

**DYNAMICS OF EMPOWERMENT:**  
**IDENTITY, CAPABILITIES, CIVIC SPACES AND AUTONOMY RESPECTING**  
**ASSISTANCE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

**by**  
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## **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** Empowerment has come to occupy center stage in development debates and policy discussions. WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health has recommended that countries should tackle inequitable distribution of power, money and resources to address health inequities. In light of this, researchers have increased their efforts to measure empowerment using various indices and scales. But few have paid attention to the interactive relationship between agency and opportunity structure through which empowerment emerges and evolves.

**Methods:** Using critical ethnography, this study explored the dynamics of empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were done over a period of two years in the program sites of Future Generations Arunachal, a community based non governmental organization working in comprehensive primary health care. The study focused on kitchen gardens, an activity taken by women's groups in Palin and Ziro areas. Themes were drawn after coding the interview transcripts and field notes.

**Results:** The context of Arunachal Pradesh, a tribal society undergoing tremendous transition was described in detail. A conceptual map was drawn of the socio political economic terrain over and through which empowerment has to emerge. Employing kitchen gardens as a metaphor, the study explored themes of identity, capability, civic spaces and the role of autonomy respecting assistance in the empowerment process. The

concept of ‘Isopowerment’ was developed to view empowerment as a performative act of moral courage. The themes were weaved together while describing a critical event to interpret the empowerment process.

**Conclusion:** Amartya Sen’s ideas on justice and capability approach together with David Ellerman’s autonomy respecting development assistance provide critical insights applicable to an empowering process. Empowerment is a process of self actualization through identity formation, where an individual balances his social and personal identity. It can be seen as a performative act where an individual acts beyond his ‘well-being’ based on his values. The process should be seen as an evolving strategy in a repeated non-zero sum game scenario. Development actors should kindle the autonomous motivation of people through a mentoring relationship to achieve empowerment.

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because of his faith in me. He never interfered with my 'style'-in writing or choosing a topic which made me discover myself, thereby empowering me.

No amount of words can ever thank my mentor Carl Taylor. I must be the most fortunate person in the current generation to have had him as my guide. I have written a tribute to him in preface but still feel it does not do justice. Sometimes I feel I must have exhausted all my good karma of previous lives to have interacted so closely with him.

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## **PREFACE**

### ***A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO CARL TAYLOR***

I do not know how I became associated with a legend in public health. Against his wishes, I only audited his course that too informally. It was happenstance that I got a call in December 2006 from him, requesting to be his teaching assistant. Very soon he became my mentor and I was always perplexed by his answers. He neither gave me a firm answer to a query nor took a hard stand on an issue. He would discuss and narrate incidents from his life which wouldn't make sense on that day. But those discussions would stick in the back of the mind, until you discovered the answers your own way at a later time. I would like to recall one incident related to my thesis which suddenly came to mind during the writing stage.

Future Generations Arunachal (FGA) was launching a new 'Pregnancy History Based Empowerment Project' in the summer of 2008. They had planned a baseline survey in eight new areas. I and Bapu (Carl Taylor) were finalizing the questionnaire for the baseline. Needless to say I and Bapu had some disagreements. The questionnaire went through five rounds of iterations. First to go were the filter questions, replaced by more direct ones. Next were the questions in which same thing is asked in different ways in order to cross check. The last ones were different categories, doctors, paramedical, community health worker were all clubbed into 'health persons'. Bapu would reprimand me saying "Why do keep asking same questions? Why don't you ask it directly? You are confusing the woman?" He said this because he had unflinching faith in the people and their ability. As for me, I was a skeptic, I did not trust the person giving the answers (set

booby traps to cross check), I did not trust the interviewers (do validation surveys on a sample), nor the data entry person (double entry). It seemed that except for Stata and CS Pro software I trusted little else. On the last round I was surprised when Bapu wanted to add the following question-“In your opinion, how many children can you feed adequately and send to a school with your current income?”

I protested and objected vigorously. I told him, this was a health assessment baseline survey and not an opinion poll. I explained how this question had potential for both information and selection bias to creep in. The answers to the question could not be fit into a regression model nor interpreted with other questions. I went on and on with a succinct, lucid, well thought out argument for not putting the question. After listening to all my points, he says “but Manju, this question will make the women think”. I stopped in my tracks, since I had no epidemiological counter point to this. Make the woman think, I could not believe my ears. I was amazed by his impatience. He did not want to wait for the survey to get over, for FGA to enter the community, to form women’s groups, undertake activities to empower the women. He wanted to start off right then and there. You may call it audacity or chutzpah but I was a skeptic then, I dismissed the idea that a single question can increase women’s thinking ability (let alone empower).

In 2010, while doing data analysis for this thesis and doing self reflection, the enormity and the depth of hidden meaning, the moral and ethical implications embedded in this statement slowly dawned on me. That single question might not have awakened the critical consciousness of the women. But more than the question what’s important is the caring nature of the person, who tries to make a woman think for herself by respecting her autonomy (even while carrying out a strictly quantitative survey). It is



about how does one engage in what Freire calls dialogue at all times. It is about having conversation with people as an equal. Bapu never explained what the phrase ‘make women think’ meant to him nor showed me the path. I discovered it through my thesis but I feel he would have agreed with my interpretation. I was indeed very fortunate to have him as my mentor.

He always used to start talking to me, then stop and say “Let me put my hearing aid, I can’t hear you properly”. Nowadays I question myself “Did I ever put my hearing aid on? Did I listen to him properly when I was with him?” He always said “Listen to the people”. I hope I can keep on listening to his wisdom and the people in the years to come.

-Manjunath Shankar

Dedicated to my Family

&

Bapu

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## **ACROYNMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ADO: Agriculture Development Officer

ANM: Auxiliary Nurse Midwife

AP: Arunachal Pradesh

ASHA: Accredited Social Health Activist

BE: Bachelor of Engineering

CHW: Community Health Worker

CRHP: Comprehensive Rural Health Project, Jhamkhed Maharashtra

DMO: District Medical Officer

DTO: District Tuberculosis Officer

FGA: Future Generations Arunachal

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GP: Gram Panchayat

GoAP: Government of Arunachal Pradesh

GoI: Government of India

IRB: Institutional Review Board

KG: Kitchen Gardens

LCC: Local Coordinating Committee

MCC: Master Coordinating Committee

MIS: Management Information System

MLA: Member of Legislative Assembly

MP: Member of Parliament

NOC: No Objection Certificate

NGO: Non Governmental Organization

NRHM: National rural Health Mission

ORS: Oral Rehydration Solution

PPP: Public Private Partnership

SDP: State Domestic Product

SEED-SCALE: Self Evaluation for Effective Decision Making and Systems for Communities to Adapt, Learn and Expand

SHG: Self Help Group

VIP: Very Important Person

VHSC: Village Health and Sanitation Committee

VWW: Village Welfare worker

## INTRODUCTION

“Empowerment – we know it when we see it”

Carl Taylor

“But if empowerment cannot be measured, it will not be taken seriously in development policy making and programming”

Deepa Narayan-Parker

Empowerment has increasingly come to occupy center stage in development debates and policy circles, in the past few decades. The two quotes above, in a way mark this transition. Empowerment, which was for most part in the background, has come to the foreground- as policymakers, planners, activists, social workers and other stakeholders have focused their efforts toward it. But the two quotes refer to an underlying tension. I intend to explore this tension in this study. No doubt, the concept of empowerment deserves the attention it is getting. I am not discounting in any way the significance of empowerment in development. Neither am I stating that, empowerment can't be captured (however vaguely) by the ever proliferating domains, instruments, variables and indicators. The main purpose of this thesis is to unsettle the growing coziness with empowerment among stakeholders. As we are in the midst of this transition, it is crucial to step back and reflect on- what we know and don't know about empowerment, where should we attempt to know more and where we should not tread and above all why we are acting in a particular way.

Peter Drucker, the well known management guru stated “What cannot be measured cannot be managed” (Terrien, 2008). The spirit of Deepa Narayan's quote is in line with this. The logic seems to be, if empowerment can be measured, then it will be

taken seriously, if it is taken seriously then it can be managed properly, if it can be managed then it can be encouraged (scaled up), so on and forth. This begs the question, should (or can) empowerment be managed? Empowerment invokes the ideas of liberation, autonomy and freedom. So it is paradoxical when one tries to ‘manage’ it.

To draw an analogy- psychologists, economists, social scientists, development experts, feminists, policy makers, donors and researchers at large can be imagined as the blind men trying to get a sense of the elephant. By management I do not mean a mahout<sup>1</sup> trying to manage and drive the elephant (in the extreme it may mean that). But to the insidious way ones tries to define and thereby limit its purpose. For if you think elephant as a rope, then it determines the use-to tie something. So ‘measuring something’ is not as harmless as it appears. It has the power to restrict or expand what ‘empowerment’ can or can’t do? Researchers should not only be cognizant of this but also know the purpose. Is one in measuring, merely attempting to describe the elephant in all its glory or is one trying to ‘unleash the beast’ as the saying goes.

It also does not mean we should ‘keep distance’ and admire the elephant as in a zoo or wilderness. My idea is to approach empowerment not as an inanimate object like ‘rope’ but as a living, breathing organism; with which one engages instead of managing and practices instead of preaching. Nowadays almost all multi lateral, bilateral, private and non governmental organizations have ‘empowerment’ in their mission, vision, goals or various other policy documents. There is a trend to sort of ‘commodify’ empowerment. Empowerment runs the risk of being reduced to a package of interventions. We are at a crucial juncture in this movement. In the past it was required to show that empowerment affects development outcomes- that it matters. Now that we know it matters and it

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<sup>1</sup> Mahout : a person who drives or control the elephant sitting on it. Usually with a stick.



matters profoundly, there is a temptation to reduce empowerment to an achievable goal or objective. In future we may become complacent about empowerment, underestimate the efforts, resources or time needed to achieve it, consider it just as one variable, make it a victim of relativism or go in any numerous other directions. When more people start using the term, it becomes commonplace and ordinary. It is one thing to know what one should feed the goose that laid the golden egg and another thing to cut it open. Much like Aesop's fable, we the development experts have recently discovered the goose that lays the golden egg. But can we control our greed enough not to kill it; do we have the patience to let empowerment evolve. The 'take home' message of my study is 'cautiously approach empowerment with reverence'.

I propose to do this not by claiming any deeper complete understanding of empowerment but by drawing the limit of my understanding. In a way to invert my mentor Carl Taylor's quote- seeing does not necessarily translate to knowing. I have seen empowerment in the women of Arunachal Pradesh. But I cannot claim to know it. I can claim to be on the path to 'knowing' and feel it is a journey not a destination. In this thesis, I want to understand the dynamics of empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh with particular reference to Future Generations Arunachal (FGA) program. Dynamics- a word borrowed from physics/mechanics is concerned with the effects of forces on the motion of a body or system of bodies, especially of forces that do not originate within the system itself. In a similar vein I will explore the forces, factors and conditions affecting empowerment among women in Arunachal-both from within and outside the system. I will also examine the components of empowerment. In addition I will locate my findings in terms of existing theoretical constructs in order to bring out the complexity of the issue.

## Study Setting:

I did this study in Arunachal Pradesh over the course of two years, under the aegis of Future Generations Arunachal, a non profit organization following the SEED SCALE<sup>2</sup> process to achieve empowerment of women. Arunachal Pradesh is a small state in the remote Northeast of India bordered by Bhutan, China, Myanmar and the Indian state of Assam. It has about 26 major tribes and 110 sub and minor tribes. According to 2001 census, Arunachal had a population of about 1 million of which 64% were scheduled tribes. There are more than 46 languages spoken which belong to the Tibeto-Chinese family(GoAP,2005). The literacy rate is 54% (Male:63% & Female 44%) and is ranked 32 out of 35 states in India(GoAP,2005). Life expectancy at birth is 54.05 years well below the national average of 63.3 years(GoAP,2005). The mean real per capita income was Rs 8760 for the period 1993 -94 to 2000-01. Other relevant health indicators are given below

**Table 1.1: Select Health Indicators in 2005**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Children 12 to 23 months who received all recommended vaccine	28
Nutritional Status (under 3 age)	
Stunted	34
Wasted	17
Underweight	37
Any Antenatal Care	59
Institutional Deliveries	31

Source: National Family and Health Survey 2005

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<sup>2</sup> In the early 1990s, Future Generations led two international task forces with UNICEF and the Rockefeller Foundation to review the global evidence base of sustainable community-based successes that had gone to regional or national scale. These task forces, co-chaired by Dr. Carl Taylor and Dr. Daniel Taylor articulated a process known as Seed-Scale, which is described in more detail in *Just and Lasting Change: When Communities Own Their Futures* (2002, Johns Hopkins University Press). See Appendix A for synopsis.

## **Future Generations Arunachal:**

. In the spring of 2007, I started providing technical assistance to FGA to strengthen their Management Information Systems (MIS). FGA was registered as an Indian Non Governmental Organization (NGO) society in 1997 to extend a process of community change across Arunachal Pradesh. In three districts representing three major tribes, FGA has helped community groups initiate and learn skills in a range of domains like health, sanitation, microcredit, agricultural improvement, income generation (especially weaving, other cottage industries, kitchen gardens), and local governance projects. From 1997 to 2005, FGA had formed numerous Women's group and Farmers Club (Men's Group) and built their capacities so that they can be at the forefront of program. A large number of women (nominated by their Mahila Mandals) and community volunteers were trained as Village Welfare Workers (VWWs) at the Comprehensive Rural Health Project, Jamkhed in Maharashtra. The trained VWW health volunteers and community leaders received supplemental training in SEED-SCALE, group management skills, and income generation activities. I learnt that, FGA has established three "Community Learning and Doing Centers" that also serve as regional training centers. In 2005, more than 80 Women's Group had been formed and more than 150 VWWs trained (FGA, 2006). Anecdotal evidence shows that over the years, women's groups have reduced alcoholism among men, reduced the traditional practice of child marriage, started self-help groups and micro-enterprises, participated proactively in many community events / festivals, and run for local election to be Panchayat members.

During my initial visits I came to know that many women had started kitchen gardens to organically grow a variety of vegetables like ginger, tomato, spinach, chillis

etc. This had perceivable impacts on women's empowerment and food sufficiency at household and village level. Even women not directly participating with FGA project got influenced and started kitchen gardens. I decided to study this phenomenon using capability approach. I wanted to find out if practicing kitchen gardens was associated with empowerment or not. In my attempt, I realized the complexity of empowerment and discovered its immense unknown potential. This in a way is a story of that (uncompleted) journey. To give a camera analogy, initially I tried to fit capabilities, kitchen gardens, food security and empowerment in one single frame. But empowerment did not get 'focused' properly. I tried to zoom in on empowerment for a better focus and in doing that appreciated its 'beauty' much better. In the end I did not get a better focus, but I did understand something about why I cannot focus. The more I knew, the more I was in awe.

### **SEED-SCALE Process:**

The SEED SCALE Process emerged through an extensive study conducted by Future Generations USA, of successful global community led initiatives like Jhamked, Gadchiroli, Ding Xian, and other such projects. It is an iterative process of action learning and is structured in terms of four principles, seven tasks and 5 criteria to measure progress. FGA followed SEED SCALE process in its program to achieve sustainable and equitable development. SEED SCALE is explained in detail in Appendix A. I will examine empowerment with respect to SEED SCALE in the study.

## **Dissertation Argument and Structure of Chapters:**

In the succeeding chapter, I start by reviewing the literature on theories of power to give some background to analyze power in societies. I then move on to the concept of empowerment, frameworks used to measure empowerment, proposed indicators and impact on development outcomes. Capability Approach and other writings of Amartya Sen, will be explained in the subsequent section due to the fact that I started the study with it as a base. I will give a brief over view of capability approach. The process of empowerment is closely related to the works of Paolo Freire, Albert Hirschman and critical thinkers. This also bears on the SEED SCALE process which will be briefly mentioned in the literature chapter. The ideas from these works will be weaved with the empirical findings in the analysis chapters.

The third chapter is on methodology. It will describe the paradigm shift that occurred in the field. It will explain how critical ethnography was used to collect, analyze and interpret data. It gives the details of data collection methods in terms of interviews, consent process and participant observation. Finally, the chapter concludes by describing how accuracy and trustworthiness was ensured in the study process.

The subsequent three chapters- from four to six present the findings, analysis and interpretations from the study. Chapter four gives a detailed description of the context of Arunachal Pradesh. Empowerment is highly contextual and a deeper understanding of the context is required to understand empowerment. Arunachal Pradesh being a unique society undergoing tremendous changes in its basic structure makes this all the more relevant. I will describe the context and transition based on my lived experience in Arunachal Pradesh.

I will present my core findings on empowerment in chapter five. I will explain how kitchen gardens acted as vehicles of empowerment. It will indicate how kitchen gardens were started and maintained in the community; the factors hindering or promoting the practice of kitchen gardens. It will then move on to the role kitchen gardens played in the process of empowerment. I will then look at empowerment through the lens of kitchen gardens and contextual factors. I will locate empowerment in terms of themes emerging from the data.

The next chapter will weave these themes using a critical event as a metaphor for analysis and interpretation. I will describe one main event that took place in 2008 in Palin. This will serve as an illustration of the meta narratives taking place in Arunachal Pradesh.

The final chapter will be a conclusion describing the strengths and limitations of the study. It will give broad overview of existing theories in terms of where and how the empirical findings fit. It will also allude to research questions that need to be asked and answered in future. It will conclude by mentioning the contributions of the study to scholarly work. This is followed by appendices and references.

I am basically following one of the techniques suggested by Wolcott (1994). I will pan the field, zoom in terms of empowerment and try to zoom out in terms of existing theories.

### **Conclusion:**

What is the difference between stating ‘the height of the mountain ‘X’ is ‘A’ and trying to climb the mountain? Some might state the same as quantitative versus qualitative. But it is more than that. Others might try to capture this ‘qualitative’

experience in terms of grades, class, slopes, difficulties, summit to death ratio and other such indicators. This opens two pitfalls. One is people become complacent when estimating the effort needed to climb-lets say by comparing mountain 'X' with grade 'x' to mountain 'Y' with grade '(x-1)'. The other is the paths, crevices and other such criteria used to 'Grade' determine the mountain. Now, the questions to ask is if a climber climbs to a point on mountain 'X', hasn't he in a way measured the mountain? Corollary-hasn't the mountain in a way also measured the climber? The indicators and measures used may defeat the purpose of climbing the same way that the predetermined, marked, described trails in national and state parks of US defeats the purpose of hiking. What's the use I ask- if we go on paths cleared and 'made safe' for us, to see what the park rangers want us to see and learn what the 'experts' want us to learn. This is a kind of domestication and is disempowering; we should resist that. The domains, indicators and frameworks of empowerment do not tell us anything about empowering the same way heights and grades of mountains do not make us wiser about climbing.

Climbing is measuring; seeing is knowing. The following chapters describe my climb to a point on the mountain. It will document in detail how empowerment unfolded in the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh. What are the conditions that facilitate or hinder empowering actions? How activities like kitchen gardening play a role in empowerment? In doing this I will discuss both the theory and practice to see where they align.

## **REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE**

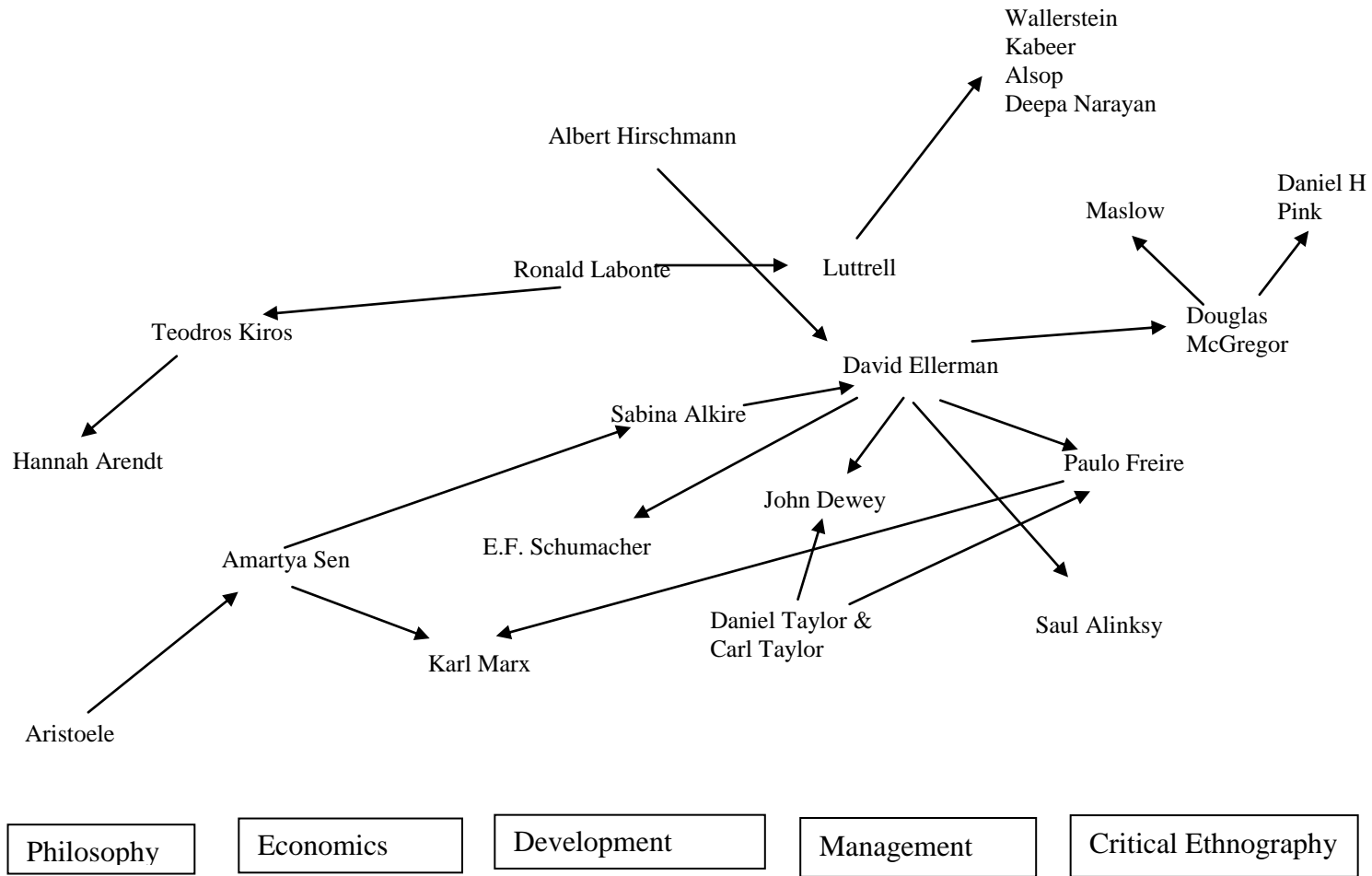
“It is not necessary to know everything, to understand something”

Clifford Greetz

The purpose of this chapter is to give a primer to the theoretical concepts and constructs required to understand the thesis being put forth. It is not possible to do justice for the topic chosen. I will convey the major ideas and view points relevant to the topic but this is in no way comprehensive. Before proceeding to the content, I would like to comment on the process that went through for the review. I had done extensive readings on Capability Approach (Amartya Sen and other scholars), Kitchen Gardens, SEED SCALE and Arunachal Pradesh before starting my data collection. During my field work, I read some more literature on tribal societies, community participation and empowerment. I started my data analysis after coming back from field. There were some themes and analytical points which made me further explore literature. At the same time Amartya Sen published his “The Idea of Justice” which expanded my analysis in scope. Basically I followed a snowball technique of reading on the references cited in the initial articles/books. This in turn led to me to read materials from diverse authors like David Ellerman, Glen Perusek, Deepa Narayan, Theodros Kiros and others. After reading sufficient materials, I was confident that I will be able to discuss or explain the empirical findings from the data. Figure 1 gives a broad topography of authors. I also read materials on neo patrimonial societies and critical ethnography.

The question of bias was constantly at the back of my mind. Am I making it too theoretical or theory laden? Am I forcing the data to fit a theory? I reflected on these





**Figure 1: Brief Schema of Literature Review (does not show all authors)**

questions when I was reading and analyzing the data. I feel the analysis and interpretation is not biased by the literature. If I were to do grounded theory, then these questions would be much more significant and applicable. In critical ethnography, the researcher needs to take an ideological stand which is informed by theory. In addition the themes and ideas first emerged from the data. I did the literature review in order to give a label or to interpret it in broader context. Not the other way round. The diversity of the sources cited, vouch for the fact that I am not trying to fit 'a particular' theory to the data. My intention here is to understand the dynamics of empowerment and not advocate for any particular theory. In understanding the dynamics, there are many themes on which various authors have made certain claims. I will try to interpret them in light of these claims in the analysis section. This chapter will give background materials for the topic.

The concept of Empowerment cuts across disciplines. It has been approached by scholars across disciplines, with their own purpose and frames of reference. Political Scientists approach this in the form of institutional structures and how it influences distribution of power. Management experts concerned with productivity of workers concentrate on autonomy and independent decision making by workers. On the other hand Psychologists focus their efforts on motivation, self determination and self esteem. Social scientists try to understand it in terms of norms, language and culture. Economists analyze it in terms of agency and rational behavior. Philosophers and development experts bring their own perspective to the table. Given this multiplicity of views and plethora of terms used to describe the same and different aspects of a phenomenon, understanding the nuances of concepts is a challenge indeed. I will give a brief introduction to theories of power since empowerment process tries to alleviate the

unequal /unjust distribution of power. I will put forth the main ideas regarding empowerment and then elaborate on the concepts in capability approach and autonomy respecting development assistance.

### **Theories of Power:**

Every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation, and every social group or system is an organization of power (Olsen M 1993).

Power must be the most widely debated issue among the social sciences and humanities.

Thye Shane (2007) gives an idea of this debate when she mentions

“Theorists have contemplated whether power is best conceptualized as (1) a potential or something that must be used; (2) “forward looking” calculated actions or “backward looking” responses to reward and punishment; (3) intentional or unintentional behavior; (4) benefit or control, and so on”

The most widely used definition of power is given by Max Weber “as the ability of an actor to realize his or her will in a social action, even against the will of other actors”

(Weber, Roth, Wittich, 1978). This is different from a power use or power exercise which refers to a concrete event where one individual benefits at the expense of the other. It is viewed as a relationship between two or more actors or groups than as the characteristic /features of those actors or groups. There are many sources of power like authority, expert, charismatic and so on. For our purposes, the categorization given by

Rowlands(1997) is very useful. She gives four categories of power viz

- 1) Power Over- ability to influence and coerce
- 2) Power To- ability to organize and change existing hierarchies
- 3) Power With-increased power from collective action

#### 4) Power Within- increased individual consciousness

Hannah Arendt uses the term strength which resembles 'Power within' and defines power as the capacity to act in concert for a public-political purpose (Power with/ Power To)(d'Entrevies, 2008). Arendt and Kiros (2001) both distinguish power from violence or domination. In contrast Marx and Foucault do equate it with hegemony and domination. Ronald Labonte (1996) criticize the importance given to 'Power Over' as compared to "power to /Power with' among the scholars. He theoretically distinguishes two forms of power. One is the 'Zero sum' power which holds that there is only so much of power around in a system. This concept frequently occurs in sociological, political and economic accounts of power. The 'non-zero-sum' forms of power address the exercise of power in which all persons and living systems can benefit.

