Infrastructure of Democracy: State Building as Everyday Practice in Agrarian Districts

ANALYSIS WORKSHOP
July 5-16, 2018, Kathmandu

I. INTRODUCTION

This report is intended to consolidate the content of analysis workshops held July 5-16, 2018 in conjunction with the Annual Kathmandu Conference (July 25th- 27th) among team members of the Infrastructures of Democracy research project. The report documents key themes that emerged as well as decisions and plans that were made during the workshops.

PARTICIPANTS		
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II. SCHEDULE

Core Team Analysis Workshop

July 5, Thurdsday
Joint knowledge production: - One-to-one interviewing about fieldnotes, interviews and other research outputs
July 6, Friday
Joint knowledge production: - One-to-one interviewing about fieldnotes, interviews and other research outputs
July 7, Saturday
Quantitative data, data analysis software & project logistics   - Review of indicator tables   - NVIVO demonstration and discussion   - Interview transcript/translation formatting and checking demographic data   - Status of contracts   - Status of travel budgets   - Status of conference participation
July 8, Sunday
Joint knowledge production   - Discussion of transcripts selected in advance   - Generation and discussion of key words   - *Source: Community Based Research Toolkit*
July 9, Monday
Joint knowledge production & Analysis workshop planning   - Discussion of transcripts selected in advance   - Generation and discussion of key words   - Overview and planning for peer researchers workshop
July 10-14
Peer Researchers Workshop   Balthali, Kavrepalanchok District (see separate schedule)
July 14, Saturday
- Peer researchers workshop debrief   - Data collection plan   - Joint knowledge production plan, including workshops in research districts and modality of working collaboratively between Canada and Nepal   - Preliminary writing plan [including book outline]
July 15, Sunday
Joint knowledge production   - Discussion of keywords and themes generated at peer researchers workshop
July 16, Monday

Peer Researchers Workshop
Balthali, Kavrepalanchok District
July 10-14, 2018

Date	Time	Activities	Remarks
July 10, 2018	7:00 AM	Departure from Kathmandu	
	9:00 AM	Arrival at Balthali	
	9:00-10 AM	Breakfast	Discuss language medium of workshop
	10 AM-12:30 PM	• *Research process:* Experience sharing/update from lead researchers, peer researchers, and Toronto team	*Updates on road development, post-election, emerging themes, and research experience* 30 minutes for each
	12:30 PM-1:30 PM	Lunch	
	1:30 PM-3:30 PM	• *Research process:* Experience sharing/update from lead researchers, peer researchers, and Toronto team	
	3:30 PM-4:15 PM	Tea/Coffee Break	
	4:15 PM-6:00PM	• *Research process:* Jointly discuss similarities and differences across the 3 districts based on above discussion	
July 11, 2018	8:00 AM-9:00AM	Breakfast	
	9:00-12:30 AM	• Discussion of photos [from peer researchers] • Jointly develop themes, keywords, and stories from those photos	Photo voice as a methodology: *Why take photo?* *What does it represent?* *How do you interpret it?* 40 minutes for each
	12:30 PM-1:30 PM	Lunch	
	1:30 PM-3:30 PM	• Meet in pairs for one-one interviews between peer and core researchers	*Come with one incident, observation, interview or reflection in mind*
	3:30 PM-4:15 PM	Tea/Coffee Break	
	4:15 PM-6:00PM	• Continue one-one interviews	

	8:00 AM-9:00AM	Breakfast	
July 12, 2018	9:00-10:00 AM	• Finish writing up notes from one-one interviews of previous day	
	10 AM-12:30 PM	• Discussion on themes, similarities and differences from previous day. • Generate ideas for newspaper articles and writing projects for afternoon	*Bring a copy of a local or national newspaper that we might publish an article in (peer researchers bring local)*
	12:30 PM-1:30 PM	Lunch	
	1:30 PM-3:30 PM	• Collaborative writing time – newspaper articles, blogs, etc.	
	3:30 PM-4:15 PM	Tea/Coffee Break	
	4:15 PM-6:00PM	• Collaborative writing time	
July 13, 2018	8:00 AM-9:00AM	Breakfast	
	9:00-12:30 AM	• Overview of data analysis techniques and tools • Discussion on Indicator tables—progress, challenges and alternatives • Planning for data analysis, dissemination/publications • Further planning—transcription and translation • Possibility of debrief workshops in districts • Contract duration and administration	
	12:30 PM-1:30 PM	Lunch	
	1:30 PM-3:30 PM	• Depart for Kathmandu	

