

nadelNEWS 1/16

Editorial 2

Reflection
Combining Best, Good, and Emergent Practice 3

Research
How Useful is the Concept of State Fragility? 5

Teaching
Fragile Contexts: Politics, Security,
and Development 7

People
Mashini Project – a Response to the Nepal
Earthquake 9

Alumni Network 10

Livelihoods in Transition –
the Sherpas of Rolwaling Valley 11

Dear Alumni

Dear Friends of NADEL

Over the last 25 years, global poverty has decreased considerably. Still, almost a billion people remain poor according to the international poverty line. Many of these people are living in or are trying to emigrate from fragile states. Supporting the poor and managing projects in fragile states will be one of the primary challenges facing the field of international development cooperation in the coming years.

Since the last nadelNEWS, issues related to fragile states have also been appearing on the NADEL agenda weekly. We hence decided to dedicate this edition of the nadelNEWS to development cooperation in fragile contexts.

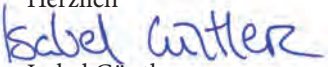
Last year, we sent out the nadelNEWS the same week that a severe earthquake shocked Nepal and the world. Three of our 2014-2016 MAS students were in Nepal at the time. Leonie Hensgen, one of the MAS students, reports on a fragile country struggling with the consequences of a natural disaster (nadelPEOPLE, page 9). Following up, in September 2015, together with NADEL alumni, we organized an evening discussion on the past and future of Nepal (page 10-11).

In September 2016, we will organize a conference together with ETH Global on conflict and migration. For more details, see our new website (still to be found under the old address www.nadel.ethz.ch), which has been put together by Darcy Molnar, who joined the nadelTEAM last summer (page 10).

Kenneth Harttgen (senior scientist at NADEL) raises the question of whether the concept of a fragile state is useful for thinking about development and policy making (nadelRESEARCH, page 5). For anybody interested in a more detailed version, the reference is provided at the end of the article.

Simon Mason (research associate at the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zürich) evaluates if and how development cooperation needs to adapt program planning to fragile contexts (nadelREFLECTION, page 3). Closely linked to these reflections, Fritz Brugger (senior scientist at NADEL) reports about a new NADEL course on fragile contexts (nadelTEACHING, page 7), that was offered for the first time in fall 2015.

With our best wishes for a hopefully more peaceful year in 2016,

Herzlich

 Isabel Günther

Impressum

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Photos: Fritz Brugger (page 1,3,5,7); Leonie Hensgen (page 9); NADEL (page 10).

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Reflection

Combining Best, Good, and Emergent Practice

Simon Mason, Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich¹

We are hooked on clear cause-effect thinking, despite the evidence that best practice based on this paradigm can do harm in certain situations. In order to improve how we work in fragile contexts, we need to first understand our deep-seated bias towards this way of thinking and realize its limitations, and second, we must explore new ways of thinking and acting in fragile contexts.

Why we seek cause-effect relationships

There is a deep-seated human need for predictability and order. We like cause-effect relationships because they mean we can order, influence, and control our lives and thereby increase our chances of survival. Psychologists have shown that there are situations where people blame themselves for a disaster, even if objectively they are not responsible. Although guilt is a terrible feeling, it seems that in some situations it is still developed as a preferred option to the feeling of being vulnerable to arbitrary disaster. If I am to blame, it means that I can avoid the situation in the future.

There is a second aspect of our wish for clear cause-effect relationships. The Newtonian, mechanistic worldview has given

humanity great benefits. Modeling the human body, human relationships or ecosystems as machines is one way to simplify reality and get a grip on the unpredictability of life. We take a system apart and study the various elements to understand how the system works. Machines of the same type all function in the same way: if a part fails, you replace the part and it works again. This is useful in some cases, but there is a fundamental problem with this approach: the human body, human relationships, and ecosystems are not machines. The diversity and complexity of interactions in live systems means that there are serious limitations to modelling life as machines. Recognizing there are limits to this “clear cause-effect” mode of thinking does not mean dismissing the benefits: we do not want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. What we need, is a way of knowing when which type of approach makes sense.