As Lukes (1974) said power is an essentially contested and complex term. There are many forms to it, the selection of which depends on the perspective and bias of the beholder. In my thesis I will discuss and debate the different forms as applicable to the given situation in Arunachal Pradesh. It is not an endorsement for a particular view but a lens to see the dynamics of empowerment.

#### **Empowerment:**

Luttrell (2007) gives an excellent overview of empowerment, tracing its historical origins to feminist theory and popular education. She notes that empowerment was first associated with the women's movement and in contrast to other debates in feminism, which were dominated by northern thinking (developed countries), much of the writing on empowerment and women emerged from the south (developing countries). Since

1980s when it was discovered that women's status and autonomy affects women's health in terms of fertility, access to health services and other development outcome , the theme of empowerment has become central to the work of development organizations , the most recent one being World Bank.

### **Definitions of Empowerment:**

Empowerment concept is related to terms such as agency, autonomy, self-direction, self-determination, liberation, participation, mobilization and self-confidence. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) in an extensive review of empowerment list 32 definitions of the term. It is not possible or necessary to go into all the definitions. Some of the widely used ones are

Narayan-Parker(2005): The expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influences, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.

Alsop(2006): Empowerment is defined as group's or individual capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

Kabeer(2005): Empowerment refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.

So most of the definitions have words /phrases like ‘make choices’, ‘influence structures’, ‘increasing assets and resources’, ‘increase in ability or capacity’. Sen uses the term ‘agency’ defined as ‘what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important’. In the literature ‘agency’ is slowly coming into use compared to empowerment. Since capability approach was my starting point, I also became familiar with agency first and then with empowerment. Alkire(2005) locates empowerment as a subset of agency. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) define empowerment as nothing but expansion of agency. Kabeer in a way disagrees with this and feels empowerment refers to something broader. Maholtra, Schuller, & Boender (2003) feels ‘among the various concepts and terms used in literature on empowerment, ‘agency’ probably comes closest to what majority of writers are referring to. I will discuss agency in the section on capability approach.

Alsop and others describe empowerment as having two components-agency and institutional environment. The former is the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value and the later is environment which offers people to exert agency fruitfully.

### **Frameworks and Measuring Empowerment:**

Alsop(2006), Narayan-Parker and Petsch (Narayan-Parker,2005,2006) and Wieser (2006) have advanced different frameworks to conceptualize empowerment. Alsop expands on the two aspects of empowerment into 3 domains- State, Market and Society. Each of them has their own sub components measured at macro, intermediate and local level. The measurements are done in terms of variables representing agency (various

assets), opportunity structure (formal and informal rules) and degree of empowerment (choice and effectiveness of choice).

Alsop's framework is in a way derived from Narayan-Parker's framework. Narayan-Parker just divides the opportunity structure into institutional climate and social and political structures. Agency is divided into individual assets and capabilities and collective assets and capabilities. Petesch on the other hand considers agency to have three components –economic and human capital, capacity to aspire and organization capacity. Opportunity structure has three components -openness of institutions, fragmentation and behavior of dominant groups and state implementation policy. All the above frameworks which can be termed as the 'World Bank school empowerment frameworks' make a distinction between the levels of empowerment such as personal, the collective and relational which is useful. Narayan-Parker and Petsch seems to be more flexible but Alsop, in trying to operationalize is very specific.

In contrast the CapDev butterfly makes a distinction between competencies accruing to the individual, to the group, to organizations as well as to networks and systems (Wieser,2006). The frameworks give some idea about the conceptual maps one carries in mind when researching empowerment.

The domains and variables used to measure empowerment, especially in large surveys, is also varied. Kabeer gives a very good analysis and review of the attempts to measure using different criteria. She uses resources, agency and achievements and come up with the strengths and drawbacks of each.

Longwe (1991) proposes five different levels of empowerment-

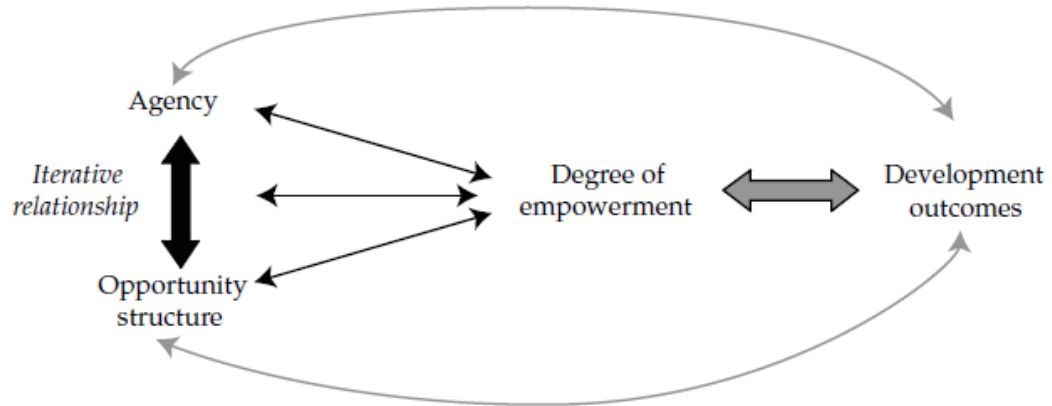
- 1) The welfare level: where basic needs are satisfied (people are passive)

- 2) The access level: where equal access is assured
- 3) The conscientisation and awareness rising level- where discrimination is addressed
- 4) The participation and mobilization level- where equal decision making is enabled
- 5) The control level: where individuals can make decisions and be in control.

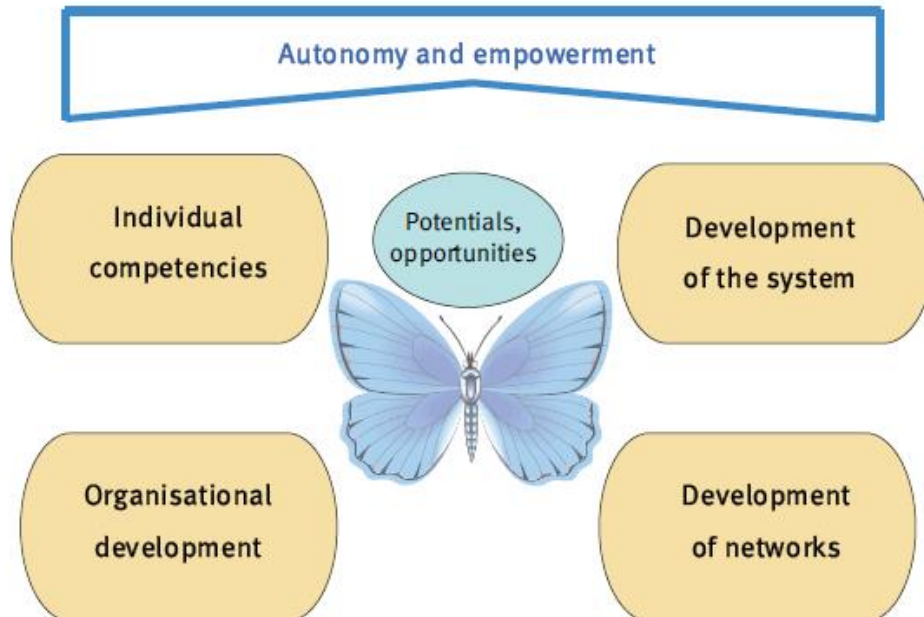


**Figure 2: The Relationship between Outcomes and Empowerment**

**(Alsop, Bertelsen, Holand 2006)**



**Figure 3: The CapDev Butterfly (Wieser 2006)**



Ibrahim and Alkire(2007) in advocating for a small set of indicators which can be universally used to compare different regions /times propose the following (built from Rowland's categories of power)

- 1) empowerment as control(power over): control over personal decisions
- 2) empowerment as choice(power to): domain specific autonomy and household decision making (domains may be purchase, health education)
- 3) empowerment in community (power with): changing aspects in ones life at community level
- 4) empowerment as change (power within): changing aspects in ones life at individual level.

Deepa Narayan-Parker (2005,2006) lists 10 methodological challenges in measuring empowerment

- 1) Intrinsic or instrumental
- 2) Universal or context specific
- 3) Individual or collective
- 4) Level of application
- 5) Dimensions of empowerment: neglect of the psychological
- 6) Origins and change
- 7) Establishing causality
- 8) What is measured: clear concepts, linked measures
- 9) Who measures: Self or others
- 10) How to measure: quantitative or qualitative.

I will not go into the details of challenges at this point. In the analysis I will take some of them and describe how I addressed the challenges.

### **Empowerment and Health:**

Empowerment is linked with many positive development outcomes like improved incomes, governance, access to basic services and strengthening of people's organizations. Since the thesis is in public health discipline, I will focus a small non exhaustive section on empowerment and health. The Alma Ata declaration on primary health care acknowledged that socio-economic political inequities were a major cause for ill health in the world. Community participation was one of the components of primary health care strategy. We can see the beginnings of 'power' inequalities as the problem and 'empowerment' in terms of community participation as the solution. More recently, the WHO Commission of Social determinants of health acknowledges that growing health inequities between different regions, countries and groups is due to the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness (CSDH, 2008). These in turn are shaped by political, social, and economic forces. As part of its recommendations it recommends countries to tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources. They specifically mention gender equity and political empowerment as part of the solution.

Wallerstein (2006) did a systemic literature review on the effectiveness of empowerment strategies to improve health and reduce health disparities. He did keyword search across multiple database and searched over 4000 articles and 500 were reviewed in depth. His findings are

“Much research has been focused on empowerment of socially excluded populations (e.g., women, youth, people at risk for HIV/AIDS, and the poor), though application of empowerment crosses to other populations and issues in public health. Youth empowerment interventions have produced multiple empowerment and health outcomes: strengthened self- and collective efficacy, stronger group bonding, formation of sustainable youth groups, increased participation in structured activities including youth social action, and policy changes, leading to improved mental health and school performance. Multi-level empowerment strategies for HIV/AIDS prevention which address gender inequities have improved health status and reduced HIV infection rates. Women’s empowering interventions, integrated with the economic, educational, and political sectors, have shown the greatest impact on women’s quality of life, autonomy and authority and on policy changes, and on improved child and family health. Patient and family empowerment strategies have increased patients’ abilities to manage their disease, adopt healthier behaviours, and use health services more effectively, as well as increasing care-giver coping skills and efficacy. Coalitions and inter-organizational partnerships that promote empowerment through enhanced participation and environmental and policy changes have led to diverse health outcomes.”

The report concludes empowering initiatives can lead to health outcomes and that empowerment is a viable public health strategy.

### **Capability Approach:**

The capability approach is a normative framework for assessing individual well being. It evaluates social arrangements in the space of capabilities. This approach was initially developed by Amartya Sen and now advanced by Alkire , Nausbuam and others. People wrongly assume and reduce capability approach to just capabilities. Sen repeatedly warns against this and advocates for using multiple information bases to make judgments. Compared to other evaluative frameworks like happiness/desire fulfillment, primary goods or consumption the capability approach offers a new perspective albeit an

untested one. Developed since 1985, this approach is slowly taking roots in the development arena.

The three core concepts of the capability approach are capabilities, functionings and agency. Since the approach is radically underspecified, it allows for numerous interpretations and weightings.

Functionings are “the various things a person may value doing or being. In other words the activities and states that make up a persons well being. For e.g. being good health, having a good job , doing mountain climbing etc. Achieved functionings are particular doings and beings a person experiences at a point in time (Alkire 2002, 2005).

Capability refers to the “various combinations of fuctionings (beings and doings) that a person can achive”. So it is a potential set of functionings from which a person can choose. For eg having a pair of legs means I have the capability set of walking, running, cycling and when I run a marathon, I am choosing one achieved functioning ‘running’(Alkire 2002, 2005).

Agency refers to a person’s ability to pursue and realize goals that he/she values or has reason to value. So in this context it is not only the capability or functioning that matters but also the ‘autonomous decision’ of making a choice. For eg whether running a marathon was my decision or was imposed on me by others also matters in evaluating social arrangements(Alkire 2002, 2005).

In *Inequality Examined*, Sen (1997) distinguishes four spaces: well being freedom, well being achievement, agency freedom and agency achievement. Sen constantly advocates for evaluating in terms of freedoms instead of achievements. As can be seen the freedom is of two broad catagories- opportunity freedom and process

freedom. Opportunity freedom is the freedom to achieve valued outcomes. Process freedom captures notions of ‘autonomy of decision’ and ‘immunity from encroachment’.

Though Sen, has written extensively on capabilities, his works on agency and equity is less but this does not mean it is unimportant or discounted. Alkire’s (2008) reveals five characteristics of agency as per Sen’s work

- 1) Agency will be exercised with respect to multiple aims
- 2) Agency includes effective power (power to achieve chosen results) as well as control (make choices and control procedures)
- 3) It is connected to capability (agency itself is part of well being)
- 4) It not only refers to decisions related to what ‘one values’ but also to what one ‘has reason to value’.
- 5) If relevant, an action will include an assessment of the agent’s responsibility in bringing about that situation.

Capability approach and many of its concepts are similar to the empowerment concepts.

### **Autonomy Respecting Development Assistance:**

David Ellerman (2005) worked as economic advisor for Joseph Stiglitz during his tenure at World Bank. In his book ‘Helping People Help themselves’, he criticizes the policies of World Bank especially those which relate to incentives (carrots and sticks). He starts with a fundamental conundrum; if helpers are supplying help that directly influences the doer, then how can the doer really be ‘helping themselves’? He does an extensive inter disciplinary review of the ideas of Saul Alinsky, Paulo Freire, John Dewey,

Douglas McGregor, Carl Rogers, Soren Kierkegaard, E.F. Schumacher and his own work to bring out the commonalities among these approaches. He condenses the helper-doer relation into five general themes of dos and don'ts.

First Do: Helper Starting from the doer's position

Second Do: Helper seeing through doer's eyes

First Don't: Distortionary Assistance

Second Don't: Giving results to doer as a gift

Third Do: Autonomous activity of doers

There are many similarities between the ideas of the people mentioned and the themes given by Ellerman with the SEED SCALE methodology. In chapter seven I will be making a comparison of these two to draw lessons for application.

Till now, I have given the major theoretical constructs relevant to my thesis. I also read extensively many other authors, explored different concepts and ideas as part of my analysis. It is not appropriate to describe them devoid of the context. As such in the analysis chapters, I will mention key findings and then use these references to debate and discuss them.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In 2007, I began my association with Future Generations, a non profit organization in US and its India country program Future Generations Arunachal. At the time I was entrusted with analyzing a dataset of a survey conducted in 2003 and with strengthening the Management Information System (MIS) based on Village Welfare Worker (VWW) registers. Through this work and involvement I began to understand the community, the organization and the impact it had on women. One of the achievements mentioned during my initial visits was kitchen gardens. I wanted to study the impact of kitchen gardens in terms of capabilities and empowerment. I received funding from Center for a Livable Future at Johns Hopkins University to undertake this study in 2008.

### **Shift in Paradigm:**

Being extensively trained in epidemiology and biostatistics, I had a post positivist mindset which is common in the field of health sciences. I intended to use a mixed methods approach to study the impact of kitchen gardens in order to capture the capabilities enhanced or diminished in terms of certain dimensions during the qualitative phase. This would also serve as formative research for refining empowerment and food security indicators. The quantitative phase would study the association between kitchen gardens and empowerment/food security (deterministic/ cause effect oriented).

During the data collection, as I began to understand the complexity of empowerment and food security in the tribal setting, I slowly changed my worldview towards social constructivism. Creswell (2006) states that paradigms of qualitative



research continually evolve; my expansion of worldview was not very radical in nature. In going for a qualitative phase, I knew that empowerment and food security was highly contextual and capability dimensions required participant's perspectives, meanings and subjective views. I hoped to adapt standard Demographic Health Survey, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and Food security questionnaires to quantitatively assess the situation, but a satisfactory questionnaire could not be developed (failed in pre testing). To illustrate one of the components of empowerment I identified in the qualitative phase was ' a woman can go against the husband's decision'; if a husband refuses to let his wife take the child for immunization, but she still takes since she knows child's health is important. To capture these acts of 'rebellion' in a quantitative questionnaire was impossible. To use decision making as a proxy would defeat the purpose. An even simple concept like defining rich or poor had a complex set of inter related ideas, themes and variables and was difficult to capture in a survey instrument.

In the field I realized that empowerment was something which was highly contextualized. The women had undergone this experience and were living it as the study was being conducted in the socio economic political culture of Arunachal Pradesh(AP). My own understanding of empowerment continually evolved throughout (and beyond) the field work. The subjective meaning of empowerment was formed through interaction with others (men and women) and the historical and cultural norms played a key role.

Schwandt (1990) lays out the features of constructionist approach:

- 1) Directly concerned with understanding as nearly as possible some aspect of human experience (empowerment) as it is lived or felt or undergone by the participants in that experience (women)

- 2) It captures the qualities of an experience within a particular context, for it is only within some context that experience has meaning
- 3) These contexts must be naturally occurring
- 4) The inquirer follows procedures for considering the context and experience as a complex temporal sociocultural and geographic whole.
- 5) Inquiry is conducted using the investigator- as- instrument who employs ordinary field work methods
- 6) The inquirer disavows a hypothetico-deductive paradigm (as happened in field) in favor of forms of inductive analysis and as a result of that analysis, produces not a technical report but a type of narrative, text or case report.

Accordingly I am concerned with the experiences of women associated with FGA program and the changes that they have undergone. This is bound by the location of the experience in terms of geography (Itanagar, Ziro and Palin in AP) and the specific sociocultural context of Nyishis and Apatanis. It was naturally occurring in as much as FGA had become part of the community and the changes attributed to it was viewed as natural or required or just. In other words these changes were internalized. I used interviews and participant observation by getting as close to the community as possible in their natural setting. The analysis was inductive and the findings will be presented in the form of a narrative.

### **Interpretive Frameworks:**

Qualitative scholars use a variety of terms –epistemology, theoretical perspective, approaches, methodology, methods, paradigms to describe the same and different ideas.

Not only the categories differ but also the typologies and hierarchy of categories differ considerably. For instance Creswell (2006) puts ethnographic ‘approach’ under ‘constructivism’ paradigm with an epistemological ‘assumption’ that researcher and participant distance must be reduced. In the same vein, Crotty (1998) has an hierarchy of ethnography (methodology) under critical inquiry (theoretical perspective) under constructivism (epistemology). There is considerable overlap among the terms depending on the field of study and school of thought. There is a need to delineate the terms before one can present the findings.

As described in literature review, empowerment was influenced by two main roots of thinking – feminist and popular education. As such I could use feminist theories or action research or critical theories for interpretation. Before going to the field, I had read extensively the writings of Amartya Sen and other capability scholars, since I wanted to *evaluate social arrangements* in the capability space. After returning from the field, during data analysis I began to read extensively other relevant literature. With self reflection and hindsight, I believe Critical Ethnography more closely resembles my field work and analysis better than others.

Feminist theory uses the lens of gender to look at social institutions and culture. It has a theme of domination and the goal is to end women’s unequal social position. I had insufficient knowledge about gender issues in general and in tribal settings in particular. Moreover historically the FGA program did not target women or have female emancipation as its goal. It just happened that women accepted the FGA program better than men even though FGA didn’t intend it. In the field I focused more on the changes the women had undergone due to association with FGA than with the broader trends and

issues of gender inequality. As such even though feminist theory with its numerous frameworks is both attractive and appropriate to anchor my study, I won't be pursuing it in view of my values and (in)capacity.

Action research and its variants (Participatory Action Research, Action Research, Participatory Research) coming out of the work of Paolo Friere and others is also relevant for empowerment. The main idea is that research should lead to action i.e. the knowledge produced (research) should be applied to solve problems in research settings (action). Although I did try some of the techniques (mapping, transect walks, power maps, diagrams) in the field, due to lack of practical hands on training on my part, the techniques did not achieve the desired results. In addition the research problem and questions were not selected in consultation with subjects. The interview questions did achieve some reflection ("you ask a difficult question" "I need to think the question" etc). The research was conducted with a retrospective mentality (kitchen garden, changes in women) and lacked prospective attitude.

Critical Ethnography best describes my values, attitude, methods and analytic strategy. At its most basic, critical ethnography studies issues of power, empowerment, inequality, inequity and dominance which blends with the topic under study (Creswell 2006). Critical ethnography is ethnography with a political purpose (Thomas 1993). The critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from "what is" to "what could be". It brings with an ethical responsibility, to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. The capability approach had broadened my vision to evaluate social arrangements in terms of multiple information bases. In choosing capabilities, I was being critical of standard economic evaluations from beginning. In the

field, the capability approach did not constrain or restrict my thinking to just capabilities alone. The visible inequality in Arunachal Pradesh, the daily struggle of women and improving FGA's field program concerned me deeply. Just merely describing the process of empowerment was not enough for me; in this study I want to move beyond to refine the process by identifying constraints and suggesting solutions.

Madison (2005) uses the themes 'postionality' and 'dialogue/otherness' to differentiate critical ethnography. Postionality means the ethnographer takes an 'activist' stance rather than a 'ventriloquist' or 'voices' stance. In this study I won't be trying to transmit information about Arunachal Pradesh in an effort toward neutrality (ventriloquism). Neither will I attempt to capture indigenous meanings and experiences from the subjects 'voices'. While acknowledging my own 'non tribalness', 'outsider' (from Karnataka state) with advanced education and work experience in public health, I take an activist stance to advocate for the women of Arunachal Pradesh especially Palin and Ziro to counter the growing inequalities by offering alternatives.

Dialogue with the others refers to the ongoing liveliness and resistance to the finality that resists the connotation of timelessness commonly described as "the ethnographic present". In other words when an ethnographer describes a lived domain, readers may get an impression that the people 'out there' are suspended in an unchanging and virtually timeless state, which is undesirable in the context of this research. I want to avoid that. I have engaged in dialogue with the people from field after returning from fieldwork in order to improve the program there. I intend to visit Arunachal Pradesh (Inshallah) in future to share my study and to maintain an open and ongoing conversation

with them. I will also use real names where possible to open a passage for readers to better connect with the ‘living domain’ rather than the lived.

Thomas (1993) while acknowledging that critical ethnography is a style of analysis and discourse embedded within conventional ethnography further distinguishes it from conventional ethnography. I don’t want to describe the culture I studied (conventional) but to change it (critical). I don’t want to speak for my subjects (conventional- ventriloquism described above) but to speak on behalf of my subjects as a means of empowering them by giving strength to their voice (critical). He states

“ critical ethnography is simultaneously hermeneutic and emancipatory... [conventional ethnography] tries to minimize the distortion when we translate what we see from one set of cultural symbols (those of research subjects) to another (those of our audience). Ethnographic emancipation, the act of cultural liberation, loosens the unrecognized symbolic constraints that restrict our perception, interpretation, discourse and action. It alerts us that things are not always what they seem”

With a public health background and coming from a totally different culture, the first things I noticed were the differences between mine and their settings. The oppression of haves over have-nots, the undermining of law and order, high and visible corruption (compared to Karnataka of course) unsettled me. I used to ask questions like how can we improve the situation, how do we overcome constraints or define development in Arunachal Pradesh. I held discussions with the people regarding these questions. But gender issues were present since the phenomenon concerned women, so I view critical ethnography as the core of my study with feminist and action research at the periphery.

**Methods:****Study Setting:**

The study was conducted in Itanagar, Palin and Ziro. Itanagar is the capital of Arunachal Pradesh with a population of about 35000 (GoI, 2001). Ziro located in the Apatani Plateau of Lower Subansiri district has a population of about 25,000. The Apatani people chiefly reside in the seven villages. Palin is another town in Kurung Kumey district with a population of 6000. Due to increased connectivity and development, the population has increased substantially in the past few years due to immigration from nearby villages and habitats. The study was also conducted in the some surrounding villages of Palin town like Joru , Radang, 12 kilo<sup>3</sup>.

**Study Location and Participants:**

The study was conducted at Future Generations Arunachal, a non-profit organization working since 1997 in the field of sustainable development and women's empowerment. During July 2008 to June 2009, interviews and participant observation were conducted in the study areas

**Data Collection:****Interviews:**

A variety of interview techniques were adapted to meet different needs of research at different times. In the initial months, topical interviews were conducted to understand the role of kitchen gardens in empowering the women. As such 6 women who were practicing kitchen gardens (1 was not associated with FGA), 3 women not practicing kitchen gardens, 2 FGA staff , 2 FGA volunteers, 2 LCC were interviewed (1

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<sup>3</sup> actual name of a village, refers to the milestone 12 kilometers on the state highway

was an Agriculture Development Officer). Based on the initial set of interviews, Catholic church Father in Palin and 2 shopkeepers in Ziro were also interviewed. The interview guide for this topical interview was developed using the initial information provided by the organization on previous visits (Appendix B). The interviews covered topics like reasons for starting KGs, factors promoting or hindering kitchen gardening, benefits of KGs, vegetables grown and reasons for those benefits, comparison between KGs and farming among others. It was semi- structured and the discussion would lead on to other interesting topics for instance in one interview it lead to how mahila bazaar (women's market) was set up.

Based on the initial interviews, it was realized that though kitchen gardens did play a role in empowering the women and lead to expansion of capabilities, the changes that occurred in the women were far more complex. As such more in-depth interviews were conducted to understand the complexity of empowerment. The sample was expanded to include an additional 4 VWWs, 2 womens group members, 1 horticulture development officer, 2 LCC and 1 MCC members. These in depth interviews were unstructured and discussed numerous emerging themes like role of groups, training methods, local politics, men's role, elections, changes in women and their status among other things. The purpose of these interviews was to get as much clearer picture as possible from as many vantage points on the process of empowerment.

In addition numerous small informal discussions were carried out with various actors during daily interaction as part of participant observation. These short conversations were used to test emerging ideas and themes in order to facilitate further inquiry.



Both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select the informants. Since the study focused on kitchen gardens, based on the knowledge of local FGA staff the initial sample of women practicing kitchen gardening was selected. This gave us leads to interview others like church father, Rakso women or Sirro farmers. Towards the end of my research I had sufficient grasp of the situation and had successfully identified multiple key informants with whom I could hold deep and repeated discussions. A big constraint was availability of selected respondents. I had planned a few interviews, but had to abandon them due to scheduling difficulties

### **Data Collection:**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Future Generations Graduate School's Institutional review Board and The Johns Hopkins School of Public Health's Committee for Human Research (IRB # 00001338). Initially I did the majority of the interviews; however FGA staffs were trained in qualitative methods in Feb 2009 via another research project's funding. The trained staff did 6 interviews towards the end. 80% of the interviews were conducted by myself .The rest were done by the staff of which half of the interviews were under my supervision. The interviews were conducted in the 'natural settings' of the subjects, where the subjects had already experienced the environment before and were comfortable. So for FGA staff and volunteers they were conducted at the office or home, for women they were at home or the farm. The interviews were conducted in Hindi (Arunachalee Hindi to be specific) most of the time. A few interviews were conducted in local language with the help of a translator (FGA staff).

