



Blending a relationship-based approach to a community-based approach: A case study in the Tamang community of Rasuwa, Nepal

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Abstract

The rapid diffusion of modernization, globalization, technology, and modern education has affected rural people and their conventional way of life. Rural areas have become an aging rural society experiencing the negative effects caused by younger generations migrating to urban areas. In the SASON conference 2013, the authors pointed out that rural people have the potential to create a model for the harmonization of modern development with community-based cultural tourism. Because of the COVID Pandemic, the dependence on tourism development increases vulnerability. Taking reference from Özgen's (2020) framework of a 'relation-based mobilized community', this study attempts to find a new perspective to shift from a 'community-based approach' to a 'relationship-based approach'. In general, when considering rural development, the community-based approach focuses on permanent populations within geographical and administrative borders. By analyzing the actual situation with a 'relationship-based approach', the findings of this study indicate that rural families and their community are supported by external family members, kinship, and social relations. Their remittances have contributed to rural families. Mobile phones and social networking services play significant roles in allowing them to communicate with each other. The young-middle generations who come and go in their communities bring not only money but also new skills and a new, more worldly outlook. The economic issues in rural areas have been found as job creation and income generation. Accordingly, people are gradually losing their pride and sense of identity in their community. As these characteristics have caused many social problems, multifunctional rural development is necessary. The analysis is based on the review of literature, primary/secondary data, and fieldwork that has been carried out since 2000 in Rasuwa. In the spring of 2023, we conducted a questionnaire survey, interviews with key people, and observation.

Keywords

community-based, relationship-based, rural community, traditional culture, tamang

Introduction

From the perspective of development, developing countries are assumed to learn from developed countries. For instance, Japan's experience has been impressive to many other countries, including Nepal. On the other hand, Japan had negative lessons behind the rapid economic growth. During the subsequent period of high economic growth since the 1960s, the rural areas faced significant depopulation. Traditional cultures and communities were often seen as obstacles to development, and in general, rural development was equated with economic development. The rapid dissemination of modernization and technology affected the rural people and their traditional way of life. Consequently, the rural areas have become an aging rural society, caused by younger generations migrating to urban areas for education and better employment opportunities. Most of the people migrating out of the rural areas have chosen to permanently remain in the urban areas and usually do not return to the rural areas. Currently, rural communities in Japan are facing serious problems due to depopulation, declining birth rate, and even survival crises. When JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) participants from developing countries visited a Japanese village,¹ a Japanese farmer said that they have weakened their communal bonds through mechanization and modernization. So, we argue that one should use negative and positive lessons to implement an alternative rural development.

Considering the common concern, we assumed that a comparative study should be conducted with caution and proposed this study. In this regard, this study examines rural development in Nepal while referring to the lessons learnt from the situation in Japan.

Since the 1950s, the Government of Nepal has adopted several different rural development approaches for the development of its rural areas. The role of local people's participation has been emphasized since the 1970s. Studies have shown that local participation is important for the success and sustainability of rural development programs. Esman and Uphoff (1984) have noted that rural people can enhance their individual interest and collective well-being by catalyzing the opportunities to organize, and that when they organize, they formulate their own rules, thus generating local approaches, provided they are given the right to devise

¹JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) Development Studies Program invites future leaders from partner countries to Japan, and offers them the opportunity to learn about Japan's modernization and development experiences. <https://www.jica.go.jp/english/activities/schemes/dsp-chair/index.html>

their own institutions without being challenged by external authorities. They enforce the rules themselves, which in turn enables the development of their own internal governance mechanisms and formulas. This results in the effective allocation of costs and benefits to the members by managing local resources effectively, ultimately leading to the development of rural communities. The process of eliciting interest and the collective efforts of rural individuals follow the community-based approach.