III. RESEARCH METHODS AND ETHICS

The process of planning the logistics of the analysis workshop (much to our surprise) provided an opportunity for the team to reflect on and discuss questions about the core commitments of the research project—to research as a collaboration, to creating a space that is conducive to producing collaborative critical knowledge, and to a social justice orientation. Some of the practical questions of workshop planning such as: where to hold our meetings, how to structure discussions, what language to communicate in, who would be included and how, all raised important questions about managing our priorities and relationships as researchers, colleagues and friends. We found ourselves having to negotiate: between questions of logistical ease vs. concerns about reproducing academic elitism; how to be inclusive across language barriers; how to innovate forms of analysis that brought forward different people's contributions.

The team also had the opportunity to have some open discussions about the challenges of navigating communication barriers and power imbalances in the research process. Peer researchers and members of the core team shared their experience figuring out their role in the peer research approach. People shared about the challenge of conducting part time research over a long period and maintaining practices of writing field notes and alternatives that they found, particularly the use of photo essays. Members of the team spoke of times of discomfort in coming together across different socio-cultural positionalities to conduct fieldwork as well as the friendships that have been forged through these partnerships. We also spoke as a group about the relationship between the practicalities of ethics as a set of rules that we follow and how these related to ethical commitments to the people and communities with which we work. Members of the team pointed to examples in which these two kinds of "ethics" do not necessarily map precisely onto one another and strategies for navigating these tensions. We spent time specifically on the idea of consent and what this means in different contexts.

The team also discussed questions of ownership in research and the challenges of navigating lines of inclusion and exclusion vis a vis data. Team members spoke of not just a sense of ownership over their work but also the sense of care and love that develops out of the hard work and relationships through which research data is produced. We talked about the importance of maintaining relationships of trust and reciprocity within the research team. The question of consent came up again in relation to questions of data ownership and we discussed the importance of maintaining practices of obtaining consent within our team when sharing data. Team members also pointed to some of the tensions between these commitments and desires to be inclusive and open with research findings. Finally, we also talked about the structural inequalities between researchers in Canada and Nepal as well as histories of exploitative research relationships that act as barriers to building and maintaining these kinds of relationships of trust and reciprocity.

IV. DISTRICT NOTES

Morang
Morang Team: Lagan Rai; Durga Hasda; Yaman Sardar

Road: Tetariya to Jhorahat (part of feeder road to Biratnager)
Road: Katahari-Tarigama Godam
Rural roads in Pidarbani village

Road Selection Note: It was difficult to select roads in Morang because the district has such a large network of roads. We decided as a team to focus on roads South of EW highway for fieldwork. For practical reasons we have focused on areas near the peer researchers' villages, one of which is in an area north of the Hulaki road (Rangeli Road) and near the Biratnagar ring road, and the other which is south of the Hulaki road (Rangeli Road) and in the so-called Southern Belt in habited predominantly Madheshi communities.

Distinctive Features:
- Motorable road building has a long history, there is an extensive road network.
- Morang is an industrial hub, which is significant for residential and labour mobility patterns.
- Large scale commercial agriculture and irrigation systems are significant for road use and the relationship between roads and environmental impacts.
- Sand extraction from river beds is significant.
- Floods are a major environmental factor shaping road management and mobility.
- Morang is an Indian border district
- Cultural politics among Madheshi and hill communities is an important regional dyanamic.