The interviews would begin with an introduction (if the subject didn't know me already) or with exchange of pleasantries (if met before). I would introduce the research topic and obtain consent orally. Both the IRB's had give permission to obtain consent with a waiver to sign. The interviews were recorded using digital recorders and then transferred to computers and back up hard drives. Two of the subjects did not give consent for recording and the interview was done with note taking. Except for few non FGA participants like shopkeepers, officials, all the subjects had a substantial association with FGA (more than 6 years). Some of the interviews were completed in one session but with key informants the interviews were done multiple times at different time periods in different places. The interviews lasted between 15 mins to 2hrs 30 mins in one sitting.

### **Participant Observation:**

I visited Arunachal Pradesh for the first time in April 2007 for about 15 days. I made three more visits over the course of next 2 years staying approximately for 1.5, 3 and 11 months respectively. In about the 16 months I stayed there, I was never conferred any official position. But I did carry out various functions for FGA and people gave me roles like Consultant, MIS coordinator, Resource Person, Trainer or more generally FGA staff.

FGA was like a home to me by which I mean it provided me a socio cultural place to set up my 'shop'. In Itanagar, I was put up in the FGA guest house which is located next door to the FGA office. My meals were prepared in the office kitchen and I spent all of my time at the FGA office (the guest house was for sleeping only). I interacted with the staff, office visitors and had complete access to all the office files except for three

almirahs. Though my exact role within the organization was somewhat undefined, at the FGA office, I worked, attended staff meeting, and enjoyed office parties depending on the occasion. I mingled freely with the staff and all of them are close to me. In free time I used to take evening walks to the bazaar, eat outside or run office errands (bank visit, state secretariat, phone office). I also attended public functions like Republic Day, Statehood day, Arunachal Festival, SHG exhibition etc. and in this way immersed myself in the community.

In Palin, I stayed majority of time at the Inspection Bungalow, slightly less time at one of the FGA staff's house and in the FGA office on my last visit. FGA had been working there for 10 years and people had come to accept it. This provided me seamless access to the community. Accompanied by FGA staff, I could visit all the places, was welcomed by all and could ask for clarifications/explanations and get translation services if required. I visited all the villages covered by FGA. I attended and observed minor public events ( cricket tournament/elections/ teachers party), home functions, FGA events(decennial celebration/VWW foundation day/VWW meetings), home dinners and the day to day life of Palin. I also had visitors who would drop in and discuss. The initial fascination slowly gave to causal acceptance as time progressed and I could walk about without eliciting anyone's curiosity. The situation was similar in Ziro except it being the district headquarters with a bigger population I had relative anonymity. I did not stay at any of FGA staff's homes or in the community. I observed VWW meetings, group meetings, annual picnic, kitchen gardens, public events, celebrations and the myoko festival.

Ethnographers try to balance both participation and observation i.e. to be both emotionally engaged participant and disengaged observer. I did try to achieve this but in retrospect I may have erred on the side of participation. The reason for this is I began ‘working’ for the FGA by doing data cleaning and training. So in the first few visits I had tasks to complete and I mingled with the community as a participant. Moreover the student from Johns Hopkins who had previously been posted with FGA had ruffled feathers and I had been warned to be sensitive. Access, building rapport, gaining trust and acceptance into a community are crucial steps in ethnography. For me, access to a community was a given, as long as I had acceptance within FGA. So I became a FGA staff, a participant and the community identified me as ‘someone associated with FGA’ if not as FGA staff altogether. The research idea and study developed through association and it was difficult to wean away from ‘participation’ after the study started. I did keep notes but not like a conventional ethnographer. An ethnographer is supposed to keep a field journal everyday and try to get into the heart of language, culture and meaning. Mine was not as detailed as that, since the paradigm shift occurred over time and I wasn’t trained to be an ethnographer. I also consciously kept within the safe confines of my ‘expertise’. Diamond(1989) states that an ethnoscientist has ‘to know almost as much’ as those questioned in order to elicit their native terms and classificatory principles. He narrates a story :

“ An eminent ethnobiologist spent years with Kalam people of the New Guinea Highlands working with native informants to identify fold terms for 1,400 species of animals and plants. Yet at one point he asked about rocks, his Kalam informants insisted they had just one word covering all rocks. A year later he returned with a geologist friend who within an hour came back with a long list of Kalam terms for rocks. The ethnobiologists angrily confronted his Kalam informants, demanding to know why they had lied to him about not classifying rocks. They

answered: “When you asked about birds and plants, we saw that you knew about them , and that you could understand what we told you. When you began asking us about rocks, it was obvious you didn’t know anything about them. Why should we waste our time telling you something you couldn’t possible understand? But your friend’s question showed that he does know about rocks”

So I ‘played it safe’ by confining it to the things I did observe and knew. I did not go into my non expertise areas like culture, marriage, rituals, customs. This ‘non anthropological participant observation’ was both constraining and liberating. The skills and knowledge I had, constrained me, but the observations I made liberated me to find a richer meaning than the narrow post positivist approach. This lead me to the more informal capturing of lived experience which deepened my analysis much more than just interviews per se. So, if I had conducted all my interviews one after the other, it would have lead me to a FAR MORE narrower analysis and a different conclusion than this. The phased and stretched observation period helped me to better contextualize my findings from interviews.

### **Data Management and Analysis:**

All the files were copied, renamed and classified. Two back up copies were made. The audio files of interviews were transcribed by the FGA staff. After coming back from the field, I went through a defamiliarization phase. Thomas describes this process as a way by which researchers distance themselves from what they have seen and assumed in the field; this gives them an opportunity to look at them critically for interpretation. During this phase, I read literature on ethnography, power, empowerment, philosophy and development theories. This was to develop a point of view- a stance which reflects the

theoretical perspective taken in the study which is central to critical ethnography. I listened to the interview tapes. The interviews were coded using both pre determined codes and emergent codes. The predetermined codes were created based on literature review, interviews and field experience (in a way the data analysis had started when I was trying to understand the initial interviews). For instance LCC role, VWW attrition and other codes were already known due to my association with FGA since 2007. While reading the transcripts and listening, I developed new codes like local resources, learning from others etc. Themes were identified by categorizing the codes.

I combined aspects of data analysis from both Wolcott (1994) and Madison (2005) for my study. Because in critical ethnography, culture is viewed as heterogeneous, conflictual, negotiated, and evolving, in contrast to the traditional view as unified, cohesive, fixed, and static. As such cultural representations are acknowledged as always being somewhat partial and partisan. Description, analysis and interpretation are the three steps suggested by Wolcott for his more traditional ethnographic approach. I will describe the context of Arunachal Pradesh and the settings of the culture sharing group. But I analyze the data from a theoretical point of view as per Madison (2005). The identification of patterned regularities as per Wolcott was followed by (critical) interpretation. My outsider (etic) perspective gave me interpretive insights for the study. In my analysis I also try to link macro and micro perspectives and structural and temporal aspects of culture. So my interpretation tries to bring out the complexity, instability and diversity of empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh. I will also use an event as a critical incident to demonstrate this.

### **Ethics and a reflection on my role in the process:**

I was in a peculiar and unique position in Arunachal Pradesh. I had neither an official position nor a specific agenda. Though Future Generations, USA was supporting me in the initial years, I was under the direct supervision of Executive Director Dr Tage Kanno. I had the same rights and privileges as the FGA staff and was for all practical purposes considered as one. I was both an insider and an outsider at the same time. This gave me a unique position to watch and be part of the organization from the sidelines. The staff used to share their problems with me freely. I was asked to render my opinion, suggestions, judgments on many matters. I tried to have as much of a balanced approach as possible. The organization went through a prolonged period of uncertainty which resulted in low staff morale during my stay there. The financial crisis affected the funding pattern. There was pressure from USA to scale up the program rapidly which was being resisted. There was also talk of replacing Dr Kanno in the middle. At one point, Dr Kanno felt that I might be a threat to his leadership and try to replace him (given my expertise and US connection). I had to be ultra sensitive and delicate in handling this. Though I was the PI, I gave complete financial control to Dr Kanno for the study. Staff attrition continued to be problematic and the organization underwent expansion, restructuring and contraction all within a short span of 12 months.

The FGA staff helped me gain access to the community and I spent more time with them than other categories of participants like VWW, LCC member or shopkeeper. I acted as one and became close friends with the FGA staff. This might have helped me to view from the staff's perspective and to sympathize with their problems. During reflection, I recognized this and as per Thomas (1993) suggestion, I am not interpreting

from an organizational perspective in my analysis. This allowed me, to retain sympathy with my colleagues and at the same time the topic was not affected by the sympathy.

Outside the organization, in the field and on the road, due to my physical features I was instantly recognized as an outsider. A ‘handicap’ which could not be overcome by any amount of native dressing!!!. I would not divulge my background details unless I was specifically asked (like where are you from?... Bangalore). I did not flash my ‘PhD badge’ or any other such badges. The staff accompanying me were irked by this and complained about my ‘non assertiveness’ or ‘passiveness’. They felt people were not respecting me or properly acknowledging my ‘background’. For instance, in front of villagers they wanted me to state ‘am a Doctor’, in front of Doctors ‘am from America’, in front of Government officials ‘doing PhD in America’ like that. This they felt was proper ‘Arunchalee behavior’ and sometimes they would override me, by stating what they felt would impress the person I was talking to. I did this not with any ulterior research motive but since it was natural to me. But unknowing to me (at the time) it gave me insight into how power plays out. I once angrily walked out of a Government office and almost got into an argument with a ‘tribal’ person.

Conquerwood (1982) in his seminal essay, describes five stances relative to ethics, four of which are fundamental problems from an ethical point of view in fieldwork. This four positions are situated on the four corners of two axes, one from detachment to commitment and the other from identity to difference. They are

- Custodians rip off (selfishness /Plagiarism): Where researchers come for the sole purpose of doing good research to further their own self interest.



- Ethnographer's infatuation (superficiality/ singles bar cruising): where the researcher is romantically infatuated and identifies superficially with the people in the study.
- Curator's exhibition (sensationalism/tourist stare): where the researcher is fascinated by exotic difference
- Skeptic's cop out (cynicism /stony silence): where the researcher is detached and determined not to become a part of other culture.

The fifth position of Dialogical Performance at the center resulting in genuine conversation is what ethnographers should aim for. Needless to say, I have briefly touched all corners and oscillated between identity and difference in my journey towards the center. In the early stages, the management expected me to just do the 'data analysis (of the quantitative survey) and move on' or had varying expectations along these lines. But I tried solving some of the organizational problems like fund raising and by getting involved in other 'non research' projects which slowly allayed fears of 'custodian rip off' and I gained acceptance. I blended with the people and environment as naturally as possible and largely avoided being a skeptic cop out. But this, was at times tested by my vegetarianism (eggitarianism??) and preference for spicy food (sambar attack and dosa craving). Once in a while (atleast once in 15 days), I used to cook my kind of food in the office. In the field I was indifferent. But it was vegetarianism that proved bit difficult in the field, the people had to make special arrangements or cook separately for me. This troubled me a lot but I was helpless. I feel this did not affect the study to any great extent since I took great pains to explain my position and also to convey that I was not meaning any disrespect to their custom or way of life nor should they feel disheartened at not properly treating their guest. This was to an extent resolved when I began to hear things

like “You have to come for dinner, we will cook eggs for you and for us it will be special” or they would make fun saying “The biggest failure of FGA is that Manju has not tasted chicken in 3 years, it’s a black mark for Arunachal. We should take it up as a challenge to rectify it”.

The enthusiast infatuation also very rarely occurred in my field work. Their language, culture, way of dressing, house construction, art work- each and everything was so radically different from my own culture that it was impossible to trivialize the other. On a couple of occasions in order to inspire FGA staff and the people to act against power and hegemony, I would narrate India’s freedom struggle and how difficult and liberating it was. But I saw that this branding them and me as ‘Indian’ was not correct. For one they were not emotionally as involved as I was about India’s freedom. Second they were never under the ‘British Rule’ as my grand parents were. Their integration into India was still ongoing, controversial and difficult.

The final and fourth corner-curator exhibitionism which emphasizes differences stuck me with force in the initial months. But my non expertise in ‘comparative anthropology’ and chosen research topics prevented me in entering this corner. I did undergo a period of ‘acclimatization’ as I soaked in the different sounds and smells of Arunachal but I never went towards sensationalism.

My research topic and questions focused my mind as I oscillated between the identity and difference on the commitment side towards dialogic performance. Having been in the field of health and development for some time, I was able to both identify and differentiate the issues. Roads were bad in Karnataka and Arunachal compared to US. But Arunachal was worse than Karnataka. Karnataka had flat land and districts were

connected through an internal network with multiple routes. Arunachal had a hilly terrain and districts were connected through neighboring state of Assam often with only one access road. Arunachal had land slides which Karnataka rarely experienced so on and so forth. So this simultaneous identification and differentiation made me empathize with the people and avoid ethnocentrism.

### **Issues of Validity and Reliability:**

Validity bothered me deeply in the field, not surprisingly –being trained in positivist approach and transforming into neophyte ethnographer on the go –did give rise to many moments of self doubt (and accompanying panic). Dr Betsy Taylor, who came in as a consultant gave me field guidance and pushed me to aim higher. I had to unlearn the standards espoused by positivist approach and relearn the qualitative approach to validity during the analysis phase. I agree with Wolcott (1990) when he says “[I] try to understand rather than convince .....and validation distracts me from the work of understanding”. In the initial stages of my data analysis, the positivistic (and post positivistic) standards I had learnt severely limited my understanding of data.

Ethnographers use a different vocabulary to describe validity- accuracy, trustworthiness, credibility, criticality, etc.

Validity is a vexed issue in ethnography. This ‘vexedness’ is even more intensified in ‘critical ethnography’ since they have to convince traditional ethnographers in addition to non ethnographers. Anderson notes while ethnographers are moving in the direction of experimentation with more ‘literary’ approaches to ethnography, educational researchers (critical ethnographers) have been moving to systematize ethnographic

research in order to ensure 'validity'. I will set out my validity parameters in terms of traditional ethnography first and then venture into critical ethnography though Madison (1993) goes against this feeling that 'accuracy' in critical ethnography is ensured by following proven traditional approaches.

Triangulation (use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators and theories) is an often cited criteria in ethnography to ensure validation. In the interviews I got multiple perspectives on the same issue from many sources. A technique I used in the field was what I call 'proxy chess'. Basically I would conduct some interviews and observations, do some preliminary analysis and present them as questions/ ideas/ confusions/ provocations in the succeeding interviews. The responses would refine my ideas or make me reflect more. So I would say something 'In the previous interviews (confidentiality was ensured by not mentioning the participants name) I was told so and so...what do think'. This rechecking would be either targeted or would come up naturally in the interviews. This is slightly different from member checking strategy which involves taking back data, analysis, interpretations and conclusions back to the people. I hope to achieve that in the future on my next visit.

Another way in which I had confirmation (that I was on right path) occurred towards the end of my field work. I met a guest who was visiting the village (to vote) and was a relative of FGA staff. She had studied engineering in Karnataka and she asked "So what do you think of us?" I answered with some of my intuitions. She agreed and the discussion went on for 30 mins or so. In the end she complimented "You seem to have a fairly good idea about us". The other way in which things got confirmed was through the Arunachal Times and Arunachal Front newspapers. They had started to invite guest op ed

columns and the readers forum which gave me an opportunity to validate my initial analysis. Especially in the election season, people started giving their opinion, situation analysis and trends in Arunachal society. These articles further substantiated my emerging ideas a bit.

Negative case analyses, thick description, clarifying researcher bias are some of the other strategies I followed to ensure validity. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) give the following metaphor to explain validity in postmodern perspective

“I propose that the central imaginary for validation for postmodern texts is not the triangle- a rigid , fixed, two dimensional object. Rather the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of response-not triangulation but rather crystallization”

So from a critical perspective, triangulation and other techniques by themselves won't suffice. Critical ethnographers like their interpretivists colleagues aim to generate insights, to explain events, and to seek understanding. Though critical ethnographers agree with interpretivists that the cultural informant's perception of social reality is theoretical constructs themselves, they do differ in claiming that such constructs permeate and sustain powerlessness (Gray, 1989). As such for critical ethnographers, validity moves beyond what is traditionally accepted within ethnographic circles. Lather (1986) advances four types of validation required in openly ideological research

- triangulation –beyond the psychometric definition of multiple measures to include multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes

- construct validity- recognizes the construct that exists rather than imposing theories/constructs on informants or the context
- face validation- recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents and refining it in light of subjects analysis
- catalytic analysis-which energizes participants toward knowing reality to transform it; what Freire terms as “conscientization”

My thesis is on the path to meet minimal levels on these four types, though I must confess that it may fall short of the ideal on each one of them. Spindler and Spindler (1987) give some criteria to define a ‘good ethnography’. After reflection, my evaluation of the study according to this is :

Criterion I : Observations are contextualized- Very good- I have got a fairly good idea about the context of Arunachal

Criterion II: Hypotheses emerge in situ as the study goes one- Very Good- My shift in focua from capabilities to empowerment and from kitchen gardens to other aspects reflects that new hypothesis emerged in the field.

Criterion III: Observation is prolonged and repetitive: good- Though I did spend more time in field, I feel it is inadequate to understand the transistion taking place. Moreover not learning the native language was a severe handicap.

Criterion IV: Through interviews, observations and other eliciting procedures the native view of reality is obtained: needs improvement- I did understand some of the views, but need t improve my communication to a metaphorical level. My interviews were direct questions with a few examples thrown in. I did not make use of metaphors or cultural proverbs and things like that.

Criterion V: Ethnographers elicit knowledge from informant-participants in a systemic fashion- very good- As far as my topic was concerned, it was very good.

Criterion VI: Instruments, codes, schedules, questionnaires, agenda for interviews and so forth are generated in situ as a result of inquiry-good- happened in the informal and in depth interviews

Criterion VII: A transcultural comparative perspective is frequently an unstated assumption- in my case it was overtly stated; the difference between my own culture and theirs was the most striking feature of my observation.

Criterion VIII: The ethnographer makes explicit what is implicit and tacit for informants- can't say- will be evaluated when I go back and present my findings. The reaction of the people will give me some idea on the validity and reliability of my analysis.

Criterion IX: The ethnographic interviewer must not predetermine responses by the kinds of questions asked.-very good- not many leading questions were asked.

## THE CONTEXT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The official description of Arunachal Pradesh is ‘the land of the rising sun’, but Arunachalee’s describe it as ‘Arunachal is the land of khushi khushi’ (Khushi is a hindi word which translates to happy/ fun-loving/carefree). The purpose of this chapter is to bring out the contrast between these two perspectives. Understanding the context is not only crucial from an ethnographic perspective but also from a positivist one. Recently Victora et al (2005) while doing a multi country evaluation of the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) concluded that context plays a crucial role in implementation and relative success of programs. The ‘objective’ evaluations need to be interpreted within the specific contexts of a given country. An even more abiding reason to understand the context is: empowerment is highly contextual. It should be remembered that the dynamics of empowerment takes place on a stage set by the underlying macro forces. These structures sometimes constrain and sometimes facilitate the process of empowerment. On other occasions they may be the very entity that empowerment is trying to modify or dismantle altogether.

I had heard “Arunachal is the land of Khushi Khushi or Arunachlee khushi khushi” on multiple occasions, in numerous contexts during my field work. It had diverse connotations each time and as can be seen might refer to the state or system or to the people themselves. It was a colloquial term used when people could not explain an incident or phenomenon, a sort of catch all phrase under which people sought refuge or to skirt past the discussion that might have followed. Maybe people need such a phrase to describe things, forces and changes that are shaping Arunachal Pradesh today? The



term is at the same time a tent giving shelter in the midst of a storm and an aspiration of people to carve a distinct identity for themselves.

The dual use of the term 'khushi khushi' referring to both- the land or the people refers to the underlying tension. It's the tension between the nation and the state. States<sup>4</sup> govern a territory with boundaries. They have laws, taxes, officials, currencies, postal services, police and (usually) armies. Nations by contrast are groups of people claiming common bonds like language, culture and historical identity. Benedict Anderson (1991) calls them 'imagined communities'(1983). So it's the story of how the state was formed in the absence of a pan arunachal identity.

The territory of Arunachal Pradesh was formerly known as 'North- East Frontier Agency' (NEFA). The British followed a policy of isolation and their colonial influence on tribal culture, institutions and way of life was minimal /non existent. After independence under Prime Minister Nehru, India also followed the policy of isolation and non interference with the aim of a more gradual integration. The 1962 Indo-China war changed that policy (Arunachal Pradesh was/is a disputed territory between India and China). Due to this geopolitical strategic importance, India adopted a strong policy of nationalism and establishment of 'state' structures'. Elwin's policy of gradual integration and building on tribal institutions became secondary to the goal of 'securing' India's borders. Baruah (2005) terms this "to extend the institutions of the state all the way to international border zones, thus *nationalizing the frontier space*" (emphasis mine). This had irreconcilable repercussions on the tribal lifestyle. Moji Riba (2010), a prominent Arunachal film maker states "Our society developed at such a speed that we couldn't catch up post-'62. Most people like my grandfather never saw a wheel when they

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<sup>4</sup> I am using the word state to indicate Arunachal Pradesh state itself and not to the larger Indian state.

emerged from the jungles. And yet, they saw jets flying in the air. From pre-wheel to jet age in 40-odd years, can any society evolve in this manner without consequences?”

Arunachal Pradesh was a union territory<sup>5</sup> and in 1987 became a full fledged state of the Indian Republic. The rapid establishment of state structures, institutions, machinery and infrastructure was followed by massive infusion of development monies over the years. This occurred in the absence of any distinct common Arunachal identity of language, religion, ethnicity or culture. Like Betsy Taylor (2009), even I was very much unprepared for the diversity offered by Arunachal. Having travelled, worked and spent time in more than 10 different states of India and two countries, one would expect diversity in language, lifestyle or food would not come as a surprise to me. But the tribal diversity of Arunachal still managed to ‘shock’ me. Each tribe has its own distinct culture, language (and many dialects within a given language) in its own ecological niche. The primary identification with one’s tribe (or clan) plays a pivotal role in the day to day affairs of Arunachalees. People would often ask me “what is your title?”. Title (similar to surname) is the part which identifies not only the tribe but also the clan and lineage. For instance- a person named Tassar Tachi : Tassar identifies him as a Nyshi(tribe) and also refers to the clan, village and lineage at the same time (women change their title after marriage). So the title precedes a person’s first name both literally and metaphorically.

The mixture of ‘tribal affiliations’ and rapid ‘state development’ produce a heady cocktail which I term Neopatrimonialism. I used the term Neopatrimonialism as defined by Erdmann and Engel (2007). After reviewing the existing literature on the use of the term in development studies, they define its characteristics as follows

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<sup>5</sup> Union territories are administered directly by the Central Government (Federal)

“Neopatrimonialism is a mixture of two co-existing, partly interwoven, types of domination: namely, patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination. Under patrimonialism, all power relations between ruler and ruled, political as well as administrative relations, are personal relations; there is no differentiation between the private and the public realm. However, under neopatrimonialism the distinction between the private and the public, at least formally, exists and is accepted, and public reference can be made to this distinction. Neopatrimonial rule takes place within the framework of, and with the claim to, legal-rational bureaucracy or ‘modern’ stateness. Formal structures and rules do exist, although in practice the separation of the private and public sphere is not always observed. In other words, two role systems or logics exist next to each other, the patrimonial of the personal relations, and the legal-rational of the bureaucracy. These spheres are not isolated from each other. Quite to the contrary, they permeate each other: the patrimonial penetrates the legal-rational system and twists its logic, functions, and output, but does not take exclusive control over the legal-rational logic. That is, informal politics invades formal institutions. Informality and formality are intimately linked to each other in various ways and by varying degrees; and this mix becomes institutionalized”

This Neopatrimonialism plays various roles in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres of life. Its effect is further accentuated, compounded and complicated by the near absence of private industry/sector, civil societies and lack of an opposing political entity. The elected representatives are primarily concerned with maintaining their ‘patron-client’ relationships and appeasing their clients, since their reelection depends on that. As such, all the elected representatives are on the side of the ‘government’ regardless of the party affiliation. There is no opposition party as such. Their clout and power gives a distinct ‘VIP<sup>6</sup> culture’ in Arunachal Pradesh. They get preferences right from getting a room in a lowly inspection bungalow to a five star hotel. You may have a reservation on Pawan Hans helicopter to Guwahati , pay in cash the day before and still end up not boarding on the day of departure because ‘a VIP had to fly urgently’. A steady stream of people can be seen outside the politician’s house, office and

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<sup>6</sup> VIP= Very Important Person

wherever they go with requests for jobs, contracts and other favors. As these VIPs pass through with the conspicuous red light beacon on their vehicles, traffic and normal routine gets altered and one can sense a cacophony of emotions like envy, veneration, anger and helplessness from the people. I accept that the same thing happens more or less in my hometown Bangalore , but what is different in Arunachal is the intensity of it. In Bangalore, it is possible to create a ‘non political’ private space without bothering about the politicians or politics; in Arunachal this space is getting gradually squeezed as politics permeates to all spheres of life. This is due to the absence of a viable private sector.

The economy of Arunachal has grown at a considerable pace since Indian independence. From 1971 to 2003 the net state domestic product per capita grew at an impressive rate of 4.35% compared to 2.63 % for India. The average rate of growth was 7.16 % compared to 4.78 % national average for this period (GoAP, 2005). Most of this growth occurred due to a steady flow of grants from the center since Arunachal is a strategically located special category state. In fact Government is the only major player in Arunachal and private sector industrialization has not occurred due to topography, lack of market access, limited local demand and segregated internal market. The state’s Government expenditure constitutes about 80 per cent of State income in 2002-03. Gurudas Das (1995) traces the transition of Arunachal from a barter economy to a monetized economy and sees a sharp change after the Indo-China war. He says the state government tried to stimulate the economy by setting up public sector undertakings (Arunachal Pradesh Forest Corporation Limited and Arunachal Pradesh Industrial Development and Financial Corporation limited), various industrial estates, district industrial estates and training people in various craft training cum production programs.

Due to a combination of factors both external and internal –these ventures were not self sustaining and the government ended up managing it. These actions lead to an influx of immigrants from outside the state and increase in capital (and land). There are only 415 small scale industrial units registered in the state of which 22 are private companies. Das with a somewhat leftist tilt concludes

“ Both the capitalist mode of production and system of governance which are often labeled as the ‘forces of modernity’ have been superimposed upon the traditional order. The introduction of parliamentary political structure and party line politics cutting across the ethnic boundaries, adoption of Hindi and English both as medium of instruction, permission for the activities by the Hindu missions, encouraging towards the growth of private property, adoption of policy of commercialization of agriculture and resource based industrialization etc- all these have brought an unprecedented change within a very short span of time. The quick accumulation of capital in the hands of a section of the local tribals has taken place mainly through corruption rather than through exploitation of their people over time. Access to the seats of power has enabled them in the way of realization of commissions against government orders, contract works, issuing of permits etc. thereby consolidating their economic position. This lumpen bourgeoisie has accumulated significant amount of money capital within a short period of time and without much of pains. A part of this local capital is then invested in the industrial sector of businesses in collaboration with their regional as well as national counterparts. As this class has emerged through an unusual as well as unethical process of accumulation and not along with the process of reconstruction of the tribal society and economy, more ruthless plundering by them of the tribal land and people may only be apprehended”

The civil society is also underdeveloped, nascent, non activist and without strategic intent in Arunachal Pradesh. There is a proliferation of ‘student unions’ in the state. The major ones are All Nyishi Students Union, All Arunachal Pradesh students union and All Apatani Student Union. There are numerous smaller unions formed along the lines of ethnic, geographic or a combination of both. They instead of advancing the interests of the ‘student community’ are nothing but a training ground for state politics- a

sort of boot camp where leaders (who are not even students) practice their art before maturing. They also act as henchmen for the real politicians. During my research period, I had to endure numerous, totally uncalled for, irrelevant state wide bandhs<sup>7</sup> (for instance bandh to oppose VAT, to condemn border dispute). The student's union elections are fiercely contested and followed since they are the first step in the ladder of power. At the other extreme in civil society, is what I term 'fly by night NGOs'. These non governmental organizations are set up with the intention of siphoning of government money without delivering any service. Most but not all such NGOs heads are relatives of politicians or 'connected' to them in some way. Others might have a 'cozy' understanding with the bureaucrats. Just to give an illustration, FGA and NGO X were both given a project to train villagers in 'Drinking water quality monitoring'. NGO X was allotted Kurung Kumey district which is hilly and inaccessible and FGA got Pasighat a relatively plain district with very good access roads and communication. NGO X purportedly completed the training of whole district in less than 15 days and collected the bills within 2 months. FGA took 6 months to complete the training and another 6 months to collect the bills.