Different systems call for different responses

The Cynefin Framework developed by David Snowden and Mary Boone² provides a sense-making framework that allows

us to keep the benefits of the “clear cause-effect” paradigm, while encouraging us to think differently where this approach is limited. The Cynefin framework argues there are four “statuses” of a system: simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. The status of the system is characterized by different forms of cause-effect relationships. In the simple state, the cause-effect relationship is clear. The adequate way of thinking and acting in this type of system is with “best practice” that works every time: there is a right way of doing things, we can use check-lists and standardized approaches. Mechanistic thinking works. In complicated systems, there is still a clear relationship between cause and effect, but it is harder to see. We need experts, there is at least one “right” solution to the problem, but there may also be other ways to solve the problem. As Snowden and Boone argue, this is the domain of “good practice,” and they illustrate this with the example of an expert who can put together a Ferrari if she or he has all the parts and the required expertise. We are still in the domain of mechanistic thinking. In complex systems, however, there are no clear cause and effect relationships discernable. Due to complex interactions, the system is more than the sum of its parts. Snowden and Boone use the example of a rainforest to illustrate this type of system. We do not know the results of our actions in such systems. Mechanistic thinking and best practice approaches fail. Snowden and Boone argue that we have to “probe” in an experimental manner in order to see how the system reacts. This is the realm of emergent patterns and solutions that cannot be pre-determined a priori or from the outside without any interaction with the system. In chaotic systems, finally, there are also no clear cause-effect relationships, but compared to complex systems it is even harder to see any emergent patterns and probing may not work.

Implications for mediation in fragile contexts

Mediators working on violent, political conflict intuitively know that simple, standardized, and “best practice” approaches do not work. One of the mediator’s task is to design a process, which means shaping the who, how, what, and when of a negotiation process, helping actors in conflict reach a mutually acceptable agreement. A typical statement by a mediator is the following: “You need a process design, but you know it will not happen as you designed it, so you need at least eight alternative process designs. The actual process design will emerge out of your input and the interaction with the negotiating parties while keeping a close eye on the changing context.” This “emergent practice” is typical for the complex systems of negotiation and mediation in peace processes. Mediation is at times also attempted in chaotic systems – e.g., massive, ongoing escalation of violence with international and regional actors funding different conflict actors with unclear and changing leaderships and agendas, such as in Syria today. In chaotic systems it is very hard to find emergent patterns and shape a negotiation process that leads to a viable peace agreement – at best one can deal

with a part of the problem. Mediators generally know when mediation can be used effectively (i.e., complex systems), and when it faces limitations (i.e., chaotic systems).

The Cynefin Framework simply conceptualizes what mediation practitioners have known and been doing all along. A huge added value of the Cynefin framework, however, is to help communicate this intuitive knowledge to other actors who are more removed from practice, but who still seek to shape this practice. The degree to which the mediation policy and support community – often sitting in head-quarters of international organizations, foreign ministries, NGOs, or academic institutions – has direct practical experience of mediation processes varies. The further removed we are from practice, the greater the likelihood that we try to use “best mediation practice” and “two page tip sheets” that overly simplify reality and ignore the complex interdependences of factors in mediation. But as Snowden and Boone point out: using “best practice” in complex and chaotic systems can do harm. In complex contexts we are far better placed if we try and use “emergent practice.”

This has implications for the mediation support community: If we work in complex or even chaotic contexts, we need to seriously professionalize mediation to develop the intuition and skills needed for emergent practice and contextualized mediation. Peace mediation is more like the job of a heart surgeon that demands years of training and supervised experience than that of someone who has done a one-week course in first aid.

This also has implications for the development cooperation community: We need to debate whether development cooperation in fragile contexts is about adapting existing tools – such as results-based management and log frames – to make them more flexible and agile, or whether it is about fundamentally thinking and acting differently in certain circumstances. One approach is to first reflect on what status of system we are working in before deciding which type of analysis, planning, and monitoring tool is adequate. The tools we are familiar with may still be useful, but not necessarily in all circumstances. Clarifying adequacy of tools related to system status could enhance constructive communication between field and headquarters and between international and local actors. These actors may work in different types of systems and have the awareness that “one size fits all” does not work, yet lack clarity on a viable alternative. The Cynefin Framework provides such an alternative, guiding both headquarters, field experts, international and local actors in how to combine good, best, and emergent practice.

¹ Simon J. A. Mason is Head of the Mediation Support Team at the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich (www.css.ethz.ch). This text was written in the framework of the Mediation Support Project (a joint project of CSS ETH Zurich and swisspeace, funded by the Swiss FDFA).