Mugu
Mugu Team: Samjhana Nepali; Tulasi Sigdel; Pushpa Hamal;

Strategic Road: Pina-Gamgadi [Karnali Highway]
District/Local Road: Gamgadi-Gilaha [Tarapani]

Distinctive Features:
- Motorable road building is very new, but has increased rapidly in the last decade.
- Mugu is characterized by a "remote" geography.
- Tourism related to Rara National Park is significant.
- Yarsagumba plays a major part in the local economy and seasonal migration patterns.
- Mugu is a China border district.
- Landslides are a major environmental factor shaping road management and mobility.

Dolakha
Dolakha Team: Shyam Kunwar; Shanta Thapa; Santu Jirel

Strategic Road: Charikot-Lamabager
District Road: Makaibari-Deurali-Panighat

Distinctive Features:
- Motorable road building relatively old and was led by the Swiss.
- Hydro power is a defining feature—the presence of the Upper Tamakoshi Hydro Project has been transformative.
- There is a domestic tourism industry focused in Jiri and Kaliinchowk.
- The donor presence has been historically important and there is continued density due to the earthquake.
- Morang is a China border district.
- The 2015 earthquakes and related environmental hazards have been particularly important environmental factors shaping road management and mobility in recent years.

V. KEY THEMES

Prior to the workshop the core team shared key themes that they found coming to forefront in their experiences with the research (from fieldwork as well as the archival research) and we began a working list of themes that maintained throughout the workshop. Over the course of the two weeks we recorded observations and points of interest arising across the three districts in relation to these themes.

Borders
Borders was a key theme in the discussions. There are significant differences between the different districts in relation to the border. In Morang the "open border" situation means that there is significant daily mobility, economic transaction and cultural connections across the border. People will even cross the border on an everyday basis to get to places within their own country due to the road geographies (road breaking boundaries as "democratic"). In contrast the China border, particularly in Dolakha was characterized by efforts to securitize movement, particular in relation to smuggling and the mobility of Tibetans. In Mugu and Dolakha historical economic and cultural exchange across the border and subsequent political restrictions were important in (re)shaping local economies. In Dolakha the increased importance of motor vehicles and the opening of alternate routes to China were also significant for local economies. In both Dolakha and Mugu imaginaries of future connections to China are significant, but they are significantly more distant in Mugu.

Remoteness
One issue that was noted in discussions on remoteness was that there is an important disconnect between official categories and actual material infrastructure. There are a number of different kinds of official distinctions related to geographical remoteness and levels of development that have impacts for administration (for example the remote posting bonus for bureaucrats). While Dolakha has a great deal of road accessibility it is still categorized as remote in certain contexts due to historical legacy. Morang is not thought of as remote, however we do find forms of internal "remoteness" due to roads being destroyed or remaining in poor condition meaning that villages are disconnected. It is remarkable how 'underdeveloped' the roads are in Morang despite its relatively accessible terrain. And in Mugu of course, remoteness is a prevailing trope and rationality for bringing the road, at all costs, that people are scarcely questioning.

Environmental Hazards
Environmental hazards emerged as a major focus in our discussions. Environmental hazards figured both in terms of the impact of environmental events and processes *on* road building and road maintenance as well as the environmental impacts *of* road building. In the hills the focus has been primarily focused on the impacts of landslides and the role of road building in accelerating erosion. But there are also significant environmental impacts related to the demand for raw materials, perhaps most significantly in relation to sand and gravel extraction. Illegal sand extraction activities have received increased attention in the national media lately. In the terai the relationship between roads and the environment has received less attention, however floods

are a significant, and often overlooked, environmental factor shaping road development. Like landslides, floods impact roads and roads can also contribute to flooding by interrupting watersheds; they may facilitate mobility across the region while also compromising mobility within the region, especially the on-farm mobility of tractors for agricultural producers, when roads bisect fields. One of the key concerns raised was for the uneven harms and benefits of environmental hazards related to road development. Its also important to note that in addition to direct relationship to environmental hazards and impacts roads also have indirect impacts through economic development and urbanization.

Corruption

Corruption emerges as a key theme and we discussed various 'kinds' of corruption and noted that they cannot all be reduced to the prevailing definition, 'abuse of trusted authority for private gain'. E.g., *milemato, chakari, bhansan garne, setting milaaune, paisa khaane*—these and other expressions all reference particular actions and particular contexts. It would be important to distinguish and then understand the moral valences or judgments associated with each of these practices. Under what circumstances would they be valued positively or negatively. Does it matter if the practice is engaged in/on the public vs the private sector?

