based governance institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya*. Villages had developed strong village-based rules and regulations to govern and regulate natural resources. This local regulatory structure was based on a long history of association and struggle, marked by frequent conflicts, particularly with neighbouring villages. The process played a vital role in defining and demarcating village territories and establishing ownership and authority over environmental resources. It shaped socio-political relations within the village, between the villages, and among the different regions in Mustang. Environmental resources became defining characteristics of the village identity and integral to village welfare. The village identity held a village together, and gave social meaning to the local people, thus promoting strong social cohesion and bonds. The village-based identity played a crucial role in building cooperation among villagers, inspiring them to take collective action to protect their control and ownership over forests, pasture, water sources and land. Thus, the endogenous environmental governance prevalent across Mustang is a historically rooted phenomenon. Its origin even predates the emergence of Nepal as a modern state in the 17th Century. It did not emerge as a result of a governmentalisation process as Agrawal has argued for the Kumaon Valley, but as a response to isolation and to political and economic marginalisation by central government.

As I have shown in this study, the process of governmentalisation in Mustang commenced in earnest only from the mid 1970s. Prior to this, there was neither any central government presence nor did the central government's forest policies during the Rana and Panchayat regimes have significant bearing on Mustang. Mustang was considered a region far flung from the national centre of power. It was isolated and remote. For central government interest in the region was limited, other than to levy and collect customs duties and land taxes.

The government's forest policy during the Rana regime was largely focused on exploiting forest resources in the Terai region for economic and political gains resulting in massive deforestation problems. The Panchayat regime introduced the forest nationalisation policy to halt deforestation. Paradoxically, its policy to encourage the migration of people from the hills to the Terai region, and the exclusion of local people from the management of forests, resulted in the massive conversion of natural forests into agriculture lands, exacerbating deforestation problems. Efforts of the District Forest Office in Mustang, from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s, were focused on enforcing forest nationalisation policy and expanding centralised rule over forest resources.

Decentralisation and participation became parts of the central government's technologies only in the mid-1970s. These government technologies were more focused on promoting modernisation by decentralising the rural development functions of central government, providing infrastructure services rather than devolving power to the local level to empower people. The environmental management decentralisation policy came into effect in Mustang only after the inclusion of Mustang in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in 1993. The Project's efforts were more participatory, involving the local people in conservation programmes, and was accommodating in the way it responded to local issues. It too, was largely focused on fulfilling its core objective of managing conservation as mandated by central government. Its participatory approach did not take on board the fact that a participatory village-based governance system was already prevalent and working across Mustang. Instead, it reinvented the wheel like all other agencies working in Mustang have been doing in the post 1990 period, based on an assumption that participatory governance was a new concept requiring new institutional arrangements.

9.3.1.1 Adaptive governance

My study shows the ability of endogenous institutions in environmental governance in Mustang to adapt to changing exogenous forces. As Raymond (2010) has rightly pointed out, this dimension is absent in Agrawal's study. The main focus of Agrawal's case study is on the government's efforts to reform the forest sector, particularly on exploring local responses to the decentralisation policy and participatory approaches in relation to environmental subject formation. He does not explore the impacts of other wider socio-economic and political changes that may have played equally important roles in the development of environmental subject positions.

My study has highlighted how the local people responded and adapted to imposed socio-political changes and related shifts in institutional arrangements, primarily to protect village authority and access rights over environmental resources. My case study shows that the majority of villages adopted concurrent village governance practices which allowed them to continue with their endogenous village institutions to manage their internal affairs and at the same time to participate in new political structures.

Agrawal's environmentality (2005a; 2005b) seeks to explain long term shifts in environmental governance by examining the complex relationships between changes in institutional arrangements and related shifts in the environmental practices and beliefs of local inhabitants in the geographical setting of the Kumaon Valley in India. My thesis examines the extent to which this argument is relevant in the Mustang region of Nepal during the last three and a half centuries.

