

The Contribution of Farmer Field Schools to Rural Development in Nepal

Annemarie B. Westendorp

Thesis committee**Thesis supervisor**

Prof. dr. L. E. Visser
Professor of Rural Development Sociology
Wageningen University

Other members

Prof.Dr. Ir. A.E.J. Wals, Wageningen University
Prof. Dr. C.J. Garforth, University of Reading, United Kingdom
Dr. C. Vijfhuizen, NUFFIC, Den Haag
Dr. Ir. C.J.M. Almekinders, Wageningen University

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Thesis

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Annemarie B. Westendorp
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Acronyms

APPO	Assistant Plant Protection Officer
AREP	Agricultural Research and Extension Program
AUSAID	Australian Government Overseas Aid Program
CIPM	Community Integrated Pest Management
CBO	Community Based Organisation
DADO	District Agricultural Development Office
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
ETLS	Economic Threshold Levels
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FECFUN	Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal
FFS	Farmer Field School
IAAS	Institute of Agriculture and Animal Sciences (IAAS)
INGO	International NGO
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IPNS	Integrated Plant Nutrient Systems (IPNS) network in Nepal
JT/JTA	Junior Technician, Junior Technical Assistant
MOAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
NARC	Nepal Agricultural Research Council
NCP	National Planning Commission
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
PPD	Plant Protection Directorate
TITAN	The IPM Trainers Association, Nepal
TOT	Trainer of Trainers
VDC	Village Development Committee
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Introduction



Chapter 1 Introduction

“After taking part in Farmer Field School training indeed the rice yields increased, and when we introduced cauliflower in our cropping systems we earned quite a lot of income from farming. But should we call this ‘development’ when my son is not interested in continuing farming in our fields?” (Male farmer, Sanga village, Kavre, 2009)

1.1 Introduction

The farmer in the quote above expresses his doubts about the meaning of development. He conveys his disappointment because he worked so hard in his fields for the benefit of his family and now his son has other intentions than he had for the future of his farm.

Development projects often show set ideas about the expected results, about their development goals, but they do not always work out as planned, there are unintended outcomes. Policy makers or project planners in development have scope to influence or shape interventions but the circumstances in which they are implemented affect the dynamics and process of decision-making which can lead to a range of possible outcomes (Grindle and Thomas, 1989). This is also the case with the Farmer Field School project in Nepal which is the subject of this book. Our study shows that we concur with Grillo and Stirrat (1997) that development is a highly contentious concept with different objectives and practices.

The Farmer Field School is a participatory approach to agricultural extension, based on adult learning principles and was first implemented in Indonesia in 1989 to deal with widespread pest outbreaks in rice. In 1997 Farmer Fields Schools (FFS) were introduced in Nepal. Thus, the term FFS refers to both a particular approach to agricultural extension as well as to the institution, the schools where the training was given.

In 1996 I got the opportunity to work on the Farmer Field Schools in the Vegetable Integrated Pest Management project in Laos (1996 – 1999) and later in Nepal (1999 – 2002)¹. At that time I was working in the irrigation sector and disappointed with development projects: too much focus on establishing technical infrastructure, corruption, and little attention for farmers’ needs.

I expected the Farmer Field Schools would be different, more participatory, contributing to rural change. I thought FFS was a wonderful method and that it would definitely contribute to yield increase, a better environment, empowerment of participants and that it was an approach including many farmers from different strata, in other words it

¹ Although the projects were called: Integrated Pest Management Projects, Farmer Field Schools were and still are at the heart of the projects. In this study I talk about the Farmer Field School projects, indicating the core elements: Farmer Field Schools, rather than the other integrated pest management activities which were included in the project.

was socially inclusive. I was excited when more women started to participate in FFS and thought this was a sign of gender equality. I was proud to be an FAO programme officer setting up such a programme in Nepal.

1.2 The Farmer Field School (FFS)

The Farmer Field School as a training institution was established by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation in Indonesia in 1989 in reaction to the failure of technology-driven modernisation approach of development. Increasing pest outbreaks, stagnating farm production, called for a different strategy of agriculture extension. With a more holistic and participatory approach the Farmer Field School was developed to provide an answer. More than two million farmers across Asia have participated. It has been considered a great success (Pontius et al., 2002; van den Berg, 2004; Mancini, 2006) to be copied in other countries all over the world (Braun et al., 2000 and 2006; Dilts, 2001; Pontius et al., 2002; Kenmore, 1991; Gallagher, 2003; Braun and Duveskog, 2008). In 1997 the Farmer Field School was introduced in Nepal by the FAO in collaboration with the Plant Protection Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives with the aim to contribute to an increased production and to agriculture development. This was followed by Nepal's participation in the FAO Regional Programme of Community IPM in Asia between 1998 and 2002 funded by the government of Australia (AUSAID). During this period more than 15,000 farmers were trained through a total of 633 Farmer Field Schools. The project started with a focus on integrated pest management. It was a new approach to plant protection and agricultural extension with greater participation of farmers.

Initially the regional FAO CIPM program was hesitant to start activities in Nepal, because of a history of many "constraints and failures" of past projects in the agricultural sector there.² However, the need for an IPM FFS project was clear for four reasons: (1) problems with over-dependence on pesticides existed in the grain belt of the terai and in vegetable growing areas, (2) a majority of the population depended on farming and were in need of improved practices, (3) serious health and environmental problems were associated with pesticides, and (4) the government extension service system was weak. Therefore, a decision was made by the government of Nepal and FAO to start an IPM program. The challenges for the program were fully recognised at the time, and summed up well by a comment from Andrew Bartlett: "One thing is clear; developing a program in Nepal would be an up-hill slog with no guarantee of a positive outcome" (FAO IPM programme officer, e-mail to Peter Ooi, FAO IPM programme officer, May 1997). Due caution was reflected in the Project Document, where it says: "It is not expected that large-scale IPM training will take place in Nepal during the next two to three years. Priority will be given to assist the Ministry of Agriculture in establishing a critical mass of IPM trainers capable of organising Farmer Field Schools".³

Knowing this reluctance to start FFS in Nepal, the deputy leader of the project in Nepal was determined "to prove to FAO and the rest of Asia that her team could do a good job!" (Interview, Kathmandu, July 2009).

² This view is reflected in the FAO Project document (1997), which cites information from the World Bank's Agricultural Manpower Development Project (1984) about many of the activities of His Majesty's Government of Nepal in the agricultural sector

³ FAO, GCP/RAS/172/NOR, Project document, Norway Addendum, 1997.

In a FFS a group of 25 – 30 farmers would meet on a weekly basis to discuss the situation regarding a particular crop and determine which agronomic practice to undertake to solve field problems. Educating farmers, discovery-learning and critical thinking in a participatory way were key elements of FFS. The entire process was facilitated by agricultural technicians from the government or local NGOs.

Farmer Field Schools have been well studied regarding their cost-effectiveness (Feder et al. 2004), their impact on pesticide reduction and farmer's knowledge on insects (Björnsen Gurung, 2002; Thiele et al., 2001; Rola et al., 2002; Tripp et al., 2005), but there is limited evidence of Farmer Field Schools' contribution to rural development, social change and rural transformation. This thesis intends to fill the gap on the basis of first-hand experience in Nepal.

All over the world FFS has been introduced. It is interesting to look at the impact of FFS in a country where it was introduced more than a decade ago and where I was instrumental in the initial establishment of the project. In this thesis I will not evaluate the FFS project but reflect on the processes of change that have taken place both inside the institution of FFS and in terms of the individual and collective transformation of the target group: the Nepalese farmers.

It has been over 14 years since FFS was introduced in Nepal. The FFS or *krishak paryaya* (literally: farmers school), as it is called in Nepalese, was a new concept in the mid-1990s. Nowadays it is a familiar concept, all over Nepal organisations and rural people speak of FFS. The government has adopted it as its key extension method, many NGOs work with FFS techniques. Even the smallest NGO talks about Farmer Field Schools and farmers all over the country can talk about the FFS. What has FFS meant for those farmers? After having worked in development projects “doing development” (Thomas, 2000; Potter, 2000; Bernstein, 2006), as well as in development education for 9 years, I was interested to learn if FFS had contributed to development in Nepal and been instrumental to social change and rural transformation.

While working on FFS, the idea for this thesis was born in 2001 amid mid-term evaluation discussions with Professor Niels Röling of Wageningen University. He was the team leader of this evaluation of the IPM project where I was the programme officer in charge. Together we visited several field schools and he was enthusiastic, he encouraged me to share this interesting project with the rest of the world. He encouraged me to study development and to write about this positive experience, to write about this success story. Although I could not start with the PhD right away the idea was planted in my mind.

Ten years after the start of FFS in Nepal I went back to update my material as part of my PhD research. My intention to write a positive story proved harder along the way. In the Netherlands I took up a position as a senior lecturer in Development Studies at Van Hall Larenstein⁴. As part of my job I studied development theories, to keep ahead of the Bachelor and Master students I am teaching. As a result of increased knowledge and insights, I started

⁴ Since December 2002 I have been a senior lecturer and course coordinator (specialisation social inclusion, gender, rural livelihoods) of the Masters Management of Development at Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Science, part of Wageningen University. To prepare my classes, to supervise Master students and to stay up-to-date with current development theories I continuously study development.

doubting if FFS had actually been such a success story contributing to rural development after all.

After taking up employment in the Netherlands I have visited Nepal on a frequent basis, and as part of this research I talked with hundreds of farmers, men and women. These farmers said they really enjoyed taking part in FFS (Chapter 6 and 7). They had fun in the sessions, learnt new techniques and got new knowledge, sang songs about insects, and were hoping that I was once more bringing them another new training opportunity. It was pleasant sharing their memories, but I had become critical and realised that I had been naive while working in the FFS project.

It was disillusioning that most FFS groups no longer existed, and that farmers wanted more services or development project rather than act autonomously on their own development. I realised that, despite my assumption that all farmers had an equal chance to participate in FFS, the majority of the poor, the untouchables or Dalits and *Janajatis*, had been excluded from FFS. I learnt that farming, in particular food production, was left mainly to the women and that the younger generation is barely interested in farming anymore (see Gartaula, 2011). Also I discovered that talking about empowerment was confusing. I had assumed that farmers were not familiar with the Nepalese term for empowerment: *sanrakshan* (protection) or *samashakti* (powerful together) I thought it to be too sophisticated for rural people; I thought it to be a typical term used by development practitioners, not part of the local vocabulary. Big was my surprise that men and women in rural villages had a clear idea about empowerment. These lessons showed my ignorance about local knowledge, about people's own ideas. Studying development opened my eyes for processes that I had neglected or ignored while working on development.

During this last decade Nepal has been subject to major political changes. In 1997 the Maoist movement had just officially declared their revolution and demands. In 2002 there was a revolution going on and there were strong fights between Maoists, army and civilians. Many men had fled their homes to escape violence and to resist being incorporated by either the government or the Maoist army. Migration for jobs or study abroad was increasing and female headed households in rural villages were on the rise (Gartaula, 2011).

1.3 What has been written about development?

Even though development seems a word with a positive meaning that we all approve of, it hides a number of debates and is subject to changing paradigms and fashions (Allen and Thomas, 2000; Edelmann and Haugerud, 2005). To begin with, the definition or concept of development has been given different meanings. Basic disagreements exist over questions such as: What is meant by development? Development of what? Is it primarily equivalent to the economic concept of progress? Should social aspects be of equal or greater importance? What aspects should be included? How is desirable defined, and by whom? How is progress to be achieved? And how should it be measured? What if development for one group is reached at the expense of other groups in society? Should ideals such as equity, political participation and so on be included in a definition of development?

Development is often associated with improved living standards, well-being and economic opportunities. Some define development mainly from an economic point of view, as basic economic well-being (measured in terms of GNP per capita). Others (Duffield, 2001,

2002; Hardt and Negri; 2000) focus on broader notions of economic development including social transformation, modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation. Amartya Sen's (1999) call for attention to the complexity of human lives and people's capabilities, played an important role for a move away from the material attempts to include human, social and political aspects (Fukuda-Parr, 2003). This has led to a development of comprehensive definitions or formulas comprising a number of human needs to be fulfilled. An example is the Human Development Index of UNDP. The origins of the HDI are to be found in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Reports (HDRs). These were devised and launched by a group of economists in 1990 and had the explicit goal of "putting people back at the centre of the development process in terms of economic debate, policy and advocacy" (UNDP, 1990: 1) and to shift the focus of development economics from national income accounting to people-centred policies (Haq, 1995).

Thomas (2000: 48) made a useful distinction between three senses in which the term 'development' is used and which we shall comment upon in the following sections:

- a) a vision, description or measure of a desirable society;
- b) a historical process of social change in which societies are transformed over longer periods;
- c) deliberate efforts aimed at improvement on the part of various agencies.

1.3.1 Development as a vision

Often it is assumed that there is a common view of what development means, but in fact there is a divide between Western thinking about development and how the people affected understand it (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997). In Nepal for instance, the word development is translated into *bikas* and has a more profound social meaning. As Pigg states: "a meaning that weaves *bikas* into the fabric of local life and pattern of Nepalese society" (Pigg, 1992: 496). Development or *bikas* is often perceived as a commodity that comes from outside and is in permanent short supply (Sharma, 2004). *Bikas* is associated with several things that imply notions of being western, improved, or something new that has come from outside, non-local, belonging to others, to foreigners. It is related to new things: new breeds of goats or chicken, chemical fertiliser, *bikasi bui*: improved or hybrid seeds; but also aeroplanes, roads, schools, bridges, videos. *Bikas* has become everyman's word. It also implies unconditional trust in Western technology, expertise and culture, including agricultural knowledge. This has been my own experience but is also confirmed by others (Pigg, 1992, 1996; Bista, 1991).

During my research I asked villagers to give examples of what they considered 'development':

"For me it is positive changes in education, schools". (Farmer, Paanchkhal, Kavre, 2009)

"I consider development when we got irrigation, schools and health posts". (Farmer, Devpur, Kavre, 2009)

"I see development as improvement in facilities: communication, schools, health centres, bridges". (Farmer, Nasikasthan, Kavre, 2009)

“Development is when the road was built; when electricity came to our village as well as water” (farmer, Yamdi, Kavre, 2009).

Several studies (Pigg, 1992, 1967; Bista, 1991; Sharma, 2004; Stone, 1989) have shown that there are big contrasts between development staff and Nepalese villagers' views of what development should be. In her study in the Tinau watershed in Nepal, Stone (1989) discovered that there is a wide gap between the ideas of development practitioners and villagers. Development requires *behavioural change* according to the project staff. Villagers, on the other hand, mentioned material aspects and visible structures: schools, a health post, an irrigation water system. Messages from development workers related to an improved status such as better nutrition, sanitation, family planning and so on, which were not considered as *bikas* by villagers (Stone, 1989).

As Nepal was never colonised, its outside influence is not directly determined by British domination, although indirectly through Nepal's close linkages with India it has been touched. For Nepal, development - rather than the remainders and marks of imperialism or colonialism - is the visible link with the West.

The elite, in particular those linked to the ruling families in Nepal, had more contact with the world outside Nepal than the majority of the people who lived in rural areas. Nepalese villagers had no idea they were relatively impoverished until a few decades ago (Bista, 2001). Only after the Rana regime was overthrown in 1951 (Gellner, 2008) and King Mahendra Shah took the reign, investment in schools and hospitals, and other infrastructure was encouraged. Outside influences were accepted and the first donor agencies were welcomed. The first development planning process started with assistance in transportation, agriculture and infrastructure. India and the United States were the first countries to provide aid to Nepal. Since then different donors and development paradigms have influenced development in Nepal. (see Chapter 2 for more details).

Rural people in Nepal now identify themselves as an underdeveloped country in relation to the developed world (Pigg, 1992). This is confirmed by rankings such as in the World Development Report or Human Development Indices, where Nepal is listed among the Low Income or Less Developed Countries (see Chapter 2).

Besides the fact that their thinking about development is related to something externally initiated, the view on development of many Nepalese is influenced by religion. The dominant religions in Nepal, Hinduism and Buddhism, put their stamp on development thinking. According to Bista, a renowned Nepalese sociologist, Nepalese think that a life of suffering is compensation for earlier misbehaviour or to prepare oneself for some sort of spiritual promotion (Bista, 1991). Hindu fundamentalists find that foreigners should not interfere in the development of Nepal as it should occur in the course of religious events. Responsibility for a miserable life or for poverty is rarely assumed by the individual but is placed in the hands of others or on fate (*idem*). Many Buddhists also believe that people cannot be actively involved in changing their livelihood and in rural development. According to them development is not a linear progress, but a cyclical movement of the universe in the hands of the gods or cosmic forces. Only good behaviour can improve one's life (*idem*).

Consequently, development or social transformation is considered by a majority of rural Nepalese as something from outside, related to fate, and not something that can be taken into people's own hands. Recently, the coming to power of Maoist leaders is challenging this perception (see Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Historical and institutional processes of rural transformation in Nepal are quite different from, for example, Latin America, to which

much literature on social transformation refers. But undeniably rapid changes have been taking place since the turn of the century in Nepal as well. There is a role for development agencies in the creation and maintenance of a 'desire for development' (De Vries, 2007), but many Nepalese expect their patron or King to provide for them. Many people in Nepal have long had faith in their King, who was considered a god himself, a representative of Vishnu. People have long believed and still trust that the powerful leader will and needs to look after its citizens (Gellner, 2008). The palace was the centre of decision-making power, while binding rules and enforcing laws were tasks delegated to local functionaries. The king was held responsible for the well-being of the kingdom, an idea which has not totally disappeared today. Politics and religion were interconnected. The sovereignty of the king was expressed in ritual and religious terms (Bouillier, 1991). It corresponds to the 'mystical nature of the kingship' stressed by the British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard (in Quigley, 2000: 238). Kingship was clearly less a governmental agency than a ritual office. This view has also implications for the meaning rural people in Nepal give to development.

1.3.2 Historical change

The meaning Nepalese people give to development must be seen in the light of socio-cultural and historical perspectives. That development is associated with something from outside, from the West, which might also have to do with the fact that Nepal remained a closed society till the 1950s. Nepal has long been run for the benefit of a single family, the Rana's or the Shahs (see Chapter 2). For a prolonged time there was no conscious feeling of belonging to a national society, there was no real national economy, and people focused on their village or community life. Under the Rana rule (till 1950) the country was basically closed to foreign influence. The social unit in which decisions and most interactions of individuals took place, was the family, within the larger patrilineal line. The elite Rana family had no wish and vision to modernise the country and used all resources for their own benefit and to maintain power. The Rana's discouraged education (a literacy rate of 2 % - UNFPA, 2007) and foreign aid. Only when the age-old autocratic rule was replaced after 1951 by a party based political system and a new government, did Nepal open up to the outside world.

Nepal's history books usually start with a reference to the events of the 18th century when Prithvi Naryana Shah, one of the Shah kings from Gorkha, united the smaller kingdoms and tribal groups or states into one Hindu Kingdom. The state Nepal in its current geographical shape was formed at that time, more precisely in 1768, when the Gorkha ruler, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, merged several feudal states or independent small kingdoms, which were each governed by an ethnic group. For 79 years, this king was the dominant figure ruling the country. Prithvi Shah managed to unite all the warring kingdoms in a strategic way: he placed his kingdom under some lord Vishnu's patronage and portrayed himself as the messenger of god, to legitimise his power (Bouillier, 1991).

The Shah family remained the ruling force till the mid-19th century, when they lost control to the Rana dynasty. In 1847, after a big massacre of nobles, the then Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana, took over all power, and made it hereditary. The Rana family ruled till 1951, when power went back again to the Shah king(s). The King and the Rana's were justified to rule: they had a personal relationship with the gods and therefore rulers by virtue. The ruling King is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He is a god on earth (Burghart, 1984; Gellner, 2008).

For a long time, administration was centred in Kathmandu and there was not much feeling of involvement of rural people in the government's ruling in Nepal. Due to geographical problems (mountains, poor infrastructure, poor access in hilly areas) people did not travel much to and from Kathmandu. The country was ruled by the King and his followers, a bureaucracy that was composed of influential or educated elite, predominantly high caste and male, who had little affinity with 'common people'. Civil servants enjoyed many privileges (Pradhan, 1993; 1996; 2002).

During the Panchayat time (1960 – 1990) the Nepalese government sought to legitimise and impose a Hindu hegemony, a national culture by homogenising the religiously, linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous society. The key to the legitimisation of the Panchayat rule was the doctrine of 'development' or *bikas*, as a national undertaking. The post-World War II drive of development and the Nepalese ruling elite's need to legitimise itself led to massive inputs of foreign aid into Nepal, to help the 'poor Nepali'. In the course of nationalisation, the Nepali was homogenised, and no attention was given to diversity, ethnic and regional differences (Burghart, 1984.)

Until 1990, Nepal was an absolute monarchy run under the executive control of the King, with some experiments in democratic practice in 1959-1960 (Whelpton, 2005). The decades after 1990 were marked by a shift from coercive state power to a discourse of decentralisation, participation and citizen control, a transformation from feudalism to capitalism.

During the period of my research in 1997, 2002, and 2009, Nepal was subject to major political changes. In 1997 the Maoist movement had just officially declared their revolution and demands (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009). In 2002 there was a revolution going on and there was fierce fighting between Maoists, army and civilians. Many men had fled their homes to escape violence and to resist being incorporated by either the government or the Maoist army. The political landscape is currently in transition from faith-directed and feudal traditions to a more political nation, from a Hindu monarchy to a secular republic. Today, Nepal stands at a crossroad between a brighter future that promises equality, security, and sustainable development and a darker scenario of more political turmoil, civil war and a growing humanitarian crisis. In today's Nepal citizens demand inclusion, participation, claim more freedom and choices than they have known hitherto.

1.3.3 Interventions by agencies

In Thomas' (2000) third sense of the term development it does not mean a desired state or a historical change process, but "whatever is done in the name of development" (Thomas, 2000: 4). Many national and international organisations are presently engaged in activities for development. The Farmer Field School is an example of such intervention.

The contribution of FFS to the development of Nepal cannot be studied without reference to the wider political-economic conditions during the last two decades. The year 1997 when the Farmer Field Schools were introduced in Nepal was also the time that the Maoists officially declared their revolution. When data were collected in 2002, as part of a mid-term evaluation for FAO and the donor AUSAID of the project that had introduced FFS, there was a revolution going on and there was fierce fighting between Maoists, the army and civilians. Many men had fled their homes to escape the violence and to resist being taken by either the government or the Maoists army. In 2001 King Birendra and a large part of his royal family were murdered and the political scene was in turmoil. Migration for jobs abroad

was on the rise and female headed households in rural villages had increased. The impact of these political-economic conditions on rural transformation is an important aspect of this thesis.

In 2007 and 2008 I was able to gather additional data on the social-cultural value and practical meaning of FFS for farmers. The last interviews were taken in 2009. At that time the Maoists had put down their arms and become part of the government, a peace agreement had been signed. The royal family, King Gyanendra had abdicated and president Yadav had been elected. His Royal Majesty's Government or Kingdom of Nepal had been replaced by the Federal Republic of Nepal. In 2008, the country voted in a Constituent Assembly (CA), named a President, elected a Prime Minister, formed a coalition government, and set about the task of writing a new Constitution by 2010, with a new round of elections planned for 2011. The new Nepal that is to emerge is expected to take on a federal character, vastly altering decision-making and administrative processes, challenging power dynamics. Still, political leaders are quarrelling and there remains unrest in the country. The new constitution has not been written yet:

“A meeting of the Constitutional Committee Tuesday decided to give five more days to the Dispute Resolution Sub-committee to resolve the disputed issues of constitution drafting at the request of political parties”. (Nepali Times, 18th April, 2012)

1.4 Doing development versus studying development

Studying development is not the same as doing development. Studying development practices in the field can contribute to improved practices but also lead to more realistic theoretical approaches (Martinussen, 1999). We can distinguish roughly three groups of people: academics who study development, people who combine academic work with development work, and development practitioners who do not engage in academics. In my case I currently teach development but started a study in development as a young student at the age of 19. I studied a BSc course at the Tropical Agricultural College in Deventer, the Netherlands with little theoretical grounding. The BSc course I took was focused on becoming a development practitioner; someone who could contribute to rural development. The course contained a lot of practical knowledge: varying from tropical soils to how to fix an engine. We also learnt to recognise harmful insects, and which types of fodder were available in the tropics. The thought prevailing at that time (1985 – 1988) was that from the West we would be able to contribute to development if we had enough technical knowledge about farming systems, pasture maintenance, insects, plants, animals and husbandry practices and that we needed to be equipped with practical skills to fend for ourselves, e.g. fix a flat tire, dress a chicken, when stuck in the ‘bush’.

Like most people who are working in development I did not consciously implement a certain development theory or paradigm. For development workers like me, development is a goal, an ambition, an ideal. However, development practitioners are not politically neutral since – consciously or unconsciously - individuals and organisations follow a particular discourse in their intervention. Discourse is being defined as a guiding rationale or story that underlies human and organisational socio-political and economic behaviour (Grillo, 1997). In

many contexts there does indeed seem to be a certain 'development gaze' or, to change the metaphor, an authoritative voice which constructs problems and their solution by reference to *a priori* criteria, for example to broad themes which buzz around developmental agencies (Grillo, 1997: 19). This is a development discourse which is "institutionally extensive and comprises of a stock of ideas that informs the praxis of many groups" (Preston 1994: 4 in Kamanzi, 2007:11). There is usually a certain philosophy in development according to which development interventions are planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated, and within which development activities are operated and can be interpreted. In my case, I followed my employer's discourse which was the FAO approach to development in the 1990s (see below).

A practice-oriented approach to the study of development was introduced at Wageningen in the 1980s by Norman Long, and has since obtained wide recognition as a part of an international critique on structural approaches to development (Long, 1989; 2001; Olivier de Sardan, 2005). Escobar (1991) is positive about those researchers studying development who draw on practical development experience. Mosse (2005) and Bernstein (2006) also stress the understanding of practice in 'the development of development thinking' by linking it with theoretical models. In my case, after I studied development for my BSc degree in the 1990s, I was subsequently 'doing' development as a so-called Project Officer of FAO in Nepal (1999-2002). Since 2002 I have been teaching gender and development as a lecturer at the Van Hall Institute which is part of Wageningen University, while at the same time carrying out a PhD in Development Studies at the Rural Development Sociology group of the same university.

With this research project I want to describe, analyse and understand the different dynamics of development interventions, in particular by using the longitudinal experience of Farmer Field Schools in Nepal as a case.

This thesis is thus a product of both doing development and studying development. This study has given me insights which I did not have and would not have been able to acquire as a development practitioner. The outcomes are immaterial as much as material. I have obtained new insights that I can use in my lecturing and in ongoing and future development interventions, apart from producing an academic publication.

1.5 Assumptions

When we study development, we need a multi-faceted and inter-disciplinary perspective. We need to question our frames of reference and re-examine our assumptions. (Allen and Thomas, 1992; 2000). In the case of the Farmer Field School in Nepal I had many assumptions, to name but a few:

1. FFS is a reaction to a modernist approach of technology transfer, applying farmers' participation, and a bottom-up approach addressing the real needs of farmers;
2. It contributed to the empowerment of farmers;
3. The difference between men and women was a cultural matter and none of our concern; if women would not participate it was because they were not interested in Farmer Field Schools;
4. With a proper plan and carefully monitoring of procedures planned results would follow;

5. FFSs have the goal and potential to contribute to agricultural development;
6. The Nepalese government wanted the same development in farming as the farmers themselves.

In the section below I want to elaborate on these assumptions and indicate the concepts and literature that has guided my research.

Assumption 1: FFS is a reaction to a modernist approach of technology transfer, applying farmers' participation, and a bottom-up approach addressing the real needs of farmers

Modernisation is a strategy of development which started to become popular in the 1950s and 1960s, the post-WWII period as it is often called. This paradigm implies transformation from a traditional society, which was considered an underdeveloped situation, to a modern way of living, brought about by economic development through industrialisation. Economic growth was seen as the way to reach modernity, through technical and economic change processes (Thomas, 2000; Potter 2000). The post-war reconstruction or Marshall plan was given conceptual support during the 1950s in the form of a modernisation theory promoted by Rostow and other American economists. Rostow (1960) argued that development goes in stages through which tradition, low income societies move and ultimately reach a take off point, based on financial investment, improved governance and improved technologies. These steps will set them on a course of self-sustaining growth. This way 'underdeveloped' countries can, with assistance, be brought to development in the same manner as the more developed countries were. This theory held that all societies progress through similar stages of development, that poor states are thus in a similar situation today as currently developed areas once were, and that therefore the task in helping the underdeveloped areas out of poverty is to accelerate them along this supposed common path of development, by various means such as investment, technology transfers, and closer integration into the free world market (Fukuyama, 1995).

In the 1980s the rising power of neoliberalism triggered by oil crises and the election of right-wing powerful governments such as in Britain, the United States, created an era of unprecedented power for the international financial institutions (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). The IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) firmly reinstated technical and economic policy solutions to underdevelopment. Structural adjustment was materialised in down-sizing public institutions and public service budget cuts.

Initially most of these development strategies saw development as a *technical* problem requiring technical solutions—better tools or technologies, better planning algorithms, better trade and pricing policies, better macroeconomic frameworks; a so called technocratic approach. Although this view on development started in the 1950s-1960s it is still widely practised and debated. For example, Bartlett (2007) stated: "The problem, I believe, is that the theory and practice of development is inherently technocratic, and remains rooted in the 'high modernist' period of political thought that existed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War" (Bartlett, 2007:55).

Not surprisingly, modernisation theory is subject to criticism (Martinussen, 1999). Criticism is mainly based upon the fact that there is continued widespread poverty in much of the world, several governments are burdened by debt and increased concerns about the environmental impact of modernisation. It was realised that a purely technical, top-down

approach, with externally imposed policies did not make things better for the poor and vulnerable in society.

The 1990 the World Development Report (WDR), dedicated to poverty, shows strong traces of an adapted policy agenda put forward in reaction to the critique the bank received on their structural adjustment programmes. In their report: *Adjustment with a Human Face* (World Bank 1990) they advocated investment in human capital and social safety nets.

In the 1970s a growing demand started in many parts of the world for people to be involved in decision-making processes which affected their lives. The goals of equality and poverty alleviation entered explicitly into the development scene. When the call for more people's participation was raised, the debate started about 'what is participation', 'who should and who does participate' and 'how can we achieve participation'. Significant in initiating this debate has been the influence of Paulo Freire on development thinking. He argues in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) that the "oppressed" needed to unite to find a way to improve their own destinies. He also called for action to 'give voice to the voiceless'. The call for people's participation is part of a broader paradigm shift responding to the large body of critical writings about top-down, modernist and authoritarian approaches that have dominated development over the last 50 years. (Escobar, 1995; Kabeer, 1994; Scott, 1998; 1985).

During the 1980s, people-centred approaches of popular participation were a reaction, arising out of neoliberal reforms and the realities of the inadequate state. Community participation became a channel through which popular participation began to be operationalised in the name of efficiency (Chambers, 1993; Cornwall and Brock, 2005). In the process, participation took a rather different shape than that conveyed by the statements of intent that preceded it. Rather than seeking people's engagement in defining and shaping their own development, the 1980s community participation largely focused on involving "intended beneficiaries" in development projects (Martinussen, 1999). In Nepal I have observed this kind of participation in irrigation schemes where project participation of people meant carrying stones, digging canals and providing free labour. Cost-sharing and the co-production of services emerged as dominant modes of participation; the concept of ownership began without any association with people's needs and priorities and a transfer of power and control.

Around the same period the focus on poverty reduction had shifted to the basic needs approach, which suggested that the focus of aid should change from investment in capital formation to the development of human resources. People's participation was positioned as key element of this approach. Statements from UN organisations like the one in 1975 when the United Nations Economic and Social Council urged governments to adopt popular participation as a basic policy measure in national development strategy..." [and] encourage the widest possible active participation of all individuals and national non-government organisations in the development process, in setting goals, formulating policies and implementing plans" (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980:213; Cornwall and Brock, 2005).

Participation has remained a strong discourse in development. Nowadays it is an inevitable dimension of any project planning and policy-making for several reasons: participation results in greater legitimacy with the donors (Vandenabeele and Goorden, 2007). Participation means different things to different people on the donor side as well as on the side of the receiving or targeted people. The most suitable level of involvement and activity will depend on many factors – including the decisions, contexts, participants and values of the individuals involved.

The literal definition of participation is 'taking part'. The question: *who participates?* is important, and at the heart of this question are aspects of power. People's power and participation in development activities and citizenship discussions have been analysed and different ladders of participation have been designed (Pretty et al, 1995; Adnan et al., 1992). Participation in development is also seen as a deliberate effort within government and non-governmental organisations alike, to increase the access and control over resources and related decision-making of the client or target group that is assumed to contribute to sustainable livelihoods and increase democracy (Li, 2007). Participation is furthermore an inter-active process involving the continuous re-adjustment of relationships between different actors in a society in order to increase control and influence over development initiatives that affect their lives (Li, 2002; 2006).

It is well recognised that there are various levels or degrees of participation ranging from simple consultation to joint decision-making to self-management by the actors. As with many powerful and popular concepts, participation is used (and sometimes misused) to describe many different relationships and activities.

The academic discussion on participation is mainly limited in order to make a distinction between participation as a *means* to achieve project goals effectively and efficiently, and as an *end* to enable local people or groups to take more control of their own lives. Participation as a tool to achieve better project outcomes versus participation as an equality or empowerment process which enhances the capacity of individuals to improve their own lives and facilitates social change to the marginalised in society. Participation is both a strategic and a methodological goal of development (Connell, 1999).

Sherry Arnstein discusses types of participation and "nonparticipation" in *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969). She grades levels of participation from manipulation (least citizen participation) to citizen control (most citizen participation)⁵. Arnstein continues to define citizen participation as "the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future".

Multiple other "ladders" of participation have been presented (Pretty et al., 1995; Adnan et al., 1992) indicating different levels of decision-making. Adnan et al. (1992) provide a typology (see below) whereby most forms of participation are top-down or externally initiated, only the last two options are indicating that people take control over their own resources and livelihood strategies, put the beneficiaries at the centre of a development process that they will lead and continuously adjust, according to their own learning processes and needs.

A further differentiation of forms of participation, put forward by Sarah White (1996), offers some insights into the different interests at stake in various forms of participation. Unlike Pretty and Arnstein her model is less a strategy to indicate levels, but more meant as a way of working out how people make use of participation (nominal, instrumental, representative, transformative). This can be a useful tool to identify conflicting ideas about why or how participation is being used at any particular stage in a process.

Typologies such as these can be read as being normative and hierarchical, implying an evolution towards more 'real' forms of participation (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). However, in most projects there might not be such thing as a clearly demarcated level, or single form of

⁵ The complete original text of Arnstein, dates from 1969, but is still referred to and can be found on <http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>

participation. In one project or intervention there can be participation both in the form of data collection and information sharing and at some stage active engagement. Additionally, when these forms of participation are contextualised, they become more ambiguous. Participation through information sharing, for example, might limit more active engagement, although it could be argued that project transparency about certain kinds of information opens up the possibility of collective action in monitoring the consistency of rhetoric with practice. Self-mobilisation or empowerment might be considered the ultimate form of participation on one of the scales (Pretty et al., 1995), but might not be in line with the expectations citizens have of state obligations (de Vries, 2007; Cornwall, 2008). Perhaps people prefer to get a flow of information, rather than having to take part in obligatory group activities to get agricultural extension?

These typologies or levels might be helpful for some people to get insights into the levels of decision-making or involvement of beneficiaries or clients in certain activities, but it implies a very technical approach towards the process of participation, which cannot be captured in simple or well demarcated levels. These typologies do not give answers to the question: *Under what conditions and when does meaningful participation take place?*

In the Farmer Field School in Nepal participation was translated in a technocratic way: the required number of participants (20 to 25) in a group, the steps to conduct a participatory training: in subgroups with assignments. There was little attention for people's initiatives and self-mobilisation. There was little attention for the on-going process that participation could enhance, and no attention for power imbalances. Participation in FFS became a technical fix, it became something that is a-historical, non-political (Ferguson, 1994) and decontextualised. The literature is quite vague on the incentives which will make people decide to participate. It is often assumed that individuals will participate when they are convinced that it is for their own benefit. Individual interests such as respect and prestige are hardly considered (Cleaver, 1999). In some cases people might take part because they feel it is their social responsibility. Generally material benefits are counted as the major reasons for participation (Büscher, 2010).

Cooke and Kothari (1997; 2001) challenge the term participation and the participatory development orthodoxy. They debate that participatory development facilitates tyranny or unjust exercise of power. They show what happens when complex and contextual concepts like participation are applied to large development projects on tight time lines. Project staff is accused of closing their eyes for differences and power inequalities, but tend to focus on easy deliverable and measurable outcomes. This is what happened to me and most of my colleagues in the Farmer Field School project. Participation, or other popular concepts, were defined by project parameters rather than applied in a dynamic and challenging way. In the FFS project participation became a measurable outcome by quantifying the number of farmers that took part, and participation was technically defined in procedures which the facilitators learned to follow. The sequence of the steps in FFS sessions, the questions to ask farmers, the group tasks: they were all kinds of 'tools' taught to FFS extension workers or facilitators in the training of trainers and expected to be followed in FFS.

The mere challenges and dynamics of participation in communities in Nepal are further elaborated in Chapter 5. In Chapter 8 the involvement of different actors in implementing FFS is discussed.

Modernisation theory was once assumed a “homogenous path to development” (Arce and Long, 2000:4) based on a Western notion of “modernity” (Arce and Long, 2000:1). In the 21st century the concept of modernity was revised. The new modernisation theory not only stresses the process of change but also the responses to that change. It seeks to explain the process of social evolution (Giddens, 1991). It also looks at internal dynamics while referring to social and cultural structures and the adaptation of new technologies. In practice ideas on modernity are appropriated and re-embedded in locally situated practices, leading to more “fragmentation and dispersal” of modernity (Arce and Long (2000:1).

In this light it is useful to make a distinction between modernisation and modernity. Whereby modernisation entails a comprehensive package of technical and institutional measures aimed at technical and social transformation, implemented by cosmopolitan administrative and technological elites ‘modernity’ can be seen as a metaphor for something new and contains “self-organising and transforming practices in different strata and sectors of society”(Arce and Long, 2000:2).

In Chapter 6 the adoption and application of modern knowledge and technologies, so called modernisation measures as they have been introduced in Farmer Field Schools will be discussed, as well as how farmers apply and adopt these technologies in their own local situation and practices, their own modernity.

Assumption 2: FFS contributed to the empowerment of farmers

Participation, empowerment, many argue that these recent development buzzwords, dress up old and successful practices in a new language (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Mosse, 1994; 2005, Biggs and Smith, 1998; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997; Chambers, 1997). Initially in Farmer Field Schools the focus was on integrated pest management and yield increase. Later, one of the objectives of Farmer Field Schools became farmer’s empowerment. As Peter Ooi and others proudly state in their publications: Farmer Field Schools are vehicles for the empowerment of farmers (Ooi, 1998; Pontius et al, 2002; Bartlett 2004; Hounkonnou et al., 2006).

Empowerment is an often debated concept in the academic world, but in development practice it seems to be used without much discussion, assuming that it is always a ‘good’ thing and having a positive impact on farmers. Empowerment is a concept which was introduced in the development world in the 1980s and became popular in the 1990s. It is possible to observe trends in the conceptualisation of empowerment together with wider approaches to development. The early explanations are associated with the basic needs approach to development and a shift from a top-down technocratic approach to a call for popular involvement. In order to understand what empowerment means in practice, in Chapter 7 I have considered it as a process of change that requires a transformation of ideologies, the invisible power dimension, a structural change (Mayo, 1999).

First I looked at the concept of power in empowerment, and then I discussed different academic definitions of the word empowerment. After a theoretical elaboration, I analysed if farmers’ experience is in line with Batliwala’s (1994) and Kabeer’s (2001) remarks on empowerment, to see if indeed empowerment is an interaction between resources and agency, related to transformation of power relations, and the increased ability to make choices previously denied to male and female farmers. Kabeer and Batliwala’s experiences demonstrate that empowerment should be regarded as a process of change at different

levels, from individual to institutional. Instead of attempting to locate, measure or label agency, I try to understand how farmers in Nepal as a result of FFS can put agency in practice, what leads to empowerment. As farmers are not a homogeneous group and women and men have different roles in agriculture in Nepal they have different views on empowerment. It will become evident that *empowerment in practice* for men and women farmers is rather different from what development policy makers and FFS facilitators understand it to be (see Chapter 7 for more details).

Assumption 3: The difference between men and women was a cultural matter and not of our concern; if women did not participate it was because they were not interested in Farmer Field Schools

Farmers were the main focus of attention in the FFS project in Nepal. However, it has long been established that farmers are not a homogenous group (Pradhan, 2002; Guijt et al. 1998; Anderson, 1983) and include many sub-groups of interest and identities. These can be based on age, gender, education, language, income, health status, etc. For the purpose of analysis in the Nepalese context it is increasingly acknowledged that variables such as gender, caste and ethnic identity influence poverty and vulnerability outcomes (Bennett, 2006). The interlinkage is not easy to analyse, let alone address. For centuries the issues have been ignored but nowadays even the government of Nepal writes openly about caste, ethnicity and gender as co-determinants of poverty in its PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan) and Tenth Plan (2002 – 2007) and Eleventh Plan (2007 – 2012). The data on gender, caste and ethnic dimensions of poverty are still very incomplete and dealing with these issues is still a sensitive matter (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009; Bennett, 2002).

It can be stated that in the FFS programme the existing hierarchies⁶ of caste, ethnicity and gender have not been challenged. The FFS programme is not an exception. As Lynn Bennett (2002) reported in her World Bank report:

“Many economists working on India or Nepal are reluctant to mention caste or ethnicity by name in their analytical and policy writing” Similar experiences are found in the FAO IPM programme. Staff seems to avoid talking about specific ethnicities or castes. Discussions on these topics are often swept off the table with remarks in the vein of: “nowadays caste and ethnicity do not matter anymore; this is something from the past. Policy makers and IPM trainers prefer more neutral terms such as “poor farmers”, “vulnerable groups” or “disadvantaged communities”, thereby avoiding the issue altogether. (Bennett, 2002:1).

In 1997 social exclusion was not considered an issue in FFS, most beneficiaries belonged to the upper caste, only in some villages Janajatis were in the majority. With regards to gender it was considered normal practice that in the FFS project the key players were men. Under influence of the Women in Development Paradigm of 2002 gender received some attention, in particular the fact that women should be key participants in the project. At that time it was already accepted by many staff and policymakers that the important role of women in agriculture in Nepal required to be reflected in the FFS project (Van de Fliert and Proost,

⁶ In the Nepalese context, like the Indian, we can speak of a hierarchy of ethnic groups because ethnicity and caste are intertwined and developing together in modern Nepal (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009).

1999). Also the donor requested specific attention for gender in the project; this can be read in the Nepal's National IPM Programme Country Report (2001:8):

“The National IPM Programme in Nepal is committed to provide women and men equal access to their training. The Programme wants to implement its activities on a gender equal basis. That this is not easy and straightforward is the experience during the implementation of the programme. “Despite the fact that most IPM trainers are male and given little training on gender issues, the participation of women has increased in the Farmer Field School. Gender remains an area however, that needs attention in the near future”.

There was, however, no elaboration on which action to take and there was no definition or clarification of what is meant by gender equality in the project documents. In FFS addressing gender issues does not go beyond the objective of having men and women participate on an equal basis. This means, once women have gained access. The structural inequity of gaining access however, has not been addressed in practice, nor the issue of women belonging to different castes/ethnic groups.

In practice, FFS had no gender perspective in its policy and activities. A large number of female participants were considered a success in terms of gender. As stated by an FAO officer in Bangkok: “we do not need a gender approach, women just come to our FFS without specifically targeting them” (interview 2006). In the Mid Term review report by FAO (2006) it was concluded that: “In the field neither social nor gender discrimination is a problem at grassroots level” (FAO, 2006:6). The fact that lower castes and ethnic minorities were often excluded from participation was simply ignored.

That it is not easy to improve the access for women in FFS was the experience of Laila Jasmin Banu and Brigitte Bode (Banu and Bode, 2002 in Bartlett, 2004: 68) in a critical review of the FFS approach by CARE in Bangladesh. They stated that:

“Problems in working with women are largely due to the highly gendered division of labour and the limited mobility that women from landholding households enjoy. Just as in other countries of South Asia, women perform the vast majority of reproductive tasks and have little time left to take part in training sessions. As many studies of South Asian gender dynamics have shown, the greater the economic marginalisation of the household, the greater the likelihood that women are engaged in productive activities (selling of labour for wages in cash or kind). Thus women from poor households have little time and opportunity to participate in FFS sessions.”

In Nepal, female participation in Farmer Field Schools varies from 100% in some areas (e.g. Bhaktapur district) to 0% in some terai communities. Among the IPM trainers only 7% is female (National IPM Programme Country Report, 2002). It has been noted that in the last IPM Mid Term Review Report (2006:8) gender issues have been marginalised with the following statement: “Field visits and programme documents suggest that neither social – nor gender discrimination is a problem at grassroots level” ().

Gender is a term introduced to make the distinction between the biological or naturally given characteristics of men and women indicated by sex (Oakley, 1972) and the psychological and cultural differences between men and women (gender). The argument to

make a distinction between sex and gender is not because biological differences between men and women do not matter, but because social relations between men and women cannot be explained by biological differences or 'natural facts' only (Zwarteveen, 2006). Gender is an ordering principle, organising and creating relations between men and women in a hierarchical way, as well as a process of giving meaning and obtaining recognition or legitimation.

Gender is still providing a useful lens with which to analyse social institutions and processes. Gender remains a central part of the understanding, and the objectives, of development; a gender focus has shown new aspects of development understanding. Gender provides the basis for deconstructing and understanding the reality of men's and women's lives and the gendered nature of economic, social and political processes (Pearson, 2000).

Gender is more than emphasising the importance of female participation in the Farmer Field School. Gender issues focus on the difference between men and women and on the relationship among and between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour, interests and needs. Gender relations affect household security, family well-being, planning, production and many other aspects of life (Bravo-Baumann, 2000). Gender can be seen as an organising principle that shapes the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and arrangements such as distribution of labour, land and other valued resources in a society.

Keeping in mind that Nepal is diverse we can make a start by acknowledging that men and women experience transformation processes and outcomes differently; a gender perspective is a way of looking at and understanding (social) realities. In Chapter 2 more information regarding gender issues, and in particular the status of women, is provided.

Too often gender is simplified as relating to women only, rather than as referring to relations of power, privilege and prestige informed by situated notions of maleness and femaleness (Indra, 1999: xiv in Schrijvers, 1999). With gender I refer to the socially constructed roles and behaviours of and expectations regarding women and men in society. "Gender relations refer to a complex system of personal and social relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to power and material resources or are allocated status within society" (IFAD, 2012: 38). The nature of gender relations – relations of power between women and men – is not easy to grasp in its full complexity. They are revealed not only in the division of labour and resources between women and men, but also in ideas and representations – the ascribing to women and men of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behaviour patterns, and so on (Agarwal, 1997:1) . In any culture, every man and woman is expected to play the gendered script as perfectly as possible according to the norms and values of the society. For example, if it is expected that one of the good attributes of an ideal wife is submissiveness (a script), the wife is expected to become submissive. Deviations from descriptive norms usually elicit disapproval, shock or even censure from others. They may affect social interactions. Contrary to sex, gender roles are not biologically given but constructed and learned, and changeable over time; they differ per society and are shaped by social, cultural, economic, political and many other factors. I consider gender not as a given but what it means to be a woman or man as socially constructed and subject to change. Gender roles, identities and relations are not tangible and static, but matters of negotiation, debate and controversy, and of continuous processes of practice and giving meaning.

In this thesis, however, I do not elaborate much on the process of construction of gender but merely look at different experiences of men and women in changing agricultural practices and empowerment. In the project implementation we might not have considered it our concern, but it matters for project management. By getting more insights in the experiences of men and women I want to get a better understanding of social constructions of reality. The differentiation in the way men and women experience participation in the Farmer Field Schools is further elaborated in Chapter 6 and 7.

Assumption 4: With a proper plan and carefully monitoring of procedures planned results will follow

When we started with FFS in 1997 we went through the traditional project cycle steps of feasibility and planning, and wrote a comprehensible, well structured project document. The project document was the result of a rather technocratic approach towards development, whereby logical frameworks formed the basis of all the activities to take place, and outputs were the focus of our activities. Indicators of the outputs are for instance the number of master trainers⁷ trained, the number of farmers participating in FFS, number of farmers who have conducted action research, number of farmer trainers registered, numbers of FFS groups or farmers associations registered with the District Development office. For me as a programme officer these indicators provided a set of clear targets. With donors wanting quick and tangible results, the use of such an international commonly accepted planning tool is helpful. The use of a log frame is practical, relatively simple and provided a clear tool to communicate intentions to donors and staff from implementing agencies.

Although this project document guided us through the implementation of the project, the results were different from what we had anticipated. Several outputs did not turn out the way they were written in the project documents, and some outcomes were unforeseen. The coordination between institutions was not enhanced as planned, farmers groups did not function as anticipated, not all farmers adopted the practices introduced in FFS, and monitoring and evaluation remained weak during the project duration. Such discrepancy between a plan and the final result of a project is not unusual as most interventions work out differently from expectations (Grindle and Thomas, 1989; Ferguson, 1994; Malpas and Wickham, 1995).

Initially the project focused on outputs as concrete measureable results, such as yield increase or pesticide reduction. Outputs were defined as the direct product of the project activities. Later it was realised that FFS led to outcomes which are more difficult to verify and often contain more qualitative attributes such as farmers' empowerment. Outcomes are usually defined as the effects or changes that occur, that are a result of the project, but are also influenced by other factors. It is clear that processes are paramount in the long run for much of agricultural and rural development, rigid 'blueprint' planning is thus inappropriate, yet structure is needed to guide actions and the log frame can provide such structure.

Despite acknowledgement of a need for increased complexity of development strategies, governments and international agencies still use rational planning and management tools to control development interventions to reach their own goals (Rondinelli, 1993).

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A senior trainer, who has participated in a training of trainers and subsequently trains other staff to become a FFS facilitator or trainer, is called a master trainer.

When we developed the project and designed the log frame we had limited knowledge of the situation of the farmers that were our intended beneficiaries, we had not anticipated the political turmoil and rapid social changes that would take place in Nepal and we also had no clear idea what the outcome of Farmer Field Schools would be. In this we were not unique. In reality development planners have attempted to promote social and economic development intervention with little knowledge of the conditions they were seeking to transform and with little certainty that their plans would produce the desired effect. Project planners often do not know the background, the needs and the context intended beneficiaries reside (Rondinelli, 1993). This was also the case in the FFS project. The project planners followed the simple notion that farmers were poor and in need of improved technology to improve their agricultural production.

In Chapter 6 I discuss how the Farmer Field School, as a project, changed direction over the years and instead of focusing on outputs became more process-oriented.

Policy makers or decision-makers in development have scope to influence or shape interventions but the circumstances in which they are placed affect the dynamics and process of decision-making and can lead to a range of possible outcomes (Grindle and Thomas, 1989). Interventions do not work out as planned, they are not linear and predictable, and interventions will give unexpected results (Grindle, 1980). There is no blue print for development (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997), the involvement of many different actors in a dynamic context shows that "Development is a multi-faceted, multi vocal process and a complex site of contestation" (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997: VIII).

A concept like the Farmer Field School might be introduced as a blue print, but in the hands of different actors the implementation varies and FFS becomes a construct of different actors, a conglomeration of different actions, of different actors each with their own agenda and strategies. In Chapter 8 I will elaborate how the involvement of many diverse actors influenced decision-making and the implementation of FFS.

These actors involved in the construction of FFS do not act in a vacuum but are influenced by the institutional setting in which they move, a dynamic process, changing over time, albeit strongly influenced by socio-cultural and historical arrangements (Mosse, 1999).

In chapter 6 I will explain how FFS in Nepal became embedded in the institutional setting and evolved under influence of a changed context. In chapter 8 I want to provide an understanding of this process and how FFS has been adopted and adapted under pressure of governance dynamics. Besides the multiple setting and the multi-rationality of development actors the multidimensional aspects of power also need to be considered (Olivier de Sardan, 2005).

I want to show that the FFS project was implemented differently from our technocratic designed plan, that governance is a construct of different actors, a conglomeration of different actions, of different actors each with their own agendas and strategies, in a dynamic context. In this chapter I want to provide an understanding of this process. The different levels of power as introduced by Eric Wolf will be used, in particular his concept of structural power.

Assumption 5: FFS has the goal and potential to contribute to agricultural development

The focus of the FFS has initially been on concrete measurable results, such as decreased use of pesticides, increased yield. After about five years it became clear that FFS was more than a project, it became institutionalised in rural Nepal and outcomes such as empowerment (see Chapter 7) became more important. These longer term contributions of FFS to rural society appeared to be broader than agricultural development and moving more into the direction of rural development.

Here I distinguish between agriculture and rural development. With agricultural development I refer to improved agricultural production often indicated by yield increase, changed farming practices, and the use of improved technologies.

While with rural development I point to a more dynamic and inclusive process, a social transformation. Rural transformation thus refers to fundamental changes in the composition of rural economic life and social organisation – changes associated with increased complexity and more linkages outside rural life (Woods, 2011; Koppel and Zurick, 1988; Gartaula, 2011). This process is always contingent on the coming together of different actors, local, international, regional and elements, including agriculture as well as non-farming activities. It is an inherently political process, involving constant negotiation and contestation. Rural transformation and social change are complex processes, influenced by multiple forces. It encompasses individual, organisational and structural levels with the representation of the community, and the rural men and women's needs and interests lying at the heart of the discussion. It involves a transformation of relations and changing prevailing patterns of access and control over resources, of challenging ideologies of top-down technology transfer and changing the institutions and structures. It can happen as a response to economic changes, introduction of new technology, political uprising, and migration.

Farmer Field Schools were introduced in Nepal as an integrated pest management project in 1997 with concrete output oriented goals: increase of agricultural production and pesticide use reduction. This was a government policy and the government used FFS as a vehicle to introduce vegetables and expand the vegetable production area. Over the years it expanded and many farmers received training.

Soon it became clear that FFS was not an end in itself (Bartlett, 2002), the training that farmers received led to capacity-building and a process of rural development. Over the years FFS developed and the intended outcomes became more process oriented, such as farmer empowerment, capacity-building. With its focus on participation FFS gave an enormous input to agricultural extension, it moved away from the top-down and purely technology transfer approach. FFS facilitated a closer collaboration with farmers, a more practical orientation for trainers and extension workers. Agricultural technicians changed their attitudes towards farmers, came to appreciate their knowledge and ideas more and started to accept farmers as partners in development rather than people who needed to be told or instructed what to do.

It is the involvement of women farmers in FFS, their increased knowledge of farming, increased feeling of control over agricultural production that leads to empowerment, to their capability to take informed decisions about issues they have not been able to make choices about before. Women feel increasingly confident and proud about this capability and their

capacity. Simultaneously other political changes that are taking place in their country, their village, like the Maoist uprising, the migration of men for jobs abroad, social change or transformation have occurred that stimulated them to use their newly acquired power. In Chapter 6 the impact of FFS on agricultural and rural development is covered.

Assumption 6: The Nepalese government wanted the same development in the case of farming as the farmers themselves

During the discussions at the beginning of the project it was taken for granted that the Nepalese government knew what was best for its citizens, that the Ministry of Agriculture was most up-to-date with the situation of Nepalese farmers. In the project documents there is no explicit reference to farmers' needs, one can read between the lines that it is assumed that farmers are poor and in need of improved technology to advance their agricultural production.

Crewe and Harrison (1998) rightly concluded that project implementers might wrongly assume that farmers have the same objective in mind as they have. If we look at the history of Nepal it has taught us that the ruling elite in Nepal had different objectives than the general citizens in rural areas. Until recently farmers were exploited and were considered subjects with obligations and duties towards the ruling forces, this has recently changed to viewing farmers as clients with citizens' rights. It is thus, in the light of this history, unlikely that the government has the same objectives as farmers in terms of progress. Additionally we know that development, or *bikas* in Nepal, is given a different meaning by policy-makers and development agencies than by the intended beneficiaries or so called target group.

People are likely to have different ideas or plans from those that development agencies had in mind with their interventions (Arce and Long, 2000). We need to consider the multi-rationality of development actors (Olivier de Sardan, 2005). Projects are often implemented differently than initially planned for, because the intended beneficiaries exploit the opportunities at their disposal in keeping with their own particular objectives. For instance, micro-credit intended for vegetable production might be used to set up a small shop or simply to buy medicines for a family member suffering an illness. In Mauja, a village in Kaski, drip irrigation was introduced and dalits were targeted as beneficiaries. Rather than using the equipment for drip irrigation, the buckets were used for washing clothes, simply because that was their priority and they had no land available for drip irrigation cultivation (Mauja, discussions with villagers, 2009). Intended beneficiaries make use of elements of development interventions in a way that suits them best, under given circumstances (De Koning, 2011).

In chapter 6 I will discuss how and which technologies that have been promoted in FFS have been adopted by farmers. In chapter 8 I will describe the decision-making processes, the various actors and multiple power dimensions that can partly explain the outcomes of FFS.

On the basis of all these assumptions we can now reflect on the FAO approach to development through Farmer Field Schools. We concur with Li (2006: 6) who elaborates on the depoliticisation of development when a project approach is formatted in a way that may be 'rendering technical' evident social, cultural, or economic inequities. With rendering

technical she refers to the way in which the identified problem and the chosen solutions are made amenable to available forms of monitoring and evaluation, to measurement, calculation and audit. Development was conceived as merely technocratic, leaving social issues and politics out of the development equation. A vital point here is that rendering technical is a form of depoliticisation or an anti-politics move (Ferguson, 1994) as it ignores the social and historical context and personal experience in favour of a formal, universal objective” and neutral assessments. Although I was aware of the socio-cultural and historical context of the project, I focused on the formal, universal objective of educating the farmers by following specific steps in setting up the FFS training. Also, I used project documents with elaborate logical frameworks as guidelines as a neutral way of reporting. Moreover, in the implementation of FFS in Nepal in the 1990s, evidently socially and economically relevant issues of caste and gender were not considered (see Chapters 6, 7, 8).

1.6 Research problem

Farmer Field Schools have been studied regarding their cost-effectiveness (Feder et al. 2004), their impact on pesticide reduction and farmers’ knowledge on insects (Braun et al., 2006; Bjørnsen Gurung, 2002; Thiele et al., 2001; Rola et al., 2002; Tripp et al., 2005), but there is limited evidence of Farmer Field Schools’ contribution to social change and rural transformation. It is not clear how FFS contributes to changes in farming practices, and ultimately towards the empowerment of male and female farmers. Also the multi-rationality of the various actors and the role of the different governmental and non-governmental actors in the implementation of Farmer Field Schools are under-studied. In other words: how is FFS used as a governance tool?

Although FFS started off as a *project* in the sense of a unique endeavour with a beginning and an end on a pre-defined temporal and spatial scale, undertaken to achieve a certain goal, in practice FFS turned out to be a longer-term development process. FFS did not follow a linear route and it had unintended outcomes. In this research I try to create a picture of FFS as a *process* and its contribution to rural transformation and social change in Nepal. I will look at the impact FFS had on farmers, but also how male and female participants of different castes/ethnic groups impacted the shape and contribution of FFS to more recent political economic and governmental changes. I will discuss the wider institutional context and the governance processes associated with implementation of FFS, including the decision-making regarding resources and manpower, and the changes over time between 1997 and 2011.

Contrary to FFS claims about its contribution to the empowerment of farmers in Nepal (Bartlett, 2002), I wanted to see what really happened, who were empowered, how this took place, and with what societal consequences. Empowerment cannot be studied in isolation, as the ‘giving power to’ or the ‘acknowledgement of agency’ is part of social processes of everyday interaction and decision-making of the implementing agencies and their subjects, the Nepalese men and women farmers.

The technocratic approach discussed above did not address political and economic inequities, gender and empowerment of farmers. By looking at different stages of contributions of FFS in Nepal, I reflect on rural transformation and gendered empowerment.

1.6.1 Research objective

This research contributes to our knowledge of the contribution to development of Farmer Field Schools in the rural areas of Nepal. I regard FFS not just a technical intervention but as part of a dynamic social process through time and in a particular institutional context. The objective of this study is to get a better understanding of the process of rural transformation over the last decade, the power play of actors, at multiple institutional and societal levels, and the political-economic and social changes that have taken place during this period. In this longitudinal research I reflect upon the practice of 'doing development' through my active involvement and leading position in the implementation of FFS in Nepal in the 1990s, and the way FFS as a tool for development became embedded in Nepalese governmental structures and institutional setting and contributed to social change over the past 15 years. With my study I wish to provide insights in the FFS as means for development for the benefit of both development practitioners and scholars.

Research questions:

1. What is the contribution of Farmer Field Schools to rural transformation?
2. How did Farmer Field Schools contribute to the empowerment of male and female farmers in the long-term?
3. How did FFS become embedded in the Nepalese governmental structure and for who is the Farmer Field School a tool of governance in Nepal?

Sub-questions were formulated as follows:

- How did the implementation of FFS as a development process take place?
- Which are the relevant multiple level processes taking place?
- How is the Farmer Field School, particularly ideas about empowerment, a construct of different actors?
- How did FFS become embedded in Nepalese governmental and non-governmental structures and in social institutions?
- What are the unintended outcomes of FFS implementation in rural Nepal between 1997 and 2009?

1.7 Methodology

This is a longitudinal study for which I was able to collect data at three different moments: at the time when Farmer Field Schools started, in 1997, during the mid-term evaluation of the FFS project, at the end of the first project phase in 2002, and in 2008-2009. It enabled me to study the Farmer Field School both as a concept or tool for development by international agencies (FAO) and national government agencies, as well as the contribution of Farmer Field Schools in rural settings to development as a process of change over time. When I refer to the concept or the institution of FFS, I will use the singular term (FFS), while the term Farmer Field Schools (in plural) applies to them as organisations with a curriculum and activities targeting male and (later) female farmers.

For this research both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used, varying from participant observation and observational participation during my years as FFS trainer to focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with male and female farmers who were included or excluded from FFS, during the subsequent research phases. Also, secondary sources like project documents and government reports were studied and their data compared with my own results.

In line with Praneetvatakul and Waibel (2006) and Mancini (2006) I recognise that assessing the contribution of FFS to development requires a mixture of approaches and disciplines. Therefore I applied a multi-sited approach speaking with professionals from different disciplines (agriculture, pest management, sociologists, planners, multimedia, education), policy makers from the national government and NGOs, international organisations like FAO and CARE, project officers, donor agencies and facilitators, staff from the Plant Protection Directorate, the Department of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC), district offices (DADO= District Agricultural Development Office), junior technicians from agri-service centres, and male and female farmers.

As an FAO programme officer I kept records, wrote reports of FFS in 1997 till the end of my contract in August 2002. During that period I visited many FFS groups, went to many FFS sessions, talked with hundreds of farmers and agricultural staff from NGOs and government offices. I have trained many of the FFS facilitators and observed many farmers' fields and practices.

For this study I used my field notes and back-to-office-reports from several field visits to Nepal in summer 1997 and spring 1999. I stayed in Jhumka in the Eastern terai in 1998 during the first training of trainers (TOT) for several weeks and visited 7 Farmer Field Schools that were conducted parallel to the TOT. After about five years of conducting FFS the project team wondered: What is actually the contribution of FFS to farming? To find the answer, in 2002 the project was evaluated by staff of a local NGO (REGARD, 2002⁸). This was a pretty technical evaluation with some assessment of the impact of FFS. The information collected was mainly quantitative, related to easy to measure outputs such as yield increase, number of trainees, reduction of pesticide applications. It was done with a survey among 764 farmers. 424 farmers who had taken part in FFS training were compared with a 'control group' of 340 farmers who had not taken part in FFS. Among the respondents 146 (43 %) were female among FFS farmers and 102 (30%) among non-FFS farmers. There was no distinction made between the replies from women or men, nor was there any differentiation on the basis of caste or class, they were all just 'farmers'.

An evaluation of a project is not neutral, like the one conducted by REGARD in 2002 on FFS, it depends to a large extent on the organisation and individuals who organises or determines the survey content (See Chapter 4 section 4.6). Thus if success is claimed it can be because it fits with the donor and implementing organisation's criteria. First of all the survey questions were designed by staff from FAO, Plant Protection Directorate and the Ministry of Agriculture. These questions reflect their position and interests of their institutions. The focus on yield and agricultural practices is very much in line with their policies. The reporting is in line with regular progress reports and formats such as the logical framework. It reflects a

⁸ REGARD: Research, and Extension Group Acting for Resource Development – Nepal, based in Dhading district and with a small office in Kathmandu.

technocratic approach (Li 2007; Mosse, 2005). The outcomes such impact assessments are likely to be “as much a product of the personal attributes of the team, the social relationship with others, as the formal terms of reference for the review.”(Biggs and Smith 1998: 1754) The interviews in 2002 were conducted by NGO staff who had not been involved in FFS. They were all educated male and Brahmin. This was not a conscious decision, but just practice as usual in those days (see Chapter 5).

The project evaluation of 2002, one of the key documents that is used in this thesis, had an emphasis on quantitative data and achievements related to project objectives written in the project documents. This presented a snapshot of the situation at that particular time. It did not give information about the process that FFS had started. However collection of data at three moments in time does give a picture of a process that has been set in motion by FFS.

In the summer of 2008 I conducted semi-structured interviews with 79 farmers (42 women, 37 men) who had not taken part in FFS (later referred to as non-FFS farmers). These non-FFS farmers came from places where they did not have a Farmer Field School. I used the same key words in semi-structured interviews with 74 farmers (54 women, 20 men) who completed FFS training. I compared these two groups to get an insight into the difference FFS participation made in farmers’ views on empowerment. In 2008 the interviews focused on empowerment aspects, while the interviews in 2009 dealt with the other research questions (above). In contrast to 2002 I realised in later years that differences between men and women are important to consider and therefore in 2009 men and women were interviewed separately.

The information collected in 2009 is based on semi-structured interviews with a total of 94 men and 53 women who took part in FFS from 5 mid-hill districts conducted from June – August 2009 and in December 2009. In this period I have visited 23 villages. I conducted in-depth interviews with these farmers, but also with 22 non-FFS farmers (16 men and 6 women), to determine the impact of FFS over time and to get a better insight in social aspects. Additionally, three focus group discussions were held with FFS women only (Sundarbazar in Tanahun district, Chautara in Sindhupalchowk district, and Bhajrayogini in Bhaktapur district), six focus group discussions with mixed FFS groups (Syampathi, Sanga , Khatri gaun, Sunthan, Jyamdi in Kavre district, and Bimalnagar in Tanahun district), and two focus group discussions with FFS men only (Kushadevi, Kavre district and Satrasayphant, Tanahun district). I also conducted three focus group discussions with non-FFS farmers (Bimalnagar, Tanahun and Kushadevi in Kavre district).

In 2009 I also considered caste and ethnicity, even though from the statistical data I already knew that particularly lower castes had hardly participated in FFS. I have used data registered by the DADO in Kavre on 19 FFS (total 400 participants) in 2007 that covered the period of 1999 – 2007. It was more difficult to interview farmers who had not taken part in FFS than former FFS-farmers, because the former were not much interested in taking part in an interview about a topic that they found did not apply to them.

Additionally in 2009 I conducted several focus group discussions: two with district agricultural office staff and two with junior technicians of the District Agriculture Development Offices (DADO) of Kavre and Tanahun. Additionally I had a focus group discussion with NGO staff members. I had two focus group discussions with NGO FFS trainers. They were all men, because the DADO and the local NGO office are dominated by men and there was no female staff present. They had all been involved in FFS.

Among NGO staff I conducted a total of 19 interviews, and 24 interviews among government staff. To get information from farmers who were facilitating FFS as farmer trainers I held 9 interviews in different locations (Kavre, Bhaktapur, Tanahun districts). Table 1.1 gives an overview of the different methods used in this research.

Table 1.1 Research questions and methods used

1. What is the contribution of Farmer Field Schools to rural transformation?	Project documents, observation, personal communication 1997, 1998	Impact assessment (2002) observations	2009 Semi-structured interviews. Focus group discussions Observations
2. How did Farmer Field Schools contribute to empowerment of male and female farmers in the long-term?		2008 Semi-structured interviews: 79 non FFS farmers (42 women, 37 men) and 74 FFS farmers (54 women, 20 men) 2009 Semi-structured interviews (94 FFS men, 53 women; 16 non FFS men, 6 non FFS women), 9 farmer trainers.	Focus group discussions Observations in 2009
3. How did FFS become embedded in the Nepalese governmental structure and for who is the Farmer Field School a tool of governance in Nepal?	Project documents, observation, personal communication 1997, 1998	2009 Semi-structured interviews (94 FFS men, 53 women; 16 non FFS men, 6 non FFS women) Semi-structured interviews 19 NGO and 24 government staff, 9 farmer trainers	2008, 2009 Semi-structured interviews: Focus group discussion

1.8 Outline of the thesis

The outline in this thesis is as follows. In the first chapter I have introduced the background, the justification for this research. I elaborate on the difference between studying development and doing development. I have also presented the problem statement of this study: the unknown effects of Farmer Field Schools on empowerment and rural development, and the relative unpredictable way male and female farmers use the knowledge and skills acquired in Farmer Field Schools. Also the question is raised if FFS is

actually a tool of governance? I also describe the methods and techniques used for this research, which are based on a collection of longitudinal qualitative data and a variety of methods.

In the second chapter I will describe the scene where the research took place. I create a picture of Nepal, the diversity of the country, the history of governance. I will provide insight into gender issues, and explain about caste and ethnicity. I will share information about the agricultural sector and discuss the turbulent political changes that are currently taking place, particularly related to the Maoist movement.

In chapter 3 I elaborate my position in the Farmer Field School, in Nepalese society and in this research. My multiple identities and roles during the last two decennia have had an impact on the outcome of this research. I was a so called 'outsider-in', because I was involved in establishing Farmer Field Schools in Nepal and I occupied a special place in Nepalese society through my marriage to a Nepalese. I explain how my work in both the institution and the organisation of Farmer Field Schools, and also this research project were influenced by fluid, dynamic phenomena in society, such as caste, gender and nationality, how they created obstructions as well as opportunities for myself. I argue that being an outsider-in has definitely had its advantages for conducting qualitative research.

In chapter 4 I describe the concept of the Farmer Field School (FFS). How FFS was introduced into Indonesia as an alternative to conventional agricultural extension and pest management. I show how the global discourse on and practices in FFS have been influenced by different development paradigms and that different actors apply different views. I describe the shift from FFS as a project to FFS as a process.

In chapter 5 I analyse rural development in Nepal, in particular community based development, with the use of case studies from community forestry and farmer managed irrigation. This analysis provides a background for the study on FFS, because it describes the dynamics in the communities where also FFS took place and continues to take place. I demystify the concept of community, I describe endogenous development initiatives, explain how changing development paradigms, feudal history, elite capture and a diverse array of interests among community members influence and shape the outcome of community development interventions.

The introduction of FFS as a project in Nepal and its impact are described in chapter 6. I explain the involvement of different stakeholders and discuss the impact of FFS on farming, thereby taking into consideration the differences between male and female smallholders. I show how FFS is more than just a project, but a process that has contributed to agricultural and rural development in Nepal.

In chapter 7 the concept of empowerment is elaborated. I researched how FFS contributes to the empowerment of men and women farmers. Empowerment is an often debated concept in academia but in development practice it seems to be used without much discussion, assuming that it is always a 'good' thing having a positive impact on the target group. In the FFS programme too there is the assumption that everybody has the same understanding of the concept of empowerment. This research provides evidence that empowerment is a process that challenges our assumptions about the way things are and can be. This study shows that male and female FFS participants say that they experience empowerment, but not in the way FFS technicians and policymakers had planned it. In chapter 8 I examine how FFS is used as a governance tool. The different actors are discussed and their views on FFS, as well as the way decision-making takes place and how the actions of actors are embedded in the institutional setting of Nepal. Looking at strategies that are key to FFS, such as farmer

participation, group formation and farmers-training-farmers, there is evidence that they may be employed by the state to make their citizens, including farmers, more governable. While FFS might be part of a technique of the state to influence the behaviour of its citizens to achieve increased agricultural production, the farmers for whom FFS is intended also actively influence the implementation of this intervention. Seeing FFS just as a governance tool does not do justice to the complexity of the dynamic environment in which development interventions like FFS are embedded.

Finally, in chapter 9 I reflect on the research, answer the research questions, present the conclusions of the findings, and reflect on the theories and methodologies used. Finally, I look at the research outcomes in the light of the recent changes in Nepal and in FFS.

2

Setting the Scene



Chapter 2 Setting the Scene

Nepal (4 times the size of the Netherlands) is a beautiful country, visited by many tourists every year. At first glance it looks like a peaceful spot in the Himalayas with people living happily in predominantly rural areas. Behind this picture of a paradise in the mountains, lies an enormous complex society, characterised by a rich social, geographic and physical diversity, strongly shaped by history. This research took place in Nepal, in particular in the mid hills (see Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1 Map of Nepal with districts indicating where this research took place. (See Chapter 1 for details about the locations)

In this chapter I will give some more insights in this diversity and describe the setting in which the research took place. I will start with an explanation of the meaning of the name Nepal. Then I will show that the images that are created of Nepal reflect the interests of the organisation or person creating those pictures and that the reality is more diverse as well as complex.

Not only is the country complex and diverse, it is also dynamic. The political situation has undergone rapid changes during the last 10 – 20 years. Nepal is currently in a flux, undergoing rapid transformation. The political landscape is, at the time of writing, in transition from faith-directed and feudal traditions to a more political nation, from a Hindu monarchy to a secular republic. Today, Nepal stands at a crossroad between a brighter future that promises sustainable development, security and equal opportunities for disadvantaged people and a darker picture of further political turmoil, civil war and a growing humanitarian crisis (Srivasta and Sharma, 2010).

I will present some basic facts of Nepal and give an historical overview which is of relevance to understanding governance in Nepal. This will include the uprising of the Maoist movement. Further I will elaborate on some major socio-cultural issues, in particular gender, caste and ethnicity. I will describe the agricultural sector and highlight the important role of women in farming.

The first impression of the diversity that characterises Nepal I got when I wanted to explain the meaning of the name Nepal. Rather than a simple explanation internet search resulted in an endless list of different explanations, many (groups of) people claim to know the origin of the country.

