



Interview with Professor Sara Parker

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Introduction

Professor Dr. Sara Parker is a well-known academic at Liverpool John Moores University in the UK, where she serves as Professor of Collaborative Action Research. Her career spans more than three decades of engagement with Nepal, focusing on issues of gender, education, and social justice. She has led significant international projects such as Dignity Without Danger, which explored menstrual stigma and taboos in Nepal. Fluent in Nepali, she has conducted long-term fieldwork and built strong collaborations with Nepali activists, scholars, and policymakers, making her research both academically rigorous and socially impactful. Her work on menstrual health activism has been influential in shaping both scholarship and policy. Beyond gender studies, she has also contributed to research on fair trade, aging and health policy, and children's rights to education during conflict. Through these efforts, Professor Parker has demonstrated how collaborative action research can bridge academic inquiry with practical activism, advancing knowledge while promoting social change. The Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology extends its sincere gratitude to Professor Parker for her generous and thoughtful engagement in answering the written questions prepared for this interview.

Question 1: Could you please share details about your family background including your birthplace, information about your parents, marital life and children? Additionally, could you describe your educational journey from primary school through to University?

Answer: My grandfather on my father's side was a chemist, so he did not have to go to war. Both he and my Nana had a keen interest in photography and were members of an amateur photography group in Salford, West of Manchester,

UK. They used their bathroom as a darkroom to print large black-and-white photographs for competitions and would host slideshow evenings after they had been on holiday. I have a lot more photographs from my childhood than my peers, as owning a camera back in the mid-60s was quite unusual. When I look back now, I realize what a privilege this was and use old family photographs in my visual sociology class to reflect on how photography has changed over the years. My parents met when my dad was studying Mathematics at University whilst

my mum was training to be a nurse. My father started his career as a computer software engineer before moving into lecturing at Blackburn Technical College, followed by a role at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Singapore in the mid-80s. My mother worked as a qualified nurse, then as an art and design teacher, before establishing a nursery school and, in the early 80s, a shop, selling both new and second-hand clothes. She taught in both the UK and Singapore and was a talented artist who used extensive embroidery in her work, influenced by nature. When she retired, she continued to teach, setting up a small business called Creative Stitch Studios, hosting exhibitions for her and her embroidery group. I get a lot of my creativity from my mum, and my love of photography from my dad's side of the family.

I was born in 1968 at Wythenshawe Hospital in Manchester, and we moved to Blackburn in the Northwest of England when I was 4. My brother was born 7 years later, making our family complete. I can still remember the day my dad sat me down on the stairs to tell me I had a brother and that I was allowed to choose his name, James. When we were young, we spent our holidays as a family with my grandparents on both sides in the Lake District on Lake Windemere, where all my family had caravans. Compared to many friends I know, I had a very small family as my mum was an only child and my dad had one sister who married and had two children. Sadly, my mum died in 2017 and my dad in 2021, but I was lucky that they both visited Nepal, my mum once and my dad four times, spending time with me in Sikles in 1995 and also 2018, which means a lot to me given the depth of connections I have there. My Auntie Rhona (mero phupū) and Uncle David both live in Australia, along with my cousin Lucy, and my other cousin Jeremy lives in France.

My primary education was in the UK, and I mostly enjoyed topic-based subjects such as history, geography, and learning about the world. I still have some of my schoolbooks from back in the 1970s, often covered in see-through plastic to keep them clean! I was always active at school and was described by many as being a 'tom boy' given my love of sports and the fact I used to play 'boys' games such as football and army more than with the girls. I have a strong memory of walking round the playground, arms interlocked with a string of boys either side chanting "who wants to play at army – NO GIRLS!" I used to get teased for this and for playing football (often better than most boys, given my competitive nature). Another memory from primary school is telling my mum I was 'stupid' because I couldn't read my homework book 'Roger Red Hat'. It turned out one of my primary school teachers had said that to me, so my mum arranged a meeting with her and told her in no uncertain terms that no child was stupid or should ever be told that by someone in her position! As a professor now, I always stress that there is no such thing as a stupid question. On reflection, I did struggle with spelling and concentration, showing early signs of dyslexia and being neurodivergent (more on this later). However, I was a fast reader who loved to read and had an active imagination, my favorite book being the Magic Faraway Tree by Enid Blyton, full of stories of

adventures to different worlds. Being a Gen X and raised on TV, my favorite TV show was *Roots*, telling the story of Kunta Kinte's journey, who was enslaved and trafficked to the USA, following the story of his family, exposing the reality of the impact of the slave trade and playing a role in developing my sense of justice and injustice. My grandparents on my mums' side both died in their 60's when I was still at primary school.

My secondary education started at a private girls' school in Blackburn, Westholme, which is now co-ed. I was the only one from my primary school who went to this school, so I had to make new friends. Here, I continued to have issues with spelling and focus, often fidgeting in class and soon earned a reputation as one of the 'naughty ones'; despite this, I excelled in most subjects apart from English Language. Students were put into different sets for different subjects, and for me and about eight other girls, they actually set up a sub-set class again, reinforcing the likelihood of dyslexia, which was not as well recognized in the mid-80s as it is now. My form teacher was also my French teacher and would always be highly disappointed with my inability to remember when to use 'le' or 'la' and would often note on my report card that I was 'lazy'. My spoken French was much stronger than my writing, but the lack of encouragement left me feeling like I was just bad at languages.

However, in 1983 my dad got employed in Singapore as a lecturer in computer studies at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, so we left the UK to start a new adventure in the country we had never been to. I attended United World College of Southeast Asia, which had a huge impact on my educational experience. Here, my French teacher praised my ability to speak French and would gently try to explain why some objects were masculine and some feminine, something I still fail to grasp! I also excelled in English literature as I immersed myself in texts such as the Brontes as they reminded me of the home we had left behind. UWCSEA really played a key role in widening my horizons, not just because we were in Singapore, but the students and teachers came from all over the world and were passionate about learning. After O Levels (now GCSE's), I stayed on to do the International Baccalaureate, where you study three higher and three subsidiary topics as well as a Theory of Knowledge course and volunteer as part of the community service element of the curriculum. This system is so much more rewarding than standard A Levels and again impacted me in terms of opening my eyes to new subjects and developing my skills as a critical questioning thinker.

Relocating to Singapore in the mid-1980s was a life-changing experience in so many ways and gave me the opportunity to explore new places and cultures, especially Malaysia, for family holidays and where we would take friends and family when they came to visit. The most significant impact this had on me, though, was traveling to Nepal with a group of students after we had all completed our exams in May 1986 to trek the Annapurna Circuit, then a full 21-day trek with no roads and far fewer tourists than there are today. This is where my love for Nepal began and I took an old camera that had belonged by my grandfather with me and started a travel

diary which I still have to this day. I quote from this diary in my PhD to explain why Nepal and why me!

I returned to Leeds University in the UK in 1986 to continue my education whilst my family stayed in Singapore. I gained a BA (Hons) 2:1 in Geography with a strong focus on the human side, furthering my passion for development and travel. Both my remaining grandparents sadly died in my first year at university, and as we had no property in the UK, we bought a house in Leeds, which I rented out to my friends and furnished mainly with my grandparents' belongings.