Considering the importance of a community-based approach, the government of Nepal has also introduced different plans and policies to institutionalize the local community through local people's participation. Local participation has gained momentum since the democratic movement in the 1990s. With the introduction of the Decentralization Act of 1992, a number of non-government organizations (NGOs) began to form and operate at the national and local levels. The government, along with international donor agencies, chooses NGOs as the main partner organizations to ensure local people's participation and generate feelings of ownership. The NGOs started to form local groups, which later developed into local community-based organizations (CBOs). Many CBOs are operating under the community-based approach policy in different sectors and programs, such as in vegetable marketing, milk production and marketing, savings and credit, and irrigation management.

Tatsumi and Joshi (2010) emphasized the importance of a community-based approach through the case studies of forest user groups and financial groups in Nepal. The activities of forest user groups were observed in their fields in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the Sociological/Anthropological Society of Nepal (SASON) conference 2013, the authors pointed out that rural people have the potential to create a model for the harmonization of modern development with community-based cultural tourism (Tatsumi & Tamang 2015).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that sole dependence on tourism development makes economies vulnerable. COVID-19 also curbed the migration of potential migrants. As rural areas offer fewer financial opportunities, many people among the young generation choose to leave. After the subsidence of COVID-19, the emigration overseas in search of study or work has restarted, proving the push and pull theory correct once again. The village leaders who implemented a community-based approach in the 1990s are aging. Community relations have been weakening, and individualism is becoming more evident. Thus, sole dependence on a community-based approach has its limitations, and the old paradigm must be changed. While the community-based approach focuses on permanent populations

within geographical and administrative borders, generally, Özşen (2020) developed his framework of a 'relation-based mobilized community' through the case study in rural Japan. He emphasized the importance of the rural second and third generations now residing in urban centers and their potential social, economic, and cultural contributions to the community.

In view of the above, this study examines the changes in livelihood, migration, and language in the Tamang community of the mountainous region of Nepal from a medium-term to long-term viewpoint. This case study is a preliminary analysis that adds a 'relationship-based approach' perspective to a 'community-based approach'.

Methodology

The analysis, so far, made in this study is based on literature review, primary/secondary data, and fieldwork that has been carried out since 2000 in Rasuwa, Gosaikunda Rural Municipality, Nepal. The fieldwork was conducted once or twice each year, except for 2020–2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Though our study faced certain challenges, we dealt with the various issues using our experience in this subject area. In the spring of 2023, we conducted a questionnaire survey by interviewing key people from the Sano-Bharku Community. Sano Bharkhu was a former Syaphru VDC ward no. 4 and which has now been in Gosaikunda Rural Municipality Ward no. 5 in Rasuwa. Through this questionnaire survey, we were able to obtain responses from 60 of the total 63 households. To explore their changes, this study used field survey data from 2018, 2010, and 2000 as references.

Rasuwa is accessible by buses or sumo jeeps from the capital city of Kathmandu via the Pasang Lhamu highway, and its headquarters (Dhunche) is approximately 120 km northwest of Kathmandu. The study area is located in the Langtang National Park, which was established in 1976. It covers an area of 1710 sq km in the southern mountainous terrain of Nepal-China (Tibet) border. In 1998, an area of 420 sq km around the park was declared a buffer zone. It is the second nearest national park to Kathmandu, situated directly to the north of the city in the central Himalayan region.

The first author visited Nepal for the first time in 1990 as a tourist and started research in earnest after 1997. She is continuing with her research in Nepal and has also studied the Japanese rural society (Tatsumi, 2021a). She believes that the time has come for Nepal and Japan to share and learn from each other's experiences (Tatsumi, 2021b). The second author was born in the study area and specializes in the Tamang society. In the field surveys, which are also referred to as 'face-to-face' or 'personal visit surveys', an interviewer visited the respondents' homes

and conducted the interviews in the Tamang language with the Tamang elderly. Our fieldwork was not conducted by a research consultancy. Some of the young residents and natives of the village also participated in our research project. These participatory and action research methods would help the younger generation to understand the reality of their village.