Numerous scholars have tried to explain the name *Nepal*.⁹ To give an impression of the different explanations, I present a selection of them below:

1. A sage called 'Ne' lived in penance on the confluence of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers. He was the sole advisor of the King. So, the word 'Nepal' was derived from the name of the sage 'Ne'.
2. "Nepal" may be derived from the Sanskrit *nipalaya*, which means "at the foot of the mountains" or "abode at the foot", a reference to its location in relation to the Himalayas. Thus, it may be an Eastern equivalent of the European toponym "Piedmont."
3. It has also been suggested that the name comes from the Tibetan *niyampal*, which means "holy land".
4. Long, long ago, the kings of the Gopala dynasty ruled over the area. They were called 'Nepa', so, after the name of the dynasty who ruled, the country was named as 'Nepal'.
5. The name Nepal is also supposed to be derived from the Sanskrit word "NEP", with the suffix "AL" added to it; though still under controversy, NEP were the people who used to be cow herders - the GOPALS - who came to the Nepal valley for the first time from the Ganges plain of India.
6. In the Gandaki Mahatmya, it is mentioned that a king called 'Nepa' ruled over the area. He conquered many kingdoms and established Shanker as his deity. He founded a country and called it 'Nepal', after his own name.
7. In the Tibetan language 'Ne' means 'home' and 'pal' means 'wool'. Sheep were reared in Kathmandu valley and much wool was produced. So, it was called the home of wool, i.e., Ne Pal.
8. In the Newari language 'Ne' means 'centre' and 'pa' means 'country'. So, 'Ne pa' means a country situated at the centre. Nepal is situated in between the two great countries, China and India. So, it was called a central country, i.e., Nepal.
9. In the Limbu dialect 'Ne' means 'plain area'. Kathmandu valley is a plain, so it was called 'Nepal'.
10. In the dialect of the Lepchas, 'Ne' means 'holy' and 'pal' means 'cave'. As it is a holy place - the centre of pilgrimage of Hindus and Buddhists, it was called a holy cave or Nepal.
11. In the language of the Tibeto-Burmese 'Ne' means 'cattle' and 'pa' means 'people'. Kathmandu valley had good grassland for cattle and the main occupation of the people was to rear animals. So, it was called the land of the people who reared animals, i.e., Nepal.
12. Kiratas, the earliest known inhabitants of this country, had a clan called 'Nepar' living in Kathmandu valley. So, Nepal might also be derived from Nepar.

As one can see from the list above there are many interpretations or explanations of the name Nepal. This reflects that there are many different groups in society that claim this country as theirs for different reasons. This reflects some aspects of the diversity of Nepal, diversity in terms of people and their conditions, their interests.

⁹ (Infoclub, 2009) available at: http://www.infoclub.com.np/nepal/history/history_ancient.htm#title;www.wikipedia.org/historynepal

2.1 Basic facts

In a tourist guide Nepal is generally presented as a beautiful country, a “Shangri-la” or kind of “heaven on earth”. Renowned for its diversity of attractions: Himalaya peaks, lowland jungle with wildlife, smiling people in colourful dresses, as is illustrated below from the Lonely Planet Tourist Guide website:

Draped along the spine of the Himalaya, Nepal is a land of sublime scenery, time-worn temples, and some of the best hiking trails on earth. It's a country, rich in scenic splendour and cultural treasures. The kingdom has long exerted a pull on the Western imagination. (Mayhew et al., 2010)

Like most commercially created images this does not tell the entire truth. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world with a population of about 26 million with a per capita income of \$560 per annum, low human development indicators (see Table 2.1), and where a large section of the population have poor access to basic social services.

Located between Tibetan plateau and Indian plains, the small land-locked country of Nepal has a great variety of topography ranging from high mountains, the Himalaya, in the north, the hills in the middle, to a narrow strip of flat land, the *terai*, in the south. The country is divided into three ecological zones on the basis of altitude, north to south. Nepal is a country of physical extremes, from the mountainous belt of the Himalayas in the north to the subtropical plains in the south. Due to this topographical variation the country is rich with climatic and - as a result- bio-diversity. This diversity is also reflected in ethnicity and cultural practices. In this context the so called founder of the state Nepal is often quoted: Pritivhi Naryana Shah called Nepal: a "*Char Jaat and Chhatris Barna Ko Phulbari*" (garden of four varnas or castes and 36 ethnic groups or sub-castes). It is a given fact that in the country many different ethnic groups reside. The number of these groups, their origin, their traditions and languages are still under debate.¹⁰ The 1991 census recorded 35 languages and 59 ethnic groups. Ten years later (and again in 2011) the census data revealed more than 100 ethnic/caste groups and more than 92 languages and dialects (CBS, 2002b; CBS 2011). These different figures do not mean an increase of caste or ethnic groups but it indicates that over the years there has been more recognition of ethnic diversity. Figure 2.2 gives an overview of the distribution of caste and ethnic groups in Nepal.

¹⁰ For more information see Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities at the website: www.nefin.org.np

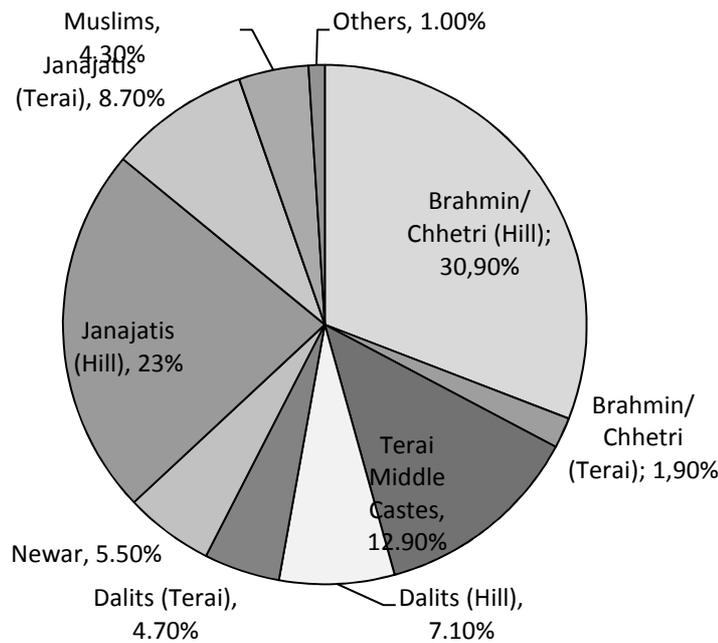


Figure 2.2 Distribution of caste and ethnic groups in Nepal

Source: World Bank and Department for International Development (DFID), 2006 (joint publication)

Nepali is the official language, while the next two most commonly spoken languages are Maithali and Bhojpuri, both found in the terai, the southern part of the country. The majority of the people are Hindus (86.5%), followed by Buddhists (7.8%), Muslims (3.5%) and others (2.2%) (DFID and World Bank, 2006). Being a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country, each cultural group has its own customs and traditions. Nepalese practise various rules and regulations defined by the customs and cultures in their daily life.

For many years this picture of tolerance and pluralism held some truth because Nepal remained relatively free from open ethnic, religious, linguistic and caste violence. However, the subordinate groups have begun to query this image and started to raise their voices against oppression and dominance by high caste and dominant ethnic and religious groups. The geography is such that some villages are still accessible only on foot or by air and it takes days to reach them. Population density varies widely across the regions with the high mountains being the least populated and (after the eradication of malaria in 1960s) terai now being the most densely populated regions. The difficulty of terrain along with varied density of population influences both decisions related to the provision of infrastructure and many remote areas remain isolated from participation in the national economy. Being a mainly mountainous country it is prone to landslides, especially in the rainy season (July – August).

The country is heavily dependent on India for transit facilities to outside world, as India borders Nepal on three sides, while it borders China in the north. The per capita income gross domestic product (GDP) for the year 1999/2000 was US\$244, in 2012 it was reported US\$560 (CBS, 2012)¹¹. The share of farm income that comes from agriculture was 61 percent in 1996, 48 percent in 2001 and is now reported 28 percent of all household income comes from agriculture. The non-farm income has increased and is reported 37

¹¹ <http://www.cbs.gov.np> (accessed 08.06.2012)

percent from non-farm enterprises and 17 percent from remittances (CBS, 2011). Economic growth comes primarily from the non-agricultural sector. The marginal growth in agricultural productivity is predominantly due to the fragmentation of land, poor access to technology, and poor rural accessibility. The share of agriculture in total gross domestic product (GDP) has declined in recent years. An important income sector of Nepal is export of labour to other countries, particularly Malaysia and in the Middle East. The remittances sent back has significantly affected Nepal’s economy and changed the social landscape, leaving more women behind to manage households. The census data of 2011 showed that 44 per cent of the Nepalese household have at least one absentee living abroad or working (29 per cent) and living elsewhere in the country (CBS, 2011).

The census of 2011 indicated that the country has a population of 26.6 million (CBS, 2012). The average density of the population is 157 persons per square km, which is one of the highest in the world. Nepal is registered as one of the poorest countries in the world but Nepal has made significant progress in human development and in reducing poverty in the past decade. Poverty incidence is estimated to have declined from 42% in 1996 to 31% in 2004, although the situation is remarkably better in urban than in rural areas. Among Dalits and hill Janajatis poverty rates are highest¹² (DFID and World Bank, 2006). The poverty status measured in terms of GDP has risen, mainly by an increase in remittances (Gartaula, 2011; World Bank, 2006; Seddon et al. , 2002). Similarly, social and human development indicators, such as life expectancy, infant and maternal mortality rates, adult literacy rate, and primary school enrolment have all improved significantly in the past decade (see Table 2.1), especially for girls and people living in remote areas (UNFPA, 2007). Communication and road access also improved in the period 1995 – 2003. Social mobilisation increased, with especially the number of forestry users groups growing significantly (World Bank, 2006).

Table 2.1 Nepal – Development Indicators

Development Indicators	1995/1996	2003/2004	2010/2011
GDP	3.6	5.5	15.7
National poverty rate		30.9%	31%
Under 5 mortality rate per 1,000 live births	145	76	41
Adult literacy	28%	48.6%	57%
Population with access to improved drinking water sources	69%	84%	89%
Average number of children born to women	5.3	3.6	3.4
Percentage of households receiving remittances	23.4%	31.9%	55.8%

Source: CBS (2011) and World Bank (2010) at http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/npl_aag.pdf, accessed 08.06.2012

There are some signs of improvements in terms of decreased social exclusion, because the younger generation has a more open attitude towards disadvantaged castes than the older Nepalese, improvements in literacy has empowered women and disadvantaged castes and ethnic minorities, and participation in community groups has given the vulnerable and the

¹² Dalits were previously referred to as lower caste, untouchables. The dictionary definition of a "Janajati" is a "jungle tribe living on wild fruits and plant roots," one that is "totally cut off from the development process". In the Gazette in July 1997, the socio-economic status of a community is used to decide if it qualifies as a Janajati. It defines "Janajatis" as communities having their "original and distinct language and culture" that are "socially backward in comparison to other caste groups" (DFID and World Bank, 2006).

poor some voice. Still, the legal system fails to treat all groups equally and political representation of women and minorities is significantly lagging behind.

According to the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI), Nepal was ranked 140th out of 177 countries in 2002 and rose to 138th in 2009 (UNDP, 2009) Notwithstanding this progress, Nepal faces immense challenges in achieving stronger growth and sustained poverty reduction. In particular, the country's difficult topography, restricted infrastructure base, weak institutions and poor governance. In addition, the persistent political instability is undermining Nepal's development and poverty reduction efforts.

The Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy (Tenth Plan FY2003–2007) recognises that the root causes of the conflict are poverty, in-country regional disparity, and social exclusion. The Three Year Interim Plan (2012/11-2012/13) aims to: achieve sustainable economic growth and generate dignified and gainful employment opportunities; build on economic strength with wider participation of the people; reduce economic inequalities; achieve regional balances and eliminate social exclusions (National Planning Commission, 2010 page 16). The strategy aims to increase agricultural production by 3.6 % and the non-agricultural sector by 6.5% annually. It intends to reduce overall poverty incidence to 21% by 2013 (NPC, 2010).

The country's rapidly increasing population exacerbates the deterioration of its natural resources, mostly through deforestation (Joshi et al., 2003). Infrastructure, such as transportation and communication is limited. Nepal has relied heavily on international aid for its development and its foreign debt has increased considerably over the last 40 years.

2.2 Socio-cultural situation

Nepal's geography contributes to social exclusion; there are differences between urban and rural, far west and central regions, mid-hills and terai citizens. Yet, however important these differences may be, they are not the focus of this thesis. In the Nepalese context ethnicity, caste and gender are closely connected social constructs. It is increasingly acknowledged that the variables of gender, caste and ethnicity are the main categories to influence power relations, access to resources, capabilities, poverty and vulnerability outcomes (Bennett, 2005; 2006; Lama and Buchy, 2002). In Nepal, a higher caste 'Brahmin' carries different values in social interaction than a lower caste 'blacksmith'. Women carry different values than men because Nepal is a patriarchal society where females are dominated by their male counterparts. People born in the high mountain areas interact differently than people born in the middle hills and terai. Given the current conditions we can argue that socio-economically and culturally Nepal is still mainly dominated mainly by male, high caste people originating from the hills.

2.2.1 Gender

Keeping in mind that Nepal is diverse we can make a start by acknowledging that men and women experience transformation processes and outcomes differently; a gender perspective is a way of looking at and understanding social realities.

Men's and women's roles are socially and culturally determined (Pyakuryal and Suvedi 2000; Giri, 2009). In Nepal, a common understanding is that men are responsible for earning economic resources (such as income, land, livestock etc.) to support the family. Most of the work that requires public contact (e.g., attending public meetings, agricultural

extension or demonstration sessions) is performed by men. Also, some activities such as ploughing, fixing a roof, slaughtering animals and felling/splitting large trees are performed exclusively by men. Women are responsible for maintaining food security, the household chores and rearing of children (Acharya and Bennett, 1981). Although in sociology such dichotomies are often criticised, even a recent study by Bhadra (1997 in Giri, 2009) states that women perceive themselves as nurturers and men as providers despite spending more time than men in productive activities.

Nepalese society is patriarchal, male dominated, and most ethnic/caste groups are patrilineary organised. Women’s economic and social positions are generally dependent on those of their husbands, fathers and/or fathers-in-law (Gartaula, 2011). Women are traditionally disadvantaged with regard to education, health, labour force, economic conditions and social welfare (Tiwari, 2007).

There are clearly gender disparities in Nepal, as can be seen from the formal reports on male-female differences with regard to mortality, schooling and illiteracy. In 2007 UNFPA reported a higher mortality rate for girls under 5 years of age, being 75 per 1,000 for women as compared to 71 for boys (UNFPA, 2007). In earlier years Nepal was one of the few countries on earth which had fewer women, due to discrimination of girls right from birth (CBS, 2002b). In Nepal and other South Asian countries researchers have estimated that there are millions of women "missing" from the population. Failure to report the birth of girls, sex-selective abortion, neglect of daughters and female infanticide may all play a role (Leone et al., 2003). Nepal’s Human Development Index¹³ has risen by 171 points in the last two decades (Tab. 2.2). The gain was slightly faster during the 1980s than during the 1990s. The rate of progress in human development seems to have slowed down further in the first half of the last decade, in which the gain was only 0.27 points, probably due to the civil conflict (Seddon and Hussein, 2002). The Gender Development Index (GDI) comparing male/female indicators shows that male and female disparities decreased faster than the overall increased during the 1990s. Increase of women’s life expectancy seems to indicate progress towards gender equality, and achievement in the educational fields has been greater for women than for men. Still, in 2005 the GDI was 15 points less than the HDI.

Table 2.2 Overall indicators of human development in Nepal (1991- 2005)

Indicator	1981	1991	2001	2005	2007
HDI	0.328	0.416	0.499	0.526	0.53
GDI		0.312	0.452	0.511	0.52 ¹⁴
GEM			0.391	0.496	0.581

Sources: UNDP - HDR, 1995, 2005, 2007; UNFPA, 2007.

¹³ The Human Development Index (HDI) is a combined indicator of per capita income, life expectancy, and educational attainment, the GDI is the HDI with a gender dimension.. The Human Development Report introduced in 1995 the Gender related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure to measure inequality between women and men (HDR, 2009). The GDI measures gender disparity by adjusting average achievements to reflect inequalities between female and male in the three dimensions of HDI. The GDI focuses on capability. GEM shows the use of these capabilities in taking advantages of opportunities in life. Focusing on women’s opportunities GEM captures gender inequality in three key areas: participation and decision-making power in economic and political affairs and power over economic resources.

¹⁴ Compare with Iceland that ranks first with a GDI of 0.962. Nepal ranks 128 out of 157 countries.

However, these achievements are not distributed equally between the urban and rural populations, nor are all development and ecological regions prospering at equal rates. In less developed regions, the gender disparity along these indicators is higher, and differs across regions, whereby the far western region in Nepal has still high gender disparities.

The GEM has increased due to the recently imposed provision of 33% female participation in the Constituency Assembly. In the Human Development Report of Nepal from 2009 it is confirmed that there are big disparities between regions and caste and ethnic groups. (UNDP - HDR, 2009). The literacy rates have improved but are still lower for women than for men. The Gender Gap reports of 2007, 2009 and 2010 show an increase from, 35% to 45% among women and an increase from 63% to 71% for men. Women's participation in politics has increased. In 2006 parliament was made up of only 6% women this had risen to 33 % in 2010. However, the number of women in ministerial positions has decreased: in 2008 and 2009 20% of the ministerial positions were taken by women, against only 8% women in 2010 (World Economic Forum, 2011). Nepal traditionally patriarchal system also applies to governmental structures, which are predominantly run by men.

Certain Nepali proverbs demonstrate a negative perception about women, some given here below mirror these views.

Chhora paye swarga jaane ("The birth of a son paves the way to heaven");
Chhori ko janma hare ko karma ("A daughter is born with a doomed fate");
Chhora bhaye sansar ujjalo, Chhori bhaye bhanchha ujjalo ("Son brightens the whole world, whereas daughter brightens only the kitchen")

These proverbs reflect the general societal valuation and position of women in Nepal and indicate that women have not only a low status, but also a low self-esteem. Though such proverbs are less commonly used nowadays in educated urban households, they still reflect widespread views on women in Nepal.

Marriage has an overwhelming importance in a woman's life. The event of marriage determines almost all her life options and subsequent livelihood. According to Hindu tradition, marriage is essential for all, whether man or woman. Early marriages are rooted in both the concept of purity of the female body (Bennett, 1983) and the need for helping hands in farm households in general. So parents prefer to get their daughters married before puberty. Although this practice has changed over the years, the ideology of women's sexuality still prevails. 33,5% of girls marry between the ages of 15-19 , as opposed to only 11.8% of boys at the same age (CBS, 2002a). Marriage is a social contract between two clans rather than the personal affair of the bride and groom. Among urban educated so-called love marriages often take place, but in rural areas women and also men rarely have any role in the choice of their own life partners. Women's status in society is mostly dependent on their husbands' and parents' social and economic positions. According to legal experts, there are over 20 laws that discriminate against women (CEDAW, 2004).

Due to the dependency on men in daily life, Nepalese women face problems like domestic violence, psychological harassment for dowry, and low opportunity in finding jobs (Dhakal, 2008). Women's lives are centred around their traditional roles of taking care of children and most household chores, fetching water and animal fodder and doing farm work.

In the past, women could only share their views among themselves and received little information from their husbands on economic and social developments. They were not allowed to participate in public meetings or discussions and were not informed of outside

activities. These days, the situation is changing. Women are increasingly participating in 'platforms' for decision-making and other common fora (Upreti, 2001; Agarwal, 2009, 2001, 1997; Banjade et al., 2006). However, the actual significance of their contribution in these meetings remains limited (Agarwal, 2001).

One tangible measure of women's status is their educational attainment. In the early 1990s, a direct correlation existed between the level of education and status. Educated women had access to relatively high-status positions in the government and private service sectors, and they had a much higher status than uneducated women. This general rule was more applicable at the societal level than at the household level. Within the family, an educated woman did not necessarily hold a higher status than her uneducated counterpart. Also within the family, a woman's status, especially a daughter-in-law's status, was more closely tied to her husband's authority and to her parental family's wealth and status than anything else. Although the constitution offers women equal educational opportunities, many social, economic, and cultural factors contribute to lower enrolment and higher dropout rates for girls. Youth literacy rates in 2010 were reported 87% for boys (age 15-24) and 77% for girls (age 15-24); primary school attendance 86% for boys and 82% for girls. Secondary school attendance was only 46% for boys and 38% for girls (UNICEF, 2012).

It is a fact that women also, participate in the process of maintaining the structure and the discursive practices that caused their secondary positions. One way in which they participate is through using and maintaining perspectives that marginalise them or articulate their subordinate position. The way women treat their daughters or maintain their son's preferential treatment contributes to keeping women's inferior position intact.

Property rights to land are inherited through the male line, but a father can give the right to a particular plot of land to his daughter during his life. Even though men own the land, women are the ones who do most of the labour related to agricultural production, such as digging, planting, weeding, harvesting and storage.

DFID, World Bank, FAO, ADB and other organisations express their concerns that there is an increased participation of women in agriculture. This is a phenomenon worldwide but also observed in Nepal. Women's increased participation is partly due to the fact that their contribution was not reported or officially acknowledged due to biased data collection (Gartaula, 2011). The economic contribution of Nepali women is substantial, but still remains largely unnoticed because their traditional role is taken for granted.

Due to male migration from rural areas to other parts of the country or overseas for employment, agriculture in the hills and terai is now primarily dependent on women (Gartaula, 2011). Also the percentage of households that are headed by women has increased to 26.6% in 2011, from 13.6% in 1996 (CBS, 2011). The 2011 preliminary report shows a population of 12.9 million men against 13.7 million women, an increase of 15% (CBS, 2012). FAO has reported the following:

"Over the recent years (2002-2005), the agriculture sector recorded a rather low growth rate of 3 percent a year on average. The negative impact of this low performance on the living conditions was reduced by substantial increase in non-farm incomes, especially remittances. The increase of migration (and thus remittances) could be a result of the long-standing conflict and low economic performance in the country. However, migration and displacements may have created new forms of vulnerabilities, especially for women head of households. The conflict opened an opportunity for women to be empowered, though at the cost of overwhelming economic responsibilities in many cases. Women have

taken additional responsibility on household management, crop production, livestock rearing and decision on marketing of their livestock, horticultural and agricultural products. The findings indicate that women have relatively greater participation in petty trade and road side sales of vegetables and fruits which are more disrupted by frequent blockades and strikes.” (FAO, 2007:5)

The same FAO has reported that 90.5% of women are engaged in agriculture against 74.9% of men (FAO, Sustainable Development report)¹⁵.

This trend has led to changes in social relations and structures, leading to the feminisation of communities (Giri, 2009). The changes include the availability of remittances, an increased workload for women, as well as a shift in women’s responsibilities and their participation in the public sphere. Feminisation of agriculture refers to an increase in the number of women involved in farming or the time spent by women on agriculture. The feminisation of agriculture can be differentiated between labour and decision-making or managerial tasks within the rural household. In rural Nepal both have been observed, although the latter is less visible. In absence of their husbands, there is an increased role for women in agriculture and they have taken up additional ‘male’ tasks such as ploughing, pesticide application, and feeding livestock (Gartaula, 2011). Women living with their in-laws have less decision-making power than *de facto* female headed households (idem).

Women emphasised this development in interviews: “Men have left: for Maoists, for jobs outside this village, some went abroad”. (Focus group discussion, female FFS farmers Sindhupalchowk, 2009). There was not only migration in search of jobs, but also many men have left Nepal to study abroad. In 2002 this was still a rare opportunity, in 2009 many farmers informed me about family members who studied in the USA, UK, Australia or Russia. What was unusual in 2002 had become common practice in rural areas in 2009.

It appears that some of these perceived changes are logical extensions of earlier practices rather than new departures. This may be particularly so in Janajati communities, where men have long been engaged in outside activities. Although the immediate cause may now be the ‘people’s war’ rather than Gurkha/Gorkha recruitment, the salt-grain trade, or labour migration, this is not the first time that village women have had to make do alone and take on stereotypically ‘male’ gendered roles. In interviews this was also stressed: “We are used to dealing with the household by ourselves, we are used to living without our husbands” (Tanahun, interview, 2009).

2.2.2 Caste: Structural system or permeable boundaries through agency?

While caste as an official hierarchy has been abolished, the influence of caste as a discrimination practice still continues in daily life. Worldwide, caste as a social institution affects the lives of over six million of the global population (Jeffrey, 2001:218), and this counts for the majority of the inhabitants of Nepal. Ethnicity, on the other hand, has emerged as an important factor in analysing political change processes (Gellner et al., 1997; Pfaff- Czarnecka, 1999). The terms ethnicity and caste are often confused in Nepal and the interrelationship is not easy to analyse, let alone address; the word *Jat* in Nepali is used for caste as well as ethnicity. People sometimes use the word *Jat* to indicate their family name

¹⁵ <http://www.fao.org/sd/WPdirect/WPre0110.htm>, Sustainable Development Dimensions Fact Sheet, accessed 12 January 2012

or ethnicity group. Thus it can happen that a Nepalese asks a Westerner: “What is your *Jat*?” referring to the surname.

Analysis of Nepal’s ethnic groups is complicated by the sensitive (political) nature of ethnic and linguistic identity and the fact that no anthropological or linguistic survey of the population has ever been conducted (Poudel, 2000). The problem of describing social categories in Nepal starts with the fact that data on gender, caste and ethnic dimensions of poverty are still incomplete and dealing with these issues remains sensitive (Bennett, 2005; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997; Gurung, 2006).

Available evidence on Nepal’s early history is limited, but the earliest inhabitants were likely of Tibeto-Burman ethnicity (physically Mongoloid, e.g. Rai, Magar, nowadays often called Janajatis) and lived in small tribal settlements with little political centralisation.

Nepal started from a nucleus and has grown through conquest and expansion. In 1816 the present border was demarcated by Prithvi Shah, one of the Gorkha rulers who unified several small states consisting of two main population groups with distinct characteristics: the Caucasoid and the Mongoloid people. The Gorkha fighters belonged to the Caucasoid people, a caste-stratified Hindu group speaking an Indo-Aryan language (Khas and Madhesis, whereby Khas originate from the hills and Madhesis from the plains), while the Mongoloid people were egalitarian tribal people speaking Tibeto-Burmese languages with distinct territories (Gurung, 2003).

Prithvi Naryana Shah is often depicted as a great ruler who wanted to unify people (Bista, 1991) by bringing everyone under one religion, culture and language but also respected their diversity. Gurung, (2006) on the other hand states that Prithvi Shah started with the act of Hinduisation, the first step in creating official inequalities among several groups in society. Hinduism was declared the state religion and the Nepali language the official mode of communication. Tribal communities were ordered in hierarchical castes through Hinduisation. In the name of national integration, small ethnic groups have been subordinated; their languages, culture and religion were denied.

In Nepal, the *Muluki Ain*, the national legal code of 1854, officially enforced Hinduisation and created a legally sanctioned hierarchical social order based on Hindu caste ranking. Within this set of laws all ethnic groups and religions were kind of forced into a Hindu system of castes. This legal code classified penalties for crimes according to caste, determined laws over land tenure and trading privileges and institutionalised dominance of upper caste elites over other social groups from Janajatis to Dalits. For a long time “Brahmins were not subject to the death penalty and were instead given the same high status as cows in the Hindu religion” (Krämer, 2008: 17). In a caste society, all the social, legal, economic, religious, and political activities are prescribed by sanctions that determine and limit access to land, position of political power and command over human labour. In Nepal economic and political power was consolidated by interlinking it with the Hindu caste institution (Bennett, 2006).

Right from the beginning of its unification the modern state of Nepal has been an affair of elites belonging to some high caste Hindu groups. At the same time, the numerous ethnic groups and the lower Hindu castes became marginalised and were prevented from any kind of participation. Many of the problems Nepal faces today in ushering development have their roots in the crucial decision taken long ago: whether the Gorkhali unification or the civil code. The basic social climate is still based on feudal relations, on power and patronage; this social climate has not been changed (Gyawali, 2002).

Bhattachan et al. (2007) listed a total of 205 existing practices of caste discrimination. Dahal (2002) also refers to discrimination against Dalits in social and office. In 2003, it was still reported that Brahmins dominated the public service sector: The Brahmins who represent 13% of the total population, hold 74% of the public service positions. Dalit comprise 13% of the population yet did not have access to high civil service positions until 2004 (Department of Civil Personnel Record, 2004). Brahmins/Chettries and Newars dominate participation in secondary and higher education. Among low castes, less than 5% of 17 to 24 years-olds attend university; among high castes, the figure is more than three times as great. Newars have the highest rate of attendance of higher learning institutions starting from secondary education (DFID, 2006).

Several authors (Bista, 1991; Bennett, 2006; Gellner et al., 1997) claim that the Nepali caste system is unique and not a copy of the Indian classical Varna or Vedic model. It is admittedly a highly complex phenomenon, but the basic elements are based on the Hindu Varna system. This system divides the population into 4-5 groups (4 Varnas originating from the Varna in Hinduism): Brahmin (priests, scholars), Chettri or Kshatriya (rulers, warriors), Vaisya (traders and merchants) and Sudra (artisans, occupational caste, labourers). Additionally there is a fifth group with the so called untouchables or lower caste, presently most commonly called *Dalits*.

Caste, as portrayed by historians and social scientists since the late 19th century, is governed by division and hierarchy. Some classical studies on caste are Srinivas (1962; 1975), B eteille (1997), Dumont (1980), and Mandelbaum (1970). These authors describe caste as it is represented in the classical or structuralist view. Dumont, a French anthropologist, states that caste is a system characterised by a rank order of values, and rituals linked to purity and pollution. As social units castes are endogamous groups with a traditional occupation and a hereditary membership. The basic criterion for ranking these groups is ritual purity. Purity and pollution of castes follow from their traditional occupation and stick to castes as a whole. Most polluting are death and bodily emissions. Castes whose traditional occupation entails contact with these elements, for instance slaughters, cleaners, washer men, leatherworkers and barbers, rank lower. All members of a caste - regardless of whether they follow its traditional occupation - share its rank in the hierarchy. Caste is considered a system with specific rules with regard to food, marriage etc. and specialisation in certain occupations appears to be pre-eminently suited for the purpose of avoiding, or at least regulating, contact with the impure (Kooiman, 1996). Caste can only be recognised in contrast to other castes whose members are involved in economic, political or social relationships or networks. (Leach, 1960 in Subedi, 2008:164).

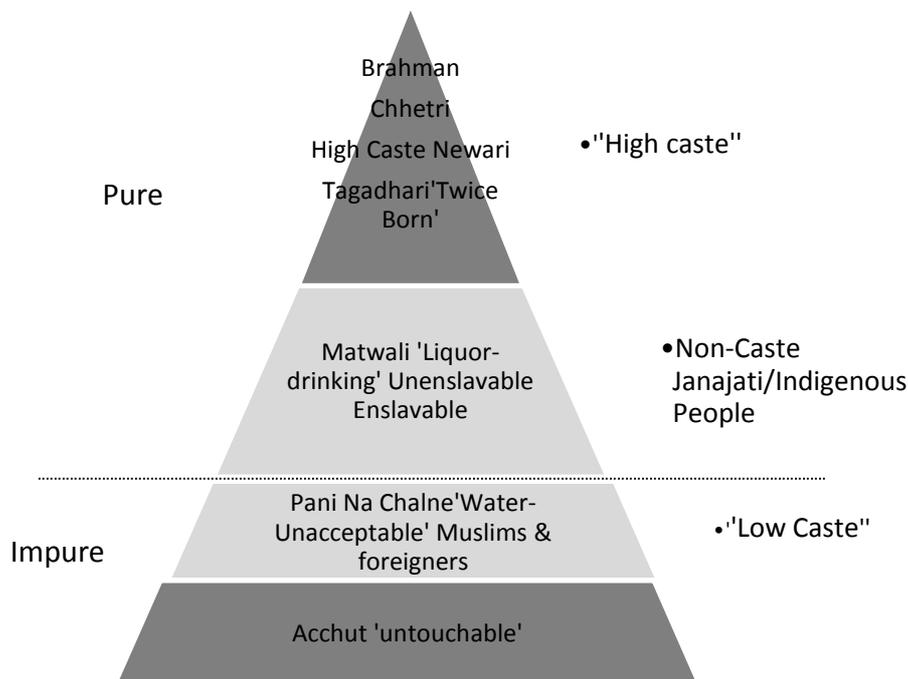
Dumont argues that caste determines individual behaviour, obligations, and expectations. All social, economic, religious, legal, and political activities of a caste society are prescribed by sanctions that determine and limit access to land, position of political power, and command of human labour. The way in which people perceive their value of life depends on the caste they belong to. Most of the lower caste people believe in fate. They think that they occupy a lower status in the society because of their previous life. Higher caste people, on the other hand, believe they deserve their high status, because of merits achieved in a previous life. By believing in fate, those belonging to a particular caste continue their traditional occupations and culture, which results in the domination of high caste in every sphere of Nepalese society. For instance "for a long time Brahmins were not subject to the death penalty and were instead given the same status as cows in the Hindu religion" (Kr amer 2008: 17). This social-cultural institution socialised people from birth onwards with

certain privileges and obligations with respect to the education they could seek, the occupation they could pursue, and so on. Likewise it shaped government institutions. By believing in fate, those belonging to a particular caste continued their traditions and culture, which resulted in the domination of higher castes in every sphere of Nepalese society. This structure is still reflected in everyday social interactions, for example in the structural exclusion of the lower castes from participation in FFS.

In the field I experienced that lower caste people rarely make eye contact with higher caste people. I have observed that in many villages when I worked in Nepal, but also as recently as July 2009 in the Kavre district. Similarly lower ranked staff, such as peons seldom look their boss in the eyes. They always seem to bow a bit, to show respect to their superior and demonstrate their own inferiority. Subordinate staff do not sit in the boss' office, unless told or given the sign to do so.

The subtleties of rank within a caste cluster are often unknown or unrecognised by people outside it. For instance, washer men can simply be identified by others as *Dhobi*. But to Dhobis things look different. As Mandelbaum writes: "Those whose *jati* occupation is to wash clothes that are not only soiled, but soiled with the exudation of sweat, are therefore consigned to low *jati* rank" (Mandelbaum 1970:190).

Simply said: One has a superior or inferior status, which is already determined by birth. As one can see in Figure 2.3: Bhramins and Chettries, and high caste Newari were at the top and considered pure, also called *Tagadhari* or Wearers of holy cord. The middle rank was accorded to indigenous groups, generally belonging to the Mongoloid race speaking Tibeto-Burman languages and following Buddhism or various animist/shamanist religions. They are classified by Hindus as *Matwali*, or liquor consumers. This classification is based on their division of work or the two categories: pure and impure; the caste(s) whose water is allowed to remain pure' and 'the caste(s) whose water is defiled'. See Figure 2.3



The area showing the different groups in the triangle does not represent population size. Dark grey shows the Hindu caste groups.

Figure 2.3: Caste pyramid in Nepal

Sources: DFID and World Bank, 2006

The above classification is often challenged. Subedi (2008) challenges the vision of caste as a rigid structure. Quigley (1993) and Gellner and Quigley (1999) deny the principle of ranking based upon ritual purity. Many studies show that given time, means, organisation and a favourable political climate, castes and sub-castes (not individuals) can rise or otherwise challenge the status hierarchy (Subedi, 2008; Holmberg, 1989; Mandelbaum 1970; Jeffrey, 2001). These studies confirm my view that caste is a social phenomenon, a set of understandings, and dynamic dispositions with permeable boundaries that are negotiated through agency. I concur with Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* (1990) which offers a fluid, reflexive notion of social phenomena such as caste, or any ordering principle that manifests itself in culture, lifestyles and identities (see Chapter 5 of this thesis). He explains how caste as an institution is reproduced through *habitus* and the employment of different kinds of resources in their interaction with others, in particular symbolic and social capital. The concept of *habitus* is used by Bourdieu to give a clarification how caste differences "become immanent in daily practices and encounters" (Jeffrey, 2001:221). People can only become a real privileged upper caste when individuals identify with one another and act together collectively.

In Nepal caste is a unique and highly complex phenomenon Bista (1991). It has evolved from Hinduism, Shamanism, Buddhism and other religious traditions and adapted and adjusted to a socio-cultural system that already existed in the diverse geographically dispersed communities. The caste system as it exists in the Hindu religion and in India could

not be adopted easily in Nepal as it involved humiliation of certain groups in society, and putting others in a superior position. No one volunteers to become a member of a lower caste (Gurung, 2005; Bennett, 2005; 2006; Gellner et al., 1997; Levine, 1987; Bista, 1991). In contrast to what is often believed, caste is somewhat flexible, it is even possible, over several generations to improve one's caste status (Bista, 1991). For instance the Tamang (Höfer, 1976 who studied them intensively) were traditionally Tibetan speakers and long considered Bhotiya. Some decades ago government officials changed their *jat* in Tamang. This was a political move of the government to circumvent Tibetan claims to Nepalese territory, and the change in *jat* was presented as being to the advantage of Tamang, in making them superior to Bhotiya. This process unified a heterogeneous group, in this case the Tamang community, whereby their incorporation into the caste system had the effect of social inclusion. Later Levine (1987) found that many Tamang had altered their status to Lama or Gurung which were both conceived as being even more prestigious. While caste is constructed by law to classify people into a group, individuals also actively create caste as a socio-economic, political tool in a social transformation process.

At the start of the Panchayat system (1961 – 1990) the state abolished the legally sanctioned hierarchy and discrimination based on caste, ethnicity and religion. The new code of 1963 talked in terms of nationals rather than castes, and Nepalis for the first time began to think of themselves as citizens rather than subjects (de Sales, 2008; Bennett, 2006), however discrimination based on caste, ethnicity and gender continued (de Sales, 2008; Pradhan, 2005). During this period the ruling elite and many development experts viewed cultural and linguistic diversity as hampering modernisation and development. The best approach to diversity was considered assimilation around a national standard, which favoured the male, high caste, Nepali speaking, educated Brahmin (Pradhan, 2007; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997; Bista, 1991).

The 2011 census (similar to the 2001 census) of Nepal showed the existence of more than 100 caste/ethnicity groups in the country. However, only seven of them have a population of more than 2.5 percent of the total population and only two of them have a population of more than 10 percent. They range from large caste/ethnic groups with more than 3 million people down to some very small groups having fewer than a thousand members (CBS, 2011). This shows the existence of several minor caste/ethnic groups. Among the dominant caste/ethnic groups none has a strong localised population concentration within anyone district.

Caste dynamics are changing. Due to changes in the peasant economy and society through globalisation, the jobs that occupational castes traditionally perform have become obsolete (Nightingale, 2005). Much of the work done by cobblers and tailors or blacksmiths is no longer required because of increased availability of new products in the market, e.g. sport shoes from polyester, made in China. Many lower caste people found work as labourers in for instance, agriculture and construction. Traditional economic and social relations are under pressure and changed. The opening up of the transnational labour market has created possibilities for job migration for occupational castes and upper castes. Education has broadened the horizons of people and contributed to questioning caste relations. The interdependence of castes and patron-client relations that have persisted from generation to generation are now subject to change. Occupational castes and dalits are no longer dependent on the goodwill of their feudal village leader or Brahmin landlord, as their

options for livelihood sustenance have broadened. Although discrimination still continues today (UNESCO, 2006), the rules are not as rigid as they were in the past. Nowadays, economic, class or political considerations tend to divide people rather than caste distinctions.

In current society people use the concept of ethnicity and caste in a flexible way. While in the past people changed their names to get a higher status, now this happens the other way around; a Dalit name gives more opportunities, opens doors that were previously closed to them (Kathmandu, interview 2009).

According to Act 11(4) of the Constitution of Nepal (1990), caste discrimination has been made punishable. The civil code has also been adapted accordingly. Nevertheless there is still plenty of evidence that the caste system continues to play an important role in society. Open up a newspaper and the dating ads are full of references to caste preferences. Look at internet sites and notice that typing in the word Bahun (upper caste), leads to weblogs full with abusive language against Brahmins by lower caste or ethnic minorities. In other words caste as an identifier and a form of social organisation remains significant (Jeffrey, 2001). In an interview an NGO staff member complained:

I was working in an NGO and the majority of the staff was Brahmin. We got on very well and I felt respected. However, one evening all left the office for a party: a Brahmin only affair, and me being from Dalit caste I was the only one from our organisation not invited. I felt so sad and excluded (Lalitpur, December 2009).

In 2007 the government again appointed mostly Brahmins, as can be read in the newsletter message below:

Nepal Govt appoints 27 ministry secretaries: 20 are Brahmins, outrageous exclusion continues to prevail

Kathmandu, October 11, 2007- The Government of Nepal has appointed 27 secretaries (Special class officers) to head various ministerial bureaucracies in the country. Not deviant from the past non-inclusive practice in the governance, 74.1% secretaries hand-picked by the current so called pro-inclusion government are from Brahmin caste, which accounts for only 16% of the country's total population. There is a total absence of representation from the Dalit community in both the executive and judiciary branches of the state.

(Nepaldalitinfor.net, 2007)

Within the caste ideology only endogamous marriage is accepted, not inter-caste marriage. This is changing but still many people are reluctant to accept the 'other' within the family. As is illustrated by the following quotes from my interviews:

Four years ago it was not thought of in our family to marry outside Newari caste, now my cousin married a Magar. We are all accepting her, but not during religious activities. Times are changing (Lalitpur, Newari woman, December 2009).

My husband's brother just recently married someone from a lower caste. She is very nice. I wanted to invite her to our house but my mother-in-law stopped it. She said: if you invite her, I will never come in your house again. So I gave in, because my mother-in-law is a strong woman (Gurung woman/officer. Lalitpur, December 2009).

Many lower caste citizens feel disappointed by the subsequent governments and realise that they themselves have to shape their future rather than wait for the rulers to be concerned about them. The interview fragment below gives the example of the experience of a Dalit man:

Kumar is a Dalit man, age 45. He set up his own carpentry business in his village. "We Dalit are lucky we have many skills, we can get many types of work". He also admits that Dalits in his village are not serious about education, many drop out after class 5 and look for a job in the city or nearby the Melamchi construction site. "One year ago life became easier for us. We can sit with the Thulo Jaat (upper caste), we do not have to wash our tea cup anymore". He has been appointed the treasurer of the drinking water committee by an NGO. His friend Shiva, who is a blacksmith, and also Dalit, became the president of this committee. The NGO was willing to install a drinking water system in their village, in particular for the benefit of the Dalit community. One of the project requirements was a Dalit president and treasurer in the drinking water committee. Brahmin dominate the village but there is a large Dalit community too. The Brahmin are also interested in drinking water, because water is a big concern in this village. The Brahmins are not happy that the Dalit man had to become the head of this committee, but they had no choice. The other members and thus the majority of the committee are from the upper caste. The Brahmins organised the construction in such a way that the tank is built in their area and thus gave them more access to drinking water. During the meetings the Dalit men have a hard time because the upper caste people never agree with them and always create tension or conflict: complain about lack of water for farming, saying that water does not reach their house etc. This way they boycott smooth functioning of the drinking water system. To insist on Dalits chairing the drinking water committee antagonised the dominant caste, and as a result the project might not be successfully completed. (Kumar. Yamdi, 2009)

During the war, Maoists gave a lot of attention to vulnerable excluded groups such as Dalits. Kumar adds:

Thanks to the Maoists we learnt to raise our voice. They stayed with us and we discussed during many late nights about changing our position. We felt they fought for us and we took their sides. But now the war is over and the political leaders have all returned to Kathmandu. If we really want change we have to do it ourselves, we cannot rely on the Maoists fighters and political leaders". (Kumar. Yamdi, Interview, 2009)

2.2.3 Ethnicity

Caste is often referred to as vertical social differentiation and ethnicity as horizontal spatial differentiation. This is not entirely a clear division in Nepal since ethnic groups have been (forcedly) included in the caste system.

Similar to the discussion related to caste, ethnicity is approached in various ways. Some consider ethnicity from an essentialist point of view (Geertz, 1973) as if ethnicity has always been an aspect of social identity, and persisted over long periods of time.

Instrumentalists, on the other hand, treat ethnicity as ‘a social, political and cultural resource for different interest and status groups’ (Subedi, 2008).

The ethnic situation we face in Nepal today is a mixture of governmental attempts to grapple with the country’s unique ethnic diversity and people’s responses to the system the government created (Levine, 1987). Nowadays there is an increased sense of ethnic solidarity as a result of the defensive reaction against the intrusive and dominating activities of the Brahmin – Chettries (Bennett, 2006).

In Nepal efforts to define ethnicity have been numerous (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997; 1999) and the views have changed from a constructed identity to an imagined community (Anderson, 1991). Recently it has become a highly politicised concept, as a result of conflicts over resources and internal politics. In Nepal, academics, government and other organisations use the word *Janajati*, indicating ethnicity is synonymous with indigenous/national/tribal identity (Subedi, 2008). This is confusing because indigeneity and ethnicity are not identical. Indigeneity is related to specific historical continuity (Nair, 2006), whereas ethnicity is a social phenomenon (Gurung, 2005). Not only academics, also ordinary people in Nepal debate about the term *Janajati*, as one taxi driver said: “I do not like to be called *Janajati*, I am a Limbu, not just part of a big anonymous group with whom I do not share anything” (Kathmandu, 2009). Others say: “I like the term *Janajati*, it makes us smaller groups united against the Brahmin/Chettries” (Magar, interview, Kaski, 2009)

Despite the differences of opinion regarding the term *Janajati*, I will use the term in this thesis to indicate all Nepalese ethnic groups as it is defined in the Interim Constitution of 2007 (page 36). In this Constitution they elaborate: “it is a person who is not a Brahmin or a Chettri, a Dalit or a member of the Madhesi community (Interim Constitution, 2007:36). For ethnicity I use Gellner’s definition: “Ethnicity is commonly understood to be the social differentiation derived from cultural criteria such as a shared history, a common place of origin, language, and values of a given territory or at least a historical link to these shared features which there constitute of an ethnic group”. (Gellner, 1997 in Subedi, 2008:175). For me ethnicity, like caste, is a social construct. It is not a rigid structure, but can be shaped by people. Ethnic boundaries are flexible and can sometimes be applied to people’s own advantage.

Analysis of Nepal’s ethnic groups is complicated by the sensitive nature of ethnic and linguistic identity and the fact that no anthropological or linguistic survey of the population has ever been conducted. The names of ethnic groups often are derived from the language they speak, and ethnic identity is based on various combinations of national origin, region, language, religion, and caste. The broadest classification of ethnicity is national origin, which includes three major groups: Indo-Nepalese, who originated in India; Tibeto-Nepalese, who are of Tibeto-Mongol origin; and indigenous Nepalese, whose habitation predates the other groups. Nepal’s census provides more specific ethnic classifications, including more than 100 ethnic and caste groups that are classified into five larger groups on the basis of shared and prominent cultural traits. The government acknowledges, however, that these categories are provisional and arbitrary. (See also Figure 2.2)

Subedi (2008) showed how Duras became Gurungs in the process of modernisation and adaptation, because being recognised as Gurung was considered a better option for many people from the Dura community (Subedi, 2008). He showed how Dura constructed their identities and set out to make their own lives under the circumstances given. Dura can “secure opportunity, security and empowerment if they are bound with the larger

community" (ibid:177). This larger community is found among the Gurung which has similar rites and ritual practices. Like caste, ethnicity matters, but it is a not rigid institution.

In accordance with these authors, some of the respondents in my own research admitted pretending to use another caste or ethnicity identity to their own advantage. For example:

I am a Magar. Our reputation is that we carry the Khukuri (sharp knife), fight and steal and are more backward than Brahmins. Nowadays you see that people change their names. They want to pretend to be a *Dalit* instead of a higher caste. Sometimes in the past I pretended that I was Chettrie, because of my surname (Thapa), nowadays I proudly say that I am a Magar or Janajati. (NGO staff, Kathmandu, 2009)

Nepal does have ethnic problems. The democratic mobilisation of the 1990 movement saw mass participation of Nepal's ethnic groups or Janajati and other marginalised groups but once multi-party democracy was established under King Birendra, they were excluded from decision-making positions (de Sales, 2008). The Constitution ratified in November 1999 ambiguously defined Nepal as a 'multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and Constitutional monarchical Kingdom (Gellner et al, 2008 :13). The fact that Hindu was stated to be the only religion was controversial and indicated the lack of recognition of other beliefs and created doubts about genuine acceptance of cultural and ethnic differences.

The different 'people's movements' provided several groups with the room to express their opinions openly and to assert their identities and rights as citizens. Since then, various ethnic and indigenous groups have begun to express their grievances. The waves of discussions and debates over the issue of ethnic conflicts and cultural, religious and lingual discrimination are holding the nation in its grips. While the 1990 Constitution expressed a strive for unity and Hindu as the only religion, the present interim constitution of Nepal 2007 however, states that in "recognising the mandate of the Nepali people expressed, from time to time prior to 1951 until now, through historical struggles and people's movements for democracy, peace and progress," the nation is the "common aspiration of multiethnic, multilingual, multi religious, multi cultural characteristics..." (Interim Constitution 2007: article 3, page 56) Hence the heterogeneity of nation has been finally recognised to provide opportunities for historically marginalised people i.e. ethnic people, Dalits, women and other minorities.

The recognition of a separate identity of ethnic groups can contribute to strengthen the process of national integration but also fracture the country. Some grieve the downfall of a harmonious Hindu kingdom, the flower garden of four varnas and 36 jats which speak a common language, follow a common religion, share a heroic past and are led by a divine and caring king. Others express relief that this false idyllic is no longer artificially maintained, and describe Nepal's past as one of oppression and see opportunities for a better society if only it finds a way to appreciate and deal with its religious, lingual and ethnic plurality (Fisher, 2008).

2.3 Administrative system

Apart from ethnic and cultural values, constitutional and legislative rules and regulations play a role in specifying rights and duties of men and women. At the time of writing this thesis the constitution was being revised and legislations amended. The administrative system is under debate and is likely to change. At the time of my research, Nepal was administratively still divided into five development regions spread over 14 zones (headed by appointed commissioners) and 75 districts (under the charge of district officers responsible for law and order, collecting revenues, and setting development priorities). The districts are further divided into smaller units— into municipalities and village development committees (VDC). Until 2008, there were 3,913 VDCs and 58 municipalities in the country. A VDC consists of nine wards, while the number of wards in the urban municipalities depends on the size of the population as well as political considerations. The chiefs of municipalities and VDCs are directly elected. This division was made as part of the panchayat reforms and remains largely in place today, although panchayats as a unit were abolished in the early 1990s, but it is subject of current political discussions.

Decision-making processes in the government system are increasingly decentralised. Currently more and more central government funds are directly transferred to VDCs and district government offices. Still, decision-making on major issues remains largely top-down in a governance structure in which the centre exercises disproportionate and sometimes inappropriate influence.

The District Development Committee Act specifies that the Local Development Ministry shall execute, supervise, monitor and coordinate the development program of the district formulated by the District Development Project Coordination Committee. Such control over the process of decision-making enforces an upward accountability and disables the local authorities. The organisation process of coordination and control among central government and ministries, DDCs, constituencies, municipalities and VDCs, are not well defined. At the local level VDC, municipality and ward levels there is no equity in participation or representation of women, Dalits and marginalised people. DDC authorities are indirectly elected by people's representatives. Therefore, they are not as sensitive to the consequences of their actions as are the VDC and municipal authorities who are directly elected.

VDC roles involve agriculture development, drinking water, construction and transport, education and sports, irrigation, soil erosion, river control, physical infrastructure, health service, forest and environment, language and culture, tourism and cottage industry, etc.

The secretaries of VDCs have to work under the direction of the Chairman (Mayor in the case of municipality and President in the case of DDC). The functions, duties and powers of the VDC secretary are administrative, such as book-keeping, maintaining records of the population, but also attending VDC meetings.

Before we look at the present governance situation, it is good to go back to the early days of Nepal, because it tells us where Nepal has come from. The context of the Nepalese governance system has its own characteristics that create changing opportunities and challenges. Institutional arrangements have been passed down from history. These institutional aspects determine the overall governance arrangements, more specifically the equity distribution between citizens, and the power relations between state and

citizen and how the current arrangement got in place. According to Louise Brown (1996:1) the current political system has the same characteristics as the earlier political system. It continues “to be hierarchical, centralised and riddled with conspiracies and dominated by a complex patron-client nexus”.

2.4 Brief historical overview of governance in Nepal

Originally the Himalaya area, the present Nepal territory, was inhabited by people from Tibeto- Burmese origin in small autonomous states. Nepal’s history books usually omit the early years of Nepal and start with a reference to the events of the 18th century when Prithvi Naryana Shah, who initiated Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom. For 79 years, this king was the dominant figure in ruling the country. Prithvi Shah managed to unite all the warring kingdoms in a strategic way: he placed his kingdom under Vishnu, a Hindu deity’s patronage and portrayed himself as the messenger of god, to legitimise his power (Bouillier, 1991). During and after the formation of the state Nepal, the ruling class was composed of the military hierarchy of Gorkhas (Thakuri and Chetri) and Brahmin attendants and advisors. During the conquest, Magars and Gurung were involved in the fighting, but were gradually marginalised. The rulers lacked administrative and financial skills and invited Newars to become members of the ruling elite. These high castes supervised the political system and extracted surplus and labour from low caste artisans.

The palace was the centre of decision-making power, while binding rules and enforcing laws were delegated to local functionaries. The king was held responsible for the well-being of the kingdom, an idea which has not totally disappeared today. Politics and religion were interconnected (Bouillier, 1991; Quigley, 2000).

The country was virtually isolated from outside influence till 1950, although it remained a de facto protectorate of the British from 1816 till 1923. All the land belonged to the King, and individuals could only use land under various forms of conditional tenure. Agriculture production was the major economic preoccupation to sustain the peasant households, landowners, the state and the state class. The surplus generated by the farmers went to pay for the administration and military campaigns of the country (Regmi, 1978).

Land and land-based resources have been the principal source of economic surplus generated by the ruling classes. Prithvi Narayan Shah started with this practice, his officials were granted land in lieu of salary. The king gave his land (but it remained his property) for military (*jagir*), political rewards (*birta*), or to set up institutions (*guthi*) (Regmi, 1978; Wiley et al., 2009). Up to today Jagir is still a term used for employment. With no direct relationship to the state, the farmers, living and working on these lands were basically subjected to their landowners (Gautam, 1991).

The land tenure system has been consistent with the predominant patron-client relationship between the state and its citizens. A patron-client relationship means a mutually obligatory arrangement between a person who has authority, social status, wealth or some other personal resource (patron) and another person who benefits from his or her support or influence (client).

For a long time, administration was held in Kathmandu and there was not much feeling of involvement of rural people in government ruling in Nepal. Due to geographical problems (mountains, poor infrastructure, poor access in hilly areas) people did not travel much to and from Kathmandu. Up to this day, it is felt that

politicians, policy makers, government officers and international NGO workers remain focused on the Kathmandu valley. It is a stereotypical remark but the large number of blue-plate four-wheel drive vehicles in the valley confirms this view.

The Shah family remained the ruling force till the mid-19th century when they lost control of Nepal to the Rana dynasty. Under their rule, the countryside was drawn into a national political-economy through the extraction of resources, a system of personal reward and punishment, and forced labour (Riaz and Basu, 2007; Regmi, 1978). The government at that time was not concerned with promotion of ethnic or national homogeneity, just minimal respect for Hindu norms (Gellner et al., 2008). The Rana's only employed their own family or people who they could trust. People who were seeking employment had to give a certain amount of money, called *chakari*. A term that is still in use but expanded more freely to indicate seeking a favour in general.

The country was under the strict rule of the Rana family for over a century. The Ranas did everything to prevent opposition. They discouraged education, suppressed any attempt at political change and spent little on public welfare (Regmi, 1978; Riaz and Basu, 2007; Gellner et al. 2008).

Nepal has never been colonised, but was a de facto protectorate of the British from 1816 till 1923. The British turned a blind eye to the suppressive affairs in Nepal (Riaz and Basu, 2007). The Ranas restricted access to foreigners. They did not want outsiders to influence their 'sovereign' status. They could, however, not prevent people from leaving to study in India, which is what some 'better off' people did. The Ranas regarded education as a privilege for the elite, and considered knowledge as a symbol of social status as well as a tool for dominance over the society. They were also concerned that if the general public would get education their superior status might get challenged.

In 1951 the Rana's were overthrown, by an armed movement led by Nepali Congress members, mostly educated in India. King Tribuvhan Shah, a direct descendant of King Prithvi Shah, reclaimed power with support from India (Gellner et al., 2008). There was no constitution and no elections were held, the king became the head of the state and restored all power.

During the 1950s, efforts were made to frame a constitution for Nepal that would establish a representative form of government. In 1952 with assistance from the United Nations, Indian administrative experts were invited to introduce a proper administration system. The result of this can still be seen today, the Nepalese administration is similar to the Indian system, designed with British colonial influence.

A period of quasi-constitutional rule, a period of democratic experimentation followed, during which the monarch (first Tribuvhan, later Mahendra) assisted by the leaders of young political parties, governed the country.

In 1960, the parliamentary system was criticised by the king as being unable to make their leaders responsible to the people rather than their own parties. In 1961, King Mahendra dismissed the cabinet, dissolved parliament, and banned political parties. A 1962 constitution created a non-party panchayat (council) system of government. This was a four-tiered system of representative government with traditional village-level councils at the local level and the National Panchayat at the national level. NGOs were banned because they would increase internal conflict. The Queen headed the Social Welfare Council,

where so called welfare organisations could register, approved by the state (read: Royal family). Unity of the nation and nationalism was promoted, summarised with the slogan: “one language, one dress, one country” (Gellner et al., 2008). This system stayed in place for more than 30 years. The country was ruled by the King and his followers.

The 1950s and 1960s were important for present-day development in Nepal. At that time the foundations for bilateral relations were laid and political structures changed. During the Panchayat era education and health service, as well as development, were brought to the country. Social change was set in motion.

In this period, the labour migration of men, first to India and later to Malaysia, and “Arab” states started. Men from the Tibeto-Burmese ethnic groups (e.g. Gurung, Rai, Magar) were recruited for the Indian and British Army, and are popularly known as the Gurkha fighters.

2.4.1 Multi-party (1990 and beyond)

A pro-democratic people’s movement brought down the Panchayat system in early 1990. King Birendra Shah agreed to large-scale political reforms by creating a parliamentary monarchy with the king as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of the government. The constitution of 1990 transformed Nepal into a constitutional Hindu monarchy and established a multiparty system. Political parties agreed that the monarchy would remain to enhance political stability and provide an important symbol of national identity for the culturally diverse Nepali people.

The new political leaders in the 1990s, who were mainly from the urban Brahmin, Chettries, and Newar elite groups, were widely seen as being corrupt, and reinforcing discriminatory power relations and traditional hierarchies in political, social and economic organisations. Most of the population felt excluded and were dissatisfied with government decisions and remained politically and economically marginalised (Stevenson, 2001). The ruling parties did not provide stable governments. Patron-client mobilisation (Mishra, 2007) and internal party squabbling led to collapse of their reign (Mishra, 2007). UML has a strong organisational network in rural areas, gets support from unskilled labourers, organises peasant movements and urban artisans, but leadership is dominated by central hill Brahmins (Mishra, 2007).

The period after 1990 is marked with a shift from coercive state power to decentralisation, participation and citizen control. A Maoist movement, which was violently declared official in February 1996, caused increasing problems for the government over the years. Up until 2004 thirteen governments came to power (Riaz and Basu, 2007). The 2001 massacre at the Royal Palace added to the unrest. The entire royal family was murdered on 1 June 2001 under mysterious circumstances, and the dead king’s brother, Gyanendra, was crowned king on 4 June 2001.

In 2005, King Gyanendra declared a state of emergency, and with the assistance of the army, seized power. A comprehensive peace agreement with the Maoists opened the way for the new interim constitution that came into force on 15 January 2007. A new parliament was formed that included representatives of all parties, including the Maoists. On 28 May 2008, the CA abolished the institution of monarchy and declared Nepal a federal republic. Ram Baran Yadav (NC) was elected to be the first president of Nepal in July 2008. Kingship might have been abolished but it no doubt survives in several institutions such as patriarchy, divine sovereignty.

At the time of writing Nepal is in a state of political turmoil, with no constitution yet (June 2012), the Constituent Assembly dissolved (27 May 2012) and with the Maoist still claiming to be ready to go back to the jungle, to continue their revolution and to take up arms again. Current political discussions boil down to whether Nepal should have federal provinces named after indigenous groups or a few provinces with neutral or geographical names as it is now.

The remarks by Karin Landgren Special Representative of the Secretary-General and chief of UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) show that among the international community there is also still cautiousness regarding the fragile peace process. During a briefing to the UN Security Council on Nepal's peace process she said that although Nepal's "dramatic political gains" were not likely to be reversed, she warned of a prospect of a "people's revolt" which she said remains an explicit Maoist threat and of the President stepping in an Army backed coup. "Any such measure would sorely threaten peace and Nepal's fragile democracy," she concluded. (Nepalnews website, 2011)¹⁶

2.4.2 Present situation

The current government system is in place due to Maoist pressure, with more attention for inclusion of ethnic minorities and lower caste people. At international level however, there is donor influence, with budget constraints, donations and development paradigms. But also the fact that Nepal is so called 'bolder between two giant powers', China and India, has an influence on governance in Nepal (Gyawali, 2002). Since early history ruling families in Nepal had close ties with leaders in India. Nowadays, most of the exports from Nepal occur via India, most common goods arrive from India, and increasingly the market receives consumer goods from China. Politicians from India have a direct influence on the government of Nepal. This becomes evident for instance in border discussions, but also in development of hydropower plants and river management. Nepalese politicians frequently visit India for talks over internal and external affairs. Many politicians have received their education in India. The political collaboration with China is not as close as with India, probably because Nepalese leaders and citizens feel more associated with India (ethnicity, language, culture, etc.) and part of the South Asian subcontinent.

Additionally Nepal is heavily dependent on donor funds and its policies are strongly influenced by the agendas or prevailing paradigms of aid agencies. Sixty-five percent of its development expenditure comes from foreign aid. About 30 percent of the regular expenditure goes for debt servicing (Dahal, 1996). Nepal's dependence on foreign aid for its development goals has made donors important actors in the country's overall governance.

After 1990 and even more so after 2006 many political but also administrative changes occurred. The government focus shifted from a control and force system to a more development-oriented approach through peoples' participation and decentralisation, by reduced state involvement in service delivery. This was accompanied by structural adjustment, in which expenses for government services were cut and positions removed. All these changes were imposed on the Nepalese government by the external community and donor agencies such as the World Bank.

¹⁶ <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2011/jan/jan07/news05.php> (accessed 7 Jan 2011)

However, they fitted progressively with the view of the people that the government was ineffective, not addressing their needs and that the voice of the common people needed to be heard.

Recently there have been more reforms in the governance system to make services more socially inclusive, administration more efficient, effective and responsive to popular demand, thereby making reservation for women, Dalit and ethnic community representatives. However, this is still in an early stage, the effective implementation is yet to materialise.

During the interviews that I conducted in 2009, people expressed that their present impression of the government is not very positive. People in the village where the interviews took place do not feel taken seriously by the government. When asked what they think about the government system they react negatively: "Our government is not good, the leaders are selfish, the government is not responsive to us people in the villages" (Interviews, 2009).

MacFarlane (1994) confirmed that there are constant complaints about the working of officers, who need bribes, are rude, and are usually absent from their desk. Villagers commonly experience that even for the most insignificant business they are told to come back another day, unless they produce extra cash. There are fears of the police, who can be brutal, discriminating, reliable and not accountable for their behaviour.

Government officers and NGO staff acknowledge that the government system is changing in a positive direction but that many weaknesses remain:

"The government has changed a bit, the system has become a bit more transparent, we have started to consider the needs of the people a bit more, but still there is a long way to go to improve the system" (Kathmandu, Interview with government officer Dec 2009)

A situation commonly found in government offices is described below with a fragment from observations during my research (Research notes, July 2009)

Current impression of government organisation in Nepal.

The district agricultural office of Tanahun looks empty. It is an ordinary Tuesday afternoon, 2pm, the sun is shining, some peons sit in the shade outside under a tree. The place seems deserted. Five, six offices are unoccupied. The walls are grey and dirty. In one of the corner rooms there is a group of 4 men, all Brahmin, sitting together, drinking tea, gossiping, or exchanging the latest news items. The chief of the office is not in. His whereabouts are unknown, and nobody seems to be the least bothered about that. The office desks are almost empty, just a few papers on a heap here and there. Just 1-2 computers, with a secretary typing away. A typical situation in any district government office.

(Personal observation July 2009)

There are several reasons that citizens express negative feelings about the government and politicians in general. First of all there is the history of the state and an elite ruling the country without considering the needs or addressing priorities of

ordinary men and women. Additionally there are also several factors why the government is not functioning well. Some of these reasons are:

Heavy, hierarchical bureaucracy

“Working in the government is heavily bureaucratized, decision-making is a lengthy administrative procedure. This hampers effective work and is a reason for some officials not to bother with some activities”. (Government officer, interview 2009)

The existence of the ‘tippani’ or the paper trail illustrates the lengthy bureaucratic ways decisions are being made in government institutions. One government officer explained what tippani means:

“Bureaucrats in Nepal are safe players. Nobody wants to take risks even when it is not so dangerous for them. Let’s share the risk is their motto, that’s why tippani is a safety tool for everybody and popular among decision-makers. There is some logic in the tippani, it is based on rules and regulations which need to be followed before a decision is taken. This is the positive point. But the bureaucrats can play and interpret the rules and thus take the decision as they like. It’s quite hierarchical (from lower rank officer to secretary) and sometimes takes a few months to decide. I can give you an example – One of my friends got an offer for training from abroad and he applied in his department for approval. Now the tippani process started and when he finally got the ok from the secretary the training was over. This is a very common case for us.

Many of our colleagues just leave the tippani on their desk and block the process. They say: “You are enjoying yourselves in Europe or America and earning as well, I remain stuck here, why should I bother with your work?” Many officers keep it shelved in cupboards. “Why work for you, if you are not doing anything special for me?” (Government officer, Department of Agriculture, interview, 2009)

Frequent transfers

“Government staff gets transferred every 2-3 year, so staff do not care if they do a poor job. If they make a mistake they will not actually get punished, they get transferred to another place. There is no accountability.” (Government officer, interview Dec 09)

Lack of accountability

“Government trainers are not so motivated to work in the field. They have a permanent job, so why bother to make any extra efforts, when you can get a salary by doing nothing. They also have not much interest in improving their knowledge. Monitoring and evaluation is weak, almost non-existent”. (NGO staff, interview 2009)

For many government officers their tasks are not always clear, especially when they get involved in a new project.

“Many tasks are not incorporated in the terms of reference. When a new project comes, tasks are simply added to your workload. This is also the case of Farmer Field Schools. This activity is not included in the TOR of staff” (government staff, interview 2009)

Neo-patrimonialism, patron-client, nepotism and corruption

Neo-patrimonialism¹⁷ influences politics in Nepal. Rather than representing the interests of Nepal as a whole, people who are elected or appointed to positions of power tend to exercise that power to benefit the interests of the group that installed them in their post. This goes back to the time of the Shah or Rana ruling, when relatives and trusted people were appointed. Government positions are governed by persistent patron-client relationships (Gyawali, 2002; Malla, 1996). Nepotism also plays a role in the working system of Nepal. People with relatives in positions of power and influence expect those individuals to direct resources (public spending, jobs, contracts) towards the interest of the family or kin, rather than to the country as whole. “If we do not do a favour while we are in power, we will lose respect from our *ahpno manche*¹⁸” (Interview, female officer, Tanahun, 2009)

Corruption is common practice in Nepal. The country scores high on the global Corruption Perception Index (146 out of 178 countries)¹⁹. The Economist also reports widespread corruption and misuse of funds:

Accounts of rampant corruption from the provinces are echoed by officials at the Ministry of Finance, at the government’s anti-corruption bodies and the National Planning Commission, and by members of the donor community who would only speak off-the-record.

The only sustained denial comes from some senior aid officers and donors who insist there is only “low-level”, “petty” and “isolated” corruption in local bodies. (Source The Economist 31 May 2011)

Knowing that their time in power might be short-lived, individuals have a short term horizon and a narrow vision of what they hope to achieve (Hagmann, 2005). Whether people are personally corrupt or not, is beside the point – the consequence is a distorted governance process.

Evaluation and job performance mechanisms have been developed but the implementation is weak. Personal linkages with higher authorities play a vital role in personnel matters. Employees tend to please their bosses rather than focus on excellent performance. Placement, promotion and transfer rules are flexibly implemented. Some postings are considered as a reward, others as a punishment, e.g. remote mountain districts.

Despite the negative image getting a government job remains popular. People like working for the government for several reasons: it provides one with security, status and financial benefits. As one government officer said:

¹⁷ Neo-patrimonialism, is a term that describes political regimes in which the collective interests of society as a whole are subordinated to the much narrower interests of people in power and their patrons and clients.

¹⁸ *Ahpno manche* means ‘own people’, indicating relatives in the broad sense.

¹⁹ http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/regional_highlights, accessed 02.03.2012)

"I like working for the government because it gives me status, and good provision for a pension, medical insurance. I also like it because it is well structured. Wherever you go, in each district the structure is in place and it is the same. There are the same procedures in all government offices. When I worked in the NGO sector it was not like that, the procedures changes when the donor changed, it was more project based and at random" (interview with senior government officer, Dec 2009)

"When I get a job in the government, it is for sure that my future is guaranteed. I know that I can provide for my family" (Nepalese Master student, interview 2010)

2.5 Maoist people's war

The Maoist insurgency or People's War, as the Maoists prefer to call their fight, began in 1996, six years after the restoration of multiparty democracy (most likely the unrest started much earlier²⁰). One key aim of their fight or revolution was: to establish "The People's Republic of Nepal." This they have achieved, but still their struggle is continuing.

2.5.1 Cause

The Maoist insurgency in Nepal has been viewed from different perspectives: as a consequence of failed development, as an ethnic uprising, and a result of bad governance (Hachhethu, 2004).

Frequent government changes and inside party conflicts have shaped the political scene since the 1990s. Power grabbing, internal quarrelling, corruption, nepotism, favouritism and political leaders who were more interested in personal gains than government stability have contributed to widespread dissatisfaction with politics in Nepal and can largely explain the fast growing support for the Maoists' cause. (Khatri, 1992; Upreti, 2006; Hutt et al., 2004).

Poverty, unemployment, regional disparities, dependency on foreign aid, unequal foreign trade relations, slow and unequal development has been considered a reason for expansion of the support base for the Maoists (Khatri, 1992; Upreti, 2006). "...Persistent economic deprivation' is the 'key factor that explains why the mid and far western regions provided a fertile breeding ground for rebellion" (Deraniyagala, 2005:53).

Mancours (2006) showed that access to land has a significant correlation with Maoist recruitment. In other words, "...relative deprivation of the (near) landless has contributed to salient support for – or at least lack of resistance against – the insurgency" (Mancours, 2006, pp.17).

Notwithstanding differences in argument, there seems to be a common consensus that Nepal's conflict can be adequately explained by relative inequality.²¹ It is undeniably a combination of factors that have contributed to the uprising of the Maoist movement and

²⁰ When I stayed on the campus of the Institute of Agriculture and Animals Science in 1986 there was already unrest among students and strong involvement in Maoist Party politics.

²¹ See studies by a.o. Lawoti, 2003; Deraniyagala, 2005; Manandhar, 2004; Mancours 2006; Sharma 2006; Hutt et al., 2004; Hatlebakk, 2008; Hachhethu, 2004.

the failure of successive governments has added to its spread. In the period between 1997 and 2002 I frequently heard: "Let the Maoists get a chance, because the others have already had their opportunity and wasted it" (interviews 1997, 2002)

2.5.2 History/background

The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) was formed at the end of the 1940s by the communists of Nepal who had a close affinity with communists in India (Upreti, 2006). At that time they lacked sufficient strength to start a movement.

In 1990 four hardcore communist parties made a first attempt to unite, they formed the CPN Unity Centre with Pushpa Dahal as Chairman (Upreti, 2006; Thapa, 2007). The United People's Front of Nepal (UPFN) was the political front of this Unity Centre. In 1995 UPFN split into two factions, one was renamed as CPN (Maoist). The CPN party started with the preparation for a violent movement. The 'people's war' was first officially declared in February 1996, when the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) presented a 40-point list of demands to the Nepali government, including the formation of a constituent assembly, the declaration of Nepal as a republic and secularisation of politics. When in 1997 their demands were not addressed the Maoists went underground. Chairman Pushpa Dahal (nickname Prachanda) introduced a new strategy named the Prachanda Path. The Prachanda Path assumes a kind of revolution that would be a fusion between Mao's war strategy of villages expanding to weapons and the Lenin model of armed insurrection (Sharma, 2004). With their initial strongholds in the mid-western districts of Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot, the Maoists slowly began to establish "base areas" elsewhere in the country. The conflict escalated after major police operations in 1998, with frequent clashes between Maoists and police throughout the country. The Maoist used several approaches in their fight over control of area and people. The Maoist collected (often forcefully) taxes from everyone, to support their cause. In some cases 'feudal' landlords were forced to give some of their land to landless people.

As far as I remember, since 1993 we have paid contributions to the Maoists. Before I got married I was thoroughly assessed by the Maoist party leaders: Was I supportive for their party? Or: was I a capitalist, the imperialist enemy? Could the party benefit from me? I was interviewed by one of the top leaders and information regarding my background was collected by the party. Over the years my dealings were continuously monitored by the Party.

Initially, the Nepalese government did not undertake much action against Maoists. This situation changed dramatically in 2001. After the royal massacre and addressing the rebels as 'terrorists' (a frequently used term following 9/11) the government and army got support in the global War on Terrorism and with the stated goal of averting the development of a "failed state" that could serve as a source of regional and international instability, the United States, European Union, and India, among other nations, have provided extensive military and economic aid to the Nepalese government.

In 2005 the Maoists signed a 12 point agreement with the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and changed their strategy from a revolutionary agenda to a democratic one (Nayak, 2007). As Prachanda in the *Kathmandu Post* on 7 February 2006 said: "The unfavourable international power balance and the overall economic, political and social realities of the country did not allow the CPN-M to use military means to seize power in Nepal" (Nayak,

2007:930). The Maoists and the political parties needed each other to fight against the autocratic King Gyanendra.

2.5.3 What do the Maoists want?

Explaining the ideology and objectives of the Maoist struggle, Babu Ram Bhattarai, one of the top leaders of the Maoists, said in 1996 in a daily newspaper:

“We want to overthrow the present state and establish a new democratic republic which will be neither communist nor socialist. In our new democratic republic, there will be no place for feudal, comprador, bureaucratic and capitalist forces, which are now flourishing under the protection and influence of foreign imperialist powers. We want to form a joint government of patriotic and democratic forces. The new system need not be a one party system but can also be a multi-party system “ (Rising Nepal 1996).

The main concern of the Maoists is the feudal structure of Nepalese society and the exploitation and absolute dominance of the leaders of Nepal. It is a class struggle. Also the Maoists are against the external influence, and want to drive out the so called imperialists (Karki and Seddon, 2003). According to them the emancipation of the Nepalese citizens can only happen through armed struggle, which they call the People’s war. They fight for equality and rights of marginalised groups, but they consider all forms of inequality a result of feudal relationships and dominance by the so called bourgeoisie (Yami, 2007).

A major difference with other communist groups in Nepal concerns the fight against feudalism. Other communists (non-Maoists) assume that strengthening the democratic process will automatically put an end to feudalism.