I met my husband, Bob, whilst in Leeds, as he was studying animal health, and we connected over our shared passion for development. We got together after he returned from six months working in Tanzania for Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in 1990, and we would travel up and down the country to see each other as I lived in Leeds and he was working as a sales representative in the South West of England. When I was volunteering in Nepal in 1992, we would write to each other, and he came to visit me in Sikles towards the end of my stay. Looking back, I think Bob coming to visit Sikles and also the Annapurna Base Camp Trek with me played a key role in his understanding where my passion for Nepal came from. I had offers to study a master's in development studies at the University of East Anglia, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and Bath University. As Bob lived near Bath at that time, this made it the obvious choice. When I secured my job at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) in 1994, Bob became an international sales representative for a global company and moved to Liverpool to make this our base. We got married in 1996 and had our son Jamie in 1999. Bob had left his job in industry at this time and completed his MBA at Liverpool John Moores before working for the fair-trade chocolate company Divine for 3 years. Together we worked with a group of activists in Liverpool to establish Liverpool as one of the first Fairtrade cities, and our daughter, Maya, was born in 2001. Whilst I remained at LJMU, Bob moved to other universities and is now a Professor of International Marketing at the University of York. Overall, you can see that my educational journey has been quite an unusual one with lots of house moves and relocations, which meant I grew up traveling a lot, but the one place that I feel has educated me more than anywhere is Nepal — every time I go, I learn something new and leave inspired!

Question 2: Your university education began at the University of Leeds where you completed a BA (Honours) in Geography. You then moved to the University of Bath to pursue a Master's degree in Development Studies, followed by a PhD at Liverpool John Moores University, UK. Could you describe your academic experiences across these universities, and how they differ in terms of theoretical and methodological rigor?

Answer: Although it was a BA in Geography, in the first year, we were required to study both human and physical geography, which I found extremely valuable. It allowed me to develop an appreciation for environmental issues alongside the social

and cultural dimensions of geography before I specialized. The department had a strong reputation, particularly in geographic information system (GIS) under the leadership of Professor Alan Wilson, which contributed to a rigorous and diverse academic environment.

What I valued most at Leeds was the breadth of the course and the opportunity to connect theory with my own experiences. For my dissertation, I drew on my travels on the east coast of Malaysia to examine the impacts of tourism on the island of Tioman. This was my first real attempt to link academic study with real-world development issues. I was particularly inspired by development-oriented modules, including one on Latin America led by Professor David Preston. His reflections on fieldwork were especially influential and helped ignite my early interest in gender and inequality within development contexts.

Moving to the University of Bath for my Master's in Development Studies marked a significant shift from a broad disciplinary grounding to a much more focused, theoretically grounded engagement with development. Bath had a strong reputation in development studies, with a noticeable emphasis on critical engagement with theory—particularly around participatory development, poverty, and inequality. There was also a strong focus on Bangladesh, reflecting the research interests of key staff such as Geoff Wood, Alister McGregor, and James Copestake.

It was during my time at Bath that I engaged more deeply with the work of thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Robert Chambers. Their emphasis on participation, empowerment, and bottom-up approaches strongly resonated with my own values, particularly considering my earlier experiences in Nepal. I became increasingly interested in participatory approaches and the role of non-formal education in grassroots development.

At the time, I was initially disappointed that my master's dissertation did not involve primary fieldwork. However, in retrospect, this was an important experience, as it pushed me to engage much more deeply with the literature and theories of participatory development. My master's thesis focused on non-formal education, NGOs, and participatory development. Like many students, I tried to cover too much ground and ultimately had to revise and resubmit it with a tighter focus. Looking back, this was a valuable learning experience in developing critical self-reflection.

Across both Leeds and Bath, there was a strong grounding in both quantitative and qualitative research methods, which provided important academic rigor. However, over time I have come to recognize that my own research preferences are much more rooted in qualitative, grounded approaches—particularly those that center on people's lived experiences. In particular, I have developed a strong interest in visual methods, which were not really covered in my formal training. Sometimes I reflect on how my academic path might have developed differently had I studied in a context where visual methodologies, anthropology, and Nepali studies were more central. That said, these interests have evolved organically through my own practice and

long-term engagement in Nepal.

My experiences at Bath were also shaped by my earlier visits to Nepal, which gave a practical dimension to the theories I was studying. In hindsight, it is striking how many of the texts and ideas I encountered at Bath were also influencing development practitioners in Nepal. Recently when I visited the library at the Sikles Cultural Museum and saw books that had once belonged to Dr Chandra Gurung, I realised how much overlap there was in the intellectual foundations we were all drawing upon. The influence of Freire, Chambers, Rahman, Burkey, Carmen and others working on participatory, community-based development created a shared framework that helped shape my future work.

I completed my PhD at Liverpool John Moores University, which I undertook on a part time basis whilst working full-time as Geography Lecturer, which enabled me to bring these interests together in a more applied and practice-oriented way. I was keen to build on key themes that had emerged from my field visits to Nepal between 1995 and 1998, which were supported by early career funding at LJMU. Continuing to work alongside studying enabled me to remain actively engaged in both teaching and research practice. It took me seven years to complete due to my work commitments and the fact that, during this time, I also had my two children, Jamie and Maya. As a result, my research became inherently longitudinal, not only sharing key findings but also reflecting on the process of conducting participatory research over an extended period. This is evident in the title *Reflect on REFLECT: A Dialogical Inquiry into Participation, Non-Formal Education and Action-Oriented Research*. As a member of staff, I had two external examiners, Prof Anna Robinson Pant (Education) and Prof Mike Parnwell (Area Studies), and thankfully, before my viva I could see clearly that, just like my Masters, I had attempted to cover slightly too much and needed to summarize the context chapter on Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) to maintain the focus on education.

Overall, my PhD and subsequent academic career have been strongly guided by my long-standing engagement with Nepal and by working collaboratively with communities, NGOs, and activist groups. This reflects a shift from learning about development to actively contributing to it through sustained, participatory, and community-based research approaches. This experience further reinforced my commitment to working collaboratively with communities, NGOs, and activist groups. It marked an important shift from learning about development to actively contributing to it through sustained, participatory and community-based research approaches.

Looking across the three institutions, each offered something distinct. Leeds provided a broad, interdisciplinary grounding and a strong connection between geography and real-world issues. Bath deepened my theoretical understanding of development and introduced me to critical and participatory perspectives. LJMU has enabled me to integrate theory and practice, supporting long-term, engaged research grounded in relationships and real-world impact. Together, these

experiences have shaped not only my academic trajectory but also my values as a researcher and educator.

Question 3: Did you always intend to pursue a career in academia? Why have you stayed at one institution for most of your career, and what influenced your shift from Geography to Sociology and Development Studies?

Answer: I'm often asked this, and the honest answer is that an academic career was not something I had mapped out from the beginning. After graduating with a Geography degree, I worked as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Urban Development and Environmental Management (CUDEM) at Leeds Polytechnic. This was before the internet existed, so a large part of my role involved physically searching for academic articles related to ongoing staff research, and producing literature reviews, summaries, and references. I worked across a range of topics, including small and medium enterprises and the need for long-term policy planning to address real-world social and economic challenges. That experience gave me a strong grounding in research and an early appreciation of how academic work connects to wider societal issues.

After this, I completed a Teaching English as a Foreign Language qualification, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I did my training at International House in London, in person as online then was not an option! As well as studying the theory, we would hold daily classes with students from all over the world, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and others, many of whom were refugees. I then taught English at a college in Finsbury Park, again with an eclectic mix of students, where I developed my skills as a teacher, meeting a diverse range of needs and learning styles. That experience not only broadened my perspective but also strengthened my interest in travel and international engagement. Developing my teaching skills during this time proved invaluable—not only for my later academic career but also for my subsequent volunteering role overseas—and ultimately contributed to my pathway into higher education at Liverpool John Moores University. My research role gave me invaluable experience, but at that stage, I was much more driven by a desire to travel and understand the world beyond the UK. I had already developed an interest in development studies during my undergraduate degree, but it was really my personal experiences—my connections to Singapore and Malaysia, and especially my visit to Nepal—that became the turning point.