Case study of Sano-Bharku community in Syaphryu

Living situations

Table 1 shows that the total population of the community in 2023 was 314, with 161 males and 153 females. A total of 33 males and 34 females stayed outside the community, especially in Kathmandu. The total number of households was 60 (54 Tamang households and 6 Magar households). Annual income was between 30,000 Nepalese Rupees (NPR) and 2,400,000 NPR. Thus, the gap between the rich and the poor is high. Among these households, 17 received remittances from abroad. The amount is between 400,000 NPR and 1,500,000 NPR per year. All households receive domestic remittances.

Table 1
Population and living place

Your	Household members			Stay in the community		Outside in Nepal (especially Kmt) Abroad		Household members	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
04	11	9	20	8	8	3	1	0	0
5-9	9	11	20	6	3	3	8	0	0
10-19	26	20	46	22	15	4	2	0	3
20-29	41	45	86	33	27	4	11	4	7
30-39	25	13	38	13	7	11	3	1	1
40-49	15	17	32	11	12	4	4	0	1
50-59	17	22	39	14	19	3	3	0	0
60-69	8	10	18	8	10	0	0	0	0
70-79	6	2	8	3	2	1	0	0	0
80-89	3	4	7	3	4	0	0	0	0
Total	161	153	314	123	107	33	34	5	12

Source: Field Survey, 2023

All households have agricultural lands, large or small. In this area, mixed farming, with crop and livestock, is a common practice. Crop farming and livestock are the main livelihood of this region. Half of the households keep some kind of animal (cow, pig, chicken, goat, sheep, yak, etc.). However, farming is very difficult here. A farmer said, “We can hardly grow any crops here. We do not have proper tools. We still use the primitive methods to farm crops. The Government has also not provided us with any privileges or facilities”. Moreover, man-animal conflicts are common here. Crops are often destroyed by wild animals that come from the national park. Moreover, the farmers do not receive any compensation from the state and have to pay land taxes to the government.

The people perceived it difficult to improve their living standard due to low agricultural production and the lack of industries and other business systems. There were limited ways of earning money. For education, healthcare, and general supplies, locals are often forced to go to other parts of the country or even abroad, particularly to make money. Thus, while migration is common, those who stay back must depend on remittances.

It is obvious that, the living conditions of these people are not getting worse. Table 2 shows their share of household goods. All households have electricity, a toilet, and mobile phones. Mobile phones and social networking services provide access to communicate with each other. They cook with fuel wood and gas. Approximately 55% of the households had motorbikes, and 47% of the households used WIFI. Social networking is gaining popularity, particularly among the young and middle generations who come and go in this community. Even the elderly used social networking sites to communicate with their children and grandchildren in Kathmandu and foreign countries. It even affects the economic, social, and spiritual aspects of their lives. The relationships among these people are changing dramatically due to the new

Table 2
Household goods holding ratio

Household Items	Holding ratio
Toilet	100%
Mobile Phone	100%
Television	75%
Motor-Bike	55%
WIFI	47%
Refrigerator	35%
Bath room	22%
Hot shower	15%
Washing Machine	12%
Computer	12%
Car	8%
Radio Cassette	3%
Micro Oven	2%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

means of communication. Keeping up with modern life has been a great challenge, which has severely affected the daily lives of the elderly, who often cannot adjust to the changes brought about by globalization. There is a generation gap between the elderly and the young. It is difficult to maintain the traditional lifestyle to which older people are accustomed.

Changes in the population pyramid

Figure 1 is the expansive population pyramid of data from 2000, which shows a larger percentage of the population in the younger age cohorts, with each age cohort smaller in size than the one below it. Fertility rates were high, but the average lifespan was low. The male population was larger than the female population. The urn-shaped age-based pyramid of data from 2010 (Figure 2) shows reduced fertility rates. The constrictive pyramid of Figure 3 shows a lowered number of young people, indicating that the population is elderly and shrinking.