It was noted that official anti-corruption practices focus mostly on transparency and good governance, for example, better monitoring of small contracts for bulldozers issued by users' groups. At the same time, we discussed how really there is no way to get outside of practices of low bidding and collusion, so the more relevant 'anti-corruption' practice would be to understand how people judge different practices of corruption locally and think about how those judgment could become a basis for collective action to reduce harms and redistribute resources and opportunity.

Road Building Modality

A comparison of different road building modalities emerged as a significant theme in our cross-district comparisons. Road building and maintenance modalities include the following broad categories: employment generation-oriented public works approaches; formal decentralized user group modalities based on voluntary community contributions; building by private contractors contracted by the state, donors or a private enterprise like the Upper Tamakoshi Hydro; building directly by the army; informal community collaborations for road building and maintenance. A public works approach to road building dominated in Mugu, where access to road building employment was a subject of contestation. In both Dolakha and Morang there were a limited number of employment-generation oriented projects (RAP3 in Morang; donor led food for work projects in Dolakha). However, an approach based on decentralized community contributions - was more common although in both districts actual volunteer labour was almost never practiced, while money contributions were often also not followed. Researchers noted the frequent (illegal) use of dozers and practices of user committees appropriating funds saved with heavy equipment use. One key point raised here was the shifting attitudes towards voluntary labour contributions (political subjectivities) its relationship to histories of forced labour, neoliberal/socialist "empowerment" and the commodification of labour. In Dolakha the role of the Upper Tamakoshi Hydro Project in actively sponsoring road development was significant for

the rapid pace of construction. In Morang informal practices of emergency road maintenance as well as informal community contributions to a person hired to carry out bridge maintenance, were noted.

Critical Consciousness

This was a broad topic with a number of related points raised. One point of discussion was around what constituted "critical consciousness". Some of the "criteria" proposed for a working definition included: looking for alternatives; asking questions about larger structures; prioritizing social justice; looking for ways to create equal opportunities. In Mugu is was noted that increased education and the influence of Maoist ideologies have contributed to increased practices of people questioning those in power: yojana ke ho? In Morang too, we saw ways in which people used their voting rights to hold politicians accountable. In Dolakha we saw examples of contestation in public forums. But it was also noted that there were factors that prevented people from voting freely and even while people speak out, they tend to be focused on individual/immediate interests. Another interesting issue that came up, specifically in the Morang context, was contrasting narratives of the causes of failures of road development. From an outsider perspective common reasons cited were: 1. lack of awareness 2. no education 3. Poverty. These perspectives are also found among the educated local youths. In contrast, for local people, many of whom are marginalized, reasons for failures of road development often focused on: contractors and officials seeking commissions and the misuse of budgets.

Labour Markets

The topic of labour markets gave rise to a range of key issues. Labour markets were significant in terms of how people related to roads as mobility infrastructure as well as to labour on road projects. In terms of broad shifts in labor markets, across the districts people noted the end of old labour systems, shifts to cash-based economies and the declining importance of family-based agriculture. In Morang, people can't sustain themselves on small agriculture plots. Meanwhile, large landholders are having a hard time finding agricultural labourers due to the end of bonded labour system, local people moving into industry jobs or urban-based informal economy activities. The importance of urban labour is significant for patterns of labour mobility, specifically the use of cycles for daily commuting. In Mugu too, people reported that it was difficult to find people for agricultural labour with the end of the "adhiya" system and the availability of yojana/project work, which offers higher rates (labour rates from 800-1000 rs per day). People are working on their own land. Seasonal labour migration to India has shifted from patterns of bringing the whole family down, to more individual patterns, people also coming back to Mugu. In Dolakha the construction boom (particularly post-earthquake) has led to labour shortages and high wages. There is also significant labour migration abroad including among the Thangmi community. Interesting to compare to historical patterns of trans-border migration. In Dolakha the large population of migrant workers related to the dam is also an interesting dynamic.