2.5.4 Who support the Maoists?

The Maoists slogans against Brahmins, Hinduisation, caste system and class hierarchies are appealing to ethnic communities, particular Magar, Gurung and Limbu belonging to the Mongoloid society, who were forcedly squeezed into the caste hierarchy when the Muluki Ain was declared. After the democratic elections in 1990, a lot of ethnic dissatisfaction came into the open. Various ethnic groups felt unrepresented in decision-making. Several ethnicities expressed that they experience discrimination and social exclusion not only by caste but also on the basis of religion, language. If you look at pictures of the Maoist army you see mostly young men and women, students and Janajatis. These are the groups that are attracted to the Maoist ideologies.

Initially, the insurgents chose the Mid-western hills to begin their war because the location is remote and far from the capital and an oppressed ethnic population, the Magars, as an easy recruitment option for the Maoists existed in this area. In this Western region of Nepal, people have long felt excluded from development (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2008).

In response to the question who supported the Maoists, Babu Ram Bhattarai in his *Politico-Economic Rationale for the People’s War* (1998) stated that the indigenous people have been oppressed by certain groups. He does not specify which groups but limits himself to general terms, and not well-defined categories which is not applicable in this multi-ethnic,

multi-caste society. The large amount of ethnographic work on Nepal since the 1960s²² showed that the diverse population cannot be reduced to general terms as 'indigenous groups' or 'oppressed groups', as expressed by Bhattarai. Many people who faced oppression under the past government or by the royal rulers, feel sympathy with the Maoist cause. Educated, unemployed youth, frustrated and having little hope on other political support, frequently joined the Maoist forces. The Maoists had a poor support base in urban areas due to their extremely violent activities, forceful financial contributions of government officers and traders (Nayak, 2007). In urban areas where many people get their income from working with internationals, many who could be regarded 'imperialists' by the Maoists, there is less support for the Maoists. There is conflicting information about the numbers of victims²³, but it is clear that the insurgency has directly and indirectly affected the lives of all people of Nepal.

In the interviews taken during summer 2009 in the foothills, after the Maoists insurgency, it was clear that most people had experienced the war as a period of dread and trouble. They were fed up with fear for the government and the people's army. They told stories of hiding from both parties and worries about paying money, providing grain or killing their chickens for the fighters. They also told stories of being afraid that their sons or daughters would be taken. In Yamdi there was a clear difference between the Brahmins and Dalits in the village.

"We had to hide ourselves and our rice from the Maoists, because they were against us"(interview with Brahmin woman, 2009)

"The Maoists gave us a lot of support. We gave them food and shelter during the war. They helped us raise our voice, to fight against discrimination and oppression" (interview with Dalit man, Yamdi, 2009)

In a good number of places, people felt torn between the army and Maoists. During the visits for this research in Sindhupalchowk district (Chautara VDC) an entire village was still facing the results of the aftermath of the fight. Many men had been killed in the area, women were left to fend for themselves and their children (Sindhupalchowk, interview, 2009). In Mauja VDC, a Gurung village in Kaski district, people welcomed the Maoists, they found Maoists more convincing than any other political party, and were willing to give them a chance. People were already used to being exploited, a visit of a government officer or police to their village in the past meant 'cutting a chicken', preparing an elaborate meal. (Mauja, Gurung man, interview 2009)

Not all army or Maoists behaved correctly. Some misused their position. Many fighters were given a gun after a short training and felt powerful, but also misused their

²² To name a few: Holmberg, 1989 for Tamangs; Messerschmidt 1976 for Thakalis; Gellner for Newars

²³ "So far we have recorded at least 17,265 deaths during the armed conflict, while the previous estimate was around 13,000," said Dhurba Gaida, secretary of the task force.(Nepalnews.com accessed 22 Sept 2011)

"The death toll has increased because more people in the villages have lodged complaints about losing relatives during the conflict." (BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8268651.stm>, accessed 9 Sept 2011)

The task force also found that 70,425 people were displaced by the conflict, although most have now been able to return home. (sources: Reliefweb, 2009)

power. In rural areas not only Maoists but also so called “caoists” (kind of ‘cowboy- Maoists’) became active. In absence of law and order, a kind of anarchy arose where people took the law in their own hands.

This chaos and anxiety we experienced in our family too. An example is given below:

One day X (my husband) got in a taxi; he wanted to get a regular ride into the city for an appointment with one of his friends. However, the car was not driven by a regular taxi driver, X got kidnapped, was blindfolded and driven to a place out of town in a rural area. There he was beaten up and forced to pay a lot of money. As he did not have much money and because he was reluctant to pay for reasons that were unclear, he asked: who is behind this action and why am I forced to pay? What have I done wrong? It worked out that a former farm labourer, who was frustrated that he had lost his job (he had left, because working on our farm did not include a ticket to Europe), took revenge on X. He had hired a gang, who pretended to be Maoists fighters, to beat X and force him to pay money. With a payment of Rs²⁴ 10.000 on the spot, X was brought back to town. (diary notes July 2005)

The Maoists have made the government, but also NGOs, more alert. The NGOs were often requested to show their funding sources and to become transparent about their ways of spending. In 2001 in Kavre district I witnessed that a German research project was terminated because the Maoists could not see any benefits for the local people, but only observed data collection for the benefit of a German research institution.

The conflict has forced the young and able men to seek employment abroad in order to avoid the violations committed by both the Maoists and Government forces. These labourers work predominantly in the Gulf (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, etc.) and in Southeast Asia (in particular Malaysia). Mass out-migration has taken place in the last 10-15 years (Gartaula, 2011).

“Depending on the income status men went to different countries. If you could not afford a loan, one went to India to find a job in security services, in the Indian army or as a labourer. People with possibilities to get a loan, or to pay for a ticket and visa requirements went to Malaysia or Qatar, Dubai or other so called ‘Arab’ states. If you had more money to spend then Korea or Japan were options: more investment initially for the work permit, but also to earn higher salaries . If money was not the biggest obstacle and men also had a higher educational background, then opportunities were sought in the USA, or the UK.”(Kavre, interview, 2009)

2.5.5 Women in the Maoist movement

Men and women have experienced the Maoist movement differently, both in their roles as victim and as actor. Men were often targeted to join the fight and either approached by the government or the Maoist army. Many men have fled the rural areas, to escape the fighting and found job opportunities abroad. Men in the Maoist movement were observed in their traditional roles. Most leaders are men, and the party’s ultimate leaders Prachanda, Babu Ram Bhattarai are both from the upper caste, dominant ethnic Brahmin group in

²⁴ 1 euro is approximately 100 NRs

society. The male leadership is ambivalent, and kind of reluctant about redefining gender relations, claiming all inequities down to feudalism and class oppression (Yami, , 2007)..

In Nepal the dominant—and often state-supported—ideologies towards women are based upon conservative Hindu concepts of femininity. However, in the country reside over 60 non-Hindu ethnic groups who speak Tibeto-Burman languages, who practice a different religion and together form a substantial proportion of the population. It is common knowledge that gender relations among these groups vary widely from the normative Hindu image, often with more egalitarian kinship and economic structures. The Maoist leaders tend to gloss over this diversity and refer to the Nepalese women (Tamang, 2002).

The website of the Maoists (www.cpnm.org), remarkably show many pictures of women who joined their army. Often of Jjanati origin, stern-looking with roughly cut short hair and dressed in green fighting fatigues and sport shoes. The women look like an extreme make-over version of the traditional Nepali women with their customary colourful (often red) sari, slippers, jewellery, and long flowing dark hair. Women were involved in the Maoist movement especially as guerrilla fighters, but also as propagandists, mobilisers and to some extent as party cadres and district secretaries. According to different sources there are about 30 – 40% women in the Maoist force (Sharma and Prasain, 2004) although there are no hard data. These are mostly women from Janajati and Dalit groups (Yami, 2007), but also many upper caste women, district schoolgirls and just literate women joined the movement (Gautam et al., 2001). Prachanda frankly admitted to have been surprised by the overwhelming response of women (Onesto, 2000).

The active involvement of women has been one of the most discussed aspect of the Maoist insurgency (Sharma and Prasain, 2004).

Women support the Maoists for several reasons: they see it as a chance to break with the oppressive traditions of the Hindu family rules (Sharma and Prasain, 2004).

Yami (2007) suggests that women are motivated to join the Maoists because they believe that the Maoists will help them fight their oppression:

“Women’s social oppression is firmly rooted in state sponsored Hindu religion which upholds feudal Brahminical rule based on caste system, which disparages women in relation to men” (Yami, 2007:15) ” Parvati²⁵ links this suppression of women to the feudal system, as other Maoists do: The feudal patriarchy headed by the King not only denies women’s dignity but also robs away her labour by denying her right to parental property “(Yami, 2007: p 108)

Parvati takes a more subtle approach by suggesting that the effects of the Maoist movement have been different for women from each group, depending upon their existing relative freedoms. She writes that the revolution has assisted Hindu women “... to break the feudal patriarchal restrictive life imposed by the puritanical Hindu religion, by unleashing their repressed energy” (Parvati, 1999). She suggests that the people’s war has had a particularly important impact on those from the most exploited Dalit communities by “...unleashing their hatred against the state” (Parvati, 1999:2).

In most cases women joined for the same reasons as men from their own community Kampwirth in Lohani-Chase (2008). The Maoist platform is clearly appealing to many rural women, both Hindu and otherwise. Women’s political awareness and motivations for getting involved in the guerrilla force was shaped by intersecting lines of poverty status, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, gender and history (Pettigrew and Shneiderman, 2004). It is

²⁵ Comrade Parvati is Central Committee Member and Head of Women’s Department of CPN (Maoist).

the first movement in Nepal in which women and men openly have been observed to fight together.

The Maoists have encouraged women, and in particular rural girls, to sign up, the leaders have shown some ambiguity towards participation of educated, urban women, who were considered to be bourgeoisie (Parvati in Yami, 2007; Parvati, 2003).

The Maoist movement has potential for transforming women's roles and gender based ideology but not without contradictions and paradoxes. In the Maoist army women were usually given stereotypical roles such as food management, mending clothes, singing and dancing, collecting donations and recruitment, and carrying loads. Women are absent in higher ranks, and in decision-making (Sharma and Prasain 2004:165). This was also admitted by Hisila Yami, 2007 "There is still a problem in accepting women leadership in the People's Army (Yami, 2007:7). Parvati confirmed this when she was interviewed by Yami: "young women were very active, but once they got married they eventually became either the wives of leaders or vanished into oblivion"(Yami 2007:108)

The contribution of the Maoists to women's empowerment (as Yami and Parvati (2007) proudly claim) is disputable. If we may believe Hisila Yami, the wife of Babu Ram Battarai then women are indeed *empowered*: "Today the image of tired malnourished women carrying children at one end and rearing cattle at the other end has been transformed into image of dignified fighting women with gun" (Yami, 2007: 11) These images of armed women are evidence of the movement's egalitarianism and "empowering" effects for Nepali women (Yami, 2007). The 'people's war' has certainly precipitated new experiences for Nepali women of all backgrounds, whether in learning to use guns for combatant women, or negotiating the fine line of safety between state forces and the Maoists, for civilian women. Joining the Maoists was a chance to break free from established positions. However, it is questionable whether it will bring changes for women in the long run (Pettigrew and Shneidermann, 2004). Members of Kathmandu-based feminist organisations are particularly unimpressed and accusing the Maoists of "...behaving no differently than our 'men-stream' political parties. We never expected our male-dominated government to involve women in the peace process, but we thought you were going to be different" (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004:2).

Since Nepali Maoist models for women's "empowerment" must negotiate between all-embracing Maoist ideologies and the existing evidence of gender discrimination in Nepali society embracing conservative Hindu cultural norms, there are noticeable gaps between rhetoric and practice. Maoists see gender inequality mainly related to feudalism. In the feudal patriarchal outlook first of all women are not treated as individuals (Parvati in an interview in Yami 2007), secondly it sees them in the light of their reproductive function.

Women are generally considered as a homogenous group by the Maoist leaders, regional, religious, caste and ethnic differences ignored. Among the Maoists there seems acceptance of the notion of a universally, stereotypical image of disempowered Nepali woman and not acknowledging the diversity among Nepalese women (Tamang, 2002).

As elsewhere, the reality for Nepali women lies in the specifics of lived experience all along the continuum between these two extremes. Julie Bridgham's film *Sari Sisters* (2009) gives an impression of women living in different realities influenced by the Maoist movement. It is important to adopt a more nuanced approach, which acknowledges both women's multiple existing scripts for agency and the constraints within which they exercise it.

Before and during the civil war many men had left rural villages to work abroad, join the Maoists or the government army. Women were left behind and forced to take up roles

earlier carried out by men, such as ploughing. Feminisation of agriculture and the rural economy took place. Although women already did the bulk of the farming activities, a lot of decision-making for instance related to crop selection was still in the hands of the men. Now women had to do land preparation, which is traditionally a men's task. In many areas, women are reported to be ploughing fields, running forestry groups, and administering schools and other institutions.

However, this was not the first time that women were alone in rural areas. The Gurkha/Gorkha recruitment, the salt-grain trade, or labour migration, were all reasons in the past that village women have had to make do alone and take on stereotypically 'male' gendered roles. The insurgency has now provided those circumstances, but by accident rather than design. Rather than successes of the Maoist movement, then, these shifts in practice might be seen as instances of the "unexpected dynamics and spaces of ambivalence" that anthropologist Andrew Kipnis identifies as central to the formation of Maoist states (Pettigrew and Shneidermann, 2004: 7).

Ultimately, the fundamental changes in gender relations that the Maoists assert may not be the intentional result of their policies, but rather the largely consequences of the conflict that emerge in relation to women's agency.

2.5.6 Challenges for the Maoists

The Maoist movement has potential for transformation but not without contradictions and paradoxes. Overall, the emerging picture of Maoist attitudes towards caste and gender relations is contradictory. The movement faces a rift based on caste: the top leaders, are men from higher caste, the lower cadres are mostly from ethnic groups such as the Magars and Tharus. While some women state that they joined the movement in search of more egalitarian gender relations, Maoist women face a complex set of struggles within a party whose understanding of their past, and commitment to their future, is incomplete and ambivalent. Additionally the return of women fighters to civil society is not without problems.

False hopes, failure of the present government, continuation of strikes (*bandh*), violence, economic suffering, fear (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2004). The leaders are threatening to go back to the jungle and take up their fight again. They have not been able to set a good example. The 'people's war' has certainly precipitated new experiences for Nepali men and women of all backgrounds, but these shifts cannot be claimed entirely as the intentional achievements of Maoist policy. Still it is clear that the Maoist movement introduced men and women in rural Nepal to potentially transformative possibilities.

2.6 Agriculture in Nepal

Historical facts show that the rural economy of Nepal changed rapidly after unification in the late 18th century (Seddon and Adhikari, 2003). Settlement was encouraged at that time, and slash-and-burn shifting agricultural practices abandoned. Government policies stimulated land clearance and cultivation, which increased production of dry-land farming of maize and millet on the upland slopes and paddy rice farming in the valley bottoms. Pastoralism gradually diminished in importance and consumption patterns changed. Overall population levels and population density increased significantly at the same time, as did crop production.

Already from that time development showed regional and social differences (Seddon and Adhikari, 2003). In the far western regions, at high altitudes there was less progress than in the centre of the country, around the Kathmandu valley. As investment in land increased through terracing and improvements of other kinds such as irrigation, the value of farm land rose too. With increased population pressure land became a scarce resource. In areas where land transactions were possible, it is likely that patterns of land ownership and even of access to land for farming became increasingly unequal, with some households (particularly of the so-called occupational or lower castes) finding it hard to get land.

Nepal's population continued to grow, the agrarian economy slowly evolved, and the structure of the economy as a whole too transformed gradually into a more diversified picture. In the 1970s food production increased rapidly. Eradication of malaria in the terai, construction of the Mahendra Highway, the East-West Highway along the southern foot of the hills, and the land settlement programs in the plains contributed to a large expansion of farm land and a significant increase in overall agricultural output (Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon, 2001). However, this positive trend was not lasting long. Nepal was a net exporter of food grain in the 1970s and early 1980s, but turned into a net importer of increasing quantities of food grain (HDR, 2002; Seddon and Adhikari, 2003) by the turn of the century. The pressure on natural resources has increased in recent years due to population pressure. During the past two decades, agriculture grew only at 3% a year against a population growth rate of 2.5% (MoAC, 2010). Thus it could do very little to enhance overall per capita income or to promote economic development. An increased demand for food and a stagnating or declining food production has resulted in a food deficit for many people. Food deficiency has become a big problem, especially for small and marginal farmers in remote areas (Seddon and Adhikari, 2003). Nepal was ranked 54th of 81 ranked countries (those with GHI > 5.0) on the Global Hunger Index in 2011²⁶, between Cambodia and Togo. Nepal's current score of 19.9 is better than in 2010 (20.0) and much improved from its score of 27.5 in 1990.

Nepal is still predominantly a rural agricultural society, where more than 80% of people live in rural areas and depend on farming as a source of livelihood (Lancker and Nijkamp, 2000; World Bank, 2006; Seddon and Adhikari, 2003). Much of the farming is of a subsistence nature, and large families depend on small parcels of land whose fragmentation is continuing, along the lines of son inheritance practices. About half of the population of Nepal consists of small farmers who have between 0.2 and less than 1 hectare of land (World Bank, 2006; CBS, 2011)

Agriculture contributes almost 36% to the national income (GDP) in 2012 (MoAC, 2012) (in 2003-04 this was 40% and 50%, in 1992) which makes Nepal very dependent on this sector (NPC, 2010; World Bank, 1992; World Bank, 2006) Even though the share of agriculture has been declining, by world standards it is still high. The country features a relatively fragile and unstable environment. The Himalayas are still rising, due to the Indian plate pushing towards Tibet. The movement of the Indian plate makes this region seismically active, leading to earthquakes from time to time. The rugged terrain is prone to erosion and frequent landslides. Access to remote and high mountain areas is difficult and construction of infrastructure expensive.

With altitudes ranging from less than 100 m in the terai to over 8000 m in the Himalayas, different climates and different types of farming systems exist within Nepal. As a

²⁶

IFPRI, 2011 available at <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/2011-global-hunger-index>

result a wide variety of crops, vegetables and fruits are produced. The Himalayas or mountain region has a low population density and agricultural production is limited due to the cold climate and limited rainfall. Here farmers grow one crop of potato, buckwheat or barley each year or every two years on sloping fields.

The research took place in the central or also called mid hills (Figure 2.1) in a region that forms the central belt of Nepal under the Himalayas. Here, 42% of the total land area of Nepal contributes one-third of Nepal's food production and is the home of 44.3% of the country's population (Ministry of Population and Environment, 2002 in Iversen et al., 2006). Subsistence agriculture is the primary mode of production in Nepal, and consequently much generated in this sector is consumed at home and not clearly reflected in the national GDP.

FFS started in the mid hills and the plains or terai. The survey data from 2002 cover the terai and some districts in the mid hills. The interviews and FGD in 2009 took place in the mid hills. Although the situation of farmers in the terai differs from the mid hills, the data collected can be compared, in particular because the FFS participants in the terai were mostly migrants from the mid hills so they shared a socio-economic history. The main difference can be found in cropping patterns (the terai has more rice, less millet cultivation) and the land size, which is on average larger in the terai (> 05. ha/hh) than in the mid hills (0.2 – 0.5 ha/hh) (See Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Cropping system differences terai and mid hills

	Terai	Mid hills
Main crops	rice	Rice in summer, wheat, barley in winter
Other crops	Wheat, barley, pulses, oilseeds, jute, cotton, tobacco	Vegetables, mustard, millet
Climate	tropical	Sub-tropical
Average farm size	1.5 ha	0.5 ha

Source: own research; Pandey et al., 2009

Actually each Farmer Field School had its own peculiarities, not only as a result of location but also due to its socio-cultural context, like ethnicity or caste. Even within mid hills or within the terai there can be large differences. For example in Kavre (mid-hills) there are tropical and temperate areas; villages dominated by Tamang or Brahmin or Chettries and so on. The data collected for this research provides a general picture and does not account for situational differences.

In the mid hills, rice is produced on terraced hillsides during the summer where water is available (*khet* land). In drier fields (*bari* land) maize and millet are grown in this season. Winter crops are: wheat, barley, oilseeds, potatoes, and vegetables. Most farms are involved in livestock production. Generally farmers keep buffaloes and cattle for milk and manure, nowadays also used for household methane gas production, oxen for draught power, goats and chicken for meat and eggs. Yaks are kept at high altitudes for meat, power, manure and milk. Pigs are popular among certain ethnic groups such as Magar, Gurung, but the higher castes neither keep nor consume pork (only wild boar). Livestock raising is second to crop production in Nepal's economy. Farmers use farmyard manure to maintain the soil fertility, supplemented with chemical fertiliser.

Rice, maize and wheat are the main staple crops, whereby rice is the most important. In Nepali there are several words indicating rice: *dhan* (the crop), *chamal* (the grains), *bhaat* (boiled rice). Rice is a metaphor for food in general. If you have not had rice, you have not had a proper meal (Gartaula, 2011). Rice is grown in the terai (70%) and in the mid hills, of which 79% under rainfed conditions (World Bank, 2006). According to the season of cultivation rice can be grouped in three types: Chaite rice, Bhadaiya rice and Asadh or main season rice.

In the research area in Bhaktapur the cropping system on khet land is: rice – wheat – fallow or rice – potato – vegetables. On bari land this is maize/ wheat – vegetables. In Kavre this can be: rice – potato – potato (*khet*) and maize – potato –vegetables (bari). Rice, maize and wheat are the common cereals grown by the farmers in both the FFS while finger millet as minor crop was grown by a limited number of households in FFS areas. In diverse pocket areas one can find a concentration of crops, e.g. around Paanchkhal in Kavre district many farmers produce tomatoes, in Paunati (in the same district) one can find a belt with citrus crops.

Vegetables are grown in kitchen gardens for local consumption throughout the country and with concentrations of market production around the major cities, in the mid hills and in the terai. Although agriculture in Nepal is still largely subsistence oriented and semi-commercial, production of cash crops has increased in recent years (MoAC, 2010).

Nepal is increasingly self-reliant in vegetable production. Vegetable demand is rising due to change in people's food habits, rapid urbanisation and an increased level of education among the population. The government strongly promotes vegetable production in rural areas.

Bhandari's study (2007) reveals that majority of the farmers in FFS in Kavre and Bhaktapur district have gradually shifted towards commercial vegetable production. Farmer Field Schools have emphasised vegetable production in recent years. Farmers of Bhaktapur, due to their nearness to the markets in Suryabinayak and Kalimati (Kathmandu) are much more attracted to vegetable production than the farmers in Kavre. In remoter districts such as Sindhupalchowk vegetable production has not taken off as a cash crop but farmers do increasingly grow vegetables in their kitchen garden for home consumption.

Land distribution remains unequal, and the average size of land holdings is very small - less than a hectare for an average family size of six. (MHHDC, 2003; World Bank, 2006, Wiley et al. 2009) Their first concern is how to increase crop production, food security and income (Giridhari et al., 2004).

Land reform has been a political issue for decades. Even though the legal mechanisms for land reform such as placing limits on the size of land owned do exist, in practice most farmers still have low productive, small holdings. Predictably, land reform has been the mandate of every political party in Nepal, particularly the communists.

The census of 2011 revealed that the country had an economic growth of 3.5%, but largely in the non-agricultural sector (5.1 versus 1.5 in agricultural sector)²⁷. It is important to recognise that this reflects not merely the slow growth in agricultural output, but also a relatively rapid rise in other sectors of the economy, and a gradual transformation and restructuring of the economy. Recently, some decline has been observed: In 1995 80% of the population was employed in agriculture, in 2010 this had declined to 66% of the population (MoAC, 2010).

²⁷ <http://www.cbs.gov.np/index.php>, accessed 24.06.2012

The rural area is mostly characterised by subsistence farming, with low and sometimes even declining yields. Farms are getting more diversified but crop production of cereals remains the main output, especially paddy: In 1995 76% of farm production were cereals, while in 2003 this had dropped to 69% (NLSS, 2003-04).

Nepal's economy and society experienced major transformations during the two decades from the late 1970s, through the 1980s and into the early 1990s from a primarily agricultural economy to a non-agricultural economy. (a.o. Seddon and Adhikari, 2003; Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon, 2001). Rapid urbanisation, also, has motivated some farmers to sell their farmland for higher prices. Such land is then used for housing, especially in urbanising areas (Gartaula, 2011). Neither unskilled and nor educated youth appear to be interested in farming anymore, trying to avoid the hardships their parents and grandparents faced (idem).

In recent years, I learned that the youth were less interested in agriculture. This can be observed in villages, where one sees mostly elderly people and women working in the fields. Rampur agricultural college used to be one of the most popular universities in Nepal until the 1990s but with the increase of private educational institutes the market for education has changed. The new generation has more options and shows less interest in studying agriculture. Among the hundreds of new higher education institutes only one agricultural college has opened in Kathmandu. This decrease in interest in farming among youth worries the farmers with whom I have interviews. As one farmer said: "Can we talk about development, have we achieved progress when our children are not interested in working on our land anymore?" (Sanga, Kavre, 2009).

Interviews and discussion with the FFS participants show that the view of rural people on agriculture, in particular land and labour has changed over the years. For the older generation agriculture and farming is something we do to get food, while the younger generation is somewhat ambivalent: they like having land for status and want to build their own house, but they do not want to work on the land. On the other hand, also the younger generation affirms that land and farming are needed for food security, but they just do not want to get involved themselves in the 'dirty job'(interview in Jhumka, 1998; Gartaula, 2011). "Farming is not my thing, why should I get my hands dirty when I studied for SLC" (Jyamdi, Kavre, 2009).

Agriculture is still an important source of income for many people in rural areas but increasingly farm households have additional incomes from other jobs or remittances. This is in line with the national trend for remittance flows over this period. The proportion of Nepalese households that received remittances rose from about 23% in 1995/96 to about 37% in 2010/2011, contributing to 23% of GDP in 2011²⁸.

2.6.1 Women in agriculture

Men and women perform different tasks in agriculture. Bhandari 's gender analysis using the so-called Harvard Analysis (March et al., 1999) of the labour division in farming in the mid hills of Bhaktapur district in a farming system with vegetable production indicates the different roles of men and women (Tables 2.4 and 2.5). This analysis provides a glimpse of different tasks but does not indicate the number of hours that is spent on each task.

²⁸ World Bank's new report 'Migration and Remittance Factbook 2011'

Table 2.4 Labour division according to gender in vegetable production

Activities	Men	Women
	Crop Selection	Y
Nursery bed preparation		Y
Seed sowing		Y
Mulching of the vegetable nursery bed	Y	Y
Watering		Y
Field Observation		Y
Organic Manure application		Y
Chemical fertiliser application	Y	
Fungicide application	Y	
Insecticide application	Y	
Land preparation	Y	
Transplanting		Y
Weeding and hoeing		Y
Staking		Y
Harvesting		Y
Marketing	Y	
Sales and revenue handling	Y	

Source: Bhandari, 2007

In addition, Regmi's Master's thesis (2010) shows the gender division in farming systems with mainly rice production in Lalitpur (below).

Table 2.5 Labour division according to gender in rice production

Activities	Men	Women
	Seed Selection	Y
Seed purchase	Y	
Land preparation	Y	
Transplanting		Y
Irrigation	Y	Y
Water users meeting	Y	
Chemical fertiliser application	Y	
Insecticide application	Y	
Weeding and hoeing		Y
Harvesting		Y
Storage		Y
Selling products	Y	

Source: Regmi, 2010

In general, agriculture in Nepal is labour intensive and women play a significant role in various crop production activities. Men are in charge of land preparation and marketing

aspects, as well as providing and applying inputs such as chemical fertiliser and pesticides. Women are responsible for a large part of the subsistence economy, but their contributions have been overlooked as they rarely become visible in the cash economy (Bhadra and Shah, 2007). The contribution of women is underexposed partly because their work is not economically valued and reflected in statistics (Joshi, 2000). The different terms used in Nepal's census survey (2001) such as holding what, head of household, main farmers, economically active, subsistence unit, and primary and secondary activity, are gender insensitive and insufficiently cover the important contribution of women's work (Joshi, 2000). Additionally, census surveys define head of household as the chief decision-maker in the household. This biased definition does not explicitly mention female-headed households and women's role in agricultural work and intra-household decision-making tends to be ignored in the census data (Joshi, 2000).

Research in Lalitpur and in the Central region (Joshi, 2000) shows that women's involvement in rice production activities exceeds that of men's. Ploughing, irrigation, and threshing were mostly done by men but all other rice agronomic practices were primarily done by women. On their own farms, women did most of the levelling, fertiliser application, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing, and storing of grain and rice straw. In exchange labour with other families, fertilising, transplanting, weeding, and post-harvest activities were primarily done by women. In all, women contributed 65% and men contributed 35% of all activities of family rice production (idem, 2000). In the winter crop wheat and maize, the gender division of labour in wheat production closely followed the pattern found in rice production.

Women work 12 or 13 hours a day while men work only eight or nine hours a day, depending on the season. Women work both outside and inside the household and have less leisure time than men (Giri, 2009; Tiwari, 2007; Bhadra and Shah, 2007; Joshi, 2000)

Nepalese societies are patrilineal, which means that the line of descent is traced through males. Marriages were traditionally almost always arranged by the parents, and a "mediator" or priest was used to complete the formalities. These days there is more 'free choice' or as Nepalese call it: 'love marriage'. But as one informant said: "Even when we were in love before we decided to marry we will always look what is behind this person that I like, what is her family like, who is her father, what relations does he have". (urban woman, Kathmandu, 2009)

The basic social unit in a village is the family, or *paribar*, consisting of a patrilineary extended household and predominantly dominated by the men, but the mother plays an important social role. Unmarried sons normally do not separate from their parents; if the parents are deceased, unmarried sons usually stay with their older brothers. Because family separation always results in a division of family landholdings, landholdings have become extremely fragmented, both geographically and socially. Beyond the immediate family, a larger kinship network exists that guides social interaction. This can occasionally involve sharing food. This network also was an important means of meeting farm labour needs, especially during the planting and harvesting seasons, when labour shortages were common.

Over the years many changes have taken place in rural areas. Some were reported in a PRA exercise with villagers in Yamdi, Kavre district, in 2009.

Table 2.6 Changes that have taken place over the last 30 years

<i>Changes</i>	<i>30 years ago</i>	<i>2009</i>
Agricultural production	Food crops, maize and millet, most months just sufficient for own consumption	Food crops: maize, but also potatoes and some cabbages. Not sufficient for household consumption.
Family planning	Men decided number of children, no family planning	Women decide with husband, family planning is easily available from health centre
Number of children	5-8	3-4
Land use	Agriculture on small fields.	Some land fallow and some for building houses, other land for farming. Many scattered small fields.
Access	Half day walking to Dhulikhel	Road access with transport possibilities, but not in rainy season.
Nutrition	Rice and maize and millet are the main staples	Rice with vegetables in daily menu
Marriage	Arranged marriages at young age, 17-18 years. Marriage took place within families in the vicinity. No inter-caste marriage.	Marriages decided by children in consultation with parents and grandparents. People marry not only with people from neighbouring villages anymore. Inter-caste marriages happen.
Migration	Not thought about.	Most families have someone (male) abroad to earn money or to study.
Child mortality	High, in each family at least one.	Children do not die at early age as in the past.
Water	Drinking water needs to collected 3 hours walking from village by women.	Drinking water tank in the village, in the Brahmin area.
Electricity	no	In most houses available.
Social hierarchy in village	Big separation between castes. Occupational castes serve Brahmins.	Less segregation between castes, but still not much communication between separate groups. Political affiliations are replacing caste differences.
Women's social space	Women not allowed outside their home without husband or other male family member. Women's name is never mentioned. Women expected to behave docile and treat their husband as a representative of god.	Women have joint groups and have become more mobile with use of mobile phones

Source: PRA, timeline in Yamdi, Kavre, 2009)

People have observed better access and improved facilities, and also more freedom. Women in particular have benefitted from less discrimination and more decision-making power and mobility. Social relations in villages have changed, shifting from caste to political divisions.

2.7 Overview of government strategies for agricultural development

As agriculture is still the dominant sector in Nepal's economy, it has been getting priority in budget allocations. The institutional set up of the agricultural sector headed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives has seen different organisational structures, with separate divisions or departments for e.g. extension and research. These departments over time were merged and then split up again. These re-organisations have contributed to a dynamic but

not always well-organised agricultural public service system, with a relatively large number of levels in the management hierarchy. Although de-centralisation is in process still many decisions are taken at central government level by the highest authority in each office. Information reaches the farmers in the district only after a long process of decision-making via several governmental levels. Over the years the government has adopted various approaches towards agricultural development at various times. An overview of these changing paradigms is given below:

Mid-'50s to mid'60s: Community Development and Extension Approach

This approach was based on the trickle-down strategy of the diffusion theory used in extension in the 1950s-60s with Indian and USA support in 1951 soon after the fall of the Rana Empire. Nepal's agricultural extension is the first public service established for the rural population. The planned efforts for agricultural development started in 1952 with the establishment of Tribhuvan Village Development Department (TVDD) under the Point Four program of the USAID. TVDD introduced the Block Development Approach in extension.

Village development workers were the grass-roots change agents to distribute improved agricultural inputs and information to the farmers; this information would trickle down to their fellow farmers. But this trickle-down theory did not materialise for several reasons, one being the technologies not appropriate for diverse and complex farmers' conditions in Nepal.

Training and Visit (T & V)

The T & V approach was introduced in 1975 in the World Bank-funded Narayani Zone Irrigation Development Project (NZIDP) in three districts of the terai. This approach was gradually extended to all agriculture and irrigation projects funded by the World Bank. It was a routine and disciplined program with a focus on model farmers and extension through trained extension personnel who became subject matter specialists. The *Training and Visit extension system* has been criticised for being top-down, top-heavy, inefficient and ineffective.

Mid-'60s to mid-'80s: Commodity Development Approach

Following the programs of the international research centres such as CYMMIT and IRRI, and in line with the Green Revolution theory, Nepal launched the Integrated Cereals Project with American assistance. It was a research-based approach with a focus on cereals. Regional research centres were strengthened, but at the centre, back-up facilities were not developed and extension was neglected, and the diversity of agro-ecological regions and farmers were not considered.

Integrated Rural Development Projects (IRDP)

During the 1970s and '80s, the impact of this project was seen only among resourceful farmers. The Integrated Hill Development Project and subsequent IRDPs during mid-seventies continued high input technology-based extension benefiting rich farmers. These IRDPs assumed that existing technology of production was adequate and the major limiting factor was institutional, more specifically needed coordination between different disciplines, such as livestock, crop and social issues.

Block Production Program

This approach was initiated at several cropping systems research sites in Nepal to provide necessary technical support services to the farmers in a coordinated way: in 'blocks', to facilitate the adoption of technologies generated through cropping systems research during the 1980s.

Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSRE)

FSRE evolved during 1980s out of the USAID-funded Integrated Cereals Project implemented during the 1970s. This was an approach that involved farmers in all the steps of technology generation. With British funding a lot of investment in off-farm trials was established. This funding was part of a scheme to provide livelihood opportunities for ex-Gurkhas who had fought in the British army.

Group Approach

This emerged as a dominant approach of extension and mobilising farmers since 1990. Under the World Bank's structural adjustment programmes the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives were forced to lay off staff and cut costs in the 1990s. This was a concrete reason to introduce the so called 'group approach', in agricultural extension in Nepal. This approach would be more efficient, easier for the extension workers to reach more farmers frequently and give more responsibilities to communities, assuming that it would also be a better reaction to farmers needs. The eighth five-year plan of the government also adopted this approach. Additionally, the Ministry had found the prevailing T&V system not to be effective. Worldwide dissatisfaction with T&V had called for more participatory approaches, for more involvement of farmers in extension, and Nepal was no exception. Farmer field schools could fit in with the 'group approach' and provided an alternative extension, more participatory method for the agricultural sector.

Pocket Package Strategy

This pocket package strategy assumes that in a certain geographically defined pocket areas there are common factors of production, which can be improved with a certain package of inputs. This pocket package idea is still a common strategy. "We select different areas that are suitable for a certain crop or other agricultural activity. In remote areas in this valley (Kathmandu) we promote bee-keeping. In more accessible areas we work on vegetable production for the market" (DADO chief, Kathmandu, interview 2009) In other DADO offices this was also stressed:

"In remote areas where people can grow vegetables we focus on seed production. This can be a good income for poor farmers, who have no market access to produce fresh vegetables. We look at climatic circumstances, and other conditions, for instance if facilities such as roads and irrigation are available".
(DADO Chief, Kavre, 2009)

Between 1980 and 1990, agricultural extension changed, got decentralised and more holistic. The government was no longer the only organisation involved in agricultural services. NGOs, civil society, private sector, and other kind of organisations somehow got involved in extension. Research and extension became more oriented towards farmer's needs. Farmer's Organisations were strengthened and established as potential institutions at grass roots for technology verification, transfer, and input-output marketing. Farmers,

recognised as beneficiaries of the extension and development services, were placed in the centre of a development strategy and were made proactive in participatory planning and implementation.

During the first years of the FFS project the Tenth Five Year Plan and the Agricultural Perspective Plan were leading in the government policy.

2.7.1 The Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP)

Agriculture received much attention in most of the Nepal's five-year plans. During the mid-1990s, an Agricultural Perspective Plan (1995-2015) was developed and endorsed by the government of Nepal. The APP, supported by the ADB and other donors, is a series of long-term (1996-2016) plans in the agricultural sector but focuses on a smaller number of priorities than previously to produce tangible impacts and to realise economies of scale for commercialisation (APROSC/JMA, 1995). To implement the APP policy makers are challenged to identify immediate, short-term and long-term strategies for periodic plans, such as the Intensive Pocket Package strategy (IPPs). The Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP) forms the backbone of the government's development strategy (In Development Group Limited, 2005).

The several APPs have gone through different paradigms: from technical and institutional approaches to agricultural development, and from a top-down to a more participatory approach. Nevertheless the main direction of the APP remains on economic growth through transformation from subsistence to commercial agriculture and a "Green Revolution" in the terai. In trying to increase agricultural production and diversify the agricultural basis, the government in its APPs focused on commercialisation of cash crops, irrigation, the use of fertilisers and insecticides, the introduction of new implements and new seeds of high-yield varieties, and the provision of credit. The effects were disappointing: as reported in the first and second Five Year Plan (1956 – 1961; 1961 - 1965) overall results were not satisfactory (Seddon and Adhikari, 2003). The economy of Nepal is best summed up by the Ninth Agricultural Perspective Plan (1996 – 2001) that states: "Nepal is growing but not developing" (In Development Group Limited, 2005).

The Tenth Plan (2002 – 2007) stressed a role for civil society, the private sector and NGOs in order to reach the poorest of the poor and disadvantaged groups. Also participation of women is emphasised. It was realised that Nepal should concentrate on fewer development sectors that were important for rapid agricultural growth. Irrigation, fertiliser, technology, roads and power were identified as the most important factors for enhancing agricultural growth. In addition, the decentralisation of responsibilities demanded that the institutional capacities and capabilities of the VDCs and DDCs needed to be strengthened, hence a local monitoring plan was scheduled. In this Tenth Plan, but also in the subsequent 11th Plan (2007-2012) integrated pest management through the Farmer Field School was recommended (In Development Group Limited, 2005).

The 1990s also saw changes in government policy, with reforms moving the economy towards a more market-oriented system. The second major change that has affected the agricultural system over the past decade is the move towards decentralisation, with the Self-Governance Act 1999, providing for greater devolution of power to the local government. An increased emphasis on participation and on partnerships between the public sector and other service providers has been embodied in the formulation of recent projects in the agriculture sector.

2.7.2 The Agricultural services system

The agricultural services system operates through regional directorates, district offices and agriculture/livestock services. At the district level there are district offices and within each district there are agricultural service centres. An agricultural service centre covers several VDCs. Altogether there were 932 agricultural service centres and 999 livestock service centres in Nepal in 1997, but many closed during the conflict period and remained closed due to financial constraints and decreased relevance or reduced responsibility. Junior technical assistants/junior technicians (JTAs and JTs) work at the Ilaka level including several village development councils. JTs report to the person in charge of the district agricultural development office (DADO). DADO is based at the district headquarter and a senior agriculture officer assisted by several subject matter specialists is in charge of the district office.

The milieu for agricultural extension is changing fast, particularly due to increased globalisation and a changing social-economic environment. Several processes contribute to a rapid rural development:

- Farmers have become more educated, vocal, aware and sophisticated, due to exposure and knowledge about their competitive role in national and international markets. A broader extension agenda is emerging, addressing diversified farmers' needs: appropriate technologies, marketing and agribusiness, natural resource management, farm mechanisation, bio-diversity conservation etc.
- Extension service providers are diversifying. More NGOs (international and local) and the private sector play a role.
- Feminisation of agriculture due to male out-migration for non-farm and off-farm jobs (Giri, 2009; Gartaula, 2011)
- Decreased interest in farming among youth (Gartaula, 2011)
- Privatisation of services and a larger competition on the market is hoped to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of agricultural services. The role of the public sector extension is changing from a "service provisioner" to a "service provider" with more emphasis on support for quality assurance, monitoring and regulatory services. Public services need to become more demand-driven. As one DADO staff member explained to farmers in his area: "We do not do house to house visits anymore. You have to come to us with requests; when you need us you have to indicate this. We work on your request not on our interest." (DADO staff in Focus Group Discussion with farmers, Kavre, 2009)

In this chapter I have given a broad overview of historical, institutional, and social conditions that are relevant to the implementation of FFS, the participation of Nepali men and women of different caste/ethnic groups, and their contribution to social development in Nepal.

3

Outsider 'in' and Multiple Identities



Chapter 3 Outsider 'in' and Multiple Identities

3.1 Introduction: insider/outsider

In ethnographic research there are debates related to who are the 'insider' and the 'outsider' in carrying out research. Insider research is usually defined as the study of one's own social group or society. Advocates of insider research assert that non-natives may be unable to grasp the deeper understanding of cultural practices and beliefs that are available to insiders. Advocates of outsider research, on the other hand, insist that non-natives can be more objective in observing and analysing social contexts and cultural beliefs (Geertz, 1983; Naples and Sachs, 2009:207).

This debate suggests an either-or representation which is problematic, because the notions are static, bipolar and over-simplistic. A researcher in today's world may be simultaneously an insider and outsider, being familiar and being a stranger (Coffey, 1999). In my case I was neither a full outsider nor an insider, I was always a bit of both. I was the programme officer who set up the Farmer Field School project which is the subject of this research, and in my private life I was married to a Nepalese man. To some extent I was an insider in Nepalese society, I belonged to a certain family, I resided in a Nepalese neighbourhood, I had family in a rural village. I spoke Nepalese, dressed in *kurta sarwals* or local cloths, obeyed certain rules, rituals and traditions, I ate rice with my hands. But still in this family I was an outsider, even after 19 years. The signs or notions that I was an outsider were not always obvious, most were subtle: the way Nepalese saw me, my walking style, the way I moved about, the mess I made of the rice dish, the 'wrong' jokes I made. Some indications of being an 'outsider' were clearer: my white skin, blond hair, blue eyes, the fact that I was not wearing the Hindu *tika*, a red dot on my forehead, not wearing golden jewellery, and so on. In this chapter I refer to myself as the "outsider in", indicating my position in Nepalese society, while remaining an outsider.

The nature of being an insider/outsider is changeable and context-related. In meetings with other international staff I might have been considered an 'insider in Nepal' because of my Nepalese connections, while at the same time I was an outsider among Nepalese staff in my office, because of my international background. In the project I had colleagues and colleagues who were also friends. By actively participating in the setting, it was impossible to separate my identity of a researcher with my identities as teacher, friend, programme officer, colleague, family member and so on.

Although the distinction of being an 'insider' or 'outsider' might not be relevant, the outcome of this research is influenced by this ambiguity in performing my role in the project and my position in Nepalese society. To conduct research one depends on others. Who I am in relation to the FFS, to Nepalese society and this research matters. The researcher's position, but also his/her identity such as determined by gender, race, ethnicity, class and residence, influence the kind of questions we ask, the responses we get, whom we approach in the field, how we make sense of our fieldwork experience, and how we analyse and report our findings.

In this chapter I want to reflect on these aspects. I want to lay out my personal history and stakes in the Farmer Field School and subsequently in this research. This involves figuring out how my identity, my position in the project, Nepalese society and my interactions might

have had an effect on my conceptualisation of, and involvement with Farmer Field Schools, empowerment, governance and other key concerns of this study. My life in Nepal started over 20 years ago, in 1986, with an internship as BSc student tropical agriculture at the Institute of Animal and Agricultural Science in Deventer. During my long-term stays and frequent visits I was able to experience a lot of Nepalese society and observe many changes.

'Doing development' (Thomas, 2000) by way of projects and doing research are political acts in the sense that they involve power differentials. Researchers' words and activities always carry power with them (after Foucault in Mills, 2003). The acknowledgement of research involving power differentials demands reflexivity : the researcher should be aware of, and reflect on, his/her own position in the society of 'the other' on the way how the others interpret their presence and behaviour, and respond to the research questions (Marcus and Fisher, 1986). The researcher is not the objective outsider, but is a part of the research situation (Bourdieu, 1990; Coffey, 1999). Reflexivity refers to the "inter-change between sociological research and human behaviour" (Giddens, 2006:94). It is important to take into consideration the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on the investigation. More broadly speaking, reflexivity is considered to occur when the observations or actions of observers in the social system affect the very situations they are observing, Thus, for example, as project manager married to a Nepalese, and as a researcher living in Nepalese society I may have affected the village and the behaviour of the subjects of my study. The observations are not independent of the participation of the researcher. In this chapter I will reflect on the positions I had in Nepalese society as programme officer, researcher and the effect this has on this research. I will present the personal setting in which this research took place, which has implications for the interpretation of the research outcome. I will explain that being an 'outsider in' has advantages in conducting qualitative research as I did in Nepal.

Reflexivity has come to have several meanings, one that refers to the researcher's awareness of and analytical focus on his or her relationship to the field of study, and the other that attends to the ways in which cultural practices involve consciousness and commentary on themselves. The social scientist is inherently laden with biases, and only by becoming reflexively aware of those biases can social scientists free themselves from them and aspire to the practice of an objective science (Bourdieu, 1990).

The call for self-reflection in anthropology came as the outcome of disciplinary crises, beginning in the early 1970s. The first sense of reflexivity in anthropology is part of social science's more general self-critique in the wake of theories by Michel Foucault and others about the relationship of power and knowledge production. Others were based on recognition and subsequent critique of the discipline's complicity with structures of inequality wrought by European (post)colonialism. The other crisis was produced by the feminist movement, critiquing the notion of the objective, neutral observer hiding the discipline's androcentric bias. The feminist intervention in particular led to an emphasis on positionality—that is, a reflexivity that is enacted through the explicit acknowledgment and theorisation of the "situatedness and partiality of all claims to knowledge" (Marcus, 2005: 10 and p. 23) and the ethnographer's position in relation to his or her interlocutors. Reflexivity was called for to counter the reproduction of inequalities in research. While reflexivity has become regular practice in anthropology and ethnographic research, few wrote about the position of the development worker in the development aid processes (Eyben, 2004; Crewe and Harrison, 1998; Mosse 2005).

As a researcher one is involved in several interactions, building relationships to conduct the study. The so-called impartial, neutral position of the researcher is a myth. The outcome of the research is influenced by the position of the researcher, his/her gender, age, or other identity traits and relations. Doing research means interaction with people, for instance through arranging focus group discussions, meetings, conducting interviews. These interactions involve power dynamics that have an impact on the outcome of research, of which social scientists in particular need to be aware. The experience of power influences action in subtle and complex ways; sets limits or opens up possibilities to what people can do.

This experience of power is clearly linked to social position and resources, or social and material conditions, influenced by, for example, class, gender and race. The interactions with others involve processes of shaping, negotiation, imposing and are further complicated by the different identities a researcher has. A male researcher is usually attributed more power than a female researcher, a lower caste is usually less powerful than a Brahmin, and a white person has a different position and status when compared to a black researcher in Nepal.

The researcher is influenced by the context in which he/she moves. The landscape of power is far more complicated, fragmented and unstable than some critiques of development assume (e.g. Escobar, 1995). It is not just the dominant white researcher who extracts valuable information from passive locals.

These reflections create a messier view of reality, but arguably a more accurate one. I will describe certain aspects of practice, and social relations which, I propose, are an indication of wider patterns the inter-relationships between context, identity, position and research bring.

To understand the complex nature of my position as a researcher I will first give more information about the different roles and positions I have occupied in Nepal over the last 25 years, the period that includes my involvement with FFS and this research. Roles are socially defined expectations that a person in a given social position or status follows (Giddens 2006: 142). A position is a social value other people give to a certain position, and is relative, in relation to other positions. For instance, a position as a director gets a higher status in comparison with lower level staff in the same office, but a low UN position might get a higher status than a high position in a national government office in some societies. In Nepal UN positions are definitely valued more than a governmental or NGO position. Employment with an international NGO is considered superior over employment with a local NGO.

A position comes with certain rights and responsibilities, certain capacities or expertise (values) are required, a certain way of dealing with the associated tasks (institutional behaviour), all in line with certain expectations or norms (Adapted from de Jager et al., 2009). Table 3.1 gives an overview of some of the main positions I had in Nepal over the years.

Table 3.1 Author's positions in Nepal 1986-2011

Period	Position
1986 - 1987	Internship at Institute of Animal and Agricultural Science, at Rampur in Chitwan district as part of my study BSc Tropical Agriculture
1993 - 1996	Development worker with German Development Service, working in the Western Regional Irrigation Directorate with water user groups
1992 - 2007	Married to Nepalese
1993 - present	Mother
1996 - 2002	FAO expert, programme officer of IPM Farmer Field School project
2003 - present	Lecturing Nepalese students in the Netherlands, Van Hall Larenstein,
2008 - present	Researcher at Wageningen University, Rural Development Sociology

Source: this research, 2011

Although the positions are presented as if they are separate entities, in practice they overlap and they are all interwoven (Coffey, 1999). In particular being someone's wife or mother co-exists and interacts with being a researcher or programme officer. Additionally I was a colleague and friend. Moreover, these positions or social roles are interlinked with identities, determined by factors such as age, gender, race, education etc. This inter-linkage not only influences behaviour but also how others value you. This created sometimes confusion for me, as well as for those with whom I engaged, in carrying out the FFS project and, later, in conducting this research.

Rather than talking about roles or positions I prefer to use the concept of identity, in which roles and positions but also other factors and characteristics of a person play a role, such as sex, religion, age, nationality, caste and so on. I will use the concept of identity, notwithstanding it is a not a clear concept (Escobar, 2008) and frequently debated (Prins, 2006). Identity is a dynamic concept, shaped by actors in interaction with others; it is contextual and varies in different situations (Allen, 2011). It articulates difference and it can be used as a social ordering principle. Identity is a broad term used throughout the social sciences. Since identity is a virtual thing, it is impossible to define it empirically. Discussions of identity use the term with different meanings, from fundamental and abiding sameness, to fluidity, contingency, negotiated and so on. According to Hall, cultural identity "is not something which already exists, but transcending place, time, history and culture; identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past". (Hall, 2003: 225). I will not elaborate on the psychological aspect of identification. Identity, as I define it is expressed in social situations and is used as a way or strategy to realise a certain goal. Identity construction is a socially creative, interactive and contextual process. Gender, caste, racial, ethnic identities do not exist in isolation but maybe emphasised or combined differently.

I want to stress that the nature of one's identity is complex and multifaceted. I will show how communication helps constitute social identity and I explore relationships between social identities. Finally, I apply these notions to my own multiple identities through the years in Nepal and my involvement with FFS.

Identity is conceptualised as a relation of difference (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). It relates to the understandings people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them, the self-image and the image that society has of a person. In the course of life everybody develops a sense of identity in a particular social-cultural environment. We can call this socialisation: the interaction with others conditions our personalities, the values we hold and the behaviour we engage in. Yet through socialisation we also develop a sense of identity. This process starts at birth and continues during the course of life. Identity is influenced by gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on and one individual can hold multiple identities that are acted out sequentially or simultaneously, like being a woman, being Hindu, being Nepalese. Gender, ethnic, racial identity are neither predetermined nor the result of some linear, uni-directional socialisation process. Identities are relational which means that they are created by the social process of fulfilling a certain role in interaction with other people and their identities. A person is associated by their identity, but also individuals use identities to their advantage. Ethnic, gender, racial and other identities cannot be isolated but may be combined or emphasised differently depending on who is present and how people assess the situation. In some occasions I stressed my professional background, in others my motherhood; in some instances I was the friend in other situations the teacher.

How then did my multiple identities influence my research? Of the multiple identities my being white and European was the easiest to observe for Nepalese. Being regarded as a white European gave me advantages as well as disadvantages, as do most Westerners experience in developing countries. On the one hand, it is related to my origin from a world considered more historically more advanced and dominant than theirs. On the other hand, it was a disadvantage because a white European is assumed not to understand Nepalese culture, traditions, history, values and so on. Nepalese people are proud of their culture, their history, and their traditions.

Also as European you are assumed to be non-Hindu, non Buddhist, in other words ignorant of their rich religious background. Religion is more part of Nepalese daily life than it is in mine. There are religious rituals to be performed each day and if you do not take part in these rituals or if you do not perform these religious acts correctly you are considered 'uncivilized'.

Being European also creates the image that one is well-off. In short conversations in teashops people would quickly go past the first introductory questions: "Where you from, are where do you work, do you have brothers and sisters", to: "What do you earn?" A question that I learned to answer with: "Enough to live in Nepal", but still it made me feel uncomfortable. As working for the UN I obviously did earn more than most of the people around me, and it raised questions: did I deserve all these means? Why me and not them? People would approach me almost daily with requests to adopt their children, to give them money, to pay for their medical expenses, to send them abroad, to pay for school fees. Many people offered their children: "Please take them with you". Some have explained this as a part of patronage tradition (MacFarlane, 1994), others from the perspective of a dependency syndrome (Bista, 1991), but whatever theoretical explanation is given, for me it meant that I was always considered to be in a position having more resources than others. I helped a lot of people, but I disappointed even more. Then again I experienced pressure to create innovative interventions or ideas to justify my involvement in international development.

Field work or interactions with people as programme officer or researcher engages us in identity work, which can be productive as well as problematic. In the following section I

discuss the implications of multiple identities as programme officer, as spouse and as researcher. I selected these three positions because they are relevant for the Farmer Field School project, my experience in Nepalese society and this research.

3.2 My position as programme officer

When I came to Nepal, the Southeast Asian regional Farmer Field School or IPM programme had already been running in several countries for about 10 years and extension to other countries was an option, one of them being Nepal (see Chapter 1). Right from the start I was involved in the discussions regarding the programme in Nepal. First as FAO staff (junior professional based in Lao PDR, working on vegetable Farmer Field Schools) visiting Nepal as an adviser, later (December 1999 – August 2002) as a programme officer based in Nepal. I was given these assignments because of my knowledge of Nepali culture, having worked in Nepal, being married to a Nepali, my background in agriculture and development, familiarity with FFS and the ability to speak the Nepalese language. After my contract with FAO ended in 2002 I kept visiting Nepal to see my family and I stayed in touch with FFS through many Nepalese agricultural professionals from NGOs and the government who had become my friends or who came to study for their Masters in Wageningen. Due to my continuous involvement with FFS and Nepal, I was able to conduct a longitudinal study, and in a position to observe changes over time.

My position was initially, in 1997/1998 (as junior professional based in Laos, working for Vegetable IPM FFS), to advise on the Training of trainers and monitor the project. In 1998 and 1999 I went on several missions and attended the first training of trainers in Jhumka, and visited the first field schools on rice in the terai and mid hills. In 1999 I moved to Nepal as FAO officer and became in charge of planning the project, budget distribution, reporting to FAO and the donor. I was responsible for the implementation of the project, to oversee that activities in the project document were pursued, to coordinate collaboration with all stakeholders, to assure that basic principles of FFS were followed, and that people felt inspired to do a good job. It was not difficult to be enthusiastic about Farmer Field Schools, because organising them was just great fun. Farmers enjoyed doing the drawing exercises, the trials, the discussions and the singing or the games. Their enthusiasm inspired me and the staff involved in the programme. I felt responsible for using the budget wisely, which was to benefit as many farmers as possible in an effective way, with good quality training. Whereby good quality meant that training was participatory, involved farmers, addressed their needs in relation to the crop dealt with in the training, that FFS were well organised (timely, good learning exercises, special topics that reflected farmers' interests, and not top-down determined by trainers with lectures or demonstrations from district office subject matter specialists, in other words not a session with farmers in the 'old style').

I was responsible for providing feedback to headquarters in the regional programme office of the project, which was located in Jakarta, Indonesia. With my Nepalese counterpart I designed plans for training of trainers (TOTs) and FFS, monitoring and evaluation and other activities. Initially mainly government staff implemented the programme but later, under pressure from the donor and international staff at headquarters in Jakarta, increasingly NGOs took part. NGO involvement led to expansion of FFS, in particular in more remote areas, but also inclusion of more marginalised people.

In the beginning all management decisions were taken at central level, but after

expansion of FFS, decision-making became more decentralised. In the districts, coordination units were established in which farmers, district government and NGO staff discussed planning, budget allocation and monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation of the programme and policy-making took place at central level. At the outset the central office decided the location of FFS, after some years the district office and later farmers themselves were involved in decision-making regarding allocation of budget and venue of FFS.

As a programme officer I did not work alone, but my views on the project and notions on terms such as participation and empowerment had an impact on the implementation. My ideas regarding certain key concepts of the project, which I have included in this research, have changed over the years. As this research reports on events or data collected over a period of time, is a longitudinal study, my personal views that changed over time are important to consider. In Table 3.2 I give a brief overview of some of these ideas.

Table 3.2 Changes in personal views on some concepts in development

Concept	1997	2002	2009
Farmers participation	Information from the farmers is necessary to make the FFS curriculum appropriate for farmers. Participation of farmers can be achieved in a rather technical way: PRA with mapping and cropping calendars at the start of FFS, discussion and drawing pictures of the crops during FFS.	Self-mobilisation in communities will lead to elite capture. To avoid this it is important to focus more on inclusion of 'real farmers' in this project.	Participation is a complex. We need to consider diversity and differences in FFS, not make social divisions bigger.
Governance	The government of Nepal is in charge of governance. They need to be our key players in implementing FFS. NGOs might take a role in remote areas where government officers do not visit.	The government and NGOs are key stakeholders in governance. They should be equal partners in FFS implementation.	The government, the NGOs and citizens play a role in governance.
Gender	If women want they can take part. That they do not participate is assumed out of their own choice.	Women are the key producers, their involvement is crucial to the success of FFS. Women in Development!	Gender is relational. FFS can contribute to gender equality if it addresses invisible power dynamics, and works on social transformation.
Empowerment	Empowerment is a means to development.	FFS contributes to empowerment, it is an outcome of FFS participation	FFS can contribute to empowerment of farmers, but more as a catalyst in a process that is already on-going. Just the provision of knowledge and skills, as is the case in FFS is not sufficient for empowerment of men and women farmers. Empowerment is a process of change, relational and context specific.
Project implementation	Technical project approach: A project will work out mainly as planned, just follow the steps. During the monitoring some adaptations might need to be made	Technical project approach	Developmental project approach: Take into consideration that development is a fluid, creative, process, things go unplanned.

Source: Field data and research notes (2009)

The views on key concepts such as participation, governance, gender and empowerment have had an impact on the implementation of the FFS project, although I was only one actor among many (Chapter 6 and 8). In the implementation of the project I followed an approach that Li (2007) calls: “rendering technical” in the sense that a project is approached as being a technical problem with an unambiguous result, neutralising or negating inherent power inequities. I followed the project document and made sure we achieved the set targets, the outputs as described in the logical framework. In the back-to-office reports it is clear that I focused mainly on technical aspects: the condition of the fields, whether the FFS trainers did include all the FFS components: insect zoos²⁹, special topics, AESA, whether they followed the steps in the FFS. I registered mostly quantitative data: The number of farmers present, the number of women and men, the age and education level of FFS participants, but not the caste or ethnic composition of the group. Several excerpts from my Back-to-Office Reports and research diary may clarify my point:

We visited today FFS in Kapil Vastu district. There were 20 women and 5 men. The farmers were all very enthusiastic. The district agriculture officer who is the facilitator of this group is also enthusiastic. The fields were in good condition. They had three trials going on: fertiliser trials, simulation of leaf cutter and simulation of insects that damage the shoots. (Back-to-Office Report, May 1997)

In the farmer fields (Bhardiya district) we noticed that farmers do not weed. In the FFS we introduce weeding as a compulsory practice. We have conducted field trials to prove that weeding gives an increase in yield. This gives more income and the DADO and farmers are pleased with the results. (Back-to-Office Report, July 2000)

During the visit of FFS in Jhapa, I noticed the presence of brown plant hoppers, but they are just a few in numbers. The FFS facilitator wants to spray insecticide and is worried to use alternative means. He is not following the FFS principles: growing a healthy crop, frequent field observations. (Back-to-Office Report, October 2000)

In my work I followed a structured and technical approach and did not know well how to react to corruption, or misuse of funds:

When I was on holiday in the Netherlands X tried to embezzle project funds. He manipulated the national FAO office to transfer funds of the project to his private bank account. (E-mail communication with FAO IPM FFS headquarters, August 2000)

Today Y put 25,000 rupees in her bag. An amount she received from over-charging on stationary for the training. She just made a fake bill. I was shocked. I did not know what to say. I kept quiet. She earns 5,000 rupees; I earn 500,000 each month. Y is also my friend. Who am I to judge? (Diary, October 2001)

These aspects have had an impact on the implementation of the FFS report, in which I took a leading role. This has had an impact on my relations with my colleagues and partners in the project. In the interaction with people, not only one’s own role and identity play a role, but it is also influenced by the relations one has with other actors and the entire interaction. A

²⁹

In FFS an insect zoo is a small pot or cage in which the behaviour of a particular insect is observed.

fragment from my diary gives an example:

In my work people judge me negatively because I work in the same office as Y. She is my counterpart or colleague, whatever you want to call this relationship. In fact I have no choice in the matter. Luckily we get on well, and working together goes smoothly. But I know that not everybody likes her, and some people treat me hostile because I work with her. And I thought naively that I could be neutral....Bizarre.(Diary, January 2002)

Another example:

We (my friend and I) are walking on the road and a man meets us halfway. He greets my friend. He is a village leader or political leader, anyway he is introduced to me as an important person. He started talking with my friend about FFS. The man expresses that it was a useless project, with not much impact. He did not pay much attention to me. This changes when he is informed that I was the project coordinator and am doing a study about the FFS programme. Suddenly he is all praise and enthusiasm: "FFS was a wonderful programme and farmers learnt a lot and he would like to have more programmes like that in the nearby future". (Tanahun, research notes, August 2009)

It is clear that some information that I got during this research is not unbiased, that people gave positive feedback on a project when they knew that I had been the project officer and when they thought there was a slight chance I could give them more projects.

In my position as programme officer I made active use of certain identities. I stressed my education and experience in agriculture and Farmer Field Schools and my experience in Nepal. I made use of the network I had, the Nepalese colleagues, friends and students. I was often in doubt whether to make my marital status known, because my husband belonged to the Janajatis and not to the Brahmin/Chettris who dominated the office where I worked. My husband was known in the agricultural sector, because most of the staff had graduated from the same university. He supported the Maoist movement and I was never quite sure that it was a good thing for me to be associated with his political views. On some occasions his Maoist background was useful, in particular when the movement got stronger, but on other occasions it was wiser to be distanced from Maoist activities.

I purposefully tried to downplay my race, whiteness, European background, my class status. This was not easy of course, because the traits of these identities are so obvious. I tried to be 'one of them' to get accepted in the Nepalese government office where I was situated. I spoke Nepalese, ate the same snacks as my colleagues and dressed Nepalese. With men in the office or in DADOs it was easy to become friends. For them to be friendly with a woman, a European was a kind of novelty. Interaction between Nepalese men and women is not always easy, and in agricultural offices there are mostly men employed. I gained trust and this helped me in the implementation of the project and later in conducting research.

Being an 'outsider in' had advantages, especially in the field. My multiple identities did not interfere negatively with the Farmer Field School and the topics or issues that were addressed (insects, farming, water management). Farmers opened up more easily due to my language skills and dress, my obvious familiarity with customs and traditions, with culture, by being a mother of children with Nepalese roots. They were interested in being involved in a project led by a white woman who 'understood them'.

These relationships, interactions, identities played a role in the formation and implementation of the project and ultimately has an influence on the outcome of this research.

3.3 My position in society

Most researchers can avoid speaking about their private life in their reports or thesis. In my case it is necessary to mention that I was married to a Nepalese man, from Gurung ethnicity, a Janajati. Nepalese in general, but Gurung in particular, place enormous emphasis on people's relatedness to each other (Pettigrew, 2008). Marriage gave me a position in Nepalese society, a 'home' and I became a kind of 'insider'. It gave me relatedness to kin, which guides social interaction (idem). It provided me with several advantages in my work and my research because I learned about Nepalese culture, I learned about Nepalese intra-household dynamics (not so much our own, but I frequently visited friends or relatives), I learned about norms and values, ideologies. I learnt how to behave, how to express myself, I learnt to speak Nepalese in a proper way with niceties for the correct audience, I learnt to make the right jokes. I learnt how to serve dinner, how to sit, how to prepare nice Nepali tea.

Generally speaking people respected my efforts to adapt, to speak the language, to fit in. At the same time many people laughed at me, I never ate in the right way; I seemed to be unable to avoid making improper remarks.

As soon as people knew I was married to a person they knew (or had heard of) I was *bhauju* or *bahari* (the wife of respectively an older or younger brother). "Namaste Bhauju, When did you come? How is your husband doing?" (field visit DADO Kapil Vastu, 2000). The first step in knowing a person in Nepal is to work out their relationship to you, a relative, a former student a residential area can all be aspects that can link you to the other.

This aspect of my life was something I could never separate from my work or doing research. This is normal in Asia where there is a lack of separation between public and private sphere. Sometimes this was productive: I gained respect and trust, sometimes it created problems; I was married to the wrong ethnic group, to a person with the wrong political colour or people were simply not happy that I knew too much.

People react in a different way when they know you are someone who is married to a Nepalese, speak Nepali, and who is familiar with customs and traditions. "Be careful we cannot speak freely because she understands Nepali" was a remark I was confronted with on the first meeting with my Nepalese project colleagues and which I overheard on many more occasions in different situations.

This position in Nepalese society became stronger when I got children. As said earlier: positions come with rights and responsibilities, a Nepalese mother and wife has to comply with certain duties and comply with particular norms and values. This was not always easy for me. I was struggling how to behave, how to be polite, how to live up to expectations. This led to conflicts, with my husband, with his Nepalese family members, with Nepalese friends. Life in a Gurung family was one of constant juggling with niceties and high level diplomatic and strategic skills.

This can be read in the excerpt of my diary below:

According to X I am not a good wife. I do not jump out of bed to make tea for his father early in the morning (4 am!). Also his mother complains that my *daalbhaat* is not very tasty (I am better at making spaghetti) . He feels embarrassed when I

make jokes with the men and do not chitchat or gossip with his aunts or with the wives of his friends. I really try my best to act feminine, dress in the right Nepali clothes, eat delicately with my hands, but talking with the wives of his friends or the women from his village in the mountain is ok for a few minutes but in the long-run just so boring. They talk about food, marriage ceremonies, jewellery, sarees and lots of other 'homey' things that do not interest me. His male friends on the other hand have often seen more of the world, enjoy talking politics and are interested in my work. (Diary, 1999)

Over the years life in Nepal has become strongly influenced by politics. This became quite pronounced with the start of the Maoist movement in the early 1990s. My political views or political colour started to matter; this is revealed by the fragments from my diary in 1993, 2000 and 2007:

Today E came to our house. He has a high position in the Maoist party. He talked for hours with X. The main topic apparently was 'me'. The Party wants to know more about my background, my political views. If I am not supporting the Maoist way of thinking X is not allowed to marry me. The Party will not give their approval. Also if we marry then we have to support the Party each month with a certain amount of money, because they say that I am from a capitalist country, therefore I am wealthy. I find this all quite unsettling. (Diary, 1993)

A couple of times stern looking men have visited our house and discussed things with X. They are Maoist. I am not supposed to know about their visits. They want to use our house to hide some of the Maoist leaders. Apparently one of the top leaders needs a hiding place and our house seems to be ideal: me working for the UN and driving a blue number plate, my husband a fervent Maoist supporter. The house situated just outside the ring road of Kathmandu, in the vicinity of the capital in a middle class residential area. Also they want to hide some guns in our house. X asks me what I think of this plan. I am worried. I do not want armed people in our house. I do not want to get actively involved in the struggle between Maoist, the government and the army. X says that we have no choice: he has to support the movement otherwise they will harm him and us. I tell him: ok we can have someone in our house, but only when you are present, not when I am alone with the kids. I know that this gives me some space, because out of the 365 days in a year, X is maybe one full day at home. (Diary, 2000)

In November I came home from a field trip to the far Western region. X had left the house. This is the first time for years really that the house was left unattended for just 1-2 hours. The Maoists have used this particular moment as if they were on the look-out? They have moved a person into our house. A person, who has been fighting at the front and who is being searched for by the army and the police, has been placed in our house, in the top room. Nobody asked our permission, or maybe X was forced to agree to this? The refugee is from the higher caste, and he makes me quite anxious. He was supposed to stay 1 week but he has been here now for over 2 months. We have to feed him and hide him. No one is supposed to know that he is in our house. He enjoys talking to me it seems because he grabs every opportunity to start a conversation but he always puts me in the position of the capitalists, the bad guys. Despite explaining that I am Dutch he still thinks that I am American, and thus the enemy. He is very demanding. Capitalist should pay for their sins... During his stay I have already arranged for his daughter to go to the dentist (she really had terrible dental problems) and his wife

to go to the hospital. Bills of over 2000 euro!! Whenever I speak Nepali, he speaks English and then says: this is the language of the enemy. I avoid him. I want him out of the house. My job with FAO will finish in August and I think it is time to leave Nepal. (Diary fragment March 2001)

We were in D. this weekend to celebrate X's birthday. Normally in Nepal you do not celebrate your birthday. It is a kind of Western thing. Lots of people do not even know when they are born, maybe the year but certainly not the day. Anyway we fixed a birthday party for X. His parents were there and some friends and, of course, all our children. I bought a cake and some presents.

During the celebrations suddenly a group of Maoist comrades turned up, easily recognisable in grey uniforms; one lady and three men. They all looked stern. The woman avoided eye contact to all extent. Why were they here? What did they want? Had we done something wrong? X talked with them. He was very pleased that such high level Party members were visiting our farm. At one stage I was invited into their discussions. The opening sentence put me immediately in an awkward position: "Bhauju probably does not approve of our movement eh?" I responded: "Why do you think this way about me?" The guy laughed and did not answer. I continued saying: "I support the ideas of change the Maoists want for Nepalese society, but that I am worried about the future, I am not sure which way things will go". And I asked: "What are the plans for the future of the Maoists?" He replied: "The party is the future". I decided to smile and keep my mouth shut because I had no idea what to say to this, and suspected that any words would get me into more trouble. This Maoist movement is tricky for us. (Diary, 2006)

The political background of my husband is something I tried not to draw attention to in my work and in my research. The inside knowledge though has been useful for this thesis.

In my private life it was not always easy to deal with my identities. In the kinship circle of my husband I felt more an outsider than an insider in society. I tried to fit in, but did not manage well. Speaking the language I mastered well, and I could dress the right way. Notwithstanding my efforts, I was not considered a good mother or wife according to societal norms because I worked full-time, travelled a lot for my work and did not prepare a decent *daal bhaat*, did not wear golden earrings and did not perform daily religious rituals. Sometimes I used my Western identity as an excuse for my deeds, my performance: my ignorance was accepted. In larger society however, I was more often treated as an insider, because of my familiarity with Nepalese culture. I used being a women and mother to bond with other women. I put my education and job to use in interactions with men to get their trust and respect.

3.4 My position as a researcher

The position of researcher sometimes caused confusion about the way for me, and for the people involved in my study, to behave. I had come back to meet the same people whom I had known for about a decade, some even longer. Many people in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Department of Agriculture and DADOs had been students at the time I did my internship as BSc student at IAAS in Rampur. Some I knew as participants in the training of trainers in 1997 in Jhumka and then met again in DADOs or at the Ministry or in the department of Plant Protection. Some were my colleagues, some my friends.

Although our respective positions had changed over time, for many government staff

and NGO staff, I remained associated with the FAO office, the FFS programme; for others I was known as their lecturer or course coordinator in the Netherlands, and many knew me as 'the wife of' X.. None knew me as 'the researcher'. But mostly people reacted positively and gave me support in my job and in my research. In Nepal one cannot just go into the field and interview people. One needs an introduction by an official who is familiar with the area, a DADO officer or a junior technician. The fact that I knew a lot of people gave me many openings to ask for support for field work, which I got. During the summer of 2009 it was not busy in government offices and several people were interested in joining me in the field.

Most people in the villages, assumed, that I, like most white tourists and development workers, would bring money or new projects. When I proved to have little control over projects, the question arose: What I could offer? In a similar fashion government officers hoped I could give scholarships or guarantee them a position in a PhD or Masters course, and when I had to disappoint them doubts arose about their contributions to this research. As a result I never managed to get an interview with some people, but as I have a large network of contacts in Nepal this did not hamper my research. I was not dependent on the support of one particular person. Some thought that helping me with their research might create a win-win situation, as is shown by some of the remarks below:

"Hello Anna my friend, how are you? Oh you are doing research now? Please write something positive so we get more donors to support us" (Kathmandu, interview, 2009, former colleague at PPD)

"Namaste Annemarieji. Oh you are doing research for you PhD. Oh well I was thinking can you help me to get a PhD position at your university?" (Kathmandu, FAO staff, interview, 2009)

"Hi Annemarie. How are you doing? Nice to see you again. I have tried to get a scholarship for a master degree at your university but no luck so far. Maybe you can help me (Kathmandu, interview, 2009, INGO staff)

"Sure Bhauju I can help you with your research. You just tell me what you need. Maybe when you have time you can help me to submit some project proposals that I have written. (Kavre, local NGO staff interview 2009)

In the cases I was able to help people, I did. In ways that are common in Asia I exchanged information in reciprocity, exchanged information with mutual help. I helped Nepalese students with their research, provided FAO staff with network contacts or academic information and so on.

Even though people might have expectations which I could not meet, they were still willing to respond to my questions regarding this research. The above selection of remarks that were made during the interactions in the research illustrates that doing research is intertwined with interactions in which interviewees have certain expectations and objectives other than the researcher. Overall, many people did not ask any favours, but were happy to assist.