In the Kumaon Valley the decentralisation and participation emerged in the 1930s as parts of new technologies of government in a response to the local protests against the centralised forest regulations. By contrast, in Mustang, decentralisation and participation were introduced as the key strategies only after the introduction of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in 1993 as part of the project implementation. Prior to this, the District Forest Office had made an effort to promote local participation in the forestry programmes through the Panchayat Forest and Protect Panchayat Forest programmes. The central government had sought to promote local participation in forest management during the Panchayat regime, but this initiative failed due to local scepticism over the government's intentions. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project's participatory model was much more decentralised, both in terms of its structure and the involvement of people, compared with the District Forest Office approach which was mainly concerned with enforcing the forest nationalisation policies through its administrative units.

The Annapurna Conservation Area Project formed committees and sub-committees, similar to forest councils in the Kumaon Valley, in order to provide an avenue to participate in the government's protected area management programme. Like the District Forest Office, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project also failed to recognise the participatory village-based governance that already existed. Instead it created a network of Conservation Area Management Committees, the Forest Management sub-committees and other allied sub committees, to implement the government's conservation policy and programmes. The local residents participated in the conservation programmes as the project provided several direct and tangible benefits for them. Besides providing technical and financial support to implement various small scale projects, they were given the rights to issue timber permits, collect revenue from sale of forest products, and the freedom to spend the funds on locally identified projects. The villages responded to the new institutional changes by ensuring that local representatives in conservation institutions consulted with them and accepted the village consensus in all major decisions related to resource use and protection.

Under the leadership of the *Ghempa and Mukhiya*, the village assembly has continued to play the major role in making village laws for environmental resources, and in turn, regulating local environmental practices. There is a strong perception among the local people that the new institutions formed by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project may not survive beyond the project period, probably a potent reason for trusting their own institutions which have proved resilient over centuries. The new conservation area status for this district has made no significant difference in the day-to-day interaction of local people with their resources. This status, however, holds a special meaning for the Annapurna Conservation Area Project's staff and conservation experts. As far as local people are concerned, it is just another designation that is linked to the government's programmes and policies

and it may not last in the long term. 'Environmentality' as an analytical construct, thus, appears to be limited in explaining the adaptive capacity of local institutions.

My research has highlighted the adaptive capacity of endogenous environmental governance institutions by responding to, and participating in different central government political and policy regimes. My findings indicate no dramatic transformation in local environmental beliefs and actions, as a result of central government's various policies, or by including Mustang under the ambit of a participatory conservation programme. This is not to undermine the dramatic socio-economic transformation that Mustang has experienced in the past four decades, fuelled largely by the increased level of investment in the development of infrastructure by central government as part of its modernisation and neo-liberal agendas. These changes, however, have not reduced the importance of environmental resources to sustain the local livelihoods and economy. The local people have continued to depend on natural resources for sustenance.

Having said that I am not under-estimating the positive implications of the decreased local use of firewood. This trend has resulted primarily from increased household income through tourism and international remittances and the linking of Mustang to the road network. All of these factors have helped make the use of alternative fuels such as LPG gas and kerosene cost-effective. Despites these positive trends, the local people still need to depend on high pastures to graze their animals, share water sources to irrigate their fields, use forests to collect firewood, timber and medicinal plants, and maintain their territories to safeguard their user rights and access to these resources. They tend to believe that these village interests can be best served only by the endogenous governance institutions and this is the reason for their continuity. My case study also suggests that village environmental subjectivity is very much linked to the history, local knowledge, and survival of the village as a socio-political and economic unit. Based on this, Agrawal's core argument that there is a strong link between emerging technologies of government and changes in people's environmental subjectivities seem to be problematic.

9.3.1.2 'Environmentality' as an analytical construct

'Environmentality' as an analytical framework is strongly focused on examining emerging technologies of central government and their relationship with changes in people subjectivities in relation to environment. This is its greatest strength as well as its weakness. I see this as a strength because this framework helps to examine the impacts of government policies and allied institutional arrangements in terms of the creation of local subjects concerned about environment, as Agrawal has argued in his case study. It is a weakness because this exclusive focus on the central government is problematic as Goldsworthy (2010) has observed. The approach ignores, as Bikren-holtz (2009) has pointed out, the influence of the wide range of different actors and power brokers who abound in the

form of international and national non-governmental organisations, community groups, and local communities and how this dynamic of power and power relations impacts on institution building and ultimately in shaping people-environment relationships in changing socio-political contexts. Each of these has been demonstrated in this study.