² David J Snowden and Mary E. Boone (2007) “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making”, Harvard Business Review



nade|RESEARCH

How Useful is the Concept of State Fragility?

Kenneth Harttgen, Senior Scientist, NADEL

Background

The factors which lead to state fragility are diverse and manifest themselves in a variety of forms. In recent years, a large body of literature has attempted to conceptualize and define fragile states more precisely, however, a uniform approach is hindered by both a lack of data and a suitable framework to classify “fragile states.” Existing lists of fragile states differ by their theoretical background concepts, but most concepts measure fragility along four main dimensions: security, political, economic, and social dimensions. These lists sometimes use objective criteria, sometimes value judgment seems to be involved, and, sometimes, a set of proxies is used to generate the list of fragile states.

It is regularly stated that development progress in so-called fragile states is lagging behind. Such statements about a lower overall progress towards economic development have prompted donors to use fragility measures to allocate aid. For example, the World Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) definition of fragile states is also used by the EU Commission to benchmark European Union (EU) aid. Only very limited detailed analysis exists that investigates to what extent

the levels and trends achievement in economic outcomes differ significantly between fragile and non-fragile countries using different definitions of fragile states.

Undoubtedly, fragile countries are likely to face serious development challenges. But it is important to address the question regarding the usefulness of fragility as a predictor of development outcomes that might justify treating fragile countries as a distinct group in aid allocation or donor policies. We investigate the usefulness of the World Bank’s CPIA and related approaches for defining fragile states in tracking the levels and progress of development indicators between 1990 and 2008 between fragile and non-fragile countries and by definitions of fragility. In particular, we focus on per capita income, poverty, childhood under-nutrition, primary completion, and under-five mortality rates.

Findings and Policy Implications

The findings show that fragile countries are, indeed, performing worse in terms of economic outcomes, regardless of

the classification of fragile state being used and the situation is worse among fragile states in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in terms of progress in economic development, improvements are not necessarily slower in fragile states. One of the reasons for this poor correlation could be heterogeneity among the group of fragile countries. It, therefore, does not appear to be a useful aggregation tool to track economic development and existing efforts that claim the opposite are driven by implicitly demanding higher rates of progress in fragile rather than non-fragile countries.

Recent creation of the fragile states concept has generally created more confusion than clarity. There is a plethora of definitions, leading to many different lists of fragile countries that change over time, with a small degree of overlap between these lists. While it is clear that fragile countries show lower levels in economic development than non-fragile states, regardless of the definition used, the categorization of fragile state is not very useful when it comes to measuring progress in development over time. Consequently, it does not seem appropriate to use definitions of fragility to allocate aid or develop uniform policy approaches for this heterogeneous group of countries.

Two ways out of this dilemma are possible. The first is to look for more robust categorizations of fragile states, such as one in which a country is deemed fragile if it has been on a list for several years or in several categories. Similarly, one might want to categorize fragile countries by the causes of fragility (for example conflict, state collapse, poor governance and so forth). The second is to move towards treating each of these countries *sui generis*, requiring a different analytical and policy approach for each, as aggregations into homogenous groups seems to be difficult.

The heterogeneity of performance in fragile states poses a great challenge to policy-making not only in the countries, but also in the international community. Given the tremendous heterogeneity of this group, a very flexible approach to policy-making that is able to respond to the country-specific challenges is more urgent here than elsewhere. Moreover, this policy approach has to respond quickly to rapidly evolving situations as the political, security, economic, and governance situations in these states will change more quickly than in other countries. Often, quick, short-term action is required to address longer-term challenges.

This heterogeneity poses a major challenge, not only to the policies to be considered, but also to the policymaking processes of national governments, as well as to donors. In fragile states, timely country-specific analytical work is needed to develop and adapt policies rapidly to an evolving situation. The rather slow-moving processes of policy-making (via national planning agencies, multi-year budgeting and PRSP processes) or multi-year donor programming are usually unable to respond with the speed and specificity required. Instead, there is a need for rapid analytical work followed by quick policy formulation and implementation. While these types of approaches are well known in security discourses, the challenge of heterogeneous forms of fragility will require similar approaches to respond effectively in these situations in order to sustain progress in economic development.

Published as: Harttgen, K. and S. Klasen (2013). Do Fragile Countries Experience Worse MDG Progress? *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 134-159.