There were particularly interesting dynamics of mobility related to construction work. In Morang road construction work was not a significant source of employment for local people, mostly it goes to outside labourers. There was difference between terai and hill people in terms of their skills in construction (black topping vs. stone work). We also see daily commuting of people from

India to work in construction in Biratnagar. In Mugu, house building work was often done by skilled people from outside. In Dolakha there is a reported labour shortage for road construction work, Dolakha people are described as "alchhi" and expecting a higher rate (the influence of donor projects in inflating wage rates has also been pointed out). In road work most labourers are coming from outside through labour brokers/contractors. The issue of the cultural politics of work and the shame of manual labour was raised as a potential contributing factor to these dynamics.

The politics and structures of feeling related to labour on roads was another important theme. The requirements for local contributions of labour and/or other forms of resources for roads had some resonance with longer histories of forced labour on roads. Today we find widespread unwillingness of people to commit volunteer labor for state road building projects. This can also be understood in relation to increased integration into wage labour economies and changing understandings of the "value" of one's own labour time.

Land Markets
In the relationship between land and roads one of the most interesting dynamics was the tension between the conflicts arising over the appropriation of land for roads vs. the desire to have roads close to one's land in order to increase not only access (use value) but also property values (exchange value). Land alignment politics. Indeed land values can be seen driving road building. The expansion of roads has been accompanied by not only rising property values but also land speculation and practices of plotting in Dolakha and Morang. In Morang land had previously been primarily valued for its agricultural productivity, now value is connected to its potential to support settlements. In some cases, land values are high but land has not been sold leading to land alienation and negative impacts on people who rely on access to land for livelihoods. UTKHP has also been involved in investments in land and land speculation. In Mugu land transactions are increasing but not mediated by "dalal"/"plotting". A further dynamic is landlords moving out of village, and allowing people to use land for free, motivated by maintaining local trust/relations.

Road Words
A point of interest was the different vocabulary associated with roads in different places/contexts. Across the districts was "sadak" used in official formal documents and by NGO and civil service people. Generally, "baato" refers to a walking track and animal trails. In Morang, "road" more common in everyday language in terai communities, perhaps due to their connections to India. In the terai, the term "baato" was also more common in hill communities. Local people with non-Nepali mother tongues also have different terms for tracts for example "dagaar" and "kuli" in Santhali language. In Mugu, "road" had the same meaning as "sadak", "road" was the term more commonly used. In Dolakha "motor baato" was the term most people in interviews used, "motorable pul" was also used.

Policy/Action
We noted a few points for potential intervention through policy recommendations or other forms of action. We also noted that it would be important to consult policy experts/professionals before making policy recommendations.

- The disconnect of the requirement for voluntary labour and land contributions and the willingness of people to contribute
- The politics of expertise and the failure to adequately prioritize local knowledge. For example, supporting the prioritization of marginalized local knowledges vis a vis environmental and livelihood impacts. Similarly, supporting the integration of already existing local management strategies into formal policy (for example systems for bridge maintenance).
- The focus on widening roads and on road design prioritizing motor vehicles and the speed of connections, marginalizing other forms of road use, for example cycling, non-motorized carts, non-transportation uses of roads as flat/dry spaces.
- Challenging the dominance of competitive, market-oriented approaches to contracting and bidding in solutions for corruption.
- What might be the opportunities for supporting local governments to prioritize locally informed development planning vis a vis the interests of donors and the national state?

VI. PHOTO ESSAYS

Morang
The plains are often overlooked in relation to discourses about the challenges of road development in Nepal. The terai is thought of as an easy plain land. But there are important geographical factors that impact road building in the terai that are often overlooked. People's experiences of rural road building in the terai is characterized by: Development and Disaster, *bikas* and *binas*.

Mugu
Mugu reveals competing development ideologies in road building modalities the labour-based environmentally friendly approach in contrast to heavy equipment-based "modern" methods—Green vs. Machine. This tension is explored through the themes of: corruption; labour markets; environmental hazards; and political contestation. The conclusion reached is that both modalities are dominated by elites/power brokers. Even labour-based work is a site of struggle. Ultimately both fail to achieve social justice.