9.4 Practical Policy implications

My research findings point to a number of possible policy and practical implications for environmental governance in Nepal, with particular reference to the Mustang district.

9.4.1. Power sharing under the new constitution

The goal of decentralisation emerged as a political agenda in Nepal in the mid 1970s. Decentralisation during this period was mainly concentrated on expanding administrative functions of the central government through the provision of publicly funded services and development activities in an effort to modernise the country. With the advent of an open and democratic political system during the 1990s, the pressure to decentralise has grown, with an added emphasis on the devolution of political power. Thus, decentralisation and devolution have become interwoven ideologies that have recently come to dominate the public policy agenda of Nepal, with far reaching impacts and implications for all sectors, from local government reform to natural resource management. Currently Nepal is drafting a new constitution to institutionalise the political gains of 2008. As a democratic federal republic, power sharing between central and federal government, between federal and local government, and local autonomy and self-rule, are on the top of the political agenda.

It is also too early to assess how current political deadlocks and negotiations will unfold and what impacts and implications new political arrangements will have on regions such as Mustang, particularly its political structure, and on the Annapurna Conservation Area. Irrespective of these wider political uncertainties, Mustang's village-based governance system will continue to provide leadership in maintaining the villages' interests and rights over environmental resources and by derivation village welfare, as it has been doing for centuries. It is unfortunate that the process of decentralisation and devolution has so far only focused on decentralising the administrative functions and devolving power from central government to local bodies and agencies. None of the central government's reform programmes have recognised or made efforts to strengthen the village-based governance system which, as this thesis has highlighted, is an outstanding indigenous example of a devolved, participatory model. It is time that this layer of local governance receives both the recognition and legitimacy it deserves in the state restructuring process. The restructuring should legitimate and strengthen village ties to their resources so that the local people can continue to exercise their rights over these, to build prosperity, and sustain them in the long term.

9.4.2   Harnessing support of the local institutions

The neo-liberal policy reforms promoted decentralisation and devolution of political authority as two key strategies and opened doors for international and national non-governmental organisations to participate in environmental and development programmes as partners (Brurtel, 2009; Dahal, 1996; Fisher, 1991; Maskey, 1998). The current institutional arrangements in Mustang reflect this broader trend. Increased emphasis on participation by both the government and NGOs since the 1990's has contributed to the proliferation of local NGOs, community based organisations and various committees and sub-committees.

Practically, this is reflected in the growth of new institutions such as committees, sub-committees and groups with specific interests and mandates. They largely represent the interests of organisations and not necessarily the interests of local people; although the latter have benefitted enormously from the technical and financial support these different organisations have provided to fulfil their programme goals or project targets.

Inevitably, most new organisations do not survive beyond the programme and project period or when the funds from donors cease. In their effort to create new participation, the government and non-governmental organisations often ignore or bypass local endogenous institutions. This is in contrast to their rhetoric and claims that their participatory approach is based on local knowledge and builds on local practices. In practice, as my findings show, the significance and importance of the local institutions in local level affairs has been undermined. This is despite the fact that local institutions have continued to play vital roles in Mustang in terms of maintaining intra-village socio-political relations and resolving conflicts between villages or amongst local people over the sharing of resources, whether or not they are related to development projects or conservation activities.

It is time that both the government and the non-government organisations working at the local level understand and recognise the importance of working with existing local institutions to implement their programmes rather than reinventing the wheel in the name of participation. This approach may not only help to reduce potential conflict within the villages, but will also contribute to the sustainability of their programmes and activities. My thesis has highlighted the roles that the *Ghempa and Mukhiya* play in their stewardship of local level affairs. These village-based institutions represent a very good example of local people exercising their rights over village resources and welfare and participating in the local level affairs.