NADEL Publications and Awards 2015

Kenneth Harttgen was awarded the 2015 excellence prize for practice-relevant development research at the annual conference of the VfS Development Economics Group in Kiel, Germany, for his 2014 publication "Association between economic growth and early childhood undernutrition."

Bahn, O., Chesney, M., **Gheysens, J.**, Knutti, R., and Pana, A.C. (2015), Is there room for geoengineering in the optimal climate policy mix? *Environmental Science and Policy*, 48 (2015): 67-76.

Baumgartner, R. (2015), Farewell to Yak and Yeti? The Sherpas of Rowlings facing a globalized world. Kathmandu: Vajra Books.

Günther, I., Grosse, M., Klasen, S. (2015), Attracting attentive academics: Paper, person or place? *Discussion Papers*, 250.

Metzger, L. and Günther, I. (2015), How to assess the effectiveness of development aid projects: Evaluation ratings versus project indicators. *Journal of International Development*, 27.8: 1496-1520.

Metzger, L. and Günther, I. (2015), Making an impact? The relevance of information on aid effectiveness for charitable giving. A laboratory experiment. *CRC-PEG Discussion Papers*, 182.

Vollmer, S., Alfven, T., Padayachy, J., **Harttgen, K.**, Ghys, P.D., and Bärnighausen, T. (2015), HIV surveys in older adults: better data, better health. *The Lancet HIV*, 2.2 (2015): e40-e41.

Vollmer, S., **Harttgen, K.**, Subramanyam, M.A., Finlay, J., Klasen, S., and Subramanian, S.V. (2015), Association between economic growth and early childhood nutrition – Authors' reply. *The Lancet. Global Health*, 3.2 (2015): E81-E81.



nadelTEACHING

Fragile Contexts: Politics, Security, and Development

Fritz Brugger, Senior Scientist, NADEL

The Federal Dispatch on Development and Cooperation 2017-2020 to be submitted to Parliament this year will most likely confirm and even intensify the Swiss engagement in fragile states, in line with the international trend. For example, the UK announced last November that it would spend 50% of its official development assistance (ODA) in fragile states and regions.

Donors' recent orientation towards fragile states is driven as much by the fact that around 30% of the poor live in fragile countries as by concerns over increasing terrorism and security threats. It is the latter that promoted the 'fragile state' label and discourse at the turn of the century in the first place. And only in 2008, were those labeled 'fragile' consulted and invited to the 'International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding', the OECD platform dealing with ODA in fragile states. In the Fall Semester, NADEL together with the Center for Security Studies at ETH has organized a course to address challenges related to development cooperation in fragile contexts.

How does working in contexts that are characterized by volatility, unpredictability, often-changing alliances, an unclear set of actors, and the absence of rule of law affect development cooperation?

Is the Logframe, which originated as a planning instrument in the US army and aerospace industry, still valid as the backbone for managing development projects? While some want to make tweaks here and there to factor in fragility, others call for completely new methodologies. But there are more fundamental questions to consider about the relation between development cooperation and fragility than just 'how to best upgrade the toolbox'.

Does ODA drive fragility?

First, *aid allocation* often unintentionally reinforces drivers of fragility in the longer term despite the fact that 'do no harm' is claimed as one of the fundamentals of development cooperation policy. ODA may even contribute to what Johan Galtung called 'structural violence,' which ODA attempts to overcome. For example, recent research on multilateral aid allocation in Kenya shows that it consistently favored co-partisan and co-ethnic voters between 1992 and 2010. Aid distribution has increased incumbent vote share and, thus, affects political power distribution (Jablonski 2014). In Mozambique, general budget

support has created a strong relationship of accountability between the government and donors over the last 15 years, but not strengthened the horizontal accountability within the government or between state and society. ODA and budget support on one side helped to strengthen state capacity and development. At the same time, it facilitated the ‘winner takes all’ mentality of the ruling party that systematically excludes non-party members from access to power and economic opportunities and monopolizes politics, administration, and the economy.