Figure 1
Population: Sano-Bharku community
2000

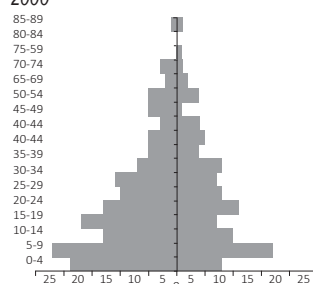


Figure 2
Population: Sano-Bharku community
2010

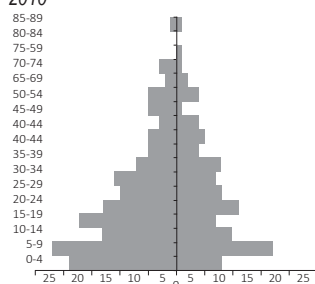
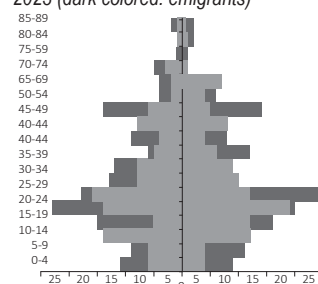


Figure 3
Population: Sano-Bharku community
2023 (dark colored: emigrants)



Migration

As shown in Figure 3 (dark colored), the young generation, from infants to students, and their parents tend to stay in Kathmandu. Most foreign migrants were aged between 18 and 29. A high percentage of women worked in Kuwait, Dubai, Iraq, Oman, Cyprus, and other foreign countries. However, some of them have returned home because of COVID-19. In approximately, 57% of all households, at least one person had at some point gone abroad for work. They found ways to earn money in foreign countries. However, some people encountered difficult experiences such as excessively hard work, low income, cruel treatment, and violence.

When the household heads were asked about their future plans, about 50% of the respondents wished for better education and well-being for their children and grandchildren. The other responses included the following:

<Economic/social problems>

- Everything in the market is expensive, and our lives are becoming increasingly difficult.
- Traditional farming is not sufficient for our livelihood.
- Agriculture has no good earnings here. I am too old to farm or raise livestock.
- It is hard to save money. I cannot find a job.
- I want to educate my children. As I am uneducated, it is hard for me to get a job.
- I am planning to send my children to foreign countries for employment and studies.
- The future is uncertain. I have no idea what to do.

<Worries of the elderly>

- I am old and worried about getting sick. Hospital facilities are out of our reach and expensive.
- I am growing old. It is hard to take on the financial burden of the cultural, marriage, and funeral ceremonies. Attending cultural ceremonies has grown expensive as it requires us to donate money.
- Some elderly people are unable to carry out their daily activities. Their children have gone abroad for employment, leaving them to take care of themselves. There are some cases where the elderly are neglected after they have fallen sick, which has also resulted in death or paralysis.
- Some elderly people have become addicted to cigarettes, tobacco, alcohol, and gambling to reduce stress. It has increased many health complications, among them, and cancer rates have increased as well.
- There is no proper healthcare facility in the area, and everyone has to travel to the city for treatment. Commuting to cities for a health checkup and paying extra for accommodation is expensive. Thus, the elderly people often endure their health problems till they become too unbearable to incurable expenses.

Education and language

Table 3 shows the education level of the population. The illiteracy rate is high at 44%, and only 10% is literate. Thus, the level of education is not high. However, most parents want their children to go to school. Some parents work hard to make ends meet and send their children to boarding schools or schools in Kathmandu. The number of children attending school has increased.

Tables 4 and 5 provide information about the Nepali language spoken in the community. Nepali is the official language. The percentage of 'Cannot speak' has decreased from 3.8 in 2010 to 2.4 in 2023. Most of those who cannot speak Nepali at present are over 40 years old.

Table 3
Education levels 2023

		Male	Female	Total	%
No School	Illiterate	50	58	108	34%
	Literate	17	15	32	10%
Infant		0	2	2	1%
Primary(1-5)		30	23	53	17%
Lower Secondary(6-8)		16	7	23	7%
Secondary(9-10)		17	16	33	11%
Higher Secondary+2, SLC		22	22	44	14%
Bachelor		3	2	5	2%
NA		6	8	14	4%
Total		161	153	314	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4
Nepali language 2010