9.5   Future research

This research primarily focused on understanding the evolution of the village-based governance system in Mustang during different political regimes, particularly in relation to the management of village welfare and environmental resources, from a socio-political and historical stance. I used the concept of 'environmentality' as an underpinning analytical construct to study the evolution of institutional arrangements for environmental governance in Mustang.

This study mainly focused on testing the validity of Agrawal's thesis to explain long term shifts in environmental governance by examining the complex relationships between changes in government and related shifts in environmental beliefs and practices of local inhabitants in the geographical setting of Mustang, Nepal. I argue that the village-based governance system that evolved during the course of Mustang's long history has been invariably focussed on the management of environmental resources and the environmental beliefs and practices which have continued to be socially embedded in Mustang's village institutions under the leadership of the *Ghempa* and *Mukhiya*. Future research should focus on the effectiveness of the village-based governance system within the political framework of the new constitution, particularly to address new environmental challenges such as climate change, which is global in nature, but has direct impacts on local conditions. Such research will help to assess the capacity of endogenous institutions to respond to both global and local level environmental changes and maintain resilience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Profile of the village-based governance system in Mustang

Thaksatsai Region			
Village	**VDC**	**Rep. Type**	**Comments**
Ghasa	Lete	Hereditary	Villagers have the right to change *Mukhiya*, if he is found to be ineffective.
Lete/Dhampu	Lete	Hereditary	Same as above
Kunjo/Taglung	Kunjo	Nominated	Only Chan Thakali households are entitled to become *Mukhiya*. No fixed term. More concerned about protecting Chan Thakali's socio-cultural and traditional rights.
Kobang/Larjung Bujungkot/Nakumkot/Khanti	Kobang	Nominated	Same as in Ghasa. No fixed term. Kobang village is the only village in Mustang that has a woman as a *Mukhiya*.
Tukuche	Tukuche	Nominated	Same as in Kunjo/Taglung. The current Mir Mukhiya of Tukuche is also the *Mukhiya* of Chan Thakali of Tukuche.
Paachgau Region			
Village	**VDC**	**Rep. Type**	**Comments**
Chimang	Tukuche	Nominated	Two *Thuimi*, one from each ward. Serves for a year. All households are entitled to contest the position.
Marpha	Marpha	Nominated	Two representatives from each of four patrilineal clans are nominated as *Thuimi* for a two year term. These positions are shared among all patrilineal clan members on a rotational basis.
Chhairo	Marpha		No *Mukhiya,* instead has a nominated chairperson to oversee village development activities.
Syang	Marpha	Nominated	Two *Thuimi* nominated from two groups –*phajans thowa* and *phajan chyangba* – for two years. All housholds are entitled to contest the position.
Jomsom	Jomsom	Nominated	Two *Mukhiya* nominated for two years. All households are entitled to contest the position.
Dhumba/Somley	Jomsom	Nominated	A *Mukhiya* is nominated for a year and position is shared between two villages on a rotational basis. All households are entitled to contest the position.
Thini	Jomsom	Nominated	Two *Thuimi* are nominated from two groups - *phajans thowa* and *phajan chyangba* – for two years. All households are entitled to contest the position.
Baragau Region			
Village	**VDC**	**Rep. Type**	**Comments**
Kagbeni/ Phalek Dhakarjung/Tiri	Kagbeni	Shared	Each village nominates the *Ghemp* and *Chhowa* from <u>*dhongba*</u> households on a rotational basis.
Khinga/Jharkot	Jharkot	Shared	As above.
Muktinath/Jhong/ Purang/Chhongyur/ Lupra	Muktinath	Shared	As above.
Tangbe/Chhusang/Tsaile/Tetang/ Gyaker/Samaar	Chhusang		As above. Even new migrants, if they hold *dhongba* status, are eligible for the *Ghempa* position.
Lho-Tso-Dhium Region			
Village	**VDC**	**Rep. Type**	**Comments**
Gyiling	Ghami	Hereditary/ Shared	The *Ghempa/Dhingi* positions are alternated between two households, i.e., when one becomes the *Ghempa* other becomed *Dhungi* (secretary). All *dhongba* households share the responsibility of *Ngiwas* (assistants to Ghempa) and *Dhurappas* (chhowas) on a rotational basis.