Second, the *scope of development interventions* typically prioritizes establishing robust states and strong institutions. The World Bank even identifies fragile states only based on their performance in the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) index. This is not only highly normative, as it measures deviations from Western ideals, it also ignores societal drivers of fragility (e.g., social cohesion, fragmentation, mistrust, power, religion, injustice, informal institutions) – issues that are hard to measure and therefore are easily ignored. Research into peace and development interventions in Congo DRC showed how priorities between local and international actors differ exactly along these lines (Hellmüller 2014): local civil society organizations prioritize reconciliation, want people to be able to visit the same market again, visit the same church, and build trust after violent conflicts. For locals, the sense of togetherness matters to the well being of individuals. In contrast, international actors – equipped with far more resources – prioritize formal top-down state institutions. No consultations or cooperation took place that could have shaped a common agenda and increased the effectiveness of their programs. Yet, as Seth Kaplan argues, without social cohesion, it is very hard to improve formal institutions because elites and officials at the national and local level accustomed to putting their own interests before the public good have strong incentives to undermine such reform (Kaplan 2015).

Towards more agile programming

At the operational level the challenge to *adapt planning and programming* to the high complexity and low predictability of fragile contexts persists. Consensus grows that context, trend, and uncertainty analysis deserve much more attention and serious engagement than filling in a MERV form (monitoring of development relevant changes) once a year. But issues of social cohesion still often go unnoticed, unreflected and do not find an adequate response in development strategies, programs, and projects. Understanding also grows that thinking about different plausible mid- to long-term futures is a prerequisite to develop a strategy that can adequately react to major shifts in the context. Scenario planning exercises are gaining ground. Yet, their integration into planning – and monitoring – is still in its infancy.

When it comes to implementation planning, development could learn interesting lessons from the software development community. The investigation of failed software projects showed

that in 80% the usage of the waterfall planning methodology – a strict sequential chain of the different project phases that is comparable to the Logframe philosophy – was one of the key factors of failure. Why is this the case? Requirements and timelines are defined in the earliest phases of the projects as fine grained and completely as possible. But in real-life, complex software projects about 60% of the initial requirements are changed in the course of the project. Other requirements are implemented as defined, but are not really needed by the customer. Sound familiar from your experience in development projects? Here is what smart software engineers came up with a decade ago: Agile software development. It promotes adaptive planning, evolutionary development, early delivery, continuous improvement, and encourages rapid and flexible response to change. It is not an ‘anti-methodology,’ but rather a methodology that enables an iterative, incremental, and evolutionary approach to complex and rapidly changing environments. The ultimate problem that the project intends to solve is clearly defined. But the way to get there and how the solution in the end exactly looks emerges over time – somehow the opposite of ‘blueprint’ solutions that still can be found in development projects.

Agile programming helps developers think in small deliverable functionalities that are kept in a ‘backlog.’ New ones are added and others removed throughout the project life cycle. The sequence of implementation of the units is constantly agreed upon based on needs and priorities. The implementation of such a unit (called ‘sprint’ in the agile terminology) is planned in detail and results are measured against quality and customer satisfaction criteria. Such an adaptive approach is less amenable to an ODA management that nowadays is increasingly being integrated into the donors’ foreign ministries bureaucracy. Instead, it challenges how responsibilities between HQ and field offices are distributed, how decisions are made, and how monitoring, reporting, and controlling are organized. Without making our organizations far more flexible, we limit our ability to adequately respond to the needs of fragile states.

The NADEL course on fragile contexts covers conceptualizations of fragility and the political economy of the fragility discourse. It further addresses questions of cooperation with actors involved in security sector transformation and in mediation and peace processes and how their intervention logic compares, overlaps with, or complements the logic of development cooperation. Finally, it asks how agile programming can be applied in fragile contexts, from analysis and planning to decision-making and monitoring.

Hellmüller, Sara. 2014. „A story of mutual adaptation? The interaction between local and international peacebuilding actors in Ituri” *Peacebuilding 2* (2): 188-201.

Jablonski, Ryan S. 2014. „How Aid Targets Votes: The Impact of Electoral Incentives on Foreign Aid Distribution” *World Politics 66*(2): 293 - 330.

Kaplan, Seth. 2015. „Modeling Fragility: A Societal and Institutional Approach”. Blog. *Institutions and Stability*. <http://g4dpblog.blogspot.ch/2015/11/modeling-fragility-societal-and.html>.



nade|PEOPLE

Mashini Project – a Response to the Nepal Earthquake

Leonie Hensgen, MAS-Student 2014-2016, NADEL

The earthquake on the 25th of April 2015 and the following after-shocks have deeply affected Nepal. Many villages were left alone in their plight and were desperate for help to arrive. One of those villages is Mashini, located at the outskirts of Kathmandu. Thankfully, there was not one death to mourn for and no severe injuries in the village. However, the majority of the houses in Mashini are either totally destroyed, or so profoundly damaged that they are not safe to live in anymore. Food supplies, cloth, and personal items had been buried under the ruins.