What stayed with me most from that time was the realization that the issues I had studied in Geography—inequality, environment, and development—were not abstract concepts but lived realities. I remember coming across an article from United World College about students, including Melissa Kwee, who had volunteered in Sikles, Nepal. Their stories made a strong impression on me and reignited my desire to return. That led me to contact the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, partly through connections with my former school in Singapore, and arrange to volunteer. Living and working in Nepal was a formative experience. It gave

me first-hand insight into development practice, community life, and the complexities of environmental and social change. It also made me critically reflect on my own position and assumptions. I think this was one of the most significant lessons in my trajectory: understanding the importance of grounding theory in lived experience and recognizing the value of learning from communities themselves.

When I later pursued my master's at the University of Bath, I approached it very differently because of those experiences. I was much more focused and motivated, and I really immersed myself in the literature and theories of development studies. The programme's interdisciplinary nature allowed me to connect Geography with broader social science perspectives and strengthened my interest in the social dimensions of development.

My early career in research support and consultancy, particularly my work with CUDEM at Leeds Polytechnic and later with Landell Mills, was also very influential. These roles taught me how to conduct rigorous research, work to deadlines, and engage with policy and applied contexts. They reinforced the importance of producing work that is not only academically sound but also relevant and useful in real-world settings. I was working at Landell Mills, a development consultancy, in 1994 when I got offered the job at Liverpool John Moores University and it took me a few days to accept the job as I was learning so much, and earning a lot of overtime money, there due to the need to meet very tight deadlines. The work was intense, challenging and satisfying but it was not a secure job and my mum for one was very relieved when I accepted the job at LJMU. You could say I became a reluctant academic, and when I arrived in Liverpool, I felt it would be for a 5-year period, but here I am 32 years later, still at the same place. One of the things that has kept me at LJMU is the fact that I have been able to develop my own modules, follow my passions and have had so much support for my research in Nepal. I have successfully bid for and secured funds to enable partnerships between my University and Centre for Education Innovation and Research (CERID) at Tribhuvan University and then with Padma Kanya Campus and Dhaka University to connect to share experiences related to education, health and gender studies.

Numerous dialogue sessions were held and staff and researchers from Nepal were able to visit the UK to present at international conferences and work on co-authored publications together. The funds also enabled me to visit so often and to introduce my colleagues at LJMU from Geography, Health, Sociology, and Education to my networks in Nepal, which have kept me at LJMU.

I continued to manage my dyslexic and neurodivergent tendencies whilst working at LJMU, which I have never seen as a limitation but as a gift that has shaped how I see and engage with the world. Liverpool John Moores has provided me with immense support, and I have used my privileged position as an academic to secure funds to continue my collaborative work with academics and activists in Nepal and to follow my own path guided by those I work with on the ground in Nepal. This supportive environment has enabled me to secure funds over

the past 35 years to develop deep and meaningful relationships with academics and activists in Nepal building a reputation as an activist academic.

At the same time, this reflection has reinforced for me the importance of education systems being more inclusive and supportive of those who do not fit conventional norms. Another factor influencing my decision to remain at LJMU has been the strong focus on global citizenship and travel opportunities, particularly the opportunities it provides for fieldwork for both my students and me. The chance to contribute to, teach, and develop modules with fieldwork components has been especially rewarding. LJMU's commitment to being a Civic University and supporting global opportunities has been instrumental in sustaining my commitment over the years.

When I first joined in 1994, I was fortunate to participate in a field trip to Poland and then be a key member of staff on field trips linked to methods modules. I have led or supported student trips to destinations such as Margate, Glasgow, London, Brussels, and Amsterdam. During my time in the Geography department, I also accompanied Professor Ian Cook on at least 10 trips to Beijing and, on one occasion, supported a field trip to Vancouver. These experiences have not only allowed me to travel, but, more importantly, to reflect on and witness the impact such opportunities have on students, supporting them in their academic development, something I find deeply rewarding. I have also taken and supported students visiting Nepal to either undertake dissertation research, complete internships, or just take up an opportunity to have a funded trip to develop their global citizenship and awareness. This is something I am currently writing an article on with colleagues who came on a Turing-funded trip in 2023. This trip was particularly rewarding as it was an interdisciplinary group and two students captured the experience and impact in a short film found on the Dignity Without Danger YouTube site.

Another important reason I have stayed at LJMU is the exceptional support from colleagues across the university. From the administrative staff in the school office to the teams who maintain the buildings and ensure everything runs smoothly—even making sure I am not locked in the building when working late which I often do give I am more of a late-night person than that early bird! There is a genuine sense of community here at LJMU.

Finally, my connection to Liverpool itself has made Liverpool feel like home, not only for me but also for my family. Although I am not originally from the city and am not a 'scouser', I love the city and it's where I now call home. Both of my children were born here, and unlike me, have only ever lived in one house. I am super proud of them both and the fact that they are from Liverpool. The city has a strong sense of identity, community, and social justice, which resonates deeply with me.

The transition from Geography to Sociology was not something I had initially planned or actively chosen, but rather the result of institutional changes. Around 2010, the three senior geographers on the team took voluntary severance, and a decision was made to close the Human Geography course

at LJMU and offer it only in the physical and Earth sciences. This had a direct impact on me and my two colleagues, Giles and Jim. Whilst they were redeployed into the Criminology team, my own teaching and research profile meant I aligned more naturally with Sociology. This was largely because I had already been delivering interdisciplinary world development modules, which sat at the intersection of Geography, Sociology, and Development Studies. My work, including collaborations with colleagues such as Professor Kay Standing, was already engaging with sociological perspectives on gender, inequality and development. As a result, the move into Sociology felt like a coherent continuation of my existing interests rather than a complete disciplinary shift, allowing me to further develop my research and teaching in areas that were already central to my academic identity. In the transition, I took on the role of Head of Geography to support the current students completing their studies. Colleagues and I were touched by their efforts to save the department, and they submitted a report for senior management aptly titled *Geography Matters*, inspired by the work of Doreen Massey! The decision was definitive, though, and in 2012 I joined the Sociology program full-time and began to work with my new team.

As I progressed in higher education, I found that I valued the combination of teaching, research, and working closely with students. I became increasingly interested in curriculum development and in creating opportunities for students to engage with learning in more applied and experiential ways. Being new to the Sociology Department, I mainly taught on my global module and qualitative research modules introducing sociologists to more visual methods and participatory visual methods, something which has grown over the past ten years. I also introduced an international field work module as an option in the final year to provide Sociology students with the opportunity to conduct their own research in real world settings. I have led two field trips to Nepal and countless to Brussels and Amsterdam showing my long-standing involvement in international fieldwork—taking students to Nepal, China, Canada, and across Europe—reflects my commitment to embedding global and experiential learning into the curriculum. Relocating to Sociology also opened up new doors and I became an active member of the International Visual Sociology Association and am currently working with colleges in India and Bangladesh who are hosting the first South and Southeast Asian Visual Sociology workshop in Delhi this September.

In terms of why I have stayed at one institution for most of my career, that has been less about staying still and more about being able to grow within a supportive environment. At Liverpool John Moores University, I have had the opportunity to evolve across roles—from Senior Lecturer to a Reader of Development Studies and now a Professor of Collaborative Action Research.