Ghami	Ghami	Hereditary/ Shared	Two households share village chief positions. *Ghempa* (2) and *Lehdok* (4- *Chhowa*) positions are nominated from *dhongba* households on a rotational basis.
Charang	Charang	Hereditary/ Shared	The chief *Ghempa* is hereditary. Assistant *Ghempa* and *Chhowa* positions are shared by *dhongba* households on a rotational basis.
Marang	Charang	Shared	Dhongba households become *Ghempa* on a rotational basis. A noble from Chhoser is the *Ghempa Chhe* of this village.
Tangya/Dhe/Yaara Ghaara/Surkhang Dhee	Surkhang	Shared	*Dhongba* households become *Ghempa* on a rotational basis.
Lo-Manthang	Lo-Manthang	mixed	Only Bista households are entitled to become *Ghempa* on a rotational basis. Two *Mithui* and six *Chhumae* are nominated from Gurung households. Two *Mithui* are nominated, one by the Raja of Lo, and the other by the *Ghempa*.
Thinker/Namgyal/ Phowa/Kimling/ Chumjung/Nyamdo	Chhunup	-	No *Ghempa*. Directly ruled by the King of Lo so he is the head, but villagers provide *Chhumae*.
Chhoser	Chhoser VDC	Hereditary	A noble has been serving as the *Ghempa*. He is also *Ghempa Chhe* of several villages such as Marang, Ghara and Gyiling.

Appendix 2: Key committees and groups, working at village or Village Development Committee levels, in Mustang

	Working areas	Operation level	Funding Agencies	Remarks
Mother/women's groups	**Common areas of work**: Health and sanitation, saving and credits, plantation, income generating activities such as juice production, fruit processing etc. social rules such as impose control over gambling **Other works**: gas depot management, plantation, drinking water depots	Village level	District Women Development Office, ACAP, individual donors, REED, various international non-governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations	Most MGs in Lower Mustang have their own building, involved in plantations and running of gas depot. MGs in Baragau and Lo regions are involved in savings and credit, and health and sanitation
Construction Committees	Drinking water projects, irrigation projects, road projects, bridge construction projects, trail improvement, wall construction, stone pavement projects, savings and credit, fund management	Village level but can also be Village Development Committee levels, if there is more than one Village Development Committee as primary beneficiary. Usually do not function beyond the project period.	District line agencies, District Development Committees, Village Development Committees, Annapurna Conservation Area Project, and various international non-governmental organisations.	Most committees or groups become inactive after the completion of projects
Farmer cooperatives	Savings and credit, apple transportation, horticultural development, food processing	Village level	District Agriculture Development Office, Annapurna Conservation Area Project and other national and international organisations	Farmer cooperatives became popular to access the central government fund after the Maoist government introduced a policy to provide a matching grant
Youth clubs	Sports, cultural programmes, heritage conservation, library management	Village level	Various international and national organisations, membership fees, local taxes	Thak Volleyball Association, a sub-district level organisation, organises an annual volleyball competition among youth clubs in Lower Mustang. Upper Mustang has started a similar event in the past five years for youth clubs in six VDCs of the region. The youth clubs of Baragau do not participate in both events.
Conservation area management committee/Lodge management committee, other sub-committees	Forestry, conservation, bio-diversity, small scale development projects, tourism, alternative energy, kerosene depot management, health and sanitation, lodge management	CAMC at Village Development Committee and others at village level.	Mainly Annapurna Conservation Area Project and other international and national organisations supporting its activities. Annapurna Conservation Area Project receives annual budget from central government for the project in Upper Mustang. It also uses internal funds generated through trekking fees	Roles of Annapurna Conservation Area Project and CAMCs will be discussed in details under environmental section (8.4).
Dalit groups	Saving and credits, goat raising	Village level	District Soil Conservation Office, District Livestock office, Village Development Committee and various international non-governmental organisations.	It is mandatory to allocate 15 percent of Village Development Committee funds for Dalit, women and children. The main beneficiary of this policy seems to be Dalit in Mustang.