We, Andrea Barrueto, Sonja Hofstetter, Michael Blaser and I (three former, one current NADEL student, working for HEL-VETAS Nepal) came to know about Mashini through a night guard who lives there and commutes every evening to Kathmandu to work. His account made us decide to support the people in Mashini, at least in the very short term. We organized a first visit, carrying food items and cloth and offering medical consultation through a nurse. The night guard had not exaggerated!

The fact that people in Mashini obviously needed support combined with the flood of mail we received asking how best to help Nepal was pivotal for our decision to start a bigger Mashini

project. Soon we realized that instead of facing financial constraints we had to deal with organizational ones. Getting relief material in Kathmandu was the biggest obstacle to overcome. The same materials were needed everywhere. Shops quickly sold out and offers from India and China took forever to reach Nepal. We had almost given up hope that the galvanized iron sheets we ordered would ever reach us when we finally managed to get them through other channels.

The galvanized iron sheets offer a small amount of protection for Mashini families from the rain during the monsoon season. However, it is obvious that this solution is only acceptable for a transitional phase. As soon as monsoon is over, people will start to rebuild their houses in Mashini and in other villages affected by the earthquake. Most of them will do it in the same manner they did before and will be at risk if another earthquake strikes. In theory, this cycle could be avoided: Local architects long ago developed affordable, earthquake-resilient construction techniques that use local materials. The challenge to the government and to the development community will be to bring this knowledge to the people in time – and to convince them applying ‚modern‘ technology.



Réseau des Anciens – Un lieu de rencontre pour les sortants

Marie-Laure Müller, Senior Scientist, NADEL

Quelques sortants du programme master 2012-2014 ont eu l'idée de créer le réseau mentionné ci-dessus. Leur but : Concevoir un lieu de rencontre pour permettre aux « anciens » de s'échanger sur les expériences acquises tout au long de leur carrière professionnelles. De plus, ces rencontres pourraient servir à discuter quelques unes des nouvelles tendances au sein de la coopération au développement et des qualifications nécessaires pour y travailler dans l'avenir.

Les initiateurs du réseau ont également souligné l'intérêt de maintenir le contact avec l'institut universitaire, afin de rester

à jour sur les résultats actuels dans la recherche et sur les offres dans la formation continue.

La première de ces rencontres eu lieu le 23 septembre 2015, avec une participation d'environ 180 personnes. Dans ce cadre, la livre de Ruedi Baumgartner, ancien co-directeur du NADEL, « Farewell to Yak and Yeti ? The Sherpas of Rolwaling Facing a Globalised World » fut présenté. Ensuite, trois experts du Népal discutèrent les défis et les chances pour le développement de ce pays suite au tremblement de terre.

Contact: alumni@nadel.ethz.ch

New at NADEL



Darcy Molnar

is a senior research associate responsible for NADEL's outreach activities and international network. Darcy has a PhD in Civil Engineering from Colorado State University (USA). Her major interest is in sustainable water resources.



Shailee Pradhan

is a post-doctoral researcher interested in low-cost nudges and technologies. She has conducted field research in Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines. Shailee holds a PhD in Economics from the University of St. Gallen and an MSc from Tufts University (USA).



Samuel Tetteh-Baah

is a new PhD student at NADEL focusing on concepts and new measurements of inequalities. He has a BA in Economics and Political Sciences from the University of Ghana and an MA in Development Economics from the University of Göttingen.



Evelyn Mühlhofer

is studying Interdisciplinary Natural Sciences at ETH Zurich. She supports NADEL's teaching and research program.

Livelihoods in Transition – the Sherpas of Rolwaling Valley

Interview with Ruedi Baumgartner, Prof.em. NADEL (Darcy Molnár, Research Associate, NADEL)

What was your purpose in writing “Farewell to Yak and Yeti”?