The overwhelming presence of Government/state has led to what economists call 'Government crowding out the community/private sector'. FGA uses the term 'dependency syndrome' to describe the phenomenon. Wherever and whenever FGA wanted to initiate its program, people would become disenchanted soon after learning that there would not be any 'freebies' given. People have in a way become 'addicted to money' and expect government, politicians and NGOs to give them all sorts of services

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<sup>7</sup> Bandh: in Hindi it means closed. Used to indicate a general strike where all activities cease. People remain indoors. Differs from curfew which is state imposed.

without corresponding contribution. The lack of 'income tax' at the individual level and relative share of central government in state revenue (60%) further perpetuates this attitude. The Arunachal Pradesh Human Development report notes

“In Arunachal Pradesh, the Government took upon itself the task of modernising the economy. The people followed the Government and participated in various developmental activities. In the process, however, an impression was created that the Government was the initiator and executor of the development process. Individual initiative, drive and 'entrepreneurship' were not considered central to the process of development, Government activism came to be associated with private passivism. In some cases, the Government's developmental activities seem to have totally replaced traditional participatory community action. For example, in the past, the people constructed bridges over small rivers and streams, they built community- council houses, repaired the village roads in their own villages, and undertook many other such activities. Once the Government took over the task of constructing bridges and roads, community action in these areas has gradually declined.”

It becomes an uphill task to dislodge people from this 'comfort of dependency'. So initiating and sustaining an empowering process must not only take place in the context of increasing inequality but also in a context where people's motivation, initiative and self reliance are ever decreasing. It is not simply a matter of people's attitude, it is how they have reacted to emerging realities and identities. Das (1995) states

“ [industrialization] may be viewed either as a means or as a social movement, a process towards achieving the latter [economic development]. While the first approach leads to mere transplantation of some large projects into the heart of the backward areas in order to stimulate the process of development in an isolated fashion, the second recognizes the necessity to develop the area symbiotically. It raises the quality of the people of the area, cultivates industrial culture among them and after setting the stage ready, it decides the type of industries to be developed where maximum local participation is assured along with the structural need of the local economy. The failure of public sector in synchronizing the local manpower with resources indicates that the industrial development of Arunachal Pradesh belongs to the first category which may in the long run be a curse rather than a boon for the local people”.

I will digress a bit now, to give illustration of Neopatrimonialism from my own experience. The Health Training and Research Center is a government institution in Pasighat entrusted with training paramedical health workers, with the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) being one of them. The institute has a sanctioned capacity to train 30 ANMs per batch. But the Director of the institute is under constant political pressure to recruit more than the capacity. He has to do it even though the facilities like hostel intake, hospital beds etc are below the norms. In 2009 64 ANMs passed out from the institute. Sitting in the FGA office, I filed almost all their applications for jobs, even though FGA runs only one primary health center and there were no open ANM positions in that center. The government receives grants from the center's National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) program to strengthen the health system to recruit ANMs. Now the politicians start putting pressure on the Deputy Director of NRHM to favor 'their' particular candidates to secure a job. Within a few months of recruitment, politicians again start putting pressure on the District Health managers to transfer them to 'less hardship' postings in relatively urban centers. This snippet illustrates many things:

- It shows how the powerful politicians and new elites influence is constant and interferes with every aspect of life- right from getting admission , to jobs and posting.
- How the legal rational bureaucratic system is undermined by tribal affiliations
- The difference between supply and demand and the opportunities for rent seeking (corruption) it provides
- The over reliance of the state on center for running what is essentially a state matter ( under Indian constitution Health is a state matter)



- How inequity in access to health services and health inequality is created and reproduced in the state due to mismanagement.
- The high rate of unemployed youths in Arunachal. World Bank (2007) states “public sector the employer of first and last resort [in the northeast region]”. Even when FGA launched a new project, the number of applicants was in far excess of the required posts (1:15). Government jobs were most preferred (as witnessed by attrition in FGA)
- The role that geographic terrain and other ecological factors play in decision making in terms of posting.
- The candidates who make such request exploit their traditional tribal, clan and ethnic relations
- The influence of modernity/globalization/neoliberal –in terms of allopathic system of medicine, modern education etc.

The last two points deals with tribal traditions and modernity which I will further elaborate below. Before that I would like to mention about the increasing inequality in Arunachal Society. As a result of corruption, bigger roles of government and Neopatrimonialism, new tribal elites have emerged rapidly in the past few decades. I am not implying that the tribal societies before independence were egalitarian. In fact there is evidence now emerging that the societies were stratified (Das 2005). But what has changed in the past few decades is the nature of this inequality- both in terms of content and the higher class. In the past inequality was visible and confined to traditional ‘high value’ items like traditional beads, lama dao( tibetian sword), mithuns , wives and slaves. Now the inequality is in terms of money, vehicles, land, house and other modern high value items. The people who are the ‘new elites’ found creative,

unethical pathways to amass their riches in the changing context of Arunachal. No doubt some traditional elites in the early phase, who commanded a vast labor force, organizational capacity, influence with government (due to traditional authority) and loyalty of tribe members successfully exploited the emerging opportunities. But in addition to them, some non traditional elites like those who got education and government posting were also able to rise rapidly in the scale. This inequality is both visible and not visible. In the field I had a hard time even to come up with an asset index which could differentiate the rich from the poor at village level. The main problem seemed to be the reference for delineating rich and poor -itself is in transition and has not reached any equilibrium where people can judge who is rich and who is not. Take the instance of mithuns<sup>8</sup>-traditionally the rich had more , but now the rich might not have any (they may find it only of traditional value and possess one or two for some customs and rituals) and poor might have more (they may be now able to possess it since the demand is low). But one proxy indicator which proves this rising inequality is the rise in crimes. Throughout my stay, the newspapers carried stories of robbery, heist , kidnapping for ransom, murder for money and such. The most audacious were the robbery of Rs1600 crores<sup>9</sup> from the treasury and kidnap of a former Chief Minister's son. I would hear comments like “this is the first time its happening in Arunachal”, “ why are people resorting to such things” or “why is crime increasing all of a sudden”. One of the reasons, I suspect may be the rising inequality and inequity. The other distinguishing characteristics of this new inequality is –traditional mechanisms for

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<sup>8</sup> A semi domesticated animal-Bons frontalis which looks like a yak/cow

<sup>9</sup> 1 crore= 10 million, Rs1600 crores= \$363 million dollars approximately

redistribution are not working or are overwhelmed and the inequality cuts across tribal and ethnic identities (traditionally it was confined to one tribe or clan).

‘Continuity and Change’ is the most common theme that I came across in my readings on Arunachal society. I also experienced it first hand in my field work. There were some aspects of the Arunachal society and culture which still continue and others which have changed dramatically. One might suspect that there is ‘only change’ and no continuity in Arunachal in all aspects and that there is only ‘apparent continuity’ - a façade which hides the small changes occurring due to a multitude of forces. This is all the more probable in society which has languages without a written script and oral narratives are the mainstay of such continuities. But without a much more in-depth study and other evidence it will be hard to make such an extreme claim. Some of the changes relate to the institution of marriage. Child marriage and payment of bride price has declined considerably. I heard rumors that they are still in vogue in the ‘interior areas’ (areas accessible by >2 days trek on foot). Polygamy is still practiced but not on the scale as previously. Inter tribe marriages have increased due to the fault of ‘education, tv and films’. “Pani kheti” (wet cultivation) is being practiced more compared to jhum keti (slash and burn agriculture). All these trends have major and minor implications on tribal life. People still go hunting though I heard stories that many animals seen in the past were no longer seen during hunting. (Gun licenses become another in kind gift used to maintain patron-client relationships). Mibang and Behera (2004) note changes in society, social structure, village institutions, resource ownership and management, village economy, sacred geography and performances while taking village as an unit of analysis.

The two major forces of change are education and spread of Christianity (and other religious identity). The state does not have any education board and has adopted the curriculum and syllabus from the center board. As such children are forced to learn in Hindi or English medium and also about the history of mainland India rather than their own rich history. Being naïve, in the initial days I looked for history and social science text books for grades 5 to 10 in the fond hope that I will learn about Arunachal society. I was informed that the Arunachal tribal history might come in Post graduate studies and not even at graduate level!!!. The state has one of the lowest population density in the country (13 persons per sq km). Therefore most of the middle and secondary schools are located in relatively bigger towns. As such, children have to be in residential training or boarding school at an early age. This disrupts enculturation and there is discontinuity in language. Most of the younger staff members who accompanied me had a hard time communicating in their own native language in the field. There are very few graduate schools and a majority of the high school pass outs leave to Delhi or Southern states to pursue their higher education.

The other major change taking place is the emergence of Christianity and other religious identities especially in Palin and Ziro. Not just Christianity but there was much diversity in the denominations. When asked what are the various types, people would start a long list “Cathloic, Baptist, Revival, Methodist, Pentecostal etc”. I would hear numerous (and somewhat humorous if I may say) stories like within the same household father would be Catholic, son would be Baptist and mother a non believer. Not only that but a person might keep changing his religion over time depending on

events and situations. The inner line permit<sup>10</sup> gave some protection to the tribals from the work of missionaries. According to an anecdote, all this changed when one minister (Christian sympathetic to missionary work) became a key minister in the Government. His support was essential for the Chief Minister (to maintain power) and he was given some flexibility. As such during the past 10 to 15 years there has been an enormous numbers of converts (though this may also be due to the fact of attaining a critical threshold over the decades). There has been a steady rise of Christians from just 1438 (0.43%) in 1961 to 205,548 (18.7%) in 2001(Census 2001). Again anecdotal evidence points that the conversion has been more in Nysihis and other ‘backward’ tribes. ‘Donyi Polo’ (translates to Sun Moon) –a system of indigenous faith is another movement which has emerged as a counter force to preserve the indigenous tradition and culture. I found this was more seriously taken in Ziro compared to Palin.

Modernity is another force which is shaping the life and aspirations of the people. Mobile cell phones have become ubiquitous, the immigrations of large labor force from outside the state in past decades, satellite dish TV , education , increase in commerce all have implications on the context in which empowerment has to take place.

### **FGA- Structure and History:**

Having some understanding about the great transition taking place in Arunachal, I will now explain the micro environment of FGA-an organization in transition. FGA was registered as a society in 1997. Future Generations, a non-profit organization registered in the US, sent Betsy Taylor as an emissary in 1996 to begin negotiations for setting up the

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<sup>10</sup> Inner Line Permit- a British system where people need to get permits to enter Arunachal. Even Indians need to get it.

organization. The requirements for an inner line permit which was stricter for foreigners and since the funding was from a foreign agency which is more tightly regulated nationally (Foreign Contributions Regulations Act) made it inevitable that the organization be founded in cooperation with the political elites. The Chief Minister's son and top state bureaucrats played a crucial role in establishing the organization.

Much of the early history of FGA remains hazy especially the period 1997-2004, since many of the people who worked then had left the organization when I came on the scene. Inadequate documentation and loss of documentation that did exist in 2004 further contributed to the mystery. I would hear in the field small vignettes here and there about those early years. I was able to piece together the bits and pieces of information but much of it may be speculation.

The organization initially started work in education and health. Right from beginning it had a 'community led' focus and it adopted a flexible programmatic structure to fit the needs of the community. The structure of the organization was always unstable till 2005. It had relied on volunteers from the community initially with very few paid positions. Experts from outside came as resource persons for training and capacity building. Carl Taylor, Betsy Taylor, Jon, Mike Rechlin, Raj Arole, were some of the few people who came but Ramesh Khadkaa stands out in the narratives of the community. He is one of the most respected and honored persons in the communities especially in Palin.

The leadership of the organization was changing constantly. It had Y.P Kholi, Nalong, Amit Sharma and Tage Kanno. Each leader's tenure lasted from 1 to 3 yrs. Tage Kanno who was the executive director when I first went to Arunachal was the longest

serving. He still retains the post as of now. Their individual leadership styles, organizational decisions, philosophy and strategy of the organization, influences of outsiders and the impact it had on the program in the field can only be speculated. Many of the earlier board members like Rana, Rintu , and other actors from Arunachal (no longer associated with FGA) also had an influence on the program.

The organization has weathered many crises in its decade of existence. The change of government in 1999 and 2007, uncertain flow of funds from US (before 2004 and again in 2008 due to financial crisis), selection of leaders, scandal of forgery and fund theft on part of a staff member are the major ones which the organization had to endure.

The organization also had many projects ranging from environment to health. But the core focus and strength of the organization was and is women's empowerment and health. This has been a constant feature right from the establishment. Other projects have come and gone, but the community did not have a collective memory of them. While I was going through the files, I came across instructions for setting up a helium balloon to capture aerial photos of Palin. Another project related to documenting the presence of the clouded leopard in Tale Valley, an article of which appeared in National Geographic (2000). The organization had also been involved in the setting up of two nature preserve parks. I heard stories of using satellite phone in 2000. There was a mention about setting up an International Peace Park in Tawang district. All these happened before 2003-04. From 2003 onwards I had a much better idea about the projects taken up by FGA. In 2005 the organization embarked on a state level training of Gram Panchyat members (village council) in seed scale. The training covered three districts in full until lack of

funding curtailed the program. FGA also started working with Solungs, a backward tribe in the interiors. Under the public private partnership scheme of the National Rural Health Mission, FGA started managing the Primary Health Center in Sille. It recruited the staff and has been successfully managing the center delivering quality health care. Though I learnt much about this projects, I will be focusing in depth with FGA's on site activities especially with women, women's group and their activities like kitchen gardens.

In 2007 when I was first acquainted with FGA the organization had a stable organizational structure. Under the steady leadership of Kanno, it had started streamlining its process and management. The organizational structure is not very hierarchical. At the top is the Master Coordinating Committee members. This acts like a Board of Directors giving stewardship to the organization. It has two types of members- (1) representatives from the three Local Coordinating Committees in the three field sites (2) other board members who are bureaucrats, members from other sites etc. The MCC has a Chair Person, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer, General Secretary; the executive director acts as an ex officio member. There were 17 MCC members in the meeting that I attended (only 8 actually came for the meeting). The Executive Director is the main person in charge of FGA. He is supported by an accountant, multi purpose worker and a driver in the Itanagar office. The rest of the staffs are based in field, working with the community. Their strength changed over the duration of my stay. In 2007, there was 8 field staff with the designation of Site Coordinator and Field Associate. There has been a constant recruitment and attrition among the staff. FGA launched a Pregnancy History Project in 2008 and recruited 9 new staff. Some of the old staff had left or had taken long leave of absence during the period. In June 2009 when I left field work, the organization



had been restructured on project basis and 12 staff were working. FGA had started to expand to three new sites. I later learnt that three of the 12 left the organization after I came back from the field.

In the field the site coordinator is the main person in charge. He/she interacts with the Village welfare Workers (VWWs), Women Group Members , Self Help group members and the Local Coordinating Committee members (LCC). The LCC consist of people from the community but more often are, in some way, related to the women members ( in tribal societies everyone is related to everyone else so this may not be of relevance). In Ziro the LCC had members from the district bureaucracy, in addition to community members, while in Palin is was entirely community based.

### **Analytical Model:**

Until now I have given the overarching picture of transitions taking place in Arunachal. My intent is to guard the reader on weighing the findings of my thesis against this backdrop. But just letting things hang in air does not help a person who is searching for answers. We all need theories or metaphor to better understand the working. Krieger (1994) states that metaphors play an essential role in cognition. She states “ Like theories metaphors attempt to produce new understanding through constructing novel connections between seemingly disparate phenomena and / or concepts , thereby enabling the ‘unknown’ to be comprehended through the reference to the ‘known’”. The ‘web of causation’ and ‘Rothman’s pie’ have served as good metaphors in epidemiology. Ethnographers frequently use metaphor or synecdoche to explain phenomenon. I will now try to focus the things described above by adapting the framework put forth by

Alsop and others with respect to empowerment. This was developed by Betsy Taylor (faculty at Virginia Polytechnic Institute) and myself as part of another project for FGA.

The Himalayan mountain range was formed when the Indo-Australian tectonic plates collided with the Eurasian tectonic plate. Over the years this gave rise to the highest peaks, the mightiest rivers and the most beautiful valleys—all different ecologies in their own right. Arunachal Pradesh being a part of the eastern Himalayas gives a perfect metaphor for what is happening in the socio-political landscape. One needs to imagine the ‘Indian–State development’ tectonic plate clashing with the ‘Pre State-Tribal’ tectonic plates. This collision creates a rich landscape of both steep hills and flat plateaus and rich valleys. The people of Arunachal have to make decisions and interact with these legacies for instance if one needs to build a house one sees what is available in nearby forest, selects a place on the hill, tries to flatten it as much as possible, build whatever size house is possible and structures one life around that house. The same applies for the practice of agriculture. In the same way people have to deal with the historical legacies and shifting movements of the tectonic plates. For instance the first schools were established in Ziro by the Indian state (may be the flat nature of Ziro plateau had strategic importance for landing military aircraft or may be people knew more about Apatanis than Nyshis—no one can tell). This gave an advantage to the Apatani tribe in terms of education and a chain of events was set in motion. Now Apatanis may be one of the best educated tribes in Arunachal. A similar allegory can be drawn for the Adi tribes who are politically savvy (may be they interacted with Assam and British more from an early time). The dynamics of empowerment takes place on the landscape already given. It can only be understood if one has proper view of the geology. Once a house is built, a

person hardly bothers about the tectonic plates deep underneath except in times of earth quakes, landslides or other such disasters. But in Arunachal one should not ignore this, because the tectonic plates are still moving. This keeps on changing the terrain of the hills on which a house stands. Empowerment needs to keep pace with this shifting terrain. This is both a challenge to empowerment and its study.

Figure 4 illustrates this process. It is a two dimensional representation of what is a three dimensional reality. On one dimension are basic political economic structures. New forms of participation and empowerment, are built at the contradictory intersection of three political structures: a) still functioning pre-state “tribal” political institutions, b) the Indian “developmental state” (with unusual power in Arunachal because of the massive and top-down flow of development monies into this border and tribal state), and, c) the neoliberal state linked with economic globalization. These three contradictory political forms converge like clashing, geological, tectonic plates to create a shifting socio-political-economic terrain in which communities must operate. These structures provide the local and state level “opportunity structures” from which communities, in partnership with FGA and other partners must try to build empowerment processes.

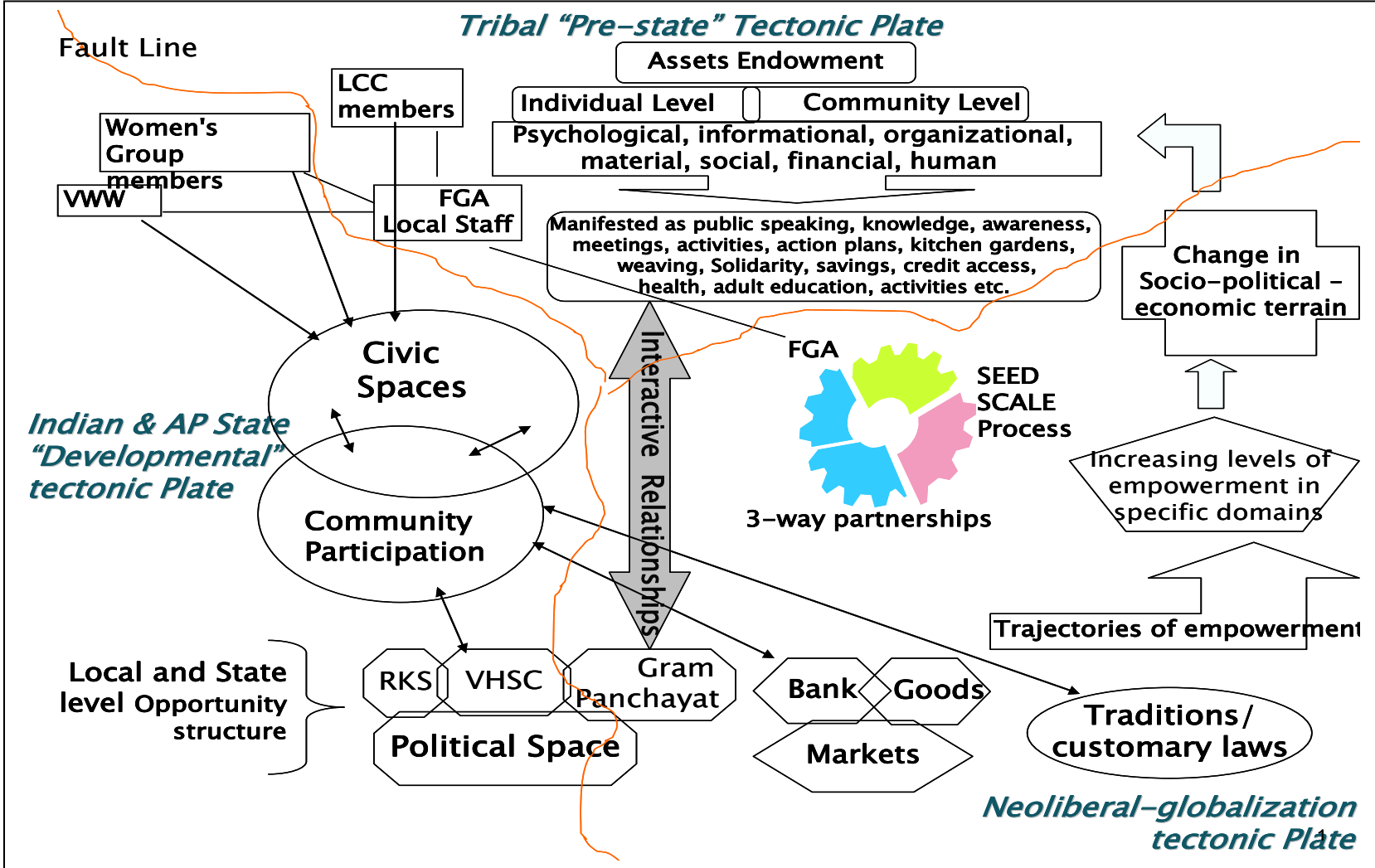


Figure 4: Analytical Model

At the second level of this chart, are the a) Seed Scale activities and outcomes that are in dynamic interactive relationships with the b) activities and outcomes of community participation and c) the social, eco-economic and political assets that enable individual and collective agency in the empowerment process. The seed scale cycle builds an effective partnership between community, FGA and other stake holders (Government and other) in order for the empowerment to evolve. Iterations of seed scale enhance the assets and capabilities at individual and community level. Through the civic spaces created by women and FGA, individuals and women's groups negotiate the opportunity structure available to gain empowerment.

At the third level of this chart, are the emerging possibilities for re-writing the "rules of the game" as communities begin to scale up along "trajectories of empowerment" (Taylor, 2009) leading to sector-based empowerment (e.g., the new government / FGA partnerships in managing Primary Health Centers), which can tend towards more fundamental changes in the socio-political-economic terrain as they get more control over the clashing, contradictory macrostructures of current social determination of ill health, disempowerment and inequity. In other words this combination of power structures and actors' interpretations generates a background sense of political "scene" – or that historically specific "political terrain" across which contestation takes place, and, which can change suddenly: "...it is as if the actors in a play, often through the unintended consequences of their words and deeds, manage to dismantle the theater and rebuild it, or part of it, in a different image" (Perusek, 2006).

This analytical model gives a good representation of the structures which are needed to understand the dynamics of empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh. In the next

chapter I will go into the micro aspects of individuals and women's group as they use activities like kitchen gardens and others to gain control over assets and to influence rules which affect their day to day life.

## **DYNAMICS OF EMPOWERMENT**

The main purpose of this chapter is to narrate the conditions, components and directions in which empowerment evolves and proceeds. I began my study with a focus on kitchen gardens and empowerment, so in the initial section I will narrate the main findings with respect to kitchen gardens. In the subsequent section I will use kitchen gardens as a metaphor/ synecdoche to go deeper into the dynamics of empowerment. This section will draw upon all the interviews, informal discussions and lived experience to draw thematic narratives.

### **Kitchen Gardens as vehicles of Empowerment:**

#### **Definition:**

Ruthenberg (1971) gives a set of criteria for defining house gardens or kitchen gardens. In the field I was confronted with a diversity of kitchen gardens (KGs from now on). Few of the criteria set by Ruthenberg were satisfied by majority of the KGs I saw. A comparison against the criteria gives the following mixed picture

- 1. cropping those plants for personal consumption that cannot be collected nor supplied by arable farming-* though the produce from KG was used for household consumption by majority of the women, the plants grown varied. Some of them attempted to grow plants which they used to collect from jungles or non traditional ones and others grew plants which were cultivated before.

2. *small plots*- This was generally true. But in Sirro and Rakso villages, the cultivation was on relatively large plots which supplied a considerable quantity of vegetables.
3. *proximity to the house*- This was not always satisfied. Very few plots were close to the house (< 5 mins walking<sup>11</sup>). Due to the non availability of land many of the KG plots were outside the village (>20 mins) separate from farm land. Still others had set up plots beside the farms in Palin (1 to 2 hrs walk)
4. *fencing*- Due to the nature of village life, where pigs, chickens, mithuns and cows roam freely , all the KGs had to have a fence. This was the single most important requirement and also the biggest obstacle for starting KGs
5. *mixed or dense planting of a great number of annual, semi-permanent, and perennial crops* - Most of them did grow more than three plants, but some women grew only one plant like ginger or turmeric or banana. The KGs were not tended in the winter<sup>12</sup> months. So both in Ziro and Palin , the plants were cultivated in summer months (roughly March to November)
6. *a high intensity of land use* – Majority of the people did not use the land intensely except very few people and in Sirro village.
7. *land cultivation several times a year* – As described above the land was used during specific months, but multiple harvest/ cycles were grown within those months.
8. *permanence of cultivation*- Many women had started and abandoned KGs during the past 8 years. Very few have properly established KGs and continue to tend it

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<sup>11</sup> Distance is measured in time in Arunachal

<sup>12</sup> In Arunachal people only refer to two seasons- Thanda din ( cold days) and Garmi din (hot days)



from year to year. Most of them, depending upon the situation, interest and circumstances are ‘on and off’ kitchen gardeners i.e. they do for some time , stop a few seasons and again start.

9. *cultivation with hand implements* – This criteria is not applicable since not only kitchen gardens but also farming is done with hand implements in Ziro and Palin. They do not use machines or beasts of burden.