Overall, my trajectory has not been linear or pre-planned, but it has been coherent. Each stage, whether research assistance, international volunteering, consultancy, or teaching, has built on the last. The key insights I have gained are the importance of interdisciplinarity, the value of experiential

learning, and the need to connect theory with practice. These principles have consistently shaped my decisions and underpin my long-term commitment to academia. Also, in all of my time at LJMU I have been very privileged to be able to travel both with students and also to conduct my worn collaborative research, supported by my partner Bob and children — I am often heard saying — you can take the girl out of Geography but you can't take Geography out of the girl!

Question 4: How did you choose your research field site, Sikles, Kaski, Nepal? What major activities have you been doing? How do they contribute to broader global academic discourses in your field?

Answer: After working as a research assistant and qualifying to teach English as foreign language I read about the connection my teachers at UWC has made to Dr Chandra Gurung and his village Sikles. This led to me volunteering to teach there and work with the ACAP staff stationed there in the monsoon season of 1992. On reflection not the best time to volunteer in a then remote village with 8 hours treks in the rain just to renew my visa once a month! This experience played a significant role in my life by not only connecting me to a village I see as second home (*mero maiti justai lagyo*), but a community, many of whom are like family to me. It's a place I have shared with my family, husband Bob, son Jamie, and daughter Maya, but also with my wider family and friends over the past almost 35 years!

Living and learning in Sikles played key role in my studies at Bath University and due to the support I had as an early career lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University is a place I visited on an annual basis in the mid-to-late 1990's enabling me to take an action research approach to my PhD grounded in the realities of the women I encountered and responding to their desire to improve their literacy skills. As I noted earlier, my PhD journey formally began in 1999, but in many ways, my research started much earlier, in 1992, when I was living in Sikles. I was there teaching English, but more importantly, I was learning—about local life, rural communities, and the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) and the philosophy that underpinned it. I kept detailed diaries during that time, and these became incredibly significant later on. In fact, in my PhD viva, one of the first questions I was asked—after “are you dyslexic?”—was “why Nepal, and why you?”. That immediately took me back to those diaries, which captured my thoughts, experiences, and, importantly, the emotional connections I had formed while living ‘in the field’, so to speak.

Sikles therefore became the natural focus for my PhD. I returned for research visits in 1995, 1996 and 1997, focusing on the extent to which ACAP could act as a role model for other regions seeking to balance environmental conservation with respect for local cultures and communities. What interested me most was how people were included in the conservation process, rather than positioned outside it. During this period, I also began engaging more actively in academic networks, including attending Royal Geographical Society conferences, and my first authored book chapter (Parker, 1998) reflected

this work—highlighting ACAP as one of the most successful integrated conservation and development projects, while also asking the critical question: is it sustainable?

Although I visited other areas within the ACAP region such as Jomson, Ghandruk and surrounding villages, I was always drawn back to Sikles. It was where I had built relationships and where my understanding felt most grounded. I also met Dr Hum Gurung during this time, including at a conservation and education workshop in Pokhara and later in Ghandruk, where he was based, which further shaped my thinking. Meeting renowned academics at this time such as Dr Chandra Gurung, Dr Harka Gurung and Dr Om Gurung all inspired me and helped me connect the links between Geography Anthropology and Development.

Photography also played an important role in building connections. I would regularly take photographs for people and bring them back on return visits—some of which they still have today. It became a simple but meaningful way of building trust and maintaining relationships within the community, and I was often asked by different members of the village to take family or community photographs.

In 1997, I co-wrote a report with Rose Khatri (née Sands) for ACAP, evaluating the Conservation Education and Extension Programme (CEEP). We found that while it had some positive impact on literacy, its reach was limited. Around this same time, I attended the launch of ActionAid's REFLECT program in London, which introduced a very different approach to literacy—one that did not rely on formal textbooks but instead combined Freirean philosophy with participatory methods, drawing on Robert Chambers' work in participatory rural development.

When I presented these ideas back to ACAP in Pokhara, I was told that they already had a basic literacy program funded by the UK's Overseas Development Administration. I found this quite disheartening, as I knew from my time in Sikles that there was a strong desire—particularly among women—for more meaningful opportunities to learn to read and write. I vividly remember discussing this with the Officer in Charge, Juddah Gurung, who said to me: “Yes, Sara, the women in Sikles are greedy... greedy for literacy.”

That really stayed with me. Not long after, while walking back to my room one evening, I was stopped by a group of young girls from the Dalit community calling out to me:

Didi, didi belukako paudne manparche “Sister sister, we want evening classes.”

That moment was pivotal. It reinforced for me that this was not just about policy or programs; it was about real aspirations and everyday lives. I left Sikles that year determined to find a way to bring this new non-formal education program to the village to see whether it would meet the women's passion for education.

When I returned to Kathmandu, I reconnected with ActionAid, reached out to my networks at UWCSEA, and raised funding to train three local facilitators in the REFLECT approach. This was then introduced in Sikles and became the foundation of my PhD over the following seven years. More

importantly, it created a space where women and some men, could come together to share their experiences, learn literacy skills, and begin their own small-scale development projects.

Alongside the academic work, I also co-authored a short article with my research assistants, and close friends, Laxmi Dhital and Kiran Bohara, which was published in *Education Action*. I was very aware that not many people read a full PhD, and it was important to share these insights in a way that was accessible to NGOs and local communities as well as academic audiences.

In many ways, my research direction has grown very organically from my early experiences in Nepal. When I returned to Sikles in 1995 as a Geography lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University—supported through staff development funding—I was able to build on my earlier time there in 1992. That period of *aune jaane*—coming and going between 1995 and 1998—was incredibly important. It gave me the opportunity to share ideas, reflect on my experiences, and, most importantly, listen to local people. That ongoing dialogue had a profound influence on my research direction.

From the outset, education and participatory development were central, very much aligned with the philosophy of ACAP. After starting my PhD and introducing the REFLECT approach into the Sikles sector, I attended the first REFLECT conference organized by ActionAid in 1998. This was a particularly significant moment in shaping my thinking. The conference brought together participants from different regions, and we first undertook field visits to literacy projects in Nepal, India, or Bangladesh before coming together in Puri, India, to share experiences and insights. It was here that I met Prof Robert Chambers at an event organized by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERID) in Kathmandu, where he spoke so well about this work and noted that he was often credited with developing Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), but noted he saw himself instead as an advocate who had learned from and shared the ideas of practitioners across the Global South. I still recommend his book *Putting the Last First* as a key starting point for understanding participatory development. Members of CERID, ActionAid Nepal, and the Educational Network all travelled to Puri for the conference, which remains one of the most impactful conferences I have ever attended. It began with regional groups collectively mapping the story of literacy and education as a “river of literacy” on the beach, which was both creative and deeply reflective. I was invited to join the Nepali group rather than the European one, and it was through working closely with colleagues from education and NGO sectors in Nepal that I learned so much about Nepal's educational milestones and challenges. Since then, participatory action research has underpinned all of my work. A key aspect of this has been collaboration—working closely with Nepali colleagues, research assistants, and community members, and co-authoring outputs wherever possible. This reflects my broader commitment to challenging traditional knowledge hierarchies and ensuring that research is both accessible and meaningful beyond academia.

The time spent in person at the conference deepened my connections with academics and practitioners and with the support of Prof Hridaya Bajracharya and Dr Sumon Tuladhar amongst others we developed a link between my Uni and CERID and secured UK Government funded Higher Education link scheme and then Development Partnerships in Higher Education (DeLPHE) to work together to build the research and teaching capacity of both our institutions – more on this later.