I had several meetings and interviews with FAO staff. Somehow the project officer was reluctant to give me information:

When I started working here, there was no single documentation, there was no information about FFS and no reporting was done. I had to start from scratch

(referring to his predecessor, who was me). I cannot give you much. The only thing I had was the project document. (Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

On my request to get some basic reports, like field visit reports that are not confidential he responded:

Please give me more information in writing before I can give you some documents. Give me a list of things you need and we can see if it is there for you. Also he wanted more clarity about my motives and plans ,”Tell me your programme”. All the same then he let me return to his office on several occasion without ever giving me information about the project. Come back next week. End of next week give me a call: and so on. (Kathmandu, research notes, 2009)

In the end I did not get any reports from him. It is clear that he had different objectives than I had, but also that he was under certain pressures. At some stage he showed me the pressure he was under to perform. He said that he was interested in a prolongation of his contract and he wanted to show the world around him that he was doing a good job. “As you know, donors are supporting but they are saying this is very narrow field. I am trying to survive this project” (Kathmandu, interview, 2009). He requested that I made my research interesting for future donors:

“Please go deeper, so you can convince the donor, if we demonstrate this is working then maybe more donors are coming.” (Kathmandu, interview, 2009).

With this question he counted on my loyalty, and I doubt if he would have asked this to an ‘outsider’. I really wanted to do research that would be useful for him, not only to contribute to the FFS programme but also as a kind of reciprocity, which is common in Asia, in exchange for his support.

During the meeting(s) I used language, symbolic capital and other ,’tools of agency’. I was constantly negotiating behaviour. I tried to be friendly, collegial, professional and academic. I wanted his cooperation and preferably some data. From his side there were reservations, maybe he had reasons to be cautious about how much to reveal to outsiders, or me in particular.

This interaction influenced my research in that I did not get all the information I wanted from FAO, but it made me creative in getting data via other sources, like DADO, Department of agriculture and NGO staff.

3.5 Methodological consequences

In the same office as the FAO programme officer there was also the PPD chief. He interrupted my meeting with the FAO officer saying:

“You should focus on economic impact. Just what we need: a socio-economic impact study, social but especially economic impact. In the PPD office they also strongly advised me to go to certain districts. E.g. Do not go to Lalitpur, but go to Kavre. PPD Chief and FAO programme officer: Go to Kavre for your study. There are good groups there.” (Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

As a result I followed their advice and went to the districts they recommended me. As I wanted to get information from districts that were not so much 'model' districts, I also visited other areas.

To deal with the multiple identities I talked to FAO staff but also with NGOs, people who were not involved in FFS, government officers. I talked to a variety of people, to get multiple insights in the impact of FFS. I worked with former students who were willing to support me. I selected farmers that the district agriculture staff wanted me to talk to. Still I also talked to farmers that were not selected by the DADO, I also talked to more women than the DADO had intended me to talk to, I talked to more lower caste people than the government staff wanted me to talk to. I continuously made choices based on the influence of the environment and people around me, but also with the experience and knowledge that I had obtained during my studies of rural development, trying to avoid or widen a primarily technical approach to the FFS project. With my academic background I was now more conscious about social exclusion processes, empowerment and governance issues.

Interviews with NGO staff were cordial, especially with World Education with whom I had had a good working relation in the past. However they were short of funding and also wanted to see if they could get some funding through me. They were generous with the provision of information for this research.

Some interviews were disturbed or did not go as planned. This is shown by the example below:

On Tuesday morning we left early to conduct some interviews with farmers in Tanahun district. X said that he would like to help me with my research. He said he had contacted some farmers and that we could meet them on this particular day. We drove 12 km from his farm to a small village. We stopped at the highway to Pokhara, although I had said that I wanted to walk and not take interviews near the road. He ignored my requests. There were a few men sitting at a teashop, they said that they were not farmers, but X insisted we talk to them, as they were important people of this village. They had heard about IPM FFS. One of them was a veterinarian, a local JTA. They were all Brahmin men. X dropped me and said: "I will be back in a minute". I requested him to introduce me to these people". His response was: "Yeah right you can start I will come back and do that". Off he went for about 20 minutes to drop a message at a friend's house.

In the meantime I introduced myself as a researcher doing a study on the impact of FFS. I asked if they were familiar with the FFS programme. They nodded. One of them had been a participant. He was a leader among the farmers and told me that he had been on many excursions organised by DADO.

On purpose I did not tell them that I had been the officer-in-charge of the project, because that would raise their expectations of funding or a similar project, I knew by experience.

After 10 minutes X returned. He interrupted the conversation. He told the men that I had started this FFS programme and was now doing research. That stirred their interest. One said: "Maybe we can get another project like this from FAO via you? X knew all these men vaguely, and they had heard about him. X was keen to make himself known to these men." Ah you are the owner of that farm where you

have fishponds, vegetables and some development project, is not it?" X started talking about all his farming activities and tried to promote his coffee business. No chance to steer the discussion in the direction of my research. The farmers were friendly enough but also had other interests to talk about. They interrupted me and said: "What do you think about the climate change. Is the fact that we do not have rains yet, due to climate change? And what are the causes of this? (research notes, August 2009)

The above situation shows that I could not always conduct the interviews as I wanted it, I could not select the site and participants as I had planned. I was dependent on cooperative staff of DADOs, friends and so on. I was subjected to power exercised by actors that were part of my research. The actors had different agendas to me and different objectives. The fragment shows that all actors create their own space for manoeuvre whenever they can. Me too, I was not just a passive researcher, I had room to manoeuvre. Interviews are often the product of such negotiation.

On that same occasion, I walked off and left the men talking with X. I met up with a couple of women in a milk collection centre. Two of them had been participants of an FFS, the other three had heard about it. They were impressed by my language skills and they provided me with a lot of information.

Being familiar with the country, having the ability to speak and understand Nepali, and having a large network gave me possibilities to visit many places and to talk to almost anyone, even people who were not selected by the FAO, government or NGO to be included in the research.

Overall I had a lot of support from Nepalese women and men in my research. In the office but even more in farmers' villages, men and women were happy to share their experiences with me. My identity as woman and mother helped me to bond with women, to create a relationship albeit short that provided trust and made them open in their interviews with me. Men helped me because they trusted me and because they enjoyed my company or maybe because they thought I could help them with something in the future. Although some of my identities worked counter-productive, like being a white European, because they raised false expectations, most identities I could put to good use in conducting qualitative research.

The biases that might have crept in my research as a result of being the 'outsider in' I have tackled through triangulation of the data I obtained through interviews and focus group discussions.

3.6 Conclusion

A researcher comes to a setting with multiple identities constructed and shaped by social experiences that are sometimes part of the research process, like in this research. The complexity of my multiple roles and identities in Nepalese society and the FFS project implementation influences both the practice of doing interviews and observation, and the interpretation of the results. Being a white European woman in Nepalese society was sometimes problematic but for my work and research it proved productive, in particular my in-depth knowledge of Nepalese culture, and my familiarity with 'the rules of the game' in Nepalese society. The problems I encountered in the multiple identity clashes in my private life, did not interfere systematically with the FFS topic. As an 'outsider in' I had many

opportunities to make selective use of identities to gain the trust of men or bond with women in particular situations and get more information required for qualitative research.

Thus my long-term involvement with Nepalese society as the 'outsider in' gave me the opportunity to learn a lot about culture, norms and values, but also gave me the opportunity to observe the changes in Nepal and the (rural) developments that have taken place over the last 25 years. Despite some drawbacks, my longitudinal research project has greatly benefited from it.

I have tried to answer the question: How is the research outcome is influenced by the position of the researcher and the multiple identities associated with it? As a researcher and as an FAO programme officer setting up Farmer Field Schools in Nepal I had multiple identities. These identities co-existed and interacted, and I have emphasised a particular one or combined them in a strategic way to reach the objectives of this research.

4

Introduction to the Farmer Field School



Chapter 4 Introduction to the Farmer Field School

4.1 Introduction

Farmer Field School (FFS) is currently a well-known concept in the agricultural sector all over the world, but what is actually meant by a Farmer Field School in its practical implementation? In this chapter I will introduce the concept of the Farmer Field School. I will describe the history, how FFS was initiated in Indonesia in reaction to a pest problem and the failure of the traditional agricultural extension approach. I will describe the principles and objectives of FFS, but also why there is no such thing as a standard FFS in real life. Although the FFS often gets presented as a clear and generally agreed extension approach, there are in fact different views of what FFS entails. There are even more different practical ways of implementing the FFS concept in real life in Farmer Field Schools in rural areas all over the world, as FFS is constructed by different actors in different ways. Throughout this thesis I shall refer to the concept and extension approach and to particular training sites as Farmer Field Schools.

FFS is a learning platform, a research strategy as much as an agricultural extension approach. Besides differences in method used or focus applied, the FFS approach is also dynamic, and it has evolved over the years. In this chapter I will show the changes that have taken place over the years. FFS started off as an integrated pest management project in Indonesia and moved to community based activities and rural development. FFS began as a project with concrete outputs but developed into a process with outcomes. It started as a project activity, turned into a programme³⁰ and became an institution. FFS started as a technical tool to contribute to agricultural development but it gradually embraced community development, and became a platform for participation and rural development.

Initially I also believed that there was a standard FFS and that FFS had to meet certain established criteria and follow certain steps. I believed in following a certain 'blue print' for FFS with planned objectives (debated by several authors like Rondinelli, 1993, Grindle and Thomas, 1989, Grillo and Stirrat, 1997, Mosse, 2005; Li, 2006), to achieve success, but I changed my view over the years. I thought about FFS as a technical project. In practice FFS appeared to turn out like this, and standardisation of project implementation was impossible to achieve (neither to be desired). This chapter is a technical introduction to the following chapters where I will explain why the outcome of FFS worked out differently than planned in terms of impact on rural development (Chapter 6), empowerment (Chapter 7) and governance (Chapter 8).

Most organisations involved in FFS claim that it is a success. However, claims for success or failure need to be critically looked at. This chapter will finally discuss some of the difficulties encountered in measuring the impact of FFS.

³⁰

In this study the terms project and programme are used interchangeable, because it is not always clear at what stage the initial IPM or Farmer Field School project turned into a programme. It started as a project in Nepal as part of an inter-regional programme. People involved speak about FFS as a project, a separate activity but also as a programme.

4.2 History

The Farmer Field School originates from the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme, which started in Indonesia about 20 years ago in 1989 (Pontius et al., 2002). It was initiated in a reaction to problems associated with the Green Revolution in Asia.

- The Green Revolution is a term referring to a technical, engineering approach aimed at small-scale farmers, assuming that agricultural production could increase if farmers had access to a certain input package, including high yielding varieties, irrigation and chemical fertilisers. The model was launched about 40 years ago and was introduced in many parts of the world. In Asia it started with improved varieties in rice and wheat, developed by research institutes in the Philippines and India. Farmers located in well- irrigated areas with suitable soils responded positively to the use of high yielding varieties (HYV) and other inputs. Agricultural productivity increased considerably. The average rice yield in Asia doubled between the 1960s and 1980s. The Green Revolution was part of a technology transfer approach which is based on a five key assumptions: A positivist view on science; science is key to finding new solutions to problems and can lead to progress. New technologies developed at research stations will lead to better farming (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1988, 1996);
- Agriculture is the main drive to agricultural development (Ellis et al., 1992, Rölting and Wagemakers, 1998). "Agriculture first" determines the view, with the small farm considered as the main platform for rural poverty reduction (Ellis, 2000);
- The diffusion of innovations as the key mechanism for large scale impact (Rogers, 1995; Van de Fliert, 2003). Farmers who adopt new technologies will benefit, others will see the effect and soon follow, or be left out and leave farming altogether (Hazell and Ramasamy, 1991). A seemingly logical process that fuels expansion, intensification and specialisation;
- Green Revolution technologies are scale-neutral; they can raise yields and income for small- and large-scale farmers (Hazell and Ramasamy, 1991). Technology is universal and exists independent of the social context (Pretty, 1995);
- Agricultural industrialisation can solve the many persistent, technical and social problems of agriculture (B. Harriss-White and S. Janakarajan, 1997). Farmers are a homogenous group.

Agricultural policy makers and international organisations such as FAO loved this approach because it sounded logical and promised self-directed diffusion processes that would provide a high internal rate of return to investment in research and extension (Evenson and Collin, 2003), reduce food prices for consumers, make agricultural industries more efficient and competitive, and generate a free labour force away from agriculture.

However, the Green Revolution and technology transfer in general appeared not to be the success story the technicians hoped it would be (Van den Berg and Jiggins, 2007; Pontius et al., 2002). New problems quickly emerged. Agricultural development took place under centralised systems unable to take the realities and variation of the small-scale farmers into account. The Green Revolution's success depended heavily on external inputs such as high yielding varieties, chemical fertilisers, and irrigation techniques. The dependence on dominant corporations and external inputs reduced the profitability of the entire farming sector, created rural unemployment and undermined the capacity of rural communities (Pretty, 1995; Van de Fliert, 2003). Farmers were regarded as passive recipients and not as

active actors in the agricultural sector. The inclusion of routine pesticide application within input packages often caused severe ecological problems, such as loss of ecological balance, pest resurgence and resistance³¹. For instance, in Indonesia the use of chemical pesticides in rice was heavily promoted during the 1980s. The Indonesian government subsidised inputs to increase rice production under the Green Revolution. Around 40 per cent out of the subsidy was allocated for pesticides (Barbier 1989; Conway and Barbier 1990). The use of broad-spectrum insecticides led to massive insect outbreaks (Brown Plant Hopper), creating big losses in rice production (Kenmore, 1991) and negative effects on the environment (Pretty and Hine, 2001) and human health (Kishi, 2005; Kishi et al., 1995). Murphy et al. (1999) empirically showed that farmers had manifested the signs and symptoms of insecticide intoxication after spraying. All this demanded a revision of plant protection approaches (Kenmore, 1996; Matteson, 2000). The problems associated with the Green Revolution showed the need for a new approach to agriculture and extension (Van de Fliert, 2003; Dilts, 1999; 2001; Röling and Van de Fliert, 1994).

In this light the FFS was a response to a serious and imminent problem. Integrated Pest Management with a participatory approach based on non-formal education principles through the Farmer Field School was considered the answer (Kenmore, 1991; Dilts, 1999; 2001; van den Berg, 2004).

The first practical move towards the development of a Farmer Field School approach was taken in the Philippines in the mid-1980s with a farmer training programme (Matteson et al., 1992). This was a collaborative effort by a team of social scientists and entomologists, to train farmers in integrated pest management. Many of the innovations introduced during this training programme were incorporated in the Farmer Field Schools later to be initiated in Indonesia. Such as: the rice field was used as a classroom, a focus on farmers rather than insects, a season-long training, experiential learning rather than classroom lectures, and field experiments. The principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1984; Van den Berg and Jiggins, 2007) and the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) formed the foundation that inspired the process of social learning-by-doing and self-discovery which lies at the root of FFS.

Although the IPM programme entailed more activities than just the Farmer Field School, in this study I focus on the Farmer Field School, being the core activity of the IPM programme. Like Bentley expressed: "In recent years, IPM became to mean FFS (Farmer Field School)" (2009:333).

Since the first FFS experiments were designed and managed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation in Indonesia in 1989, more than two million farmers across Asia have participated. It was considered a great success (Pontius et al., 2002; Van den Berg, 2004; Mancini, 2006) to be copied in other countries all over the world (Dilts, 2001; Pontius et al., 2002; Kenmore, 1991; Gallagher, 2003; Braun and Duveskog, 2008).

The dominant agricultural extension approach prior FFS was the Training and Visit system (T & V). The T&V system has been one of the most influential extension organisational developments in the last decades (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996). It was introduced in the mid- 1970s with investments by the World Bank. The system tried to achieve changes in farming methods through advice from extension agents who had close links with agricultural research stations. The T&V system had a hierarchical organisational set

³¹ The history of the IPM is well documented. For example see the Community IPM web site: www.communityipm.org and the Farmer Field School website: www.farmerfieldschool.net

up with one village extension worker (VEW) for about 800 farmers (idem). The extension workers were supervised by higher level extension officers who were assisted by Subject Matter Specialists (SMS).

A major difference between FFS and the Training and Visit system is that the FFS requires active involvement of farmers rather than experts. The T&V system of extension follows a linear transfer of technology model, mostly top down, with information provision to selected contact farmers. In this model a trickle-down approach is assumed through the application of uniform extension technologies. FFS on the other hand fits into a broader education and extension picture and can be used as a tool for empowerment, education and/or adult learning, innovation as well as extension (Braun et al., 2006). Kevin Gallagher has compared the traditional training and visit system with FFS (Table 4.1)

Table 4.1 Differences between T&V/technology transfer and FFS

<i>Subject:</i>	<i>Training and Visit:</i>	<i>Farmer Field School evolution:</i>
<i>Field-level extension officer's job</i>	Deliver pre-packaged 'messages' from a research-extension linkage. Primary job is information transfer, not technical expertise, which is reserved for specialists not at the field level.	Technical facilitator: Every FFS-facilitator should have basic technical skills (at least able to grow the crop, or rear animals, etcetera). Secondly, every FFS-facilitator should have group oriented training and management skills. These skills are typically learned in a season-long Training of Trainers where they learn what and how they can teach.
<i>Experience of trainers</i>	Variable, but most often lacking basic farming skills and experience. Field level staff given communication skills.	Master trainer with farming experience gained during Training of Trainers when each person is required to grow crops and carry out field studies so that they test what they will use in Field Schools later.
<i>Information</i>	Primarily top-down messages from distant research stations about situations presumed to be representative of farms.	Recommendations are tested against conventional practices and new information about the site emerges. Promotes local creativity.
<i>Contact point</i>	Contact farmers who are supposed to train other farmers by passing on external information.	Groups of interested farmers who farm on a daily basis through generating local study circles.
<i>Time frame</i>	Continuously, forever, on a two-week regular cycle not based on any natural phenology.	A pre-defined period. Usually on a weekly basis over a season. FFS may be longer than a season, but never less than one season integrated with the crop phenology.
<i>Pedagogy</i>	Training: Use of static pre-determined demonstrations and in field examples to show and tell.	Education: A focus on underlying principles that allow farmers to derive and adopt recommendations within their own dynamic their ecological, social, and economic realities.
<i>Evaluation</i>	At best indirect: based on measuring delivery and funds spent.	Pre- and post-testing. Community self-surveying. Identifiable indicators defined in terms of system-critical factors. Internal rates of return.
<i>Training site</i>	Demonstration field, training centres, home of contact farmer, static not revisited in time or observed in terms of any on-going process.	A shared field in which the FFS uses to dynamically validate and test new management methods over the entire season (for example decisions during one part of the season can be verified by yield cuts)
<i>Long term objectives</i>	Increase food production, etcetera: 'Farmer's attitudes, lack of knowledge, and practices are an object/constraint of a development process.'	Nurture groups that will continue to address agricultural and community problems on their own and with technical backstopping: 'Farmers as the subject of development.'
<i>Research</i>	Primary source of information is research stations assumed to develop representative models that are widely applicable.	A process and consequence of local testing and within-community/ ecosystem learning.

Source: Gallagher, 1999.

4.3 What does a Farmer Field School look like?

In a real life Farmer Field School villagers form groups of 25-30 farmers, men and women ranging from 20 – 60 years of age. These farmer groups meet regularly to learn on an experiential basis with a facilitator, usually staff from the agricultural office or an NGO. This happens often in a physical environment that is called a ‘school without walls’, nearby a farming field. The main requirement to become a participant in FFS is to be a farmer. Although it is not an official requirement, generally these are farmers who have some land. The origins were in rice and integrated pest management. See Box 1 for the general characteristics of a Farmer Field School in rice.

Box 1: A rice Farmer Field School

The basic feature of a ‘typical’ rice IPM rice based Farmer Field School are as follows:

- A rice FFS meets once a week and covers a full cropping season
- The primary learning material at a Farmer Field School is the farmers' field
- The field school meeting place is close to the learning plots, usually outdoors, a ‘school without walls’
- FFS educational methods are experiential, participatory, and learner centred.
- Each FFS meeting includes at least three activities: the agro-ecosystem analysis, a “special topic”, and a group dynamics activity.
- In every FFS participants conduct a study comparing IPM with non-IPM treated plots.
- An FFS often includes several additional field studies depending on local field problems.
- Between 25 and 30 farmers participate in an FFS. Participants learn in small groups of five to maximise participation.
- All FFS's include a Field Day in which farmers make presentations about IPM and their studies, for neighbouring farmers and officials
- A pre- and post-test is conducted for diagnostic purposes and for determining follow-up activities.
- The facilitators undergo intensive season long residential training to prepare them for organising and conducting field schools.
- Preparation meetings precede an FFS to determine the curriculum, learning needs, recruit participants, and develop a learning contract.
- Final meetings of the FFS often include planning for follow-up activities.

Source: Pontius et al., 2002; Bijlmakers, 2005.

Farmer Field Schools were based on the following “integrated pest management” principles:

1. grow a healthy crop
2. conserve natural enemies (these are beneficial insects such as predators)
3. conduct regular field observations
4. innovation through experiential learning
5. farmers are considered to be experts.

The first principle implies that farmers have to understand plant biology and apply proper agronomic practices. The second principle means that farmers need an understanding of the ecology of the crop and its environment. The third principle demands that the FFS participant learns to observe and analyse their crops regularly and to make informed decision based on

the conditions of the agro-ecosystems. The fourth stresses that farmers can experiment and introduce innovations based on their own skills and knowledge gathered through discovery learning. The fifth asserts that farmers know their local specific circumstances better than 'outside' experts.

The FFS curriculum follows the natural cycle of the crop, rice or vegetables. This approach allows all aspects of the subject to be covered, in parallel with what is happening in the FFS member's field. For example, rice transplanting in the FFS takes place at the same time as farmers are transplanting their own crops - the lessons learned can be applied directly. By paying attention to the ecology of the plot, FFS encourages an understanding of the agro-ecosystem and its natural processes. It stimulates preventive rather than curative measures and the use of natural processes rather than external chemical inputs and other quick fixes. Hence it seeks to reduce farmers' dependency on external inputs and corporations, and fosters an agro-ecosystem approach that leads farmers to be managers of self-organising complexity (e.g. use of natural enemies, recycling of wastes, etc.) rather than of simple mechanical systems.

Farmers are experts. FFS mobilises farmers' combined intelligence. Instead of being an 'end user', the farmers themselves learn to conduct experiments independently, create opportunities for innovation (Dilts, 2001). The farmers no longer rely on blanket recommendations, on uniform technologies; they seek instead to optimise diversity and local opportunity. One key factor in the success of the FFS has been that there are no lectures – all activities are based on experiential (learning-by-doing) participatory, hands-on work. This approach builds onto adult learning theory and practice. Each activity has a procedure for action, observation, analysis and decision-making. The emphasis is not only on "how" and "what" but also on "why" (Braun and Duveskog, 2008). This way farmers master a learning process that can be applied continuously to a dynamic situation: the ecology of their field or their livelihoods.

Innovation through the FFS and discovery learning is not limited to agricultural production technologies. It can also be extended to include innovative, ecological management (e.g., integrated nutrient management), community life and livelihoods, institutional and organisational development. As Braun and Duveskog state: "Experience has shown that structured, hands-on activities provide a sound basis for continued innovation and local adaptation, after the FFS itself has been completed. It is also one of the main reasons that farmer facilitators can easily run FFSs - once they know how to facilitate an activity, the outcomes become obvious from the exercise itself" (Braun and Duveskog, 2008:6). In an e-mail discussion we had (12th March07), Deborah Duveskog stressed that FFS is all about learning how to learn, meaning that the initial technical topic is of less relevance and it is the skills in experimentation, innovation, reflection that matters.

4.4 Different views and practices

While it seems that nowadays a Farmer Field School is a common phenomenon in Nepal, in particular in the agricultural sector, it is clear from the different reports, articles and discussions with actors in the field that different practitioners hold different views on FFS.

A discourse analysis of the use of the term Farmer Field School showed that there are different ideas and meanings attached to the concept of FFS. This has an impact on the implementation of FFS. By discourse analysis in this paper I looked at texts in reports and other related papers but also held interviews with people involved in FFS. The technique

gave an interesting insight into the ideas and ways of thinking of people related to FFS. As dominant discourses set out ways of classifying people and defining problems, they have serious material consequences on the process of policy making or project design. Certain dominant discourses or views of 'reality' serve the interests of some groups over others.

In the literature there are different views varying from seeing FFS as an extension, a learning or training method, or a research platform, as shown in the following synopsis I made:

Extension

Farmer Field Schools train farmers to strengthen their decision-making capacity with respect to the use of agro-chemicals (Gerster, 2006). FFS is participatory approach of diffusing new science-based knowledge and information to farmers (Hakiza et al, 2004). Pretty (1995) refers to extension workers and not facilitators conducting field schools, implying that the Farmer Field School is an extension tool, and that knowledge transfer is the basis of the FFS. Quizon et al. (2001) state that the FFS is a method to deliver new knowledge and techniques. "IPM FFS is the model for farmer education across the world. Other extension methods have been exposed as lacking the capacity to provide the education that farmers require in the increasingly complex agricultural systems that they manage" (Niels Røling at a Regional meeting with the FAO Community Programme, Ayuthaya, Thailand, 1999)

Learning

Others in the FFS movement reject the notion that FFS can be an extension tool. Van den Berg (2004) clearly states that the FFS is not an extension method. He explains that extension sets out to deliver, to teach to do a certain technique, and that its effects are measurable by the level of adoption of specific practices or technologies. Conversely, the Farmer Field School sets out to educate local people with practical knowledge, to enhance their capability for informed decision-making in response to what are always context-dependent pest problems, and thus they are also taught adaptive management. When I asked farmers in Nepal in 2002 they almost unanimously told me that the farmer fields school is a training in which they learn about *satrojib* (insect pests) and *mitrojib* (natural enemies or beneficial insects) while they always thought that all insects were harmful to their crops.

Research

Van de Fliert et al. (2003) consider FFS as a platform for participatory research and/or farmer learning, mainly related to potato, sweet potato and disease management, whereby two-way learning takes place: researchers and farmers learn from each other and from their experiments.

To summarise, FFS is not a conventional extension method but a platform for group-based learning and knowledge creation and dissemination, where there is room for participatory research, based on the experiential-learning principle, where farmers are seen as equal partners in development. In practice the emphasis will be on research or technology transfer, on learning, depending on the interest of a group, the facilitator or the mandate of the organisation one works for. This will influence the allocation of resources. Depending on the different discourses of agricultural change and rural development, those who consider FFS a platform for research will focus on research activities, on trials and action-research. Others will put technology transfer in the curriculum, and use FFS to promote new varieties of farm

technologies. There will also continue to be different practices of implementation or constructs of FFS as both academic debates and practical fieldwork conditions change over time. Practitioners often assume FFS to be a structure or model, while in practice there is no such thing, as FFS is constructed in different ways. The construction of FFS is a result of agency, self-oriented practices and complex arrangements of both the implementers and the farmers involved. (see Chapter 6)

For me structure is too much identified with conditions, context, driving forces rather than agency, self-oriented practices and complex arrangements. “What might appear to be relatively stable structural features ... can be understood as highly specific, self-transforming configurations of actor projects and practice” (Long, 2001:62, 63). In this study I prefer to use the concept of social construction to indicate the role of the various actors in a field of interactions and processes to stress the dynamic situation individuals live and respond to. Following Long (2001: 2) I focus on the “making and remaking of society through the on-going self-transforming actions and perception of a diverse and interlocked world of actors”. (see Chapter 6)

4.5 FFS evolution

Not only are there different views and practices concerning FFS, but also FFS has also evolved over the years. This evolution can be seen in several ways, through diversification, expansion, institutionalisation, and by the shift from a project approach to a process approach.

Originally the topic covered in FFS was integrated pest management in rice as a single crop. After a while the FFS programme diversified moving from its single-crop focus to include secondary or rotation crops within the rice-based systems and also including vegetables in both low and highland systems. Nowadays one can find Farmer Field Schools on tea, coffee, cotton, livestock, soil management, organic agriculture, agro-forestry, groundwater management, and so on. More and more topics are incorporated outside the agricultural field, which include integrated vector management (Van den Berg and Knols, 2006), HIV/AIDS and other human health issues, and income-generating activities such as handicrafts.

From 1991 to 1994, with support from the FAO Inter-country IPM Programme, rice IPM-FFSs spread from Indonesia to Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Lao PDR, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. In 1997 the Farmer Field School concept was introduced into Nepal by FAO as a pilot project. A season-long FFS approach was conducted through TCP/NEP/6712 *Implementation of Integrated Pest Management in rice*.

As a result of the popularity of the IPM-FFSs in Asia, there was a strong movement to copy and expand the approach to other situations. Farmer Field Schools are now active in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East and North Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe, and recently also in the United States and Western Europe (Denmark), reaching a total of 87 countries by 2008. (Braun and Duveskog, 2008). In the 15 year period from 1989 – 2004 approximately \$100 million was granted in Asia for Farmer Field Schools under the guidance of FAO (Bartlett, 2005).

At the time when the Farmer Field School was launched in Nepal the overall aims formulated in the Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP) were to accelerate agricultural productivity through transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture, crop and farm diversification. FFS was adopted as one of the initiatives aimed to contribute to agricultural development and food security. In the project documents it was also written that:

“The overall goals of the Integrated Pest Management programme with its FFS in Nepal is to reduce poverty and increase food security, while protecting the environment”. (FAO Project document, 1997: 1)

In 1997, the project became based in the Plant Protection Directorate (PPD). This happened because Farmer Field Schools in the Asian FAO IPM programme were based on integrated pest management. The IPM Programme started with its main focus on training trainers and conducting Farmer Field Schools. Right from the beginning the PPD chief wanted to train all the PPD district staff and launch the programme nationwide, to cover all the districts. This was unusual for the Asian regional programme, where countries had started with FFS on a pilot base, small-scale.

In Nepal, the project started with a survey and PRA study – conducted by a Filipino IPM FFS expert, in Chitwan, the district where pesticide misuse was reported. This was kind of standard procedure, followed in all countries where FFS was introduced. This study formed the basis for the curriculum in the training of trainers that was to follow. The first training of trainers (TOT) took place in the Eastern terai, and the 35 participants were plant protection staff from various district agricultural offices and central level. The training covered all aspects of rice production and lasted the entire rice growing season.

For many officers it was the first time they had to plant and weed their own rice crop. Parallel to their classroom and field training the officers conducted Farmer Field Schools in villages. This way they learnt to conduct FFS and became familiar with participatory methods. It was an eye-opener for most participants. Many had never spent so much time with farmers before. As one participant said:

“I used to find it boring to spend one hour with farmers, now in FFS I feel I am lacking time, it is so interesting and fulfilling to work with farmers” (Tanahun, agricultural officer, interview 2002).

After all the plant protection officers in the country had been trained in conducting FFS, NGO staff and also government officers from other disciplines such as vegetable production and agricultural extension were trained. Gradually lower level staff got involved in conducting FFS. What happened over the first four years is summarised in the following table.

Table 4.2 Evolution of FFS activities 1997 – 2001

<i>Year</i>	<i>Key Activities</i>
1997	Field studies to collect information about rice production practices and problems
1998	First 'Training of Trainers' course for 35 staff of Plant Protection Directorate, with facilitators from Philippines
	Graduates of the TOT conduct the first 30 FFS
1999	Second TOT is conducted, with some NGO staff, facilitators from Philippines and Indonesia
	Total of 63 FFS conducted in two cropping seasons
2000	A start was made with farmer trainers
	Participatory planning workshops are carried out
2001	Third rice TOT, this time managed by an NGO using Nepalese facilitators.
	Vegetable IPM in response to farmers demands.
	More than 50% of FFS are now being conducted by farmer trainers
	By the end of the year, IPM farmers had formed their own organisations in 26 Districts.
	Government decides to increase allocation for IPM Programme as part of the next 5-Year Plan.

Source: own research and Bartlett (2002)

Soon it became clear that FFSs were not an end in themselves (Bartlett, 2002). As in other countries, it was found that FFSs could be the starting point for the sustainable management of agricultural and ecological resources in a given locality. FFS gives farmers an introduction to experimenting, participatory training and non-formal education methods based on ecological principles. Once this foundation is laid, farmers typically move on to take initiatives, make decisions, experiment and communicate for the development of their community. This evolution within the programme occurred in all the member countries after ten years of programme implementation. However in Nepal this occurred much sooner. The Nepalese government central team wanted to start with follow-up activities after FFS and with farmer trainers already after 2-3 years in the project.

In a previous account of the early history of the programme this approach is described as follows:

“This short history should not be viewed as a “project”, or a pre-determined sequence of activities. In 1997, the Plant Protection Directorate and FAO reached agreement on a set of broad goals and plans for the initial activities (training of trainers, number of Farmer Field Schools in all rice-growing districts). Subsequent activities were planned year by year, taking account of the results, which had been achieved, and the emerging needs and opportunities. But the Nepalese team also looked at the processes in other Asian countries and wanted to be part of that. In this way the IPM program in Nepal has evolved at a rate which was quicker than anybody had expected, and it has taken a shape which could not have been predicted five years ago.” (Bartlett, 2002: 16)

As the Deputy director of the National IPM Programme said: "We want to show the world that Nepal can be the best with FFS"(Interview 2002).

In the first 4 years the development of the programme went really fast. It expanded almost nationwide. Figure 4.1 gives the growth in the number of participants in IPM Farmer Field School from 1998 to 2001.

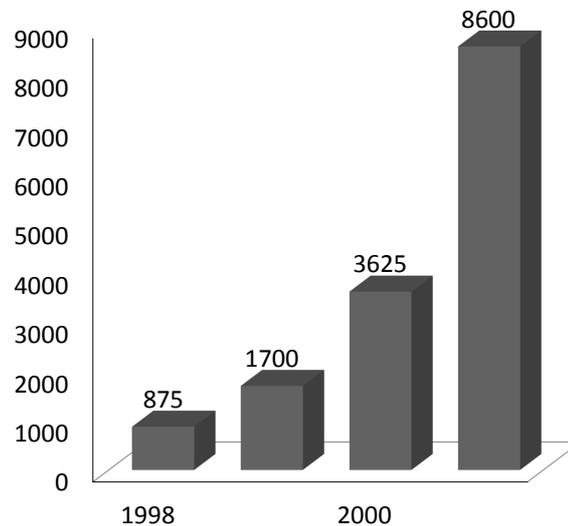


Figure 4.1 Annual numbers of participants in the IPM Farmer Field Schools in Nepal (1998-2001)

Source: Westendorp and Biggs, 2003

The story of the Nepalese IPM programme did not stop in 2001. The following year saw the launch of The IPM Trainers Association of Nepal (TITAN) with government officials, NGO staff and farmer trainers as members. By 2003, TITAN was being contracted by CARE International to provide consultants for a large rural development programme in Bangladesh. In 2005 two trainers went to Tajikistan as international FFS trainers (personal communication, 2007).

The focus of FFS changed over the years. In the first FAO project document (1997) the objective of FFS project was defined as follows: To contribute to sustainable broad-based poverty alleviation and food security while contributing to environmental protection. In 2003 the objectives were to: (i) to contribute to institutionalise a sustainable national IPM Programme in Nepal by strengthening the capacity of the PPD; and strengthening the capacity of National, Regional and District Level training and extension institutions, and (ii) to empower farmers to increase production and productivity efficiently. As an immediate follow-up to this project Norway provided financial support to the government for a 2008-2013 project through UTF/NEP/059/NEP with FAO technical assistance, the *Support to National IPM Programme in Nepal: consolidation, up-scaling and institutionalisation, Phase II*. The major objective of this last project is to strengthen the organisational and managerial capacity of IPM farmer groups and associations.

While FFS was started as a project it gradually turned into a programme through a process of institutionalisation. Institutionalisation is a process through which new ideas and

practices are introduced, accepted and used by individuals and organisations so that these new ideas and practices become part of 'the norm' (Sutherland, 2000). We can talk about institutionalisation when an intervention or activity or approach has become "part and parcel of regular programmes and activities"(van Veldhuizen et al. (2002:376). Thus FFS has become a familiar concept in Asia and later in other countries, in Nepal, among all classes and across the rural-urban divide. In this sense FFS is both an institution and an organisation with a strong normative flavour (Uphoff, 1986:9).

In line with Leach, Mearns and Scoones (1999) I view institutions not just as 'rules of the game in society' but as regularised patterns of behaviour (Leach, Mearns and Scoones, 1999: 237). "Regularised practices, performed over time, eventually constitute institutions" (Leach, Mearns and Scoones, 1999: 238). In addition, the authors make a distinction between formal and informal institutions. On the one hand they acknowledge the formal regulations, which can be the elements that donors or government require to be part of FFS or guidelines to be followed, issued by FAO or governments or NGOs. On the other hand, there are also informal rules legitimised by social norms and codes of behaviour, including gender division of labour, class hierarchies, kinship networks. For example, locally adopted land tenure arrangements are "more in the nature of customary practices carried on over time than a set of rules or norms" (Leach, Mearns and Scoones, 1999: 91).

This distinction between formal and informal is convenient but misleading (Cleaver, 2006b) because the dichotomy does not apply; the terms are not mutually exclusive. Formal has the connotation of modern, bureaucratic, organisational, official and more likely to be "robust and enduring" (Cleaver, 2006b:789) than informal (social, traditional) institutions. Often, the formalisation of informal institutions is sought to make an informal institution more visible and open to interventions (Scott, 1998). I therefore like her notion of a 'socially embedded' institution (Cleaver, 2006b), indicating the social acceptance of FFS.

A similar critique comes from Nuijten (2003:11) who rejects the simple dichotomy between institution and organisation and introduced the term 'organising practices'. With organising practices she refers to the different actions and strategies that people follow to sustain and develop their daily livelihoods and other life projects. Organising practices can develop into established patterns through processes of institutionalisation. (Appendini and Nuijten, 2002:73).

As an institution, FFS has become such regularised practice, performed over time. On the other hand, as several organisations have adopted the so-called FFS approach, they have also adapted them into their regular activities as organised practices. FFS is institutionalised because farmers, extensionists, policymakers, and donors speak about FFS as a familiar concept, even after the project has been terminated, and people know what FFS means when they have not even taken part in FFS. FFS has become an institution because of the values that have been attached to it over time. In Chapter 6 I will show that this certainly applies to the situation in Nepal.

FFS practices were not only determined by official rules and regulations but were shaped as well by cultural, social, historical and political processes. FAO project staff might have developed rules or steps to follow in FFS, but local norms determined who would be the participants or the leaders in an FFS, which behaviour was accepted from FFS facilitators, while cognitive influences determined the extent to which social and cultural beliefs or traditions were adopted or imposed on the actors. Hence the FFS model that was developed in Indonesia would be shaped differently in Vietnam or Kenya.

In Nepal, an FFS run by Brahmins is different from a Janajati FFS facilitated by a Tharu farmer, while an FFS with a mixed gender group has a different shape or content than a women or men only FFS. These socially constructed characteristics vary over place and time. In Nepal FFS started as a project, with a given procedure or framework to follow, with rules imposed by the donor and intervening agency such as Ministry of Agriculture, the District Agriculture Development Office and Plant Protection Directorate. FFS evolved through different practices, which over the years were influenced by social norms and cultural factors in a dynamic way (Scott, 1995; Munir, 2002).

Finally, the approach to FFS evolved from a project into a process, transforming FFS from a product. In Indonesia and Vietnam, Farmer Field School graduates continued to remain active in their FFS group and initiated development activities, such as more trials on pest and disease crop management, or other agricultural related activities such as setting up an irrigation system with the community (Pontius et al, 2002). Their FFS training became a vehicle for other activities, initiating processes of change. Thus a shift could be observed from field-based activities to community-based activities, a shift from output to outcome, from product to process.

FFS gives farmers an introduction to experimenting, participatory training and non-formal education methods based on ecological principles. Once this foundation is laid, farmers can move on to take initiatives, make decisions, experiment and communicate to address problems for the development of their community. In Indonesia, and later in other countries, it was found that FFSs could be the starting point for the sustainable management of agricultural and ecological resources in a given locality (Ooi, 1998). The move to "community" in IPM emphasises a strategy from field activities to community or village development, and a move to institutionalise FFS (Pontius et al., 2002), but also indicates an awareness that FFS is not just a project with a clear start and a predefined end with set outputs, but a process leading to further development with broader outcomes.

When FAO changed the project name from Integrated Pest Management to "Community IPM" in 1997 this change was formalised in a project phase - first in Indonesia and later in other countries in Asia that were part of the inter-regional FFS activities. The so-called "Community IPM" is a strategy in which the Field School is a first step in the development of the sustainable management by a community of its shared agricultural and ecological resources. Under this programme follow-up activities were undertaken, and farmers were encouraged to become 'planners' or 'researchers' in community development after they finished FFS, looking beyond their individual agricultural fields. Braun and Duveskog (2008:8) view these changes in FFSs as a natural group process "as the natural progression of the FFS; the phasing or timing by which particular FFSs would evolve to multi-dimensional and/or higher-level concern is for the groups themselves to determine."

I regard this development in FFS, or evolution, as part of the bigger picture in which FFS took and takes place, a picture that is influenced by a series of prevailing development paradigms. For instance 'empowerment' became an issue in FFS when it was fashionable in development circles. In a similar vein the farming systems' focus was replaced by rural livelihoods when 'livelihood-thinking' became popular among donor agencies at the end of the last century.

The evolution of development approaches is subject to continuous debate and review, in which FFS also participates. Ellis and Biggs (2001:239) have developed a timeline that includes substantive theories, minority discourses and development approaches. The

changes in approaches regarding FFS from product to process fit into this scheme as shown in Table 4.3

Table 4.3 Rural development ideas timeline

	Ideas, Themes, Paradigms, Approaches and Objectives in Rural Development
1950-1960	Modernisation, dual economy model, backward agriculture, community development, lazy and backward peasant
1960-1970	Transformation approach, technology transfer, mechanisation, agricultural extension growth role of agriculture, green revolution, rational peasants, farming systems research
1970-1980	Redistribution with growth, basic needs, integrated rural development, state agricultural policies, state-led credit, urban bias, induced innovation, green revolution, rural growth linkages, farming systems research-extension, project approach
1980-1990	Structural adjustment, free markets, getting prices right, retreat of the state, rise of NGOs, rapid rural appraisal, food security and famine analysis, rural development as process not product, women in development (WID), poverty alleviation, poverty with a human face, process-approach. FFS linked to integrated pest management.
1990-2000	Micro-credit, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), actor-oriented rural development, stakeholder analysis, rural safety nets, gender and development (GAD), environment and sustainability, poverty reduction, territorial oriented sustainable rural development, empowerment of rural poor, capable peasants, FFS under the umbrella of the Community IPM project
>2000	Millennium Development Goals, sustainable livelihoods, good governance, decentralisation, critique of participation, sector-wide approaches, social protection and poverty eradication, multiple dimensions of poverty, getting service right, privatisation of extension services, PRSP, social inclusion, equity, climate change, partnership diversification of FFS in other crops and inclusion of topics such as HIV/AIDS. Linking FFS with rural livelihoods. Expansion of FFS in Latin America and Africa.

Adapted from Ellis and Biggs, (2001:239) and World Bank World Development Reports (www.worldbank.org)

Clearly the evolution of both the development agenda and development approaches is much more complex than can be captured in the outline below, but it indicates the changes in general terms, and periods in which FFS occurred.

Despite the changes in perspective and evolution of approaches since the 1950s there is arguably a common theme underpinning thinking on rural development: Faith in agriculture as a central driver of rural development and the persistence of a small-farm model as the key focus in rural development. Since the late 1990s, there have been some significant changes in the structural context of the development agenda and with it a change in the focus of development approaches. Essentially, the faith in agriculture as the cornerstone of rural development and the small farmer as the main point of entry has been severely shaken. The reason for this is the emerging empirical evidence on the nature of rural poverty and livelihood strategies which have evolved in response (Bernstein et al., 1992).

Ellis and Biggs (2001: 238) note that “ideas that first appear in one decade often gain strength in the following decade, and only begin to affect rural development practice in a widespread way ten or fifteen years after they were first put forward”. If one places FFS changes or evolution along with these development paradigms, it appears that indeed the

changes in academic thinking and writing about development were put in practice a while later in the approaches to FFS, so there was a certain time lag.

In the period 1990 - 2000 most FFS initiatives still had a focus on agriculture as the engine for rural growth and, although there was an increasing trend to support livelihood diversification and acknowledgement of the increasingly complex rural reality, household level agricultural growth remained the emphasis in FFS. Women were increasingly encouraged to participate, following the WID approach. Real attention for unequal gender relations was not a point for attention in this period. During this time FFS programmes changed from using a project to a process approach in most places. Instead of yield increase, farmer empowerment, capacity-building and other development processes were increasingly emphasised in FFS.

Modernisation policies and structural adjustments from the World Bank and IMF in the 1980s put a strain on classical agricultural extension and research services with budget cuts and job losses. This transformed the roles of extensionists and researchers and placed greater responsibility on rural communities. While challenging for professionals and their institutions, improving agricultural research and development has demanded approaches that are more responsive and better suited to local agro-ecological and socioeconomic conditions. FFS are often seen as an effort by institutions to re-think how to organise themselves for greater and more effective agricultural innovation. This way FFS, with its group approach and focus on capacity-building, gained popularity from an efficiency point of view. Budget cuts in government extension approaches have also speeded the move to involve farmer trainers in several countries simply because they are cheaper and often more effective than government extension officers. (see also Chapter 6 and 8)

After 2000 FFS approaches came under pressure of poverty eradication policies and were influenced by the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals. In particular in Africa FFS has included topics that address food security and income generation (see remark on FAO website below). Here, the field schools are becoming the foundation of field-based food security programmes, specifically in Kenya, Sierra Leone and Nigeria as health and nutrition problems were more apparent than in Asia (Okoth et al., 2002). Diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria are destructing many rural communities and have been taken up as key topics by FFS projects. NGO and health officers have been involved in conducting these Farmer Field Schools with classes on hygiene, internal parasites and safe bodily practices.

Millennium Development Goals are brought into play in FFS success stories as stated in a recent report by FAO (Settle, 2010)³²:

“ Capacity building at community level (such as is done in Farmer Field Schools) is key to the sustainable intensification of food production, which will contribute to increased food security and improved livelihoods in the region, an important step towards achieving the first Millennium Development Goal, reducing hunger and poverty.”

In Nepal FFS was also strongly influenced by global development theories (see chapter 1). Table 4.4 below gives a brief overview of the key changes in paradigms and the FFS approach or focus at different periods, as conducted by the Nepalese government. I have not included the NGOs in this table because that would make it more complex, and NGOs are highly

³² <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/48883/icode/> (accessed 5.5. 2011)

influenced by their international ‘mother’ organisations like CARE and World Education in the USA. Such international NGOs in my experience are usually more progressive in putting new development thinking into practice than government agencies. CARE were already talking about livelihoods while in the Ministry of Agriculture no one had heard the term, World Education wrote about empowerment in their policy proposals while in the Ministry a growing awareness of the women-in-development discourse had only just started.

Table 4.4 Dominant development paradigms that influenced FFS in Nepal

Dominant development paradigms	1997	2002	2009
Technology transfer	Technology transfer is strongly emphasised in the curriculum		
Agricultural growth	The objective of FFS by MoAC is agricultural production increase	Transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture	
NGO involvement	MoAC collaborates with 2 international NGOs	A few international and some local NGOs involved in FFS implementation	MoAC collaborates with 1 international NGO and several local NGOs
Group approach	FFS group formation	Many groups registered	Most groups dissolved
Rural development as a process not a product	Product or output focus	Start is made with follow-up activities	FFS considered entry points for long-term community development, without external support.
Women in development	Focus on male farmers	Increased participation of women, due to government policy and commitment female farmers	Most FFS participants are women
Food security	Focus on rice as food crop	Rice production and introduction of vegetables as cash crop.	Focus on commercial crops rather than food
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)	PRA exercises prior FFS to determine training content	PRA as standard (technical) exercise before start FFS	PRA not included anymore in FFS procedure
Commercialising agricultural production	Focus on rice as food crop	FFS in commercial vegetable production encouraged.	FFS in vegetables and tree crops (e.g. citrus) Linkage with markets
Farmers empowerment	- not yet considered	Action research or village planning (participatory planning); registration of FFS groups	No longer supported by project activities
Sustainable livelihoods	Single crop focus	Acknowledgement of multiple crops in farming system	Attention for soil improvement and compost-making
Decentralisation	All decisions made at central level	DADO and district committees established to coordinate FFS	DADO can allocate funds for FFS, VDC can allocate fund for FFS
Social Inclusion	Brahmins dominant at all decision-making levels in FFS, social exclusion not considered an issue	Brahmins dominant at all decision-making levels in FFS, social exclusion not considered an issue	Social inclusion is part of the present government policy and of many donors, but not many changes yet in FFS

Source: own research and Five Year Plans Nepalese Government

As is clear from these examples, FFS has been influenced by prevailing popular development paradigms. Donors who determine the funding sources, organisations who are involved in FFS implementation, they all somehow carry the impact of development thinking with them and put their mark on the construction of FFS.

The table reflects mainly the impact on government-run FFS. FFS organised by government staff are influenced by national policies and national aims, such as agricultural growth and national food security. National policies change but are slow to adapt in comparison to local NGO policies. The procedure is more rigid, the prevailing hierarchy and bureaucracy make that government administration is not very flexible. There are development theories that have had little to no effect so far on government policies in the agricultural sector, such as the right-based approach. NGOs in Nepal do use a rights-based approach and focus on social inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as Dalits and ethnic minorities. NGOs also focused more on strengthening rural livelihoods and diversification of farming through income-generation, where they can apply a more holistic approach than the government who is prioritising particular sectors.

In 2002 PPD was actively promoting follow-up after FFS. This was not their policy anymore in 2009. Many farmers were disappointed when this stopped. In 2002 and in 2009, all farmers that I talked to would like to have follow-up activities after FFS, and in fact were expecting continued services from DADO. The FAO programme officer also wanted to do more than just FFS; he thought that not a one-off effort like FFS, but continuous support was needed. He sighed that this would require more funding and more commitment from the government (Kathmandu, interview, 2009). In 2002 farmers said that their relationship with DADO had improved and they were happy about this. Also DADO staff was pleased about the better working relation with their farmers. In the past they only knew a few model farmers or contact farmers, now they had got familiar with many more farmers. Unfortunately, this positive trend was reversed in 2009 when the farmers I talked to all (n=101) complained that the district officers did not pay much attention to them anymore after FFS. There was no follow-up after FFS, as they had hoped. They were very positive about FFS and the contribution of the junior technician or DADO at that time, but they would have liked to have seen more. Their expectations from DADO were high in 2002, likewise their disappointment in the following years was high.

“DADO has no time and funds for us”. (Farmers group, Sindhupalchok, 2009)

4.6 Measuring impact or evaluating FFS results

Farmer Field Schools have been constructed with different objectives by various actors. Notwithstanding the different views or objectives, most practitioners, each with their own agenda and objectives in mind, assert that FFS is a success. Whether FFS has success or impact is a continuous debate, mainly done by development practitioners and less by scientists, like Sherwood, Braun, or Bartlett who discuss or analyse Farmer Field Schools from an academic perspective. Since its origin in Indonesia, FFS have been perceived as a highly successful extension approach. FFS has shown remarkable impacts in terms of pesticide reduction, increases in productivity, knowledge gains among farmers and empowerment (Davis, 2006). Masses of data have been generated, but these are mostly presented in unpublished project reports that have a limited circulation and are not peer-reviewed (Van

den Berg and Jiggins, 2007). Most reports on impact have been written with a positive bias, and are used to improve a project or to entice a donor into more funding. Given the substantial donor investment into FFS since the 1990s, clearly donors do see FFS as a positive investment (Bartlett, 2005; Braun and Duveskog, 2008). The claim of the positive impact of FFS is made by the implementing organisation to show their donors that they have met their targets, that their investment has resulted in a positive contribution to development. Development actors in the field assert success when they get positive responses from farmers. FFS facilitators who have conducted field school sessions, want to prove that their training efforts had the desired effects, and stress this in their reporting. There are, however, a few critical papers and researches that question the success of FFS. In particular, World Bank staff questioned the expected effect of the diffusion of knowledge from trained farmers to non-participants, which is essential for achieving a large-scale impact of FFS (Rola et al. 2002; Feder et al., 2004). Also the cost-effectiveness has been subject of a fierce debate (Van den Berg and Jiggins, 2007).

Measuring the impact of FFS has been problematic and a variety of methods have been used to evaluate FFS (see Chapter 1). Methods used vary from hiring independent technical consultants, collecting yield data to focus group discussions and PRA sessions with farmers. One of the problems is that what is seen as the result of FFS depends on the objective of a project or organisation. What do FFS initiatives attempt to achieve? Is it an output or an outcome? With output I refer to concrete project objectives such as increased yield, increased profits or reduced pesticide use. I understand outcomes as going beyond the tangible outputs to include the long-term and often less visible real-life changes which happen between the delivery of outputs and the desired impact (UNDP, 2002) such as sustainable livelihoods, empowerment, and institutional development.

This output versus outcome debate is also reflected in the way the FFS has changed: initially a focus on concrete output, like pesticide reduction and yield increase, later a move towards more development-oriented objectives such as empowerment and broader community development. That FFS sets out to “educate local people to enhance their capability for informed decision-making in response to context –dependent problems” (Van den Berg and Jiggins, 2007: 668) does not really make measuring impact easier. Changes in inputs are relatively easy to calculate, but anybody who has been closely involved with FFS will know that there are a wide range of other benefits which are difficult to quantify and which are manifest only after some years, being more a process than a product. This has consequences for measuring success, for evaluating progress. A meta-analysis of 25 impact studies (mostly conducted in Indonesia and other places in Asia) commissioned by FAO concluded:

“The majority of studies... reported substantial and consistent reductions in pesticide use attributable to the effect of training. In a number of cases, there was also a convincing increase in yield due to training.... Results demonstrated remarkable, widespread and lasting developmental impacts. It was found that the FFS stimulated continued learning, and that it strengthened social and political skills, which apparently prompted a range of local activities, relationships and policies related to improved agro-ecosystem management”. (Van den Berg, 2004:18)

Evaluating the impact of FFS is complex. Firstly it is not easy to determine what to measure: is it crops yield increase, pesticide reduction or the more complicated change in knowledge

or attitude towards sustainable farming? Do we measure output or outcome? Do we evaluate short-term or long-term effects, in other words rigorous impacts versus comprehensive"? (Van den Berg and Jiggins, 2007: 668) Furthermore, assessment depends on who defines impact: the farmers themselves, practitioners, donors, pesticide sellers, organisations? A project can be successful in terms of farmers' participation but it can be a failure from the point of view institutionalisation; it can be a success from donor point of view, but a failure according to farmers. Project designers might wrongly assume that farmers have the same objective in mind as they have (Harrison, 2002). Maybe for a farmer increased agricultural production might not be the outcome he wished for, it could be that he had other aims in mind when enrolling for FFS. There are several other reasons why it is difficult to make generalisations about the impact of Farmer Field Schools. The conceptual and methodological problems associated with assessing the impact of Farmer Field Schools have resulted in disagreements among economists (Feder et al. , 2004) and FFS practitioners about the advantages of this intervention. It is known that farmers do not respond equivocally to such questions as: Has FFS been beneficial to you? Was it a success or a failure? The facilitator, evaluator or district agricultural agent are part of the social and political environment in which their own and farmers' behaviour is framed (Harrison, 1996), and the valuation of their interactions becomes part of the evaluation of FFS. Understanding the complexity of the social, cultural, historical, and political environment, of the implementation of FFS, and how decisions are made might provide a more differentiated picture of the decision-making process and motivation of the various actors to become involved with FFS.

4.7 Conclusion

The Farmer Field School was first developed in Indonesia in 1989 as a response to problems associated with the failure of the Green Revolution and in particular with misuse of pesticides. Since then FFS has been implemented by several organisations, each with different objectives and interests. FFS has evolved from a concept and activity focused on a single crop, through a learning and field-based extension methodology to a community-based approach to rural development. It is still a popular approach in many countries all over the world, although its success is heavily debated. It is, however, not easy to determine its impact because of the variety of methods applied, the diverse and changing interests of the actors involved, and the time frame in which FFS evolved.

In Nepal FFS started as a project in 1997, with a given procedure or framework to follow, with rules imposed by the donor and intervening agencies such as the Nepalese Ministry of Agriculture, the District Agriculture Development Office and Plant Protection Directorate. Organisations and individuals shaped FFS in various ways. It evolved through different practices, and became structured by social norms and processes of embedded institutionalisation (Scott, 1995; Munir, 2002; Cleaver, 2006a and 2006b). Due to differences in motivation, scope of analysis and methodology, it is unlikely that experts and academics will reach any agreement on the advantages and disadvantages of the Farmer Field School. One problem seems that FFS is taken as a blue print and not as suggestions for actions to be taken in particular historical, social, cultural and political contexts. Often, practitioners speak about a standard FFS while in practice the context and the actors determine a different implementation of FFS. The outcome is thus not so much a result of planned and predictable

steps, but more a series of often unintended outcomes as the result of a dynamic social interaction. This thesis does not intend to provide an evaluation of FFS in Nepal over the last decades in terms of success or failure, because the dichotomy does not make sense: what is a success for one actor can be a failure for another, and neither success or failure can be learned only from technical, visible results. Therefore, this thesis has followed several of the people involved over the years in this longitudinal research in order to analyse how FFS has evolved, how different actors play a role in the construction of FFS and how FFS has contributed to a process of change and rural development in Nepal.

5

The Myth of the Community



Chapter 5 The Myth of the Community

5.1 Introduction

The title of this chapter is taken from a book by Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah (1998), which aims to provoke discussion about current participatory approaches and to improve the understanding and implementation of these approaches. In this chapter I concur with the authors of *The Myth of Community* and I intend to demystify the concept of community, and discuss community development approaches in rural Nepal to create a better understanding of the context where the Farmer Field Schools took place.

Farmer field schools have over time developed into a form of community development with its group based approach and its broader aim to help communities solve their own problems. As is explained on the FAO website:

“[T]he FFS are not considered an end in themselves but a foundation for the development of the farmer’s own sustainable agricultural practices in their respective communities. In addition, this facilitates the formation of concerted farmer and community groups, local leadership and community-centered initiatives on sustainable agriculture.”³³

Farmer field school activities are stimulated to continue in the form of an FFS group. The groups were expected to remain active and keep working on agricultural development, but it was also assumed that FFS farmers would get involved in broader community activities, addressing particular problems that are prevalent in their community. As one senior agricultural officer expressed in a report: Farmers can “solve their problems using local knowledge and resources” (PPD and FAO, 2004:50). It was assumed that the problem-solving capacities that farmers learned in the Farmer Field School training would be used to address farmers' own needs and deal with problems in daily life in the community, taking development in their own hand. The Farmer Field School is expected to become embedded in the community.

In Nepal the FFS project management underscored this view. Our strategy was to create FFS groups, to encourage registration at the district office and in several cases give them (albeit limited) additional support on community development, mainly facilitating participatory planning or action research. In our approach we believed that:

“Farmers emerge from field schools ready to engage in further discovery processes to find solutions to crop protection and production challenges, as well as to address a broader set of problems which confront their communities....Community development through FFS is anchored on the theory that with knowledge comes empowerment, the recognition of what people want to achieve and the drive to work on it”. “the initial FFS experience evolves into

³³ Source: (http://www.fao.org.vn/Uploaded/ngocdiep/What_is_Community_IPM.pdf, accessed 11 August 2011)

community ownership, planning, management and implementation of Community Programmes".³⁴

In Nepal community participation is not a new concept. Before the inception of FFS there were already many community development projects in Nepal. Several of these activities have been initiated by external forces but there are also endogenous development initiatives in Nepal. In this chapter I will provide insights into community participatory development and in particular community based organisations in natural resource management in Nepal, using case studies from farmer managed irrigation and community forestry. I selected farmer-managed irrigation systems (FMIS) and community forestry because Nepal is known for success stories or 'good practices' in community forestry and farmers managed irrigation³⁵. As reported in the Nepali Times (24 Feb 2012):

Nepal's traditional systems of managing local forest and water were recognised when Elinor Ostrom was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 for her study in Nepal of the management of the commons. Ostrom has often said that the prize actually belongs to the farmers of Nepal whose management of irrigation for long-term sustainable yields she researched 30 years ago. (<http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/2012/02/24/Editorial/19031> accessed 27.04.2012)

Unlike community irrigation and forestry, FFS does not focus on common property resource management, but on agricultural development. The Nepalese government supports these initiatives in irrigation and forestry out of concern for the maintenance of resources to improve agricultural production. With FFS the government's interest is more in the field of agricultural production. Aspects that community forestry, FMIS and FFS share is that they follow participatory approaches, focus on community mobilisation and are a reaction to modernisation and technology driven development.

In line with Uphoff (1992a) I thought that locally embedded or community organisations, such as irrigation water users groups or community forestry users groups, were important for sustainable development for a number of reasons. They would mobilise and regulate resource use with a long-term view for future generations; resolve local conflicts; locate specific knowledge to be put to most efficient and sustainable use; regular monitor and be able to adapt quickly to resource status changes. I further assumed that participation in collective resource management would have a unifying effect: community members would join forces for a common cause, and community management would lead to social equity. This chapter reflects on some of these assumptions on community involvement from case study experiences with farmer-managed irrigation and community forestry and FFS. My argument does not imply criticism of a community development approach, rather I want to

³⁴ www.vegetableipmasia.org/Concepts/CommunityIPM.html, accessed 11 August 2011.

³⁵ For more information on community forestry see a.o. Shrestha and Mc Manus, 2007; Acharya, 2002; Dev et al., 2003; Yadav et al., 2003; Schoubroeck, 2006; Lachapelle et al., 2004; Ostrom 1990; 2007; Varughese and Ostrom, 2001; Springate-Baginski et al., 2007; Platteau, 2004; Baland and Platteau, 1996; Agrawal, 2001. For more background reading on farmer managed irrigation: Esman and Uphoff, 1984; Uphoff, 1992; Bhattarai et al., 2002; Van Etten et al., 2002; Pradhan, 2000; Shankari and Shah, 1993; Wijayaratna (ed.) 2004; Zwartveen, 2006.

show the limitations of the ideals and models of community and collective action in terms of which policy is conceived and practice is interpreted.

First I will give an overview of the changing paradigms of community development in general, which also have an impact on development in Nepal. Then I will discuss community development in Nepal. Next I will describe the cases of community forestry and farmers managed irrigation and draw lessons for FFS. I will provide answers to the following questions:

- 1) What does community development in Nepal involve?
- 2) What do we understand by the community? Which lessons can we draw for FFS from community dynamics in Nepal?

This study draws on my experience and a collection of recent literature on participatory community development, FMIS and community forestry. The cases are selected from the mid hills in Nepal, as that is the area where I worked, thus am most familiar with and from where I got most material. Also the data collected on further impact of FFS (Chapter 6, 7, 8) took place in the mid hills. Cases on FMIS and community forestry from the terai would provide a slightly different picture, because the forests and irrigation systems are larger, there is a difference in bio-diversity and there are other ethnic mixtures in communities. Not only are there different ethnic groups in the terai, than those in the mid and high hills, but also for many people settlement took place there more recently (after eradication of malaria about 40-50 years ago), whereas in the mid hills communities have been established for centuries. However the socio-historical context in which community organisations are established is similar in the mid hills and in the terai.

5.2 The history of community development worldwide

As many other countries in Asia and Africa, Nepal has been subject to a series of development approaches. Among these approaches or paradigm shifts community participation in development is a frequently mentioned term. In fact this has outlasted many other development “fads” (Stone, 1989). Basically community development, is about ‘progress’ and the ‘community’ and it implies that it takes place in a participatory way with community involvement in decision-making processes. However, like all ideas about development, the term community development is contested, reflecting the differences in interests that play a role ‘when theory meets practice’. Community involvement, community development were words first used in the Cold War period in the 1950s and 1960s, a strategy aimed at preventing European post WWII liberated countries from adopting a communist regime. This was a real top-down, technocratic approach, in which community initiatives and target population needs were not considered. This approach was also adopted for expansion of activities in so- called colonial countries to prepare them for independence (Carmen, 1996). Community development at that time was about involving people in a community which encouraged them to educate themselves to improve their life conditions through health, agriculture, education and mass literacy schemes (Smith, 2004). The original United Nations view on community development in 1958 was a method ‘for improving the levels of living, particular in underdeveloped areas’. It was defined as a process to create conditions for economic and social progress for the whole community. (UN 1958, In the Charter of the United Nations, article 55, page 16)

When quick results did not show, aid agencies soon dropped community development for new initiatives such as the 'green revolution'. Technology transfer, agricultural extension and the dissemination of innovations became a focal point. After a while it was realised that a purely technical and top-down approach, with policies imposed from outside did not make things better for the poor and vulnerable in society.

In the 1970s the call for more people's participation begun. Community development as a trend also has gained renewed global interest since that time (Guijt and Shah, 1998). Significant in initiating this debate was Freire (1970). He argues in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that the "oppressed" needed to unite to find a way to improve their own destinies. He also called for action to 'give voice to the voiceless'.

In the 1980s this urge for community development and participation was further elaborated with an increase of grassroots activities by local NGOs, seeking alternatives for outsider-driven development activities. Demanding more respect for local knowledge and participation of local people. Chambers' call for 'Farmers First' highlighted the way in which development was carried out by development planners who were not listening or taking the voice of local community's seriously (Chambers, 1983; 1997; 1993; Chambers et al., 1989a and b). Chambers is criticised for his over-optimistic view about the potential and capabilities of local population with their local knowledge. He does not mention the tensions that occur in local communities, he avoids discussions about how to deal with situations in which certain groups within society are oppressed by local culture (Cleaver, 2001a; 2006). Olivier de Sardan (1992) warns for projection of clichés and prejudices and idealisation of the poor.

At that time government run or state induced development was criticised by many: (Escobar, 1995; Scott, 1998; Hyden, 1983; Rondinelli, 1993). Cernea (1985) in his "Put People First" showed how organisations like the World Bank could work systematically at community level. Beneficiaries were considered the main actors, key decision-makers and encouraged to define their own development. The role of the external agents was limited to financiers and facilitators.

The limitations of central government management of environmental resources and need for more community involvement was stressed by many (a.o. Kothari, 1989, Guha, 1989; Ostrom, 2007; 1990). This assessment created a renewed interest in the local management of resources. The concept was embraced by governments and funding agencies, such as the World Bank, from the perspective of efficiency: cost-saving, when people manage the common resources they are using themselves.

Community management was seen as the solution for mismanagement by the state, corrupt governments and excesses of expensive inflexible bureaucracies (see World Development Report 1992: *Development and the Environment*, World Bank 1992). Greater community involvement guaranteed efficiency and effectiveness of investment and a contribution to empowerment and democratic decision-making (Cleaver, 1999; Uphoff, 1986). The discourse on the need to respect traditional knowledge and management systems in the 1980 and 90s (Agarwal and Narain, 1989; Ostrom, 1990; Shankari and Shah, 1993) further supported a requirement to include community members in development approaches.

After the 1990s NGOs and government agencies increasingly wanted to involve communities in taking control of their own development. This had arisen from dissatisfaction with the up till then often externally initiated forms of local development and the ineffectiveness of the externally imposed interventions. This was also the period that Farmer Field Schools were introduced.

Around the same time gender issues started to get attention, mainly because it was acknowledged that women play a crucial part in the conservation, management and safeguarding of water, forests and other natural resources. In the mid 90s the concept of eco-feminism was introduced. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, two prominent eco-feminists, argue that the capitalist and patriarchal systems that predominate throughout the world reveal a triple domination of the South, women, and nature (Mies and Vandana, 1993). In practice these concerns were poorly translated. At best a gendered approach is translated as the participation of both men and women. Increasingly women were forced to take part in water users group and forestry meetings or sit on committees, often with quotas like one third, or 25%. This happens with the idea that eventually women would benefit from, but also contribute to, better irrigation and/or forest management.

Currently the term broadly used is: Community driven development (CDD), indicating interventions that increase community decision-making power over their own development process and outcomes (Dasgupta and Beard, 2007), community-based development projects in which communities have direct control over key project decisions, including management of investment funds. This is in contrast with community-based interventions, which can be as limited as information sharing. The underlying assumption of CDD projects are that communities are the best judges of how their lives and livelihoods can be improved and, if provided with adequate resources and information, they can organise themselves to provide for their immediate needs.

Community-driven development is part of a broader paradigm shift responding to the large body of critical writings about top-down, modernist and authoritarian approaches that have dominated development over the last 50 years. (a.o. Escobar, 1995; Kabeer 1994; Scott, 1998). The World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Sourcebook (Dongier and others, 2001) promotes community-driven development as enhancing sustainability, allowing poverty reduction efforts to be expanded, building social capital, strengthening governance, and improving market and public sector activities. CDD can be seen as empowering by the left, but also as cost-effective, more efficient, delegating responsibilities, by the more neo-liberalists or extreme right. For an indication of its popularity the World Bank alone has increased its lending from \$325 million in 1996 to \$2 billion in 2003 for community-driven development projects (Dasgupta and Beard, 2007).

Community-driven development is assumed to reduce information problems (by obtaining development priorities directly from communities and giving target groups the opportunity to identify projects and indicate potential recipients), expanding the resources available to the poor (through credit, social funds, capacity building, and occupational training), and strengthening the local capacities of communities by fostering organisations that represent the local people. Among donor organisations there is generally an optimistic view of the possibilities of working with local organisations, among academics there is a more nuanced and pessimistic view. Timsina, 2003; Shrestha and McManus, 2007; Malla et al., 2003; Platteau 2004, Cleaver, 2002; Nygaard, 2008; Iversen et al., 2006 and others in particular emphasise that elites capture the benefits and the poor or weaker groups are missing out.

It cannot be assumed that community-driven approaches to development will per se increase the possibilities for broader-based participation in political, social and economic processes – and that indeed, in certain instances, they may worsen the exclusion of locally

disempowered groups from access to public decision-making processes and public resources (Hickey and Mohan, 2004).

5.3 The concept of community

The word community is a term readily adopted by politicians and academic, but also by development practitioners. A concept with almost infinite elasticity (Carmen, 1996). The word community is typically used to indicate different types of target groups or the larger context in which they live. The 'community' is generally defined as a local or small group of people, living in a particular area, characterised by 'face-to-face' relationships (Kingsbury et al., 2008). Community is also considered as a group of people with common interests, living in the same geographical area, and frequently feeling a sense of 'community spirit' (Shortall, 1994 in Shucksmith, 2000: 209; Berkes, 2004). Community is often seen as some kind of ideal or natural, social entity (Cleaver, 1999).

The suggestion that a community consists of people living in the same area is being challenged by Geschiere and Gugler (1998) who explain how urban migrants in Africa remain involved with their community of origin and feel they remain part of the community even if they have moved from their village to the city or beyond. They keep in touch through sending money, constructing houses or burial sites, and keeping land. This is also the case in Nepal. While many people have moved abroad they keep in touch by internet, phone and support families by sending remittances. Even when people have lived abroad for years they still feel part of their birthplace community and keep land in their name.

Gupta and Ferguson (1997) question too the spatial assumption or the physical demarcation of community. People in communities move around, have connections, even reaching beyond national borders. A vision of a community with individuals not living in one location per se, not in isolation but interacting, such a vision offers space for imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). People are members of different communities for different reasons (Harrison, 2002): by kinship, religion, residence, caste.

Definitions of community generally disguise less genuine and egalitarian attitudes. There seems to be a tendency to ignore the complex relations, to deny legitimacy and gender, class or caste politics (Cleaver, 1999; Kapoor, 2002; Briggs, 2005; Nuijten, 2005). The concept of community often simplifies real-life conditions, not meeting the needs of the entire community as is implied (Guijt and Shah, 1998). Inequalities, discrimination, oppression, power inequalities are often overlooked or not taken into account because policy making by the state, international organisations, even NGOs, requires simplification (Scott, 1998). Gender is usually hidden in seemingly inclusive terms, 'the people', or 'the community' while in most cases what is referred to as 'the community' actually means 'male community' (Guijt and Shah, 1998). It is not realistic to generate an image of cooperation and harmony by talking about 'the community'. Its heterogeneity and complexity makes a community difficult to conceptualise or measure.

Bista (1991) explains that in Nepal, rural communities are made up of a complex social web, consisting of a hierarchical social structure that includes different social and economic classes, a variety of ethnicities, unfair caste systems and gender discrimination. In Nepal, communities face several hierarchies, such as elderly dominating over young, male dominating female, Brahmin/Chettries dominating Janajatis or Dalits, Hindus dominating Muslims (Bennett, 2002; 2006) that link people within, but often outside their place of residence.

Bourdieu explains this process of position-taking in society by the concept of *habitus* (Robbins, 2000:31). “*Habitus* is both a system of schemes of production of practices, and a system of perception and appreciation of practices” (Bourdieu, 1989:19). One’s social position within a particular social group, such as caste, informs one’s ‘caste’ *habitus*, “a sense of one’s place and a sense of the place of others” (Bourdieu, 1989:19). This results in the internalisation of specific personified characteristics, which comprise hierarchical boundaries and, consequently, structure relationships with other castes or social groups (Bourdieu, 1990, 1993). Hence *habitus* relates to power: “The power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is (political) power par excellence” (Bourdieu, 1989:23)

Communities are not homogenous in composition, needs and priorities. Mosse (1994), Kothari and Cooke (2001), Guijt and Shah (1998), and Cleaver (2001) have all criticised the indiscriminate use of the concept, the assumption of a homogenous unit. They stress that simplifying the term will obscure the complexities and ignore the power dimensions. Yet, its centrality in daily life means that it cannot be ignored or dismissed. Moreover, policy makers need a simplifying, inclusive concept to target the lowest societal level: the community. It is still a useful unit to work with, as long as we are aware that there inequalities, power differences, flexibilities in demarcation of space, and providing we consider the complexity, the socio-historical background and diverse nature of the context the community is situated.

Individuals inherit a concept of community and live with this idea in a strategic way (Robbins, 2000). This way it is easy to explain why in Nepal people belonging to a certain caste feel more comfortable interacting with people from the same caste. This already starts from an early age, in the family and community where one is brought up. For example, in Brahmin families for generations it was normal to go to school, to read books, to listen to religious texts, but in a Gurung or Dalit family this was not part of common practice and not part of their symbolic or cultural capital. Whether or not they form a real class, individuals who share a similar position in social space are likely to live in similar places, forming families and neighbourhoods. People who work in government offices are usually educated male from higher castes. For them it is more comfortable to communicate with people from their caste, and sex, this seems ‘natural’ to them. This has been going on for generations, so Brahmins, but also other caste groups, feel that it is kind of ‘normal’ that Brahmins are the leaders in villages and contact persons for the government and NGO services. People from Brahmin caste origin have more connections in the government, social capital, which are a product of history and the principle of its subsequent history (Bourdieu, 1993:32).

When talking about community development in general, it is important to ask the question who is representing the community? What is meant by “the community”? As there seems to be a tendency to ignore the complex relations, to deny or ignore legitimacy and gender, class or caste politics (Cleaver, 1999; Kapoor, 2002; Briggs, 2005, Guijt et al., 1998), in community development it is important to identify who are the actors, how are they related, how is the power structure, who are the intended beneficiaries, the users and managers of the resource in question (Kumar, 2005).