The diversity of kitchen gardens may be seen as weakness of the program in the field. But I would argue that it is a strength; strength of SEED SCALE process and FGA program. Being a community led program, one should expect diversity and not uniformity in an intervention. All the women tried in their own unique way to adopt the program to their own distinctive socio cultural situation. Some of them did not try at all, others tried and gave up but some still are continuing and expanding.

This diversity also reflects some of the other phenomenon occurring. Non uniformity is reflected in all aspects of FGA program. If you take the sites, all of them are on their own unique path. No two women’s groups are similar in structure, activity or outcomes. Even the Village Welfare Workers (VWW) registers were different from one another. Within the same individual also, there is non uniformity over a period of time. So some might start KGs and then move on to set up a grocery store or undertake a different activity. Within people who practice KGs, they will be experimenting from year to year-in terms of growing different vegetables, increasing plot size or the way in which vegetables is grown. This freedom to explore one’s options is due to the flexibility and non specificity provided by FGA and the space this provided for people to find their own niche.

## **FGA's Role:**

*“ FGA didn't say anything.....there was just motivation...it never told us if you make big farms you will get this or that...you should be self confident. if you start something with self confident then everything will be easy....they never said there will be this much money or you will earn so much like that...yes it did tell us that if you work...then you will never be hungry. If you are self determined then no one will point a finger at you. This they definitely told us. ”*

*-MCC Member (also big vegetable farmer in Sirro)*

*“ .....in 2000 they gave us training about health...they told us we should eat vegetables...the women discussed in meeting . if we do gardens we will get food to eat and also save money....that's how it started”*

*- FGA staff*

*-*

*“ FGA did not give us proper support....if they had given us some seeds or small implements like sickle it would have been helpful...and we would also do KGs*

*- VWW-Hija Village*

*-*

*Myself: “what did the FGA do?”*

*Women: “They did nothing”*

*Myself: “Didn't they encourage you to start KGs, give some training like that?”*

*Women: “Ohhh that.....yes they did that....but they gave us no money, salary or seeds.....things like that you know”*

*Myself: “ So you feel training is not important”*

*Women: “no I didn't mean that.....” looks at me, at FGA staff and all three of us start laughing.*

*-VWW- Dui village*

FGA right from the beginning has emphasized 'training' and 'capacity building'.

It very rarely gives out any hand outs (in kind or cash). This puts it at odds with the

prevailing culture in Arunachal Pradesh, where politicians, local leaders and other NGOs

are doling out money, machines or other in kind gifts. This 'dependency syndrome'

mentioned in the previous chapter creates conflicts between the community and FGA.

People sometimes feel FGA is unreasonable, has tight fist over money and is 'nothing but

talk talk talk'. FGA for its part, feels this will create dependency in the people for

resources and is not sustainable. As seen from the last quote above, some of them even discount the training received since it ‘does not count’ at a more conscious level.

FGA discusses the issues with the community to arrive at a solution. Many times the discussions and decisions take place in the community and they approach FGA for guidance. FGA guides them to relevant government program or creates a space for community to approach government. In the extremes some people felt that, all the things were done only by the community, they had to pull all the way and FGA just had a nominal role if any. This, in a way, indicates the ownership assumed by the community.

Seed Scale process main outcome is ‘behavior change’, as such it systematically deemphasizes resources and services as the main focus of an intervention. The main purpose of FGA training is to make them aware of the situations and to make them reflect on their lives. It does this by conducting trainings (earlier they used to send the women to CRHP, Jhamkhed). It also takes the people on exposure trips to study ‘successes’ elsewhere. The objective is to ‘inspire’ and ‘motivate’ the women to start doing something. One of the women from Hong said “after I came back from the trip...I could just not sleep. How could I let so much of my land go waste...I wanted to pick up a dao (machete) and start clearing in the midnight. But I patiently waited for sunrise and immediately started clearing the area around my house for kitchen gardening”. Another women said “after I came back from Jhamked, I was impatient and restless, I wanted to tell other women, form groups and do things which they had done in Jhamkhed”.

The other aspects of FGAs role was the non-specific nature of the training. It assumed a ‘mentorship’ role and encouraged people to get training in whatever they were interested in. So the training could be on seed scale, KGs, literacy classes, candle making,

weaving, tailoring, leadership etc. The training programs arose and were designed based on the communities felt needs. It did not insist that all the women should attend, those who were interested could attend .It was non judgmental about how the training was utilized- did the trainees actual follow step by step was inconsequential ; post training, they would simply discuss what's happening in the community and make plans.

Another aspect which I noticed in my observation of an 'Environmental awareness training in school' and 'VWW Refresher Training' was the pragmatic approach. By this I mean FGA always advised the people that while making action plans- the goal and objective should be practically feasible –'doable'. They advised to rely on local resources as much as possible for achieving it. It didn't matter if the set goals were 'small' as long as they were feasible.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the context and events surrounding how KGs were initiated occurred around 2000, when documentation was weak and people who were involved are not currently working with FGA. So there are many layers of narratives surrounding how this came about and I am not in a position to comment. Some say they did it for health reasons, others for income-it's a mixture of responses. In Palin, the women clearly attributed FGA for initiating KGs and said some non-FGA people also started after seeing them. In Ziro, they had traditionally practiced KGs but people said FGA made them realize the potential (market value?) of KGs and also some new individuals started.

## **Capabilities:**

*“earlier we used to plant seeds here and there....no timing...now we know which seeds to plant in which season....you know in systematic way”*

*-Woman Rakso*

*“ I give vegetables to my neighbors and clan members...they like me and it feels good.....they do not give anything back but it does not matter ”*

*-Woman Hinda I*

*“ the women’s group members met the ADO Pertin(Agriculture Development Officer) and invited him to come and give training”*

*-FGA staff*

*“ women did not know how to sell. They were very shy. People ridiculed if a woman sat down to sell vegetables. So the women discussed in a meeting and decided we need a place where women can come and sell their vegetables. That’s how we came to set up the mahila bazaar (women’s market)...where women can bring vegetables grown and collected from jungle to sell...”*

*Myself: “really....I only saw women managing the shops in the market..so earlier it was not like that?”*

*Woman- “ yes..eariler the shops were run by non-tribals...FGA came...training started and all of them left...now only women(laughing)”*

*-VWW Gilo Tabing*

KGs had impacts at many levels. I would like to classify them as direct, indirect and intangible. Direct impacts are those which are most noticeable and tangible. Almost all the women said that vegetables grown were used for household consumption, it had increased the dietary variety and they would sell excess vegetables to earn some petty cash.

The consumption of vegetables within the household was very much appreciated by the women. Earlier the regions were more dependent on the neighboring states of Assam for vegetables. After the KGs were started there has been a more equitable balance between the two regions. This is facilitated by the natural ecology. Assam, which is in the plains, has a different weather pattern, so vegetables grown in one season in

Assam, cannot be grown in Palin or Ziro. In the next season the situation reverses. As such, the exchange of vegetables has become complementary between the regions and moreover, vegetables are available throughout the year as a result of this. First priority of women who practiced KGs, was to consume within the household. I tried to get some idea about the proportion consumed that was self produced, but the women could not give a satisfactory answer. Some women said 3 days per week in the peak season and once a fortnight in lean season. This I suspect is due to the fact that Arunachal Pradesh does only subsistence farming and the numeracy skills is weak among the people especially women. They just brought what was available or required from the KGs for the day and cooked without bothering to keep records or estimates. In the field, I gave them some books to keep as KG registers but could not follow up.

The women also mentioned the variety in diet consumed. Earlier they used to eat only pumpkin, bottle gourd, lai patta (lettuce). Now they could consume ginger, chills, tomato, yam, potato, orange, banana, etc.

Anything grown in excess was sold for cash. The women themselves sold it or gave it to a middle man or store owner depending on the situation. The money got was small and was used to buy minor items for the household. Majority of women informed that they would buy items for children like pens, books, biscuits etc and they felt actively contributing to their children's education. The child's education expenses would be say Rs18000 to Rs30,000 and income from KGs would contribute 2 to 10% of it at the maximum (except for women from Rakso and Sirro –see below). It had a disproportionate psychological impact (if one compares earnings to expenses) since this may be the first time they were experiencing control over money or felt contributing to

child's education. Some of the women also contributed to the 'women's group revolving fund' –this fund was used in emergencies or to give loans to other members at far below market rates (2 to 3% per month compared to 10% per month).

The next level of impact is what I term the indirect impact. These are slightly less noticeable but do come out in the interviews. They can more or less be attributed to the KGs per se. For instance- many women talked about the knowledge they had gained in terms of growing vegetables and also managing farms (seasonality of vegetables, distance between plants etc). They for instance realized that they can grow 'non-traditional' vegetables in their land. Some women shared the vegetables with their neighbors or relatives which increased solidarity. Many women started doing KGs in groups, before starting their own plots-this led to increased group participation and unity.

Many of the women who went to market to sell their produce, developed other social skills like negotiating (bargaining), marketing, planning and management. For instance, to get seeds they would have to go to Ziro or Harmutti (in Assam) or manage it through an intermediary. Some of them abandoned KGs and started their own petty business shops or went in other directions. Those who went to Harmutti or managed business had to deal with people who spoke Assamese or Hindi. Many of the women I interviewed had developed language skills after joining the FGA (some said that they knew the language but were shy to speak before and now they could speak freely). Few women also talked about the savings they were making. "In the past we used to spend money on buying vegetables, the money so saved now can be used to buy rice". This showed some impact on food security, but food security was affected by other factors (availability of Government subsidized food, transition from slash and burn to wet

cultivation, better roads and communication and increased purchasing power in community all had an impact on food security). The 'revolving fund' had its own spin off impacts. Some women used the emergency funds during ill health and avoided catastrophic expenditures. Other used the loans for other activities, but even upon much probing I got general answers like 'for husband', 'for house items' etc.

The third level of impact which I term intangible is very much similar to indirect except in terms of attributability. For instance, to start KGs fencing is really important. Fencing is an activity traditional done by males and convincing one's husband is essential. Those who convinced were able to start KGs, but this sort of persuasion skill did not come from KG per se. They would have started when they wanted to join a women's group or to attend a training program. This is a sort of cumulative effect on a person's personality. KGs did play a role but to put an exact finger on it is very difficult.

Decision making, one of the concepts which quantitative surveys try to capture can be taken as an example. Each season- one needs to decide whether to start, continue or abandon a KG. If decided to start or continue which vegetable to grow- ginger which is comparatively easy or tomato which is difficult, untested and requires lot of capital investment . One evaluates from ones experience and makes a decision. But the skill of decision making has a much broader impact on other decisions and decisions making skills in 'other' areas has an impact on decisions regarding KGs.

### **Local Resources:**

*"for mahila bazaar...I first approached Kajang for his vacant space and convinced him to give it for some time...then I borrowed tin sheets from someone...we got bamboos from jungle for posts then we tied everything using available materials to form a temporary shelter....there was some space left...lot of goods used to come from Assam wrapped in*



*polythene sheets...we then used that to cover remaining area.....we cleaned the floor and told the women to sit and sell vegetables and cooked food. We invited the ADO to come and inaugurate the mahila bazaar .....it was a big success and we did for a couple of months...then the owner said he wanted to build a house and we had to close it down”*  
-LCC Palin

*“to maintain the health of the soil, I collect animal waste from under the house and other areas of the village and then spread on the KG plot.....I worked as day laborer for 10 people in the village and in exchange I invited them to come and build the fence for my KG”*

-VWW Rakso

*“ in early days our husbands did not allow us to meet ...shouting we needed to cook and take care of children...so we used to work hard with great intensity throughout the day in the farms (to finish required work) and just before we left for home, all the women would gather and discuss problems”*

-Woman Member

*“ in early days I used to buy seeds from outside, now I am using my own seeds”*  
- Women

Necessity is the mother of invention, so the saying goes but the way in which it works in the community is quite remarkable to observe. When sufficient self motivation mixes with the resource constraints, it ignites the imagination of the people. The policy of FGA to not give handouts with the intention of avoiding dependency works. It helped people to discover their own potential in unexpected ways and built their character. The self motivation was created by inspiration -“ when I saw this very old women in Jhamkhed writing her name with difficulty, I asked myself I am young why can't I write my name?”. Once people get this sort of motivation, they might initially ask for black boards or a teacher or money to conduct classes. When even this is not supplied, they approach the local school teacher on their own or try to learn from children. This use of local resources can be observed in all aspects of FGA work weather it be training or organizing an event.

This high standard lets only the purest pass through. The drawback is it may commit Type II sort of error, i.e. some people may be motivated but the circumstances may not permit them to push through. If we don't give the resources, then the relationship may become antagonistic. But if we relax the rules, then we face the problem of free riders-those who are interested in the resources more than the goal. To avoid this error, requires a keen sense of perception on the part FGA (experts in Seed Scale terminology). The mentor has his role cut out for him-when to speak when to keep quiet, when to lend a helping hand when to burn the crutches- all uneasy questions which can only be answered with experience in the field.

### **Group Dynamics:**

*“ earlier we used to meet only to do farm work (labour group-reciprocal exchange of labour)...now we meet at other times also ..we sing, dance , tell our stories...its good”*

*-Women*

*“we started with community gardens, but after some time we noticed that some people did not come or do the work properly...it was difficult to manage ...so we met and decided that whoever is interested will do individual gardens”*

*-VWW*

*“nowadays when we visit another group member , we immediately know if there is food in her house or not. We then help her out”*

*-FGA staff*

*“ if one of the group members is sick, then we go to her field and work”*

*-Women*

The formation of women's group increased solidarity among the women. From simple sharing of one another's problems to helping each other to collectively oppose an abusive husband –the women's group have matured over the years to tackle issues confronting them. Even with regard to KGs, the women share their trials and tribulations about growing various vegetables and plants. In fact, many of the women who are currently practicing KGs, had initially started with community or group gardens. Since

those gardens created group conflict and rift among members, they went for individual gardens. Still in Radang and Jorong villages women are managing the gardens collectively. In a way the groups gave a platform for the women to do collectively what they couldn't individually- its like crossing a road in the chaotic traffic of India, one person won't dare to step on the road but as soon as there is a small group, all of them cross( vehicles also slow down seeing a group!!).

This is referred to as 'power with' or 'social capital' in the literature. Ibrahim (2006) uses the word 'collective capabilities' for such self help collectives( to overcome some of the drawbacks of capability approach which is thought as too individualistic). But equally important is 'power to'-the power to organize. The formation of women's group was met with lot of resistance from the community –overcoming this was itself empowering in a way.

The women's group also served has a platform for testing and exhibiting their growing skills sets-public speaking, overcoming shyness, sharing knowledge, discussing issues. Betsy Taylor (2008) uses the term 'civic spaces' to describe this.

“By 'civic' I mean that which is transitional between social life and public life—those webs of cultural meanings, social skills, identities, discourses, practices, and labours which can translate the social into the public, and the public into the social.”

In my discussions with the FGA site coordinators, it became clear that there was diversity in the activities, unity and effectiveness of different groups. The staff classified these groups into three categories – Cat I-meet regularly and does some activity annually, Cat II-newly formed or defunct groups, Cat III-meets but does not act on action plan.

There are many factors which determine the level of success of a group, it is not possible to go into the details of each here. The main factor is the leadership provided by the VWW. Many of the VWWs trained leave or become inactive due to a variety of factors (marriage, children, work). In other cases the groups and VWWs do not gel. In some cases, the past activities may have 'failed' and the group gone into decline.

An important factor that repeatedly came up during my field work is what I term the 'protestant dilemma'. The staff and women frequently mentioned things like "some of the women have become individualistic", "the women have become busy and have no time (due to the success of their business)", "some feel I have learnt how to manage my child and house-why should I give time for the group now". I use the term 'protestant dilemma' as per Jack Betty (2001) quoting Stephen Innes regarding the Calvinist Strain in 1650s of USA

" The more everybody labored, the more society was transformed. The more diligently the people applied themselves-on the frontier, in the meadows, in the countinghouse or on the Banks of Newfoundland-the more they produced a decay in religion and a corruption of morals, a society they did not want, one that seemed less and less attractive.....[in effect] industry, temperance, self discipline lead to increased wealth and then lowering of moral standards and common good subsequently. Epitomized as "Religion begot prosperity and the daughter devoured the mother"" (pg 15-16).

The women who are initially successful become impatient with the 'slowness' of the group and try to find 'greener pastures'. In fact a woman remarked "I feel like leaving FGA altogether, but FGA as changed me so much I feel I should still continue". This is an extreme statement in that she not only wants to leave the group but the whole 'FGA family'. This indicates the underlying tensions within a person and within a group; but it

also indicates the tremendous self confidence-empowerment generated by FGA where women can think independently (quit FGA) .

In addition to the internal workings, according to my observation some FGA policy also had an impact on the group's unity. In my interviews with FGA staff, I brought up this issue and it was not accepted. But I am not fully convinced and I urge the reader to make his own judgment. One of the policies was to create Self Help Group (SHG) in addition to the women's group. All the women's group members could be part of a SHG or only a few. The main difference between a women's group and SHG was 'money'. SHG's actively saved money, lent money , had bank accounts and consisted of women who were more industrious. On the other hand, women's group was a platform for discussion, social service and volunteer work. I felt there would be conflict among women who were part of SHG and women's group and vice versa.

Margaret Mead stated "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has". In Palin around 2000, Hinda I was the best group. It had 2 members from Rakso, 2-3 from Hinda I , 2-3 from Hinda II , 2 from Dui villages. In later years, the women went separate ways to form groups within their own villages. I observed the same thing in Sangram area. The reason for this is not exactly clear. The initial group members were charged with creating new groups. Pressure to scale up might have a role in it?(not officially confirmed from FGA). Regardless, the initial group that was formed was very powerful I feel. It consisted of truly highly motivated individuals who overcame lot of resistance from the community. When they were separated, the energy got diluted.

No group is constant, they undergo periods of dormancy and high energy depending on a multitude of factors. One group I visited near Sangram was highly demoralized at the time, they had grown ginger (about 100 kgs) but were not able to sell it due to inaccessibility of markets (transportation cost: Rs4000, Sale value: Rs1500). They had buried the ginger about 2 feet below ground since there was no refrigeration. I was asked for a solution which I could not give and I had to return with an uneasy feeling and a heavy heart. Not the VWW, not the women, may be FGA staff, maybe nature's bumper crop- whose fault was it for the low morale in the group. But instead of fixing blame, I (and seed scale) would argue to look at it as a learning experience. The women have to learn from this experience, endure some suffering and then overcome it to take on new activities. That's the idea behind seed scale and the empowering process.

### **Mishaps, External Factors and Struggle:**

*" [on asking why they are not using the empty land] ....this is empty land now, as soon as we starting clearing the grass for KGs, a 100 owners will arise and start quarreling"*

*" ....I had spread the haldi (turmeric) to dry in the sun and gone to the jhum kheti (slash and burn farm field 2-3 hrs away)...but it rained all of a sudden. I was helpless. The harvest could not be sent for powdering. All the group members are sad"*

*" ..my husband is very supportive....he encourages me to do KGs instead of jhum kheti"*

*"..people make fun of us ....they say you work all year and how much do you earn. We make (false)bills and earn more...they ask can you buy a car by kitchen gardening?"*

*" ....the Government has a new scheme for growing Citronella....so the group is discussing whether to do it next year"*

Life is anything but dull in the villages. It is a continuous struggle against nature's forces, social pressure, political entanglements and immoral temptations. Many factors

promote or hinder kitchen gardening, but the most commonly mentioned ones were land availability and fencing. Both in a way are related to traditional institutions and values.

Traditionally land has been held in commons and tenure can roughly be categorized as (i) Family land (ii) Clan Land (iii) Common Village Land . (Showren,2009). There are no records of land allotments and the state has also not instituted any process for survey and documentation. The tenure rights are passed orally and conflicts are resolved by Inter-Clan tribunals. Many women who started KGs on leased land in Palin and Ziro had to abandon after the owner wanted it back. Even the mahila bazaar had to be stopped due to non availability of land. By land availability, I not only mean ownership per se but also the distance from home, fertility, the terrain and other suitable factors which women need to consider when starting KGs.

The other most common barrier to starting KGs was fencing. It is a common traditional practice to let animals roam free especially during agricultural off season. Fencing requires hard physical labor and is usually done by men. So to build a fence needs persuasion skills on the part of women. Even in off season with fencing, I heard stories of sheep, pigs, cows and mithun coming through and damaging the plants. When asked about controlling the animals or fining the owners I heard responses like “Sheep is not human....you can’t fine them...it will be committing sin” or “we can’t let the mithuns be confined to jungles...they should come and walk around. They get enjoyment”. I was stuck by how women had to balance age old customs with animal ethics and there own morality- fencing is not just a practical issue but carries much deeper meanings.

Mishaps, setbacks, partial failures are a given when one engages with the nature’s elements. Hailstones or unusually cold weather can all damage crops and delay ones

goals. The access to easy money through corrupt means among fellow villagers, the pressure to get children educated and similar phenomenon definitely makes one question the course of action envisioned. This introspection builds one's inner strength and resilience over a period of time. As a woman remarked "those who are lazy....those who wear nail polish don't want their hands dirty by doing KG". This remark has layers of embedded meaning- lazy-those who can get easy money, nail polish-those who want to show off and earn status. But does this remark also translate the other way-those who do KGs do it not for the sake of clean hands or money? Do they have a much higher purpose? These are questions which an empowering process will have to answer.

Lurking behind some mishaps are opportunities. In Jorung village, the women had built a makeshift fence and were growing vegetables. But mithuns broke through the weak fence and damaged the plants which were witnessed by the men. The men bemoaning the loss of food for their children, resolved and built the strongest fence possible.

During data analysis, I reflected that social pressures and temptations (especially materialistic) confront all of us—even those whom we term 'empowered'. I feel we are all empowered (or not empowered) to different extents in a way. Freire (1970,1993) states "As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized". I will elaborate on this point in the coming sections.

### **Distribution and Excellence:**

In India we say 'the stars need to align for things to work out'- when they do align something magical happens. When all the issues are resolved, obstacles overcome and



opportunities exploited- excellence is generated. The cases of Rakso village in Palin and Sirro village in Ziro stand out in terms of achievements with regard to growing vegetables. I compare it with 'silicon valley' for technology companies or Detroit for automobiles. No doubt there are many factors and historical influences which enable a geographic area to achieve excellence in a particular industry. My aim is not list all the influences with regard to this phenomenon but to draw attention to some relevant points. The excellence achieved is built upon layer of success with many trial and errors on the way. In addition the excellence achieved is not in permanent equilibrium-it has to be recreated continuously.

Sirro is a village located about 30 minutes from Hapoli the district center of Ziro. It is an extension of Hong, the largest village in Apatani Plateau. People who had no land settled in here over the years. The terrain of the village is neither too plain nor too hilly. There was sufficient land available. The soil is black which indicates very good fertility. 10 years ago there was nothing there except for a few KGs. With motivation and determination, the people cleared the jungles and started more KGs. These KGs grew in size over the period and have now attained big commercial farm sizes. Sirro is said to supply 60 to 70% of the vegetables to Hapoli market. Some farmers have started exporting to Harmutti and Itanagar . They grow a variety of vegetables brinjal (egg plant), cabbage, potato, tomato, cauliflower, lettuce etc. When I went there, some of them had started growing kiwis on experimental basis. An unusually high number of progressive farmers are located in Sirro- Chada and Tatu among them are associated with FGA and there are three womens groups. All of them maintain strong fencing throughout the year. All of them use natural fertilizers as much as possible and avoid using pesticides (one or

two rounds maximum). They are aware of the pitfalls of India's green revolution and are in a constant process of balancing their success and lifestyle. Not just vegetables but they have also successfully launched dairy farm, bio gas , vermi-culture among other things. Sirro has been labeled 'model village' and many people (trainees from Government and other agencies) come to study its success.

Rakso is a village located about 25 mins from Palin. It is on a hilly terrain. Compared to Sirro, the KGs are relatively smaller but amongst the surrounding villages they are larger and has been consistently farmed. They are managed by a group of dedicated women (about 6). During difficult times (landslides or irregular supply) only Rakso vegetables are available in Palin market. But supplying local markets is not their motivation. They have come up with a unique arrangement with the Don Bosco School. The women supply vegetables for the residential school and in return their children's tuition fee is reduced. The women came up with this arrangement after a conflict with women who were managing shops in the market (both associated with FGA!!). The conflict was with respect to price , amount of lettuce in a bundle- I did not get full details. But the women do not hold any grudge or negative feelings about one another and are still working together.

The previous two paragraphs do not do any justice as for a detailed explanation but it gives an indication of the multitude of factors involved in arriving at a somewhat temporary equilibrium. Market access, soil fertility, hard labor, supportive neighbours, conflicts, trail and error are just the tip of iceberg towards remarkable achievements. The distribution of KGs among the women varies by individual, group and village characteristics. But regardless of it almost all women mention KGs as an achievement

(even those who don't practice) of the women. Compared to the population of Palin or Ziro, the number of women actually practicing KGs may be small but it had a definite role to play in empowerment. The women attach a deep symbolic meaning to KGs in their evolution of thinking, maturation, empowerment and women's movement at large. The meaning of which can't be captured by quantitative indicators like proportion of women practicing KGs, amount of vegetables grown relative to consumption etc.

Until now I have explained the KGs and the surrounding issues at some length. But the women and FGA started a number of activities like health camps, social service, pig rearing, fish ponds, candle making, traditional craft, weaving and others. KGs need to be seen as a metaphor for a multitude of other activities. I did not have sufficient time to explore in depth all such activities but they were mentioned during the interviews. KGs are but one of the vehicles of empowerment. It is not a question of WHAT (KGs or fish ponds) was done but a question of HOW an activity X is done that is crucial for empowerment to occur. I will now explore in detail this question of how empowerment occurs. The basis for this is not from KGs per se but all the other stories and issues I heard and saw in the field. I will now focus on the dynamics of empowerment.

**Pedagogy:**

*“ Ramesh told us...I have planted some samplings ..and now you (LCC) have to be like fence which protects the plant and lets it grow.....He would make people laugh when angry.....or angry when they were laughing”*

*-LCC*

There are remarkable similarities between Seed-Scale process as described in “Just and Lasting Change” (Taylor & Taylor-Ide 2000) and autonomy respecting

development assistance as described in “Helping People Help Themselves” (Ellerman ,2005). Ellerman’s chapter on ‘Hirschmanian Themes of Social Learning and Change’ is especially relevant to the pedagogy of seed scale. In the succeeding sections, I will present themes from the field and how they can be located within the themes espoused by Ellerman. Although the themes are presented as separate section, I would urge the reader to see it as the same thing seen from different angles. Teasing out themes does not imply they are separate in reality. Ellerman uses a strategy of triangulation to compare Albert Hirschman concept of unbalanced growth with other diverse scholars in different fields to show the similarities and overlaps.

In the field I noticed that the learning (and empowerment) of women had four interrelated stages on the way to internalization

1. Role Models-Inspiration leading to self motivation
2. Non specificity of teaching through use of metaphors
3. Testing of evolving concepts
4. Real life experience and adaptation.

These do not take place in any specific order but occurs over a period of time. The sub theme of Role Models-Inspiration came up repeatedly in the interviews; as such I will explore it in a separate section. The other related aspects but equally important is the role of professionals (experts –seed scale) and the interest/effort shown by the women to learn.