Question 5: Your academic expertise includes gender, education, and ageing research in Nepal. Could you explain what initially drew you to these areas of research?

Answer: My focus on gender also developed naturally through these experiences. Through long-term partnerships, particularly the DFID-funded DeLPHE collaboration between 1999 and 2012, which I led, became more directly engaged with issues of gender inequality in education, health, and development. This work included contributing to the development of the first Master's in Gender Studies at Padma Kanya Campus, which was offered off-campus so that all genders could attend. As noted above, this also enabled us to collaborate and conduct research on various topics such as gender-based violence, education, and social change.

I noted above how the links I created and funding I secured has kept me at LJMU. Whilst these links were running, I was based in Geography, supported by a great team, and by bringing fellow colleagues and friends, such as Conan Leavey and Rose Khatri (Health), Kay Standing (Sociology), played a key role in expanding my insights and networks. Kay and I worked closely on the Gender Link, and after collaboratively reviewing the Gender Studies program, we identified a gap in the literature around acknowledging and including Nepali feminists and activists in the curriculum. This led us to interview a number of inspirational women and develop a toolkit showcasing the amazing work being done to tackle gender discrimination in Nepal. Kay and I co-authored a paper with BK Shrestha from Global Action Nepal reflecting on the importance of education and family support in enabling girls to both enter and proceed in education at all levels.

From there, I connected with Shrijana Yonzon, a gender advocate who founded the Celebrating Womanhood (Navadevi) Awards, in 2002. After connecting through her mum, we worked together to bring more stories into the public domain and into the university curriculum, which led to the publication "Celebrating Inspirational Women". These materials are available online on my university website. Laxmi Dhital, my long-time research assistant and close friend, played a key role in interviewing these women, and reading the stories deepened my respect for the strength and resilience of activists in Nepal. Reading them makes me quite emotional, and every time I come to Nepal, I learn something new and am totally blown away by the work being done by so many, women and men, to fight for social justice. I always leave inspired.

The link with Padma Kanya Campus in the mid-2000s led to the development and launching of a new Master's in Gender Studies, which is still running today, and I often

visit to deliver lectures to students on my current research. Connecting academics in Nepal with those in Bangladesh between 2008 and 2011 was a special link that benefited all parties through our workshops and research activities. Through these connections, we worked together not only on curriculum development but also on research, leading to further research bids, some successful, some not, and joint publications. Many of my co-authored publications, listed on my university profile publication page, would not have been possible without these funds and it's a great loss that such smaller pots of funding are less available today as I strongly believe in the value of collaboration and for all academics this requires funding.

A particularly important moment came following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. In 2016, I co-authored work exploring the gendered impacts of disaster, and what stood out to me was the strength and organization of local activists and the importance of recognizing gendered needs in crisis response. One issue that emerged strongly was the additional discrimination faced by menstruating women during this time. While dignity kits provided a practical response, they also highlighted deeper structural inequalities, which led directly into my later work on menstruation. This has since become a key area of my research. Through the Dignity without Danger (DwD) project and subsequent funding to amplify its impact, I have been involved in collaborative work exploring menstrual stigma and advocating for menstrual justice.

What is distinctive about this work is its grounding in participatory and visual methodologies—co-creating resources, working with NGOs and activists, and ensuring outputs are accessible and impactful at both local and global levels. All of the creative outputs we have produced, including a book celebrating 34 menstrual activists, 28 women, and 6 men, and giving a snapshot into the work being done in the menstrual activist networks here in Nepal.

Across all of this, what has remained constant is an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach. Whether working on education, gender, ageing, or more recently visual methodologies, my research has been shaped by long-term relationships, international partnerships, and a strong belief in learning with and from others. I often say that I go to Nepal not just to research, but to learn, to be inspired, and to work alongside people. In that sense, my role has often been to connect people and ideas—bringing together academics, activists, and communities to address shared challenges.

So, while my research areas may appear diverse, they are all connected through a shared commitment to participation, social justice, and making a meaningful difference both within and beyond academia.

Question 6: Your main teaching areas include Global Inequalities and Society, Visual Sociology, and International Fieldwork. What are the key focuses of these courses, and how do you integrate your research and academic practice into your teaching?

Answer: My teaching very much reflects my academic journey, which began in Geography. Early in my career at LJMU, I

taught a wide range of modules including World Development, Globalization, Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, as well as research methods and dissertation supervision. I spent the first few weeks of classes critically deconstructing terms like “the Third World” and “ecotourism,” encouraging students to question assumptions and think more deeply about power, representation, and inequality. Nepal was often a key case study in this teaching.

I do sometimes miss working in a Geography team, particularly its strong tradition of fieldwork, but I have consciously carried this into Sociology. Alongside colleagues, we have embedded international and experiential learning into the curriculum, including within Criminology, making our programs at LJMU quite distinctive. We have also written about this work and continue to research the impact of global opportunities and fieldwork on students’ perspectives and development.

Across my current teaching in Global Inequalities, Visual Sociology, and International Fieldwork, there is a strong emphasis on connecting theory to real-world contexts. In Global Inequalities and Society, for example, I introduce students to key debates on development and social justice, again drawing on Nepal as a case study while situating it within broader global processes and examples from around the world. I have also incorporated innovative assessments such as poster presentations, which allow students to communicate complex ideas in accessible and creative ways, skills that are highly relevant beyond academia. International Fieldwork remains central to my teaching. As module leader, I design and deliver all aspects of the module, ensuring that students engage actively with research in international contexts. Where travel is not possible, I developed a ‘virtual field trip’ model so students can still undertake meaningful overseas-based research. Beyond this, I’ve supported placements and global opportunities through LJMU’s Go Global and internship schemes, enabling students from across disciplines to gain experience in Nepal. I am also currently researching the longer-term impact of these experiences on students’ worldviews and aspirations.

The Visual Sociology module is a newer development and one that brings my research into the classroom very directly. It focuses on visual and creative methods—such as photography, film, and storytelling—and gives students the opportunity to explore social issues in more innovative ways. This links closely to my broader research practice, particularly around participatory and visual methodologies.

I make a strong effort to integrate my research into teaching wherever possible. For example, I use materials from my Qualitative Analysis in Action online resource, which includes interviews with inspirational women in Nepal. This allows students to engage with real data and develop their qualitative analysis skills through authentic, meaningful content. I also draw on my projects around gender, education, and menstruation to demonstrate how research can inform practice and policy.

Another key aspect of my teaching is my commitment to diverse and inclusive assessment. Alongside essays, I use

posters, presentations, portfolios, and reports, reflecting the kinds of communication and analytical skills students need in the workplace. I see assessment not just as a way of measuring learning, but as part of the learning process itself. Finally, I supervise undergraduate and postgraduate research and contribute to teaching across programs and faculties, as well as externally through guest lectures.

Overall, my approach to teaching is underpinned by the same principles as my research: interdisciplinarity, participation, and a strong commitment to real-world relevance. Whether through fieldwork, visual methods, or applied projects, my aim is to provide students with engaging and transformative learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom.

Question 7: You served as the Principal Investigator for the British Academy-funded project “Dignity Without Danger: Collaboratively Analyzing Menstrual Exclusion in Nepal (2018–2022).” Could you highlight the key opportunities, challenges, and outcomes of this project?