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	1	16	1	3	1
10-19	0	52	2	6	2
20-29	1	42	0	16	2
30-39	0	28	0	12	0
40-49	0	17	0	12	0
50-59	0	3	0	13	2
60-69	0	2	0	13	3
70-79	0	1	0	8	0
80-89	0	0	0	4	0
Total	2	161	3	87	10
%	0.8%	61.2%	1.1%	33.1%	3.8%

Note: 0-4=16-NA=4

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table 5
Nepali language 2023

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	0	18	0	9	0
10-19	0	30	1	3	0
20-29	0	63	0	11	0
30-39	3	35	1	22	0
40-49	0	13	0	24	1
50-59	1	7	0	16	1
60-69	0	2	0	13	2
70-79	0	0	0	7	1
80-89	0	1	0	4	2
Total	4	169	2	109	7
%	1.4%	58.1%	0.7%	37.5%	2.4%

Note: 0-4=20-NA=3

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Tamang is the mother tongue, and Tables 6 and 7 show the corresponding data. The percentage of 'Fluent' speakers was 82.3 in 2010. But no one spoke fluently anymore in 2023. They use Tamang language in conversation.

Table 6
Tamang language 2010

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	17	3	0	3	0
10-19	53	8	0	3	0
20-29	52	5	0	4	0
30-39	32	4	1	2	0
40-49	25	3	0	1	0
50-59	13	1	0	4	0
60-69	13	0	0	5	0
70-79	9	0	0	0	0
80-89	4	0	0	0	0
Total	218	24	1	22	0
%	82.3%	9.1%	0%	8.3%	0%

Note: 0-4=16-NA=2

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table 7
Tamang language 2023

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	0	0	0	26	1
10-19	0	0	0	31	3
20-29	0	0	0	70	4
30-39	0	1	0	56	4
40-49	0	0	0	38	0
50-59	0	0	0	24	1
60-69	0	0	0	16	2
70-79	0	0	0	8	0
80-89	0	0	0	7	0
Total	0	1	0	276	15
%	0%	0.3%	0%	94.5%	5.1%

Note: 0-4=20-NA=2

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Tables 8 and 9 show data from 2010 and 2023 regarding the status of English as an international language in the community. The figures under 'Can Read and Write' have changed considerably, and most of the people in this category are under 30 years old. Incidentally, due to the impact of immigration to foreign countries, 28 people speak Arabic, 7 speak Hebrew, 3 speak Greek, 3 speak French, 3 speak Korean, 2 speak Malay, and 2 speak Japanese.

Table 8
English language 2010

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	0	3	1	0	15
10-19	0	14	8	0	37
20-29	0	11	4	0	43
30-39	0	7	1	1	26
40-49	0	2	1	0	24
50-59	0	1	0	0	12
60-69	0	2	0	0	11
70-79	0	0	0	0	9
80-89	0	0	0	0	4
Total	0	40	15	1	181
%	0%	16.9%	6.3%	0.4%	76.4%

Note: 0-4=16-NA=30

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table 9
English language 2023

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	0	10	0	2	15
10-19	0	23	0	8	3
20-29	0	43	0	12	19
30-39	0	18	0	12	30
40-49	0	6	0	6	26
50-59	0	2	0	0	23
60-69	0	0	0	0	18
70-79	0	0	0	0	8
80-89	0	0	0	0	7
Total	0	102	0	40	149
%	0%	35.1%	0%	13.7%	51.2%

Note: 0-4=20-NA=3
Source: Field Survey, 2023

Tables 10 and 11 show data from 2010 and 2023 regarding the status of the Hyolmo language in the community, which continues to be spoken due to the influence of the Hyolmo culture. The figures under ‘Cannot Speak’ have changed considerably.