Non-specificity in teaching refers to metaphors, stories and fables which were used in the day to day learning. This does not mean there was no content based learning like immunization, health hygiene, KGs, candle making and such trainings. In fact those were also conducted but what the women recall with almost nostalgic emotion are the

very early learning's they had –in the period before 2003 (which sadly is hard to recreate in interviews). One of LCC members recalled “Initially there was lot of resistance for FGA to work. Husbands did not allow women to go. They put fear in us saying- foreigners will come and steal (the women?), or accused women of having illicit affair with Ramesh or talk about bring Omak (politician) with ulterior motives. Then we went to Ramesh and narrated our problems, Ramesh told “You keep carrying your basket, the dogs will bark and follow you for sometime and then it will leave by itself”. It was so true, in the fields we saw that dogs left us when we kept walking...we kept coming to meetings and the men changed”. This gives some idea of the training that happened. There was lot of participatory games, singing, dancing etc during the initial years. This non specificity gives freedom to the people to explore and come up with their own meanings. It is better to compare LCC to a fence than to list the roles, functions and power of LCC as described in the Bye-Laws of FGA. This openness means it is flexible and adoptable. LCC member says “I am still trying to figure out what being a fence means”. As the plants grow (women's group mature) the fence has to grow or change in other ways.

Ramesh has mentioned in previous chapter is the most fondly recalled expert in the field. He spent considerable time in the field holding training and meetings. He lived among them and was part of everyday life. As can be seen from the quote he developed a keen sense of peoples needs and was able make them laugh when angry and vice versa (this is different from manipulation). This shows his responsiveness to the people and he was creative. I tried to catalogue some of the stories he told but people said he came up with stories on the spot. There was no method in madness as such. The other person

whom people remember is Matum; FGA staff and women alike recall that he was the person who made it 'sink in'. Being a Nyishi and from local community, he was able to translate, explain, elaborate the concepts in teaching. This reminded me of Malcom Gladwell's "The Tipping Point" where he mentions Maven and Connectors who together with salespeople spread ideas and behaviors in a society.

The other side of this coin is the interest and effort shown by the women to learn. Though Ramesh was remembered more, they told that they learnt from all the people- Kanno, Amit Sharma, Luke and other experts who came; had left some learning in them. Once a participant remarked "we have learnt from you also", I asked "what did you learn". He replied "I can't say". Ignoring the question of veracity I would like to focus on the openness of mind shown by the women. They learn not only from experts but from Govt. officials, Church Priest and other actors. Once when I enquired about the difference in level of empowerment between Palin and Ziro, one possible explanation given was

*" Ramesh went to Ziro and Pasighat also. But Palin people was actually unknown. Such a teaching came from FGA side..people attract... catch that teaching...but Ziro and Pasighat may have poor catching.....they had sufficient knowledge ...what is he saying .they may have nullified...Palin was so backward when such a teaching came..people woke up ...women and people of Palin pay attention...so they benefit...only concentrate was there from Palin people.....they heard ..they appreciate and they follow...[they felt] ...these teachings are better than board teaching(formal education)....they follow"*

Historical legacy of backwardness, a teacher-maven, a community-connector, an interested-student (and other factors not studied)--- indeed the stars should align for learning to take place.

The other aspect of teaching-learning is testing the concepts before accepting. Once during a post lunch talk with four women one topic lead to another and I finally found

myself narrating the story of “Joan of Arc”. With my undeveloped Arunachalee Hindi (we must have spent 5 mins searching for the Nyishi word for war) I narrated what I could recall about Joan’s tale. But the things that stuck me was the rapt attention the women paid to the story compared to my training in the VWW register. Within two hours of this, one of the women met a sister from ‘Missionaries of Charity’ and confirmed the story. This sort of critical thinking, not accepting what one hears, testing what is taught within ones knowledge and social setting is crucial for empowerment to take place.

The last idea in teaching is the real life experience and adaptation. The lessons taught are not permanent. They need to adapt as time changes. The difference between testing and real life is one of initiation. Testing an idea is an act of initiation and risk taking. Real life adaption is one of continuous testing of the idea after initiation. It’s like trying to grow ginger at first and after some experience experimenting with kiwi or tomatoes. It is a desire at mastering of a skill , a drive to excel and keep improving continuously. Ellerman states

“learning that transforms older beliefs does not take place in that manner [imparting knowledge/ incentivizing learning] . In order for learners to have ownership of new knowledge and for the new knowledge to have a transformative effect, the knowledge must be more the fruits of the learner’s own activities. Such knowledge comes out of a constructivist active learning process, not out of pedagogy of teaching, imparting, transmission, disseminating or pouring knowledge into passive students”(Ellerman 2005, 217).

Seed Scale envisions a process of scaling up in which empowered communities teach other communities. This did start out with earnest in FGA programs. Women who were empowered had a ‘sense of service’ and wanted to reach out to other women. They wanted to share their own stories of success with them and inspire them to act. Seeds

were planted in far off areas like Sangram (2hrs) and Bameng (different district) and also nearby villages like Chambag, Yangte and other villages. This expansion has met with mixed and limited success. The reasons again vary- maybe the absence of outside experts or a supportive FGA environment or the issues women faced is different in 2005 than 1997; it is difficult to pinpoint but I would like to focus on one pitfall of scaling up. I am not implying that they committed this (I could not observe the women training others) but rather as a point to keep in mind while scaling up. The pitfall is the difference between ‘Socratic Ignorance’ and ‘Professional Gaze’. The method of Socrates –asking questions and letting the learner not find answers but to think for themselves is crucial for active learning. The questions were to elucidate the topic since Socrates did not “know”. Professional Gaze refers to the practice of asserting one’s professional power to achieve “learning”. This might even come in the form of pseudo-Socratic method where someone who has already decided on the answer and is only trying to ask leading questions to bring the listeners to the same conclusion (Ellerman 2005). The probability of empowered women acting as professionals is low but can’t be ruled out altogether. They might feel they ‘know more than others’ especially if they are relatively empowered and from the same community. One LCC remarked

*“I keep telling them (FGA Staff<sup>d3</sup>) ....that they have to be more professional ...you know systematic.....they should not waste time.....they still treat people like children.....singing dancing playing games.....those times are way past. now there should be order in how they do things”*

-LCC

The Socratic method requires trust, humility, patience and tremendous restraint on the part of teacher to be effective. The teacher- much like the women who practice and

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<sup>13</sup> FGA staff referred here are from the community ....they are the ‘experts’ now.



learn in real life thus mastering a skill –also should try to master his skill by practicing in real life. In scaling up, when women try to teach other women they should act above and beyond what professionals (as of now) are required to be effective. They themselves should ‘unlearn’ a part of what they have strived so hard and long to learn. Their success can’t be transferred to other women enbloc without the active learning part. The other aspects of scaling up to be kept in mind are involvement of outside experts and spending time with the community with constant monitoring and follow up.

### **Role Model-Inspiration for Self Motivation:**

The one thing that no teacher can supply to the learner is motivation to learn. Almost all the women frequently mentioned things like “we have to work such that we can be an example for others” or “we have to be a role model” “we learnt from Jhamked women”. The women were trapped in some of sort of hopeless situation, there exposure training to CRHP, Jhamked inspired them to take action. It was not just the content of the training (ORS preparation, child care, healthy behaviors) but the whole experiential learning that jolted them from their inertia. Going to an exotic place, travelling on train for 4 days, crossing roads, seeing older women doing things which they can’t imagine- the whole experience played a role in inspiring the women. Before a journey could start the woman needs to convince her husband, gets moral support from other women, learns travel tips from previous batch women and after returning she shares her training with other women, tells her own travel adventures which builds the personality of the women. As seen the quotes from beginning, women are moved by particular incidents old women writing her name or kitchen gardens in smaller places and make an inner resolve to

follow it. The training manual prepared by LCC, Palin for 'SHG Training' quotes a Nyishi proverb "Kagey jemma and teagey nyijik" which translates to if you observe someone doing something, you will do something and if you listen carefully what other is saying than you will say something. The training manual quotes this to explain a key principle of Seed Scale process "Build from Success". Ellerman quotes Hirschman

" I began to look for elements and processes...that did work, perhaps in roundabout and unappreciated fashion. This search for possible hidden rationalities was to give an underlying unity to my work. The hidden rationalities I was after were precisely and principally processes of growth and change already under way in societies I studied, a process that are often unnoticed by the actors immediately involved, as well as by foreign experts and advisors" (Hirschman 1984a,91-93)

Seed Scale not only advocates building from success of ones life or community bit in the annual cycle promotes going to other communities to study success elsewhere. Mark Twain (1906) stated "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.... Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime" . The initial training and travel to Jhamkhed, Itanagar, Bomdilla and other places lead to awakening of the critical consciousness. It made people ask "if they can do it, why can't we" and created aspirations among the people "Lets make Palin , the Jhamkhed of Arunachal Pradesh.

A critical distinction between the Jhamkhed inspiration trip and other 'knowledge exchange' exposure trips is the flexibility of FGA to not pursue post training follow up or have an ulterior motives about training. It did not incentivize women to practice a particular aspect or reprimand those who didn't "understand the lessons". FGA continued to discuss the issues and acted as a mentor. Many of the women who went to Jhamkhed and other trainings became inactive or are only partially active in FGA programs. It is

only a select few who are working dedicatedly with a service oriented mind for the community. This is due to inner motivation- a sense of calling in them which cannot be induced externally. There are two types of motivation-autonomous and heteronymous. The field of motivation has been extensively studied by management and psychological sciences. Autonomous motivation is the one derived from ones own self- an inner drive- where the task at hand itself is enticing. The task is an end in itself. The well known examples in the current information society are Wikipedia, Mozilla , Linux and other such voluntary driven software and organizations. Management disciplines before 1970s were dominated by heteronymous motivation- pay, incentives, bonus and other mechanisms were used to make people like work. Based on the work of Daci, McGregor and others there has been a transition from heteronymous to autonomous motivation. Daniel Pink (2010) gives a good summary of this new motivation theory and concludes there are three main components – Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose. I have brought up mastery in previous section and will deal with purpose in the section on equity.

Humans are motivated by both heteronymous and autonomous desires at the same time. Alkire (2007) gives an example- one can do doctoral studies for the social status, higher earnings and also for inner intellectual curiosity. So it is not a question of weather a drive is purely autonomous or purely heteronymous but whether they are in the foreground or background (Ellerman, 2005). Maintaining a focus on purely autonomous desire is challenging because people have different roles in society and they need to balance the various needs and desires of different roles. FGA has followed a strategy of ‘survival of the fittest (purest)’ to filter out those who are driven by external motivations. First the men walked out when there was ‘no money’ , then the women who were trained

became inactive, when there was ‘no salary or other external benefits’, real life events makes the task ‘unattractive’ like this only a select few women driven by autonomous motivation are working for the community. The question to ask is what proportion of earths population is autonomously motivated and for what proportion of time?

As mentioned before, these select women who want to be examples/role models for other women, have travelled to other villages to inspire the women. One LCC bemoaned “...when we go to their homes and discuss our stories and achievements, they do not believe us...they discount us ...may be we need to take them to some place”. In India there is a saying “Ghar ki murgi dal bara bar (Chicken of the house is like salads)” i.e. we discount things which are nearer or known ( many people don’t visit the tourist spots near their home).

### **Building Blocks of Empowerment- Assets~Resources~Capabilities**

*“....thinking back in time ..I see that we were getting ill all the time. When you are ill you can’t work in field, you cant think clearly. Life was full of tension. Second point is Apung<sup>14</sup> ...drinking that all the time we wouldn’t realize how the time went. Talking and drinking time used to fly. We could not do good things. After drinking...we would start fights and quarrel..get angry and abandon working in field....Now I see that I have stopped illness...I have closed illness for children. Pharmacy drugs I have saved (money). The cost doctor visit is saved. Time and money is saved (by being healthy). If you are not ill, then your heart and mind is happy. When we left drinking (Apung) ...then we didn’t have to borrow Apung...time was saved , no quarrels with husband. we could talk properly with husband and discuss how to run home. The time we got we can use it for KGs or to work in field or to keep children clean. There is no time loss now. Now husband is working and taking care of house. He has taken all my tension. If I was like earlier ..then I would be tensed about educating children....who knows I may have not sent them to school also ....now we have enough food in house....I can help others also...what to eat tomorrow..what to eat today I know a little bit systematic now...even if there is nothing there should be four things I kitchen ....salt must be there...sugar must be there....mind applies in advance now....earlier we used to eat whatever was there.....we never knew”*

-Biri Mema, FGA staff, VWW, Volunteer

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<sup>14</sup> Apung- local beer brewed from rice .

The above is my favorite quotation. There are many things which I like about it. For one, it shows how assets-resources-capabilities whatever label one gives influences one another in complex interactive synergistic ways. But more than that I like because, it shows the deep thinking, understanding and reflection that has developed in the women. Self- Reflection I contend is the basic foundation on which the bricks of assets or resources or capabilities stand. Based on self reflection, Mema (whom I will introduce in next chapter) beautifully explained to me what all development (and public health) experts are trying to study and prove (I feel the difference between development experts and Mema is non existent). This sort of insight is not acquired from direct learning (banking education), even if an outside expert were to teach all the benefits from health and becoming sober, people would not act. The public health epidemics of smoking, obesity etc shows that knowledge per se is not sufficient to adopt health behaviors.

The other thing I like about it is its emphasis on time. Time like empowerment can't be supplied externally. One has to find time oneself. Time to reflect, to ask what is one doing with one's life, to ask how to lead ones life, to evaluate past decisions, to understand ones motivation. We all know time is a resource but frequently ignore it. Being in a rat race or the daily grind we don't have time to do things our hearts want. People who don't get time to quit smoking, to exercise or to travel (things one has an intention to but can't) are in a way as disempowered as the women in Palin. This logic again brings us back to the point of all of us being disempowered to some extent.

Empowerment is not a pyramid built upon successive layers of assets but it is the space enclosed by these building blocks. If self reflection is the foundation then behavior

change is the key to unlocking these assets. Ellerman gives a good explanation of how learning takes place for behavior change

“Against the forces of self preservation of the “whole cloth” of older beliefs, there are the incentives to solve problems for which the old beliefs may be inadequate. Change might start in the small, where problem-solving progress might be made by unraveling and changing some of the beliefs. But now the interconnections could help unravel the older cloth. Bottlenecks or inconsistencies would appear between the old and new beliefs, and problem solving pressures would be transmitted forwards, backwards and sideways to adjust other beliefs. “One thing would lead to another” and eventually the person would arrive at a new set of interconnected beliefs”(Ellerman , 2005, 216)

*Change might start in the small where problem solving progress might be made-* sounds identical to FGA strategy to encourage people to do things which are doable; weather it be small or irrelevant. This leads to change in one or two beliefs, but confidence grows and bigger problems and stronger beliefs are tackled. “ We knew we had to keep houses clean and tie pigs up, but we could not do it. Then we decided in meeting that we will fine those who did not tie the pigs. Even then we could not do it. Seeing pigs running and dirtying ...we would laugh together. We could not impose the fine. It took us a long time to put a system in place....now we don't let pigs dirty the house” (Women).

**Resistance~Persistence~Endurance:**

“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.”

-M.K.Gandhi

In the Indian epic Ramayan, Sita the wife of Lord Rama enters a pyre to prove her purity- an act commonly referred to as ‘Agni pariksha’ ( literally Fire (God) Exam –

Ordeal by Fire). I feel the women of Arunachal Pradesh must have undergone something like this on the path of empowerment. In the field every now and then some men would come and request, “these FGA women are doing so much for the community, you should give them some allowance”. I can only imagine what the women must be hearing from others about doing some ‘real job (which earns money)’. All the women narrated how difficult it was initially to convince their husbands, “many arguments” “many challenges” “many difficulties” (they would stress the word ‘many’ in tone and pronunciation). They have to overcome resistance. I have explained how unavoidable events, mishaps and tragedies test them-one needs to be persistent. They also have to endure ridicule, insults and “discouragements”. All this chisel and mould their character.

One of the most common activities performed by all the groups is “social service”-a community service activity like cleaning the market area or public water tank or widening a frequently used walkway. This built the confidence, increased their prestige in the eyes of community and won them crucial allies. But some people do ridicule or pass comments like “They must have got a Govt contract to clean”, “FGA must be paying them” or “You should come and clean our house properly or clean this or that properly”. (This reflects the changing times and attitude in Arunachal where people are highly suspicious of any ‘free volunteer social work’). They see that the sincere VWW who has been working since 10 years, has not been selected for as ASHA (CHW) under the NRHM or that the woman’s group that did remarkable work did not get a loan from the government (which is taken by the wife of a bureaucrat or a relative of politician). Each time this happens they question what they are doing and search for

answers from their heart. I feel this is related to morality at large. Again Hirschman explains this in “Exit-Voice” analysis

“ In Hirschman’s formulation of the two moments of change, replacement is exit and transformation is voice. A customer dissatisfied with a company’s product can exit to a competing product or can complain to the company (exercise voice) to try to get it to transform the product. In an organization, a dissatisfied member has the choice to exit (migrate) to another organization or to exercise voice to try to change the organization. Each potential migrant worker faces a choice: to exit to find a better home or to commit to making home better” (Ellerman , 2005 215)

Each hardship is an exit-voice decision node. Each time a trained VWV faces a hardship, she can exit (become inactive) or voice (continue). The continuation of an act is a reply to the hardship faced. This requires moral courage and a sense that one is doing the right thing. It requires that one be hopeful and have an optimistic view of life and possibilities in the world.

### **One thing leads to another- Creativity~Resourcefulness:**

It has been found that companies which give more autonomy or free time to employees are more creative and innovative. No surprise because the earliest experiments studying autonomous motivation were on chimpanzees who were given puzzles to solve (requires creativity not a banana). Hirschman refers to the idea of unbalanced growth as “the idea of maximizing induced decision making”. The problem solving pressures induced will call forth otherwise unused resources and enlist otherwise untapped energies. I have already narrated some of the innovative ways in which people use local resources under KGs section. This can again be again seen in the next chapter but I would like to share one experience



Once I was teaching something using the white board and when the board was full, I realized that I had mistakenly used the permanent marker instead of the white board one. I knew a wet cloth would be inadequate, some one had told me way back that a nail polish remover would remove the permanent stain. I asked the women if the nail polish remover is available in the village market, they said no need for that. They had a way for removing the stain. Quickly two women got up and took the white board marker, they overwrote over all the scribbling with the second women immediately rubbing it off. This worked, the board was not super clean but functional.

It's not the resources (nail polish remover) but resourcefulness that finally matters. I don't know if they had arrived at the solution by trial and error or if someone had told them. But this illustrates my point.

### **Civic Space and Deliberative Democracy:**

FGA created new spaces for the women where none existed before. This required creativity and social labor on the part of women. I heard stories of how women met and discussed 'wherever possible' before they had built a training center. These spaces created three levels of interaction- village, site and inter-tribal. At the village level women could discuss their every day problems and know what is happening with their fellow neighbors as evidenced by knowing who is sick or who is having food shortage or other hardships. At the site level VWW and 1 or 2 groups members would attend the monthly meeting and discuss how their action plan was progressing or their success. They would share knowledge about Government programs or their experiments with new vegetables for instance. This also provided a platform to discuss issues affecting the

community, I remember once in a meeting the discussion quickly turned to how there was tension in the villages in an election season. These spaces also opened up latent communication channels-in tribal societies no doubt everyone knows everyone else but this does not necessarily translate to sharing information. I was always amazed about how quickly the news of my arrival spread (even before I left Itanagar) among all the groups and its members even when the villages had great distances with virtually no communication and people being busy.

The inter-tribal interactions had their own positive effects. FGA would organize exposure visits from one site to another and people would naturally compare their tribe with the others (as I used to compare Arunachal to Karnataka). Through these inter-tribal interactions I learnt for instance, that in Nyishi houses loose ends of the bamboo twine face up from the floor whereas Apatanis take extra care to see that it faces down, that Adis have extra mattresses for guest and not Nyishis – things I never noticed or which even an anthropologist would have taken a long time to learn. It also leads to less prejudice and stereotyping of the ‘other’- “earlier I used to think Nyishi’s carry machete (violent) but now I know they are not like that”.

The village and site spaces I think created ‘closed impartiality’ as described by Sen (2009). The women brought their ‘lived experience’ to the forum. People think of ‘objectivity’ based on ‘data’. Even a principle of Seed Scale is ‘action based on locally specific data’, but when people think of data they get an image of surveys or participatory methods. I was initially entrusted to strengthen this principle by giving technical assistance to FGA. Since I don’t want to digress, I have presented my experience in Appendix C. The main finding of my experience was they collected few of what I would

like call 'formal data' and did not analyze or share it with communities if analyzed. But thinking of data in these 'formal' terms undermines the community and takes the power to the 'experts'. When women come and discuss in meetings they bring their 'shared lived experience' under the scanner of 'objectivity'. They brought to the table a sort of 'qualitative data' from an emic perspective. The issue that they would finally decide to act on was 'what others could not reasonably reject'(Sen 2009). This would be a pressing need what Freire calls 'Start with the itch...the issues that irritate' (Taylor and Taylor-Ide 2000). These discussions (which turn very lively as I have observed) also helps to build one's critical 'self reflection' - when a person sees a different angle of seeing the same thing or brings a new perspective. No doubt more 'rigorous data' collection with the help of experts would have enhanced the discussion, but it is not a necessary condition for action. The cognitive side of 'autonomy respecting assistance' is "Help should start with the learner's present knowledge not from a tabula rasa" (Ellerman 2005). This means we need to start with the stories that the women want to tell, as such participatory methods hold more promises than formal surveys. Even the best managers when launching a new product have insufficient 'rigorous data' - many of them have to act on intuition and gut feeling. The women are in a way trying to launch a 'new industry' in their community be it KGs or Candle making- so 'rigorous data' is not necessary and sometimes not sufficient (to act).

The inter-tribal interactions, interactions with outside experts from FGA and travelling to other areas like Jhamkhed brought in 'open impartiality' and made them avoid 'parochialism'. It made them realize the differences between self and others to

expand their horizons of what is possible. To borrow Freire , it made them discover new areas where it itched and new issues that irritated.

Betsy Taylor (2008) uses of the term ‘civic space’ as a bridge between ‘social’ and ‘public’ but Sen (2009) states that democracy does not necessarily mean just the formal institutions like ‘ballots’ and ‘free and fair elections’. Sen sees democracy as ‘public reasoning’. In the absence of a ‘real democracy’ in Arunachal (where votes are bought), I feel these women’s group and other spaces not only bridged social and public but sometimes can also be seen as ‘public’ itself. Arendt (1958, 197) states “The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be”. In other words the FGA spaces were a space of appearance “where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things, but to make their appearance explicitly”(Arendt 1958) . And when the women’s group decided to form an action plan, they exhibited power in the Arendtian sense.

### **Life cycles, Iterations and the Arrow of Time:**

In physics Time has two aspects (Caroll, 2009)

- repetition: predictable cyclic behavior-like earth revolving around the sun in 365 and 1/4 days, quartz vibrating, pendulum swinging which is what allows us to measure time
- change –the most mysterious aspect, somethings change - not only change they change in irreversible ways. They change in one direction

and never change back. This is the arrow of time-which gives direction from past to the future. Physicists call these irreversible changes as entropy which only increases, never decreasing- a broken egg can't be put back.

This gives me a good metaphor to describe empowerment. Social life is lived in moments. A moment is a convergence of many cycles in life. Customs, festivals, rituals take place in cycles, elections come in five years, each child one has as cyclic pattern, Seed Scale planning takes place every year, VWW meeting every month, women's group meeting every 15 days, agriculture (KGs) has its own seasons/cycle, government development programs every year (or five years in India). They are like the seconds hand, minute hand, hour hand, earth's rotation each moving but in its own rhythm. Like wise life also have its own social circadian rhythms. Every now and then we get an opportunity to adjust clocks –atomic clocks needs to made still for a second, every four years we need to add a day or add new cycles according to need- milliseconds for Olympic races. Social life also provides one an opportunity to adjust ones cycles-like a when a small child starts going to school, the women can think of becoming a VWW or add new cycles-when a husband is convinced , the woman can add women's group meeting cycle to her life. The adjusting or adding new cycles requires time and may upset other cycles or be in harmony.

Iterations are also cyclic acts of repeating a process but they have the aim of approaching a desired goal. So at the end of an iterative cycle one needs to evaluate whether they are moving towards a goal or if the iterative process needs modification. This requires critical thinking and a decision has to be made at the end or beginning of

each cycle. Government officials have to decide whether to continue program or not, farmers have to decide to grow or find a service job, women have to decide to go for a women's meeting or not. Unlike the natural sciences, the social cycles do not have to be 'inevitable'. This absence of 'inevitability' makes empowerment possible. People can consciously choose to add, adjust or delete a cycle but there are limits to it. Social pressures can give the 'illusion of inevitability' - one should get married, one should have a job or graduate and decisions of the past makes adjusting some cycles impossible- having children implies caring for them. So in each moment, only some cycles are adjustable through iterations and not others-which in a way constrains how much empowerment is possible. This leaves some women in an 'indeterminate' position-neither empowered nor disempowered. There are many women "...I like the FGA program, I want to be part of it but I have small children to take care off" or "I am so busy with my shop, I can't go and train other women which I want" If agency is defined as what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals he or she regards as important, then these women are not exhibiting agency or empowerment. But they are also not in a position where they do not know what they want. Moreover this constraint is not imposed by 'an evil external structure' out there; it is a result of one's choice. The women might want to care for her children or have set up the shop because she was empowered in the past (empowerment causing disempowerment). I would like to term such positions as 'indeterminate'. The women in such position consciously wait for an opportunity to open up when she can pursue her goals- the stars should align.

Power like entropy shares the characteristic of irreversibility. By this I do not mean power always increases and never decreases but just that the arrangement of power

in a society cannot go back to a previous position. Like the broken egg which can't be put back-it is almost impossible to imagine say slavery will return. It can potentially return but the probability is very very low and even if it returns it can't be in the original form. It is something like evolution, which is unidirectional. Empowerment evolves over a period of time. The changes in the 'rules of the game' take time. I had noticed that the senior(1<sup>st</sup>) wife is neglected in some instances when the husband is polygamous (Polygamy is accepted in Arunachal societies but on decline), so I asked the women why they don't oppose polygamy like they opposed child marriage or the bride price, they replied " we know it is wrong, but if we bring up the issue it will upset the men and lead to lot of tension, the time is not right". They need to wait for the right allies, societal trends and other factors to be right for a strategic move. Lindblom (1959, 1979) gives the term 'incremental muddling through' while describing policy making which appropriately describes how empowerment changes the structures that influence ones life slowly.

The other reason why changes in power are irreversible is humans in a society are engaged in what game theorists call "repeated game scenario". The oppressors/ dominators and oppressed/dominated are not in one grand game, where there is one unique strategy to usurp power from another. It is an 'infinitely repeatable game' where the oppressors and oppressed see each other and the strategy continually evolves over time. Peruske (2006) gives the term 'Historical Self Consciousness' to differentiate human sciences from natural sciences. He states that human actions occur not only against a natural background but also against cultural and historical background. The

motives of human actors are not universal and can change even within a particular context as humans learn. He gives three reasons for this

1) Human actors learn from past- they learn from history, from past practice and theorization

2) Human actors interact strategically-they employ rhetoric to persuade but will hide true motives

3) The motives of human actors are occluded from themselves-that real meanings (masked and deformed by ideologies) are hidden from actors who operate on surface of events.