5.4 Community development in Nepal in stages

Throughout Nepal one may find many community organisations that have evolved from local or endogenous institutions and are usually rooted in cultural, traditional, and voluntary organisations. They contribute to community service and are organised by a well-recognised and valued group in society. Some have existed for generations while others have a more temporary function. These community organisations, along with kinship and household networks, formed the foundation of local power relationships; their networks remained largely segmented and localised. “There is usually an upper class of the land owning nobility, politicians, urban administrators or elite, and an underclass consisting of wage labourers, petty traders, marginal and poor farmers, landless of rural Nepal” (Mishra, 2007: 19).

In order to understand community development it is important to look first at the history of community development in Nepal. This development can be divided into four stages – the period before 1955, the period between 1955 and 1974, the period between 1975 and 1993, and finally, the post 1993 era.

5.4.1 Before 1955

Before the unification of the state Nepal, the place consisted of scattered, isolated communities. These communities remained, even after unification, quite autonomous due to inaccessibility and remoteness of many areas in this mountainous country. In these communities local leaders carried out development or service delivery activities, often supported by groups locally formed organisations. Many of these organisations also had a religious background, either Hindu or Buddhist which made them rather exclusive, especially when they were based on a single ethnicity or caste or even a family.³⁶

These linguistic ethnic and caste group affiliations were historically the only bases for the formation and nurturing of social organisations. These leaders were usually influential persons and often well-to-do. They donated land or resources to temples. They spent money on temple construction, building bridges, rest places, and so on, to gain religious merit, and/or local support. This donation would eventually benefit the family in a spiritual way but it would also provide prestige (*nam khumaune*: literally: earn a name) in the community. Respect or prestige is important in Nepali society. Status quo in Nepal is reinforced by religious attitudes, rules for conduct and morality and by social institutions such as the caste or marriage system. A *guthi* is such an organisation of the Newars in the Kathmandu valley. *Guthis* are religious, charity trusts, mostly established with land grants of religious elites. *Guthis* have unmistakably been borrowed from India since Licchavi times, but they have been reshaped and reformatted, at least partly, in local terms to adjust to a different social structure (Toffin, 2005). Membership provided and still provides a deeper meaning to the lives of Newar people. Membership is normally inherited within the family, from father to son. *Guthi* originally meant the specific ‘land given to a temple’ (Regmi, 1978), but it has come to mean the group responsible for managing temple lands and other assets, and more generally in association with temple and funeral related social responsibilities. The activities of these localised institutions, however, were never associated with development or *bikas*.

³⁶

See also Biggs et al., 2004 for an extensive study on community organisations in Nepal.

At that time, there were other organisations in society, such as the ones dealing with sharing seasonal work, including mutual labour exchange groups for planting, weeding, harvesting, usually on a rotating basis, like Parma³⁷.

So called mother's groups play a particular role in Nepal. Mother's groups or *Ama Samuhas* are perhaps one of the most common traditional voluntary organisations in Nepal. They first started with the Gurung of Western Nepal. As most of the Gurung men used to join the British Army, and later the Indian Army, over the last two centuries, Gurung women formed mother's groups to support each other, but also to sing, dance, and organise cultural activities in the evenings. One of the most well-known activities they perform is to welcome returnee Lahures (returnee British or Indian Army Men) and guest visitors. These Lahures and guest visitors donate money to the *Aama Samuha*. The collected money is used to build walking trails, temples, etc. This type of fund raising is still popular in many Gurung villages.

5.4.2 1955 -1974: Central government planning

In 1955 Nepal began with central development planning. The major community development efforts from this period were Compulsory Savings Schemes, state-driven Cooperative Movement and a Back-to-Village National campaign. These efforts failed due to lack of community ownership feeling, dominance by state and privileged families plus a lack of transparency and accountability (Human Development Report, 2001). Nevertheless, it laid the foundation for future group-based approaches. This way many Nepalese learned the basics of official, legalised cooperation-based activities.

In the early 1970s self-help groups and users' groups were promoted to maintain public resources such as drinking water, irrigation, forests, and roads. These groups consisted of Brahmin and Chettri men, and decisions were made by them.

Also functional groups were set up, such as (male) farmers groups. Due to limited scope and a focus on a single sector, these groups had little capacity to deal with human poverty. Although it was criticised for its inadequate focus on the most deprived in society, lack of ownership, lack of transparency and accountability, this functional group approach is still popular with government agencies today.

5.4.3 1975 – 1990: A focus on poor and women

Limitations of the sectoral approach to poverty reduction asked for a need for a more pro-poor and multidimensional methodology. In the early 1980s targeted social mobilisation approaches, such as Small Farmer Development Programme (SFDP) and Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), were launched. The small farmers and women were targeted with access to resources such as credit, the capacity of outreach line agencies was improved. Women in particular were separated as a special focus group under the Women in Development Approach (WID). Since 1975, when women were declared as an 'issue' in development, the Women in Development (WID) approach was embraced (Acharya, 2003). Women started to be seen as producers; their direct role in food production, hence in development, began to be recognised.

³⁷ Parma is an informal institution of reciprocal labour exchange, in practice this is often harvesting and planting together in Nepal.

Many external agencies set about using community groups to facilitate their development intervention: farmers groups, road maintenance groups, vegetable growers associations, women groups, forest user groups, credit and saving groups. This approach is very popular among governments and NGOs to date. Most people in rural areas are a member of one of these groups or locally based organisations. In my interviews people revealed that they are usually a member of several groups: a women's group, a community forestry group, a saving group, or a health group. In the Ninth Development Plan (1997 – 2002) the Nepalese government emphasised the implementation of development interventions through these local groups or organisations, whether endogenous or externally initiated.

Also in Nepal, as a result of the failure of formal, donor-driven top-down development interventions, there has been an increase in seeing the possibilities of building upon endogenous or traditional community organisations, in an attempt to produce more sustainable and equitable development strategies.

5.5 Community forestry and farmer managed irrigation

Much of the thinking and discussion of community development comes from the study of institutions for common property management, such as water users groups, forestry groups, and farmers associations (Olstrom, 1990; Uphoff, 1992b; Platteau, 2004). Farmer managed irrigation and community forestry sectors and their community organisations have a long history in Nepal. They have been long accepted in Nepalese communities in such a way that they have been more or less embedded within local society, or in other words they have become vested with legitimacy by local communities for a long time. Community forestry and farmer-managed irrigation systems have been portrayed as Nepal's successes in development to the outside world.

5.5.1 Community forestry groups

Bharkhore Forest is located in Siwalaya VDC, Parbat district. All households in ward 1 and 3 are recognized users of this forest. The group of users is ethnically and economically heterogeneous, but the main occupation is subsistence agriculture.

Historically the forest was managed under a state appointed tax collection system, until 1957 when the forest was nationalised. As a national forest the resources were depleted. In 1978 the villagers appointed a watchman to prevent further degradation of the forest. After abolishment of the *Panchayat system* under the new community forestry policy the forest was officially handed over to a forest users group in 1993. The district forestry office has assisted with formulation of a committee, a plan and a constitution.

The users committee consists of representatives of different settlements, whereby women are given preference, but caste and ethnicity or wealth is not considered. (Acharya, 2002)

Community forests have been important sources of basic needs for rural households in Nepal. Forests have provided firewood, timber, fodder, roofing and various non-timber products such as ferns, medicinal herbs and mushrooms. Particularly for the poor and people with little or no land, they have contributed critically to their livelihoods. Today, for

instance, firewood is still the most important source (and for many only source) of rural household energy, and is still largely gathered, not purchased (Agarwal, 2001; CBS, 2012).

As forest provides many benefits, it has attracted various interested parties, varying from small households, private enterprises to the government. In Nepal over 20% is managed under the umbrella of community forestry (Shrestha and McManus, 2007). Community forest management in Nepal takes place in various forms: by traditional institutions, or community organisations newly established by the government and international non-governmental organisations.

In the hills several communities have a history of relatively high local autonomy and therefore were used to manage their forests, mostly under some kind of feudal arrangement. During the period that the Ranas' or other powerful families ruled Nepal, they considered the forests as their private property and used it exclusively for their private benefits. Government appointed forest inspectors to control the forest use (Nightingale, 2006).

In 1957 under the National Forest Act the forests were nationalised, all community land was converted into state land. This measure had a negative effect on the forest because local people resorted to quickly removing forest products fearing that the government might close forests permanently (Shrestha and Mc Manus, 2007).

Nightingale (2006) reports that many people were not happy when forests were nationalised in 1957:

“But, what we didn't like is that after the Rastriya ban (National forest) was formed, no one protected the forest and there was a lot of loss”. (interview with a Thakuri man (in Nightingale, 2006:8)

By the 1970s when the forest resources were almost depleted a crisis was called for and local communities, but also the government, was forced to take measures, especially in the form of involving local users in managing forestry resources.

Many organisations claim the initiation of community forestry in Nepal, while in fact, it is in many cases local leaders, local functionaries who had influential power, often government representatives or government protégées (Timsina and Paudel, 2002; Wakiyama, 2004) who mobilised villagers to protect the forests. The villagers were obliged to contribute or support as a member living in a community. Some communities have formed themselves a group to protect and manage their forests (Acharya and Gentle, 2005).

In the 1980s and early 1990s forest user groups (FUGs) were initiated as part of a community forestry (CF) programme promoted by the Nepalese government and donor agencies. It was a big policy shift, allowing forest user groups to be the unit for managing community forests. The Forest Act, 1993, further strengthened the FUGs by giving them legal status and more autonomy to mobilise funds and other resources. Community forestry gathered pace in the 1990s because it dovetailed perfectly with grassroots democracy and local self-governance. As a result, requests to hand over forests to communities have increased rapidly (Biggs et al, 2004). Community forestry today forms one of the central themes of many rural development programmes (Winrock, 2002). In 2005 there were over 14,000 registered CFUGs nationwide, with several thousand more groups reportedly awaiting certification (Department of Forestry –DoF- , 2005).

Still conservation is the key focus of DFO and utilisation of forests for livelihood purposes gets little attention (Shrestha and Mc Manus, 2007; Nightingale, 2005; 2006;

Wakiyama, 2004). The current approach of NGOs is a more supporting and facilitating one: local people are encouraged to get involved in planning for a more flexible use of the forest resource, in order to serve their livelihoods (Yadav et al. 2003).

The notion of 'community' in community forestry is difficult. It indicates a group of people living in a certain geographical area. Sometimes is referred to a whole village development committee (VDC)³⁸, sometimes to a ward, or to a hamlet or neighbourhood (tol). And, they sometimes cross administrative boundaries at DDC, VDC and ward levels, depending on the location of the forest. Initially the communities were defined by the local *panchayat* administrative unit, and community forestry took place through local political structures (Winrock, 2002). People who lived in the proximity of the *panchayat* were automatically included in the community and given user rights, those outside the border were excluded from access to the forest, even if they were traditionally using the forest. After restoration of democracy efforts in 1990s, increasing the term community was replaced by 'users group' (Shrestha and McManus, 2007), indicating a broader group of users, although there is still an emphasis on geographical boundaries (Wakiyama, 2004). There is no guarantee that all users will be included in a users group. There are difficulties identifying and deciding who is included as a forest user (Wakiyama, 2004) and exclusion of users takes place (Agarwal, 2001). Property distribution, of land and thus forests, is always contested, and likely to be claimed by village leaders or local elites Li (1996). Nightingale (2005; 2006) reported that higher caste people were particularly happy with the concept of community forestry, because they can now control the forests.

When community forestry was introduced, managed by a community forest users, committee lower caste people were not happy even though they could see resources regenerating under community forestry. Nightingale (2005; 2006) reports that lower caste men and women from Sangkhola, regretted the loss of the National forest system because under that system they had found it easier to transgress the rules and avoid paying for key resources. For them, resources were 'easier' to get under the national forest because they did not have to go through a whole committee with higher caste people, they only had to deal with the forestry government official. (Nightingale, 2006)

From several studies it is clear that many people use the community forest for different purposes. A study by Richards et al., 2003 showed that the mid wealthy people use mostly on community forests for wood, while the poorest households collect mostly grass and fodder in the forests. Gender relations continue to be important in defining control over resources and the division of labour both within households and communities. Women use the forest to collect fuel wood, litter, or leaf and fodder for animals, and meet their household needs. Women have expertise in local biomass resources including their properties as fuels. Women can differentiate between those fuel-wood species which burn fast with high heat, those which burn at a slow speed with low heat and those that smoke (Kelkar, 1995).

Men on the other hand are more preoccupied with construction timber and wood for agricultural implements (Yadav et al, 2003). A study conducted in rural hilly areas of Nepal indicated that women, especially from high caste Hindu families, were solely responsible for collecting, storing and cooking with firewood, but men cut the wood to be used as firewood,

³⁸ The Village Development Committee is the smallest administrative unit in Nepal. A VDC is divided in wards, usually 5- 9 wards.

as women are considered not to be strong enough. Among minority ethnic groups, such as Tamangs and Rais, there is more work sharing at the household level and men were also involved in collecting and cooking with firewood. Among the low caste groups such as Kami and Sarki, both men and women are involved in managing the household firewood system (Mahat, 2006). The same study found that women are involved in stealing firewood from private forests since they did not have access to community forests. As a result they had concerns with the risks associated with stealing firewood (e.g breaking their legs, financial penalties etc.) (Mahat, 2006).

The rich are less dependent on common forests since they often have either private land with trees or do not need income from the forest (Dev et al., 2003). While the rich favour conservation of the forest, the poor users are most interested in maintaining a regular supply of forest products from the community forest to sustain their livelihoods. In interviews, it emerged that the poorer household members could not afford to buy firewood as it is very expensive, so they have no choice but to continue to use the community forest to obtain firewood. The FUG record book shows that it is by and large the poor households who have paid the most fines for illegally using the forest (Timisina, 2003). The poor and landless often depend on the forest to support income-generating activities such as firewood selling, alcohol-distillation, charcoal for blacksmithing etc. (Dev et al. (2003) . Their livelihoods are vulnerable, they are often poorly educated, food deficient and exposed to poor communication within the village and with external organisations. They tend to be less involved in user groups and excluded from social activities. Many report a distinction between poor and rich groups in society (Richards et al., 2003; Yadav et al., 2003) and Dev et al. (2003). Others stress that caste relations are central to how power operates within the community forestry user- group (Bhatta and al. 2007, Krause, 1988, Nightingale 2002 a.o; Wakiyama, 2004).

There is considerable evidence that the poor and marginalised of the community lose out to the local elites who wield far more power and tend to get the bulk of the benefits. The only existing rule regarding social inclusion is that the community forest users' executive committee must include 33% women.

Different users have different needs and as such need different types of support (Banjade, et al., 2003). Several authors (Shrestha and Mc Manus, 2007; Li, 1996) indicate that the role of the government and NGOs in community forestry is debatable. (Springate-Baginski et al., 2001) suggest that with gender and equity policies the state has had a positive influence on inclusion of women. But the same author says that there is not much support for the poor in contribution for their livelihood. Nightingale (2006) describes with her study on Pipledi Forest Users Group that men and women have different views on the role of the state.

High caste men are keen to emphasise their appreciation of the DFO in initiating the FUG. Women express their lack of understanding of the formal part but stress their role in conserving the forest and in management of forest products. Lower caste men, Kami in this case, stress ignorance, claim innocence because they cannot read or write the official documents. This gives them an opening for bypassing rules set by the FUG and DFO (Nightingale, 2005; 2006).

Usually the high caste men in the user-group have an interest in cultivating a strong relationship with the DFO staff. Historically such relationships have been useful to them and many see connections with government employees as a potential source of jobs, support in

local disputes and other intangible benefits that may receive later. One way in which they seek to gain favour is by demonstrating that they are educated and 'developed' (Pigg 1996). Most often they do this by invoking understandings of scientific forestry and deferring to expertise when arguing for particular management strategies. Yet the high-caste men, by appealing to their trust and understanding of the DFO's forestry practices, are able to assert their superior right to control the user-group (Nightingale 2005; 2006).

Brahmin and Chettri men do not need to prove (to anyone 'outside') that they are the rightful managers of the forest, their literacy skills, high-caste status and gender ensure that claim under local cultural norms (Nightingale 2005; 2006). The women in contrast generally have few direct dealings with DFO staff and have a greater need to emphasise their knowledge and thus claim to manage the forest in part because they have become largely marginalised from the committee management process (Nightingale 2002). Many women stated that women's influence on the user committees has deteriorated over time as the (male) leaders have become more entrenched and disputes between political parties have taken precedence over other alliances and issues within the group (Nightingale, 2006).

Timsina (2003) describes a case on forestry groups in Dolakha:

"In introducing community forestry policy the government has stimulated changes in social relations between different groups: women and Dalits are purposively requested to sit in the FUG. However, major control over the implementation of community forestry policy at the local level still lies with the village élite, and only patchy elements of social justice accrue to the poor and marginalised (2003:241).

In a study conducted by Dev and Adhikari (2007) it became clear that in 12 out of 14 FUGs decision-making was dominated by the privileged, rich and educated, the involvement of illiterate, low caste, women was negligible.

5.5.2 Farmer managed irrigation schemes or water user groups

An analysis of farmer managed irrigation schemes provided information similar to dynamics of community forestry. This is described below.

This part of the study is largely based on literature and field visits to irrigation schemes and information collected in the period 1993 – 1996 when I worked over 3 years for the Western regional Irrigation Directorate in Nepal to support and train water user groups (WUGs). Information was obtained mainly through frequent field visits and talks with village men and women, in addition to conversations with government and NGO staff involved in the irrigation sector. This information is supplemented by existing case studies and literature findings.

The department of Irrigation was founded in 1952 with support from India. After 1950, systems were increasingly converted to 'community-managed irrigation systems' due to political developments, and this provided an entry for new farmers as users of the systems, or expansion of existing households. Only in 1970s did FMIS gain official recognition by the state in policies and plans. At the end of the 1990s, several other agencies became involved in irrigation, including the department of agriculture, local development but also NGOs (Pradhan, 2000; 1998).

Almost 70% of the irrigated area in Nepal is managed by farmers, in so called Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems. In fact Nepal is famous for its thousands of farmer managed

irrigation systems (Martin and Yoder, 1986).

Farmers have built and managed some of the FMIS by themselves for centuries. These schemes are found in diverse environments and apply a wide range of technologies to use different water sources for the production of several crops, but mainly rice. For generations' groups of farmers with adjacent landholdings worked together to construct water diversions, dig canals and to transport water to their fields for growing irrigated crops, mainly rice. Individual farmers in hilly areas, on their own, can seldom get surface water for irrigation. Construction and maintenance of the structures to divert, convey and distribute water requires investment and hard work of a group of farmers. For a group of farmers to accomplish the various irrigation management activities, their efforts must be organised. Therefore one usually needs an organisation of a group of farmers or an institution for the development and operation of irrigation systems.

In many new irrigation systems the formation of water users associations were made mandatory. Farmer managed irrigation system are considered potentially a cost-effective alternative to government run systems through which to expand and intensify irrigation development and improve performance of irrigated agriculture. Indeed farmer managed organisations produced measurable improvements in system performance and efficiency (Uphoff and Wijayaratra, 2000). Irrigation has contributed to increased yields, and changing cropping patterns (Plusquellec, 2002).

In history these endogenous or local 'farmer managed' systems were based on rules set by the feudal lords and their fiefs. They had more to do with the feudal relationship than with other local social relationships. The role of the state was never entirely absent. Traditional systems were built with grants from the king or other feudal lords. Development of irrigated area probably occurred during the past two centuries under guidance/supervision of *birta* and *jagir* grant holders (Shivakoti, et al., 1997). These grant holders were able to mobilise tenants, slave labour, capital and land to build irrigation systems. The 17th century edict of King Ram Shah mandated water resource conflicts to be settled at community level (Pradhan, 2000). In practice local tax collectors and landlords built most of the older systems. They were built to improve their own production of their land. Although the old influential families may no longer occupy their formal governmental positions, they and their descendants still play an important role in current systems. (Poudel, 2000)

Guthis were also traditional community organisations that developed irrigation systems to increase the production on their temple land-holdings. Farmers felt obliged to comply with the wishes of the religious leaders. It is not easy for ordinary farmers to rebel against the interest of the leaders of such charitable trusts, whose authority is religiously strengthened.

The influence of feudal elites such as *mukhiyas* (former revenue collectors in the hills) is still big in the community level conflict resolution process. These local power structures and customary practices are decisive in water use negotiation process (Upreti, 2001; Pun, 2001).

Over the years both political and economic linkages have become more complex, diversified, fragmented and contested. In particular the earlier strong inter-linkage of political and economic aspects within a patron-client relationship, between feudal rulers and his dependents, have been dissolved, and now involve more political and economic agents of different kinds. Further, there is an increasing influence of foreign and international actors, government and non-governmental agencies on Nepal's policies and programmes, and an

increasing presence of such donor run projects in small localities. As a result irrigation systems are changed, new institutions are set up or old ones are transformed, and rights and duties concerning water are redefined.

FMIS irrigation systems are located mostly in the hills of Nepal and show a high degree of organisational and managerial inputs, both of which become essential when there is not much capital available for construction and of the canals. Over time, these local irrigation organisations have developed their own rules and regulations regarding resource mobilisation, water allocation, system maintenance, conflict resolution, property rights in water. Irrigation is a natural resource or a common resource system, and implicitly also a social system. The water right is a dynamic concept and changes over time due to season, cropping patterns, social structure and power relations (Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan, 2002; Benda-Beckmann, et. al., 1996).

The water from irrigation systems is not only used for irrigation. Families use the water for washing, bathing and cleaning but also a large amount for watering livestock (Van Etten et al., 2002).

The diversity in water use is increasing, with the introduction of micro-hydro and modern water mills. Users of *ghatta* (traditional water mill) and micro hydro owners demand changes in the existing water rules, in which irrigations gets priority. The *ghatta* and micro hydro owners want an equal share, but often lose out against irrigation users (Bhattarai et al, 2002).

Differences in wealth, gender, caste, ethnic background, political orientations allow for different access to resources. Singh (2001) states that 'might is right' is prevailing. According to him "it is clear that this way the more vulnerable people who have little bargaining power will usually lose out. In practice this means women and people from the lower caste, such as the Sarki or Kami people, who have little or no land, have less income, are less educated and so on" (Singh, 2001:130).

There is a difference among the more wealthy and poor. The distribution of benefits from irrigation development is more or less proportional to land distribution, which is often highly unequal (van Etten, J. van Koppen, B. Pun, S., 2002). Farm households that gained access to irrigation benefit considerably (Van Etten et al., 2002), whereby there is inequality among water users. "The better-off dominated in the Water Users Association Committees" (Van Etten et al., 2002:17). "The more powerful farmers got away with more quantities and continued to fight about even the small amounts of water that small farmers needed on their small plots" (Van Etten, van Koppen and Pun, 2002: 25)

Often the benefits and burdens of irrigation are gender-biased. In a newly established irrigation scheme, Andikhola FMIS women's tasks in the family farm increased more than men's because tasks traditionally handled by women, such as weeding, transplanting and harvesting, increased when rain-fed agriculture was replaced by irrigation (van Etten et al. , 2002).

Irrigation is often assumed to be a male task but many women are also involved and interested in irrigation. In the irrigation sector men dominate the scene with male engineers and constructors. Furthermore men are decision-makers in water user committees (Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen, 1998; Zwarteveen, 2006). Women are generally excluded from informal and formal fora in which rules and practices about water distribution are set and implemented. Some practices, such as night irrigation are a problem for women, so they are

excluded from water at those times (Koppen et al., 2001). Women do use irrigation systems, if not formally included then informally. There are reports of water stealing (Zwarteveen, 2006) and observations of water use in irrigation systems by women for livestock, washing, kitchen gardens (personal observation, 1994). Women often expressed a desire not to be included in official committees; they showed reluctance in taking part in water user meetings when I worked in the irrigation sector (personal communication, 1995).

Imposing a quota for women or *Dalits* in water users groups is a step forward towards inclusion of a diversity of users but does not guarantee that their needs are addressed. This rule of compulsory participation of women, or any vulnerable group, does not make sense, when those women have in fact no interest or time or capabilities to participate in the organisations (Zwarteveen, 2006).

Women, who are generally without landownership titles can not gain their own independent water rights. Although women irrigated alone or jointly with their husbands, water shares were commonly registered in their husbands' names. Husbands also arranged transactions like the renting out or selling of water shares. Women were often uninformed about the number of shares and transactions made. While in one- third of the sample households women participated in maintenance activities, their contributions were typically registered in their husbands' names (Van Etten et al., 2002).

Not only gender issues play a role in irrigation management, ethnicity and caste too influence community organisations such as FMIS. When I worked in irrigation in the Western Region the water user committees were predominantly male and Brahmin dominated, *Janajatis* in lower castes had little access to irrigated land and were traditionally not involved in decision-making in water distribution. Irrigation development risks being biased towards those who already own land. FMIS are not necessarily more equitable or efficient than government managed systems. Water rights are formed and influenced by power structures and social relationships, as well as other rights. In fact these seemingly participatory institutions can exclude significant sections in a society (Agarwal, 2009; 2001). Participatory exclusion, as Agarwal calls it, affects women, *Janajatis* and lower caste groups, in forest user groups but also in water users associations and this exclusion extends into other arenas too, such as village councils.

People do not isolate irrigation from other social processes and relationships. Changes in the political structure or administration of villages may be as important for irrigation as changes in irrigation infrastructure or organisation itself. Shifts in political power have a great impact on actual water rights (von Benda-Beckmann et al., 1998) Water disputes often do not stand in isolation but are connected to other conflicts, in which a wide range of institutions might be involved.

It is shown everywhere that local communities at different stages in history appropriated state regulations and rights. What were considered external rules over time became internal rules of the community, and were incorporated into the existing body of regulations. Under influence of government and NGO interference in farmer managed irrigation systems certain rules and regulations have been changed or added. The opposition between so called customary rules and laws and state law becomes blurred, because the regulations are being adapted over time (Pradhan et al. 2000; Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan, 2002).

Customary laws and state laws all have weaknesses if it comes to water rights. There are diverse customary systems. They differ in the extent to which women may have land

rights and may inherit land. This has consequences for their water rights. Also ethnic groups have been incorporated into the state Nepal in different ways and at different times, this has consequences for land and water rules and regulations. Water rights are linked to land rights and are a source of power. People from higher caste tend to have better access to higher political authorities and as such to access and decision-making related to water rights (Van der Schaaf, 2000).

The introduction of a new irrigation system or the extension of a canal by supply- led development intervention generally does not advocate principles of democracy, equity and social cohesion. More often than not, they are supporting unequal power structures within a community and ultimately they often fail for social reasons (Upreti, 2001). Even if a project is set up with the intention to contribute to poverty alleviation, as was the case with Andhi Khola by the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), thinking they could use irrigation differently so that it would in fact benefit the poorest of the poor. They strived for irrigation development in which landless people, as well as landowners, would benefit equally, nevertheless the benefits of the project went mainly to the rich households. (van Etten et al. 2002).

Villagers are not just passive victims in this process. It is found that people do resist, are not always passive subjects, dominated by the state actors and powerful elite. People do resist unequal power relations, although this might not always be obvious. People get benefits in unorthodox ways. There are reports of water stealing or unlawful water use (Zwarteveen, 2006), 'unruly' practices in forest use (Timsina, 2003).

5.6 The post-1990 community development era in Nepal

The focus of development interventions has changed over the years. Infrastructure and agricultural technologies were the major focus until recently. Since mid 1990s institutional development, transformation of administrative, as well as technical skills has been the main emphasis. Increasingly attention for the different livelihoods of users and equity issues do ask for attention from service providers. Ideas have changed from project structure and content (community, development, integrated rural development, basic need) to a focus on process approach (from technology transfer to an emphasis on participation, negotiation and empowerment). From 1990 onwards significant changes in community development took place: the deprived were considered partners in development rather than passive recipients; social mobilisation was considered by the government and NGOs as a good tool for poverty reduction. Development interventions became more people-centred and holistic.

Mobilisation of local resources but also decentralisation of decision-making, self-governance and people's empowerment were aims to be achieved through community organisations (Shrestha, 2004). Rights-based approach to development is now a popular strategy, in particular used by NGOs to reduce local communities' dependency on aid by improving government capacity. In the rights-based approach community members are encouraged to fight for their human rights, but are also addressed in their responsibility to meet their (local) obligations.

On a large scale local or village-based social mobilisers were appointed and trained to reach people. Still the focus on poverty in this time remains narrow as it focused mainly on material deprivation, on basic needs and income, not on reducing vulnerability and powerlessness, exclusion and the marginal conditions people live in. This is also the period that Farmer Field Schools were introduced, which fitted the philosophy at that time: FFS was participatory, treating farmers as active partners in development.

National NGOs mushroomed in this period after 1990, many using a group approach to reduce poverty. These NGOs were assumed less hierarchical than the government, more flexible. Still their reach was limited and the organisations often failed to include the marginalised or deprived in society. Many of their programmes evolved in isolation, and parallel to those of the local government, due to poor communication and coordination. As one interviewee said: “The NGOs do their own thing. They do not coordinate with us. Sometimes I get informed about some of their activities in our district, but usually I get to know by chance” (District agricultural development office chief, 2009).

Also, uncertain sources of funding made NGO interventions often unsustainable and donor-driven. This was confirmed by NGO staff in an interview (2009) in Kathmandu: “We are dependent on donors for funding. If we have no funds, we have no programme”.

Post 1990 traditional institutions such as the *guthi* are still very active in many Newar rural settlements, especially among Maharjan farmers and other associated agriculturist castes (Toffin, 2005). But in most cases, especially in urban areas, *guthis* are on the verge of disappearing. The general collapse of such local organisations can be explained by a series of interrelated factors. In the first place, through the increased mobility of people urbanisation contributes to a diminished social cohesion. As a matter of fact, the local organisations such as *guthi* depend above all on fixity and proximity of residence. A recession in religious concern and interest can also be mentioned. People today devote less time and money to rituals, and become reluctant to attend to their ritual duties and traditional obligations. Westernisation and modernisation of lifestyles, and the development of new media like television and video, even in rural settings, have altered attitudes and opened up a large part of the population to newer horizons and more materialist values, widely different from the old socio-religious order (Toffin, 2005). Religion is not rejected, but the constraints of modern life and salaried work have reduced it to a less central position than it has traditionally occupied.

The method of financing charitable and religious institutions itself has changed. Since the downfall of the Rana regime in 1951, the state practice of “making land endowments to temples or other religious and charitable institutions has become obsolete” (Regmi 1978: 55). People still contribute for religious purposes, to construct a new temple, for instance, or to perform a special ceremony, but they do this mostly by money subscriptions, and no longer by establishing endowments of private lands under the *guthi* system. New individualistic and egalitarian concerns have multiplied these conflicts, and do not incline the people to reconstruct or join new associations.

Having observed the successful cooperation and fund raising capacities of mothers’ groups, many INGOs and NGOs have formed and promoted Ama Samuha groups across the country among different caste and ethnic groups.

In recent years, especially after the democracy movement of 1990, some caste and ethnic groups (Adivasi, Gurung, Kirat and many more) have formed, what Biggs et al. (2004) call Modernised Indigenous Groups (MIGs) for social, legal, political and economic advancement, especially in reaction to their awakening to exclusionary and socially threatening activities by other caste, ethnic and political groups against them. Most of these groups have multiple functions.³⁹

³⁹ For more information see the website of National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities, <http://www.nfdin.gov.np/>

Today's community development differs significantly from historical ways. In the past it was people's obligations to contribute to community management of resources, now it can be considered their right to use and manage their community or common property resources. In today's community development usually efficiency and an equity principle is introduced.

Over the past decades, community development have gradually changed. Initially it was predominantly based on patron-client relations, whereby the (powerful) land owner decided what needed to be done and other villagers followed instructions and fulfilled obligations. This principle has changed over the years, even if patron-client relations are still strong in Nepalese society, people got more options to break free from patron obligations, e.g. through education, migration, livelihood diversification. In time land ownership altered. Large landownership remains but these days more people have a chance to buy land and claim land rights. In addition more communal resources are managed by community groups such as FUGs or water users groups. In the past community development was directed by the government, but increasingly more stakeholders got involved, like NGOs and the private sector. The political situation has changed from a ruling family, kingship to a republic. The Maoist movement has had a strong impact. The Maoists have taken measures to include the more socially and economically disadvantaged in society in processes of political discussion and policy formation. The voices of previously silent groups have been made more audible.

Nowadays caste, gender and ethnicity are under scrutiny, but in Nepalese society increasingly political party membership is becoming a social tool to classify, distinguish, and divide people in society. This fact has not been dealt with yet and it needs further study.

5.7 The changing face of Farmer Field Schools

FFS took place in local settings as described above, in situations similar to farmer-managed irrigation schemes or community forestry areas. The community development approach of the 1970s, like that of FFS today, tended to view 'community' as a homogeneous group of people, living in the same geographical area, with common interests.

When for this research I was going through the literature, studying the above described case-studies, and digging into the memory of my own experience I realised that my point of view on community development, and on community organisations in particular, was rather naïve and restricted. I did not question the concept of 'community' when I worked for FAO.

I then assumed that community organisations functioned in an equilibrium, before they were disturbed by outside factors such as, state policies, migration, globalisation. I assumed that local communities were harmonious and all would have the same opportunity to participate and that each could raise their voice and be involved in decision-making. I never questioned caste, ethnicity or gender issues, ignored power dynamics and assumed that people who were not present in community meetings simply were preoccupied with other things. This vision of participatory development through communities is romanticised.

In the FFS we see similar patterns as in the forest users groups and farmer-managed irrigation systems. Existing community groups, such as farmer associations, or new groups are shaped into a FFS group by an external force: district officer or NGO staff. The formal aspect of registration with the VDC or DDC, selection of a name, assigning positions of secretary and president got much emphasis in the FFS project. Usually the existing power relations remain in place, inequalities are not challenged: not by the users themselves, not

by the external agent. There was a tendency for FFS facilitators, mostly Brahmin men, to favour those who are already powerful and articulate, and who already enjoy a greater capacity to act and to engage with bureaucracies. Men from upper castes have the social connections, the education, the style, language and presentation (i.e. individual social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990; 1993).

In 2002 I wrote an article with Stephen Biggs enthusiastically describing how many IPM FFS groups continued their activities, that the groups remained active (Westendorp and Biggs, 2003). In 2008 however, a master student (Humagain, 2008) reported that 80% of the groups were not active anymore. During my field research in 2009 I observed the same trend. Most groups had been registered but were not actively involved in follow-up activities. In Kavre district 68 many groups were still together out of 261 (DADO staff, interview, 2009). These groups were generally an earlier established farmers group, under the government guidelines of 1993, when it was decided that agricultural activities were done under the so called Group Approach (Agriculture Perspective Plan, 2005). Only FFS groups that had continuously received support from service providers functioned well, other groups had dissolved.

As stated earlier, the groups that were formed under the FFS project were either existing groups or newly formed. Either way we have observed that mainly the higher caste men, so called 'model farmers' and village leaders took part in the first FFS. This phenomenon can also be translated as 'courtesy bias'. The fact that we used the local leaders to get the project going, to get support from the leaders meant that we from FAO could find access to the community. These people were typically the persons that extension workers or FFS trainers were already familiar with, or they were the people that were usually approached with a new intervention in a village. The local leaders played an important role in setting up FFS. More often than not we saw these leaders leave after a few sessions. The direct incentive of the FFS was not interesting for them. When leaders discovered that there was not much to gain except knowledge that was usually irrelevant to them, they left the training. However, they acknowledged that they shared a vested interest that their village performed well, because it contributed to their prestige too, and they encouraged others to take part. Over the years we saw more women, more ethnic minorities; more young farmers take part in FFS. In fact, nowadays the majority of FFS participants are female. This is partly caused by the imposed quote of the government of 33% participation of women in groups, such as farmers groups. For women it was often the first time they had got such an intensive, season-long agricultural training. For most women it was the first time to learn together in a group and get attention from the agricultural extension officer. In contrast to water users groups, where women were often not interested in sitting in meetings (Zwarteveen, 2006), women said they enjoyed the weekly FFS sessions (interviews, 2002; 2009). The women seemed more committed learners in FFS than the men. Most women remained active in groups when there was a kind of saving and credit system established (Humagain, 2008).

Overall the institutionalisation of these groups in a formal way was not successful. In particular groups that had been formed just for the purpose of FFS stopped existing after the season-long training. Most groups were dissolved. Why? First of all it was naive to assume that groups would remain functional after FFS to work on their own development. It is an over simplification of reality. Most FFS farmers were already active in other groups. Farmers

took part in FFS but in their daily life they were involved in many interactions, which were equally or more important than FFS. Many farmers did not feel a need to stay in the group after FFS training. At the same time there might be many individuals who felt uncomfortable to work in the groups that the agricultural extension officer or FFS facilitator had formed. Differences in interests or relations among people were not acknowledged.

For example when an FFS group consisted of women-only there were frictions experienced among the women from different castes, ethnic background or age. Dalit women from Yamdi (Kavre district) told me that they took part in a FFS with only women, but they did not like it.

We were only two Dalit women and felt overpowered and dominated by the Bhramin and Chettri women. They made us feel small and stupid during FFS. They behaved as if they were superior and knew more than we did. I enjoyed learning about agriculture, but next time we should be with more Dalit women. I prefer not to be in a group with only Dalit women, because then the Brahmins will laugh at us again and we will still be a separate group. I prefer to be in a mixed group with women from different castes in equal proportions, I mean quite a few Dalit women, quite a few Brahmin women and quite a few women from Janajatis or other castes (Yamdi, interview Dalit women, 2009)

Apart from gender differences, it appeared that overall higher caste people are dominant in FFS groups, whereas lower castes and landless people were largely excluded from FFS participation. In the interviews in 2009, Dalits said that they did not know FFS took place in their village. Information sharing is important to get the marginalised groups included in projects such as FFS, and is a simple example where lower caste frequently feels excluded: 'the elite do not share information voluntarily' (Platteau, 2004). In Chapter 6 these issues will be further elaborated.

There was blindness to the socio-historical context, the social relations and institutions have not been considered. In the FFS project there was much emphasis on the establishment of groups, formal registration, in other words, a technical approach to participation and community development (Li, 2006; 2007). The establishment of new functional groups like FFS, might also obscure the actual activities undertaken by individuals and other well-established local institutions, such as *parma* or *ama samuha* (see above).

There was little recognition of the diversified livelihoods, interests (see Chapter 6 and 7), motivation, nor of the fact that people were already involved in other institutions or organisations. As one of the (male) farmers explained; "I am a member of the forest users group, the vegetable producers group, the drinking water association, the saving and credit group, the road construction committee. Also during the rice season I take part in community planting, weeding and harvesting through *parma*". (Kavre, interview July, 2009). Another woman said: "I am involved in the mother and child health care group, the forest users group, the water users group, the mother group, the literacy club etc. Additionally she said she worked with some people on maintenance of the local temple". (Sindhupalchowk, interview July, 2009). These remarks show the involvement of people in multiple organisations and institutions, be it formal or informal. Women and men have different networks as one DADO officer explains:

For example men gather in tea shops every morning and evening. There they

arrange labourers for field work (*mela*⁴⁰, *khetala*⁴¹ etc.) and share their worries. They discuss their plan to sell or purchase animals and goods, they arrange loans. Women are not part of this. Women on the other hand leave in the morning to collect grass or do field work, like *parma* or organise festivals, like *mela*. Men and women use their own networks to arrange, for instance, carrying manure to the field, harvesting crops, help neighbours on festive occasions. (DADO officer, Kavre, interview, 2009)

A focus on establishment of groups is a simplification of the multiple interactions and relations with which people are involved. This technical approach towards community participation has little to do with the principle of participation to increase decision-making of individuals in their own development. It seems an establishment of institutions that 'mirror bureaucratic structures' (Cleaver, 2006b:788).

While the project emphasises collective action, community development and empowerment, the approach taken remains largely concerned with formal procedures and efficiency. There is lack of understanding of 'deeper determinants of technical and social change' (Gurung and Biggs, 2010).

In the field we also observed gender differences in dealing with group mobilisation. In an interview in Kavre with a DADO extension worker said:

"We learnt in the FFS that mostly men kept information to themselves. When we tell someone about training, a tour or another opportunity they do not share it with others. They showed no interest to move the group forward, but they were focused on getting an income, a job or off-farm work. Women usually share the information they received and keep groups together. They also conduct more activities together such as harvesting, planting, collecting fodder."(Kavre, interview, August 2009)

Women's groups are often headed by men. As one lady in Yamdi explained:

"We women cannot read and write and when you are an official group you have to register, go to offices and so on. Men are better equipped to help us, they can do this for our women's group. Without the men I think we might never have become a registered group. (Yamdi, interview, 2009).

Women in Sindhupalchowk confirmed this.

"Now we have not many men in our village left, we also have no contact with DADO. We do not know the new people there, they do not know us. We do not go there (Sindhupalchowk, interview, 2009)

From the interviews it became clear that uneducated women or lower caste people have less access to information, feel restricted to be involved in decision-making, in report writing or making a written action plan. They feel not confident to visit an office and officially register a group at the district or village council.

⁴⁰ Mela means festival in Nepali but is also used to indicate working together, e.g. planting rice or millet.

⁴¹ Khetala are farm labourers in Nepali

Over the years I have observed more Farmer Field Schools that were organised for a single caste or ethnic group, which reduced caste or status tensions. In particular FFS conducted by farmer-trainers were more likely to contain members of the same caste or ethnic group. Examples are FFS for only Tharus in the central terai region, or an all-Muslim FFS in the area near Nepalganj.

We have managed to organise a FFS with only Tharus and that has made a great difference. I am a Tharu and speak the local language, I come from this area and know the circumstances but I also know the people and people know me. When the DADO gave me the opportunity to conduct an FFS it opened doors for my community that would have remained closed if only DADO sirs would have done the FFS training. The DADO sirs are Brahmin and do not speak Tharu. (Farmer trainer, Kailali district, interview 2002)

5.8 Conclusion

Community centred rural development approaches have had a significant impact on shifting discourses and practices with positive effects for communities. Yet they are not free from problems. Critical to any success is an appropriate and accurate representation of rural community actors, their needs and relations. Community development strategies cannot provide blue prints for development. Community development is a dynamic process with local, national and global actors. It involves continuous negotiation and contestation over resources with the discursive framing of community, context and representation of community at the heart of the debate.

Rural Nepalese society operates through principles of hierarchy, human interdependence, and action through personal relationship and social networks. It is through these individual, hierarchal interdependency relationships that goods and services are negotiated and exchanged. Members in communities are linked together through kinship, caste and other institutions, persons negotiate or manipulate their multiple connections in order to gain access to resources and services. Within any given social context of a local community there is likely to be a distinction between elites and others. That is people with privileges and power, people who have a vested interest in maintaining their status quo (Sharma, 2003). This pattern can be simple but it can also be more complex because of gender, caste, ethnicity, education, changing patterns of patronage, land ownership and employment. In Nepal there is a history of hierarchical boundaries and marginalising of certain groups in society, such as women, lower castes or ethnic minorities in this social process.

I am convinced that FFS can contribute to community development, but a few considerations must be taken into account:

- Communities are not static and homogenous entities, and cannot be defined as a geographical area alone;
- Power dynamics and socio-historical forces create inequality within the 'community'
- Multiple actors and stakeholders play a role in communities and their power positions are changing over time;

- The social setting is changing and becomes less rigid, giving more room for manoeuvre and change.
- People are involved in several formal and informal institutional organisations and networks. FFS project staff and facilitators must critically question whether it makes sense to keep the group in tact without additional support?

Farmer field schools need to employ a flexible approach where there is room for manoeuvre to include people who do not fit the formal requirements for participation.

From our research and this case study on community development in Nepal we learnt that in Nepal community participation and development is not a new concept (Biggs et al., 2004). In fact in most village communities there are several community institutions or organisations. Before the inception of FFS there were already many community development initiatives in Nepal, following several paradigms, in particular community forestry and farmers-managed-irrigation projects are popular. Like irrigation and forestry FFS is not just a technical intervention but a process that takes place at multiple societal and organisational levels through time and place in a dynamic socio-political and economic context, coloured by history.

The government of Nepal uses community organisations to manage natural resources, but evidently people in the villages are active in shaping these institutions and using them to their own prevail. Our research has shown (see Chapters 6 and 7) that through community projects including FFS, and despite set-backs in equality empowerment does take place. Women have indeed gained decision-making power; Janajatis get more opportunities to join in development activities such as FFS. The poor are increasingly learning the rules of the development game and challenging exclusion, but they need to be informed about external interventions.

Another important conclusion is that for FFS to be effective, the target 'community' is not necessarily the geographically defined ward or village community, but preferably the social group of participants who constitute a self-defined community of interest, whether by ways of caste or ethnic affiliation or by gender. Rather than equity, it is social familiarity or cohesion that creates the necessary basis for collaboration in Farmer Field Schools and afterwards.

6

From Agriculture to Rural Development: The Contribution of Farmer Field Schools in Nepal



Chapter 6 From Agriculture to Rural Development: The Contribution of Farmer Field Schools in Nepal

" The mission found that particularly in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Nepal and Vietnam, the Programme had: a) demonstrated an approach to farmer learning and innovation which clearly recognises the farmer as decision- maker and lays the basis for continued learning and for wider participation in society; b) enabled farmers to increase their incomes from rice, while adopting more environmentally friendly and healthy farming practices (i.e. drastically reducing or eliminating the use of pesticides, in particular insecticides); c) laid a basis for strong national Community IPM programmes, supported by Government and more importantly, mobilising the joint initiative of farmers". (FAO, Executive Summary, 2001: 8)

6.1 Introduction

On the basis of a survey in 2002 (REGARD, 2002) and a mid-term evaluation by FAO in 2001 the project team concluded that FFS was successful, basically because yields had increased and pesticide use had been reduced. At first as a programme officer I was pleased with the results, because it fitted with the objectives defined in the project documents and my Terms of Reference for the job. The results were in- line with the planned results of the project, in fact even exceeded the expectations. The positive evaluation provided the necessary arguments to renew funding for a second phase of the project, which was eventually granted by the Norwegian funding agency NORAD⁴² (see Chapter 4).

Meanwhile, I had become a university lecturer on rural development, gender, and social inclusion. So, despite these positive reports, I started questioning the results. Has FFS indeed contributed to long term changes in agriculture and rural development in Nepal? Was FFS a project with a clear start and an end or is FFS a developmental process that continues after the intervention?

In Chapter 4 I introduced the concept of Farmer Field Schools. In this chapter I will describe how FFS has contributed to agriculture and how FFS has evolved and become embedded in the institutional setting of Nepal. I will portray the different actors that play a role, elaborate their views and objectives, their role in construction of the concept of FFS. Over the years FFS trainers have changed, the content of FFS have changed, and also the composition of the groups of participants themselves has evolved. These changes took place alongside prevailing paradigm shifts in development studies, changes in the context such as

⁴² Consequently the *Support to the National IPM in Nepal* (UTF/NEP/055/NEP) programme was launched with technical support from FAO:
"In 2003 the Government of the Kingdom of Norway agreed to provide a grant totalling US\$1,284,444 for the "Support to the National Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Programme" in Nepal. The main objective of this programme was "to contribute to sustainable broad-based poverty reduction and food security while contributing to environmental protection".(from: NORAD Inception Report 2009: 1)

out-migration and political upheaval, but also as a result of enhanced insights in FFS implementation.

When the Farmer Field Schools started in Nepal as part of the FAO Integrated Pest Management project in 1997, this was also the year that the Maoists declared the People's Revolution. FFS began in a period that was characterised by rapid socio-political changes in society.

I will show that FFS has contributed to changes in agricultural production from yield increase and changing agronomic practices to rural development. For this analysis I have used data from field notes from 1997 and 1998, the survey conducted by REGARD in 2002 (N= 424 FFS farmers from 10 districts), supplemented with interviews conducted by myself as part of my regular FAO IPM programme officer's duties from 1997 to 2002. As a programme officer I was able to guide the REGARD team in their survey. The information from 2009 is based on interviews (N=147) and 14 focus group discussions which I conducted in the period between June 2009 and December 2009 from 5 districts (see Chapter 1 for more details). Additionally I have used data collected on FFS participants (caste, age, sex, education, land ownership, crops) from the District Agricultural Development Office in Kavre from 1997 to 2007 (N=400). FFS started in the mid hills and the plains or terai. The survey data from 2002 cover the terai and some districts in the mid hills. The interviews and FGD in 2009 took place in the mid hills. Kavre district and its FFS participants have been included in the research in 2002 and 2009.

Although the situation of farmers in the terai differs from the mid hills, the data collected can be compared with the argument that what matters here is that they are all smallholder farmers (around 0.3-1.0 ha) who all received a similar type of FFS training with set government recommendations. Also the FFS participants in the terai were mostly migrants from the mid hills so they shared a socio-economic history. The main difference can be found in cropping patterns (see Chapter 2.6), but data in this research are only compared when they concern the same crop, mostly rice. When I discuss other crops, such as vegetables, this is indicated in the text. Actually each Farmer Field School had its own peculiarities, not only as a result of location but also due to its socio-cultural context, such as ethnicity or caste. Even within the mid hills or within the terai there can be large differences. The data collected for this research provides a general picture and does not account for situational differences.

FFS has challenged ideologies of top-down technology transfer and has become institutionalised as a new way of working with farmers in a participatory way, respecting farmers as partners in development, contributing to capacity building leading to better informed decision-making skills. FFS facilitated a closer collaboration of extensionists with farmers through a more practical orientation of trainers and extension workers. FFS has contributed to a process in which women have become more valued actors in agriculture. FFS is not just a technical intervention but a process that takes place at multiple levels through time and space, in a dynamic socio-economic, political context.

6.2 The start of FFS in Nepal and the impact on agriculture and farmers' knowledge

Despite the fact that pest problems were used as a reason to introduce FFS in Nepal, in contrast to Indonesia, Vietnam, and other countries in Asia, poor pest management and in particular misuse of pesticides was not yet a significant problem and certainly not the main

problem in agricultural production for Nepalese farmers. Pesticide misuse is merely a problem in pocket areas. Pesticide use is heavily concentrated in the cultivation of commercial vegetables, mustard and cotton, and more intensively in the terai, Kathmandu valley and its surrounding areas (Jha and Regmi, 2009). In rural areas most farmers farm in a traditional way, with no or very limited use of pesticides, because they are poor and cannot afford inputs, because they do not have much information about inputs and because inputs are basically not available (Adhikari, 2002). Farmers training needs were more on improving agronomic practices, such as spacing between plants, weeding and fertiliser management.

Following the example of neighbouring Asian countries, the first Farmer Field Schools were organised in rice-based farming systems. Rice is the preferred staple food of the Nepalese people. Of all cultivated land, 47% is used for paddy production (MoAC, 2010). 72% of rice is grown under rain-fed condition, of which 70% is in lowland (terai) and 9% in the mid-hills (MoAC, 2010; Pokhrel, 1997). The first two years FFS were conducted in rice only, in irrigated as well as rain-fed rice, early as well as main season (monsoon) production.

There are three words in Nepal to indicate rice: *dhaan* - the rice crop, the unhusked grain ; *chamal* - rice after harvest, the white rice; *bhaat*- boiled rice, the meal. Rice is not just a crop, it is also used as a metaphor for food in Nepal. If people have not eaten rice, despite having eaten other food, they just did not have a proper meal. Rice is important in everyday life of Nepalese. Conversations usually contain the question: *have you had rice, have you eaten yet?*

In Nepal the government has a vested interest in agricultural development. Thus in Nepal the FFS emphasis was to increase agricultural production, to improve farming in general. Consequently the curriculum had a strong emphasis on improving agronomic practices. Field visits in the period 1997 – 2009 confirmed this feature. Standard curriculum of a FFS contained the following topics: seedbed preparation, planting distance and density (number of seedlings per hill), fertiliser application practices (timing and quantity), weeding (timing), water management, seed collection and selection, varietal selection and also knowledge about natural enemies and insect pests and their management, disease management.

To date, over 60,000 (Braun and Duveskog, 2008) Nepalese farmers have graduated from season-long FFS training. Participation in FFS has always involved a considerable cost in terms of time (season-long, weekly sessions, daily field observations). Despite these costs, millions of farmers decided to participate. It is clear that many farmers thought that participation in the FFS was worthwhile (Bartlett, 2002). A large majority of individuals showed interest and willingness to allocate working days to attend IPM training in FFS (Atreya, 2007).

In Nepal, like elsewhere in Asia (Chapter 4), the FFS project initially set out to equip farmers with more knowledge and to contribute to concrete outputs such as yield increase and pesticide reduction. “The desired outcome of IPM FFS is an improvement in farmers’ knowledge and decision-making capacity which is expected to lead to a change in input mix and practices used leading to yield increase, lower pesticide use and ultimately, higher farm profits” (David and Asamoah, 2011: 213). In fact, in 2002 and again in the interviews in 2009 farmers confirmed that they experienced an increase in yield and income (see table 6.1). This did not have a big impact on the overall agricultural production of the country. As the FAO programme officer expressed: “IPM does not contribute significantly to increased production of Nepal’s agricultural sector” (Kathmandu, interview 2009). In fact, the average yields in a district or region have increased little over the years; the production increase was achieved

mainly through expansion of cropping area (Pandey et al., 2009). Yet, the yield as indicated by FFS farmers is higher than the national average. In 2009/10, even with good and timely rains, the average rice yield in Nepal was 2.9 tons per hectare (t/ha) (MoAC, 2010) as compared with the yield of FFS farmers (N=424) in 2002 of almost 3.6 t/ha (REGARD, 2002) and as much as 3.7 in 2009 (N=147) (interviews, 2009).

Table 6.1 Yield and income data from FFS farmers

	Rice Yield (ton/ha)	Income from agriculture (NRs/yr)
1997 ⁴³	3.21	29.440
2002 (N=424)	3.58	35.660
2009 (N=147)	3.69	52.000

Source: own research

The practice of pesticide reduction was reported by farmers in 2002. Similarly, Upadhyaya (2003) reported that the use of pesticides in rice decreased by 40% in almost all national IPM programme areas in Nepal. The frequency of pesticide applications by farmers decreased after attendance at FFS. These findings rely on case studies and individual FFS reports which mainly focus on the rice agro-ecosystem (Jha and Regmi, 2009). An increase in rice yield does not translate immediately to a higher income, because rice is mainly a staple crop and only sold by farmers who produce an excess in rice. Vegetable production on the other hand leads usually to more income, because most vegetables are sold on the market. Pandey et al. (2009) observed that while the production value from other crops increased by nearly two times, there was an almost threefold increase in production value (income) from vegetables during the 1995 to 2004. Vegetable expansion was primarily due to the high vegetable consumption by an increased population, a favourable price and also the effects of the 20-year Agriculture Perspective Plan (Pandey et al., 2009).

FFS has been used as a vehicle to expand vegetable production. In 2006/2007 there were 221 FFS focusing on vegetables compared to 131 FFS focusing on rice (Poudel, 2007). This way FFS has contributed to a diversification in crop production, especially vegetables such as cauliflower, tomato, and cucurbits, but also potato. During the field visits in 2009 I observed that all of the 23 FFS villages I visited had introduced vegetable production.

Although the emphasis remained on rice, in 1999 the project expanded with FFS in vegetables, in particular tomato, potato, cauliflower and cucumber. Training of FFS facilitators was not easy because we faced many problems with insect pests and diseases. We learnt that especially pest (insects as well as diseases) management in vegetables is not as simple as in rice. The agro-ecosystem of vegetables is often not well-balanced and the crops are susceptible to many pests and diseases because they are not part of an ancient agroecological system in Asia (Braun et al., 2000). This is confirmed by Elske van de Fliert who had a similar experience in Asia and Latin America: "Integrated pest management seems easy for wet tropical agro-ecosystems with crops such as rice or mixed cropping systems favouring (relative) diversity of the ecosystem. However, a more difficult situation, when it comes to ecological balance, is usually found in introduced crops with a more artificial ecosystem, such as vegetables" (Van de Fliert, 1997: 3).

⁴³ Reported by REGARD 2002 and confirmed in interviews with PPD staff in 2002 and 2009.

Despite more difficult growing conditions several district agricultural offices have introduced vegetable production through the FFS. In Kavre, for instance, the DADO has promoted cauliflower and potato production in many villages that had previously only food crops such as rice, millet and maize.

While MoAC might want to see results in terms of yield increase and adoption of commercial vegetable production, FFS was designed as a capacity-building investment to improve farmers' knowledge, and decision-making skills, leading to broader development (Van den Berg, 2004).

An increase in yield and income is relatively easy to measure or observe, but changes in knowledge is more complicated to prove. In the field I asked farmers what they had learnt from FFS. In 2002 and 2009 all farmers responded positively to this question.

Farmers gained knowledge of insect pests and natural enemies in order to recognise and conserve beneficial insects and work towards a sustainable agro-ecosystem. In 2002 and 2009 farmers expressed that they had learnt to value insects that were not harmful to their crops, they learnt to recognise natural enemies such as wasps. Also they learnt that crops have a natural capacity to compensate for insect damage and that spraying is normally not necessary. As farmers said: "less still-born calves, due to less pesticide use" (Lalitpur, interview 2002). They also said: "Our calves do not die so often anymore since we spray less, and our straw is cleaner" (Bhaktapur, interview, female farmer, 2002).

As one farmer, in Kavre district reported in 2002:

We are directly involved in the learning activities of FFS sessions. For instance, we observe with the trainer the problems of seedlings in the nursery, for example, need of water (what are symptoms of deficiency of water), need of nutrients and need of fertilisers, attack of insects and diseases, etc. We discussed these observations in the group, analyse the issues in the groups and decide what to do for experimentation to solve the problems. (FFS male farmer, Kavre, 2002)

In a similar way another farmer in Kavre explained how he learnt about pest and natural enemies or 'friends of the farmer' as he called them:

In FFS sessions we learnt to observe insects and diseases in growing crops; we used to discuss to find out whether they were harmful or beneficial insects, for instance, we also used to rear the insects in an insect zoo, we learnt about their life cycles, we used to observe their characters, for example, whether they eat the crops or not. By continuous observation of their behaviour it became easier to decide whether they were harmful or beneficial insects. We got less afraid of insects because we saw that they were not all harmful... Moreover, we used to see the result of active experimentation, for example, use of local pesticides, like cow urine, on the insects and used to see whether they can control the pests or not. (FFS male farmer, Kavre, 2002)

A fellow male farmer said:

After seeing the effect of botanical pesticides on the insects and diseases we conceptualised that botanical pesticides prepared by local plant materials can also control the insects. (interview Kavre, 2002)

FFS farmers sprayed less pesticide in 2002; their applications were reduced by 50% (REGARD, 2002), and in the cases they did spray they used less hazardous products. As farmers recognised more diseases, fungicide use on potato and tomato increased in particular. In addition after FFS more farmers bought micronutrients and vitamin mixtures (e.g. multiplex) for their crop, in particular in vegetable production. In 2002 an increase of 40% was reported (REGARD, 2002). Farmers wanted alternatives for pesticides.

In 2002 83 % of farmers said that they experienced better health. 79 % of the FFS farmers said that the costs for medical care were reduced, but could not tell by how much (REGARD, 2002). They just said: 'we get ill less often, we have fewer headaches, and so we need fewer medicines'. With a reduction in pesticide and medical costs, in combination with an increased yield farmers said that their income had increased as a result of FFS (Interviews, 2002).

Regarding agronomic practices farmers learnt to reduce the number of seedlings per rice hill (from 9-10 per hill to 3-5), optimal spacing between plants, fertiliser application according to the need of the plant (growth stage related). All these practices were government recommendations.

Increased space between plants, reduced number of seedlings per hill led to more vigorous growth in 2002 and ultimately more harvest. Interviews with the farmers in 2009 revealed that number of seedlings per hill in rice and the spacing of plants was the best gained knowledge:

We had a habit of using more than 10 seedlings at a place while transplanting the rice but then we saw the result on FFS learning plot that yield was not less between transplanting of 2-3 seedlings and more than 10 seedlings at a place. After FFS training we used 2-3 seedlings per hill while transplanting rice and that practice has saved us more than ten times the amount of seed". (Bhaktapur, FFS women farmers group, 2009)

The farmers were also encouraged to use or test (government recommended) rice varieties that would give higher yields. Several farmers changed from a local variety of rice to improved varieties, especially Mansuli and Radha. Also farmers said they had diversified more, in rice they were planting more varieties to spread risk, but also because they use different varieties for different purposes: local for consumption and straw production, high yielding varieties like Mansuli for sale and consumption. Furthermore, farmers said they had enhanced their skills to select varieties from a high yielding area and applied this practice after FFS.

After FFS farmers used less chemical fertiliser and followed more the recommended dosage as given by the government. In 2009 there was a slight overall increase of chemical fertiliser use, but this was mainly due to an expansion of vegetable production (PPD staff interview, 2009).

In FFS training farmers learnt to apply chemical fertiliser in a more balanced way, at stages when the crop needs it most. This has led to a 20% reduction of fertiliser use in the rice seedbed (REGARD survey 2002). Farmers have replaced plain urea application with more composite fertilisers with urea, potassium and phosphorus. Farmers learnt to apply fertiliser

on a more regular basis based on the need and growth stage of the plant (REGARD, 2002:14). General practice of farmers was to apply only basal fertiliser, and then just urea. In FFS farmers learnt to reduce the basal dosage and to practice top dressing at different stages. The governmental recommendation was to do it three weeks and six weeks after transplanting. Farmers also learnt to apply DAP instead of urea only. ‘Traditionally farmers did not apply P or K in their basal dosage, since they were unaware of the need for additional elements’ (REGARD, 2002:15). This government recommended method promoted chemical fertiliser instead of farmyard manure because it is easier to calculate a specific dosage of nutrients per crop.

Despite carefully planned curricula and procedures farmer knowledge and skills gained from FFS evolved over the years. The responses from farmers in 2002 were different from 2009, as you can see below in Table 6.2 Over time farmers said they had forgotten or found some knowledge not as relevant as in 2002⁴⁴.

Table 6.2 Knowledge and skills farmers gained in FFS

Farmers’ FFS knowledge in 2002 (N=424)	Farmers’ FFS knowledge in 2009 (N=147)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce the number of seedlings per hill in rice - To increase the space between lines/plants (planting distance). - Knowledge on dangers pesticide use - Reduced use of pesticides - Change from hazardous pesticides to less harmful pesticide - To apply chemical fertiliser in a more balanced way, less fertiliser but at the right growth stages - Better understanding of balance in agro-ecosystem - Recognition of pest and natural enemies - To recognise disease symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce the number of seedlings per hill in rice. - To increase the space between lines/plants (planting distance) - Knowledge on dangers pesticide use - Reduced use of pesticides - Change from hazardous pesticides to less harmful pesticide - To apply chemical fertiliser in a more balanced way, but cannot relate this to growth stages. - General knowledge that insects were important but could not recall details.

Source: own research 2009 and REGARD, 2002

In 2009, the farmers in Kavre district admitted that they had resorted back to an increased use of pesticides.

“My neighbours spray and then I also feel I have to spray. I am not confident anymore as I was just after FFS” (male farmer, Kavre, 2009). Besides peer pressure, also time and labour were used as a reason for not adopting some alternatives like bio-pesticides in 2009. “Preparing bio-pesticides is time consuming and a labour-

⁴⁴ 18 of the farmers interviewed in 2009 had taken part in the survey in 2002, but not all. It would have been more precise if all the farmers who responded had been questioned in 2002 and then again in 2009, but this was logistically not feasible. Still the responses give an impression of the overall trend that farmers apply a selection of skills and knowledge gained in FFS. It should be noted that most of the officers (20 out of 24) and NGO staff (15 out of 19) interviewed had been involved in FFS from the start in 1998.

intensive task. It is easy to buy ready-made pesticides” (Female farmer, Kavre, 2009).

In 2009 in Tanahun district FFS participants learnt how to make tea from *neem*⁴⁵ leaves. When I asked how many participants of one FFS group in Tanahun prepared bio-pesticides after the FFS training, only 3 out of 30 members said they had used the local pesticides after FFS training. According to them the main reason for not adopting new knowledge is due to the fact that it means more work, e.g. it is time consuming.

“It is time consuming and we need more labour to make bio-pesticides from local plant materials; it is easier to buy chemical pesticides from the shop. In the emergency cases, when we see lots of harmful insects, it isn’t possible to prepare the local pesticides”. (Male farmer, Satrasayphant, interview, Tanahun, 2009)

This observation is supported by Dormon (2006) in his PhD dissertation about management of cocoa pests and diseases in Ghana. He reported that the main reason for not adopting IPM practices by cocoa farmers is due to the high labour demand of the learnt practices.

Even though the entry point of many FFS is pest management, the information related to the insects is not all used by the participants. In 2009, farmers told me that they learnt to recognise some insect damage and some pests, and they learnt that some insects are natural enemies. But this knowledge is not used much in farming they said. “We forgot most of these insect cycles” (Sindhupalchowk, female farmer, 2009)

Also the simulation trials, in which insect damage and recovery capacity of plants is studied, are a bit difficult to understand according to the majority of the farmers (82%) in 2009. The key message farmers got in relation to pest management is more or less summarised by this farmer’s remark: “We know now that not all insects are pests and that we should not spray strong pesticides” (male farmer, Kavre, 2009).

In 2002 farmers learnt that the fertiliser application was related to growth stages of the crop, but in 2009 farmers did not recall this knowledge. In particular women said that they did not adopt technologies that were too technical, like fertiliser calculations. Nor did they follow practices that were too labour intensive, like observing the fields on a regular basis and preparing pesticide alternatives. Women stressed that many aspects were too technical, too difficult such as simulation trials, or fertiliser application related to a certain growth stage and fertiliser calculations.

“We did a lot of measuring in FFS. But we do not know why” (Sindhupalchowk, female farmer, interview, 2009)

“We do not remember about diseases. We do not know what to do with diseases” (Kavre, female farmer, interview, 2009)

For women the key learning point was the fact that they could get a yield increase with less seedlings, or a larger planting distance.

In all FFS basically a kind of standard curriculum is offered. To all farmers in a certain context, similar information or knowledge is presented. Not all information or knowledge is applied in

⁴⁵ Azadirachta indica, a common tree found in South Asia, called Neem or Wonder tree because of its medicinal qualities.

the same way by the participants. Looking at the social effects from a gender point of view or at household level it discloses that the impact of FFS is different for men and women. Women have different roles in livelihoods than men, there is differential access to resources, but also men and women use FFS skills and technology in a particular way.

For most women, in 2002 and 2009, FFS was the first training they had had in agriculture. For them this was a new and enlightening experience as they said. Conventionally agricultural training was reserved for men. FFS was the first time women received agricultural information from the DADO office.

Interviews and FGD in 2009 revealed that, in contrast to men, women can recall all the details of the knowledge they gained in FFS training (even after 8 years): number of seedlings per hill, planting distance, times of weeding: all activities that are related to their duties in the farming system, in relation to food crops, especially rice and to some extent in maize. The women were keen to show their knowledge and proud to say that they still apply this in the field. In particular food crop production increased and households have benefited from their skills and knowledge gained in FFS. Generally the women admitted that they did not apply the knowledge and skills in vegetable production that they had learnt in FFS. Most women found vegetable production not beneficial: (I do not know where to sell, and ' how much can we eat'; 'I gave up, it was too much work for too little output'; 'I have no market access' (interview with women in Kavre and Sindhupalchowk, 2009). "I do not have time for vegetable production, I am busy with rice and kodo (millet)" said one woman in Kavre (Kavre, interview, 2009). "I learnt about vegetables but I am alone so I do not know what to do with all the harvest, and I stopped" said another woman in a neighbouring village (Sindhupalchowk, interview, 2009). Another woman adds: "We eat little vegetables but after FFS I produced so much and did not know how to market them, so I stopped with the cauliflower production" (Kavre, interview, 2009). In the field I heard that in particular women expressed a need to increase the production of food crops and wanted to learn more about rice or millet production. Even though vegetable production is kind of stimulated by the government, it is not something that all (female) farmers accepted and adopted passively. With increased responsibilities for women in agriculture, in particular food security, the production of vegetables in Kavre, Tanahun and Kaski had not expanded among women.

Women use the information differently than men. Also the application of knowledge depends on the opportunities or availability of resources one has. As was confirmed by one Dalit woman: "I could not apply the knowledge I learnt on vegetables because my husband did not give me land to grow vegetables". (interview, Yamdi, 2009). Men and women have different access to resources such as land and cash (see Chapter 2). Land in Nepal is usually registered in a man's name and decisions regarding household expenses are made by men.

With the trend of feminisation of agriculture (see Gartaula, 2011 and Chapter 2) women have taken up more responsibilities and tasks, even decisions that were previously assigned to men only. With restricted outside support or services it was observed that women have developed strong ties together. In all the villages (N=23) visited, the women gave the impression of having close collaboration, especially among the same caste groups or ethnic communities. Even in multiple caste/ethnic societies the women worked together in close collaboration to produce food and to help each other in dire times. These FFS training sessions were not only used to learn new skills, but also to exchange gossip, share news; they were social happenings.

In rural villages women can even be seen to plough fields, but this is still rather

unusual. Also women have been involved in the last rites when for instance their father died and there was no male relative available to perform the religious rituals as part of the funeral ceremony (Sindupalchowk, female farmer, interview, 2009). Only, these are exceptional cases. Generally feminisation of agriculture in FFS areas means that women got more work and to some extent decision-making power. In terms of agronomic practices: women decided the cropping pattern and the timing of agronomic practices. Also women increasingly decided which variety to grow. "We cannot decide to buy or sell land but we can decide how to farm" (Kavre, female farmer, interview, 2009).

In FFS women use the information regarding rice production to improve their food production, to increase yields. It is their role to provide food for the family and in that role they have an interest in learning how to do this in an optimal way. Women shared common interests in FFS. The women who were interviewed all felt responsible for food production and were interested in working together with fellow women farmers to help each other to achieve this food production. Farming activities are often undertaken together by women: weeding, harvesting, and planting. FFS farmers, in particular women, said that the demand for labour increased after FFS: the new technologies (more frequent weeding, regular crop observations) are labour intensive. Almost all the respondents said that they increased the frequency of weeding in the fields.

FFS has an impact on changes in gender relationships: Men increasingly appreciated women's role in farming and valued their knowledge gained in FFS. Women were considered more important actors in agriculture and taken seriously by agricultural public service staff. Women have become more valued actors in agricultural production. In 2002 World Education staff informed that female Farmer Field School graduates were in high demand as agricultural labourers, because of their increased knowledge and skills (World Education staff member, interview, Kathmandu, 2002)

While women have benefitted from FFS, especially in their role as food providers, men have shown a decrease in interest in FFS participation over the years. Men, generally, displayed less interest in skills to improve food production, but wanted to use FFS to increase income through cash crop, such as vegetable production, or to get a chance for off-farm labour. Men proved to be more interested in non-farming activities, or at least income generation. This reflects their role as 'breadwinner'. The expectations from society are that men should provide an income for the family.

Many men who had participated in FFS tried to use the training to get a better connection with the outside world, the world beyond their village community. Quite a few (8 in Kavre district) have become farmer trainers. Several men have used the FFS training certificate to get a job abroad, mainly in Malaysia and Arabic states, as casual labour. Also men have used the opportunity to become a farmer trainer and get employment with local NGOs. In interviews men could not really recall the information provided in FFS, related to crop production, especially food crops.

An exception were small groups of young, educated men (20 – 25 years) who had taken an interest in working in commercial vegetable production in Bhaktapur, Kavre and Tanahun. In particular in areas that were within a day's travelling from the district headquarter or other markets, young men have become increasingly involved in vegetable production, such as tomato, potato and cauliflower. They are creative, innovative and started to experiment with different cash crops. In this way ginger production increased after FFS. The young men interviewed said that cash crop production offered them a better alternative than migration;

‘We can make more money with pleasant work here in vegetable production than if we went to Arab or Malaysia’ (Kavre, interview, 2009). Young male farmers in Bhaktapur district said they were only interested in taking part in FFS if they ‘could develop entrepreneurial skills in the training’ (Bhaktapur, interview male farmer, 2009) or: “When we learn about marketing” (Bhaktapur, interview male farmer, 2009).

FFSs with a focus on food crops are more effective with women involvement. FFS training on vegetable production is more appropriate for young educated male farmers with an interest in cash production.

The farmers, men in particular, felt more comfortable than before they participated in FFS, to go to the DADO office and ask for more support. This was also confirmed by DADO officers who saw an increase of (male) farmers coming to their office to ask for services or other inputs. Women too, showed more interest and confidence in discussing agricultural issues with technicians, during field visits in their village, but women did not make the move to go to the office to talk to government officials.

6.3 Participants in Farmer Field School training

The kind of participants in FFS has evolved over time. If we compare the information collected in 1999, when FFS started, with the survey of 2002 (REGARD, 2002) and the data collected in 2009 we can see that the general characteristics of FFS participants have changed (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 FFS participants’ characteristics

	1999	2002	2009
Landowners	All (N=389)	All (N=424)	All (N=147)
Gender/sex	Male (95%) and 5% female	Male (70%) and female (30%) but majority male	Majority women (60%), and 40% men
Caste (predominantly)	Brahmin	Brahmin/Chettri	Brahmin/Chettri with some Janajatis and sometimes 1-2 Dalits
Education	SLC and higher education	SLC and literate (Janajati or elderly women >40 yr)	Mostly literate, some illiterate (esp. elderly women) and some young SLC graduates
Main occupation	Farming and off-farm occupations, village leaders	farming	farming
Age	25-40	18-45	Young around 18-20 and 35-45
Drop-out	Many drop-outs, few people participate in entire FFS season-long training	Few drop outs	Few drop outs
Willingness to pay for FFS	yes	yes	no

Source: own research

One of the noticeable characteristics of FFS participants is the fact that they all own land. This means that FFS participants are not a real representation of the rural population, because the national statistics indicated that about 77% of the population owns land (CBS, 2002; ADB, 2009). While it is not explicitly mentioned in the project documents, in practice landless farmers or labourers are excluded from participation in FFS. These criteria were followed based on the assumption of DADO and PPD staff, which was that only farmers who owned land would invest in their fields and could practice technologies introduced in FFS (interviews with DADO and PPD staff, 2002 and 2009).

Additionally, the majority of the participants in FFS are educated.

At the start in 1997 and 1998 FFS farmers were male and well-educated (field visit notes 1998). In 1999 the number of female participants had increased: 21% as opposed to 79% male (Galvan and Soehardi, 1999).

In 2002 61 % (N= 259 out of N=424) had SLC (school leaving certificate) or higher education, 29% (N=123 out of N=424) was literate and their age was between 25 and 45 years (REGARD, 2002). These data were confirmed by statistics kept in the DADO office in Kavre on FFS (total participants N=400). Among 400 FFS participants, 90% (N=360 out of N=400) was educated or literate in 2009. There was a decline in participants with SLC or higher education. In 2007 only 24 out of 58 had higher education or SLC in Kavre, 29 persons were literate and 5 illiterate. In 2009 in certain pocket areas the participation of SLC graduates had increased (N= 39 out of N=50, 78% participants). (DADO Kavre, 2009)

In 2009 in several villages I heard that young boys and girls, from Brahmin, Chettri or Newar communities, who had just obtained their SLC (School Leaving Certificate) took part in FFS because they had time on their hands, while waiting for their next education to start after the summer or rainy season. They were requested by their parents or the extension officer to participate in FFS, but they frankly admitted they were in FFS as an obligation and they were not interested in agriculture, let alone planning to use the knowledge and skills learnt in FFS. They wanted to go to further education and move on to non-farm jobs. As in other rural areas the new generation looked for more diverse jobs than just farming. "My brother told me to take part. He did not have time and so he obliged me to be in the FFS. I did the training but have no interest in farming, I want to go to Kathmandu for study" (Yamdi, young female SLC graduate, interview, 2009).