Answer: The Dignity Without Danger (DwD) project emerged from earlier collaborative work examining gender-based violence in post-earthquake Nepal. The first grant was a British Academy Small Grant and led to me becoming a member of the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Partners’ Alliance in Nepal (MHMPA) and listening to the research needs of a larger number of activists working to end menstrual discrimination. In that research, we identified how menstruation heightened vulnerability, with women and girls often excluded from temporary shelters and lacking access to products to manage menstruation with dignity as well as the importance of quality education. This highlighted an important gap and led to the development of a larger British Academy – Global Challenges Research Fund (BA/GCRF) program. The project explored menstrual exclusion in Nepal using a collaborative, community-based approach. It responded to a call to address issues of Dignity, Heritage, and Violence, and its title was inspired by Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*, which explains that ideas of purity and impurity are shaped not just by hygiene but by social, cultural, and religious beliefs. Challenging these norms—and recognizing menstruation as natural rather than impure, also aligns with the pioneering work of the Radha Paudel Foundation (one of our original six NGO partners) and the Global South Coalition, which advocate for “dignified menstruation.”

One of the key opportunities within the project was the ability to build strong partnerships across academic, NGO, and activist communities. From the outset, collaboration was at the heart of the project, though my links with the MHMPA we identified six local NGO partners to work with and recruited a Nepali research team co-developing both the research design and the use of funding. This included support for local dissemination, ensuring that the project remained grounded in local priorities and lived experiences. The project also benefited from additional institutional funding from LJMU and a no-cost extension from the British Academy, which enabled us to

sustain and expand activities beyond the original timeframe.

A particularly important and rewarding aspect of the project was the use of creative and participatory methodologies. We worked with communities to co-produce visual and narrative outputs, including murals, films, and digital storytelling. For example, collaborations with Kaalo 101 resulted in urban art that brought menstrual stigma into public domain providing stories from each of the provinces we worked in with a visual output. Working with Jay Paudel from Stories of Nepal supported the collection and sharing of local narratives that helped demystify menstruation and given his reputation increased or audience and engagement far beyond our networks. Through collaboration with filmmaker Dr Sara Baumann and the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF), women in Kanchanpur were trained to use GoPro cameras to document their own experiences, resulting in documentaries, dramas, and creative outputs such as songs. All of these are available on the Dignity Without Danger YouTube and are showcased on our Instagram. So, whilst the pandemic presented challenges, it also created unexpected opportunities—participants had more time to engage with filming and reflect on their stories, deepening the participatory nature of the research.

These creative approaches were central not only to the research process but also to its impact. They enabled meaningful engagement across different groups, from rural communities to policymakers, and reinforced the value of inclusive, co-produced knowledge. At the same time, the project highlighted ongoing challenges, particularly the need for more accessible menstrual education resources and better training for educators. Ensuring inclusivity—so that resources meet diverse learning needs and abilities—remains a critical priority moving forward.

Alongside these opportunities, the project also required navigating complex challenges, including coordinating a large interdisciplinary and international team, working across different cultural and institutional contexts, and adapting to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these challenges also strengthened the project, encouraging flexibility, deeper collaboration, and more innovative approaches to engagement.

As part of this, I co-organized a hybrid international conference in 2021, which was delayed due to COVID-19 but, as a result, became the first hybrid conference to be held at the British Academy in London, opening it up to input from all over the world. This led to the publication 'Experiences of Menstruation from the Global South: Towards a Visualised, Inclusive and Applied Menstrual Studies.

In terms of outcomes, the project has produced a significant body of work. Academically, this includes a British Academy Special Proceedings Volume and further co-authored publications. The edited collection *Menstruation in Nepal* Dignity Without Danger brings together contributions from the project team and wider scholars, reflecting both the depth and growth of this field. All outputs are collaboratively produced, underscoring my commitment to co-created research

and shared knowledge production.

Beyond academic outputs, the project has generated a wide range of impactful resources, including menstrual education materials co-developed with NGOs, activists, educators, and community members. Following a stakeholder workshop in 2019, I supported Global Action Nepal in securing funding from GIZ to develop a suite of materials, including a teacher's guide, a student guide, a collection of radio interviews, and a Nepali translation of WASH United's *Ruby's World*. Together, these resources form the "Resources for Menstrual Education" (R4ME).

Building on this work, Dignity Without Danger was recognised recognized through additional British Academy Amplify the Impact funding (£50k), awarded to a small number of projects for their contribution to addressing inequalities in developing contexts. This funding enabled continued collaboration with the Global Action Nepal team to pilot the R4ME materials in 63 schools and to develop robust recommendations for educators, menstrual activists, and government stakeholders. Feedback from this phase indicates strong demand for more creative outputs, expanded training, and materials that are more accessible and inclusive materials. These are areas that I plan to further develop in collaboration with colleagues in Nepal.

Through subsequent Amplify the Impact funding, I have led work to evaluate these resources and contribute to policy and practice recommendations. This phase has focused on strengthening policy engagement, including collaboration with ministries in Nepal and engagement with UK policy forums, to ensure that research translates into practical, actionable solutions.

Overall, the project demonstrates a trajectory from collaborative research and creative knowledge production to real-world application, policy influence, and sustainable impact. It has also opened up further opportunities, including fostering international collaborations and contributing to global efforts to address menstrual injustice.

Question 8: You have served as a collaborator on several research projects. What do you see as the main benefits and challenges of research collaborations, particularly between Nepali and UK academic institutions?

Answer: A defining feature of my work has been its deeply collaborative nature, grounded in long-standing relationships with local communities, practitioners, and organizations in Nepal. My early involvement in the DelPHE links between my university and partners in Nepal was particularly influential, as it provided valuable insight into local issues and strengthened my connections with activists working across a range of areas, especially those linked to gender.

I strongly believe that meaningful collaboration, particularly when it is genuine and long-term, enhances the relevance and impact of research. It ensures that work is rooted in local priorities and experiences, rather than being driven solely by academic agendas. This approach has

been central to Dignity Without Danger, where collaboration with colleagues, including Madhusudan Subedi, as well as partnerships with NGOs and the Natural Health Network in Nepal, ensured that the research was guided by stakeholders. This not only strengthened the research itself but also led to a range of creative outputs that are being used by activists and contributing to changing the narrative around menstrual stigma in Nepal. At the same time, this way of working is not without its challenges. Balancing my research commitments with teaching responsibilities has required careful planning, often timing fieldwork to coincide with university breaks. This has sometimes meant being away from my family during important times such as Christmas and Easter. Leaving my children when they were younger was emotionally difficult, although it also created space for them to build strong relationships with their father, and they have had opportunities to travel and experience aspects of this work themselves.

More broadly, sustaining collaborative work can be challenging, particularly in terms of managing expectations and securing funding. A principle that has guided me throughout comes from Sidaway's advice to "not make promises you can't keep," which I have taken as a personal mantra when working with partners. Funding remains a significant constraint, especially in ensuring that resources can be equitably distributed and used by collaborators in Nepal. In the context of growing conversations around decolonizing research, I believe there is a clear need to rethink funding structures to better support truly collaborative work. Too much research remains extractive, and I am committed to approaches that prioritize local voices, agency, and more inclusive ways of producing knowledge. One thing I have learnt from the Dignity Without Danger research project is that more time and funding is needed to work with partners and participants writing up and disseminating the findings as I am in the privileged position of having a full time job at a UK University that pays my salary to do this whilst my research team especially early career researcher need to move on to the next job to develop their careers.

Question 9: You have also worked closely with various non-governmental organizations. What opportunities and challenges did you encounter while collaborating with NGOs in your research and academic work in Nepal?