I will deal with the third point in the discussion section. But the first two imply that getting the 'truth' from human actors is next to impossible. When a person says its 'not the time to oppose polygamy', one cannot interpret it as 'not empowered' without knowing the strategic intent. In-depth knowledge about the situation and time frame - short, medium and long is required to interpret such statements.

### **Equity- Walking with Hands Together:**

*"I am at the annual picnic in Ziro and Kanno is organizing a game with 'a purpose'. All the LCC members (mostly male) are standing one behind the other, touching each other and holding one another. Competing against them is a group of women, standing besides one another holding their hands. I get the feeling that this has been played in the past or that the crowd already knows what's going to happen. The race begins and there is laughter all around. As expected, the women win by a wide margin. On closer observation one sees that in reality only two women crossed the line, the group which had started in a single horizontal line had ended up as a curved non linear line over a short distance. Some women runners were laughing and did not pay attention to running, the women who were agile were ahead, other had a hard time keeping up and had left holding hands."*

*-Manjunath*



What does equity mean in the Arunachal context? How do women who start at the same point end up at different points? The FGA program had such diversity of impacts among women. I observed that some women had become ‘more empowered’ than others, they could talk in public more freely, think more critically or achieve more than others. In Sirro and Rakso, women achieved remarkable feats compared to others and women’s groups also had different levels of success. Internal evaluations by FGA also had found that equity awareness and action was its weak area (FGA internal report). How much a woman is empowered depends on so many factors, the number of trainings she attended, the group unity, her socio-cultural circumstances, the attention she paid during training, the distance of her village and the complex interactions between them. How do we align the stars for all the women? Empowerment which aims for a more equitable distribution of resources and power can end up at micro level being inequitable. It is not a common tide that lifts all ships, but a river which is closer to some houses than others. When I confronted people with the equity question in the field, I got many an interesting philosophical response. One said “When we sit and discuss, then it is equity” –democracy as equity. Another equated sustainability with equity saying-“If I eat and others don’t ..it can’t continue...same when others eat and I don’t...that can’t go”. The answer I feel lies not in seeing where the women are ending up but in observing if they are holding hands or not- as long as they hold hands, as long as they come sit and discuss, as long as they see if others are eating or not-till then I feel there is hope for equity. On asking about the ‘goodness’ of transition from community to individual gardens, the response from the FGA staff was “its ok if they do individual gardens and get ahead, but they should come and share their stories so that other women get inspired”.

The main outcome of seed scale is behavior change, but it does not specify what sort of behavior . Lets consider the following statements

Type A Behaviors:

*“In earlier times we used give vegetables and also receive vegetables from our neighbors and relatives .....now a days we have become very selfish (lalchi) ..we hold it to sell it in market”*

*Some of the women associated with FGA have become network marketers. They build network tree of women who buy products.*

*People associated with FGA have become contractors using skills gained. They have started exploiting the patron-client relationships in the neo patrimonial system.*

*When discussing a particular project which FGA did not get since it did not give kickbacks “I told, in order for you (Executive Director) to go to heaven, you have pushed many villages into hell. There is nothing wrong in giving kickbacks, because once we get the project we will do good work. Other NGOs give kickback and do nothing, which is double loss”*

Type B behaviors:

*“I sometimes don’t sleep at night. I always think of the past when I was nothing ..... I remember how Ramesh sir taught me .....how I developed.....I want to help other women now but I am so busy looking after my business.....I think a lot and start crying”*

*“The amount of tension, rivalry, conflict that these elections cause is too much to bear. Sometimes I wish there were no elections. I don’t want to be involved in any conflict nor support any person, but it is impossible. People, friends and relatives force me. I try to bring harmony both before and after elections and its impossible. The unity in the village and groups get broken after elections. I don’t want to vote but I have to”*

*“ I can go to nearby villages to train women, no problem with that. But I need some money or rations to go to really interior areas, that’s why I don’t go”*

Many of the women in the field want to do social service and help other women. They want to be role models for others. This attitude is under stress. There are some women who want to carry on with their lives. The ‘protestant dilemma’ I referred to is a constant concern in empowerment. The women while balancing there different needs

face 'exit-voice' of a different sort, exit the group or voice their concern in the group. If empowerment aims to create a just society, then I feel an empowering process must also lead to moral awakening. Freire (1970.1993, 28) says

“In this situation the oppressed do not see the ‘new man’ as the person to be born from the resolution of this contradiction, as oppression gives way to liberation. For them the new man or woman themselves become oppressors. Their vision of the new man or woman is individualistic; because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class. It is not to become free that they want agrarian reform, but in order to acquire land and thus become landowners-or, more precisely, bosses over other workers”

It is like Frodo in ‘The Lord of the Rings’ - he has to carry the ring but not wear it (Tolkein, 1954) ; avoiding this sort of self corruption must be built into empowerment. As mentioned previously inequality is increasing rapidly and they see others having cars, build cement houses and have other material comforts. So who should be their role model-Jhamkhed women or the new rich guy? Temptation can come in many different disguises. For instance take the third quote in Type A behavior - he wants to do ‘good’ but feels paying kickback is fine in order to do good. There are many bogus NGOs which are taking money. What’s wrong if FGA pays up, and does something. There is some rationale for this but do the ends justify the means? These are questions which the people have to question and answer themselves.

The maxim of autonomy respecting assistance is to respect the ‘autonomy’. Whenever FGA faced these problems it brushed off saying “We have empowered these women, they are free to do whatever they want, if they want to leave they can leave”. Again the mentor is in a dilemma should he try to instill ‘his values’ on the student or to

let him find on 'his own'. Of the 32 definitions given by Alkire (2007) of empowerment, only one by Jackson (1994, cited by Rowlands 1997) mentioned "support the empowerment of others in the community". Is there a moral obligation on the part of 'empowered' with regard to others? Kiros(2001) in a highly intellectual philosophical book tries to tackle this question. He does not conceive power as domination. He sees self construction leading to self empowerment which he terms true power. While a person is self constructing he has to think critically and Kiros feels this critical thinking in its 'sincerest' form will avoid bad desires. As such a self empowered person will not use language, desire and truth to manipulate others.

The third component of Pink (2010) theory of motivation is purpose-which means that those who are autonomously motivated and trying to achieve mastery work for a higher purpose than self achievement. One of the women said "I think we are like teachers. A teacher educates students who become big persons in life but the teacher remains small" Empowerment needs to inculcate this attitude of using the gifts one has for others and not purely for oneself.

### **Seeing and not seeing Empowerment:**

*Myself: You are talking about bringing changes to the community. What are the changes that FGA has brought to Palin?*

*Rocket: This FGA...as far as I have seen... has taught us self sustain....those who have listened carefully with attention to Future Generation teaching... have had big changes.... especially in income generation, leadership,..in health...about immunization....in small income generation...in revolving fund...People who do not see good (clearly).....those who do not see how he was before....for them it is not seen. We know what he was.....how he was? Now he is in what position. Was he able to give lecture before? no not able. Was he able to get on a vehicle?. Now how is he getting on a vehicle. If you see this things the changes is like between sky and earth. For those who don't pay attention....any attention....they are not visible still.*

*Myself: by those who don't pay attention ...you mean people like me who come from outside.....they can not see the changes....*

*Rocket: Yes.....they can not see enough.....we who sit in reality ...like Mema, Aari, Nyaari...[we can see it] ...in some of the basti (village) they depend only on jhum cultivation....like myself...morning 6 am ...taking the basket...wearing clothes upside downside....collecting (fire)woods for evening....having eaten boiled food...we go...mister (husband) what is happening.....children what is happening.....the child in side me(pregnant) what is happening..[without regard or worrying about these matters] ...people like that ...how are they now?.....in what stage are they now. If you see..there are big changes.....*

*Myself: So these changes ....did they happen only in Mema, Nyaari, Rima, Aari or in others also...*

*Rocket: no no...they happened in many people.....*

-Byabang Rocket, LCC, MCC, FGA volunteer

The above excerpt highlights the central issues that confronted me during my engagement with empowerment in the field. Being an outsider, how can I see clearly the changes as vast as sky and earth? The issue was perennially at the back of my mind during my field work. I remember soon after starting my data collection in August 2008, I told Mema, I want to compare a Non FGA women with FGA (I had done 3 interviews with FGA women at the time). She agreed, we went the next day, I did the interview for about 30 mins and then we left. On the way back I was thinking deeply but Mema had a satisfactory look, as if the job had been done. After much more thinking, I confessed

*“I did not see any difference between the women”  
She was surprised: “How can't you see?” I replied “I didn't”.  
“But the chickens were running all around.....didn't you see that”  
Myself: “No I didn't..even if they were so what?”  
Mema (with a sense of disbelief) : “ the house was dirtier”  
Myself: “ all the houses are similar and appear the same to me”  
Mema: “huh...huh....the woman could have sat closer to you but she didn't”*

No matter how much Mema tried to show me, I simply couldn't see.

Empowerment is at the same time both visible and not visible. What sort of mental clarity does one need to see it? For it's not the eyes, but the mind that perceives empowerment. By this I mean not the visible tangible things like 'sitting closer', 'tidier house', 'talking in public' which captures empowerment (eyes). But it is the behind the scene -symbolic meanings and significance attached to such activities in a person's own unique socio cultural settings that determines and fully grasps what empowerment is (mind). To get such a sufficient grasp, like Rockets says one should indeed spend considerable time in the field.

Towards the end of my field work, I realized that these seemingly inconspicuous things pointed to something deeper that occurs in empowerment. It indicates intangible things like 'not having a fatalistic attitude' 'having an ability or a sense of control of ones surroundings' 'being able to plan and manage one's family or life itself'. Keeping a house clean and not letting chickens run around means the women is not letting things go as they would (non fatalistic), is 'in charge' of the situation and managing her family and life. But feminists may see the same things in a different light. They may say such things are perpetuating gender hegemony. So how does one interpret and judge what one sees ? The connections between the visible and the invisible are situation dependent and immensely complex. But it is such connections which is the essence of empowerment.

What reference should one use to judge and conclude regarding a person's empowerment? I tried to use non-FGA woman as a reference to see empowerment in a FGA woman. Rocket suggests a person is his own yardstick. Whose strategy is better? In using a non-self reference, I was trying to impose a universal sort of reference for all

women (at least Palin women). If I use 'a clean house' as an indicator, then (1) it may or may not show empowerment since the intangible connections I mention above are left out from the equation ( a woman might mechanically keep a clean house lets say husband's pressure-which does not show self motivation/autonomy/agency) (2) even when it does show- the implication for a programmatic intervention to promote empowerment is vague since the intangibles are not clearly understood and it is the intangibles that we need to strengthen. I agree with Rocket that a person is his own best reference; sort of self reference. In my interactions with the many women during fieldwork, no two women's socio cultural settings were alike. Some women's husband were supportive, other women were in weak /non functional women's group, others had children of varying ages and many such factors gives all women a unique social cultural identity. Such identities are not fungible.

### **Identity and Values:**

*" I noticed that everywhere I went, I was identified as a FGA person, the women would introduce me to other women as VWW or volunteer or womens group member ...it was as if FGA was the new Clan in the community"*

*-Manjunath*

"We can never know what to want, because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come."

*-Milan Kundera (1984)*

If agency is defined as the ability of an individual to pursue the goal he values; then question to ask is how does the individual decide which goals to pursue? As Milan Kundera says do we never know what we want? Are we destined to lead out lives pursuing transient goals which we can't evaluate? These questions came to me in the

field while conducting an interview. Did the women really want to do kitchen gardens or something else? She could be empowered pursuing any of the activities associated with FGA-candle making, weaving, traditional crafts. So why KGs. In empowerment valuing a goal is as important as pursuing i.e. empowerment should move beyond the ability to pursue to include ability to value. The current definition assumes that every individual knows what he wants but as Persuke (2006) says the motives of human actors are occluded from themselves. At every moment, a person knows what he wants but over a period of time he needs to give a reason for his wants i.e. unveil the motives behind his wants. Empowerment in effect is a process which clarifies what an individual is not only to the outside world but also internally to himself. Throughout my interviews the women said “we have changed so much”, “10 years ago, I was a different person” and such statements. Not only at individual level but even at society level this was evident, “No one knew the potential of Sirro, not even FGA or the Government, even the people of Sirro did not realize the potential, but with hard work we have transformed it”. Empowerment creates new identities and clarifies older identities as people construct their individuality, groups and societies at large through a critical thinking of what these mean.

Identity is an unresolved issue in social sciences but what everyone agrees is it affects how one thinks and reasons through the values a person has. Teschl and Derobert (2008) state that at the individual level though people have multiple identities they do not think of themselves as multiple identities but see and recognize themselves as an ‘I’. In empowerment, this ‘I’ engages in critical thinking and reflects on not only about what they are and do and have reason to value but also about who they are and would like to



become. Teschl and Derobert (2008) distinguish two types of identity-social and personal. An individual in Palin (personal identity-I) is at the same time a woman, a Nyishi, a mother, a kitchen gardener, FGA volunteer, women's group member, a human (social identity-multiple identities). But a person is not the member of a group because ,he/she has a label but because they actively engage in activities those groups represent. The goals and desires of some of the social identities are in conflict with others for eg.: Having children may mean unable to attend a FGA training even when one wants. Through critical thinking one is constantly trying to balance these different goals and identities. There are three components to this balancing act- subject, object and object of choice (Teschl and Derobert 2008). In some situations object of choice decided the subject- so a person is born as a nyishi and as a girl. So in empowerment a person is not choosing whether to be a nyishi or a woman but what the meanings and consequences of this social identity. In Nyishi, they have child marriage, bride price and polygamy as traditional practices and values. The woman has to decide if her own daughter will be married off at a younger age for money as second wife or not. In other situations the subject decides the object- the women may choose to be an FGA women's group member and convert to say Catholic. The FGA training programs and the sermons in Church may bring out conflicts between all these social identities since the values (or value hierarchy) they advocate are not aligned. Now the women has to critically think, reason and decide on the goals, desires , values that these social identities are pushing on her own personal identity. As long as a woman lets the social identities dictate and she accepts without reasoning then she is not empowered. If she reasons, decides and try to choose and balance her personal and social identities she is empowered- this act of 'trying to balance'

gives one a sense of control over ones life and destiny. This view may be too individualistic and I guess same thing can be said about collective identities with some modifications but I won't be exploring it this thesis.

The current literature on empowerment concentrates on assets and domains decision making, self efficacy without trying to explore how all this fits in ones life. At the extreme, they may give social identities to a person in the form of X is poor, woman, illiterate ,she needs to have m domains and control in x etc which I feel undermines the individual and his potential to achieve more than what these identities dictate. To give an analogy –social identities are like various musical instruments, the self –the I, is the conductor. If the conductor/composer feels the instruments will play o its own and his waving of the baton will make no difference then he is disempowered (fatalistic) but on the other hand if he tries to compose his own unique symphony from the instruments given to him and those which he can add then he is on the path of empowerment. Composing a symphony is not an easy thing; the composer has to test each instrument for the exact note and depth (values). When a woman in Palin starts and abandons a KG, but again starts a grocery store or does something else, she is trying to find herself- composing her symphony.

### **Partners and Opportunities:**

*“...if an Adi or Apatani Government officer comes , he is good. If Nyisihi its not so good  
.....”*

*-FGA Staff Palin*

*“ ..it is not community takes from bottom (moving hand from down up with palms up) or government gives from up(moving hands from up to down) ....it is like that.....it is not like that”*

*-Mema*

*“[on asking if he would come with me to meet the District Health Officer] ....you go alone...I had talked angrily with him (fight/quarrel?)when he did not select our VWWs as ASHA”*

*-LCC*

*“[after receiving gift from District Health Officer (aboutRs10,000)....the LCC President remarked] I did not feel like accepting the gift....but if I refuse it will be like an insult...I almost asked him..give us some training..some knowledge...we do not want money”*

*-LCC*

In Alsop’s framework- the term ‘opportunity structure’ is a sort of paradox. Opportunity gives one, the sense of a lucky break or something arising unplanned whereas structure implies rigidity. How can opportunities be structured? Three-way partnership is a key principle of Seed-Scale. With the sort of development monies coming to Arunachal, one would expect opportunities to be ‘out there’ for empowered /interested individuals to exploit. On the contrary neo patrimonilism creates a counter wave of dependency in the community. Lukes (1974) in his book Power: A radical view, brings the concept of 3 dimensions of power; the first is the formal structure and the second dimension relates to decision making, agenda setting, informal and institutional influence. Since the public and private spheres permeate one another, the picture presented in Arunachal is a complex mixture of both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> dimensions of power. As such people in the community have to wait for cracks to open in the structure as if they are in a long game of fishing. To follow Peruske (2006) scene analogy, these are the cracks through which the dismantling of the stage takes place and so that it can be rebuilt.

Three way partnership (between Government –Top down, Experts-Outside In and Community-Bottom up) is a key principle in seed scale. Unlike markets, Government as an institutional structure and is more relevant in Arunachal (though globalization has influenced Arunachal) and I would like to analyze more on how these cracks within

government appear to facilitate empowerment. The smallest cracks are when women approach Government officials like Agriculture development Officer or a school teacher to conduct trainings (kitchen garden/literacy classes). This requires no investment and the officials are more than happy to come and train them. Sometimes the government official posted is friendlier than others. He sees the work of the women and wants to encourage them as much as possible-though he is within a government he has a different value. The District Commissioner of Ziro has become 'a friend' of FGA, she wants to help the women in Ziro but can act only under the formal (rules) and informal (politicians) constraints imposed by the structure. Other times the Government structure itself opens a crack for instance they want to hold an exhibition of products produced by women's group on Republic Day, they are forced to approach women who are successfully producing 'something'. They may not even be friendly, in fact they may have given all the funds to other groups (represented by their relatives) throughout the year, but they are forced to approach women who are doing good work. The pressure to show results within the government forces them to maintain at least a semblance that government programs are working. The women have to constantly be in the 'public domain' and 'trying to get attention' (fishing) for these opportunities to appear and for them to exploit it. Majority of the times they will be disappointed since the values, procedures and rules of Government does not match those of the community.

Alsop's framework also restricts the opportunity structure to 'formal institutions'. There are many informal opportunities provided by the empowering process itself. If the VWW is not working properly, it gives an opportunity for other women to takeover her role. If one LCC member is busy with some private work, its an opportunity for other

LCC member to fill his shoes. These sort of taking over the roles of others provides experience to assume new roles whenever cracks open in the formal institutions. They bring the women to the table and give them a voice.

**Discussion:**

*“If a person looks up at sky and walks he may fall into a pit...if being afraid of pit he looks down and walks then he may hit a pole. To reach ones destination, he has to look straight”*

-LCC

I have presented the themes related to the dynamics of an empowering process with regard to women associated with FGA program in Arunachal Pradesh. I will now try to envelope these themes to state my emerging ideas about empowerment. I feel empowerment is a balancing act, one has to balance one’s personal and social identity, one’s aspirations with life’s reality, family and the group. It not only needs assets and resources but also a willing student and an able mentor who doesn’t create dependency. The student learns from all sources and life’s experiences by engaging in self reflection; he thinks both critically and creatively. It is a journey towards the ideal with reality as the map and guide.

Emerson stated that “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment”. Empowerment is not only ‘being yourself’ but in addition also trying to change the world aided by a moral compass: learning from a role model as well as being a role model for others. I see empowerment as a process of self discovery and not just as a person's ability to confront external forces affecting him/her. He/She would be guided by autonomous motivation most of the times with heteronomous motivation at the background. My idea closely resembles what

Maslow might have called 'Self Actualization'. I differ from Maslow in that I do not think the needs have a hierarchy i.e. lower level needs have to be satisfied before attaining higher level. The needs are dependent on the identity which is constantly evolving . At the acme I feel empowerment itself becomes non-consequentialist i.e. the person does not care about his well being if he knows his well being is in conflict with his core identity. Sen(1992) acknowledges that agency goals may be in conflict with well-being goals as when a person fasts protesting against injustice.

In development literature, empowerment has been constantly linked with well being. If a woman is empowered she has better health or higher income and some people feel this in itself is the purpose. I feel the goal of empowerment is justice and not just well being. In 1997 when FGA started training programs, many husbands objected and threatened the women, if women only cared about well being then the best path would have been to follow their husband's advice, but those who got empowered did not do so. Empowerment requires moving away from well being, a sort of risk taking and this in turn builds confidence in oneself. Identity formation, autonomous motivation and moral courage are the components of empowerment. These are the emerging ideas in my understanding of empowerment which need further exploration.

Heisenberg uncertainty principle states that both the position and momentum of an electron can't be measured simultaneously. In the same vein, one can't see the two themes simultaneously, as such when an event occurs say a tragedy it affects resilience, identity, learning and other themes simultaneously. To borrow Richardson and St Pierre's (2005) idea of the crystal, one can see the crystal in a particular angle at a time; each angle is like a theme the description which I have presented. Angles do not convey the

beauty of the crystal. They also do not tell how it would like from a different angle at the same time. As I told in the introduction, the height of a mountain can be measured and its beauty appreciated only when one climbs, so seeing empowerment as a crystal itself is starting on the wrong foot. In the next chapter I will try to narrate a critical event that took place in Palin and try to fit the themes as they arise during the event. This will give us a better appreciation of empowerment.

The word empowerment is supposed to mean that we will bring those who are powerless at par with those who have power. This I feel, gives us a wrong sense of how things actually work in the field. The powerful need the powerless in order to maintain their domination. We can't bring the powerless 'at par' without some unknown entity being dominated. As I have mentioned before, all of us are dis-empowered to some extent. We need a different language to better understand 'empowerment'. As such I want to use the term 'Isopowerment' to better fit my ideas. Isobaric lines are the lines which connect places of equal pressure on the map. Iso-powerment is also a line where people have equal power. Baltimore is not equal to Palin but they may have equal pressure, likewise person A might be on a different point on the imaginary isopowerment line than person B but still both have equal power. The oppressors, the oppressed, teachers and students –all should try to move towards isopowerment; teachers should not try make 'teachers' of their students, the oppressors should not become the 'new oppressed'. Let's imagine a society as a plane standing on a pillar. The people with different weights are on the plane making it unstable. This instability is the degree of injustice in a society. There is an isopowerment line invisible on this plane where if people stand at their respective points, stability will be restored. Since everyone is disempowered to some extent, there is no

one on this line. Whenever the powerless try to move towards this line, the powerful stop them or move to a different position. As Freire (1970,1993) says “the oppressed not only liberates himself but also the oppressor”; the powerful are comfortable with the instability in society, whenever the powerless move they force the powerful to move also. Seeing how the powerful move, the powerless make their next move in an infinite game - changing strategy and tact for the elusive iso-powerment line. People use their morality as a compass towards this line. Empowerment process is the great performance of this unsynchronized movement of the people. I will try to bring this out through the analysis of a critical event in the next chapter.



## THE COMPLEXITY OF EMPOWERMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a critical event that demonstrates the various facets of empowerment. Some of the themes described in previous chapters can be seen but more than that my idea is to show the performance of empowerment in Arunachal context.

### **Introduction:**

The poem “The Leveler” by Robert Graves (1920) tells the story of a how a war veteran and an amateur soldier had a sort of role reversal when both of them faced death. In recounting the following event, my main purpose is not to compare it to the poem as such –which in a way does explain what happened in Palin during the months preceding the election. Nor is it meant to be a metaphor for the changes happening in Arunachalee society. To me, it is like a sub plot in a great epic like Mahabharat. Each tale or sub plot in that eternal story, can stand on its own. But to fully grasp the tale, one needs to understand the meta-narrative of all the other tales and the epic itself. The characters in each tale were not only constrained by their immediate co-characters and the plot, but also represented and accounted for broader themes outside the plot per se. Their actions in a way were inevitable but they also had a choice. Yet it would be impossible to characterize the actions as right/wrong, successful/unsuccessful, just/unjust, and necessary/unnecessary or any other duality —on any scale within the plot, within the epic or life itself. In a similar vein, the following event represents the broader themes happening in the transition of Arunachalee society and each lens of assessment reveals something and obscures much more.

The events happened between January to May 2008. I was in Palin in January 2008 and could feel the Panchyat<sup>15</sup> election frenzy picking up even though dates of the election had not been announced. My understanding of the events is based on the interviews (of the two central characters and others) conducted a year later. But more than the interviews, my interpretation and analysis are based on participant observation during four visits for 16 months. On my last visit I was able to observe the MP<sup>16</sup> election first hand and how central it was to people's life. Election was not the central purpose of my research efforts, yet they crept into my interviews and observations. It preoccupied the minds of my interviewees and local landscape so much that it was inescapable.

I will first narrate the events from the perspective of the two central characters- Rocket and Mema. After that I will try to tease out the themes and broader issues confronting them in particular and others in general. Though I use the word central, I am not using it in the sense of two protagonists, i.e. they are not the be all and end all of the things happening in Arunachal. I use them as two contrasting figures at a particular point of time in the evolving landscape/ecology of Arunachal as it is swept by ever greater forces. They are both similar and dissimilar in many aspects.

The storyline in brief could not be more intriguing. With respect to the Zilla Parishat (ZP- District council) elections for Palin seat in 2008, the following are true. Rocket was prepared. Mema was not prepared.. Mema had no plans while Rocket had a plan of action. Rocket had 3 months, Mema less than 3 days. People around Mema forced her to take steps which she did not necessarily want to take. She does not regret it. People around Rocket forced him to take steps which he definitely did not want to take. He

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<sup>15</sup> Panchyat system= Panchyat Raj Institutions -local governance structure at three levels, panchyat= village level, Anchal= higher level with cluster of villages, Zilla=district council.

<sup>16</sup> MP= Member of Parliament, representative to the Indian parliament

deeply regrets it. He was a veteran in politics and she a neophyte. He had Rs 7 lakhs saved for the occasion, she had not saved any money for elections. On Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, the phones in Palin were not working but lines were open in Ziro. It was a curse for Rocket. On March 30<sup>th</sup>, again the phones in Palin were not working but the lines were open in Ziro and it was a blessing to Mema. Mema filed for nomination and Rocket didn't. People may think that Mema and Rocket are poles apart, but they couldn't be more wrong. They were neither different nor against one another. But still the "Election" in a way acted as "The Leveller". In the end, neither of them contested the election. But they may have changed course of future elections and themselves.

**Rocket:**

Rocket is an old hand in politics. He is a multi faceted personality and wears many 'medals' (as described by himself). He is on innumerable committees (Nyokum Committee, School committee, sports committee) and tribunals (to resolve tribal disputes between Nyishi clans). He is associated with FGA (LCC,MCC and resource person) since 1997 and other NGOs in Palin. He has helped many people in Palin (health access, financial crisis and other means) and he is a natural public leader. He is well respected in the community and has lots of integrity (never accepts kickbacks, opposes mass copying in school exams which I may say is not a populist measure). He was also one of my key informants and I had the privilege of his company, discussing issues, sharing thoughts and analysis and to observe him closely on all my visits. He was a Gram Panchyat member (village council) from 1987 to 2003 and Anchal Samiti member (cluster of villages -council) from 2003 to 2008. He had mixed luck in terms of candidates that he

supported for MP or MLA election (his supported candidate lost the election more times than won). He is a Congress party worker and loyalist. He had set his sight on the ZP seat (District level) for 2008-2013 term.