Most FFS have been conducted in 'pocket areas' (Chapter 2), usually more than once, whereby the first participants were male and from upper caste, in subsequent FFS participants were predominantly female or high school graduates⁴⁶, and if there was a large Janajati community the 'ethnic minorities and illiterate women would take part in a second round of Farmer Field Schools' (Focus group discussion with male and female farmers Sanga, Kavre 2009) (See Chapter 7.4).

Janajati or ethnic minorities are increasingly taking part in FFS. In Kavre district out of 199 FFS 6 consisted mainly of JJanajatis: Tamang, Rai, Danuwar or Majhi (DADO, 2009), whereby since 2005 there are more JJanajati participants. There are not many mixed FFS registered with Brahmin and Janajati.

In the early days of FFS, 1998-2001, most participants were usually the village or farmer leaders with whom the district agricultural staff was already familiar, such as the VDC leader

⁴⁶ School leavers certificate holders: SLC graduates

or progressive or 'model' farmers, the so called elite. These men were easy for the predominantly male FFS staff to approach, as they were already familiar with these individuals from earlier contacts or interventions (see Chapter 4 and 5). This way it is easy to explain why people belonging to a certain caste feel more comfortable interacting with people from the same caste. This trend can also be seen as a so-called 'courtesy bias' which is a common phenomenon in development projects, to please the leaders in society, to get their approval and get an entry point in their community. With their support it was easier to continue the project and to introduce the project and to include non-elites or more marginalised people.

During the season-long implementation of FFS it became difficult to keep the attention of these so called elite farmers; most of them had other duties (employment, business and politics) and interests. FFS participation meant intensive weekly sessions, obligations that did not appeal to them. Also the financial incentives were below expectations (actually none) for many selected trainees. The dropout rate was high and adoption of the FFS techniques low.

In 2000 we decided to introduce a better selection system for the FFS, because we wanted to attract 'real farmers' who wanted to learn about farming. We did not want 'opportunistic' men in our training that would neither apply the technology offered, nor use the knowledge. We wanted people to complete the entire season-long training. We introduced an intensive selection process, with potential participants through selection meetings in which basically an entire village (men and women) took part. At least, that is what we thought at the time, later I discovered that Janajatis and lower caste people were excluded from these sessions. In these gatherings a PRA map was created from the village, semi-structured interviews were done and a cropping calendar was made. Through these methods, farmers could indicate farm opportunities and problems for a specific crop. We also conducted a gender analysis with the villagers (men and women), in which we discussed the labour activities related to rice or any other crop that would get the focus in FFS. In this gender analysis all villagers were invited to discuss the different roles and responsibilities men and women had in relation to this crop. The debates were loud and interesting and a session usually ended with a conclusion by the community that women take a large part of the workload and responsibilities in most crops and as a result more women were selected to be the participants in FFS. Soon FFS facilitators discovered that women were anyway more committed participants than most men, and the facilitators encouraged more women to participate in FFS.

This process coincided with an effort by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives at that time to include women more in their agricultural services. The Ministry imposed a 33% quota of women participants in farmer training. This move was influenced by the Women in Development a paradigm that was influential in the development scene in those days. As a result of these parallel societal and institutional shifts, in 2000 more and more women participated in FFS, mostly from the higher caste. In 2009 it was found that the majority of FFS participants (N=88 out of N= 147, 60%) were women (this research and DADO registration in Kavre, 2009). These women are not a homogenous group, but belong mainly to the Bhramin Chettri caste. Generally, participants from FFS are mainly from the upper caste: Brahmin, Chettri. In the Kathmandu valley Newari participants dominate the FFS. In Kavre district, out of 400 participants 50% belonged to the Brahmin/Chettri⁴⁷. From the perspective of caste composition, hardly any lower caste people had taken part in FFS: in

⁴⁷ Source: field data registered at DADO Kavre, 2009.

Kavre district only 5 (1.2%) out of 400 participants were of lower caste origin. Dalits were generally not invited and Dalits said they mostly do not have land, or are poor and cannot afford the time to attend training. They usually do not receive the information either, because lower caste people usually live at the edge of a village and are not in the inner circle where information regarding agricultural services is circulated. Neither do most Brahmin extensionists venture into these lower caste quarters (Chapter 2 and 5).

FFS claims to have a participatory approach, in principle everyone who is involved in farming can participate. This is explicitly mentioned in project documents and supported by the government, FAO and NGOs. Still, not all individuals have equal opportunities to take part in FFS. Some are excluded because they do not belong to the social group that is dominant in the village. Some could not take part because they are not educated. While some people feel inferior and think that agricultural training is not something they can take part in.

In Kushadevigaun the men in the village said that people from the Dalit community were not interested in taking part in FFS because they were involved in off-farm labour, mostly construction, and not interested in learning about farming practices. The men from the Dalit community however, said that they were interested but that they did not have land to practice the agricultural skills as learned in FFs. The Dalit women said they had never heard about FFS but would like to get FFS training if an opportunity would arise.

Participation of the poorest section in society is problematic. The poorest can simply not take the risk, and do not have the time to sit leisurely in a training of which they are not even sure it will benefit them. Women too expressed that they could not always attend the FFS session because they had other duties such as planting rice, cooking food or preparing children to go to school. "I cannot go to the FFS which starts at 7 am because I have to prepare food and get the children ready to go to school" (female farmer, Kavre interview July 2009). Also lack of education excludes people from taking part in the FFS. "Sir asked people who can read and write to be in the FFS" - is an often heard statement (Tanahun, interview, 2009).

While 90% out of N=400 farmers in FFS were literate and educated, there is a recent trend towards inclusion of more illiterate, in particularly elderly women (age >40) from Brahmin/Chettri or Janajati. From 2005 onwards in several FFS training groups illiterate women and/or Janajati have been included, usually around 5-6 persons (Data from DADO Kavre, 2009)

Almost all farmers interviewed in 2002 (97%, N=411 out of N=424) were willing to pay for FFS (REGARD, 2002). They did not say how much, but it is in contrast to general beliefs that farmers only participate if there is a financial 'incentive'. In those early years of FFS people in rural areas were really interested in participating in FFS and to get more services from the government and NGOs in general. In 2009 the system changed. Funding became decentralised and at VDC level people got more authority in the use of government budgets. Farmers gained more direct influence and access to other projects and FFS had lost its popularity, its uniqueness. Farmers said they liked FFS but did not care to pay for its training courses. A DADO officer Kavre:

"We can distribute the budget now according to our own interest, and so if we want we can conduct more FFS. However the small irrigation project is more popular, so we implement more of the irrigation projects. The reason is that for the small scale irrigation a full sum of 50.000 rupees is available and that is nice

for the farmers (and somehow for us). It is more lucrative than FFS training.”
(Kavre, focus group discussion DADO office, 2009)

These developments were not anticipated in 1997 when agriculture was still considered the key to growth and development in Nepal. We had not expected a decline in interest in farming among youth, nor did we anticipate a feminisation of agriculture.

6.4 Curriculum changes

In the beginning the project was much focused on expansion of FFS and food crop production (read: rice). Slowly the content of the training changed leading to more diversified farm practices (read: vegetables). In more recent years compost and soil conservation became an important topic in FFS.

Over the years the curriculum of FFS was slightly adapted as you can see in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Curriculum changes between 1997 and 2009

Curriculum at start in 1997	2002	2009
AESA ⁴⁸ with elaborate coloured drawings	AESA with simple drawings and mostly with written information	Simple AESA, less time taken for drawings
Ice breakers, energizers, songs	Games in every session as standard procedure	Games and songs mostly left out
Weekly special topics, often by invited <i>subject matter specialist</i> from DADO	Every week a special topic done by facilitator and sometimes <i>subject matter specialist</i> from DADO. This was dealt with in a particular way: questions related to the topic were distributed among subgroups. Answers were presented and discussed in plenary	Once a month special topic by <i>subject matter specialist</i> or FFS facilitator
Key topics	Integrated pest management	Crop management

Source: own research 2002 and 2009

The changes mentioned in table 6.4 are just a few observed changes, learnt from interviews with farmers and FFS staff. Overall the curriculum became less technical. The core activity from FFS, the Agro-Eco-System Analysis, was often carried out in simpler forms than in the early years of FFS, while it remained the key activity in FFS. Teams went to the field and collected data, but this was usually implemented by a few key individuals who could read and write. In 2009 in many FFS groups I observed that the plants were not drawn anymore. According to some of the trainers “this was too time-consuming” (DADO FFS trainer, interview, Kavre, 2009). Also the games and songs took up too much time, said the trainers. I am aware that many trainers left out the singing or games because they found them useless, felt embarrassed to facilitate these activities or were often running out of time, while farmers valued these exercises very much. I know that many FFS facilitators felt

⁴⁸ AESA stands for Agro-Eco System Analysis. In Farmer Field School session this is a core activity in which FFS farmers go in subgroups to the cropping field observe the plants in two plots: one with improved practice (usually government recommendations) and one with regular farmers’ practice. A colour drawing illustrates the differences between those two plots.

uncomfortable doing participatory exercises as they were not entirely clear about its purpose and rather gave a short lecture on a technical topic. They somehow preferred to give a lecture, also because they thought that this would gain them more respect from farmers. At the same time the participants in FFS had changed and with fewer well-educated people it is likely that FFS facilitators resorted to a simpler version of FFS training. Still FFS was more participatory than any other activity that agricultural staff had previously conducted. In fact FFS farmers' participation became normal procedure in agricultural extension and research, and a closer collaboration with farmers was established.

When the programme expanded, the facilitators or FFS trainers changed. The responsibility was first with the plant protection officers, based at PPD, regional offices or in DADO, Kathmandu. After a few years most FFS were conducted by JT⁴⁹ or JTAs, with help from farmer trainers. In the NGO sector the FFS were conducted by field staff from local NGOs or CBOs. In 2009 it was mostly farmer trainers who conduct FFS, with monitoring by DADO staff or local NGO staff.

In 2000 for the first time farmers were trained to become trainers, *farmer trainers*, to conduct Farmer Field School in their area. This move was done to be more efficient with funds (farmer trainers are cheaper than government officers), to expand or scale-up the programme. Additionally farmer trainers are considered closer to the practice of farming and have local knowledge, and can speak a local language (see Chapter 4 and 5 and 8). On the website of the FAO, which reports on the current status and successes of FFS, it is written that:

In Nepal, in the area of agricultural extension, Farmer to Farmer Extension, based on FFS approach, has been adopted as an extension tool for rural development and the transfer of agricultural technologies. (FAO Regional Vegetable IPM Programme in Asia, 2011)

Hom Prasad is such a farmer trainer:

Hom Prasad Neupane 50+ is a farmer in Sunsari district, Baklaure VDC ward no. 8. He took part in the first series of Farmer Field School in Nepal, which were organised as part of the training of trainers for assistant plant protection officers in April-June 1998.

Initially he was very skeptical about FFS:

- Season-long ("Why do we have to give so much time for a training on rice?")
- No daily allowance ("We used to get some money to take part in a training, where is our incentive now?")
- IPM in Rice ("What can we learn about rice that we have grown for many generations?")

However, during the season he really started to enjoy the training and realized that through this new approach he actually learnt a lot more than he had ever done before. And not only he and his fellow farmers in the FFS, even other members in the community regretted not having taken part in the FFS.

After graduation he wanted to continue with FFS activities. When in 2000 the opportunity arose to take part in a course for farmer trainers he joined. Since then he has been organising farmer fieldschools in his own and neighbouring communities. The advantage is that he can communicate in their language, he is available anytime and he can adapt the curriculum to the local needs. (End-of-

⁴⁹

JT stands for Junior Technician, JTA for Junior Technical Assistant.

The employment of farmer trainers had an impact on Farmer Field School curriculum, because the farmers who had become trainers did not have the technical education like the DADO or NGO staff. Often the farmer trainers invite DADO staff to give a session on a technical topic.

In fact it was these farmer trainers who moved to more remote areas, at higher altitude or further from the main road, in areas where only local languages were spoken, where more ethnic minority groups reside. This was not always appreciated by staff from Kathmandu. One farmer trainer told me that he was criticised by staff from the Plant Protection Directorate in Kathmandu:

“Why you go so far away. It is difficult for us to visit and do the monitoring of your FFS” (interview, Kathmandu, officer, 2009).

Since 2005 the government of Nepal has been encouraging social inclusion of ethnic minorities and lower caste people. Still many male Brahmin government officers have difficulties appreciating interaction with Janajatis or Dalits.

“The Janajatis are so backward” (interview, officer, Kavre, 2009). “The people from this ethnic group are uncivilised” (interview, officer, Tanahun, 2009). Or: “Dalits are dirty and uneducated” (interview, officer, Lalitpur, 2009), “Dalits are backward, they are laggards” (interview, officer, Dhading, 2009); “I find it difficult to work with Dalits” (interview, officer, Bhaktapur, 2009).

6.5 Organisations involved in FFS

In Nepal FFS started as a project, with a given procedure or framework to follow, with rules imposed by the donor and intervening agency such as Ministry of Agriculture, the District Agriculture Development Office and Plant Protection Directorate. FFS as a project was established by FAO and the Nepalese government with funding from Australia. Soon other organisations became engaged in FFS.

At this point I prefer to speak of actors rather than stakeholders, because the term actor implies more active involvement than the term stakeholder which indicates having a stake or interest in FFS. Actors are conscious and unconscious social agents (Cleaver, 2002) who are deeply embedded in FFS. Actors’ behaviour is embedded in structures and networks of relations; shaped by routine and practices; restricted/influenced by social norms, values and institutional constraints (Long, 2001). In line with Long, actors have ‘the capacity to process their and others’ experiences and to act upon them’ (2001:49). Thus actors do not necessarily have a rational pre-determined objective to participate. Their ‘stakes’ are outcomes of interaction and negotiation processes, usually not rigidly set or predetermined claims to an output or outcome.

Several organisations have adopted the so called ‘FFS approach’, they have taken up FFS in their regular activities (see also Chapter 8). A Farmer Field School has become a familiar concept among farmers, policymakers and donors, even if they have not been part of a FFS

project they have an idea what FFS contains, it is accepted as an institution. Institutionalisation is a fact when people talk about FFS after a project has been completed or when people know what FFS means when they have not even taken part in FFS. FFS has in fact become part of regular jargon in the rural development sector in Nepal. Some of the main characteristics of these organisations are described below, starting with the donor who is the main funding agency of FFS.

AUSAID

In 1997 the donor for the FFS project was the Australian bilateral funding agency: AUSAID. AUSAID's objectives were to increase income of the rural poor by a) increasing agricultural productivity b) non-farm income generation activities and c) sustainable natural resource management. The Farmer Field School fitted directly with the aim to increase agricultural productivity through sustainable natural resource use.⁵⁰ In 2001 AUSAID stopped funding FFS for reasons unclear to me and NORAD took over.

NORAD

NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, is the bilateral development agency of the Norwegian government. The first activities in Nepal were funded with AUSAID, in 2003 NORAD became the main donor of FFS. It is not very clear where the project fits into NORAD's development policy. Around this time, NORAD became involved in 'good governance' in particular they played a role in peace building and negotiation with Maoist and government parties. Discussions with FAO showed that within FAO there is no clear idea what makes NORAD fund their FFS project. "Probably something related to good governance" said the for FFS responsible FAO officer in Bangkok" (email exchange, 2009). It is not mentioned on the NORAD website.

NORAD gives the fund to FAO for implementation. FAO allocates funds to the Plant Protection Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC). When asked why NORAD does not give funds directly to the Ministry of Agriculture, a representative of NORAD said: "we prefer to work multilateral with FAO" and he did not want to elaborate further (conversation with NORAD programme officer, July 2002).

FAO

The FAO has a long-standing relation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in Nepal. Among the UN agencies, FAO was the first one to start field level work in Nepal in 1951. Between 1967 and 2009, some 180 projects and programmes covering various aspects of agriculture such as policies and legislations, crop diversification, dairy farming, small farmer development, aquaculture, community and leasehold forestry development, marketing and post-harvest management were implemented in the country.

FAO is a so called technical agency, providing technical assistance. FAO's existence in Nepal depends on the collaboration with the government of Nepal. The number of projects is considered an indicator of success. The FAO representative expected funding to increase after 2007.: "We need more projects, we are lacking behind in Asia" (FAO representative interview 2007). The current view of FAO in Nepal is given on its website:

⁵⁰ AUSAID website <http://www.usaid.gov/publications/pdf/ruralstrategy.pdf>, accessed 04.01.2010

FAO technical cooperation programmes will continue to assist the Government in an integrated approach to address its immediate priorities through capacity building, institutional improvement, food security-related issues, agriculture and rural development. FAO, www.fao.org/world/nepal accessed 4.1.10

The Nepalese Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives

The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC) has the following vision:

To improve the standard of living of the people through sustainable agricultural growth by transforming the subsistence farming system to a competitive and commercialised one.

To achieve this vision they have formulated the following mission:

To promote knowledge based farming by transferring modern agricultural technologies through mass media communication and developing effective linkage between research and extension system. (Website Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, www.moac.gov.np Nepal, accessed 06.01.2010)

MoAC has as a main guideline the Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP) (See Chapter 2). The APP considers agricultural growth as the key to poverty reduction. The APP stressed the need to diversify agricultural production on the basis of geographical location and commercialisation of agro-products.

Government policies have changed over the last 20 -30 years (see Chapter 2). Farmer field schools could fit in with the 'group approach' and provided an alternative extension, more participatory method for the agricultural sector (Chapter 2).

When in 1997 the Farmer Field Schools were introduced the national policy makers recognised the fact that agriculture-led growth strategy was the only option for overall economic development in Nepal. FFS fitted in the national plan (Eighth Plan (1992-1997) that emphasised that the sector's most urgent tasks are to provide food for a growing population. Farmer field schools were seen as a means to contribute to food security and agricultural development.

Agricultural extension services in 1997 in Nepal were top-down and focused on technology transfer approaches. This technology transfer approach relied almost exclusively on research station based standard recommendations often neglecting the diversity of rural livelihoods and the socio economic circumstances at local level. Farmer Field School promised to be a different and more effective approach. Among the staff at the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC) this awareness was present: "a more participatory approach to agricultural development was needed" (MoAC, interview 2009, Kathmandu). As one agriculture officer said: "FFS came at the right time and at the right place" (Department of Agriculture, interview 2009, Kathmandu).

The Plant Protection Directorate (PPD)

The Plant Protection Directorate or PPD is the main implementing agency of the Farmer Field School programme. The Plant Protection Directorate (PPD) of Department of Agriculture (DOA) undertakes general pest control methods and new programmes on pest control management such as integrated pest management under which the FFS is the main

component. The major emphasis at present is on FFS in rice, cash crops such as tea and vegetables. The programme started with FFS in rice and FFS is being gradually replicated in other crops such as vegetables, fruits and potato. The Tenth Five-year Plan officially recognised the need for FFS, in particular to disseminate the national pest control strategy. The Agricultural Perspective Plan (1997-2017) has also highlighted on the need for FFS as a primary plant protection measure for farmers. In Nepal, APP has duly recognised IPM as one of the priority agenda for sustainable agriculture.

The PPD allocates funds and gives the main responsibility to the district agricultural offices for implementation of FFS. In the DADOS it is then usually the plant protection officer who is in charge of FFS. He might be assisted by other officers, JTs or farmer trainers.

In 2000 and 2001 the Nepalese Government started to allocate local budget through the District Agricultural Development Offices (DADO) or Village Development Committees (VDCs) for farmers field schools. In 2001 30% of the FFS were locally funded. In 2009 there was little local fund used for FFS. Although decentralisation of budget responsibility gave more freedom to DADOs to allocate budget for FFS, the fund was often used for other projects such as small scale irrigation. "Farmers demand more irrigation projects" said a DADO officer in Kavre (interview 2009). He continued explaining: With the small irrigation projects farmers, as a group, get a lot of money immediately in their hands, plus they can build an infrastructure that suits them, with FFS it is training and they have less faith in direct benefits"(interview, 2009)

When FFS started in Nepal the donor trend was to promote government and NGO collaboration. Due to previous partnership links in other countries-, World Education was selected in Nepal. In fact in Indonesia the FFS started with World Education and FAO staff working on an adult-learning approach to agricultural extension. The collaboration with CARE began in other countries, in particular in Bangladesh and because of its success it was extended to Nepal. Historical ties, earlier experience and international personal relationship started the NGO-GO collaboration on FFS in Nepal.

FFS had NGO involvement from the start, albeit reluctantly, because the government officers in 1997 were not keen to give work (=money) out of their hands and were often jealous of their NGO counterparts, who had usually higher salaries. In 2009 DADO chiefs complained about lack of coordination or poor communication from the NGO side: "We hardly keep track of the NGO activities, they involve us when they need us. Most of the time we only hear about their activities when they are already wrapping up their projects" (Kathmandu, interview 2009)

World Education

Besides the government institutions, NGOs (both national and international) are involved in FFS. In the first phase these were two international NGOs: World Education and Care Nepal. Via World Education 9 local NGOs were involved in carrying out field schools in 12 districts in 2002. World Education's work focus is on education and it linked FFS to its literacy programme with rural women, as is explained on their website:

Farmer Field Schools in Nepal - The Next Generation (2002 - 2005)

The reality for young women and out-of-school youth in rural Nepal is that agriculture is a major focus of their lives. Over 82% of Nepal's population is supported by agriculture. Rapid population growth has meant that although agricultural production is increasing, levels of malnutrition are still rising. World

Education is working with older girls graduating from its Girls Access to Education (GATE) Program and out-of-school youth in its Brighter Futures Program by linking them to Farmer Field Schools (FFS). World Education works with its nine NGO partners to identify girls and out-of-school youth who have not entered school or who have dropped out. If a community is interested, they form groups of parents and daughters or youth interested in attending a FFS. At the end of the season, girls, out-of-school youth, and their parents share what they have learned with the community through a Farmer Field Day. This is their opportunity to show (and show off to) the rest of the community. Farmers can proudly share what they have learned with their families, neighbours, friends and peers. Through sharing, they also recall the whole Farmer Field School experience and reinforce their own learning.

<http://www.worlded.org/WEInternet/index.cfm> accessed 15.01.2010

In 2008/2009 World Education was not really a major player in FFS anymore; they had not received much funding through FAO from NORAD. In 2009, most of their FFS staff had been laid off; only one Master trainer was left. However, in 2009 they were still implementing FFS on a small scale and applying for more funding for expansion of FFS.

CARE Nepal

Besides World Education, CARE was a major player in FFS in Nepal. CARE's mother organisation is based in the United States. CARE is a well-established NGO in Nepal and one of the few that are working in agriculture. CARE began working in Nepal in 1978. The early focus was on improving infrastructure in remote areas and agriculture extension activities. Today, its programmes are wide-ranging and promote equitable and sustainable livelihood by addressing the causes, rather than the symptoms of poverty and social injustice. CARE places special emphasis on involving women, Dalits (people from "low caste" groups) and landless groups in local development processes. It maintains formal and informal partnership at multiple levels: with local NGOs, government agencies, communities, civil society groups, federations, networks and the private sector. CARE Nepal is currently working in partnership with over 80 local NGOs, 10 different networks and approximately 1,000 community based organisations. (CARE Nepal website, www.care.org accessed 4.01.10).

CARE has changed its mandate and is presently no longer implementing FFS. Former FFS staff in CARE were no longer available and the new staff at CARE did not know anything about FFS (interview Kathmandu, July 2009).

CARITAS

Currently Caritas Nepal is a major actor in implementing FFS. Caritas, established in Nepal in 1990, is a social development/relief organisation, with its headquarters in New Zealand, operating under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church in Nepal as its social arm. Caritas Nepal tries to spread the love of *caritas* by working in solidarity with the poor, marginalised people of Nepal with a mission to empower them to overcome poverty and realise basic human rights and social justice and to provide relief to those suffering from disasters and conflict. The main programme areas of Caritas Nepal currently are: Improving Food Security of Rural Households through Sustainable Agriculture; Building Sustainable Peace; Cooperatives and Micro Enterprises, and so on. Caritas Nepal carries out its work in the field through partnership with selected local Their work on FFS is explained on their website:

“This programme is aimed at building the capacity of farmers (men and women)

through Farmer Field Schools which provide them with training to acquire organic farming and integrated pest management (IPM) skills. The production of rice in the target areas has increased by 50% over the project period. Other stakeholders in the programme are the 20 cooperatives and NGO partners whose capacity for promoting sustainable agriculture is being built.

(<http://www.caritasnepal.org/eng/introduction.php> accessed 15.01.2010)

CARITAS gets some funds from FAO but mainly implements projects with own funding. This makes them a more interesting partner than for instance, for World Education who despite several efforts to get funding from other sources, remained dependent on implementing FFS with funds allocated by FAO. Interview with World Education staff revealed that they are disappointed that they have not been included in the current phase of FFS with FAO. They feel they have been sidelined. "Because we do not have close contacts with PPD staff or FAO staff we do not get FFS" (World Education interview, Kathmandu, 2009).

The fact that so many organisations are interested in FFS is a sign that the FFS fitted the needs of the organisations that are responsible for managing agricultural interventions: government departments, NGOs, and donor agencies. Development interventions are driven by the needs of organisations, to a) maintain its exigency and b) the need for organisations to maintain relationships (Mosse, 2005). These two reasons are interlinked and also apply in Nepal in the case of the Farmer Field School project.

Without projects an organisation like the FAO could close its office. "The excellent relationship we have with the government, we need to maintain, this is important for our organisation (FAO staff, interview, 2009). The Plant Protection Directorate needed the integrated pest management project in order to keep up with new developments and to improve its services to the farmers. The old approach was literally outdated and needed a new impulse. The IPM Farmer Field School provided this stimulus. The FAO needs to sustain its relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and other government agricultural services, since its mandate is to work with national governments. The government of Nepal wants to retain relationships with the FAO to supplement their budgets and to get additional benefits like training. With limited public funds and low salaries, government organisation are more often than not interested in collaborating with an agency like FAO, just simply because it provides extra financial space. Working with the FAO means that the Plant Protection Directorate (PPD) is able to afford extra vehicles, fuel costs, computers, trips abroad, and more funds for staff training. All legitimate reasons for the government to sign a contract with the FAO for a new project.

"The Nepalese authorities in the Ministry of Agriculture had heard that the FFS was a popular new extension approach in Asia, and Nepal wanted to be part of this network, they too wanted to participate in an international programme". (Kathmandu, interview former IPM deputy coordinator, 2009)

Organisations are likely to be supportive or interested in a project or approach when they have a shared interest or a common principle (Mosse, 2005. Cleaver, 2001). Farmers' participation can be such a principle. The concept of participation - an ambiguous concept in itself (see Chapter 1) - might have provided the common agenda for all actors involved in the FFS Programme. This vagueness is required to conceal ideological difference, to allow compromise and to build coalitions. This was also the case in Nepal, where all FFS actors in Nepal, despite their different interests, agreed that farmers' participation was important and

would be the leading element in the new way of work in the agricultural sector. It is a politically useful concept; it lacks clarity and can as such be accepted by many. In fact, no one contests the need for participation. In order to persuade, simplicity, unity is needed, for this the concept of participation is suitable. Food security is another one of such concepts that many organisations involved in FFS share: CARE, Caritas, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation, FAO. Food security is not specifically defined by these organisations. This ambiguity provides room for manoeuvre. Participation and food security forge coalitions necessary to advance the FFS.

Likewise more keywords that are attached to FFS fitted in with the fashion of development jargon at that time and suited the vocabulary in the agricultural policy documents: participatory, sustainable, local knowledge, farmer groups, and food security. These are all words, concepts that made the FFS attractive for the FAO, MoAC, NGOs such as Care Nepal and World Education, and donors like NORAD.

After the FAO IPM project started with FFS many organisations followed. It became an extremely popular intervention. It is usually difficult to get support for a new project. However, once this project got started it was easy to find more support. When word got round that the FFS was part of a regional programme with funding from the Netherlands and Australian government other donors such as NORAD were happy to step in. Funding from other respected partners is almost a guarantee that the “project” works well. With a field visit, showing enthusiastic farmers, I could easily sell the project in 2002 for more funding to NORAD. During this field visit NORAD staff said they wanted to support Nepal as focus country. The FFS fitted into their current development themes: de-centralisation, sustainable rural livelihoods, farmer participation, environmental protection, non-formal education. They saw advantages in the fact that the FFS was supported by both Maoists and government.

All kind of training or group work with farmers in Nepal were suddenly called Farmer Field Schools. This varied from a short training in an irrigation project to a long-term (a year or longer) intervention, including agricultural skills training but also marketing and e.g. income-generation. This could be a FFS in tea or rice, but also solely on a topic like soil nutrient management, such as Helvetas, a Swiss NGO does. Some organisations focused on special aspects, like disease management, which was the case with FFS run by CIP (International Potato Centre) in Nepal . The national potato research and improvement program adopted the FFS program⁵¹ in 1999.

Several international, national and local actors have been involved in FFS, have shaped FFS, have adopted FFS in their programmes. FFS has become a familiar concept in Nepal among several organisations and individuals, among all classes and across the rural-urban divide, institutionalisation has happened. With so many organisations or actors involved, - see Table 6.5⁵² - it is clear that there will be many different objectives and views on FFS. When I interviewed people different views about FFS came up:

The FAO representative said: “FFS is a forum to train farmers to produce organic

51 For a description of the FFS programme started in 1999 in the potato development section of the government of Nepal see Hidalgo, Campilan and Lama (2000). The rice based FFS approach had to be adapted so it could be applied to potato seed and disease problems. This involved amongst other things, making it a multi- season programme as integrated disease management requires a longer time frame. An evaluation of the FFS in potatoes was undertaken in 2002 (Ojha and Lama, 2002)

52 I did not specify local NGOs because that would make the overview too complex

goods” (Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

Another FAO expert: “FFS is an entry point to organise marketing of agricultural products”. (Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

While an FAO programme officer stressed: “FFS leads to group solidarity and can contribute to the current peace-building process”. (Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

The CARE programme officer stated that the FFS is the ideal method to introduce and transfer new technologies. (Kathmandu, interview, 2002)

World Education, on the other hand, sees the FFS as a follow up activity for women groups where they can practice their recently mastered literacy skills. (Kathmandu, interview, 2002).

Table 6.5 shows the major actors with their different objectives in FFS:

Table 6.5 Major actors, different objectives and clients in FFS

Actor	Key objective organisation in Nepal	Role in FFS	FFS objective	Immediate clients
NORAD	Good governance & bio-diversity conservation	Funding		Government of Nepal
FAO	Food security	Technical assistance, fund distribution	Agricultural production, Technology transfer, extension method, integrated pest management	Government of Nepal
MoAC	Agricultural growth	Coordination, policy making	Agriculture production, food security	farmers
PPD	Plant protection or pest management.	Fund distribution, implementation, content or curriculum development	Technology transfer, pest management	Farmers
District Agricultural Development office (DADO)	Implementation of APP	Implementation	Agriculture production, food security	Farmers
National Agricultural Research Council	Research	Implementation FFS	Research, innovations	Farmers
CARITAS	Food security Organic farming	implementation	Technology transfer, food security	Poor marginalized farmers (men and women)
World Education	Adult learning, non formal education, literacy programmes	Fund distribution to local NGOs, technical assistance	Women empowerment, post-literacy programmes	Rural women, just literate
CARE	Food security and improvement situation socially excluded, poor vulnerable groups	Fund distribution to local NGOs, technical assistance	Technology transfer, food security	Marginalised rural men and women, Dalits
Local NGOs	Context specific	Implementation FFS		Context specific
Farmers		Participants in FFS	Agriculture production, food security, cash production, knowledge generation	Household members

Source: own research, 2009

As is shown in the table 6.5 above the major actors at national level have different strategies and objectives with their work in Nepal. They also have different client groups for which they provide their services, whereby the government targets farmers in general, most NGOs work with better specified beneficiaries and in particular focus on more vulnerable groups in society, like women or ethnic minorities or Dalits. For instance, World Education is working with older girls who were not enrolled in school, the 'Girls Access to Education' (GATE) Program and linked them to Farmer Field Schools to practice their literacy with agricultural

training.

FFS must fit in with research of NARC, must focus on pest management for PPD, and be part of food security and working with socially excluded for CARE. If one considers that not only over 50 district agricultural development offices, but also over 20 local NGOs are involved in the implementation, all small organisations with its own mandate, objectives and strategies, it is obvious that there is no single direction which FFS follows. The local NGOs have not been specified in Table 6.5 because they operate in a locally specific context, strongly influenced by their funding agency.

I will not go into detail regarding the different applications of FFS, but just show that there is no single approach to FFS. Among the key actors in our project there are different ideas on what FFS actually entails or what FFS is meant for: extension, plant protection, crop management, research (see Chapter 4).

The reasons for these different objectives are: mandate of their organisation, the development philosophy an organisation wants to follow, the professional education and experience people in organisations have, the socio-cultural, historical, political and economic environment they operate in. Also it reflects peoples' personal motivation, expertise and power. It is normal in projects or programmes that actors have different views on a key concept such as FFS and that they construct the idea of FFS in their own way. These different dynamics affect implementation.

FFS arrangements are not only determined by official rules and regulations but are shaped as well by cultural, social and political processes. FAO project staff might have developed rules or steps to follow in FFS, but local norms determine who will be the participants or leaders in an FFS, which behaviour is expected from FFS facilitators and influences determine the extent that wider believes or traditions are adopted or imposed on actors. FFS in Nepal varies in the Far Western terai from the mid hills. In one village the farmers might be interested in finding a solution to their weed problem, in another they might want to get more production from their local beaten rice. The socially constructed characteristics vary over place and time. In some villages Tamang are in a majority and in another Brahmins determine the course. In a Muslim community they determine different rules or have different norms than in a Hindu or Buddhist community. Organisations and individuals shaped FFS in various ways. FFS evolved through different practices, and became structured by context specific social norms and cultural factors or cognitive institutions (Scott, 1995; Munir, 2002) and other circumstances. The outcome is thus not so much a result of planned and predictable steps, but more a result with unintended outcomes, a result of a dynamic interaction.

Even if each actor has a rather different kind of commitment or objective with FFS, they can come together in a productive 'campaign', like expansion or promotion of FFS. In Nepal all actors together have created FFS to become a popular concept that has stimulated farmers' participation in the agricultural sector. Even though differences occur, differences also evolve or disappear FFS became a process through interaction and over time.

These changes in FFS need to be seen in the light of other transformations in the country; such as budget cuts in the agricultural service sector, decentralisation of government and NGO responsibilities, pressure from Maoists in the rural areas, migration from rural to urban areas, decreased interest in farming by the youth, feminisation of farming and globalisation (see chapter 2). In addition many farming systems have changed from purely subsistence to semi-commercial with production of cash crops. Livelihoods have changed from farm-based

to a mixture of farming, off- farming and non-farming, this process already started in 2002, but increased in 2009 (MoAC, 2010).

6.6 Conclusion

Farmer Field Schools were introduced in Nepal as an integrated pest management project in 1997 with concrete output oriented goals: agricultural development through an increase in agricultural production and a reduction of pesticide use. This was a government policy and the government used FFS as a vehicle to first improve rice production and then introduce vegetables and expand the vegetable production area. Over the years FFS expanded its regional coverage, and over 60,000 farmers received training.

FFS was initially a project conducted mainly by the Nepalese government, in particular the Plant Protection Directorate but along the way more and more actors became involved. Each with their own agenda and objectives (see Chapter 1 on a discussion of the assumptions). Despite their different concerns and sometimes even conflicting stakes between organisations such friction did not lead to the demise of FFS, on the contrary. It provided a variety of perceptions of the role of FFS (Chapter 4) and its participants (see Tables 6.4; 6.5; 4.2 and 4.3) which led to the expansion of the approach and institutionalisation of the concept.

FFS started off as a project, with a clear start, written documents in which the duration was indicated, starting in 1997 and ending in 2002, but in fact with this project a process of change was set in motion (see also chapter 4). In villages where FFS was conducted 8 years or longer ago, we still see that farmers continue with some of the practices that they learnt in FFS training. Farmers applied some of the agronomic practices that were introduced in FFS to their own purposes and objectives, even if it might not be exactly the way project planners had envisaged it in their documents.

Farmers developed new skills, changed their cropping patterns, diversified rice farming with vegetable production, and changed their agronomic practices of weeding, pesticide and fertiliser application, and spacing between plants). Yields increased, pesticide use was reduced. FFS thus contributed to agricultural development, but increased knowledge also led to improved practices and better informed decision-making skills of farmers and their households, increasingly also including the women.

Farmers made their own choices, their own decisions, whereby men and women clearly exposed different interests and needs. Although in the project farmers were treated as a homogenous group, it became clear that men and women used FFS in different ways and to different purposes. People might not actively resist but use the system in a way that suits them (Gellner, 2008).

A woman who took part in an FFS said that she did not like the new planting distance that she was supposed to do in FFS. She wanted to plant her rice more densely: "I want more straw, so I plan my rice close together, with high density. Actually I do not care if Sir says otherwise" (interview, Tanahun, 2009).

Women were interested in FFS participation to learn about farming and to contribute to food security in their family. Women did not adopt technologies that proved to be too labour-intensive such as preparing alternative means for pesticides, additional weeding and regular field observations. The technical aspects of FFS that were concerned with simulation trials or fertiliser calculations were too difficult women said in interviews. Women are especially interested in labour-saving and cost saving technologies, such as the use of less

seedlings and larger planting distance. These practices they adopted easily and still apply after 8 years.

Men, on the other hand were interested in using FFS to increase their livelihood options, to get a job opportunity or to earn income. The young generation is generally not interested in a future in farming, with some exceptions. Some young men want to learn about commercial agriculture, as a source of income.

Clearly FFS was not an end in itself any more, and the training that farmers received led to capacity-building and a wider process of rural development. Over the years FFS developed and the intended outcomes became more process oriented, such as farmer's empowerment (Chapter 7) and capacity-building. With its focus on participation FFS gave an enormous input to agricultural extension, moving away from the top-down and purely technology transfer approach. Over the years FFS changed. The content of the training changed, not dramatically but some elements disappeared and some were added. Budget cuts in the agricultural service sector, decentralisation of government and NGO responsibilities led to an increase in say over funding at village level, resulting in a decrease in FFS training, because when given a choice villagers wanted road construction or irrigation facilities rather than training. FFS remains to be a technical intervention tool of the government, but it has also been embedded in rural Nepal becoming a developmental process that takes place at multiple levels through time and place in a dynamic socio-culture, economic and political context.

In the country many farming systems changed from purely subsistence to semi-commercial with production of cash crops. Livelihoods changed from farm-based to a mixture of farming, off-farming and non-farming.

In addition the composition of the FFS groups changed. Initially it is observed that a courtesy bias took place: the privileged, village leaders, high caste and higher educated men were invited to take part in FFS. Later more women and Janajatis were included, and occasionally a Dalit individual. These changes should be seen in the light of the involvement of a variety of actors, but also as a result of the changing context of Nepal and influenced by globally changing development paradigms. The war, out-migration of men, and female emancipation lead to a feminisation of agriculture. The Women in Development movement, a government policy of the 1990s lead to an increased participation of women in FFS. General patterns of access and control to resources like micro credit, land changed, in particular in favour of women (CBS, 2002; CBS 2012). The more recent democratisation processes in Nepal led to the inclusion of more Janajati and occasionally a few Dalit farmer participants in FFS. The participatory processes, the group discussions, the discovery-learning approach have encouraged farmers to raise their voice, a trend that fitted with the political changes after the turn of the century, allowing FFS to provide a medium for a more democratic governance process. FFS gave women's participation in agricultural extension a boost. It can do the same for Janajatis and Dalits but not if FFS focuses only on the powerful ones (Chapter 5).

Apart from programmatic and internal changes within FFS, contextual changes also added to the developmental role of FFS. These are addressed in Chapter 7.

7

The Contribution of Farmer Field Schools to the Empowerment of Farmers



Chapter 7 The Contribution of Farmer Field Schools to the Empowerment of Farmers

Empowerment means that I am able to do most things myself; I feel empowered because I can now buy a lipstick without my husband's permission (Female farmers in group discussion, Sanga, 2009)

7.1 Introduction: Empowerment, FFS, and farmers' experiences

Initially in Farmer Field Schools the focus was on integrated pest management and yield increase. Later, one of the objectives of Farmer Field Schools became farmer's empowerment. As Peter Ooi and others state: "Farmer field schools are vehicles for empowerment of farmers" (Ooi, 1998; Pontius et al, 2002; Bartlett 2004; Hounkonnou et al., 2006). De Jager in his PhD thesis (2007:147) declares that it is not clear what the impact of FFS is on empowerment: "a comprehensive impact assessment still needs to be done on broader development impacts of FFS such as on empowerment".

In this chapter I will elaborate on empowerment in relation to FFS. Empowerment is an often debated concept in the academic world but in development practice it seems to be used without discussion, assuming that it is always a 'good' thing and having a positive impact on farmers. I will first look at the concept of power in empowerment, and then I will discuss different scientific definitions of the word empowerment. After this theoretical elaboration I examine what empowerment actually means in practice, from the perspectives and experiences of the men and women who have participated in FFS over the last decade in Nepal. Since farmers are not a homogenous group and women and men have different roles in agriculture in Nepal they have different views on empowerment. Such a gendered study adds significantly to our understanding of empowerment through FFS.

Instead of attempting to locate, measure or label agency (see Mosedale, 2005; Malhotra et al., 2002), I try to understand how farmers in Nepal as a result of FFS can put agency in practice, that leads to empowerment. I will demonstrate that empowerment should be regarded as a process of change at different levels, from individual to institutional, an interaction between resources and agency, related to the transformation of power relations and the increased ability to make choices previously denied to male and female farmers, following Kabeer (2001) and Batliwala (1994). It will become evident that *empowerment in practice* is rather different from what development policy makers and FFS facilitators understand it to be.

7.2 Understanding power in empowerment

To understand the process and outcome of empowerment one must examine the key word 'power'. In fact what is power? In dictionaries power is defined as the ability to act, strength and force. The often used definition of Max Weber sees power as the chance that an

individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her own will, even against the resistance of others. Marx believed that power in society is finite, in other words that there is only so much of it, and that it can only be held by one person or group at a time, or the zero-sum model. Power as a limited good: a gain by one is the loss of others. Traditional social science emphasised power as influence and control, often treating power as a commodity or structure divorced from human action (Lips, 1991). A zero-sum conception of power means that power will remain in the hands of the powerful unless they give it up. It neglects the way power is experienced in most human interactions.

Foucault considered power as relational and not as a total form of domination (Mills, 2003: 47). According to Foucault power is real and emerges from the domain of collective interaction (Mills, 2003). His views on power have been adopted by many social scientists (Giddens, 1984; Wolf, 1998; VeneKlasen et al., 2007) who defining power in relational terms as the capacity to influence the behaviour of other people. Foucault (1980) rejected the idea that power is a trait of any particular individuals or groups; rather it is spread and exercised through the whole society (in Mills, 2003). Power is not simply what the dominant party has and the oppressed lack. Power is relational and strategic. It is something the dominant but also the marginalised in society can exert. "Between every point of a social body, between a man and a woman, between members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who does not, there exist relations of power which are not purely and simply a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual" (Foucault 1980a: 187). I believe that Foucault only wants us to think beyond the obvious, that there is power everywhere, also in unexpected places. That people exercise more resistance to oppression than one would imagine. Scott (1990) elaborated on this idea, and suggested that we need to add to the analysis the behaviour of the powerless and the powerful when they are in groups with their equals. Then one can observe what Scott calls a 'hidden transcript', that is a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant' (Scott, 1990: xi). Thus we must analyse the total relations of power, their hidden, as well as their public, representations.

Foucault has been criticised for "downplaying agency" (Mills, 2003:47) and not indicating how hierarchies of gender, caste, and ethnicity influence webs of power (Bradley, 2007). On the other hand, some feminists seem to feel quite favourable towards the work of Foucault, because they have found "in his work a way of thinking about the forms of power relations between men and women which do not fit neatly into the types of relations conventionally described within theorisations of power, which tend to focus on the role of the State, ideology or patriarchy." (Thornborrow, 2002 in Sarah Mills, 2003: 34).

Giddens allows us to explore how women and men experience differences in power. With his structuration theory (Giddens, 1982, 1984, 2006) he introduced the link between social structures and human action. Giddens (2006) considers power to be situated in transformative capacity. Since transformations occur through social relations, power can be related to rules and resources. He argues (2006:135) that one needs to consider action in the context of structure and vice versa. Structure is an active process of structuration by actors in time and among spaces. Actors produce structures and actors' actions are influenced by structure, by rules and resources. These rules and resources can be employed by groups and or individuals to achieve their ends and he explains for instance, gender inequality as the differences in the status, power and prestige women and men have in groups, collectivities and societies.

In distinguishing types of power, I have found a useful framework in relation to

empowerment in Rowland (1997) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2007) who have defined four categories of power:

1. *Power over*, meaning the power to make something, somebody or a group of people do something because they have less power. Usually this happens in a negative way such as restrictive control, punishing and denial of access.
2. *Power to*, enabling an individual or a group of people to do something due to a person's potential to shape his/her life and world. It also refers to organisation's potential to shape the world.
3. *Power with*: strength due to collective action, mass based on mutual support, solidarity and collaboration. It occurs when people are cooperating with other, it also refers to organisations forming networks or alliances.
4. *Power within*: personal strength, self-confidence.

In other words, empowerment is not simply about giving power to people; people already have power (power within). For Mosedale (2005) empowerment starts with 'power within'. "One needs first Power Within: self-esteem and self-confidence. In a sense all power starts from here, such assets are necessary before anything else can be achieved (Mosedale, 2005:250).

Another classification is proposed by Gaventa (2006) and Lukes (1974) who make a distinction between visible, invisible and hidden power. Visible power is the measures one can observe, formal rules and public decision-making or formal institutions. Hidden power is related to political agenda setting and decision-making over resources. Invisible power is found in the ideologies, the habits, norms and values that people have. These three dimensions of power (Gaventa, 2006; Lukes, 1974) different forms of power, together with the four types of power identified by Rowland (1997) and VeneKlasen and Miller (2007) can help explain the different perspectives of scientists and practitioners on empowerment. These three dimensions are compared to an 'iceberg': what you see is not all there is (Mayo, 2004: 41).

Focussing on processes of change, Kabeer (1999) proposes an alternative way of thinking about power: the ability to make choices (1999: 436) which can be determined by all different forms of power (power over, power within, power to, power with) and in the different dimensions. As power does not exist in isolation nor is it inherent in individuals, power and power relationships can change. Power as in empowerment should therefore be considered as something fluid, relational that can occur in different forms and dimensions. If empowerment is regarded a process of change, it requires a transformation of ideologies, the invisible power dimension (Mayo, 2004).

Despite the fact that the view on power has evolved from power being an asset to power being a process and relational, in many conceptualisations of empowerment by development practitioners 'power' is still considered an asset. Although slowly changing, the practitioners' discourse on empowerment seems to be lagging behind the academic discourse on power. Below I will briefly show how the academic views have evolved.

7.3 Empowerment as a concept

First of all, empowerment is a word one does not come across in a basic English course at High School. It is a term that I only became familiar with when I started working in international development. Searching the internet, www.empowerment.com (accessed 20th March 2010) is not very helpful: the site showed a picture of a monkey on a bicycle. In the field of human interaction the term empowerment sounds pretentious, and has a connotation of 'knowing what is best for others'. Still empowerment is an interesting concept that is worth debating, having a positive connotation for most: to gain strength, to get power, to become independent, and so on.

Bartlett (2004) compares empowerment with the taste of a mango or the feeling of snow, suggesting that empowerment is something almost everybody will recognise, but almost nobody can describe. There is no universal agreement; the experience is contextual and unique to each individual. Yet, sociologically some observations can (and should) be made.

Empowerment as a concept was introduced in the domain of development in the 1980s and became popular in the 1990s. Similar trends in the conceptualisation of empowerment can be observed with wider approaches to development. For example, earlier explanations were associated with the basic needs approach in development and the shift from a top-down technocratic approach to a call for popular involvement.

More recently, the World Bank linked empowerment to poverty reduction and better service delivery: Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (World Bank, 2002a). 'Empowerment of the poor' became a popular slogan, replacing the earlier top-down and material well-being approach. Today, the word is found documented in over 1,800 World Bank aided projects (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005). Whilst welcoming the increased attention for the need for participation of the poor themselves, the World Bank agenda with its neo-liberal intentions (Li, 2007) does not lead to transformation of power dynamics nor does it address the so-called invisible power dimension that keep people in poverty.

In the development literature the definitions of empowerment emphasise broadly three issues: 1) increased access and control over resources; 2) the individual's agency and own potential to achieve change; 3) a transformation of power relations. Some examples are given below.

The IFAD definition of empowerment is a technical one: access to productive resources and the capacity to participate in decisions that affect the least privileged (IFAD, 1995).⁵³ Others define it in terms of the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. (Narayan, 2002:14; 2005:5).

These definitions inform an approach that many development organisations follow: the provision of credit, and/or seedlings and income-generating activities, assuming that

⁵³ The definition used by the International Fund for Agricultural Development includes both access to productive resources and the capacity to participate in decisions that affect the least privileged (Popular Coalition to Eradicate Hunger and Poverty 1995). In World Bank publication, *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*, 2002:11.

increased access to resources will be empowering by and in itself. As one NGO staff member in Nepal explained: "We give the women seedlings of citrus trees. This will empower them". (Kavre, interview, 2009). And another NGO representative: "We provide women with training to learn income generating skills, so they can earn their own living" (Kavre, interview 2009). Empowerment is here seen as having knowledge and skills providing power over something, creating visible power.

Others consider control over resources combined with capabilities of the individual agency as an important aspect of empowerment, such as Sen: "Empowerment is the process of gaining power, both control over external resources, and growth in inner self-confidence and capability" (Sen, 1997:6) And Chambers: "Empowerment means that people, especially poorer people, are enabled to take more control over their lives, and secure a better livelihood with ownership and control of productive assets as one key element" (Chambers, 1993:11).

This approach to empowerment, in particular the focus on individual agency, is popular among local NGOs in Nepal. One NGO member talked about 'personal and social advocacy':

"Utilising a self-help instructional model to increase literacy, girl's education, small business development, skilled trainings, personal and social advocacy, our organisation has been empowering more than 50 women in various districts of Nepal to help them take charge of their lives" (Kavre, interview, 2009)

The individual strength or ability is stressed by several sources, sometimes linked to the right based approach, for instance by DFID and others:

Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfil their potential as full and equal members of society (DFID 2000). Or: "Empowerment should lead to the liberation of both men and women where each can become whole beings irrespective of gender and collectively use their potential to construct a more humane society for all" (Akhtar 1992 quoted in Batliwala 1994:131). And again: "True empowerment is not a condition which can be bestowed by one group on another but is, rather, an on-going process by which the disempowered seek to fulfil their own needs and preserve their own rights" (Swift and Levin 1987:84).

These definitions of empowerment stress the aspect of 'power within' people, and try to address aspects of hidden power.

Some academics and development practitioners believe that empowerment is about gaining control or changing the structural context in which actors live. For example: The development of the ability and capacity to cope constructively with the forces that undermine and hinder coping; the achievement of some reasonable control over one's destiny (Pinderhughes, 1983). Or:

Empowerment is about the creation of political, legal, socio-cultural and economic environment that would facilitate, encourage and enable the powerless (i.e. the poor) to influence policies, decisions, actions on their behalf (Sharma, 2003).

"At a personal level, empowerment refers to the process whereby people are enabled to gain the resources that help them to live in optimal conditions, in ways that they would choose. While these resources are partly psychological, they are also educational, economic and political. People can have self-confidence, self-esteem and the knowledge necessary to influence their environment but be disempowered by the community or political system in which they live"(Bolaffi et al. 2003: 85).

In these definitions of empowerment the visible dimension of power, but more specifically the hidden power dimension, is emphasised, linked to 'power to', power over and power within.

In FFS empowerment is also viewed as farmers gaining control over their own lives. As John Pontius et al. (2002: 3) wrote in an overview of the history and status of FFS activities in Asia: "[e]mpowerment reflects the developmental process whereby farmers become able to identify factors that inhibit their control over their lives and the means to resolve those issues". Experiential learning introduced in the FFS facilitates this process. FFS practitioners (Ooi, 1998; Pontius et al., 2002; Bartlett, 2004) assume that this process of discovery or experiential learning continues after FFS and that farmers practice this in other crops than the ones practiced in FFS, and even take it further into their daily existence, solving problems in their community and social life.

Power in this definition is considered as an 'asset' and not as something relational. The key dimension of power considered by FFS policy-makers is the visible dimension; there is no attention for agenda setting or conditions of access and control over resources at household level, the hidden power dimension. The invisible power dimension, required for real transformation is not addressed in FFS.

Batliwala and others emphasise that real empowerment can only take place when there is a change in the structure, a transformation of unequal power relations:

Empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power (Batliwala 1994); "Empowerment is the process of awareness and capacity-building leading to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action" (Karl, 1995:14); and empowerment is about freedom to choose and achieve different outcomes (Sen 1999).

Some authors include the element of poverty and social exclusion: "Empowerment expresses the idea that disadvantaged and poor people increase their 'freedom of choice and bargaining power in relation to ... more powerful groups'" (Adnan et al, 1992, in Neefjes 2000: 100) or "Empowerment ... refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied them" (Kabeer 1999: 436). And: "Empowerment is the process of awareness and capacity-building, which increases the participation and decision-making power of citizens and may potentially lead to transformative action which will change opportunity structures to an inclusive and equalising direction" (Andersen and Siim, 2004:2).

For me empowerment is the interaction between access and control over resources, exercising agency, expanding the room for manoeuvre in an institutional setting, leading to transformation of power relations, addressing all three dimensions of power.

All these different definitions reflect different positions and objectives of individuals and organisations and they might change over time, following new insights, often based on academic debates. In the early years the 'power' in empowerment was seen as an asset, a resource and only in the 1990s it was considered as social relational. This is reflected in the later views on empowerment, including UNDP's changed definition of empowerment. In 1998 the organisation defined empowerment as: "full participation of people in the decisions and processes that shape their lives" (UNDP 1998: 8). Then empowerment was viewed in the context of policies and programmes designed to strengthen people's capacity to respond to

their needs and priorities. Civil society organisations were seen as mediators for people's empowerment through a focus on strengthening these mediating structures. At that time in the academic world, definitions of empowerment were already revised and issues of power relations were given importance. As is often the case, the academic world is ahead of the development agencies, using renewed insights and redefining concepts. Then in 2004 UNDP defines empowerment "as the process of transforming existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power." (UNDP, 2004: 12). This interpretation is also very similar to UNDP's approach to human development which is defined as "creating an environment where people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interest ... to be able to participate in the life of the community" (UNDP 2004: 1). In 1998 UNDP considered empowerment as a process facilitated by 'outsiders' related to capacity-building, enhancing participation in decision-making. In 2004 the organisation considered changes in power relations, thus structural transformation, and people's own role as a key to empowerment.

This discussion makes clear that there are many definitions and that there is no agreement on the concept. I agree with Zimmerman (1984) that a single definition of empowerment may make attempts to achieve it prescription-like, or in a technical way, contradicting the very concept of empowerment. This vagueness of the word empowerment has an advantage "so it gives us breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means" (Batliwala, 1993: 48). But Rowland (1995: 105) correctly suggests: "The concept of 'empowerment', if it is used precisely and deliberately, can help to focus thought, planning, and action in development. However, when its use is careless, deliberately vague, or sloganising, it risks becoming degraded and valueless."

Empowerment cannot be fully understood if the process of disempowerment is not analysed (Kabeer, 2001). Empowerment is a process in which those who have been denied choice acquire the ability to make choices, in other words a process of change, from a situation in which people were disempowered. Kabeer (2001) distinguishes between two choices: strategic life choices, those which represent valued ways of 'being and doing', and the other more everyday choices which follow once the first choices have been made. These choices can be evaluated in their transformative potential, the extent to which these choices have the prospect for challenging and destabilising social inequalities and the extent to which they merely express and reproduce these inequalities. I agree with Kabeer's position that: "power operates not only through constraints on people's ability to make choice, but also through their preferences and values and hence the choices that they may make" (Kabeer, 2001: 25). She identifies different levels of change. Empowerment can reflect change at:

- Deeper levels: structural relations of caste/gender/class (invisible power);
- Intermediate levels: institutional rules and resources (hidden power); and
- Immediate levels: individual resources, agency and achievements (ibid.:27).

To be meaningful empowerment must ultimately encompass individual, organisational and structural or institutional levels.

Batliwala (1993) defined this process of change as a transformation of the relation of power between individuals and social groups, transforming social power in three critical ways, by:

1. Challenging the ideologies that justify social inequality (such as gender and caste);

2. Changing prevailing patterns of access and control over economic, natural and intellectual resources; and
3. Transforming the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures (such as family, state, education, church, media and market).

I agree with both Batliwala and Kabeer that empowerment is relational and should be regarded a process of social transformation that must encompass individual, institutional and structural levels.

In my discussion of the question whether or how FFS contributes to empowerment in a way as foreseen by FFS policymakers, by applying the experiential learning approach leading to a process of power changes, I follow Kabeer's model of empowerment (2001). Naila Kabeer uses the following three elements: Resources (means) – agency (process) – achievements (outcome).

In this formula, agency is the key concept, because it concerns the individual, the subject of empowerment. I see these elements linked, not in a linear way but in a cyclical movement, a continuous process, whereby the outcome influences the resources and so on. In many occasions a change in achievements (ends) brings about a further change in the means or resources of empowerment. How we precisely define empowerment within our projects will depend upon the specific individuals and contexts involved (Bailey, 1992). I see this process taking place in a given context. Agency is a concept that is context dependent. We are all influenced by the social contexts (structures, institutions, rules, norms) in which we find ourselves, but we are not simply determined by these contexts, we also help in shaping them. The institutional environment or context shapes the opportunities people have. A woman can travel by bus to go to the city, but in Nepalese society she is expected to stay at home or travel with a male family member. It is not the woman's agency but the context that constrains her if she wants to go shopping (Long, 2001).

Instead of attempting to locate, measure or label agency, I try to understand how farmers in Nepal as a result of FFS can put agency in practice, that leads to empowerment.

7.4 Contextualisation of access to resources and gender

Empowerment entails a change in terms of which resources are acquired as much as an increased chance to access the resources. The terms on which people gain access to and decision-making over resources are as important as the resources themselves when the issue of empowerment is being considered. Access and control over these resources are influenced by contextual circumstances. These contexts can be social, cultural but also historical. Access may be conditional on highly clientelist forms of dependency relationships or extremely exploitative conditions of work based on historically inherited associations or it may be achieved in ways which offer dignity and a sense of self-esteem.

In Nepal access to resources and exercising agency is influenced by the cultural history of patron-client relationships, Hindu beliefs, caste and ethnic differentiation and discrimination, but also strong patriarchal norms and values. Also current social changes such as male outmigration, the rise of the Maoist movement, the feminisation of agriculture, democratisation of education, and urbanisation have an impact on agency and control over resources.

Economic factors also influence the availability of resources. People with more financial capital have more assets, such as land. Access to land is important in determining farming opportunities and FFS participation. Only farmers who have access to land are eligible participants in FFS; although not always explicit, land ownership is a criterion for participant selection. For most people in rural Nepal land tenure arrangements are historically linked to feudalism, clientelism and patronage (see Chapter 2). Land ownership is skewed, with 7.5% of farmers still owning nearly a third of the farming area at least another 10% of rural households have absolutely no home or land at all (half a million rural households) (DFID, 2010).

Patriarchy or caste influence the access and control over resources by certain groups. In Nepal it is mostly men who own land, who inherit assets such as the parental house and land. While women traditionally own little or no land particularly legally recorded, this is suddenly changing with an introduced waiver of registration fees when land is recorded in the name of a woman. This policy change made it lucrative for men to register land in a female household member's name, thereby expanding the household assets. The proportion of such transactions doubled in 2008. Uptake may reflect a genuine change in attitudes, but may also reflect use of a fortuitous new mechanism for families to contribute to cover up the total size of properties (DFID, 2010). Some FFS women interviewees said that nowadays they have more access to resources such as land: "I also got land rights from my husband and mother and father-in-law" (Juna, 38, Sindhupalchowk, interview, 2009). It is hard to tell if this is a result from FFS participation, but it is clear that FFS participation took place at a time that women started gaining access to important resources such as land.

Caste and ethnicity, particularly in the *terai*, strongly correlate with levels of landholding and landlessness; high castes own more and rent in less. By agro-ecological zone, inequity in ownership is greatest in the *terai* mostly populated by Dalits, one of Nepal's poorest ethnic groups. Here most large holdings are found and most outright landlessness exists. According to the last government census 1.3 million out of 4.2 million families in Nepal did not own land in 2001⁵⁴. With an estimated four members per family, the estimated landless population was 5.5 million people - out of a population of 21 million, or 26 percent - mostly members of the Dalit and other *terai* communities. According to the local NGO Dalit Welfare Organisation, 15 percent of Dalits living in the western hills of Nepal and 44 percent of those in *terai* were landless, out of six million Dalits nationwide in 2009.

Finally, the recent socio-political situation also triggered new roles for women. In Sindhupalchowk women reported:

"We learnt everything that men also can do. We can also carry dead bodies, when men are not there to do this. Our men have left for various reasons: for the Maoists, for the army, for jobs outside this village, some went abroad: Iraq, Israel, Korea.

We are not embarrassed to do men's work when they return. In fact men do not do much work here. We can tell them what to do, but they are not doing it. Also when they come from their work they do not want to do anything at home." (Pipalgaun, interview, 2009)

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Census 2011 land ownership data were not released at the time of writing, June 2012.

In most Farmer Field School project documents and in discussions with project staff farmers are depicted as a homogenous group irrespective of gender. However, in practice men and women in Nepal have different tasks and responsibilities in farming. Women and men have unequal access to resources and are affected by policies and measures in different ways (Joshi, 2000). These differences are well described in an early study by Acharya and Bennett (1981), and still confirmed by later authors such as Indra Majupuria (2007). Individuals face differences in access and control of resources such as land and capital, but also education whereby men traditionally dominate women, and elderly women have a different social position than younger women. Joshi (2000: 250) found: "Nepal's patriarchal culture restricts women so much that they have few decision-making roles inside or outside the household". The low status of women, systems of patrilineal descent, patri-local residence and rules of inheritance interact to isolate and subordinate women throughout the country.

Many women mentioned that they are busy during the day with preparing food for the family members, preparing kids to go to school and make sure the children do their homework. Women are occupied with domestic chores and farm work. Still many find time to attend FFS. "We wake up earlier to finish our duties so we can go to the FFS" says Rani (interview, 2009).

Nepalese women are still less mobile than men; women often have little say in what they want to do. The extended family and the farm is where their activities take place. Men, on the other hand, are usually the ones who move into public spaces to take part in community activities or local politics. In the case when there are several projects taking place man can order their wives to take part in their place. Narayan Parajuli said: "My younger sister had to take part in FFS, because I had no time. I was involved in the establishment of a drinking water tank at that time" (interview 2009, Yamdi, Kavre district).

Gender issues are "interwoven systematically into the basic social structure of Nepalese society, as are other traditional values" (UNDP HDR 2004: 31- 32). Not only gender but also caste and ethnicity are part of a complex, interlinked, deeply hierarchical social structure that forms the basis for social exclusion and poverty in Nepal (Bennett and Gajurel, 2006).

Data from Kavre's DADO of 19 FFS (conducted over a period of 1999 to 2009) with a total of 144 male and 336 female participants reveal that 50% belong to Brahmin/Chettrie whereby most are from Brahmin origin (36%). Four out of these 19 FFS consist of Janajati participants only: Tamang or Danuwar. The total of Janajati participants over this 10 year period was almost 33%. The Dalit participants were less than 3%. The remaining 14% consisted of Newar.⁵⁵

In several places there have been changes in the participants of FFS. In Sanga, for instance, I observed in the first FFS batch of 1998 mainly male Brahmin participants, in the second FFS of 2002 mainly women, belonging to the higher caste, while in the most recent FFS in that same village in 2005 the participants belonged to the Janajatis. These changes also reflect a change in the political environment: first males from higher castes were the target group, then women as a result of the international and national Women in Development (WID) policy, and nowadays there is more national and international attention for ethnic issues and social inclusion of minorities.

⁵⁵ Although some claim that Newari belong to the Janajati, in my research I do not elaborate on this discussion. In the research areas Newari people did not belong to an ethnic minority, in fact were mostly a privileged group.

Among the 153 interviewees, only 5 were from Salit caste (See chapter 2 for more information on caste). Dalits and other poor citizens hardly participate in the FFS, due to several reasons, such as not being invited to the FFS training, having no farm land, no education, no time, or living far from the training site. If a Dalit farmer does not take part in the FFS, this is not in the first place because he cannot do the exercises, but because the community relations, the context, constraints his participation, not his agency. Lower caste and/or poor people need to work and so have no time to take training courses like FFS. This was confirmed by Bishwakarma, a Dalit in Kavre (interview, 2009):

“Even if we had known about FFS, my wife and I have no time for such training, we have to work all day to meet our needs.”

In a study among 40 participants in Kavre, 20 male and 20 female (Regmi, 2010) most men said that their family expected them to participate. It was tradition that men in the families took part in agricultural extension activities. Also 35 of these 40 farmers said that men were free to participate and did not need permission from the household or family, while women were considered too busy to take part due to household duties. Also women, according to this study, needed permission from the other household members before they could participate in an agricultural training. Only if other women also were taking part, and if they could combine it with household roles, women might get permission.

Gender and caste determine access to education in Nepal. Education is important in FFS. It is often a criterion to become a FFS participant. Most agricultural technicians expressed a preference to work with educated farmers. If one has the ambition to become a farmer trainer it is crucial to be able to read and write. Information from the Kavre DADO showed that out of 19 FFS, only in 2 FFS were there many participants who were just literate, which means they can read a simple short text and write their own name. These 2 FFS groups consisted of women only, one with Brahmin women and one with Janajati women. As women are often less educated or have less chances to go to school in Nepal, they have less chance to become a farmer trainer. Uneducated elderly women have fewer chances to participate in FFS, educated men or young boys and girls usually accompany them and take the lead in field activities and discussions.

As mentioned by FFS facilitators, mostly participants who have a low level of education cannot actively participate in the learning process. During the sessions, the participants have to make notes, make drawings on paper and engage in minor calculations – activities that demand a minimum level of literacy and education. FFS facilitators in Tanahun said: “The level of education of farmers is one of the important factors for actively involving in the learning activities during FFS sessions”. “The level of education of participant farmers is also an important factor for active learning and developing expertise of the participant farmers” (Tanahun, group interview, 2009).

However, considering all these issues was beyond the scope of this research. As gender is at the basis of all forms of discrimination and a fundamental ordering principle, I have focused on empowerment and gender rather than on the differences between the different social categories of women and men in this study.

7.5 Farmers' perceptions of empowerment

As empowerment very much reflects a personal experience or feeling I asked farmers themselves to define empowerment. I talked with men and women who did not participate in FFS and men and women, who did, to see if participation in FFS had an impact on their view on empowerment. Then I compared this with the way it is defined by the Farmer Field School trainers, junior technicians or agricultural extension workers who facilitate FFS.

In the summer of 2008 and 2009, together with VHL Master students Ramesh Humagain, Nalini Lamichhane, Rabindra Sapkota, I conducted semi-structured interviews (SSI) with 79 farmers (42 women and 37 men) who had not taken part in FFS (later referred to as non-FFS farmers). These farmers came from places where they did not have a Farmer Field School.

We used the same SSI key words in interviews with 74 farmers (54 women and 20 men) who had completed FFS training (later referred to as: FFS farmers). I compared these two groups to obtain an insight of the difference FFS participation makes in farmers' perceptions of empowerment. Additionally, I conducted five focus group discussions with respectively district agricultural office staff (twice), and with junior technicians (three times). I had two focus group discussions with NGO FFS trainers. They were all men, because the DADO and the local NGO office are dominated by men and there was no female staff present. They all had been involved in FFS. Furthermore I consulted FFS project documents.

7.5.1 Findings

Initially I expected that farmers would be unfamiliar with the word 'empowerment', since it is a word mostly used by well-educated Nepali. Also it sounds quite 'formal' in Sanskrit: *sashaktikaran*, too sophisticated in my view for farmers. But how wrong my assumption was, how prejudiced I proved to be when it appeared that 95% of the farmers interviewed were familiar with the word and had clear ideas about its meaning.

Perceptions of empowerment of women with/without FFS

In lively interviews women explained their views on empowerment. In the table below (1) the data collected from women who had taken part in FFS and women who had never attended FFS are presented.

Table 7.1 Empowerment according women farmers with/without FFS

Empowerment is...	Non-FFS Women N=42	%	Empowerment is...	FFS women N=54	%
Awareness	17	41	Awareness through education	4	7
Self-reliant, strong	7	17	Self-confidence, ability	13	24
Women development	5	12	Speak	4	7
All in household in good condition	4	10	Take part in decision-making	2	4
Express own feeling	3	7	To involve in groups and development work	22	41
Free, can move from home	1	2	Give women strength, ability and freedom	2	4
Do not know	5	12	enable those who are unable	2	4
			Unite all	3	6
Total	42	100		54	100

Source: Research data 2008 and 2009

For women who never took part in FFS, empowerment meant mostly awareness or being self-reliant. With awareness they meant: becoming aware of gender inequalities. Some added: empowerment means women's development and self-reliance. Ten out of 42 women specifically emphasised 'women': "women awareness, women development, give women freedom". For them empowerment is a term associated in particular with women. They explained that women were often targeted for empowerment by NGOs but also by the governments' Women Development Office. Most of their activities were about raising awareness. Generally speaking, women without FFS experience see empowerment as increasing individual strength, personal growing. This is line with Mosedale who states that "One needs first Power Within: self-esteem and self confidence. In a sense all power starts from here, such assets are necessary before anything else can be achieved (Mosedale, 2005:250).

Women who took part in FFS mainly considered self-confidence and involvement in work and group activities as empowerment. In Sindhupalchowk a group of FFS women said: "We learnt to give an answer. We learnt to become less shy, we learnt to interact with JT/DADO". (Pipalgaun, interview, 2009)

Some women also mentioned an increase in mobility as empowerment:

"My husband encouraged me to participate in FFS, now I have no hesitation in attending training, tours and community meeting." (Kavre, female farmer, interview 2008)

Collective action is one aspect that has been encouraged by FFS participation through the weekly group sessions. Many women mentioned group work as their perception of empowerment. They said that they achieved empowerment through group work or

collective activities. They explained that through the weekly group sessions they felt increased social support and solidarity. Bartlett (2004) calls this the social capital route to empowerment. In a case study from Bangladesh, as in Nepal, social capital has contributed to empowerment rather than individual strength.

I expected that there would be a difference between older and younger women, that age would be a factor of difference regarding their vision on empowerment, but there was not much significant difference. Women from all ages talked about self-reliance and group activities. It must be noted though that women in the age 20-27 talked a bit more about decision-making than the older or younger women.

A woman aged 22 said:

“Taking part in decision-making, and reaching decision-making position”.

Another woman, aged 27 stated that: “Able to make a decision is empowerment”.

Women who said they do not know what to say about empowerment were all older than 40 and illiterate. Women from the Janajati community, in particular Tamang, mentioned that FFS participation “enabled those who are unable”. During interviews in Kavre district 2008 and 2009 Newari women talked about “uniting all”.

Perceptions of empowerment of men with/without FFS

In interviews with men (37 without FFS and 22 with FFS experience) the answers were different from the women’s responses, as shown in table 7.2.

Table 7.2 Ideas of men with/without FFS regarding empowerment

Empowerment is...	Non-FFS Men N=37	%	Empowerment is...	FFS men N=20	%
Group action for society, active in social work	20	54	Group action for society, active in social work	8	40
Self-development, Self-confidence and decision-making power	9	24	Self development	3	15
To use power and knowledge for positive change	4	11	Realise people’s needs; enable those who are unable	4	20
Awareness of development	2	5	Full awareness thru education	2	10
Do not know	2	5	Put balance between men and women	1	5
			Unite all	1	5
			Speak	1	5
Total	37	100%		20	100%

Source: Research data 2008 and 2009

Men who did not take part in FFS considered empowerment mainly as being active in social work or as one said: 'group action in society', or even stronger: 'to move the group with unity'. From the answers of men in rural areas it is clear that their idea of empowerment is far more focused on individual contributions to social development, on action outside the household. There is not much difference between men with or without FFS experience.

Men and women from the Newari community talked about 'unity' in relation to empowerment. One Newari man said: "Every Janajati should be united to save the nation" (Lalitpur, interview, 2009). A Newari woman expressed: "Empowerment means to be in unity for national development" (Kavre, interview, 2009). And another woman said: "All Nepalese should feel unity for national development" (Kavre, interview, 2009). Several Newari villagers talked about the exclusion of Janajatis, but it must be noted that the Newaris, in particular in the area around Kathmandu and in the research areas, are not a marginalised group. In fact they are the most educated in these areas. Bennett (2006) explained that the Newar ethnic group members who live in the Kathmandu valley, are close to the circle where the power is and are often treated well in comparison with other ethnic groups.

After FFS participation the women's view on empowerment seems to shift in the direction of the men's view on empowerment. Their focus on group work and social activities for development has increased. More than men, women look at personal development when they talk about empowerment: involvement in decision-making, becoming self-sufficient and able, becoming self-confident, and taking initiative.

When I asked farmers about how they experienced empowerment as a result of FFS participation women mentioned the group work and the collective singing or speaking in front of others (18/54 = 33%); the actions they were not used to before. Through FFS they were breaking with their habitual shy behaviour in public. Women gained self-confidence, gained a voice in the weekly group sessions, as a result of the social space, the FFS team spirit and solidarity that was provided in the meetings. Indeed, this 'social capital route' of empowerment is rather different from the 'human capital route' that men follow in empowerment in Nepal (Bartlett, 2005). For almost all the women taking part in FFS it was their first time in participating in an agricultural training, which was previously considered a men's business. Until recently agricultural technicians only approached men for agricultural training or demonstrations. Women also expressed that they now felt more appreciated as a partner in farming. "My husband wants to know what I think about agriculture, since I have taken part in FFS. Also my in-laws respect my new skills and knowledge" (interview, Kavre, 2009).

For men speaking and group involvement was also important, but less explicit than for women. The men who talked about gaining confidence through presenting and singing were mostly younger than 20 years. One Dalit man said: "FFS gives a chance to unknown people" implying that he had felt excluded before.