My first contact with the Sherpas of the Rolwaling Valley dates back to 1977 when I went to Nepal for fieldwork aimed at understanding the impacts of rapidly expanding Himalayan mountain tourism on traditional agro-pastoral livelihoods. The book is the outcome of a follow-up study, which offers the privilege to evaluate the evolution of new livelihood strategies among the Rolwaling Sherpas over a time span of two generations. This long-term perspective also allows for insights into essential local preconditions for successfully dealing with risks and opportunities of a rapidly globalising world. Unexpectedly, yet to my great satisfaction, spiritual and secular leaders of the Rolwaling community welcome the book as a means for promoting better understanding of their community’s origin and history among the younger generations, and for fostering Sherpa identity as a Buddhist minority in a Hindu society.

Your book focuses on the Sherpas. What draws you to them, to their culture, to their values?

In retrospect, my first trek to the remote Valley near the Tibet border resembled a pilgrimage in search of sustainable mountain livelihoods. As a representative of an obviously “unsustainable society” I was keen to experience a mountain community that had, over generations, sustainably managed natural resources for its survival in a truly marginal environment. My investigations into the organisation of an agro-pastoral cycle of transhumance, from winter settlements at 3200 m up to the high yak pastures above 5000 m, added to my respect for these people. Sustainable resource management impressed me as the outcome of economic rationality and the blessings of Buddhist and Pre-Buddhist deities. Traditional village governance was the joint responsibility of the headman as the secular and the head lama as the spiritual leader of the community.

Which major transformations have you witnessed in the Sherpa community over the years?

Already in the 1970s, indicators pointed to limits of growth within the agro-pastoral economy. Dividing parents’ inheritance into viable units, for instance, increasingly met limitations and thus became a major factor for the employment of the Rolwaling Sherpas in the growing expedition tourism. Although latecomers at Mount

Everest as compared to their countrymen from Khumbu, Rolwaling Sherpas nowadays count among the best performing climbers and manage their own expedition agencies.

How did this shift to expedition tourism affect the Rolwaling community?

The communal gravity centre shifted from Rolwaling to migrant households settled in Kathmandu. Hardly 20% of the population remains engaged in traditional agro-pastoralism. Facing a still fragile state after the civil war (1996-2006), the community established a well-performing civil society organisation, registered as an NGO, which assumes the responsibility for local governance. Modern education has become a key community concern that also promotes occupational diversification. Yet, ironically, this goes along with an increasing alienation of the younger generations from Sherpa culture. The Rolwaling Sherpas are therefore ready to invest into a communal centre in Kathmandu and the renovation of their Buddhist Monastery in the Rolwaling Valley. Great hopes rest on the newly appointed head lama, a charismatic personality, who recently re-opened a primary school in Rolwaling, which follows an innovative curriculum that blends secular with religious education.

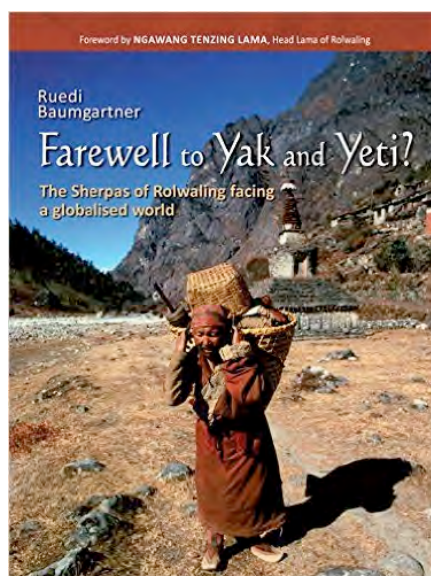
You include many photographs in your book. What role should these images assume in the eyes of your readers?

I faced the challenge of how to capture the social, economic, and cultural change of a community in a holistic manner? How to render the outcome of such a study accessible to a vastly

diverse readership, ranging from men and women of the Rolwaling community to Nadel students at ETH? I finally opted for playing on three chords simultaneously. No doubt, the Rolwaling Sherpas, men and women, play the keynote, predominantly in the form of life story interviews. The book’s analytical comments and images, in turn, are the two accompanying chords. Photos are used to illustrate change by presenting before-and-after situations. However, they do not explain change. This is the role of the analytical comments.

Any final comments?

The most gratifying event still lies ahead of me, that is, the handing over of the book to all Rolwaling households on the occasion of Losar, the Tibetan New Year of 2016.



Available at:
www.vajrabookshop.com
www.amazon.com