Dolakha
In popular imaginaries, dozers figure as agents of development. But this development is characterized by contradictions. We see these contradictions in: road imaginaries; political debates around corruption; and environmental hazards. Through attention to these contradictions we come to the conclusion that people are the real agents of development, not the dozer.

VII. ARCHIVES

Indicator Tables
In Year 2 we developed a set of extensive indicator tables to gather a variety of quantitative data from the district sites that would inform our analysis of the political economy of roads. At the workshop we sat together to compare what team members had found so far and what remaining information they thought would or would not be feasible to obtain. We revised the indicator tables accordingly.

Policy Document
We have maintained a working policy document that consolidates information on the current policy frameworks for roads building and governance as well as main governing bodies and organizations. During the workshop Elsie, Courtney and Tulasi collaborated to update the policy document. However, we also decided that, given the ongoing large-scale re-organization of these institutions and policies, that we would delay finalizing the document until the new systems had begun to taken shape.

Media Analysis Report
Courtney Balaz-Munn reported on a review of media articles related to roads over a six-month period (January to July 2018). The review finds roads and infrastructure discussed in relation to several key themes. First, many articles reveal an optimism towards both Chinese investment in infrastructure projects in Nepal at the international level and improvements to roads to facilitate access and connectivity at Chinese border crossing points at the local level. Second, "contractors" are almost uniformly portrayed in a negative light, as they are blamed for poor quality roads, incomplete projects, and corruption in construction processes. Third, discourses of road building reflect discourses of development, where some journalists view the phenomenon in terms of the positive outcomes they promise, and others focus on the contested process of trying to achieve those outcomes. Fourth, a number of articles identify ways that trends in political processes and political structures impact processes of road construction. While these four themes were selected for discussion in this report, they are only a sample of the wide range of themes and arguments around infrastructure presented in English-language Nepali media sources, and roads continue to arise as contested phenomena in public discourse.

VIII. PLANNING

Over the course of the workshop we discussed plans for final data collection processing and analysis and dissemination over the coming two years.

Dissemination Plan
- Conferences
  - South Asia Conference: Katharine will be presenting at the South Asia Conference in Madison Wisconsin, October 11-14, 2018 (Panel title *The Infrastructural Bridge: Methodological Devices and Conceptual Tools Across Urban and Rural Divides*)
  - SWAY Conference: SOAS-based research project SWAY (After the Earth's Violent Sway) is hosting a conference in London, January 10-11, 2019. We discussed potentially submitting abstracts to the conference
  - AAG Annual Meeting: We planned to organize paper sessions on Himalayan Studies' contributions to Geography organized around the themes of Sustainability, Disaster and Infrastructure for the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers Washington D.C. April 3-7, 2019
- Media Publications
  - Publication of photo essays in local (Mugu and Dolakha) and national (Morang) newspapers.
  - Newspaper editorials: Samjhana recently completed an editorial entitled बिकासमा बददैछा दुरुपयोग "Increasing Misuse in Development" by Samjhana Nepali was recently published in Rara Sandesh. We discussed the potential for additional editorials in local/national newspapers.
- Academic Publications
  - Individually authored articles that are district specific
  - Co-authored articles around key themes
  - Co-authored Book
- Website
  - We will continue to post updates about the team's activities and publications
- Looking ahead to a 2019 or 2020 Workshop

IX. RESOURCES

Books/Articles of Interest
Thapa, Hari Bahadur. (2017). *Rajgaj*. Kathmandu: FinePrint. (Nepali)
ISBN: 9789937665254

Upadhyaya, Surya Nath and Ghimire, Dipesh Kumar. (2017). *Samaj ra Bhrashtachar: Karan, Aayam ra Paridam. Kathmandu: Sangrila Books*. (Nepali)
ISBN: 9789937914840

Raj Panday, Devendra. (2018). *The Idea of Integrity and the Universe of Corruption and Anticorruption*. Redink Books. (English)
ISBN: 9789937922203