Sunmaya Karki can explain elaborately what she learnt in FFS eight years ago. They had also fun she says. Their group consisted mainly of women and they have registered as a group. They meet occasionally. Their leader was a Brahmin man. He could read and write plus he had the contacts with the government offices, so he is better suitable than any of the women, she says. He is also free to move and visit Kathmandu, while most women were home-bound (Kavre, interview 2009). This phenomenon I have observed often: women in

groups requesting men to do their book-keeping or be the leader and maintain contacts with the outside world, not challenging the status quo, the established relations, but using the established labour division to their benefit.

Most women mentioned that family support was a prerequisite for empowerment, while for men this does not seem an issue. These examples illustrate the level of empowerment that Kabeer (2001) calls the immediate level, there is not much evidence of change related to intermediate or deeper levels. FFS affects daily life choices for women related to farming. FFS does not address strategic choices (Kabeer, 2001), but some participants indicate changes in their relationships which might be influenced by FFS participation.

In some cases FFS participants reported changes in relationships with their husband, in-laws or other community members. Some mentioned that they will treat their children differently than they themselves had experienced. These changes are illustrated by the following answers to my question whether FFS participation had made a change:

“In the time before FFS my father and mother in-law treated me as domestic helper these days that is changed and the relationship with my husband is good, he does not deny what I do.”(female farmer, Lalitpur 2008)

“These days the relationship with father and mother in-law has improved. I treat my son and daughter equally with food, education and other things” (female farmer, Kavre, 2009)

“The relationship with all family members has changed these days, my husband helps me in household work, I treat my son and daughter equally”. (female farmer, Kaski, 2009)

“My relation with my husband and father- and mother in-law have changed; I get more freedom, I am free to participate in group and social activities.”(female farmer,Tanahun, 45)

“Yes, previously permission had to be obtained from husband to do something but these days I can do it on my own. I treat my son and daughter equally. I live in a different family from my parents-in-law. The relationship is good. (female farmer, Kaski, 2009)

“Yes, previously my husband decided everything in the farm, these days he takes my idea to make a decision. I also got land rights from my husband.” (female farmer, Tanahun, 2008)

A few women said that their husbands took advice from them. This was a new experience for them, and it meant that their newly acquired skills in FFS were valued. "Yes, my husband always takes advice from me" (female farmer, Kaski, 2009).

Many FFS trainees stressed that these days (in contrast to the recent past!) they send both boys and girls to school. This is a break with tradition when usually boys got preference in

attending school. “We treat son and daughter equally in education and health” (female farmer, Lalitpur, 2009).

If we apply the theory of Kabeer (2001) on these results regarding the linkage between resources, agency and outcome, it is evident that an increase in knowledge and social capital leads to an increase in agency and capabilities. Through participation in FFS men and particularly women expand their framework of information, knowledge and analysis. It enlarges their room for manoeuvre, their space for negotiation. They get involved in a process that enables them to discover new options, new possibilities and eventually make better informed decisions in farming.

This process, however, does not take place independently of its structural and institutional context. For women in particular this process took place in the group they were in with FFS. They felt safe, secure and confident to act in a group with like-minded people with whom they interacted on a regular basis in the weekly FFS sessions. The social space and solidarity that was provided in the group contributed to their empowerment, also in the wider society. This was also found by Bartlett (2005) among women who took part in FFS in Bangladesh.

Yet, when we look at individual cases (below) we learn that empowerment is not a simple formula as described by Kabeer, but a complex and a multi-dimensional process, influenced by the institutional context in which it takes place.

Laxmi's case

Laxmi is a married woman with two children. She is 37 years old, Brahmin. She took part in FFS 7 years ago and was an enthusiastic member. The government trainer liked her, admired her enthusiasm, her learning attitude and asked her to become a farmer trainer. “Initially I had no idea about becoming trainer, but when people asked me a lot about problems they faced in the field I became encouraged. I felt it is my responsibility to share my knowledge with others. And I really enjoy learning about agriculture. Sewa is *euta dharma ho*: (giving service is a part of faith/religion) so I help people”. There were more men who also became farmer trainer, but eventually they all moved abroad in search for work.

Laxmi completed another FFS as a trainer (July 2009). The FFS was difficult this time: the (all Brahmin men) farmers used a lot of pesticide and the crop (cucumber) failed due to hailstorm and insect pests. Still she smiles confidently and says: “It was a good learning opportunity for me”.

Initially her husband was not happy with her being a farmer trainer. She said that the whole village gossiped about her: “She had become arrogant, she was too proud”. The villagers, in particular the women, accused her for not helping their village, just helping others. But Laxmi did not let her work get disturbed by them. She encouraged her husband to come and see her in action. She invited him on the last day, the field day when FFS participants show other farmers and officials what they have learnt. They usually dance and sing songs and make a nice show. Laxmi said: “I just pretended not to know how to use the camera, how to play the cassette. So I asked help from my husband”. He came along, operated her camera and music player as she had requested. This way he observed her performance and was convinced that she was doing a good job, (...that she was not playing with other men.) Her husband is supportive that's why she can do this work, as long as she does not neglect her duties as mother and housewife.

For the other women in her village she conducted a Farmer Field School in her free time. Now they respect her too, she says, because they learnt a lot and profited from their new skills. Laxmi is happy that she has had this opportunity; she has more chances in life than her mother she says. In her turn she also wants to give more opportunities to her children. She has not been to school herself, but her own daughter is going, just like their son.

Laxmi's decision-making power related to income and children's education has increased, but still her husband is the main breadwinner and makes the final decisions in her household. She feels treated equally by her husband and respected in her role in her household, in that sense the power dynamics at household level are transformed to some extent.

With the use of new skills and relationship with government offices she has gained a higher status, respect. But has it changed power relations as Batliwala refers to? She has more access and control over intellectual and natural resources than before FFS. She has proven that she, as uneducated woman, can give FFS training, and thereby challenged the prevalent dominant feeling that only male FFS participants can become good farmer trainers. Still the higher government officials do not appreciate her (please shut your mouth about FFS today' when asked to attend a district meeting). According to an informant the male government officers are jealous of her popularity. She is highly appreciated by women farmers in her district.

Laxmi has *power within* due to several aspects – her willpower, knowledge, a character that does not give up easily. Being a Brahmin gave her the connection with the trainer, and acceptance in other Brahmin communities where she has conducted FFS. She has convincing power; she can influence her husband and the other villagers. She has to fulfil certain gendered tasks, but there is room for manoeuvre. The roles she has as a woman and as a Brahmin are not rigid, they have changed. She is allowed to work, her mobility has increased for instance.

Can we say that Laxmi is empowered? With the use of new skills and relationship with government offices she has gained a higher status, respect. But has it changed power relations as Batliwala refers to? She has more access and control over intellectual and natural resources than before FFS. She has proven that she, as uneducated woman, can give FFS training, and thereby challenged the prevalent dominant feeling that only male FFS participants can become good farmer trainers. In line with the Women in Development paradigm the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives is happy with more women involvement. Still the higher government officials in Tanahun and surroundings do not appreciate her; "Please shut your mouth about FFS today" is whispered in her ears when she is asked to attend a district meeting). According to an informant the male government officers are jealous of her popularity. She is highly appreciated by women farmers in her district.

Laxmi's decision-making power related to income and children's education has increased, but still her husband is the main breadwinner and makes the final decisions in her household. Laxmi can make more decisions regarding farming than before her FFS training. She feels treated equally by her husband and respected in her role in her household, in that sense the power structures at household level are transformed to some extent. She can make choices which were previously denied to her (historically, culturally). She can conduct training in Tanahun district and earn some income, but only if it does not affect her duties at

home. She can buy a sari without asking permission from her husband. Laxmi is still tied in her role as mother and wife. Her own ideas might have changed but the external forces have remained more or less untouched by her participation in FFS. The prevailing pattern of access and control over resources have been slightly changed in her advantage, structures and ideologies determined by patriarchy and religion have not been transformed, just got a little bit stirred perhaps, but one way or the other changes have been set in motion. If not directly for Laxmi, her daughter might be able to get more choices in life, thanks to Laxmi's pioneering work.

Govinda's case

Govinda is a Brahmin man, married; age 42 and he completed his SLC years ago. He lived in Kavre, in a remote village, 4 hours by bus from the district capital on a road that is not accessible during rainy season. There was no money to continue his education and he joined his father and mother on the farm. He is married and has two children, a son and a girl who both go to boarding school. They have a small farm, and two cows. His wife is mainly doing the farm work. Govinda is always keen to take part in government agriculture training or NGO training because he hopes this will give him new opportunities, preferably give him the possibility to move outside his farm. When there was FFS, 5 years ago, he took part and he grabbed the opportunity to become a farmer trainer. Now he is occasionally employed by a local NGO to conduct FFS, while his wife is doing the farm work.

He conducted 2 FFS so far. One FFS took place in the neighbouring village and one in his own village both in cauliflower. He is well respected in his village because this new crop brought a lot of change in his community: they started commercial vegetable production and increased their income. In particular young men (20-30 years) took up the agro-business.

Govinda got confidence and feels powerful because he is a man from the upper caste and is part of an influential network in his village. He has knowledge of farming; he received several trainings on agriculture. He is often contacted by DADO as a resource person or model farmer. Also education gave him power.

Can we say the Govinda is empowered? Govinda has the knowledge and skills to be a good farmer and after FFS became a farmer trainer. Does Govinda have the ability to make choices previously denied to him? FFS participation gave him more knowledge about farming, but because he used the opportunity to become a farmer trainer, he left active involvement in farming. This work earned him a little income and prestige. He has the network and good relation with government officers from the district agriculture office. The local politicians respect him in his village. Due to his work with local farmers in particular Maoists respect him, and that is quite useful in this remote area where Maoists are in control.

The context he lives in, a remote village with limited facilities and little contact with the outside world restricts his opportunities to get more assignments. His network is limited, and consists mainly of government contacts in DADO and although he can conduct FFS training, when the government does not allocate financial resources for training he is left jobless, which in practice turns out to be most of the time. Living in a remote rural village created his feeling of disempowerment. He has little chance to contact other service providers. The location he lives is still remote and rarely visited by government officers or NGO workers. Still increased prestige, respect and capability are rewards after FFS, and can be considered empowerment. When Govinda got a job as farmer trainer, his wife's workload increased: "I cannot help her anymore with agricultural work".

He has had a few opportunities to earn an income as farmer trainer, but because he has left farming, he has become more vulnerable due to making himself dependent on income from the limited opportunities giving FFS. There is limited shift in power relations: the government has given him authority to train farmers, a task that was earlier limited to government officials, but the government decides when and where. Govinda has no control over his income; in fact he has somehow become more vulnerable and more dependent on the government for income.

In the same area young farmers, from different castes and ethnic groups have invested in farming. They have become skilful commercial farmers, selling ginger, vegetables and potatoes. They have direct links with traders and do not depend on DADO for advice. In an interview in 2009 they told me that they learnt a lot by doing. They have contacts with UNDP and are involved in VDC governance activities.

Govinda's choice to leave agriculture and become more dependent of trainer's income has not really increased but diverted his options. It has not improved his autonomy. He has challenged the ideology that farmers cannot become trainers, but in his household he maintains gender inequality conditions (or even made the situation worse) by increasing his wife's workload.

Govinda is using his old network (upper caste government officers) while in the area a new network has been established with young progressive new farmers from different caste and ethnic backgrounds. He does not make optimal use of his resources and agency, e.g. get actively involved in farming, work closely with the young dynamic guys in his village on cash crop production rather he waits passively for the next government officer to drink tea in his house. With the young generation, he could join forces and challenge prevailing ideologies for instance regarding the established caste, state and market structures.

The case of Maya and Devi

Devi and Maya are from the same village: in a remote hilly area, far from the main road, in Kavre district. Devi has just completed high school and Maya is uneducated. Devi is a Chettri girl in her early twenties and about to move for further studies to Kathmandu. Maya is a Dalit woman, 38 and married with four children. Devi received information about FFS, but Maya did not hear about it. In the village we meet the two communities separately. First the Brahmin/Chettri group explains about the FFS and how it was organised. The Brahmin/Chettri community explains about their farming system and how they faced difficulties in the revolution period: "We were afraid of the Maoists, we used to hide for them".

According to Devi and other Brahmin and Chettri persons sitting in the group: "Dalits are not interested in learning, we called them for the FFS but they did not come". Speaking with the Dalit community on the other hand, they are genuinely surprised to hear that there was a FFS in their village: they did not know! The Brahmin NGO trainer did not inform the Dalit community in this village. As a result Maya and others could not attend, the whole Dalit community felt excluded. They would have liked to attend FFS training; they are keen to learn new farming techniques. The NGO trainer had difficulties finding participants in the Brahmin/Chettri community among the adults, so he mobilised the youth. Devi as a girl had to attend as her parents told her too. Her brother who is 2 years older was free to refuse participation in the FFS. After the FFS almost all participants went to study or work and most left the village. In a discussion unanimously they said that they were not interested in farming and that the training was fun but useless for them. They did not practice any of the

newly acquired skills in farming. Devi did not challenge but mainly confirmed prevailing ideologies.

Maya is a woman from the Dalit community, living on top of a hill, in Kavre, far from the main road. For drinking water she had to walk 2 hours to this main road, until recently. Of late a drinking water tank has been built in their village, with assistance from an NGO. Five years ago she heard by accident - while collecting water - that there was a FFS in the village near the main road. Although this is not her village and she has to walk 2 hours just to get there she was determinant to participate. She took part with another Dalit woman, and learnt a lot about a new crop for her: cauliflower. However, being the only Dalits in a group dominated by high caste women she and her friend felt uncomfortable in the FFS. A few Brahmin women, who gave her and her friend an inferior feeling, however, dominated the FFS: they knew everything and Maya felt stupid. Still she enjoyed learning new skills. Now after the training it is difficult to apply these skills because due to lack of land and water they cannot grow vegetables.

The men and women in the Dalit community in her village stress that they want to take part in training or group activities such as FFS but not in isolation. They want to mix with other castes, but they do not want to be a small minority so upper castes can dominate them. Maya and her community (Dalit) members explain that things have gone better recently. During the Maoist struggle they got support from the Maoists. 'The movement gave us Dalits a voice'. They were not afraid of them, but were hopeful that the Maoist would make things better for Dalits. Now they realise that Maoists have sided with other politicians in Kathmandu and that they have to fend for themselves. "The Maoists helped us to raise our voice but now we have to use this voice and our joint forces to change the situation for Dalits". The drinking water tank was built by an NGO who wanted to support lower caste people.

What about Maya, the Dalit woman who took FFS trainer: is she empowered? She gained new skills and knowledge but cannot put them to good use because of lack of water and land. At home her husband decides what to plant and that is not cauliflower but maize or millet. In the community she still feels inferior due to dominance by Brahmin women in her training. In fact she still has little power or choice. Lack of resources and an oppressing social structure of relationships hinder a transformation in her situation.

Evidently *empowerment in practice* is rather different from what development policy makers understand it to be.

7.6 Empowerment according to Farmer Field School facilitators and extension staff

Interviews with FFS facilitators showed a gap between them and farmers in respect to their view on empowerment. In focus group discussion with respectively 8 and 13 JTs (junior technicians) from the District Agricultural Development Office (DADO), they mainly talked about empowerment as an achievement or outcome when: "women dare to speak or raise their voice" or "when women are not afraid to say their name"⁵⁶. They also often express

⁵⁶ In Nepal women traditionally do not mention their name to anyone, they are called mother of..., the sister of, or the wife of, women are given a title according to their role or position in the family. This can be *kanchi* (youngest daughter), *maili* (second daughter) etc. My husband did not even know his mother's and his older sister's names.

empowerment in terms of ‘doing what they (read: farmers) have been told or taught’ or “when farmers follow what they have learnt from us”, “when they adapt the technology introduced to them”. FFS facilitators see empowerment as an outcome that can be bestowed by them, in the sense of ‘power to’.

All FFS facilitators have observed a change among farmers who participated in FFS, especially among women. This is illustrated with the following remark:

"When I meet women who have participated in FFS they approach me with a lot of questions related to farming, they are not shy to ask for advice or seeds or other information. This is not the case when I visit women farmers who have not been in FFS. They are more shy and do not talk about agriculture at all with me."
(Kavre, district officer DADO, interview July 2008)

According to the facilitators FFS leads to empowerment, through the field experiments, the trials. The FFS trainers and extension staff consider empowerment as a good or commodity that they provide to the farmers. They assume that they enable farmers to improve their lives. Unlike farmers who mainly see empowerment as a process that affects their own lives, or that occurs when they are involved in social work, or in groups interact with others, FFS trainers talk about empowerment in terms of the product of technology transfer (resources) or a behavioural change (agency) that they have observed among farmers. Among the farmers only a minority of women mentioned that improved access to seeds and technology has contributed to their empowerment.

In 2003 in a conference where several key players in FFS like policy-makers, NGOs, FAO staff, FFS facilitators came together, empowerment was discussed in relation to FFS (CIP-UPWARD, 2003). During this conference, the participants concluded that knowledge is associated with empowerment. In the FFS learning activities, weekly meetings in the fields where farmers improve their observational capabilities, data analysis and decision-making skills. The technical and practical knowledge the participants gain in the learning activities increase their confidence which is seen as a form of empowerment. In this conference participants concluded that through experimentation the learners become empowered, they learn how to work together, become able to identify problems and able to solve local problems systematically (idem). What farmers actually learn through the FFS experiential learning platform that is seen as empowerment are the following skills (Adapted from CIP-UPWARD, 2003):

1. To strengthen the problem-solving capacity and skills in order to address the problems and identify opportunities that are important to them;
2. To generate and manage knowledge and understanding for their individual and community needs;
3. To strengthen critical thinking capacity and identifying options and risks in decision-making;
4. To enhance confidence in the learning process;
5. To enhance capacity to experiment, and to test and adapt principles, guidelines, and practices according to their interests.

FFS is used as a process tool for empowerment not only by involving farmers in a set of learning steps for improved farm production, productivity and sustainability but also to empower farmers via their collective forum whereby they can discuss exiting problems, share experiences and co-develop plans for future work for their welfare (CIP-UPWARD, 2003).

The perception of empowerment as a good delivered, resembles what is referred to as the 'rendering technical' (Li, 2007) of a social process, providing a technical solution for a complex social problem disregarding the wider historical, cultural or political context. In FFS this boils down to a procedure of following a sequence of guidelines: first discovery learning about integrated pest management and crop management. When farmers are skilled in the problem-solving techniques, they are taken through a follow-up trajectory in which community development problems are addressed in a similar fashion. In training sessions such as those in IPM FFS, they are guided through the following steps: identification of the problems, listing the possibilities based upon previous experiences or theories, conducting experiments, drawing conclusions, and taking informed decisions (FAO staff, Bangkok, interview, 2002).

In Nepal also empowerment in FFS is addressed in a technical way: with participatory planning according to a set of top-down pre-defined steps, with action research also through a sequence of clearly set pre-determined steps. Also FFS groups were encouraged to register as an established organisation, as if registration was a prerequisite for collective action and empowerment.

FFS does not address the existing structural inequalities in a community, FFS does not discuss relations between higher caste and lower caste, between men and women. Still, by making a conscious selection of predominantly upper caste or women in FFS, the project does affect social relations. The actions of FFS practitioners do not take place in a vacuum.

'Empowerment' is thus approached as a technical, neutral tool, or an asset that FFS participants can be taught to use, that they can learn to 'own'. Consequently, gender differentiation, experiences of women as different from men and the relevance of institutional structures that surround the poor and disempowered farmers who for a long time were excluded from participation, were not addressed.

FFS programme officers or experts see empowerment as a way to mobilise groups and establish a forum for collective action. The following statement from an international NGO programme officer is revealing: "We consider FFS as an important means to empowerment, in the way that the FFS provides a solid and necessary basis for future group formation through the processes of discussion and the need to come to consensus. We see that some groups have matured into actual community development groups that can take responsibility for community development activities e.g. infrastructure, education, health care, etc. However, by far the most groups just continue with the income-generating activities. (e-mail communication, October 2009 with ADDA⁵⁷)

The programme officer's perception that FFS can be a vehicle for empowerment through collective action was confirmed by the perception of a local NGO in Nepal:

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ADDA: Agricultural Development Denmark Asia, an international NGO.

“To provide skills, to uplift the lower community, is empowerment. We do this with self-mobilisation of saving and conducting regular meetings by a Dalit women group.” (Oct 2009, RIMS⁵⁸)

From a neo-liberal point of view, empowerment can lead to more autonomy of farmers (Rose and Miller, 1992). In an environment where service delivery is limited due to difficult topography and limited resources, FFS can indeed contribute to farmers becoming self-reliant and in charge of their own development. This is a view that is supported by several FFS facilitators and DADO staff.

Interestingly FFS farmers have not become more autonomous, but are demanding more services from the government, in particular DADO. In Tanahun and in Kavre agricultural staff confirmed this:

“These days more farmers come to our office to demand mini-kits, seeds or training”(FGD Tanahun, 2009). Or: “we see an increase in farmers who come to our office. They want more services, they feel more confident to demand resources from us, e.g. fertiliser or extension.”(FGD, Kavre, 2009)

7.7 Discussion and conclusion

‘Empowering’ farmers has become a frequently mentioned ambition of development interventions, similarly the case of Farmer Field Schools. Empowerment is an often debated concept in the academia but in development practice it seems to be used without much debate, assuming that it is always a ‘good’ thing, having a positive impact on people in the target group. In the FFS programme too it was assumed that everybody had the same understanding of the concept of empowerment.

This research provides evidence that empowerment is a process that challenges our assumptions about the way things are and can be. Male and female FFS participants confirm that they experience empowerment, but not in the way FFS technicians and policymakers have planned.

Data showed that male and female farmers differ in their perceptions of empowerment and there is a big gap between policy makers, FFS facilitators and the farmers regarding their perception of empowerment and how it can strengthen individual or collective action.

Power, as the key element of empowerment is mostly considered an asset, by practitioners, while in academic debates power is no longer seen as a thing but a relational concept. This change in academic discussions slowly permeated the empowerment discussion. In Farmer Field Schools power is still mainly seen as an asset, and empowerment is mainly regarded as a tool. Most facilitators see empowerment as an instrument, to achieve increased production and more autonomous farmers, who can manage their own development, who can act autonomously. We have described this perception of power as a case of ‘power to’, as opposed to other forms of power such as ‘power within’ or ‘power with’.

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RIMS: Resource Identification Management Systems, a local NGO.

Interviews confirmed that empowerment is a complex, multi-faceted process, which is not easy to quantify or measure. Through participation in FFS men and in particular women expand their framework of information, knowledge and analysis. It enlarges their room for manoeuvre, their negotiation space. They get involved in a process that enables them to discover new options, new possibilities and eventually make better informed decisions in farming. An increase in knowledge, skills and income can be important for change. But training by itself does not automatically lead to empowerment. For women gaining voice in a group, the social cohesion and common solidarity provide the space for empowerment.

If we compare the different views of empowerment of men and women with and without FFS experience we see that women, who had not taken part in FFS are more focused on building awareness and self-confidence, whereas FFS women focus on group activities as well as individual growth.

Especially women that have experienced empowerment say that. Through FFS women in Nepal have gained confidence and access to resources such as knowledge and skills concerning farming as well as land. Several female farmers replied that they can now make choices which were previously denied to them historically and/or culturally. They added that this was not the result of the process of discovery learning in FFS as it is assumed by policy-makers, but due to their group participation, collective singing and presenting, and their capacity to speak in public.

Their responses reflect the traditional role of men and women in Nepal, which is for women mainly centered around the household. Where women all said that family support is a prerequisite for empowerment, men do not mentioned this at all. The men seem unaware of this fact, or take family support for granted. For women empowerment seems to be a process of expansion of their comfort zone. They have become more skilled and confident in farming, an area in which they were already active but in which they have gained more control over production processes.

Among the men there is not much difference between FFS participants and non-FFS participants in terms of their definition of empowerment. In both cases, men's definition of empowerment is more related to involvement in improvement of the society, on their actions outside the household. The men interviewed see empowerment more in terms of 'doing something good for society' through collective action.

It is clear that neither male and female farmers, nor FFS trainers see empowerment in terms of strategic life choices, critical thinking, increased decision-making, in identifying and addressing factors that restrain their lives as it is indicated in the FFS documents by the project designers. None of the FFS facilitators seemed aware of the wider objective of 'discovery learning', its link with addressing problems felt in the lives of male and female farmers in Nepal.

None of the farmers talked about solving problems they face, perhaps *becoming self-reliant* comes closest to the definition that FFS policy makers defined. In short, empowerment, as defined by FFS project designers, is not based on male and female farmers' real life practices, experiences and perceptions in Nepal. Also empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party (Mosedale, 2005: 244). Rather those who would become empowered must claim it through action in their personal and institutional environment. Development agencies, such as DADO or FAO cannot empower farmers. Agencies involved in FFS may be able to create conditions favourable to empowerment but they cannot make it happen.

Initially empowerment was considered to be achieved through improved access to resources, later the focus was on increased capabilities of farmers and strengthening their agency. A more radical view is that empowerment is only achieved when a transformation of power relations has taken place. The acquirement of resources alone is not empowerment; it is necessary to consider what people can do with these resources, i.e. the process or agency they exercise and specific historical, socio-cultural and political contexts. Empowerment is a process in which several actors are involved in FFS itself but also others such as state institutions, the Maoist movement, international and local NGOs, that together shape the conditions for farmers' empowerment and rural transformation.

Empowerment in FFS means also applying a 'forward-looking' strategy, identifying ways in which FFS participants can enhance their empowerment, e.g. networking with relevant agencies and other groups in society, practicing application of discovery-learning on societal issues such as discrimination, social exclusion, to provide multiple options, enhance men and women's sense of choice and empowerment. In FFS more attention can be paid to identifying and addressing factors that restrain people's lives, and proactively working on improving conditions to facilitate strategic life choices. When this is beyond the scope of FFS, collaboration with other agencies or linking farmers with other organisations might be an option.

FFS has evidently offered opportunities to women through agricultural training that were previously denied to them. It has become an accepted norm for women to take part in agricultural extension activities. FFS does not address other inequalities between men and women, let alone certain social exclusion aspects in society. By initially inviting mostly higher caste farmers to take part in FFS, hierarchical relations between castes were reinforced. Even though the context is now changing and the political environment demands more attention for vulnerable and previously excluded groups (see Chapter 6), the FFS project often reinforces existing social class divisions and still fails to take seriously into account diversity and difference in terms of caste, income, land, ethnicity, gender, age, and education.

Even if FFS does not address social conditions that cause inequality, discrimination or social exclusion, other changes in Nepal created a modification in the context in which FFS takes place. Increased outmigration away from rural areas, urbanisation, and the feminisation of agriculture, together with government policy demands for an increase of female participation in development, and the rise of the Maoist movement have encouraged Dalits and Janajatis to raise their voice. These circumstances have created better opportunities for women, as well as for Janajatis and Dalits. In rural areas, such previously ignored groups have now become more vocal, demanding justice, requesting more support from the government, and also demanding inclusion in FFS.

8

Farmer Field School as Governance Tool



Chapter 8 Farmer Field School as Governance Tool

Traditionally there was a patron-client relationship between government staff and farmers. This is gradually changing. There is more pressure from farmers on government officers to perform. (DADO agricultural extension officer, Kavre, 2009)

8.1 Introduction

The above statement from government staff exemplifies the changes in the relationship between farmers and government agencies, changes that can be related to the impact of FFS but also to a transformed social political context. Increasingly government officers expressed that they were engaging in new relationships with the farmers to whom they were supposed to provide technical service. These new relations between the state and its citizens have also been recognised by others (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001) and this trend has implications for projects that promote a participatory approach such as the Farmer Field Schools. The challenges inherent in the implementation of FFS will be discussed in this chapter.

After my reading and reflection on FFS (see chapter 1) I started wondering whether FFS really was a participatory intervention addressing farmers' needs, improving farmers' situation, empowering farmers and contributing to agricultural development and food security or whether it was it more close to being a governance tool? Can it be that the Nepalese government embraced FFS because it was a means to impose their agenda for agricultural development? Is it that interventions like FFS are used as a tool of state power, a means to control farmers, an expression of sovereignty (see Hardt and Negri, 2000).

In Chapter 7 I discussed the impact of FFS on the empowerment of farmers, the so-called target group of the project. Empowerment was defined as a relational and context specific concept. If empowerment is considered a relational concept, what role do the implementing organisations play in the empowerment of male and female farmers? What implication does it have for the governance of rural development?

In my research, several Nepalese government officers defined empowerment as the state "when farmers implement what we tell them to do". This remark indicates a "rendering technical" (Li, 2007: 12) of the problem of implementing FFS with empowerment as a technical fix, but it also illustrates that some government officers see FFS as a forum for the government to control farmers, in "attempts to constitute a governable subject" (Li, 1999: 295).

In fact the Nepalese government, but also NGOs involved in FFS apply a rather technocratic approach to empowerment, as well as to participation and development in general, and assume that well-defined plans, farmers' participation, empowerment and other development objectives are products that can be rationally transmitted to farmers to produce desired outcomes. Rendering technical is here a form of depoliticisation or 'anti politics move' (Ferguson, 1994), as it ignores the social and historical context and personal experience in favour of a formal, politically neutral approach. Projects serve as an instrument to depoliticise development issues, transforming social and economic relations into 'technical' problems that could then be 'solved' through bureaucratic intervention

(Ferguson, 1994). These institutional actors consider development and empowerment as a process that can be directed in a certain way. Instead the actors involved in FFS make decisions through social, deliberative processes that are inherently political (Büscher, 2010). Project management strategies which detach interventions from historical, social and political context, or bend these realities into the discipline-bound logics of diagnosis and prescription (whether in education, irrigation, health or agriculture), do not achieve their stated objectives (Long, 2001).

In this chapter I will explain that there are several indications that FFS is used as an instrument and part of governance in a complex setting, and with unexpected outcomes. The government, NGOs but also male and female farmers exercise power and together they play an active role in shaping the outcomes of FFS.

I want to show that the FFS project was implemented differently from its plan, that governance is a construct of different actors, a conglomeration of different actions, of different actors each with their own agenda and strategies. These actors do not act in a vacuum but are influenced by the institutional setting in which they move as part of a political process. Politics are here defined as the social, deliberative process with which actors make decisions that determine social and public outcomes (Büscher, 2010).

In this study I consider governance as the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority, and influence and enact policies and decision concerning public life, and economic and social development⁵⁹, with special focus on the Farmer Field Schools. Governance is a broader notion than government, whose principle elements include the constitution, legislation, administration and judiciary system. Governance involves interaction between formal and informal institutions, between the state and those of civil society. Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision.

8.2 FFS as a technical project

FFS was set up as a project to support farmers. Interestingly, the status of farmers as the target group of intended beneficiaries was not described in the project documents, but it was simply stated that farmers had low agricultural production outputs and were in need of new technologies and capacities (National IPM Programme Inception Report 2003; 2009).

To support these farmers a project was developed with a technical approach. FAO stresses on its website (www.fao.org) that it is not an aid agency but it undertakes 'technical cooperation' projects (TCPs). FFS was such a TCP project through the Plant Protection Directorate (PPD). FAO emphasises the technical expertise of its personnel as a principle attribute (Crewe and Harrison, 1998). I was also one of those technical experts (see Chapter 3) with technical advice and assistance as my key tasks. The FAO stresses its normative function providing guidance through collection and dissemination of information. The theory of value free neutrality is central to this and associated with the technical advice (Crewe and Harrison, 1998).

⁵⁹ Governance Working Group, 1996: source www.gdrc.org, accessed, 13 September 2011

Despite acknowledging a need for addressing the increased complexity of development, and recognition of less controllable problems, governments and international organisations still try to use rational planning and management techniques to control development interventions. In order to reach our own project goals of FFS rather than encouraging experimentation, flexible and social learning that are crucial to assist intended beneficiaries in achieving their goals (Rondinelli, 1993) we focused on achieving the set targets as formulated in the project plans. “The language of economy permeates FAO documents” (Crewe and Harrison, 1998:37 and many neo-classical concepts are accepted “with little sense of the problems entailed by them” (ibid: 37).

When we started with FFS in 1997 we went through the traditional project cycle steps of feasibility, planning and wrote a comprehensive, well structured project document. The project document was a result of a rather technology-driven approach towards development, whereby logical frameworks formed the basis of all the activities to take place. In the FFS project documents (FAO, 2003; 2009) there are clear plans and detailed descriptions of expected, measurable outputs: the number of farmers trained, the number of FFS groups established, reduction of pesticide use in percentage, yield increase in percentage. The ideas are neatly presented in logical frameworks and budgets. A logframe, as it is usually called, summarises the objectives of a project and the activities designed to achieve them, as well as the critical assumptions that underlie the progression to project goals. The logframe is developed by (international) FAO staff in collaboration with Nepalese government staff from the Plant Protection Directorate. The logframe also specifies the indicators to be used to monitor the project inputs, outputs, impacts and outcomes. Examples from projected outputs (FAO, 2003; 2009) are:

1. A cadre of qualified facilitators for rice IPM is established
2. An enhanced ability of FFS trainers and farmers to identify and respond to new field problems
3. An internal monitoring and evaluation system is established
4. A cadre of qualified farmer trainers for rice FFS is established
5. Improved coordination and symbiosis among IPM and FFS institutions
6. Existing and newly established IPM farmer clubs/groups actively engaged in continuing relevant and well-designed action research and group learning activities
7. Enhanced coordination with local, national, regional and international institutions and resource persons to provide technical support

Indicators for the outputs are for instance the number of master trainers⁶⁰ trained, the number of farmers participating in FFS, number of farmers who have conducted action research, number of farmer trainers registered, numbers of FFS groups or farmers associations registered with the District Development office. For me as a programme officer these indicators provided a set of clear targets.

Although these project documents guided us through the implementation of the

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A senior trainer, who has participated in a training of trainers and subsequently trains other staff to become a FFS facilitator or trainer, is called a master trainer.

project, the outcomes differed (Grindle, 1980). Several outcomes did not turn out the way they were written in the project documents. Initially the project focused on outputs, concrete measurable results like yield increase or pesticide reduction. Outputs were defined as direct product of the project activities. Later it was realised that FFS led to outcomes which are more difficult to verify and often contain more qualitative attributes such as farmers' empowerment (Bartlett, 2002). Outcomes are usually defined as the effects or changes that occur, that are a result of the project, but are also influenced by other factors. There is no blue print for development (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997), the involvement of many different actors in a dynamic context shows that "development is a multi-faceted, multi vocal process, and a complex site of contestation" (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997: viii). The logical framework and traditional project cycle are useful tools, but could be better used if it 'was acknowledged that projects are carried out by people working in a social context' (Biggs and Smith, 1998: 1748) and political environment.

Policy makers or decision-makers in development have scope to influence or shape interventions but the circumstances in which they are placed affect the dynamics and process of decision-making and can lead to a range of possible outcomes (Grindle and Thomas, 1989).

The coordination between institutions was not enhanced as planned, farmers' groups did not function as anticipated and monitoring and evaluation remained weak during the project duration (Sitaula et al., 2006). This discrepancy between a plan and the final result of a project is not unusual as most interventions work out another way as foreseen (Grindle and Thomas, 1989; Ferguson, 1994; Malpas and Wickham, 1995). Decision-making, agenda setting and implementation take place in a dynamic institutional setting, in which many actors are involved each with their own agenda and strategies. It needs to be acknowledged that projects are carried out by people working in social contexts, with all the features of social relationships that are present in human interactions "We recognise that deeper issues, such as the broader political setting and the nature of institutional power structure in which projects exist, always affect the nature and content of projects" (Biggs and Smith 1998: 1749).

8.3 Governmentality

To grasp the motivation and practice associated with these relations, and the power implied in them, in this chapter I draw upon the concept of 'governmentality'. Governmentality is a concept originally developed by Foucault (Mills, 2003) and applied to development bureaucracies by Rose (1996), Ferguson (1994), Agrawal (2005), Escobar (1995), Li (2007) and others. Governmentality refers in broad terms to the ways in which society is made governable; it refers to an analysis of political power (Rose and Miller, 1992). Governmentality is the analysis of 'who can govern and who is governed' but also the means by which that 'shaping of someone else's activities' is achieved (Foucault, 1991 in Mills, 2003:47). It includes the techniques and procedures which are designed to govern the conduct of both individuals and populations at every level not just the administrative or political level. Foucault applies the notion of power as the ability "to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 1984 in Wolf: 1990:586). Foucault regarded the 'order' of development as a form of governmentality (Foucault, 1991 in Lewis and Mosse, 2006).

From the perspective of governmentality, the role of NGOs and civil society in shaping and carrying out governance functions is not a matter of power transfer from the

government to non-state actors (Rose and Mills, 1992). Rather, it is an expression of a changing rationale of the government, a strategy by which civil society is redefined from a passive object of government to be acted upon into an entity that is both an object and a subject of government. The practice of governmentality is not fixed, different 'modes of governmentality' occur, in response to changing political ideologies, changing social and economic circumstances. Foucault's idea of governmentality was also applied by Li's study of a World Bank project in Indonesia (2007). She showed how international organisations through national government agencies are concerned with ensuring that the behaviour of its citizens conforms to a 'right' way of doing things, which will lead to a very specific set of goals. This can also result in forcing farmers to adopt practices that farmers are not in need of, but what the government thinks that the country at large needs. A typical example is the attempt to focus IPM FFS on rice in Vietnam because the Vietnamese government is keen to improve rice exports, while farmers feel that rice does not pay and are waiting for government support in the production of fruits, vegetables and other higher value products (Linh, 2001).

Governmentality refers to the attempt to shape human conduct by designed methods and plans, by governance tools (Rose and Miller, 1992). Assuming that the concern of government is the well-being of the entire population, the government requires special means, since it cannot regulate and coerce each person individually. Rather the government (and not the state exclusively, but in partnership with NGOs, donors and other authorities) sets conditions "artificially arranging things so that people, following only their own self-interest, "will do as they ought" (Li, 2007: 5). Government operates by configuring desires, habits, aspirations and beliefs. Power exercised at macro level, is influenced by powers exercised at micro level; the state is dependent on its citizens and vice versa. Individuals, by their own means or with support from others, play their own role in cooperation, negotiation, resistance or in any other ways interact to fulfill their own interests and aspirations (Wolf, 1990; Lewis and Mosse, 2006).

This attempt to the conduct of conduct can be applied to FFS too. Farmer field schools crystallise into institutions, they form individual behaviour, act as a frame of reference for the perception and evaluation of things (Li, 2006; 2007).

In terms of governmentality over the years the Nepalese government shifted some of its responsibilities to NGOs and civil society organisations. When the FFS project started the donor insisted on collaboration between NGOs and the government. This involvement of various actors has caused opportunities and friction from the start (Chapter 6). One of the reasons that FFS did not evolve as planned, is the involvement of many actors.

8.4 Governance actors

Government is one of the actors in governance. Other actors involved vary depending on the level of the public intervention at stake. In FFS these are international institutions like the NORAD, FAO, NGOs like CARE, World Education. At national and sub-national scales in Nepal these actors may include sub-divisions or departments of MoAC, DADO, influential land lords, farmers associations, village leaders, cooperatives, national NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, banks and credit unions, political parties, the Maoists etc.

In chapter 4 and 6 we saw that the various actors involved in FFS have different objectives and interests. Several actors implement FFS in different ways, there are different practices. FFS can have a research focus, used as tool for vegetable production promotion,

or can be a forum for adult-learning. FFS as part of the CIP potato programme focused on disease control, World Education organised FFS as part of a post-literacy programme, DADO Kavre tried to promote cauliflower production in rural areas. DADO organised FFS with mainly Brahmin participants, CARE included more Janajati and Dalits in FFS. Within the Plant Protection Directorate some staff wanted to focus on insects, others on pest management or research (Kathmandu, interview, 2009).

These actors did not act in isolation but are subject to several influences. One of them is the forces of international development paradigms. (See Chapter 4 and 6). Additionally political developments, migration and socio-economic changes have influenced FFS (see Chapter 2 and 4).

At the start of the project it seemed quite straightforward. The government, in particular PPD and DADO (under guidance of MoAC), but also NGOs decided: where to conduct FFS, whom to train, the content of the curriculum, choice of crop and so on. In line with national policy DADO decided which crops to grow in certain pocket areas, in line with their donor policy NGOs decided to focus on illiterate women and Dalits. At first sight it seemed indeed that these organisations imposed their own agenda on men and women farmers in the field. But is it really that simple or straightforward?

There is critique from practitioners that the Farmer Field School is not really demand-driven, due to government's forcing their own agenda upon their people. This could be in line with the governmentality argument, or conduct of conduct (Li, 2007). Governmentality has often a negative connotation associated with force.

Dhital, a government officer is an example of a person who voiced this criticism: "We in the government decide what is good for the farmers" (Kathmandu, July 2009). And Sita (NGO staff) said: "FFS is used by our government to impose their ideas, and to force farmers to produce more for the country. It is not clear to me and my colleagues how they incorporate farmers' needs and interests" (Kathmandu, August 2009). Do organisations have so much power over (Veneklasen and Miller, 2007) farmers in their target areas?

MoAC but also FAO follows certain criteria for the selection of farmers for the FFS project sites. The directions from FAO technical staff are illustrated with excerpts from an interview. (Kathmandu, July 2009)

"First we discuss with stakeholders (read: DADO, sometimes DDC), which service centre, which wards to select, then we talk to the farmers and verify the information we got from the district and the service centers.

We have to get them [.....government officers] from the very beginning, we should not have them not knowing from the beginning. From the start the government has to take responsibilities. In a participatory way we are acting therefore we are inviting the chief of the service centre, because they know about the area."

Question: For the new project phase (mid 2009 to start) what are your selection criteria for the farmers or beneficiaries?

"We are talking about high value crops, so farmers who already grow them can participate in the project. They need to have irrigation, they need to be organised in an association, and then we want to work with them. We can link production, marketing etc. we link with the World Bank irrigation project because they have

irrigation associations”

“Thus we look if:

- Priority crops are there, which should not be rice
- Irrigation is there
- Pesticide use/misuse, what kind of pesticide they are using
- Willingness of the farmers; are they willing to cooperate, all criteria go if they are not willing”

“Everyone says they are willing, but are they inside also really willing, are they willing to participate?”(FAO, Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

The selection of a certain crop is mostly determined by government and documented in their policies, and not on request of farmers. The government but also NGOs decided: where to conduct FFS, whom to train, the content of the curriculum, choice of crop and so on. (See Chapter 6)

NGOs got involved in FFS for various reasons (see Chapter 4 and 6). The Nepalese government shifted some of its responsibilities to NGOs and civil society organisations. The NGOs became part of FFS because it was part of a global governance trend (Nebelung, 1991). In time of globalisation and increased international networks and responsibilities, governments need to collaborate more with NGOs (Duffield, 2001; 2002). This fashion I also observed in Nepal which was confirmed by a study I undertook for the Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst (DED) in 1994 on NGO cooperation⁶¹. Since the 1990s indeed in Nepal there are more NGOs, international and local, that take over roles previously undertaken by the government.

Sometimes NGOs also have certain reasons to work with the government, as is illustrated by the words of an NGO staff member:

“If DADO is motivated all other partners will also be motivated, then it is good to work together. Be aware that there is also often hidden expectation. IDE (an NGO) wants to show (their funders) USAID that they have good collaboration with DADO, this increases their chance for more funds. USAID wants to see smooth cooperation with the government from NGO side. I have observed that IDE takes always ex-DADO staff for employment. They do this because this guarantees better collaboration with government in the future in the districts” (Tanahun, NGO staff interview 2010)

There are sometimes conflicts between the government and NGOs regarding roles and responsibilities. NGOs have to work within a given framework of the government which inevitably limits their room for manoeuvre. They have been given a certain mandate, allocated certain districts or regions where they can work and get certain procedural instructions from the government.

There were reports on awkward collaboration efforts between local NGOs and government staff. There was mistrust on both sides:

A DADO chief said:

“NGO does not like working with the governmentt only at some stage they ask us

⁶¹ Westendorp, A. (1994) Possibilities for Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst Nepal to collaborate with NGOs – an inventory of experiences of other international agencies and NGOs, internal report for DED Nepal.

to come and observe but at a late stage. This does not stay in the system". (Tanahun, interview, 2009).

Hereby he referred to remaining in 'the system' that NGOs action is not sustainable if it is not linked to government activities. NGOs are donor dependent organisations and might not last, because if they do not get 'outside funding' they cease to exist. While according to government staff, the government remains always in place, the government system is there to stay. (Kathmandu and Tanahun, interviews, 2009)

NGO personnel expressed doubts about working with the government:

"Government staff only want to work with us if they get extra money or training or other benefits. They are never genuinely interested in working with us NGO staff for the benefit of the country, it is always related to personal interests"(Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

There are differences observed between collaboration between NGOs at district and central level. Generally there is more close collaboration at district level, especially when NGO staff like their government counterparts, have received agricultural education at Rampur, the one and only (government) University for Agriculture and Animals Science (IAAS). In Nepal, Rampur graduates feel affiliated with each other and one of the first questions when people in the agricultural sector meet each other is: Which batch are you from? Referring to the year one has graduated from Rampur IAAS. Several staff in the government, CARITAS and CARE have studied at IAAS and worked either for the government before or after their NGO career.

There are many constraints in collaboration especially because of differences in administrative procedures, finances, leadership and ownership of the collaboration, but also different attitudes towards the FFS, working with farmers in general. Administratively the FFS remains in the Department of Plant Protection, the first professionals associated with IPM were entomologists, who feel that they are the owners of the programme. Although the FFS agenda is expanding with staff from extension, research and NGOs, there remains tension between the different organisations. Government agencies and staff look at NGO staff with envy due to the salary they receive, and NGO staff continues to regard government personnel as bureaucratic, corrupt, and associated with government politics. In an interview with one NGO, a staff member said: "Government officers only work if they get more money or daily allowance, otherwise they do not want to work " (Kathmandu, interview 2009)

Another NGO staff member said:

"They (government staff) always expect incentives from the NGO,. Synergic planning we can do, but they always look for money. We need to collaborate with them and when we have no incentives to give we just promise them that we will try to get more money for them in future projects" (Tanahun, interview 2009)

A third NGO officer explained why he preferred to work for an NGO:

"I like working for an NGO. There are several reasons: Good salary, the working environment is pleasant, you consult directly with scientist, there is less hierarchy,

there is a learning environment. My father is a teacher and he was disappointed when I went to Lumle as JT⁶². He wanted me to learn more. In the government office I would get a job in *sewa kendra*⁶³ (agricultural service centre), with local people and the learning environment was less. So I was happy when I could join an NGO “(Kathmandu, NGO staff, interview 2009)

Government agencies are generally reluctant to work with NGOs as these organisations often act as recipients rather than donors. Additionally they compete for support from the population in the rural areas. Reputation and legitimacy (upon which governance depends) are scarce resources, which governments have to share with other organisations active in the same field. Success is fragile and failure will create political problems which governments want to avoid (Li, 1999; Mosse, 2005)

CARITAS realises that collaboration with government agencies is crucial for the sustainability of its programme. As one officer said:

“We work together with the government, because in the long-run we will need each other. CARITAS has involved government Master trainers to train their own staff on FFS. We work a lot with government organisations; we want a smooth cooperation with the government” (Kathmandu, CARITAS staff, interview 2009).

At the same time CARITAS is also aware of the weaknesses of the government. As the programme officer told me: “NGOs work more conscientiously than government officers. Government officers are not able to implement effectively, they have little money and different attitude” (Kathmandu, interview CARITAS programme officer, 2009)

Among the NGOs there has been a shift: CARE had lost interest in FFS (Kathmandu, CARE staff interview, 2009), and CARITAS has become a major player. World Education expressed a high interest but has little influence in the entire project because it operates only on a very small scale due to small fund allocation for FFS. In an interview with World Education staff they expressed the problems with getting funds for FFS: “It is stressful to raise money all the time, to keep everything going. I am on the 3rd proposal for FFS in three months” (Kathmandu, interview with NGO staff 2009).

They also showed their dissatisfaction with their current relationship with PPD:

“All donors want to put money through the government these days. Nobody wants to fund private or NGO system anymore. Everybody thinks by putting money through the government makes them stronger. World Education and CARE do not get on with government coordinators of the FFS IPM programme and therefore do not get funding”. And:

“All new FAO project money goes to Chitwan, Jhapa, Barsa not to where there is a real need. Only money is allocated for 20 FFS for all the NGOs. That is not even a token gesture. We have to do all the reporting etc. it is too much work in return for little funding. The coordination we had with PPD and FAO regarding FFS 7-8 years ago is no more”. (Kathmandu World Education, interview 2009)

⁶² Junior technician in a government office. In Lumle there is a government-run agricultural research centre.

⁶³ Agriculture service centre, that covers a few villages or VDCs (see Chapter 2)

It became obvious from the above information that the involvement of different actors in FFS created a dynamic situation with ever evolving relationships and interaction.

8.5 Changing views on farmers

A closer look at FFS reveals how the state not only sees the farmers as objects but also seeks to govern the farmers or rural population, however, this view has changed over the years.

Generally in the eyes of the state, as well as FFS actors in Nepal, the majority of farmers are subsistence farmers who produce for their own consumption, who face lack of irrigation, lack of adequate technology and skill manpower (World Bank, 2011b), and who are ignorant (World Vision International Nepal, 2009). The picture below confirms this stereotypical view: the male farmer with a simple hoe and the women in the shadow of her husband, carrying a heavy load.



Figure 8.1 Traditional picture of farmers in Nepal⁶⁴

Farmers, but also households and communities are treated as a black box, assuming a uniformity that does not exist (see Chapter 5 and 6).

Over the years in Nepal a shift took place from the sovereign state to a state that has more concern about its population (Gellner, 2008). While the state holds nominal power and controls most of the public resources disbursed at district level, village leaders and farmers are increasingly able to exert power. In particular with the democratic movement in the 1990s and the removal of the panchayat system, the government started to focus more on citizen concerns. In 1997 government officers acted as patrons, and farmers did what they said. Farmers in those days expected the government to look after them. Government staff were considered 'all-knowing' and farmers were seen as ignorant and stupid. In 2009 most farmers still considered agricultural extension officers as knowledgeable, but farmers are more aware that they have rights and they realised that they could demand services. Increasingly they request services from the government. It was reported that today farmers frequently come to the DADO office and ask for inputs or advice.

In FFS too, farmers were encouraged to become critical thinkers and through a process of

⁶⁴ Source: Developmentart (2006) available at: [http:// developmentart.com](http://developmentart.com) (accessed 18.03.2012)

discovery-learning in FFS training make informed-decision regarding field management. The discussions that were part of FFS made farmers more confident and vocal. The traditional working relations have changed; farmers have become subjects rather than just objects.

“I used to tell farmers what to do. In the FFS training of trainers I learnt that as far as possible I try to facilitate. Never try to teach a farmer”. (interview government staff, July 2009)

“Farmers come to our office to ask for FFS” (Tanahun DADO office, FGD 2009, August).

“Increasingly farmers come to me to ask for FFS. Farmer trainer: “I have too many requests from farmers to get FFS in their village, I cannot meet their demand”. (Kavre district, August 2009)

Although it happened on a small-scale it is a sign that farmers feel more confident to approach the officers. The environment has changed. It is nowadays naïve to consider the government or NGOs as the actors who can decide everything and regard the farmers as passive beneficiaries or oppressed citizens rather than subjects who are actively involved in co-shaping rural development.

A DADO chief explained: “Traditionally there was a patron-client relationship between government staff and farmers. This is gradually changing. There is more pressure from farmers on government officers to perform. There is a general feeling among government staff that farmers do not trust them very much, or that they do not respect them well. He continued: we should give some good planning and programmes to farmers, but we should really implement it and we should stick to this, then the farmers will also believe us/trust us (*biswas garchha*)”. (Kathmandu, Interview 2009)

In 2009 during my interviews the agricultural sector was involved in a change from a top-down to a demand driven service. In this approach government officials wait for farmers to ask for assistance rather than impose. Also government staff asks for more inputs from farmers, especially knowledge and labour participation. Farmers’ knowledge is valued. Most farmers had difficulties adjusting to this system as shows the interview (Kavre, focus group discussion, August 2009) below:

“Government official: you can ask us for advice, this is for free. We are ready to come. We have motorbikes, cars, we can come to you. We have different facilities. Before the government told you what to do. But nowadays we work for you, you pay tax, we earn salaries from your tax. Now you can demand our services.

Farmers: “Before sir called us and we came for the training. He did not tell us we could demand his services.”

Government official: “You have to give us work. We are ready to serve you”.

Farmers; “ We also did not go or call you. We did not know, we had no knowledge. We are surprised that we could call sir from the office”.

Farmer: “It is a bit easier if we know the sir, but when the former JT got transferred we did not know who to call. Our people are not there. Also we go to the office and then there is nobody there”.

The officer: “The government is yours, as well as mine”.

Farmer: We have no idea how to make the government ours. Our work is rice, we have no

knowledge. (Still after FFS the farmers feel like that the officer sighs to me).
The officer says: "You exaggerate you have received training. There are more remote areas where they have never had training or service, like Jumla Humla".

Farmers: "Now you say to us: we have not called us, you blame us for not calling you.

If we do not have a person that we do not know, no *aphno manche* then we will not get information or seeds when we ask it in DADO".

Agricultural government officer: "No you have to come in a group and demand seeds".

Farmers: "We did not know that we have to come in a group to demand inputs".

The situation became a bit uncomfortable; the government official showed in this interview that he is fed up with complaints from farmers. The farmers conclude: "you guys eat salary, we eat rice. We have hardship, you are lucky".(Kavre, focus group discussion 2009)

A new element in the relationship between communities, their elected representatives and the state is the on-going policy of decentralisation. The extension of state power to the periphery and to provide a more responsive and locally accountable administration is encouraged by the World Bank and UNDP. In 2009 we saw that village development committees (VDCs) got more power as part of the decentralisation of government decision-making and as such more influence in the use of funds for FFS. DADO also got more responsibilities, among which allocation of funds to the villages

In interviews it seemed that DADO and farmers' interest in FFS has decreased over the years. As some officers and FFS trainers said: "FFS are high input, low output interventions for us". Generally the respondents were positive about decentralisation; "There is more money at VDC level" (Kavre, interview 2009). Still respondents were concerned about misuse of funds at local level. In discussion with communities during fieldwork, people expressed strong and generally critical views about their relationship and interactions with government.

The relations between government and farmers have changed in the decentralisation process but also influenced by the Maoist movement, and FFS has contributed to this process.

For Maoists farmers are key producers of food for the nation, and they are mostly considered proletariat, especially the small holders or landless. Among the Maoists who called for class struggle, fight against imperialists and feudalists and "power to the people", Farmer Field Schools were at first seen as tools to encourage farmers to organise themselves, to increase self-belief, plus increase food production to feed the population. For the Maoist movement in Nepal the focus in FFS on farmers (or proletariat) who learn to think critically, who learn to question government and other interventions, who get involved in 'informed decision-making' appealed in 2002. There are examples that FFS farmers became more vocal and assertive, claimed more support from government offices and other service providers. Some of the FFS farmers became Maoist party members or district leaders (e.g. in Mahadevsthan VDC, Kavre district). But generally in the field Maoists in FFS encouraged farmers to learn well and to focus on improving food security of the nation. One Maoist leader pressed in a FFS session:

"Please farmers learn new technologies and increase the food production. You are the future feeders of our nation" (Kavre, interview, 2009).

8.6 FFS and structural power

There is a great deal of interaction between different actors. A continuous process of negotiation, bargaining, reaching agreements, resistance among all actors takes place. Underlying these process are complex power dynamics. Power exists in every relationship. Power is not a tangible thing to be possessed or measured, but sets of relationships that change, circumstances that alter; the sites of power relations are not singular but multiple, overlapping and concurrent (Foucault, 1988 in Mills, 2003; Li, 2007).

The concept of power is one that is often taken for granted, yet one that is at the root of governance, empowerment and theories on participation of groups or individuals. Regardless of its 'fuzziness', 'power' can be seen as a driving force behind the exclusion of certain groups in society, in the relations of dominance and subordination existing between certain groups and between individuals, and in the potential for certain people to exhibit agency and to ask for social change. This can be clearly to observe relations of dominance like patron-client or Bahun-Dalit, but usually there are more complex webs of relationships and more imperceptible power dynamics. It can be argued that power acts on the individual at multiple levels, and that it can be a force impeding individuals' actions and potentials. There are several ways to look at power. Earlier I explained the different forms: power to, power over, power with, power within in relation to empowerment (Chapter 7). Eric Wolf (Wolf, 1990:587) applied a notion of power that structures the political economy introducing the term of 'structural power'. His model on the levels at which power operates can be helpful in understanding governance and the forces that impede and those that can promote empowerment and farmers' participation.

Wolf identified four modes of power related to his concerns with political economy, modes of production, and deployment of social labour (Wolf 1999; 1990). Wolf based his theory on Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. Power is, according to Wolf, an aspect of all relations among people. Eric Wolf's conceptualisation of the relationship between ideas and power and, in particular, of the interconnectedness between what he identifies as the 'four modalities of power', can be a theoretically helpful starting point in thinking of governance and farmer's empowerment in the Nepalese context. These four ways in which power is woven into social relations are (Wolf, 1990: 586): (1) power of potency or capabilities characterised by a particular individual (power within); (2) interactional power or the power of an ego to impose its will on social action upon another (power over); (3) tactical or organisational power, where individuals circumscribe the actions of others, or the control of contexts in which capabilities and interactional potential can be exhibited; (4) structural power, if powerful enough, that organises the settings and specifies the direction and distribution of energy flow. Structural power controls behaviour and access to resources (Wolf, 1990). Structural power is derived from Foucault's concept of "governmentality" and "shapes the social field of action so as to render some kinds of behaviour possible, while making others less possible or impossible" (Wolf, 1990:587). Additional to the relational and instrumental view of Foucault, Wolf looks at cultural aspects and ideologies, following Bourdieu (1990).

In ascending order of inclusiveness these modes represent the potency of *individuals*, the social interactions of *groups*, *tactical power*, and *structural power* (Wolf 1990). In this scheme the four modalities are not mutually exclusive; they interact in complex ways. But for Wolf structural power is most important, for it relies on the other modes of power to

account for the deployment of power within a social field, it works to the advantage of those who hold it. When does a situation occur where the settings have been changed, a direction is given to a certain flow of energy/ when does structural power occur? These four modalities of Wolf can help uncover how dominant ideologies affect the agency, autonomy, and ability of social actors to access and make use of power.

Wolf's first two modes of power, individual and group, are variations of Weber's idea of power as an attribute of a person's potency or capacity in power relations to impose their will on others. The potency of an individual or capabilities can be based on the social and/or economic position of a person, his or her health status, knowledge, and control over resources. FFS was initiated by a powerful leader. Despite initial reluctance to get an FFS programme started in Nepal (see Chapter 1 and 4) the PPD chief in 1997, played a key role in getting things started. He saw perspective in the Farmer Field School. The PPD chief welcomed the IPM programme because he realised that the plant protection needed a new impulse and the Farmer Field School could provide this. Hereby the notion was implied that the Farmer Field School was purely an integrated pest management approach. He was happy to be linked to a UN project, which would guarantee funding, and prestige. He was able to mould policy, even in times that his directorate was fully focused on spraying calendars and conventional pest management. He created support for the FFS programme, he assured that expansion happened nationwide and that all PPD staff got trained before any other staff of the MoAC. When FAO strongly recommended starting on a small-scale in a few districts, he ignored their advice and launched FFS in almost all the districts in Nepal. But he was not acting in a vacuum. It is to be noted that the PPD bureaucracy was not a coherent whole, but included officials with diverse views, whose interactions constantly reproduced and modified PPDS practices. The chief was influenced by many of his colleagues; he is part of many relationships, within his directorate, the department of agriculture, FAO. Not only in his professional sphere, also in his private life is he engaged in relationships. He also has a family that puts pressure on him. At one stage this pressure led him to employ his cousin in the programme. One officer told me:

“Our Chief started the IPM programme. Immediately in the beginning of the project he gave a job to his cousin. But after a couple of years there seem to be some friction between them. Now they are not in touch with each other anymore. He said to me I do not get in touch with him anymore. We manipulate each other: if I do him a favour he has to do me a favour” (Kathmandu, department of agriculture officer, interview July 2009)

It should be noted that this particular person was a male, belonging to the Brahmin caste, with affiliations to the ruling political party at that time, all aspects that had played a role in him getting into his position as decision-maker in the first place.

Projects need many supporters in order to come into existence. Therefore powerful leaders are needed to persuade others. With others (Bartlett 2005; Biggs and Smith, 1998; Mosse, 1999, 2005) I recognise that the views and actions of a few people can be crucial to the progress of our work: a village elder, a director of a department, a programme manager from the donor agency, a driven expert. Lipsky (2010) emphasises that leading individuals are not simply devices in the process, but rather have substantial ability to mould policy outcomes. In the case of the FFS programme these leading bureaucracies were found in the committed and active deputy IPM leader at the plant protection directorate, the charismatic leader of World education and the committed programme officer at CARE Nepal (Bartlett,

2005). Those who work in these institutions influenced the practical implementation of the FFS programme and produced an outcome that suited them. These people have the ability to make things happen, or to obstruct them. We also know that the opinions of these people are based on personal interests and value judgement probably even more often as they are based on economic considerations. If we want key decision-makers to promote a particular intervention we need to be equipped with technical and financial information plus an understanding of what drives these people. We need to understand their hopes and fears, their motivations, their affiliations and connections, their past experience and aspirations (Bartlett, 2005).

The capability of an individual to impose his will on someone else is often related to power people derive from the societal or structural position he/she has and the resources he/she possesses, including knowledge and symbolic capital. The FAO officer is male from the higher caste, which gives him by birth already more symbolic capital than the Janajati woman who is the secretary in his office. With his educational degree, earned in India he has more knowledge and advantages on the job market than the peon who is uneducated. This particular FAO officer has a high position in the hierarchy of the organisation and can influence the FFS programme. He controls the budget and can allocate resources in areas he feels important. He can make lower staff, such as his secretary or peon, work for him, to collect data, write letters or simply demand a cup of tea. He can select his own district for FFS implementation and influence the project outline.

Powerful people in privileged positions can influence decision-making, they have considerable scope to shape and influence development processes, but there are several factors that influence their room for manoeuvre and the outcome of the decision-making or implementation process (Grindle and Thomas, 1989).

Interplay between the power and interests, but also beliefs of various actors contribute to the emergence of contradictions between project plans and practice. In a situation involving more than one person or organisations, issues of interpersonal and inter-organisational power relations arise.

When we look at the different relations we see a complexity of power dynamics, influenced by socio-cultural, economic and political factors. People who are seemingly powerful might be vulnerable at the same time. For instance if we consider the FAO officer who is in charge of the financial resources and the entire FFS programme run by the government, he is powerful and susceptible at the same time. The FAO officer has power because he is in the position to decide what to do with the fund, whom to involve, where to start the project, in which districts with which stakeholders. He has high status because he is from the FAO, he can decide about financial matters, but at the same time he feels weak because the donor and the entire FAO leave him in charge and they 'lean back and watch' (Kathmandu, FAO staff, interview, 2009). On the other hand he feels powerless, he has a short-term contract, is dependent on the donor and the good will or collaboration of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. This is shown by his remark: (interview, 2009):

"I had a hard struggle to get money for FFS. Even government, who used to fund FFS a few years ago, has now mainly FFS funded with donor money. Donor and FAO representative are just sitting back and waiting for the results". He also feels pressure to prove that this is a good project. "Nowadays donors are not interested in funding FFS: they think it is not sustainable." We need to convince donors that it is a good project and that we need further funding". (Kathmandu,

interview July 2009)

Besides these official relations, the FAO officer is influenced by informal relations, or hidden agendas, which can explain why he selected his 'home district' for a pilot project. As one officer in PPD said: "The FAO sir selected his own district, even though it is not a good FFS district, they are not really active there with FFS" (Kathmandu, PPD, interview July 2009)

In Nepal people in government, but also in NGO positions, act on the basis of approval from their community, rather than on the basis of professional performance (Bose, 1991). Rather than representing the interests of Nepal as a whole, people who are elected or appointed to positions of power tend to exercise that power to benefit the interests of the group that installed them in their post. People with relatives in positions of power and influence expect those individuals to direct resources (public spending, jobs, contracts) towards the interest of the family or kin, rather than to the country as whole (see Chapter 2). Individual and interactional power of individuals is context dependent and subject to change.

Traditional views and attitudes but also historically established practices (see Chapter 2) still have some bearing on daily practices: *aphno manche* (nepotism, appointing people you know, linking only with your 'own people'), patron-client relations, *chakari* (paying money to get a job or favour), albeit in slightly changed forms.

An example of personal favours is given by the process of the allocation of funds to the district agricultural offices. From 1997 – 2002 funds for FFS were disbursed to district agricultural offices by the PPD. This was mainly decided by one person, the deputy IPM officer in PPD. Usually this was done on the basis of funds available and on personal relationships: " We will look at the number of districts that can conduct and want to conduct FFS, then we divide the fund: give 2-3 FFS each. However, I will not give any money to Sindhupalchowk because the officer in charge of FFS is not active" (personal communication PPD staff, 2001). And: "In Danusha the officer is nice and active so I will give him more funds" (Kavre, personal communication PPD staff, 2001).

Chakari was common practice in the time of the Rana's to get a position in the government, but nowadays *chakari* can still be applied in many ways to force a favour from someone.

Some government officers explained what *chakari* means in their profession:

"Nowadays, one of my peons is doing *chakari* to me. Actually he is not that good and nobody cares about him. Even the boss doesn't offer him any work. You know that if there is no work, definitely there is not any profit for him. He thinks that I am very new and I don't know any bad comments about him, that's why he looks at me for opportunities" (Tanahun, interview July 2009)

And:

"One of my JT always loves to go to the field and every time he brings something (vegetables, oranges, seedlings, potato etc.) from the farmers for us. We, as our family lives in Kathmandu, always love these things without paying. Because of his good *chakari* everybody likes to recommend him to be sent to the field. On the other hand he is also making good money Rupees 700 per day with the field allowance. (Kavre, interview, July 2009)

Or:

"*Chakari* are hidden but a well-known fact: Most of the Dado or farm chiefs are

giving cash or goods (good quality rice, fruits, potatoes, fuel), whatever they have in their district, to the central level authorities as *chakari*. (Chitwan, interview, August 2009)

Chakari takes place at all levels:

“Farmers also do *chakari* for us if they want to get something good from us like money for irrigation, revolving fund etc . If so, they might even kill a cock when we visit their home.” (Kavre, interview, August 2009)

People derive power of potency or capacities from the position they hold, the resources (like knowledge, money) they have, but also from connections they have. From all the interviews conducted with officers it is clear that personal relationships play a role in getting a position, getting a role in a project, receiving budget or fund request approval. “If you don’t have these personal relationship then your chances are nil or limited”. (Kathmandu, interviews with NGO and government staff, 2009 and 2010)

As one official from the government said:

“I tried to get an IPM adviser post in FAO but with no luck, because” as she says “ none of my people are there anymore (Kathmandu, interview 2009)” “In fact I am worried: I am out of the FAO circle, I do not know anyone anymore. Not in touch, I do not have my name on FFS network lists anymore.”(Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

These relationships can be based on several factors; the fact that people followed the same education (“We went to Rampur together”), that they are relatives, from the same village or district, have the same political party or views, have a background with the same discipline (plant protection, social scientist). There is not a clear-cut demarcation. Sometimes a relative might be helpful in getting a job or sometimes relatives avoid contact because they do not want to fulfil social obligations. “My sister has left for the USA, and she never visits us because she does not want to feel obliged to give us presents, money or jobs” (Kathmandu, Interview with government officer, 2009)

For a long time it was mainly men from higher castes who got powerful positions and acquired most resources, but due to donor pressure and the Maoist movement this is changing. Some Brahmins feel discriminated these days:

“Nowadays we are discriminated against. We cannot get a government post any more; we have to compete with Dalits and Janajaties who are favoured. I feel it is not fair.” (Government officer, Kathmandu,2009)

The third and fourth modes of power, as indicated by Wolf, tactical and structural, are extensions of the first two modes. Tactical power occurs when the practices of some agents in political fields and arenas circumscribe and give opposition to the practices of other agents. Tactical power is much linked with individual’s agency. Structural power happens when agents in political fields and arenas organise the settings in which political processes occur, so are able to direct the flow of power strategically (Wolf, 1999; 1990).

Tactical or organisational power was often observed in FFS. Many PPD staff was interested in expanding their mandate and using FFS as an extension tool, but this is being

blocked by other directorate staff or by the department of agriculture. Within PPD there are conflicts of interests: some divisions or staff members are interested in promoting the use of pesticides, other want to stimulate application of integrated pest management. Even collaboration with general agricultural extension staff is complicated. Agriculture extension is a separate directorate within the department of agriculture and staff are reluctant to adopt an approach from the plant protection directorate in a domain that they consider as theirs.

Despite the fact that within the MoAC it is generally expressed that Farmer Field School would be a good approach for agricultural extension, this has not been put into practice. FFS is still mainly considered a pest control or integrated pest management tool. Many vegetable production officers and agricultural extension officers at department and district level have been trained in a Training of Trainers to conduct FFS in an effort to broaden the scope and scaling up of FFS. Also the current FAO officer in charge of FFS is a great promoter of a more holistic approach in FFS.

FAO: "Focus has been on pest management, but we have to move beyond plant production. IPM does not contribute significantly to production of Nepal's agricultural sector." (Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

However it is difficult to get this materialised. As FFS started in PPD it remains seen as a PPD activity. The first trainees and also foreign trainers came with a plant protection background. Also key leaders in PPD and FFS are focused on plant protection, in a very technical sense. An agricultural staff member acknowledges this problem:

"FFS is an extension approach, but it is not nationally accepted due to professional clash. The extension staff always says: it is the responsibility of the plant protection staff. This is the case at PPD level as well as district level". (Kathmandu, MoAC officer, September 2009)

Even after inclusion in the FFS project, several agricultural extension staff and DADO staff from other disciplines besides plant protection, quietly resist FFS as an extension approach. After the training of trainers they just do not get involved in FFS or give the responsibility to someone else, a junior technician or a farmer trainer.

This resistance is not just among staff from other disciplines, many women in DADO refuse to go into the field to conduct FFS. Women who were trained to become FFS facilitator often use excuses as not being able to go to the field due to household responsibilities. "Yes I was trained to facilitate FFS, but with my children it is difficult to go to the field (female officer Chitwan, interview 2009). And: My in-laws do not like it when I do field work (female officer, Kaski, interview 2009). Or: I would like to do FFS, but I cannot ride a motorbike and do not know how to go to the field, so now I do office work" (female officer, Kathmandu, interview 2009).

Structural power goes beyond the organisational, is more linked to the institutional and happens when agents in political fields and arenas organise the settings in which political processes occur, so are able to direct the flow of power strategically. Structural power happens when relationships modify and ideologies change.

Structural power is not easy to achieve, and not easy to facilitated by external forces. In order to achieve structural power an analysis of the current power dynamics is crucial, whereby the three dimensions: visible, invisible and hidden by Gaventa (2006) are useful in particular to locate invisible power.

Structural power can translate into a combination of visible (observable decision-

making), invisible (shaping meaning and what is acceptable) and hidden (setting of the political agenda) power, which in turn affects the individual, interactional, and organisational modalities of power.

NORAD and FAO exercise visible power when they determine the size of the budget, the reporting guidelines for FFS. DADO officers show authority when they decide the crops and the sites for FFS. Visible power can be observed in the explicit inclusion or exclusion or marginalisation of certain groups that is institutionalised and legitimised in policy making and laws, like the government imposed quota of 33% for women participants in group activities of FFS.

Hidden power, or the setting of the (political) agenda, refers to ways in which powerful groups control access to positions and resources, decision-making processes. In this case, the processes of exclusion and marginalisation are not as apparent as in the case of visible power because they are usually not rendered public through policies – instead, these dynamics operate on multiple levels and rely on existing factors, both material and ideological, and relations that already limit subordinate groups' access to the public arena. These relations can be institutional, determined by caste or ethnicity, whereby lower castes or ethnic minorities are excluded from decision-making in the political domain. This can be determined by gender roles, where women can be subordinated as a result of patriarchy. In Nepal hidden power is often shaped by personal relations or in terms of nepotism, *aphno manche*, the employment of “own people” (see Chapter 2).

Considering hidden and invisible power can help explain why even when policies are put in place to change clear and obvious aspects of inequality, access to such power is not always given to those targeted by such policies, even if lower caste people or women are granted special rights as citizens, they might not benefit. For example, when the law was changed and *kamaiyas* (lower caste who were forced into slavery for many generations in Nepal, in particular in the terai) were given freedom, because slavery was officially abolished, many *kamaiyas* became worse off. They no longer had a land lord to protect them, to give them employment and food or salary, nor did they have a shelter. The views, beliefs, regarding *kamaiyas* had not changed.

In a similar way when women were granted official land rights, by a government policy amendment, many women did not benefit. It was often the husband or male family member who used the opportunity to put land in her name but under his control. It was a measure to appropriate more land for himself than is officially allowed by the state. Patriarchal ideas maintained the status quo of women in relation to land ownership. The hidden agenda of the government to impose these laws can be international approval or economic efficiency, while invisible power can be manifested ideas or norms and values of roles and dominant social groups.

On the one hand, the effects of ‘hidden power’, or the way the political agenda is set and what issues take central stage in political discussions, can affect how such policies are implemented at the local level or how local actors can dismiss their relevance. On the other hand, the effects of ‘invisible power’, or of the ideological boundaries, give legitimacy to rejection of policies or maintenance of inequality and serve to reinforce the status quo – thus imposing limitations on individual actors and often leading to their internalisation of an inferior, subordinate position. In this form of power, people may be unaware of their rights, their ability to speak out, and may come to see various forms of power or domination over them as ‘natural’, or at least unchangeable. Dalits might consider it ‘natural’ that they are at

the lower ranks in society, women might consider it 'normal' that they are dominated by their husbands.

Experiences of inequality, social exclusion and poverty are often rooted in historically established beliefs about – culturally and socially acquired outlooks on, race, caste, ethnicity, gender, age and so on. Such historical views are not easily changed. In fact historical dispositions inform current practice, current practice reinforce views and attitudes (Moncrieffe, 2006). In interviews I came across some of such dispositions or internalised (negative) self-image of accepted superior or inferior position:

“I am a Dalit, probably because I did something wrong in my former life” (Kavre, interview 2009)

“As a woman I should not complain. It is my duty to cook rice and daal, do dishes, wash clothes, collect firewood, collect fodder from the jungle, milk the cow, cut grass, ‘lipne⁶⁵’ our house, care for the children, the in-laws, my husband, do puja⁶⁶ day-in-day-out. This is what is expected of a woman. If I would neglect my duties I am not a good wife or mother and this might have repercussions, which I accept. This is my fate” (Tanahun, interview 2009)

Others maintain certain dispositions about people. For instance one agricultural extension officer tried to describe to me what a person from the Magar population looks like:

“They (Magar) are kind of backward. They are not like us (Brahmin), they are *lathaa* -dumb” (Kavre, interview 2009)

Dalits are often depicted as dirty, backward:

“They are dressed a bit scruffy, not very clean and speak with rude words”(NGO worker, Pokhara, interview 2009)

But also people from higher castes are described with biases, as one remark shows:

“The people from higher castes try to dominate us” (Janajati farmer Tanahun, interview 2009)

“They (Brahmins) use us as *kotala* (plough labourer), they use us as labourers, they consider us as inferior” (Dalit Kavre, interview 2009)

To change these views and to strengthen the capacities of marginalised people in society is a complex task. An example of this complexity can be read below, which is an example of an NGO's attempt to change the setting and give more resources and power to Dalits.