Table 10
Holmo language 2010

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	0	0	0	0	19
10-19	0	0	0	10	49
20-29	0	0	2	40	18
30-39	0	0	0	33	6
40-49	0	0	0	28	1
50-59	0	0	0	16	1
60-69	0	0	0	16	1
70-79	0	0	0	9	0
80-89	0	0	0	4	0
Total	0	0	2	156	95
%	0%	0%	0.8%	61.7%	37.5%

Note: 0-4=16-NA=14

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table 11
Holmo language 2023

	Fluent	Can Read & Write	Can Read	Can Speak Only	Cannot Speak
5-9	0	0	0	0	27
10-19	0	0	0	4	30
20-29	0	0	0	25	49
30-39	0	0	0	28	33
40-49	0	0	0	29	9
50-59	0	0	0	21	4
60-69	0	0	0	13	5
70-79	0	0	0	6	2
80-89	0	0	0	6	1
Total	0	0	0	132	160
%	0%	0%	0%	45.2%	54.8%

Note: 0-4=20-NA=2

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Discussion

This study has shown that the Tamang community of Rasuwa consists not just of those who live there. The rural families are supported by external family members and kinship beyond regional borders and national borders. The economic hardships in the rural areas include difficulties related to job creation and income generation. Many young people go to school or work in Kathmandu or even abroad. Their remittances contribute to the sustenance of their families. During the earthquakes in 2015, the members of the external families assisted the community reconstruction more than the government and the development aid agencies.

Mobile phones and social networking services play a significant role in enabling these people to communicate with each other. The relationships are changing dramatically due to new means of communication. For example, a grandparent communicates with their grandchildren abroad, even though they have never met them in person. It even affects the economic, social, and mental aspects of rural people. Some of the people who continue to live in rural areas cannot see any hope for the future. The people are gradually losing their sense of pride and identity in their community. Suzuki (1940), an expert on Japanese rural sociology, emphasized that rural societies in Japan are becoming not only economically poor, but also socially and mentally deprived. Losing the sense of pride, identity, and self-confidence is a matter of grave concern for rural communities. As Suzuki points out, these issues are common not only to Japan but also to Nepal.

This study has also found that the traditional Tamang identity and culture are in decline due to modern education, technology, globalization, market policies (monetary system vs barter system or semi-barter system), and migration abroad for better opportunities. The young and middle generations who come and go in their communities often bring new skills and a new worldly/global outlook. Most of the young people tend not to be mindful of their traditional culture and have an increased sense of individualism. Though some of the people realize that their culture is important through their experiences outside the community, it is a big challenge for this community to preserve and practice their traditions and identity.

Conclusions

This study offers an important suggestion for future research. As the families and their rural community are supported by external family members, community-based sociological studies must be conducted to examine these external relationships. The relationship with the outside people may be helpful in sustaining

the rural community, and thus, the 'relationship-based approach' should be put into perspective. So far, a 'community-based approach' has been emphasized in the context of rural development; however, a 'relationship-based approach' must also be taken into consideration. However, this does not mean choosing between the two approaches but adding the 'relationship-based approach' as an analytical perspective on understanding the relationships within the community. This is an approach that only works within a family or community and is not to be confused with the network theory.

Japan began to consider a 'relationship-based approach' after rural communities and kinship solidarity had weakened. This realization may have come too late. The population pyramids of some rural communities in Japan have been inverted. The Japanese government is carrying out various policies such as the hometown tax, agricultural business, young farmer support, rural life support, and rural development, but it might end up reacting after the problems. Some communities in Japan cannot continue their local festivals and have the potential to disappear. The number of people involved in agriculture and traditional culture has also been drastically reduced.

Considering the situation in Nepal, based on the current situation of Japan, the number of migrants is not high, and some of the younger generation remain in the community in Nepal. In terms of population decline, the problem in Nepal is not as serious as in Japan. Nepal could act before these problems arise. Based on the negative Japanese experience, rural development in Nepal can be seen as a "relationship-based approach" at an early stage.

We assert that this study is one of the preliminary studies for adding a 'relationship-based approach' perspective to a 'community-based approach'. This research has to be continued from a medium-term to long-term viewpoint. Interviews with migrants abroad are necessary, and the comparative study with other villages is also needed.

The potential for rural areas to play an important role in academic research and teaching could then be seen by rural sociologists. If young people or students participate in these types of action research and practical projects, they would have the opportunity to understand their own issues and the importance of their own culture, and begin to think about how to integrate their traditional systems with new styles.

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