Answer: My connections to NGOs in Nepal developed from my early experiences volunteering with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. As my research evolved, I began working more closely with a range of NGOs, with Global Action Nepal (GAN) becoming a particularly important long-term partner following my meeting with B.K. Shrestha in 2007. Learning about GAN's work in promoting inclusive and quality education was instrumental in shaping my practice-oriented approach to collaboration.

Through this work, I was involved in several community-level initiatives. For example, in Sikles, projects focused on educational development and community engagement helped establish local organizations such as

the Madi Khola Women's Organization. Following the death of Dr Chandra Gurung, further local structures were established, including the Sikles Development Committee and the Chandra Gurung Foundation. My collaboration with communities there included supporting a participatory photography project, which resulted in exhibitions and the edited book *Our Village, Our Life* (2011). This experience was particularly important in reinforcing the value of placing resources and decision-making at the local level, recognizing that communities themselves are best placed to identify their needs—while also highlighting the challenge of balancing competing priorities within communities.

Much of my work with NGOs has been strongly practice-oriented, particularly in supporting educational initiatives. This has included collaborative projects with organizations such as Children-Nepal and the Women's Skills Development Organization, including developing a children's storybook linked to fair trade and supporting locally produced materials. These collaborations have been highly rewarding but also highlight a key challenge: the ongoing need to secure funding to sustain and build on this work.

Within my research, Global Action Nepal has been central, particularly in the Dignity Without Danger project, where their role ensured meaningful engagement and dissemination at the local level. NGO partnerships have been essential in ensuring the research produces outputs that are not only academically robust but also practically relevant, including educational resources and advocacy materials. At the same time, sustaining these partnerships is increasingly challenging in the current funding climate, with significant pressures on civil society organizations, particularly those working in areas such as gender and reproductive rights.

A further challenge is ensuring that NGO partners can fully participate in international academic and policy spaces. While funding constraints often limit this, there have been important successes such as the DeLPHE funding scheme supporting the exchange of staff between the UK Nepal and Bangladesh at the start of my career. More recently, for example, British Academy funding enabled B.K. Shrestha from GAN to attend the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Conference in 2023 in Washington, DC, where he was the only male and one of a few representatives from the Global South, providing a vital opportunity for a practitioner voice to be heard. It is important that academics leading research bids fully cost the time of those we collaborate with into bids so we can work together to develop proposals but also work together to disseminate and reflect on the findings. This reinforced for me the importance of ensuring that collaborations are genuinely inclusive and that NGO partners are recognized as equal contributors.

Over time, I have continued to work closely with NGOs and remain an active committee member of the Britain–Nepal NGO Network (BRANNGO), supporting and engaging with those working in the development sector. Without these connections the research I have been involved in would not have been as productive and impactful. It's also important that NGOS connect to academics working in the area so

they can deepen their understanding of the socio-cultural and political context of the places where they work. I work closely with several NGOs based in the UK and am an active committee member of the Britain–Nepal NGO Network (BRANNGO), supporting and engaging with those working in the development sector.

Overall, working with NGOs has created significant opportunities for meaningful, impactful, and grounded research, but it also requires ongoing attention to issues of funding, sustainability, and equitable partnership.

Question 10: Based on your educational background and professional experiences, what are your perspectives on the future of the social sciences, particularly in relation to women’s issues in Nepal?

Answer: My perspective on the future of the social sciences in Nepal is shaped by both my academic work and long-standing collaborations with colleagues, NGOs, and communities. Nepal has a strong and well-established tradition of social science research, supported by organizations such as Martin Chautari and Social Science Baha, which have played a key role in fostering critical, locally grounded scholarship. It is important that these spaces continue to be supported and that they remain inclusive, diverse, and accessible to a wide range of voices. I would particularly like to see greater attention paid to gender equality within academic and research spaces. While there has been progress, there are still instances where panels and events are dominated by men, so-called “manels”, and there is a need to ensure that women’s voices, as well as those from marginalized groups, are more consistently represented and valued within both research and public forums.

I also think it is important to move beyond Kathmandu as the primary site of knowledge exchange. While the capital has a vibrant research community, there is significant potential to strengthen connections and create opportunities in other parts of the country. I was particularly inspired by the First Far Western University International Conference, which demonstrated the value of creating spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in different regional contexts. Expanding these kinds of initiatives can help to decentralize research, build capacity, and ensure that a wider range of perspectives is included.

Looking forward, I would like to see a continued shift towards more equitable and collaborative forms of knowledge production. This means research that is not only conducted in Nepal but increasingly led by Nepali researchers and institutions, with international partnerships that are genuinely reciprocal. Decolonizing research in practice requires changes to funding structures and greater recognition of locally based expertise.

In relation to women’s issues, there has been important progress in recent years, particularly in raising awareness around areas such as menstrual health, gender-based violence, and inclusion. However, significant inequalities remain, and there is a continued need for research that is grounded in lived experience and connected to local priorities. My work has

shown the value of collaborative and participatory approaches in this area, particularly in co-producing knowledge with NGOs, activists, and communities to contribute to meaningful social change.

A key challenge moving forward is ensuring that research translates into practice. There is a need to strengthen the links between research, policy, and implementation, particularly in areas such as education and gender equality. This includes investing in training, resources, and capacity building to ensure research has a sustained impact. Policymakers often say more evidence is needed to tackle many social issues, when I feel more action and Government support are needed!

Overall, I remain optimistic about the future of the social sciences in Nepal. There is a solid foundation to build on, and with continued commitment to collaboration, inclusivity, and locally driven research, there is real potential to contribute to more just and equitable outcomes for all genders.

Question 11: You have served as the Chair of the Britain–Nepal Academic Council (2023–2026). Could you outline the major activities of this organization and discuss potential avenues for academic collaboration with Nepali scholars and institutions? Are there any initiatives or examples that you found particularly impactful?

Answer: As a committee member and now Chair of the Britain–Nepal Academic Council (BNAC), I have built on the strong foundations established by previous colleagues to support a collaborative platform connecting academics, practitioners, and activists across the UK and Nepal. The Council’s work centres on fostering meaningful academic exchange, strengthening partnerships, and creating spaces for dialogue across disciplines and sectors. Every year, we host a two-day Nepal Study Day event to support the Social Science Baha Conference in Nepal, award a PhD prize, and invite key academics to present as part of an annual lecture as part of our Nepal Study Days.

A key priority has been supporting early career researchers, through mentoring, sharing expertise, and creating opportunities to engage with UK-based academic networks. An important aspect of the Council’s work has also been to extend beyond academia by bringing activists and community voices into the network. For example, supporting the Herne Katha tour premiering their film *The Lost Years* in the UK in 2024 created a valuable opportunity to connect creative practice, lived experience, and connect to the Nepali diaspora here in the UK. Initiatives such as this have been particularly impactful in fostering more inclusive and grounded forms of knowledge exchange and develop connections with the wider community.

I am also keen to further develop links among BNAC, BRANNGO and the NRNA, all of whom actively work to support Nepali students in the UK, particularly those who may be experiencing financial or emotional challenges while studying here. In my role as Chair, I have attended a number of events at the Nepali Embassy this year, which have helped to strengthen these connections and have contributed to the development of a new network, the Nepal Student Welfare

Association. This initiative aims to provide more coordinated support for international students, and I look forward to seeing how this network develops.