Appendix 3: The Anapurna Conservation Area Project principles

Three ACAP's principles are:

i) Local Participation; the local people were involved through various locally formed committees and sub-committees who were primarily responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring all conservation and development activities.

ii) Sustainability; particularly to achieve financial sustainability even after funding from donor agencies become exhausted. Tourism entry fee was used as a prime strategy for it. ACAP also focused on building local capacity to sustain conservation efforts in the long run.

iii) Lami (match maker): ACAP sees itself working as a Lami or a matchmaker or a facilitator between the local people and government agencies, between donors and the local people, to identify local problems and mobilize resources around them to address these (Gurung, 1993; p. 34).

Appendix 4: The Annapurna Conservation Area Project programme themes

ACAP programmes are divided into ten thematic areas

i) Natural Resource Conservation programme focuses on forestry, wildlife, biodiversity and soil conservation related activities. It includes strengthening local committees and sub-committees, establishing forest nurseries, promoting plantation, managing non forest timber products, river bank protection, wildlife monitoring and providing compensation for wildlife depredation and raids, range land management and research, survey and documentation

ii) Alternative Energy programme focuses on providing alternative sources of energy and appropriate cooking and heating devices to reduce the use of firewood. This included promoting micro-hydro power, solar technology, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and kerosene. It also included promoting devices such as back-boilers, smoke heaters, improved hearths, low wattage cookers and so on.

iii) Conservation Education programme includes formal and information education and extension programmes such teaching conservation education curricula at local schools, workshops, student green force clubs, mobile camps, awareness camps, publication, study tours and special celebrations, all aimed at generating local awareness and building the local capacity in conservation.

iv)   Sustainable Tourism Management programme includes strengthening tourism related institutions, information materials, skill development, publication, waste management and tourism infrastructure development (porter shelters, camp sites, sign postings, bridges, trekking route and trail development).

v)   Community Infrastructure Development includes providing financial technical support for drinking water, trail/bridges, school buildings and toilets. The local are expected to contribute voluntary labour and local materials for all community infrastructure development projects.

vi)   Gender Development programme includes strengthening women groups, income generation, day care centres, health and sanitation, all aimed at increasing women participation in decision making process.

vii)   Agriculture and Livestock Development programme includes supporting farmers, bee keeping, irrigation support, seed distribution, agriculture demonstration plots, off season vegetable production, nursery and greenhouse support, animal husbandry, training and workshops.

viii)   General and Reproduction Health support programme includes general and emergency health services, health awareness and reproduction health camps, mobile camps and nutrition programmes.

ix)   Cultural Heritage Conservation programme includes restoration and maintenance monasteries, temples, chhortens and support to monastic schools/traditional festivals.

x)   Capacity Building programme includes workshops, training and exposure visits.

xi)   Research, Survey and Documentation includes research on key stone species, documentation of indigenous biodiversity resources, and biodiversity registration (TNC, 2009; p.,36-37).

Appendix 5: Details of international non-government organisations

The American Himalayan Foundation (AHF) is an US based non-governmental organisation which has been actively supporting Tibetan refugees and communities in India and Nepal. AHF helped UMCDP to secure US$ .75 million from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). AHF provided the same amount as a matching fund for the Upper Mustang Biodiversity Project which UMCDP implemented as the most important programme from 2000 to 2006. The total value of this project was US$ 2.215 million. NTNC and other partner organisations such as ICIMOD and UNDP provided the remaining funds to the project (UNDP, 2006). AHF funds were specifically earmarked for heritage conservation and health care programmes, the former were largely implemented through an

independent consulting firm based in Kathmandu and the latter through ACAP. It was under this grant two main monasteries, Jhamba and Thubten, located within the walled city of Lo-Manthang village, and few other important religious monuments were restored. ACAP management plan (2009-2012) has identified heritage conservation, controlled tourism and rangeland management as three priority programmes for the Upper Mustang region (NTNC/ACAP, 2009; p. 57