A local NGO installed a drinking water system in Yamdi a remote village, high above the Tibet – Kathmandu highway. This village has a large Brahmin and Dalit settlement. Prejudices exist in this location: “Brahmin's are clever and suppress us Dalits” and “Dalits are not interested in changing their status, getting education or learning new skills” (Kavre, interview with Brahmin and Dalit villagers, 2009). The

⁶⁵ Maintain the walls and floors in and outside the house with a mud/manure mixture.

⁶⁶ Religious rituals, usually Hindu or Buddhist in Nepal.

drinking water system was to benefit Dalits in the first place, therefore the NGO put as requirement that the drinking water committee should be formed by Dalits. The chairman and secretary are now Dalit men. The other members are Brahmins. The NGO was pleased that the Dalits were in decision-making positions. They went ahead with the project and installed the water tank. The NGO called their project a great success and an example for other VDCs. However, little did they know that the Dalits in the committee could not attain anything in meetings that they were in no position to make real decisions, and worse than that many of them could not even get much access to drinking water. First of all the Brahmins forced them to build the tank in the area where the upper caste people live, far from the Dalit community. Then at every meeting the Brahmins, who would turn up in majority, blocked any proposals put forward by Dalits. The Brahmin community was constantly resisting and creating problems. They caused troubles with water supply to the Dalits, and irritated them with lots of discussion and refusing any agreements during meetings. (Field notes, August 2009)

With donation or resources and giving official responsibilities visible power relations were moving in favour of the Dalits. The hidden agenda of the NGO might have been to attract more financial support from foreign donors. Ultimately however, invisible norms about values, norms and rights in the society created tensions and hampered smooth operation of the drinking water system.

Like all organisational cultures Nepal's bureaucracy is not exempt from socio-cultural influences of the larger society (Gurung and Biggs, 2010). Caste, gender ideologies permeate and underscore this ethos and consequently wield considerable influence on organisational practice. For instance relatively few women are represented in the agricultural offices and in the National IPM programme of FFS in Nepal. It is normal to find societal norms and practice of patriarchy and caste permeating the organisational culture in particular of the governmental organisations that implement FFS.

Traditional views and habits are persistent but not static. This was shown by a remark by a Brahmin DADO chief who took part in FFS training of trainers:

"I was used to going to a training course for the financial allowance. My fellow colleagues and I were not used to planting rice or getting our hands dirty, it was not prestigious. But in the training we became proud to grow our own rice. Becoming dirty was the new status that got admiration" (Training of trainers, conversation with government officers, 1997)

Wolf's (1990) notion of structural power seems to be a useful concept to apply to the governance of FFS. To what extent has FFS had an impact on changing the institutional setting? Which strategy has been effective in changing visible, invisible and hidden power dynamics?

There are a couple of strategies that are key to FFS, and could be called instruments or tools of governance (Li, 2007), which I have selected to study through the lens of structural power: the application of a participatory approach, group mobilisation and the employment of farmer trainers. Did these strategies induce structural change? And: how did this occur?

8.7 Structural power and FFS participatory approach

The participatory approach was a key strategy to be followed in the FFS. How does the concept of structural power help us to understand the dynamics of participation in FFS?

First of all 'participation' is a concept that is popular among government agencies, as well as NGOs. It is a concept that provides a 'shared agenda' among donors, NGOs and government and therefore easy to pursue (Mosse, 2005). In FFS farmers' participation was introduced in a technical way as part of the compulsory steps to follow in FFS. With groups of farmers containing 25 individuals, activities in sub-groups, discussions with a certain set of questions, tasks in field work, responsibility given to farmers to collect data, participation was instructed to FFS trainers in a technical way, with clearly written guidelines. Nevertheless, it was a new approach and a different way of working for government officers, who were used to talking to individual, so called model farmers. It was also new to have discussions with farmers or let farmers work in sub-groups, the conventional extension approach was more a lecture or a demonstration to farmers. This way participation got institutionalised and accepted as the new way. This participatory approach changed the settings, changed the agricultural extension approach of DADO.

Before FFS agriculture extension took place in traditional top-down fashion, with the all-knowing extension officers explaining new technologies to a selected group of farmers or a few model farmers. The role of the farmers was a passive one: listening to the message of the extension worker and adopting proposed changes, new farming practices or technologies. Farmers who took part in conventional agricultural extension were usually educated male Brahmins, who owned land. In FFS the group of farmers was not selected by the agricultural extension worker, but the communities themselves decided who would take part. Initially it were the same male Bahun, educated privileged farmers who were selected for FFS, but gradually the composition of participants changed (see Chapter 6), and became more diverse. Then in the FFS training farmers were encouraged to discuss in small groups, to question or debate with each other, to think critically. The extension officer got more a facilitator's role in this process. In the field they practised discovery-learning and problem-solving skills that would lead farmers to take informed decisions regarding farming practices. No longer were the extension workers telling farmers what to do.

Initially farmers' participation was not a topic on the agenda of plant protection staff. Farmers got instructions, were told what to do. Farmers felt obliged to fulfill obligations towards government officers and often expressed a certain fear:

"We had always fear to cut the goat" or "We always had to cut chickens"
(Interviews, 2002, 2009).

Despite the fact that the plant protection staff was trained in a conventional way, and used to talk to farmers about calendar spraying, pesticide use, threshold levels, they were ready to work on the FFS approach. They were happy to talk about integrated pest management and the FFS, using a vocabulary such as farmers' participation and learning about natural enemies and pests. This was not purely due to a quick mentality shift or attitude change, or acknowledgment of a need for farmer training and a more participatory approach. They were instructed by their superiors to conduct participatory farmers training using the FFS approach. Certainly government staffs were made to believe that a more participatory approach in working with farmers was needed, but it was not until they started practicing it

that they experienced that it made their job more fun and their efforts more effective:

“I used to think that farmers were stupid and ignorant. Since the FFS project, I now always think of farmers as a tank of knowledge gained from experience and try to learn from them in order to make my service efficient and effective” (interview government staff, July 2009)

For PPD staff one of the reasons they feel that the FFS was successful is because they became more respected by farmers. Before they had to explain about thresholds, which was quite difficult, or they were called for a pest outbreak but they could often not avoid that the damage was already done. The participatory approach to FFS was more enjoyable and gave them more job satisfaction.

In the old days talking with farmers was not considered status-enhancing but after FFS interaction with farmers was valued more. Also the international donor community appreciated this shift: “It is good to see these government officers talking with farmers as if they are equal” (conversation with NORAD staff 2002).

Farming in Nepal is seen as a dirty job in particular by (government, Brahmin) officers. During FFS training of trainers we tried to change farm practices into something positive, into hands-on training. In the training of trainers the government officers felt they got brainwashed. As a result their attitude towards working with farmers changed.

“I was brainwashed in Jhumka during first IPM TOT (integrated pest management training of trainers), I liked it very much. It lasted four months; we did not get a *bhatta* (daily allowance), lots of practical work and long days. We all became real good friends. Farmers learnt digging out the problems in their field, they learnt to talk. But also the officers learnt to talk with farmers. I never had such a pleasant training as in Jhumka” (“Before FFS I found half an hour talking with farmers too long, now a day is still too short.” (DADO Chief, Kathmandu, interview 2009)

In FFS we realised in the training of trainers that government staff, who were mainly male from higher caste, were not used to physical labour, in fact turned up their noses at field work. The following statement by one senior government officer said (Jhumka, 1998, July) was confirmed by other government officers:

“We had no idea how to plant rice, we were reluctant to go into the paddy field, and we did not want to get dirty. The facilitators forced us and said it was part of their training. So we planted our own rice, we watched it grow, we weeded the fields and we got very proud. We were proud to show it to our superiors when they came to visit. Planting rice also increased our credibility with farmers. I am glad I have done the training and went into the mud”.

Another officer said:

“For us a government job was working in the office and occasionally visiting farmers in their houses, but never did I expect to go into their actual fields. When I had to do this in the FFS training it was new to me, a big challenge, but also enjoyable” (1998, July). DADO staff: I gained more respect from farmers when I went to the field, but also my friends in NGOs started to appreciate my work more when I went on field visits. (Kavre, interview, 2009).

The DADO Chief said:

“We were used to training being only theoretical and *bhatta* but this training was different. We had to do our own work. We felt uneasy in the beginning. Also farmers felt this way, they did not get any *bhatta*, any money, but they learnt a lot. We also taught people how to speak, how to work. We learnt so much by doing practical work, discovery learning. We learnt a lot how to control brown plant hopper”. (Kathmandu, interview, 2009)

We did not learn much in Rampur (BSc agr. campus), we learnt more in this training-of-trainers’ course. After this I also had confidence I could run the training-of-trainers or FFS. I conducted a training-of-trainers and refresher course in Nepalganj.” (DADO Chief, Kavre, 2009)

In 2004 the deputy IPM programme coordinator concluded:

“In the beginning there were doubts on the success of the program as there was generalised pre conceived thinking that government agricultural officers do not work in the field with their own hands. However, it was proven that officers showed their capabilities in field work.”(PPD and FAO, 2004:5)

Structural power took place when institutional change and ideological and attitude change occurred. A participatory approach became an acceptable way of working with farmers and a new philosophy for government extension workers. However ideological barriers prevented inclusion of all sections of society in FFS.

8.7.1 Social exclusion

In Chapter 6 it became clear that not everyone was able to take part in FFS. It was not just lack of education, time or no access to land that explains social exclusion. It is the history, politics, prevailing ideologies (such as based on patriarchy, Hinduism, ethnicity, political affiliation such as Maoism) and power relationships, which explain social exclusion processes.

There was clear evidence of social exclusion in certain villages: some people were consciously invited some were not informed. But on other occasions or in some areas exclusion happened in a more subtle way, through indirect discrimination.

In interviews and discussions it became obvious that FFS trainers and officers, but also village leaders played an important role in participant selection.

Some (male and female) participants said in interviews that the officer had told them to come; they felt they had an obligation to attend. This is related to their past, to historical events, from the times that citizens felt obliged to follow orders from government officers.

In most villages visited in 2002 and 2009 there are Brahmin (male) landlords or village leaders: from our research we noticed 14 out of 17 villages had Brahmin leaders in 2008, 2009. In the minds of lower caste people upper caste individuals have manipulated government programmes in collaboration with government staff (Kavre, Tanahun, Bhaktapur, Sindhupalchowk, farmers -interviews 2008, 2009). But this conflict is not limited to

Brahmin/Chettries and lower caste people. In other villages too I have observed and talked to dominant groups and groups that felt excluded. In Kavre district Tamang people live uphill and are distant from resources such as irrigation but also far from the centre of the village where information regarding training opportunities appear. In Dapcha the participants were all from the central ward in the VDC, they all belonged to the Newar community. This had created tensions with the Tamang (Janajati) population who live in other wards, further from the centre, more on the higher hills, and who were not invited to take part in the FFS. During a focus group discussion a Tamang man expressed his anger about being excluded from FFS training (and other DADO and development activities) and said he was interested to learn about agriculture just like his *village brothers*. His confidence was brought about partly by alcohol. The Newari participants reacted with embarrassment and statements like: “Oh well people from his ethnicity are like that” (implying: they drink and behave uncivilized). The Newari people explained that they were educated and the agents that brought development to their village, would eventually also benefit the other ethnic groups.

In the neighbouring village Syampathi, the selection process was done differently: the VDC leader had chosen two people from each ward to take part in FFS training. As a result there were Tamang, Newari, Brahmin participants. It was not clear if there were also Dalits in this FFS. At any rate the selection was done in such a way that people from different wards felt represented. Groups that were composed of such a diverse group from different locations usually fell apart after FFS (Humagain, 2008). (See Chapter 5)

Government officers admit that they usually go to the leader farmers that they have worked with for years, or generations. “We work with farmers with whom we have a long-standing relationship” (DADO Kavre, interview July 2009). And: “We go first to the village leaders, when they are helpful the whole village will cooperate” (DADO Tanahun, interview 2009). Especially in the first FFS, it was mostly the so called elite farmers who were approached, who took part in the training and as a result benefitted. However, after the first FFS, in the same area often another FFS was conducted and this time round other farmers got a chance to learn in FFS (see Chapter 6). Masaki noticed: (2007:115) the officers turned to the elite in first instance, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. “We should not assume that elites want to exploit or suppress” (ibid.: 64). Like Masaki (2007) I have observed that most of these elite farmers are not necessarily oppressing people, they also want others in the villages to benefit from development interventions. Many of these leading farmers feel that it is their obligation to help others in their village. Like one farmer said: “I help my people to get development”. (Kavre, interview, 2009). Many Brahmin leaders see themselves as generous benefactors, helping the poor and uneducated.

Farmers too have potency and use power due to their extensive knowledge of an area, or his relations with influential people. As one extension officer said: “I need to have a good relationship with the farmers in this area, because if they are unhappy I will have trouble. He was referring to an area where many Maoists are living (Kavre, interview, 2009). Another DADO officer said: “I need to talk to this leader farmer because he is important, he knows many people. If he agrees with our project, all other people in his village will too”. (Kavre, interview, 2009).

A number of government officials still considered FFS as an intervention in the old-style that depicts local people in need of guidance from outside agencies, such as DADO or agric-service centres. Along this line they invite people to attend FFS. In fact they often instructed people to come.

When asked in Tanahun, a group of eight Gurung women unanimously said: “Sir asked us to come” (Tanahun, interview, 2009)

The same replies came from women in Sindhupalchowk and men and women in Kavre. In the past it were men who were invited by the extension officer, but in 2009 more women were called by the sir (being a JT or government officer that does not seem to make a difference, any (male) representative of the government or NGO is referred to as ‘sir’.

In Sunthan people responded:

“We do not know why we actually took part. We thought we can learn from agriculture, so we just joined FFS, we do not know why. Probably because this was a chance to learn something. Agriculture is our work. The Officer from DADO/JT came and organised a meeting with everybody. 25 people in a group learned about cauliflower. It was very pleasant, we had fun, we learnt a lot from the DADO person. We felt like family together”(Kavre, interview 2009).

Feminisation of agriculture has been addressed in chapters 2 and 6. As a result of their increased responsibility and visibility in agriculture women are more targeted as beneficiaries or participants in agricultural interventions such as FFS. This way patriarchal expectations of women, to provide unpaid care, is perpetuated not only in respect to the domestic space but also in respect to national food security or agricultural production.

The selection procedure of FFS participants might have happened in a top-down manner, but it also offers an arena to which farmers react and resist decisions taken. Sometimes women just sat in FFS session without talking or fully participation. Others left early on the grounds that they were busy with their household work, or they were not feeling well, drawing on the myth that women are prone to get sick, that they are weak. Sometimes people send other family members and now and again they just did not turn up. Ordinary people are not entirely submissive to its external forces (Masaki, 2007:3). They had way to subtly and unobtrusively renegotiate power relations by virtue of their underprivileged positions that also served as ‘structural properties’, using limitations and opportunities arising in their day-to-day lives.

Progressively more people are not only selected because they are powerful landlords or traditional village leaders, or contact farmers, but because they are political leaders. Nowadays it is not plausible to ignore local elected leaders while forming FFS groups. One official said: “It is part and parcel of the democracy or the new politics of our country” (Kathmandu, interview August 2009)

With the Maoist movement gaining power (Chapter 2) NGO staff and government staff feel compelled to include more people who were Maoist supporters in their FFS. So one government officer said that he wanted to keep good relations with farmers in Paanchkhal and Mahadevstan in Kavre district “because they are strong Maoist leaders” (interview Kavre, 2002)

World education staffs admit that it is not easy to select the right individuals for FFS:

“It is difficult to select right persons for FFS: the men who take the decisions, the leaders, or the daughters-in-law who do all the work?” (Kathmandu, interview August 2009)

8.8 Group formation

Another aspect of FFS that is a typical feature of the programme is the formation of groups. This was in-line with the government policy, where the 'group approach' was promoted in the APP. As was reported by PPD and FAO (2004) that the FFS group can "solve their problems by using local knowledge and resources" (2004:50). And: "the emphasis is on strengthening self-reliance and group interactions among farmers, therefore the sustainability of the FFS approach in the hand of the farmers rather than the government institutions"(2004:2). Group mobilisation can also be considered part of governmentality, as a governance tool.

Rose et al. (2006:85) call the process of group formation 'responsibilisation' whereby the groups formed get the responsibility to plan and find their own destiny, to solve their own problems, to work towards autonomy. Thus the task of the government shifted towards the community. The increased popularity of social capital or group building, and community development, can be best understood in the light of economic liberalisation and public-sector restructuring Ben Fine (1999). As Fine puts it, the slogan of development agencies has become "Developmental state is dead — long live social capital!" Group mobilisation is a result of programmes such as 'structural adjustment' that have reduced governments' budget for public expenditure and redefined the state's responsibilities for government services (Fine, 1999).

Group formation, or as Nebelung calls it the 'mobilisation' approach (1991: 263), is a widely practiced strategy, where so far no common understanding has been evolved about its goal, its theoretical and practical implications and the potential obstacles (263) "Group cohesion is not created around an idea of 'solidarity' but around materialistic views" (Nebelung, 1991: 274) (see Chapter 5 for more on group dynamics). This is confirmed by Cleaver (2006, 2001a, 2002) who warns against group mobilisation without considering existing (non) formal institutions and other contextual dynamics.

In Nepal the group approach became popular and official government policy in the 1990s (APROSC & John Mellor Associates, 1995) *and* is often regarded a method to empower people, but also as a way to give responsibility to communities for their own development. In interviews and group discussions it became clear that most people are involved in several groups: road committee, forest users, mother and health group, mother savings group and so on. Working with groups is an example of a 'shared agenda' among NGOs and government agencies. The MoAC promoted a group approach and so did INGOs and local NGOs, albeit for different reasons. They all found common ground in working with groups as happened in the FFS. Several NGOs work with established groups. After FFS they continue with the group with other activities. World Education, for instance, had built literacy groups with women. After the literacy classes the same groups got FFS training. After FFS they continued with another activity. CARE had vegetable growers groups and worked with the same groups on FFS. After FFS they continued with income-generating activities in some communities. CARITAS links FFS farmers groups with existing farmers' cooperatives. CARITAS' idea is that this will increase the sustainability of the FFS group and at the same time will guarantee marketing of the vegetables they learn to produce in FFS. (Kathmandu, interview 2009)

Prior to starting the training FFS groups of about 25 people are formed. These groups first receive FFS training and afterwards are expected to act collectively to work on 'development of their own communities'. Usually the FFS groups registered with the VDC as

CBO. In some communities the groups did indeed register and continued to meet and work on community activities, such as irrigation (Lamichane, 2008), but this was usually the case when follow-up support was given by either the government or by an NGO. In most places however, the groups dissolved after FFS, (Humagain, 2008).

Many groups expressed that they wanted more services from the government; they expected a continuation of support after FFS. Several groups were left disappointed. Their newly established close link with the government officer was something they expected to intensify. Rather than taking action to initiate new activities themselves many farmers were waiting for “sir” to come back and help them move on. This is not unusual, people generally want more services from the government or expect NGOs to fulfill their promises (de Vries, 2007)

Group mobilisation can be a governance tool, but citizens are not simple passive beneficiaries. If people do not want to stay in groups or farmers associations, these groups dissolve. Group members do not just duly follow instructions of agriculture production, but have their own ideas about the interpretation of the instructions. In FFS it was hoped or assumed that groups would remain active, solve community problems and work on collective empowerment, but in most cases this did not happen (See Chapter 5). Groups disintegrate when activities do not pay off materially or socially. Also people left the group when they did not feel comfortable, where there was no social cohesion. Participants left FFS groups due to caste, ethnic, gender, age, educational differences. Ideological barriers and social viability are often underestimated in group mobilisation (Rankin, 2001). Groups that were not newly established for FFS, but already existed as vegetable growers group or farmers group, are more likely to remain active after FFS training. FFS where mostly women take part are more liable to remain functional in FFS groups than Farmer Field Schools with mostly with male members. For most women FFS was the first agricultural training they got, and they remained active in the FFS to support each other.

To summarise, the group approach was not a new strategy for development organisations in Nepal. It was already part of the government policy and FFS worked with groups but did not necessarily change the setting or direction of farmers groups. Most groups dissolved after FFS activities were terminated. In the case of group formation structural power did not occur, when most groups dissolved after FFS. There was no institutional or ideological change.

8.9 Employment of farmer-trainers

A further instrument that can be considered part of a governmentality strategy in the FFS project was the introduction of the concept of farmers’ trainers, farmers that are trained to become FFS facilitators. Like group mobilisation this is a way for organisations to work more cost-efficiently with farmers. From another point of view it can be seen as a way to give more responsibility to farmers, or decentralise decision-making, but also to incorporate more local knowledge and concerns in FFS was by introducing the concept of farmer trainers. This strategy was received by farmers and officials with mixed feelings. An official explains: “The extensive employment of farmer trainers to conduct FFS has its advantages and disadvantages. The key advantages are that it is relatively cheap to expand the FFS, or up-scale FFS. Moreover, local farmers speak local languages, know the people and their circumstances better than government or NGO trainers” (Kavre, interview 2009). Another officer states: “The quality of FFS is lower when conducted by farmer trainers than when FFS

is run by government officers". (Kavre, interview 2009)

Also from the farmer trainers point of view there are troubles reported, as is illustrated by a farmer trainer, employed by NGOS, as well as government officers:

"Some people do not join FFS because they say; it is only for A 's advantage, she earns money. Others do not think they can learn anything new (join generation) or do feel they do not get any financial incentive to join." (Bhaktapur, female farmer trainer, interview, 2009)

Now there is virus disease in tomato, the farmers are worried and have lost interest in FFS because there seemed to be no solution. I am worried, how to keep the group together. (Bhaktapur, female farmer trainer, interview, 2009)

Shiva is another farmer trainer and worried "I really do not know how to handle disease in tomato, I do not have the knowledge".

Devi, a farmer trainer in Tanahun:

"I did not know how to address problems in cucurbit, so the whole crop was lost due to pest and diseases. I learnt a lot, but the farmers were disappointed." (Damauli, interview, 2009)

The concept of farmer trainers was readily adopted by the government, in particular because it was cost-effective, much cheaper than employing government officers to run FFS. But the quality of the FFS is questioned by some. Both farmers and government staff have doubts about the quality of FFS run by farmer trainers. The possibility of accepting farmers training other farmers is influenced by history, international forces and prevailing cultural norms and values or ideologies, whereby decades of feudalism patron-client relations, patriarchy and Hinduism have a big impact in Nepal. The institutional setting is as such that government officers still claim and receive more respect, but the situation is changing and increasingly the role of farmers training other farmers is accepted. Structural power occurred. Increasingly people believe in the capacity and strengths of farmer trainers and in their ability to train other fellow farmers. The recruitment of farmer trainers has brought about a change in traditional thinking and practice of agricultural extension.

8.10 Conclusion

By looking at FFS from a governance perspective, I moved away from the usual assessment of FFS on farming practices or agricultural development. The 'governance' lens sheds light on the role of the implementing agencies and decision-making processes, and gives greater recognition of the complexity of implementing effective development interventions in which FFS farmers as subject play an active role. There are several indications that the state (donors, government and NGOs) use FFS and the FFS project as a governance tool: the project plan is defined by the Nepalese government and FAO with measurable objectives, strategies and budget allocations. There is a purposeful selection of the place where to conduct FFS, and the definition of the target group or intended beneficiaries. There is careful selection of FFS trainers, the content of the training is determined a priority by government agencies (mainly DADO, PPD) and NGOs, and selection of the crop is decided by the district

agricultural office. These all seem measures to control the project pathway.

Still the FFS project did not work out as planned; the careful engineering of the project steps and strategy did not prevent the prevalence of unexpected outcomes.

First of all the involvement of various actors with their various roles and interests in FFS, different practices construct FFS and the project as a whole in many ways. Their interactions and (sometimes conflicting) interests guarantee a complex web of relations and inherent power dynamics.

Applying Wolf's model of structural power I showed that several governance instruments were applied to give direction to FFS. The involvement of NGOs, the group approach, guidelines for a participatory approach, employment of farmer trainers were examples of tools used in FFS. However, just the tools did not provide a change of the setting, a social transformation, a change in power dynamics. These long-term or structural changes occurred only when ideologies, values changed and invisible power was addressed.

It can be argued that FFS is being used as governance tool, giving responsibilities to farmers for their own development, solving their own problems. Group mobilisation and the use of farmer-trainers are some other examples of a shift of responsibility for service delivery from the state to farmers themselves. FFS changed the institutional setting to some extent; it gave room for farmers' participation, which was not common practice in conventional agricultural extension. Participation was introduced in a formal way by the FFS project, but became an acceptable way of working with farmers by government officers and NGO alike, and farmers appreciated this new way of interacting with extension agents. The attitude and ideology of both farmers and agricultural technicians or extension workers changed. A participatory way of working became accepted practice.

Nonetheless it became clear that these strategies cannot simply be forced upon farmers and can only be employed with collaboration of the farmers who are meant to benefit from FFS. The state might push, but other actors and the institutional environment resist, collaborate, and determine the space for manoeuvre. While FFS is part of a measure of the state to influence behaviour of its citizens and a strategy to achieve increased agricultural production, the farmers for whom FFS is intended, influence the implementation of this intervention. Farmers are far from the passive victims depicted in project documents, but they exercise their agency and increasingly raise their voice.

Additionally the analysis showed that ideologies of caste, patriarchy, ethnic belonging but also historically evolved relations and ideas affect agency and the ability of social actors like farmers and project staff to make use of power.

The context in which actors operate, but also the actors themselves are subject to change. For instance, farmers who were traditionally trapped in patronage systems and mainly considered as tax payers are nowadays more respected as clients who can claim services. Formal and informal institutions, such as ethnic identity, caste solidarity or gender roles have obtained an inherent function in FFS agenda setting. Prestige, belonging, or other aspects of symbolical capital play a role. Power is woven into social relations at different levels starting from individual potency, to group interaction and structural or institutional levels.

Farmers stressed that they liked the FFS, it provided them with a forum to discuss agricultural problems they face, they learned about ways to improve their agricultural production. They claimed that through FFS their relationship with the government improved. Rather than control over farmers, FFS facilitated interaction. It became a popular approach

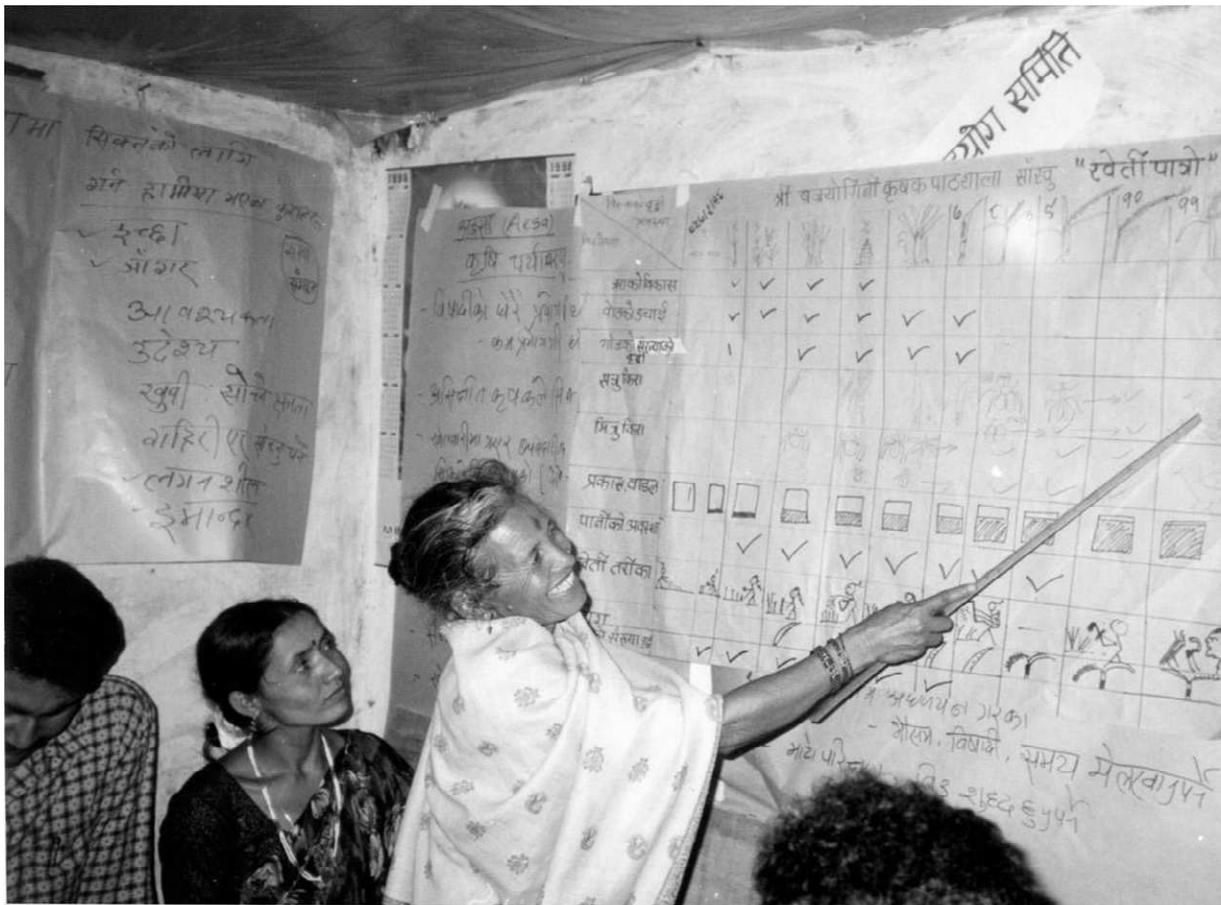
that was applied by many organisations, and expanded in many areas by which numerous farmers enjoyed participation.

Governmentality as a concept is helpful to analyse governance strategies. For getting a better understanding of governance and rural transformation, a change in relationships among actors and their ideologies, the notion of structural power is more useful.

FFS has been institutionalised (Chapter 6), facilitated empowerment (Chapter 7) and as a project it has contributed to the long-term process of rural development by promoting a positive view on farmers as actors in development, generating the appreciation of more interaction with male and female farmers in a dynamic setting where historical traditions and widespread views on caste, gender, and religion keep affecting the agency of actors.

9

Conclusion



Chapter 9 Conclusion

“If Bhagwan does not help us we have to do it ourselves” (female farmer, Sindhupalchowk, interview 2009)

9.1 Methodological reflections

This has been a longitudinal research project during which a great variety of methods have been used, from a survey providing quantitative data using statistical analysis, to flexibly designed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations providing more qualitative data. Like the FFS project I myself have evolved over the years, and so have the methods I applied. My position as an insider in Nepalese society and in FFS through my previous work and life in Nepal has provided me with unique opportunities to deepen my understanding of the data collected. If I had known at the onset of the project in 1997 and during the survey in 2002 that I would use all the data for a PhD research, I could have tried to follow and interview the same farmers over the years.

Unfortunately this was not the case. There was no linear planning for this research in 1997 and I faced uncertainties and unexpected situations, which led to unexpected outcomes. This, however, is not unusual in research. The large amount of information gathered for this study spans more than a decade, providing a rich source of new knowledge that hopefully contributes to a better insight in the practice of development interventions such as FFS and its role in rural development in Nepal.

The notion of a developmental problem being ‘rendered technical’ (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007) has provided inspiration for this study. Because of my experience with teaching Gender and Development courses and working with men and women in Nepal I realised that this notion still lacks a gender dimension. With gender I refer to the socially constructed roles and behaviours of and expectations regarding women and men in society. The nature of gender relations is not easy to grasp in its full complexity. Gender relations are revealed not only in the division of labour and resources between women and men, but also in ideas and representations – the ascription to women and men of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behaviour patterns, and so on.

In this thesis I have used gender as an ordering principle and I have not elaborated on gender relations, which was beyond the scope of this study. I was particularly interested in the different experiences of men and women in applying agricultural skills learnt from FFS and their different experiences with empowerment.

Now, coming to the end of this thesis, there remain many topics that require further investigation. Rather than closing my research, I feel that I have only just started and that I have gained better insight into what issues need further study, such as gender relations associated with governance and changing caste-related power dynamics in Nepal and elsewhere. But to conclude this thesis let me first account for the answers to the three research questions.

9.2 Answering the research questions

The quote at the beginning of this final chapter is a remark from a female farmer in the mid hills of Nepal who was interviewed during the course of this research. She expressed disillusionment with the sources of support she previously counted on, like *Bhagwan*, God; her faith in religion, but also in the government - who was until recently considered a representative of the God or goddess in Nepal - has been shaken. Together with many other women in her village she took development in their own hands. This woman was not an exception among the respondents in this study.

The contrast between the remark of the young male farmer in Chapter 1 and this woman's words encompasses the changes taking place in rural Nepal: On the one hand the younger generation who has lost interest in farming (with some exceptions) and, on the other hand, the women who have increasingly taken responsibilities in agriculture. The role of the state, historically confined to government agencies has made room for a governance of multiple actors including NGOs. The government was previously considered to be looking after its citizens whereby farmers were treated as duty-bearers, but this also has changed. Farmers have become more aware, more vocal; they are demanding services and claiming their right. Within this dynamic setting the Farmer Field School (FFS) project took place which was the subject of this research.

This thesis is based on both the practice of doing development through the FAO financed FFS project in the 1990s and the subsequent study of development in Nepal in which FFS was instrumental. The objective of this research was to look if FFS had lived up to its promises and contributed to agricultural development and the empowerment of farmers. I tried to get a better understanding of the process of rural transformation over the last decade, the power play of actors at multiple institutional and societal levels, and the political-economic and social changes that have taken place during this period. In this research I have reflected upon the practice of 'doing development' through my active involvement and leading position in the implementation of FFS in Nepal in the 1990s, the way FFS as a tool for development became embedded in Nepalese governmental structure and institutional setting, and how it contributed to social change over the last 15 years. With my study I provide insights into FFS as a development tool for the benefit of both development practitioners and scholars. I have used the Farmer Field School as a case, but the conclusions may be applicable to other interventions in the agricultural sector.

The three main research questions that followed from the research objective were:

- 3) What is the contribution of Farmer Field Schools in rural development
- 4) How did Farmer Field Schools contribute to the empowerment of male and female farmers and rural transformation in the long-term?
- 5) How did FFS become embedded in the Nepalese governmental structure and for who is the Farmer Field School a tool of governance in Nepal?

In the chapters 4 to 8 partial answers to these questions have been given. In this concluding chapter these answers are brought together. Additionally, I will reflect on the theory and methodology used in this research. This chapter and this thesis conclude with some final considerations regarding the future of FFS in Nepal.

1. What is the contribution of Farmer Field Schools in rural development?

Development or transformation is a complex social process in which intended beneficiaries often have different objectives than project planners. Drawing from the experience of the Farmer Field School project as a carefully planned intervention, this research demonstrates how change came largely as an unintended result of people's actions in a dynamic socio-economic environment, rather than as an outcome of strategic planning.

Farmer Field Schools were introduced in Nepal as an integrated pest management project in 1997 with concrete output oriented goals: the increase of agricultural production and pesticide use reduction. This was a government policy and the government used FFS as a vehicle to introduce vegetables and expand the vegetable production area. Over the years many farmers, increasingly also women received training. FFS was initially a project conducted mainly by the Nepalese government, in particular the Plant Protection Directorate but along the way more and more actors became involved, each with their own agenda and objectives. They all constructed FFS in a way, despite their different concerns and sometimes even conflicting interests. Yet, the resulting friction (Tsing, 2004) between organisations did not lead to destruction. On the contrary, it provided a variety of justifications to promote Farmer Field Schools, leading to the expansion of the approach and the institutionalisation of the concept - as long as the actors involved could implement FFS in a technocratic and non-political way, somehow finding some common ground. Vaguely used concepts such as participation served the purpose of finding common ground. .

FFS started as a project with a clear objective and written documents in which the duration was indicated, from 1997 to 2002. In villages where FFS was conducted eight or more years ago we still see that farmers continue with some of the practices that they learnt in FFS training. FFS started as a project but generated a continuous process of change. As often is the case, there are several positive and some negative outcomes. Although it might not be exactly the way project planners had proposed in their documents, a fact is that farmers do still apply some of the agronomic practices that were introduced in FFS. Farmers developed new skills, changed their cropping patterns, diversified with vegetable production, and changed their agronomic practices such as in weeding, fertiliser application, and spacing between plants. Yields increased and pesticide use was reduced. Increased knowledge led to improved practices and better informed decision-making skills. One can conclude that FFS indeed contributed to agricultural development in Nepal.

For several reasons the FFS project management could not fully control project implementation and not everything went according to plan. First of all there are many different actors involved in the FFS programme, from the government to NGOs and farmers, all with their own agenda and strategies, and acting in a dynamic political-economic context. On the one hand farmers were educated in discovery-learning and critical thinking; on the other hand they were expected to adopt the new techniques that were introduced in FFS. We learnt that farmers are not helpless victims who adopted vegetable production or used fewer pesticides because they were being told to do so. Farmers made their own choices, their own decisions, whereby men and women clearly exposed different interests and needs. Practices that have been introduced were adapted, made suitable and were re-embedded in locally situated practices (Arce and Long, 2000). Moreover, although in the project farmers were treated as a homogenous group, I have given evidence that men and women used FFS

in different ways.

Soon it became apparent that FFS was not an end in itself and that the training farmers received generated a process of capacity-building and rural development, not only involving farmers but also the technical staff themselves. Over the years FFS developed and the intended outcomes became more process oriented, such as farmer empowerment and capacity-building. With its focus on participation FFS gave a boost to agricultural extension in Nepal enabling it to move away from the conventional top-down and purely technology transfer approach. FFS facilitated a more practical orientation and a closer collaboration of trainers and extension workers with farmers. Agricultural technicians changed their attitude towards farmers and they came to better appreciate their local knowledge and ideas, and started to accept farmers as partners in development, rather than citizens who have to be told or instructed what to do.

The content of the training did not change dramatically, but the context did. Started as a technical intervention FFS evolved into a process that took place at multiple temporal and spatial levels in a dynamic socio-cultural, economic and political context. Also the composition of the FFS groups changed in the period of 1999-2002 and 2009 (See Chapter 6). Initially we could observe a courtesy bias towards the rural elite, village leaders, high caste and well-educated men who were invited to take part in FFS. Recently more women, illiterate and Janajatis were included, and occasionally a token Dalit was allowed to participate in FFS. These changes should be seen in the light of the involvement of a variety of actors, but also as a result of the changing political-economic conditions of Nepal and the influence of globally changing development paradigms. The war, outmigration of men, and the emancipation of women lead to a feminisation of agriculture. The Women in Development movement, a government policy that demanded a compulsory participation of 33% women in agricultural activities and, simultaneously, the strong commitment shown by female farmers together resulted in an increased participation of women in FFS at the turn of this century.

In practice FFS confirmed the national inequalities based on caste, landlessness. Dalits, who have little to no land, were excluded from taking part in FFS. They were usually not even informed about the training opportunities. Patterns of access and control to resources changed in particular in favour of women. The participatory processes, the group discussions, the discovery-learning approach has encouraged farmers to raise their voice, to think critically. This trend coincided with the political changes. Democratisation processes in Nepal gradually led to the inclusion of more Janajati and incidentally a few Dalits in FFS by 2010 FFS thus provided a platform for a more democratic governance process.

2. How did Farmer Field Schools contribute to the empowerment of male and female farmers and rural transformation in the long-term?

In the FFS project power - being the key element of empowerment - is mostly considered an asset; hence empowerment is mainly regarded as an instrument. The FFS approach towards empowerment is a good example of the 'rendering technical' of a new problem. Rendering technical is a form of depoliticisation or an anti-politics move (Ferguson, 1994) as it ignores the social and historical context and personal experience in favour of formal, universally 'objective' and neutral assessments. Li (2006: 6; 2007: 6-12) elaborates on the depoliticisation of development when a project is formatted in a way that perceives evident social, cultural or economic inequities as technical problems. The identified problem and the

chosen solutions are thus amenable to available forms of monitoring and evaluation, to measurement, calculation and audit. Development, and thus empowerment, generally have been conceived as merely technocratic, leaving social issues and politics out of the equation.

Although I was aware of the socio-cultural and historical context of the FFS project in Nepal, I and the other Plant Protection Directorate and FAO project team members focused on the general objective of 'educating the farmers' by following specific steps in setting up the FFS training. I used project documents with elaborate logical frameworks as guidelines as a neutral way of reporting. Moreover, in the implementation of FFS in Nepal in the 1990s, evidently socially and economically relevant issues of caste and gender were not considered (see Chapters 6, 7, 8).

At the start it was assumed by the project developers that if farmers would follow certain steps in discovery-learning they would go through a process of empowerment in a technical way. Most extension workers considered empowerment as a tool or 'power to' achieve increased production and produce more autonomous farmers who could manage their own development, who could act autonomously. Many agricultural technicians thought that farmers would become empowered just by doing what they ought to do when they adopted the technologies that had been introduced by the agricultural staff.

If we apply the approach of Kabeer (1994), then in FFS empowerment is considered a result of gaining knowledge and improved capacity or agency to address problems through a discovery-learning process and through collective action. FFS in fact did increase the access to knowledge and skills related to crop management through enhancing discovery-learning and problem-solving skills in groups. By repeatedly practising these skills male and female participants increased their self-confidence. The benefits in terms of empowerment seemed to be more apparent among women than among men. Most men went on with 'business as usual', while women clearly actively engaged with a change in their lives. Women experienced that their decision-making power regarding access to resources – particularly used in farming - had expanded. By acting in a group on a weekly basis they enlarged their social capital. Group cohesion and increased solidarity provided the social route to empowerment (Bartlett, 2004).

I had assumed at the start of the project that the difference between men and women was a cultural matter and none of our concern but this assumption was challenged during the course of project implementation and particularly during my research. FFS offered opportunities to women who were previously denied access to them through agricultural training. It has now become accepted for women to take part in agricultural extension activities. FFS did not address other inequalities between men and women, let alone certain social exclusion mechanisms like caste and ethnicity. By inviting mostly higher caste members to take part in FFS, caste hierarchies were reinforced by the project. Even though the context is changing and the political environment nowadays demands more attention to vulnerable and previously excluded groups (Chapters 2 and 6), the project has reinforced existing disparities and failed to take into account the diversity and difference in terms of caste, income, land ownership, ethnicity, gender, age, and education.

Despite the fact that FFS did not address certain conditions in society producing inequality, discrimination and social exclusion, modifications of the wider social-economic and political conditions in Nepal did influence the performance of FFS. Over the last decade, labour outmigration away from the rural areas, the feminisation of agriculture, the government policy demanding an increase of women's participation in development, and the

Maoist movement have encouraged Dalits and Janajatis to raise their voice. These circumstances have expanded the opportunities for women, Janajatis and Dalits. In the rural areas previously ignored or marginalised groups demand justice, request more support from the government and also demand inclusion in FFS training. The men and women who had participated in FFS felt more confident to talk to officers and felt encouraged to speak up against government staff. FFS participants have expressed an interest in more services from the agricultural extension officers or DADO. Gradually more farmers realised that they had to take development into their own hands. They demanded more services. Men increasingly visited DADO offices to demand mini-kits or other inputs and they asked for advice. Meeting agricultural technicians in their fields women too had started to ask them critical questions. FFS has thus started a process with unknown consequences, at a time when Nepal is in a political-economic flux.

3. How did FFS become embedded in the Nepalese governmental structure and for who is the Farmer Field School a tool of governance?

By looking at FFS from a governance perspective, I moved away from the usual assessment of FFS on farming practices or agricultural development. The governance lens, including a power analysis, sheds light on the role of the implementing agencies, the decision-making processes, and it gives greater recognition of the complexity of implementing effective development interventions.

From the start FFS was governed by the Nepalese state agencies together with FAO. Increasingly also local NGOs became involved, donors, government and NGOs used FFS as a governance tool: defining the project plan with concrete objectives, strategies and budget allocations. The locations where to conduct FFS, the target group and the intended beneficiaries, were purposefully selected. Also, the careful selection of FFS trainers and the content of the training were determined by government agencies (mainly DADO, PPD) and NGOs, and crop selection was decided upon by the district agricultural office. These all seemed measures to control the project's pathway.

But FFS in practice was far from a rational act or an example of Foucauldian governmentality. Governmentality as a concept is helpful to analyse governance strategies. For getting a better understanding of governance and rural transformation, a change in relationships among actors and their ideologies, the notion of structural power is more useful. The practices of different actors with different concerns and capacities, roles and interests in FFS were constructed differently by each Farmer Field School. Also, the Nepalese government and the NGOs involved in FFS did not have the same development objectives as the farmers themselves. Finally, the interactions between all actors in FFS exemplified a complex web of relationships and inherent power dynamics (Wolf, 1990). Some elements of these power dynamics might be visible in project documents, budgets, monitoring and evaluation guidelines, but the main part is hidden or invisible. The hidden agendas of the actors and the cultural norms that influence project management are not easy to detect. Actions take place and decisions are made in a specific socio-cultural and political context, influenced by historical events and not always based on an economic rationale.

Strategies that are central to FFS, such as farmers' participation, group formation and farmers-training-farmers, might be employed by the Nepalese state to make their farmers more governable. It can be argued that FFS is being used as governance tool, giving responsibilities to farmers for their own development, solving their own problems. Group

mobilisation and the use of farmer-trainers are examples of a shift of responsibilities for service delivery to farmers themselves. Nonetheless this research made clear that these strategies cannot simply be forced upon farmers.

The context, but also the actors themselves, are subject to change. For instance, the farmers themselves who were traditionally trapped in the debt bondage of a patronage system and considered as merely tax payers are nowadays more respected as clients who can claim services from the government. Institutions based on ethnic identity, caste solidarity and gender have obtained a new function in designing rural transformation.

I have used the concept of structural power which occurred when FFS was instituted by the government in collaboration with NGOs. FFS changed the institutional setting to some extent, giving room for farmers' participation which had not been acceptable before. On the other hand, FFS also kept access restricted to certain categories of farmers, namely mostly higher castes and male farmers, while women and Dalits remained excluded. The invisible power dynamics that maintained inequality between castes were not challenged. Gradually FFS enabled more interaction between farmers and officials, and created room for farmers to express their needs and desires. Farmers stated in interviews that they liked the FFS experience because it provided them with a forum to discuss the agricultural problems they faced as they learned about ways to improve their agricultural production. They claimed that through FFS their relationship with the government improved. Rather than exercising control over farmers, FFS moved toward a facilitating project. It became a popular approach that was adopted and applied by many organisations, and it expanded into many regions in Nepal.

FFS has been institutionalised (Chapter 6), facilitated empowerment (Chapter 7) and as a project it has contributed to the long-term process of rural development by promoting a positive view on farmers as actors in development, generating the appreciation of more interaction with male and female farmers in a dynamic setting where historical traditions and widespread views on caste, gender, and religion keep affecting the agency of actors.

Reflecting on the results of my study, what can we say about FFS in Nepal and in the wider context of global development? I will elaborate on my views in the following, last section of this thesis.

9.3 Looking to the future and policy implications

Technical interventions are seen as answers to agricultural problems. FFS have been applied to address complex problems that require a more inclusive socio-political approach. This thesis suggests that FFS as a technical intervention should not be seen as independent from contextual dynamics, like ethnic and caste hierarchy, environmental changes, and the rapid cultural, social, and political changes that took place at the turn of this century in Nepal. Only then FFS as a project and as a process can be understood in its contribution to farming systems, livelihoods, and rural transformation.

In rural areas most young people move away from farming to urban centres; they are no longer interested in working in agriculture (Gartaula, 2011). The men and (young) women who stay in agriculture do not wish to engage in food crop production but in earning money through cash crop farming. The richer ones, in particular higher caste men try to study abroad obtaining scholarships or using their social capital. Young women want to study and get jobs in the NGO sector, hospitals or in teaching at primary schools in Nepal.

There is a chance that FFS will remain a strategy of the government and NGOs, probably more and more focusing on cash crops. If FFS becomes more focused on

commercial farming it is likely that more men than women will take part. Also, in a commercial environment people seem to be reluctant to spend a day per week in an FFS training session, so the structure of the training sessions will have to be adapted. It is likely that farmers who are interested in taking part in FFS would want to learn more about a commercial crop than only during one season, so their training might need to be extended throughout the whole year. Furthermore commercial-oriented farmers are interested in developing their marketing skills, so the FFS curriculum might need to be expanded by including more entrepreneurial oriented topics and networking skills.

The extension services in agriculture in Nepal will increasingly become privatised. Farmers will have to pay for agricultural services and indicate their demands and needs. This research has shown that - given the option - farmers would use government or other funding for the construction of infrastructure, like roads and irrigation. They are interested in training through a Farmer Field School, but it would not be their first priority in spending their money.

Community power dynamics are likely to change in the coming decade. Caste discrimination will decrease, and ethnic minorities, as well as lower caste people, will increasingly demand participation in training, extension and group activities. Women will take a more active part in decision-making processes, especially in areas where men have moved out in search of jobs. The feminisation of agriculture is likely to continue as mostly women will be left with the task to look after feeding the family.

The Maoist movement has supported FFS. The Maoists saw FFS as a tool to teach farmers improved technologies and to increase national food production. The previously marginalised Janajatis and Dalits have been encouraged to raise their voice. However, the Maoists also want a centrally governed nation-state, with little room for participatory discussion forums such as FFS. They want FFS to technically support farmers to increase their farm production, but they do not support farmers to become critical thinkers. Increasingly people are aware of inequalities; ethnic revival, social inclusion, caste discussions are part of daily news topics. Migrants contribute to inclusion of the rural population in a rapidly globalising world bringing in new ideas and material.

The new FFS project phase that has already started, aims to seek access to the global market with a focus on cash crop production, market linkages, and capable farmers. Yet again, FFS in this new phase neglects the notion of a changed social political environment with a demand for more equity. There may be a risk that FFS then again is rendered technical, as a governance tool severed from the real life experiences and expectations of the farmers for a more democratic development in Nepal.

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Summary

This thesis argues that Farmer Field Schools in Nepal contributed to agriculture and rural development and to gendered empowerment. The Nepalese government, but also NGOs involved in FFS applied a rather technocratic approach towards development (Li, 1999) and assumed that well-defined plans, agricultural development and other objectives are products that can be rationally transmitted to farmers to produce desired outcomes. They considered development as a product that could be delivered to the farmers. This technocratic approach did not address political (Ferguson, 1998) and economic inequities or gender differences of farmers. Neither did it incorporate the multi-rationality of actors involved in the intervention (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997; Büscher, 2010).

Drawing on the experience of active involvement in FFS at the start of the project in 1997, and consequently by collecting data during a mid-term project evaluation in 2002 and as a part of a PhD research project in 2009 this has become a longitudinal study of the institutional, social-cultural and political changes that have taken place during more than a decade. I have collected measurable data such as yield increase and I used survey data from 2002 and 2009. I have also collected qualitative information through Focus Group Discussions and in-depth individual semi-structured interviews with male and female farmers, project staff and government officials and NGO staff. Additionally I have gathered information from relevant project documentation and participatory observation among a wide range of actors in and around FFS. By looking at the different stages of FFS in Nepal, I reflect on its contribution to rural transformation and gendered empowerment.

The Farmer Field School was first developed in 1989 Indonesia as a response to problems associated with the failure of the Green Revolution and particularly with the misuse of pesticides. FFS follows a participatory approach to agricultural extension and research, and aims to bring about change in rural areas. FFS has been implemented all over the world by various organisations. FFS was introduced in Nepal as an integrated pest management project in 1997 with concrete output oriented goals: the increase of agricultural production and the reduction of pesticide use. Despite the on-going debate on the impact of FFS, this thesis shows a rather consistently positive picture of short- and medium-term impact, with farmers able to improve their yield, reduced pesticide use and a better balanced fertilizer application system.

Changing donor paradigms as well as a growing insight that farmers' realities and needs were different and more complex than initially assumed during the planning of the project, made FFS more outcome and process oriented, focusing on empowerment and capacity-building of farmers. After more than a decade FFS indeed did contribute to rural development in Nepal not so much because of careful project planning, but rather in a complex way with largely unintended consequences, embedded in a socio-cultural context.

When FFS started it was designed as a project, with a clear start, written documents in which the project duration was indicated, starting in 1997 and ending in 2002. I found that ten years after FFS was conducted, farmers still continued with some of the practices they learned in their FFS training. FFS has developed from a project into a continuous process of change. Although it might not be exactly the way project planners had envisaged in their documents, a fact is that farmers still apply agronomic practices as introduced in FFS. Farming practices have changed, yields increased. Fewer pesticides are used, less rice seedlings are planted per hill, and so on. Also more farmers started with vegetable production. For many women FFS was the first training in agriculture they received. It

contributed to an increase in their knowledge and skills, boosted their confidence in participation in community events and speaking in public. Women appeared to be interested to participate in FFS to learn about farming and to contribute to the food security of their family. Men, on the other hand, were interested to use FFS to increase their livelihood options, to widen job opportunities or to earn a better income.

At the turn of the century one of the objectives of FFS shifted from integrated pest management and agricultural production to farmer's empowerment. Farmer field schools are vehicles for empowerment of farmers (Ooi, 1998; Pontius et al, 2002). Empowerment is an often debated concept in the academic world but in development practice it seems to be used without much debate, assuming that it is always a 'good' thing having a positive impact on farmers.

In the FFS programme it was assumed that everybody had the same understanding of the concept of empowerment. My data showed that male and female farmers differ in their view on empowerment and that there is a big gap between policy makers, FFS facilitators and female and male farmers regarding the perception of empowerment.

This research showed that empowerment is a social process that challenges our assumptions about empowerment as a deliverable, a product. Men and women FFS participants said that they experienced empowerment, but not in the way FFS technicians and policymakers had planned it, going through a rationally designed set of steps: identifying a problem in the field, experimenting with a solution and drawing conclusions. Our survey showed that women without FFS experience saw empowerment as increased individual strength, personal growth, stretching their comfort zone. Women who took part in FFS mainly considered empowerment as self-confidence and involvement in work and group activities. Men's idea of empowerment was much more focused on their capacity to contribute to the improvement of society, on action outside the household, which would contribute to their prestige. FFS trainers spoke about empowerment in terms of a result of technology transfer or a change in behaviour that they had facilitated among farmers. Apparently, FFS staff had a very technical and non-political approach towards empowerment, not based on male and female farmers' realities in rural Nepal.

Most FFS facilitators claimed that they could empower farmers and they did not consider farmers' interest and agency. FFS facilitators did not see empowerment as a process that farmers themselves are actively part of.

Interviews confirmed that empowerment is a complex, multi-faceted process, which is not easily quantified or measured, let alone regulated in a technical way. Through participation in FFS men and particularly women expanded their framework of information, knowledge and analysis. It enlarged their room for manoeuvre, their negotiation space. They got involved in a process that enabled them to discover new options, new possibilities and eventually make better informed decisions in farming.

Several female farmers replied that they could now make choices which were previously denied to them for historical and cultural reasons. They said that this was not the result of the discovery learning in FFS like it was assumed by policy makers, but of the group participation, singing and presenting, their learning to speak in a group. Women gained confidence, gained a voice in the weekly group sessions, as a result of the social space, the FFS team spirit and solidarity that was provided in the meetings. This 'social capital route' of empowerment (Bartlett, 2005), is rather different from the 'human capital' route that men follow in empowerment in Nepal.

In this thesis I contend that FFS is 'rendering technical' (Li, 2007) a complex social,

cultural, economic and political process of rural development by defining empowerment as a non-political tool, an asset that FFS participants can be taught, that they can learn to 'own'. Consequently, gender differentiation, experiences of women being different from men and institutional structures that surround the poor and disempowered Dalit farmers, keeping them in poverty and powerless, were not addressed. I consider empowerment as a process in which people strengthen their own power and capacities, and improve their position in society. Empowerment is a process in which several factors but also actors play a role. The actors within the FFS project but also external actors like the state, the Maoist movement, NGOs, and individual forces are involved. They all work together in changing constellations, in time and place.

An actor-oriented and contextual analysis of FFS, of how the actors implement FFS in the cultural, historical and political environment of Nepal at the turn of the century creates an understanding of state-society relations and governance issues. It provides an insight in decision-making processes and the power dynamics influenced by socio-cultural factors. A closer look at FFS reveals how the state seeks to govern the farmers, and the extent to which government agencies offer the means of empowerment to farmers. It also reveals how certain social categories in society remained excluded from participation until recently, especially women and Dalit. In project documents and interviews farmers are usually depicted as passive citizens, who are poor and in need of knowledge and new technologies. Farmers, on the other hand, consider the state as responsible to look after their well-being to a large extent, as care takers. But it is a rather simplified view to consider the government or NGOs as the actors or care-takers who can decide on behalf of farmers as passive beneficiaries or oppressed citizens. In this thesis I have described how relations between state and civil actors are subject to complex power dynamics. Power is woven into social relations at different levels (Wolf, 1999) starting from individual potency, to group interaction and structural or institutional levels.

The implementation of FFS took place in the context of a dynamic environment where major political and socio-economic changes took place. The contribution of FFS to the development of Nepal cannot be studied without reference to history and the wider social, political-economic conditions during the last decade. The year 1997 when the Farmer Field Schools were introduced in Nepal was also the time that the Maoists officially declared their revolution. When data were collected in 2002 as part of a mid-term evaluation for FAO and the donor AUSAID there was a revolution going on and there were heavy fights between Maoists, the army and civilians. Many men had fled their homes to escape the violence and to resist being taken by either the government or the Maoists army. In 2001 King Birendra and a large part of his Royal family were murdered and the political scene was in turmoil. Migration for jobs abroad was at a rise and female-headed households in rural villages had increased (Gartaula, 2011). In 2009 during the last series of interviews, Nepal was in a flux again; a federal government had been elected, the Maoists had become part of the government, but disputes remained. The interim constitution was developed with much attention on social exclusion of marginalized groups. These changing political-economic conditions of rural transformation have resulted in an increased awareness of ethnic diversity, rights claims by historically marginalised groups, and interventions to divert caste discrimination in the rural areas where FFS has been conducted. Despite these changes FFS project staff keep focused on a technical, non-political approach and continue to speak about yield increase, opening market linkages, cash crop opportunities, as if these local dynamics do not matter.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift beargumenteert dat Farmer Field Schools (FFS) hebben bijgedragen aan de agrarische en rurale ontwikkeling en de empowerment van mannen en vrouwen in Nepal.

De Nepalese overheid, maar ook NGO's die betrokken zijn bij FFS, passen doorgaans een technocratische benadering toe ten aanzien van ontwikkeling (Li, 1999) waarbij ervan wordt uitgegaan dat een meer planmatige en rationele werkwijze kan worden aangereikt aan boeren om zo de gewenste ontwikkeling tot stand te brengen. Zij zien ontwikkeling dus als een product dat kan worden overgedragen aan boeren. Deze technocratische benadering houdt echter geen rekening met de politieke (Ferguson, 1994) en economische ongelijkheden en evenmin met de verschillen tussen mannen en vrouwen. Tevens wordt de veelzijdige rationaliteit van de bij het proces betrokken partijen onvoldoende in acht genomen (Grillo en Stirrat, 1997; Büscher, 2010).

Mijn promotieonderzoek is een longitudinale studie van de institutionele, sociaal-culturele en politieke veranderingen, die gedurende vijftien jaren in Nepal hebben plaatsgevonden. De studie is geënt op mijn jarenlange ervaring en actieve betrokkenheid in FFS (vanaf het begin van het project in 1997), en tevens gebaseerd op data die door mij verzameld zijn gedurende een projectevaluatie (in 2002) en als onderdeel van dit promotieonderzoek (in 2009). Ik heb gegevens verzameld, ondermeer met betrekking tot opbrengstvermeerdering, en ik heb onderzoeksdata gebruikt uit de periode 2002 tot en met 2009. Ook heb ik kwalitatieve informatie verzameld afkomstig uit focus group discussies en afkomstig uit individuele semi-structureerde interviews met boeren, met project stafleden, overheids- en NGO stafmedewerkers. Verder heb ik informatie toegevoegd van relevante projectdocumentatie, van eigen observaties en van observaties door een uitgebreide kring van betrokkenen binnen en buiten FFS.

Door te kijken naar de verschillende ontwikkelingen van FFS in Nepal, reflecteer ik op de bijdrage van de FFS aan de agrarische en rurale veranderingen en aan de empowerment van mannen en vrouwen.

De Farmer Field School is ontwikkeld in Indonesië als een antwoord op problemen, die gerelateerd waren aan het mislukken van de Green Revolution en in het bijzonder aan het verkeerd inzetten van chemische gewasbeschermingsmiddelen. FFS volgt een participatieve benadering met betrekking tot landbouwvoorlichting en onderzoek, met als doel om de agrarische productie en rurale ontwikkeling te verbeteren.

Over de hele wereld is FFS toegepast door een grote verscheidenheid van organisaties. FFS is in Nepal in 1997 geïntroduceerd als een geïntegreerd gewasbeschermingsprogramma met concrete einddoelen: verbetering van de agrarische productie en vermindering van het gebruik van gewasbeschermingsmiddelen. In weerwil van de doorlopende discussie over het nut van FFS schetst dit proefschrift een voornamelijk positief beeld van korte- en middellange termijneffecten op boeren, die in staat blijken hun agrarische productie te verhogen, het gebruik van chemische gewasbescherming te verminderen en te komen tot een beter gebalanceerde toepassing van meststoffen.

FFS was ontworpen als een project met een duidelijk beginpunt, met geschreven documentatie waarin het projectverloop en de duur waren vastgelegd, startend in 1997 en eindigend in 2002. Een decennium later passen nog steeds vele boeren de

praktijkervaringen, opgedaan tijdens FFS trainingen, toe. Echter, dit doen zij niet precies op de manier die de projectontwikkelaars in hun plan hadden voorzien. FFS heeft zich ontwikkeld van een project met een duidelijk begin en einde naar een continue veranderingsproces. Het is hierbij een feit dat de boeren nog steeds de agronomische praktijken toepassen, die in de FFS zijn geïntroduceerd. Minder chemische gewasbeschermingsmiddelen zijn ingezet, minder rijst zaailingen worden er geplant, en de productiviteit is verhoogd. Ook zijn meer boeren begonnen met de teelt van groenten. Voor de meeste vrouwen was FFS de eerste landbouwtraining die zij kregen. Dit heeft bijgedragen aan de ontwikkeling van hun kennis en vaardigheden, en het versterkte hun zelfvertrouwen in deelname aan publieke bijeenkomsten en het spreken in het openbaar. Vrouwen bleken geïnteresseerd te zijn in deelname in het FFS programma om kennis op te doen omtrent landbouwtechnieken en om zo bij te dragen aan de voedselzekerheid voor hun familie.

Mannen daarentegen waren geïnteresseerd om FFS te gebruiken om hun inkomensmogelijkheden te vergroten, hun werkgelegenheid te verbeteren en om een beter inkomen te verwerven.

Veranderende donorparadigma's, alsmede het voortschrijdende inzicht dat de realiteit en de wensen van de boeren anders en meer complex zijn dan in eerste instantie in het project waren aangenomen, hebben ertoe geleid dat de doelstellingen van FFS meer procesgeoriënteerd werden met een focus op capaciteitsversterking en empowerment van boeren. Ruim 10 jaar na beëindiging van FFS is het evident dat het project daadwerkelijk heeft bijgedragen aan de rurale ontwikkeling in Nepal. Echter dit is niet zozeer het resultaat van de planmatige uitvoering van het project, maar veeleer te beschouwen als een complex van grotendeels onbedoelde gevolgen die zich voltrokken in een sociaal culturele context.

Rond de eeuwwisseling is een van de doelstellingen van FFS verschoven van geïntegreerde gewasbescherming en agrarische productie naar versterking van de capaciteiten van de boeren. Farmer Field Schools zijn instrumenten geworden voor de empowerment van boeren (Ooi, 1998; Pontius et al., 2002). Empowerment is een veelvuldig besproken concept in de academische wereld, maar in de praktijk wordt het veelal zonder discussie toegepast, in de veronderstelling dat het altijd een goede zaak is met een positief effect op boeren.

In het FFS programma werd aangenomen dat iedereen hetzelfde verstaat onder het begrip empowerment. Mijn data laten echter zien dat mannelijke en vrouwelijke boeren zich anders verhouden tot het concept empowerment. Tevens is ten aanzien van empowerment sprake van een grote discrepantie tussen de opvattingen van vrouwelijke cq mannelijke boeren en de vooronderstellingen terzake van de beleidsambtenaren cq FFS project medewerkers.

Mijn onderzoek toont aan dat empowerment een sociaal proces is, en dat onze aanname dat empowerment een leverbaar product is, ter discussie gesteld moet worden. Mannen en vrouwen, die deelnamen in FFS gaven aan dat ze empowerment hebben ervaren, maar niet zoals FFS deskundigen en beleidsmakers dit hadden voorzien. Empowerment werd door boeren niet ervaren door middel van een rationeel ontwikkeld stappenplan (bestaande uit probleemidentificatie in het veld, experimenterend met een oplossing en het daaruit trekken van conclusies). Het onderzoek laat zien dat met name vrouwen zonder FFS ervaring empowerment zagen als een versterking van individuele kracht, persoonlijke groei en uitbreiding van hun comfortzone. Vrouwen die hadden deelgenomen in FFS ervoeren

empowerment vooral als vergroting van zelfvertrouwen en betrokkenheid in werk en groepsactiviteiten. Onder mannen was het idee over empowerment veel meer gericht op hun capaciteit om bij te dragen aan de verbetering van hun gemeenschap, op acties die plaats vinden buiten het gezinsleven en die bijdragen aan verbetering van hun eigen prestige. Hier is nauwelijks onderscheid tussen mannen met en zonder FFS ervaring.

FFS facilitatoren spraken over empowerment in termen van technologieadoptie en/of gedragsverandering; doelstellingen die zij als landbouwvoorlichters nastreefden. Bij aanvang van het project had het FFS personeel een erg technische en apolitieke benadering ten opzichte van empowerment, niet gebaseerd op de realiteit van mannelijke en vrouwelijke boeren onder rurale Nepalese omstandigheden. De meeste FFS facilitatoren claimen dat zij bij boeren empowerment teweeg konden brengen en namen de interesses en agenda's van de boeren zelf niet mee in hun overwegingen. Zij zagen empowerment niet als een proces waarbij boeren zelf een actieve rol spelen.

Interviews bevestigen dat empowerment een complex proces is met meerdere facetten, dat niet gemakkelijk te kwantificeren c.q. te meten is, en niet op een technische manier te sturen is. Door deelname in FFS hebben mannen en in het bijzonder vrouwen hun raamwerk van informatie, kennis en analysemethodieken vergroot. Het heeft hen ruimte gegeven om te manoeuvreren en hun onderhandelingscapaciteit vergroot. Zij zijn betrokken geraakt in een proces waarin zij nieuwe opties, nieuwe mogelijkheden kregen en waardoor zij uiteindelijk beter onderbouwde beslissingen konden nemen op het gebied van landbouw. Verschillende boerinnen onderstreepten dat zij nu keuzes kunnen maken die vroeger onmogelijk waren om historische en culturele redenen. Zij zeiden dat dit niet het resultaat was van het opdoen van technische kennis binnen FFS, zoals werd aangenomen door de beleidsmakers, maar door de groepsdeelname, het zingen en presenteren en door te leren discussiëren en hun mening te geven binnen een groep. Vrouwen kregen meer zelfvertrouwen, kregen een stem in wekelijkse groepsbijeenkomsten, als gevolg van de sociale ruimte, de teamgeest en solidariteit die werd geboden in de FFS bijeenkomsten. Deze "social capital route" van empowerment (Barlett, 2005), verschilt behoorlijk van de "human capital" route die mannen navolgen in Nepal.

Ik zie empowerment als een proces dat mensen in staat stelt om hun eigen krachten te vergroten en hun positie binnen de maatschappij sterker te maken. Ik zie het als een proces waarbij vele factoren van invloed zijn maar waarbij ook meerdere actoren in Nepal een rol spelen, zoals de staat, de Maoistische beweging en individuele krachten. Zij werken samen in een altijd dynamische configuratie, die verandert door de tijd en verschilt per plaats.

Een analyse van FFS met aandacht voor de deelnemers, de context, de historische achtergrond, de veranderende sociaal- culturele, politieke context van Nepal rond de eeuwwisseling, geeft meer inzicht in bestuursaspecten en sociale relaties, de verhouding tussen de staat en de gemeenschap. Het geeft een kijk in processen, die leiden tot beslissingen en machtsverhoudingen, die beïnvloed worden door sociaal-culturele factoren. Een diepere analyse van FFS onthult hoe de staat probeert om de boeren te besturen en biedt inzicht in de mate waarin de overheid middelen kan aanbieden om empowerment te bewerkstelligen bij boeren. Tevens wordt duidelijk hoe bepaalde sociale categorieën in de maatschappij tot recent uitgesloten bleven van deelname, in het bijzonder vrouwen en Dalits.

In projectdocumenten en interviews worden boeren gewoonlijk afgebeeld als passieve burgers, die arm zijn en behoefte hebben aan nieuwe kennis en moderne technologieën. Boeren, vanuit hun perspectief, beschouwen de staat als zorgdrager, verantwoordelijk voor een groot deel voor hun welzijn. Het is echter een gesimplificeerde voorstelling van zaken dat de overheid (en NGO's) beslissingen kunnen nemen uit naam van boeren als zijnde passief begunstigden of onderdrukte burgers. In dit proefschrift heb ik beschreven hoe de relaties tussen staat en de burgerlijke deelnemers onderworpen zijn aan complexe dynamische processen en machtsverhoudingen. Macht is een relationeel sociaal proces dat op diverse niveaus plaatsvindt (Wolf, 1999), beginnend bij individuele potentie tot aan groepsinteractie en op structurele en institutionele niveaus.

De uitvoering van FFS vond plaats in een dynamische context, waarin grote politieke en sociaal economische veranderingen plaatsvonden. De bijdrage van FFS aan de ontwikkeling van Nepal kan niet bestudeerd worden zonder te refereren aan de geschiedenis en de brede sociaal-politieke en economische condities gedurende het laatste decennia. Het jaar 1997, waarin de Farmer Field School werd geïntroduceerd in Nepal was tevens de tijd waarin de Maoïsten hun revolutie officieel verklaarden. Toen in 2002 data werden verzameld met als doel om te komen tot een tussentijdse evaluatie voor FAO en de donor AUSAID, was de revolutie in volle gang en waren er heftige gevechten tussen Maoïsten, het leger en burgers. Veel mannen waren weggevlucht uit hun woonplaatsen om aan het geweld te ontsnappen en om te voorkomen dat zij werden opgepakt door de overheid of door het Maoïstische leger. In 2001 werden koning Birendra en een groot gedeelte van de Koninklijke familie vermoord. Het politieke landschap was onrustig.

Migratie voor werk buiten Nepal nam toe en in rurale gebieden werden steeds meer huishoudens geleid door vrouwen (Gartaula, 2011). In 2009, gedurende de laatste sessie van interviews, bevond Nepal zich weer in een stroomversnelling; een federale overheid was gekozen, de Maoïsten waren onderdeel geworden van de regering, maar de uiteenlopende politieke meningsverschillen bleven bestaan. Een tijdelijke grondwet ging van kracht met veel aandacht voor sociale uitsluiting van gemarginaliseerde groepen. Deze veranderingen in de politiek- economische condities van de rurale transformatie hebben geresulteerd in een toenemend bewustzijn van etnische identiteit, het opeisen van rechten door historisch gemarginaliseerde groepen, en interventies om kastendiscriminatie te voorkomen. Dit had ook invloed op de rurale gebieden waar FFS plaatsvond. Ondanks deze veranderingen blijft de FFS projectleiding gefocust op een technisch, niet politieke benadering en blijft spreken over oogstvermeerdering, opening van nieuwe markten en het verbouwen van commercieel aantrekkelijke gewassen kansen, alsof deze lokale dynamiek geen rol speelt.

In dit proefschrift toon ik aan dat een technocratische benadering van rurale ontwikkeling, de complexe sociale, economische en politieke aspecten van het veranderingsproces worden genegeerd. In FFS wordt agrarische en rurale ontwikkeling alswel empowerment beschouwd als een apolitiek concept, iets dat mensen kunnen leren of zich eigen maken. Als gevolg hiervan zijn verschillen tussen mannen en vrouwen, kastenverhoudingen, lokale veranderingen en andere social and institutionele processen niet in acht genomen.

About the Author

Annemarie Berendina Westendorp was born on the 16th December 1964 in Haaksbergen, the Netherlands. She studied Tropical Agriculture (BSc) in Deventer at the college which is now called Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences. Her internship took place in 1986 and 1987 in Nepal and India. This was her first encounter with Nepal, based at the Institute of Animal and Agricultural Science (IAAS) in Rampur, Chitwan district. She graduated with two specialisations and wrote two dissertations. One dissertation was based on a desk study for the specialisation Tropical Animal Production on animal draft power. Another dissertation was based on field research in Kenya on small scale irrigation for the specialisation Rural Development. After graduation she worked for two years as a development worker in Papua New Guinea for the EU project: Smallholders Marketing and Food Security Project in Kotidanga, Gulf Province (1989-1991). Upon completion of this contract she read Agricultural Economics (MSc.) at the School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia, in Norwich (September 1991 – 1992). During her stay in the United Kingdom she also provided training for VSO, for future volunteers, to prepare them for their work abroad. From October 1992 – March 1993 she worked as a researcher for UNRISD to study the gender policies of various bilateral and multi-lateral international development agencies. This report was presented at the Beijing Women's Conference in 1994. Although a long-term contract was offered she decided to gain more overseas experience and took up various positions with the German Development Services. From 1993 – 1996 she worked in Nepal, mainly in the irrigation sector working with water users groups in the Mid Western Development Region, based in Pokhara. In September 1996 she got a job with the FAO, first as APO in the irrigation department (Farmers Irrigation and Training Project: FIAT) and from 1997 onwards with the Vegetable Integrated Pest Management Project in Laos. After 3 and half years working in Laos, she was offered a position as programme officer in Nepal on the Community IPM project. This project has been the topic of this report. Since January 2003 she has been employed by Van Hall Larenstein (previously based in Deventer, now in Wageningen) to lecture and coordinate the course Rural Development and Gender (formerly named: Social Inclusion, Gender and Rural Livelihoods), which is a specialisation of the Master Management of Development. As part of this job she has also been involved in various NUFFIC projects in Africa, in particular in Ethiopia, mainly as gender expert or as teacher trainer. This PhD research was conducted alongside her regular employment activities.