The Council continues to facilitate events, workshops, and networking opportunities that encourage joint research, co-authorship, and future funding collaborations. There is significant potential to build on this further through co-developed teaching, joint supervision, and student exchange, supporting more sustainable and equitable models of international collaboration. That being said, the funding landscape, as noted above, is shrinking and requires us to work together more to gain access to funds to continue our work.

Overall, this role has reinforced the importance of building on existing relationships while expanding opportunities for inclusive, collaborative engagement. The most impactful work has been that which brings together diverse perspectives, academics, activists, and communities, and supports the co-production of knowledge with real-world relevance.

Question 12: What major changes you observed in Sikles since you began your fieldwork? How do these changes reflect global academia?

Answer: This is a very big question, as the changes I have observed in Sikles over the past 35 years have been extensive and ongoing. Each time I return, something has changed, socially, economically, culturally, and technologically. It is difficult to do justice to this in a short response, and I am increasingly aware that I need to spend time reflecting more systematically on these changes, drawing in particular on my personal diaries, which capture these transformations over time.

At a broad level, the changes in Sikles reflect wider global processes, including increased mobility, out-migration, access to education, and the influence of digital technologies. There have been shifts in livelihoods, family structures, and aspirations, as well as changing relationships between generations. In this sense, Sikles offers a powerful lens for understanding how so-called “remote” places are deeply connected to global flows of people, ideas, and resources, which resonates strongly with contemporary debates in global academia.

More recently, I have also become interested in how digital platforms are reshaping representation and engagement. While in Sikles in early 2026, I began using TikTok to capture and share everyday moments and reflect on the changes I had seen, using the SiklesDiaries hashtag on my Sara Didi channel. I was struck by the level of engagement this generated, with some posts going viral, particularly those featuring interactions with older members of the community, with whom I have developed long-standing relationships. This has opened up new ways of thinking about storytelling, audience, and the ethics of representation. I plan to post more when I return to share my love of Sikles and the opportunities and challenges of living there.

At the same time, I am conscious that these observations only scratch the surface. I would like to develop this work further, potentially through a dedicated research period

supported by a sabbatical or fellowship, to reflect more deeply on the changes. I have witnessed over time. I am also interested in exploring more creative approaches, including the possibility of producing a short film that captures the voices and perspectives of those who live in Sikles or maintain strong connections to it.

Finally, I feel there is an important opportunity to revisit and update the coffee-table photography book I edited in 2011, *Our Village, Our Life*. A second edition is long overdue, and I would want this to foreground the voices of local people, whose insights are crucial to understanding these changes in ways that go beyond my own perspective.

Question 13: You have been working in Nepal for the last 35 years. What are the key lessons you would like to share, and do you plan to continue your work in Nepal in the future, and if so, how?

Answer: The simple answer is yes; Nepal is in my heart. It has shaped me in so many ways and played a huge part in who I am today, both personally and academically. Over the years, my research has grown out of long-term relationships with people and places, and doing this interview for this journal has been a reminder of all that I have done and all I have worked with. It has been quite emotional and taken me longer to do than I anticipated!

What I have learned most is the importance of listening, of valuing everyday experiences, respecting those you work with, and of working collaboratively. It's those connections, more than anything, that have stayed with me. As you can see, I have a deep connection to Sikles but also have become close to the women filmmakers whose work we have showcased at local, regional, and national venues. I hope to work with them again in the future and connect them with networks I am involved in to build on this work and support their efforts to promote social change in their communities.

In terms of the future, I intend to continue working in Nepal for as long as I am able to, both whilst working in academia and beyond. I will continue to seek research funding and collaborate with colleagues and partners in Nepal, maintaining the relationships that have been so central to my work. While securing funding is always uncertain, and my return visits have often depended on this, I have always held on to the belief that I will return. I have lost count of the times I have written in my personal diary, “When will I be back? I do not know, but one thing I do know is that . . . I will be back!”

Nepal is not just a site of research for me; it is part of me. In many ways, it is my second home, and I remain deeply committed to continuing this work.

Question 14: Drawing on your experience as an Editorial Board member and reviewer for the *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, what common challenges do you observe in submitted manuscripts, and how might the journal further support authors and strengthen its academic quality and international visibility? What advice would you offer to early career Nepali scholars seeking

publication?

Answer: From my experience on the Editorial Board and as a reviewer, one of the most common issues I encounter is that papers do not always make clear connections to the wider literature. As a reviewer, if I find myself asking “how do you know this?”, it is usually a sign that the argument needs to be more clearly grounded in existing research. Sometimes references are included, but they can feel quite limited or drawn from a narrow set of sources, without fully engaging with the depth and breadth of scholarship in that area. Strengthening this connection to the literature is often what helps move a paper from being descriptive to making a more substantial academic contribution. Another area that requires careful attention is writing about sensitive topics. It is important to think carefully about how places and people are represented, ensuring that anonymity is protected where appropriate, while also recognizing that, in some cases, participants may wish to be acknowledged. Data should be handled thoughtfully, not just through the use of pseudonyms, but by considering the wider ethical implications of how research is presented. These decisions should be discussed openly, with clear attention to the ethical issues underpinning the research. Greater reflection is also often needed on the researcher’s positionality, acknowledging that all knowledge is subjective and situated. It is therefore important not to over-theorize or over-generalize, but instead to remain grounded in the specific insights and contexts from which the research emerges.

For early-career scholars, my main advice is to see writing as an ongoing process rather than a final output. Participating in writing workshops, developing papers from conference presentations, and seeking feedback from peers and mentors can make a significant difference. There is also value in taking time to refine arguments and ensure clarity before submission, rather than rushing to publish. Maybe the editorial team could run writing workshops and feedback sessions to encourage submissions. Commission special editions would also be welcome and having more varied formats for submissions could also be worth considering.

In terms of the journal’s future development, I think there is a real opportunity to further strengthen its reach and visibility by engaging more actively with both researchers based in Nepal and the wider Nepali diaspora. This is particularly important for early-career researchers, including master’s and PhD students, who should be encouraged and supported to publish their work. The journal’s open access model is a major strength, and this could be built on through initiatives such as special issues and stronger links with key research networks.

Finally, as the academic landscape evolves, it is important for the journal to engage with emerging challenges and

opportunities, including the use of AI in research and writing. This is something we have reflected on collectively and will need to work on more as we move ahead. Clear guidance on how AI tools may be used would be helpful, but I would also encourage authors to retain their authentic voice, which remains central to strong and engaging scholarship.

I would encourage early career researchers to engage in forums such as Social Science Baha, the Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya, and Annual Sociology Conference organized by Tribhuvan University, and research spaces like Martin Chautari in Nepal, as well as BNAC Nepal Study Days in UK, which are a great place to connect with other ECRs—spaces where you can listen to others, share your own work, and develop your ideas. I am also a strong advocate for sharing research in different forms, including podcasts, blogs, and visual formats such as posters, as these create opportunities to connect with like-minded people and to have your ideas constructively questioned, ultimately strengthening your work.

If papers are rejected, do not get disheartened; take on board the feedback, develop the paper, and resubmit to the same journal or one that fits more closely with your key focus. Also, publish from your PhD, often a break is needed to recover after completing such a monumental piece, and on reflection, I wish I had published more from my own thesis. One thing which I feel is really important in disseminating research is to work with your research assistants and those you have worked with. As a Professor of Collaborative Action Research, the majority of my work has been written with those I work with, which is why completing this interview has been a challenge for me!

Finally, please don’t be shy—many academics have reservations about sharing their research, and feeling anxious is both normal and healthy. We look forward to reading your work, and I hope this interview has inspired you to follow your dreams.

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