Rocket told me his plan of action in front of Inspection Bungalow in Jan 2008. He would not rely on money to win the elections. He would go from village to village on foot and mobilize his constituents for support. I left Arunachal in March 2008 and every one of us expected him to stand for the ZP seat. In the interview a year later, he told me what actually happened. He had mentally worked out his budget- there were 19 segments within the constituency, at Rs20000 per segment would require Rs3,80,000. He would need to hire a sumo and some vehicles –estimate 1 lakh. There would be a stream of people to be hosted at his house (mituns, pig, tea, soft drink, hard drink, local drink etc) – estimate 1 lakh and other incidentals (posters and worker support) would result in 1 lakh more. So he had saved upto Rs 7 lakh for the election. On Feb 5<sup>th</sup>, he went to Ziro to withdraw Rs35000 where he received a fateful call. The person told him to immediately come to Itanagar to lobby for ‘Congress Ticket<sup>17</sup>’.

So Rocket came to Itanagar and spent the next two and half months and all his savings in the fond hope of getting a ‘Congress ticket’. He stayed in almost all the hotels in Itanagar and met innumerable ‘friends, relatives and political middle men’ (referred by the term ‘bhai log’ -brothers). All of them assured him that he will get the ticket, that they would put in a ‘good word’ for him and asked for some money. He spent on an average Rs11,000 per day(his numbers) and all his money got exhausted in the two months. He held many many meetings and parleys. In the midst he wanted to leave Itanagar and get

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<sup>17</sup> Ticket is a nomination by a party of a candidate. In India ,the Party’s central committee nominates a person unlike USA where people registered within each party nominate a candidate.

back on his campaign trail which he had left abruptly but his ‘bhai log’ persuaded him otherwise (ticket final kar ke jao....get the ticket and then leave).

In the beginning, there were two contenders for the ‘Congress ticket’ . One of Rocket’s close associates with whom he shared all his plans betrayed him (Rocket: “ My friend began thinking I don’t have a car, I don’t have a bike, If I can run for ZP why can’t he?”). So towards the end there were three contenders, the situation deteriorated and went into a political gridlock.

In the end Rocket lost most of his money, tried raising money from relatives and finally gave up. A big meeting was called of all the three contenders and they were instructed that they had to resolve the issue and come up with a compromise candidate. They discussed and unanimously selected Takam Pario ( brother of Takam Sanjay-long time former MLA<sup>18</sup> of Palin). Their reasoning was Pario had lots of money (he was a real estate tycoon), he can do a good campaign and also become Zilla Chair Person. On Apr 28<sup>th</sup> , they not only selected Pario but also declared that they would neither contest independently nor support any other candidate.

### **Mema:**

Mema describes herself has a social worker and trainer. She is sort of ‘poster girl’ or ‘brand ambassador’ for FGA’s success. It is well deserved. If one listens to her life story, one would be amazed at the tremendous transformation she has undergone. I first met her on my second visit to Arunachal in July 2007 and even I could see great changes in her from 2007 to 2009. Her partial life story is published in as a chapter. In 1997 she was one of the ‘disempowered’ woman in Palin. She went to Jhamkhed training in 1998

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<sup>18</sup> MLA-Memebr of Legislative Assembly- representative for the state parliment

and since then has been associated with FGA program. She became a literate, formed women's group and assumed leadership roles in her community. First she was a volunteer, then Field Associate and in 2008 was working as Site Coordinator of FGA for Palin. I have interacted with her and held very deep meaningful conversations with her. I am amazed by her 'Pure at heart' attitude towards life, her eagerness to do good and serve community. During my interviews another thing which became apparent was her very deep reflection and analysis of things happening in Arunachal.

Mema had no intention of contesting the elections. In January she had told maybe the Gram panchayat but she felt her FGA work was more satisfying and intended to continue it. On 28<sup>th</sup> April, she, many VWWs and women group members were returning from the monthly meeting when they heard the news that neither Rocket nor others would be getting the ticket. Pario had been selected and he will be elected uncontested. Since he had lots of money, he would try to become the ZP chairperson. She and the VWWs felt this was wrong, it is not right that a person is selected to contest just because he has money. Questions like How can the men surrender without a fight? Why didn't they contest the election with BJP ticket(rival party) or as independents? went through their mind and they had a heated discussion and reached Mema's house.

There to her surprise many women had assembled including Rima(LCC, MCC member/school teacher). The news of Rocket's action had spread like wild fire across the Palin bazaar. Women had spontaneously gone round from shop to shop discussing and came to the conclusion – 'Pario should not get elected uncontested, someone from 'aurat log (women folk)' should stand against him. They felt Ladka log sab katam (men folk had ended/give up/no hope). Palin mein koi ladka nahi hai...hum Pario sae lad nae

ke liyae , aurat se hana hai. (Palin has no men... We need to fight Pario..... person should come among women). And they were thinking Mema should be the candidate. Mema agreed that someone should stand against Pario but not necessarily a woman. She thought the women were joking when her name came up.

The discussion went on, Mema suggested Rima. No, not possible Rima had a Government job and according to rules she should have resigned 3 months before. Mema said she has to think of her FGA work. Who will carry on the work if she files?. She also told , she has no money, she needs some money to atleast contest (namesake). One of the women volunteered to take care of the deposit amount needed for filing nomination. Another woman said she will give Rs1 lakh from her savings. A third woman said she will give whatever is in her savings. Mema again objected saying their husbands will be angry and scold them. Husbands won't know, it will be secret!!!. The women further persuaded Mema saying she did not have a bank or government loan, all her dues were paid etc. Mema as a last resort said to file nomination we need so many documents, with only two days remaining, it will be impossible. Mema's house had become the space of appearance and women were having a lively debate in the civic space created.(The smart politicians in Itanagar had waited till the last moment to make their strategic move. No time to get rival party ticket, no time to campaign, no time to file nomination , all the money saved by getting elected uncontested to be invested in become a ZP chair person).

The women said piece of cake. A woman went of to Sangram (50km from Palin) to get No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Apex Bank. Another went to Water and electricity department for no dues certificate. A third woman was dispatched to Ziro (since Palin phones were not working) to make a warning call to Rocket and Aka –‘ Get

Mema's telephone bill no dues certificate from Itanagar or never set foot in Palin ever again'. Again their resourcefulness came to the rescue.

With amazing speed and coordination the women assembled all the documents required within one day, an impossible task by any stretch. A day to go but also a night to overcome. By then the men had sort of 'awakened' and two persons came forward to file nomination. They started putting pressure on the women not to file nomination. It would split votes and aid Pario. Women resorted, why didn't you come forward earlier? Why are you coming only after we initiated the process. Rocket counseled Mema "Pario is a good business man; Is it wrong if we are in his good books. He has a vehicle, bull dozer and JVC. If we request him..... that we will bear some petrol expenses can he make a road to my village... is it wrong?. Here is my brother planning to study BE in Karnataka, if I ask Pario to help by giving Rs20,000 is it wrong? Forget that, if I am not contesting is it necessary for my brother or sister to take on my fight (Byabang Taj the person intending to file was from Rocket's clan, Mema was originally from Byabang clan , now married into Biri clan). Mema still said she will contest. Rocket said " You will lose the election . No chance of winning. Three of us (earlier contenders) are supporting Pario. Since I have told in public that I will support Pario, I will not vote for you". Mema said "Winning is not my intent. We just want to fight. How can people in Itanagar decide, who our local leader has to be?" The men tried in vain to convince women not to file. The women had a meeting and resolved " We cannot withdraw now. We have to go ahead and file nomination. Otherwise we stand to lose our face and people won't respect us in future if we succumb to pressure".



So on the last day, Mema and Rima armed with all the required documents went to file nomination. Both of them knew how to write but had never filled a nomination paper before. Even one mistake may disqualify them. They needed help. So Mema went to Congress party office, there the workers were very angry with her and resented her very much. Mema resorted “ Why are you angry with me? If I get elected, I will be leader for you also. If Pario gets elected he will be my leader too” (7 months before Obama made his winning speech). Finally one of the ‘moderate/liberal’ in the office got convinced and helped Mema and Rima to fill the application. So off they went to Circle Officer to file.

Circle Officer who is the returning officer for Panchyat elections asked “ Do you know Palin is not in the women’s reservation<sup>19</sup> category? Still why are you filing nomination?”. Mema “ Pario is contesting elections only because he has money. We want to show that money is not important. That’s why we are contesting in men’s category, even though it is not in Women’s quota”. The circle officer got convinced and told Mema to select an election symbol from the display chart. Mema selected a bag (handbag?) because “Women carry the bag!!”.

By evening Pario’s men had started pasting poster all over Palin and Mema was disheartened by her lack of preparation. The youths of Palin came to her rescue. They said “What you are doing is the right thing . We are proud of you. Don’t worry about posters. You don’t need money. Tonight make lots and lots of tea. I and my friends will hand draw your poster using chart paper and pens. We will also paste them tomorrow”.

Local resources meets human energy in unexpected ways.

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<sup>19</sup> In India 33% of the Panchyat seats are reserved for women. The constituency are drawn up by lottery without replacement every term.

So by May 1<sup>st</sup> Mema, Pario and two others had filed nominations. The scrutiny of papers was on May 6<sup>th</sup> and the last day to withdraw nomination was May 8<sup>th</sup>. May 15<sup>th</sup> was the voting day. The events that further unfolded was even more dramatic.

All the three male candidates and their supporters started putting intense pressure on the women , their wives and sisters, clan members for Mema to withdraw her nomination. The women resisted. On May 6<sup>th</sup> the Circle Officer called all the candidates. Mema had 1 mistake, Pario had 2 and the other two candidates had 4 or more mistakes on their application. No one was disqualified. All of them came back and started campaigning. Campaigning was in full swing. ‘Opinion poll’ indicated that Mema will get more votes than Byabang Taj, pressure mounted even more on Mema to withdraw. By then the collective resolve of women had started weakening and some of them were leaning towards withdrawing the nomination.

On May 7<sup>th</sup> evening, after intense rounds of discussion, meetings, parleys which I can only guess and imagine- a compromise deal was struck. All the three candidates accepted the demands of the women. They agreed to sign the deal and write an apology/agreement to the women. The women agreed to withdraw Mema’s nomination provided the other three male contenders would do thus-

Whoever won the election was bound to

- 1) A women representative will be involved in the all decision making and planning .
- 2) Below Poverty Line card will be given to eligible women and the beneficiaries will be selected in consultation with women.
- 3) The elected person will support the women in all their activities like social service, health camps and others .

4) Consideration will be given illiterates or those who don't have father and mother.

5) In future when Palin seat comes under women's reservation quota, all the three candidates will support Mema or any women's representative.

Partners come on board when opportunities are exploited.

All the three candidates signed the agreement and Mema agreed to withdraw her nomination. But the Circle Officer sent a notice from Deed (80 kms from Palin) which was pasted in front of the Circle office. All the three candidates (Byabang taj, Mema and Padu) had been disqualified, Pario had been elected unopposed!! When the public and private spheres permeate, anything can happen in a neo patrimonial society. No more voting. Pario declared himself the winner and left Palin. The men and Mema's supporters surrounded the Circle office. The situation deteriorated rapidly. It was riot like atmosphere. Apatani and Adi bureaucrats and officers felt they won't be able to control the situation. The Circle Officer was untraceable. The senior most Nyishi officer in Kurung Kumey district (Assistant District Commissioner) was dispatched to Palin to restore order (and peace), All the people surrounding Circle Office and Inspection Bungalow were shouting "We need to vote. You cannot declare Pario elected uncontested. Announce that there will be voting on 15th". They accused the Circle officer of accepted money to favor Pario. All the women joined the sloganeering "Circle officer ko le avo...chuuma dek kar mar henge (Bring the circle officer in front. We will kill him by kissing)". Officials consulted even more officials in Itanagar, called up election commission in Delhi, may be a supreme court lawyer also, to resolve this 'unprecedented constitutional' crisis. Can they go against a 'Returning Officer?'. In the end they did declare that election will be held on 15<sup>th</sup>. All the three men would be contenders. Mema

withdrew her nomination. But Byabang Taj and Padu suffered from the rumors of Pario winning. Their campaign suffered a set back . Pario reportedly spent Rs1 crore and Taj Rs 70 lakhs. Pario won the election by 800 votes. Post election, analysis revealed that Pario would still have won if there were only two contenders but by an even narrower margin.

### **Forces beyond one's control:**

#### **Election, corruption and the political landscape:**

At the surface Rocket's actions may seem commonplace in politics and may be dismissed as a grave miscalculation in his experienced nevertheless not perfect political career. But elections are different in Arunachal. Everything is different in Arunachal. There are many trends running deep, which one needs to be aware before one can assess Rocket's action. Over the course of last 5 decades, the tribal culture and institutions have mixed with the Indian state to form a sort of neo-patrimonial political system. Political clientelism and patronage are the main source of establishing and maintaining power. The absence of private sector industry makes 'Government jobs' the only option for employment. The absence of an effective opposition party makes the ruling Government exercise almost 'monopoly' power on all matters of the state with absolute disregard to rules, procedures, norms and guidelines. All the jobs, contracts, licenses, tenders and other matters are used to expand and maintain ones political base through clientism and patronage.

In mainland India, local body elections like Gram panchayat or Zilla Parishad are relatively low key affairs. The involvement of politicians and people is toned down compared to the MLA or MP election. Reason being, the budget, functionary power and oversight given to local bodies is low (decentralization is still 'under progress'). In Arunachal Pradesh, the local elections are fought with the same if not more rigor as MLA elections. The rationale for this is once a person wins he gets into the 'inner circle' of the administrative system where he can not only access intelligence on upcoming development projects, schemes and tenders but also manipulate it to get favors for his chelas(servant/follower) . He also becomes a direct conduit for the MLA above and the people below and as such can directly tap into the distribution system of favors and political clientism. Another difference between mainland and Arunachal is the strategy for winning election. Mainland follows what is know as 'vote bank' systems where they are assured of a traditional base (based on religion/caste/history) and concentrate their efforts on the swing votes. As such many people are not even targeted and entire sections left untouched since they do not upset the political calculation. In Arunachal each and every vote counts. Each and every house is visited during campaign. Alliances, deals, partnerships are struck throughout the campaign period. Money is not spent on public rallies or mass communication but on workers and animators and as direct contribution on per vote or per household basis. The people are forced to align and favor one candidate much before the voting day. Pressure from all sorts of people – be it village neighbors, clan members, matrilineal and patrilineal relatives, religious congregations, friends are brought on individuals and household to influence voting. All sorts of inducements from jobs, money, bikes, cars , contracts are given in addition to hospitality

favors like drinks, mituns and other in kind inducers. The net result of the campaign is that each candidate can guess how many votes he will get within a margin of 10. The elections are won on a very narrow basis-50 to 2000 votes for any candidate. Even after the voting the people are invited to party and celebrate so that they can check if they actually voted for the candidate or not. The whole process splits the community and causes lot of animosity. The winning candidate will black list all those who did not support him and await his retribution day. As one person said “ If my candidate does not win, I will be punished for the next 5 years”.

Corruption has evolved over the years in Arunachal. It started with timber industry, Public Distribution System and Public Works Department and early entrants capitalized on immature systems to make obscene amounts of money. This gave rise to the ‘new elites’. The new elites consolidated their power by democratizing and standing for elections or supporting particular candidates (king or kingmaker). What started as an innocent tribal tradition of giving token presents and gifts for supporting (voting) a particular candidate has slowly evolved in scale, sophistication, sphere, manner and meaning into the present system/culture of ‘buying votes’. People in interviews used terms like “Aisa hi vote dedaya (voted just like that)” or “free mein vote diya (I gave vote for free)” to describe voting in the past. The new elites did show of their new found wealth (cars , partys etc-another tribal tradition?) which instigated the people. So they kept on making ever more bigger demands to support and the corruption also tried to match the ‘investment’ in a vicious cycle. People learn from their experiences, in repeated game the strategy changes every time the game is played in infinite loops. So in

mainland India one expects that each project or scheme will have a leakage of 5 to 20%. In Arunachal the leakage is 80 to 95%.

In mainland India it is a multi party system. But in Arunachal there are only winners and losers. All the winners will sooner or later align with the party that rules the Central Government in India. Raison d'être is simple enough. Arunachal does not have a revenue base of its own. The income of the tribal population is tax free and the income generated through excise is very meager (no customs). It depends on a grant in aid from Central Government to fund most of the state programs including to a considerable extent the Government staff salary. So in order to better facilitate the flow of central funds, it makes sense to align with the central ruling party. The overwhelming presence of Congress party in Arunachal does give the illusion that the state is Congress affiliated, but the reason for this is Congress has ruled the Center for most years. (In 1999-2004 when BJP ruled the center, the elected representatives promptly changed their allegiance to BJP. Again came back to Congress when Congress came back in center in 2004). In 2008 Congress ruled the Center and Arunachal State Government and as such Congress tickets were highly sought after.

Rocket can be seen now as trying to surf the powerful waves of election, corruption and party affiliation sweeping across Arunachal. Initially his strategy relied on his solid reputation and his own savings. But since he was a congress loyalist and a keen supporter of Takam Sanjay (a key politician to get Congress ticket), he had a higher chance of getting ticket. I won't try to figure out if he miscalculated or not but to me

- His own savings and reputation might not have won the elections. Given the “money for vote” mentality prevailing, he had to mobilize extra resources by aligning with a ‘benefactor’.
- Given the tribal culture of sponsoring supporters, it was inevitable that he spent money on ‘bhai log’ in Itanagar as expected.
- Only Congress ticket mattered. No other party ticket was attractive enough. He also had a higher chance of getting Congress ticket.

I will come back to Rocket’s predicament later to further analyze the situation.

### **Civic Spaces and Women’s movement:**

At the outset, it may appear that Mema and women were not prepared for the situation. But for those of us who know the FGA program or heard stories about women’s tribulations; we may dare think that the resilience and ingenuity exhibited by women has been perfected over 10 years. The women of Palin had faced and overcome numerous hardships in the past. The display of their dynamism during this event was but a mere reflection of the collective and cumulative experiential learning. I will touch on some aspects of this now.

Women helped Mema by giving money and moral support. This ‘helping’ attitude grew out of women’s group members helping one another. In interviews, women have told that before FGA they did not care about one another. The women’s attitude then was if a woman was sick, no one went to her house; if a husband beats his wife, it was their private affair; if the house had no rice, tough luck. But all this changed when the women



organized themselves into groups. Now women would go and confront a abusive husband, donate rice to overcome food insecurity or tend the farms if a woman had illness.

Betsy Taylor refers to it as ‘civic spaces’, Palin women simply say ‘meetings’. I sometimes felt they meet and talk. They talk and meet, again meet and talk ; keep on doing it till all hell breaks loose!!. I have observed some of their meetings and if any issue strikes a chord, it simply takes off. My translator forgets me and joins the discussion with full vigor. I don’t know what they will be discussing, but I can ‘sense’ the energy levels and importance. The meetings held on the day of Rockets ‘surrender’ and subsequent meetings to work out the strategy are evidence of their strength. People refer to everything as a ‘meeting’. It may be two persons or 40. It may be widely known or not known. It may be a discussion, debate, argument, entertainment, statement or any thing else. It is based on reflection and everyday life. It may take place in front of shop, over tea in house, traveling in public transport or a more formal public meeting. It may or may not have an immediate goal in sight. For instance reading the event above, people may think the five demands that the women made from men were worked out in the meetings between Apr 28<sup>th</sup> to May 8<sup>th</sup>. But that is not so, I had observed women discussing the issue of selection of Below Poverty Line beneficiaries way before. I am sure the other demands they made had been discussed much before; the event just gave an opportunity to bring it out in open and afford legitimacy.

The way women organized themselves, worked out the steps and took responsibility for the steps requires planning and organizational perspective. This was a direct result of FGA work plans. Past experiences of organizing health camps, training programs and other activities made handling an unexpected situation smooth sailing.

Before Mema convinced the congress worker or the circle officer, she had convinced her husband about Jhamkhed training, women about the importance of boiling water, argued with her Church's Priest about family planning and other innumerable occasions. The self confidence , leadership and unity displayed by women were learned and earned in bits and pieces. Like Rocket, Mema represents the broader themes from the meta narrative.

### **FGA and Seed Scale :**

One would think that, FGA the organization instrumental in the development of Rocket, Mema and Palin women would have been very supportive of their efforts. But FGA itself had a tortuous history. Founded with the help of elite politicians, in the initial years it faced a lot of hardships. There were pressures from local politicians who felt threatened by FGA's activities. So in the past 5 to 8 years it had been trying to rebrand as a non-political organization, to shed off its image as 'Omak's Organization' (Omak is a prominent politician). The staff and women had a hard time in convincing the public, Government officials and other stake holders that FGA was really really "non-political". It had achieved some success in these efforts and was able to withstand change in government (within Congress)in 2007.

In the build up to the election season, many staff had brought up the issues like- whether they can stand for elections? If the FGA Staff rules permitted it ? If it was ok to stand for elections or to at least support a candidate. The senior management was indifferent, discouraged such discussions and was fearful that it will undermine the gains in projecting the organization as non political. Rocket's efforts for a ticket were tolerated easily because he was a politician and a volunteer (LCC and MCC member). But Mema's

action was looked down with distrust since she was on regular pay roll. The senior management had hinted that organization by laws didn't permit staff standing for elections (Staff rules were non existent).

The organization was in an ethical quandary. It had encouraged autonomy of individuals, women's groups and community. They were taught to be independent, task oriented and to lead. That was one of the ways FGA built empowerment in women by not imposing its own views. Now it could not explicitly oppose any women standing for election since (1) it opposes its way of functioning and (2) standing for elections is a sign of empowerment-one of the stated organizational goals. This ethical dilemma also appears in smaller forms-suppose an empowered woman wants to leave her woman's group to start something independently- should the organization discourage her or wish her luck?

The Three Way Partnership between top down- officials and leaders, bottom up- community and outside in-experts is a key principle in SEED SCALE. This is not as clear cut in field. When community members like Mema become FGA staff (experts) there is some erosion of the boundary between community and experts. And when people like Rocket, Mema and other women stand for elections the gray area between community and leaders expands.

When asked what they would have done if they had won the ZP seat? Rocket said "Winning the seat will give me access to district officials-DC, DMO, DTO etc whom I can sensitize about development and Seed Scale. I would have tried to change their behavior. Also I would have helped people and small NGOs which are doing real development". Mema replied "I would have changed the behavior of elected

representatives. They pay too much attention to schemes which are not relevant in community. I would have showed them how to make work plans in community for real development”. Both of their goals were in line with Seed Scale’s and can be seen as a way of ‘Scaling up’.

The work plan for Palin site did not indicate that they will organize themselves into a collective and nominate a woman for election. Seed Scale process did not bring this about explicitly. But the spontaneous display of ‘human energy’, the collective anger at a ‘wrong’, the way people helped one another, is precisely what seed scale tries to do. The people and especially women collectively felt that what happened was ‘wrong’. The reasons for this may be

- 1) They might have felt cheated when a well deserved candidate like ‘Rocket’ or other local people were denied tickets. The higher ups brought in a new candidate who was not in picture at all.
- 2) Rocket and others let them down by not giving a fight .
- 3) Higher up people in Itanagar tried to decide what is best for them
- 4) They tried to cheat the people by bending the rules to get an ‘uncontested’ candidate elected.(Cheat them of money they would have got for voting).
- 5) Pario’s only qualification was he had money. People knew that money wins elections, but making it as explicit might have upset some.

This can be classified as

- 1) those which went against the ideal standard of a justice
- 2) those which went against the accepted standard of justice at that time (status quo).

Sen uses the term Open and Closed impartiality to delineate this. Closed impartiality is the procedure of making impartial judgments which invokes only the members of a given society. Open impartiality procedure invokes judgments among others from outside the focal group to avoid parochial bias. People who felt ‘cheated’ that they won’t be getting money (for votes) due to there being only one candidate were invoking judgments based on closed impartiality. Those who felt ‘wronged’ because of other reasons had a more open impartial view.

Combinations of wrongs lead to the provocation of a mini revolt. As seen by the demands made by the women (agreement), they were discussing issues based on their ‘self reflection’. They had discussed this as a sort of public reasoning. No one collected data on the impact of electioneering, or selection of Below poverty line beneficiaries for instance. But everyone experienced this sort of ‘suffering’ during elections. Their own experience was ‘qualitative data’, the issues that irritated. Better vigorous data would have been good but not necessary.

**Empowered or not...that is the question:**

Empowerment is a tricky issue. If one were to ask who is more empowered among the two central characters, much analysis and perspectives would emerge. When I first listened to the event, I felt Mema was a clear winner. After much analysis and reflections, I still feel Mema was more empowered but the gap between Mema and Rocket had come down. Before I explain myself, we need to distinguish two conceptual issues – weather they were empowered or not? if so to what extent is one way of asking. Another way is to ask weather they acted as empowered or not (exhibited empowerment

or not) i.e. do we see empowerment as an end point or as a process. The literature says it is both and a conceptual clarity is needed in research design.

### **Empowerment as an Outcome:**

This view defines empowerment as enhancement of assets and capabilities of individuals; these assets and capacities usually pertain to those which increase a person's ability to engage, influence and hold accountable institutions that affect them. In terms of assets and capabilities before the event, both Mema and Rocket had been endowed with more or less equivalent abilities. Both of them made remarkable progress through their association with FGA. Their assets in terms of psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial and human (Alsop's framework) had increased since 1997, though one might say Rocket had slightly better assets than Mema. This was especially so in the domain of 'politics'. Rocket being a veteran had more social capital and political standing than Mema. However, after the event this advantage was sufficiently eroded (Rocket in a way committed political hara-kiri). Rocket could not stand for ASM (lower level) and his prospects for future ZP elections were bleak. He had lost some confidence from his constituents. He went into a sort of contemplation and became a recluse for some months after the election. Mema on the other hand became politically savvy and learnt much from the exercise even though she did not go the full length. She is open to standing again (if Palin comes under women's quota) but she would not prefer it ("Politics gives you lot of tension and you have to hear lot of abusive remarks (galli)"). Politics and elections are no longer as mystic as before for her. But

again since Pario won the election, Rocket's political standing might have increased in a way and his influence is tied to Pario's performance in future.

In terms of "ability to influence", Mema and Rocket are not comparable. They took different paths to influence different domains in their social milieu. Mema tried to influence externally by opposing the practice of how election was about to be conducted. She first changed the requirement of getting elected 'uncontested'. Second by filing in a 'non-women's' quota seat she challenged the prevalent view that women should only contest in those which are earmarked for women by government. Third, through the demands the women influenced the "business as usual" mentality in many schemes like selection of BPL beneficiaries. Rocket tried to influence more by accommodation than by opposition. Seed Scale(FGA?) leans towards accommodation (though not explicitly stated) and Rocket's actions were more in line with it. Rocket wanted to influence by his own agency first, when this was not possible he became a supporter of Pario in the hope of influencing him. The jury is still out as to the extent of his success in this endeavor.

### **Empowerment as a process:**

This view takes the stand that the proof of pudding is in eating. So rather than asking what went into the pudding (assets and capabilities), we focus on the taste (acted as empowered individuals or not). Empowerment is defined as group's or individual ability to make effective choices i.e. to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Both Rocket and Mema's choices were influenced by people around them. Mema felt somebody should fight the election, so the choice she made by standing herself was in line with her own motivations. Rocket felt that he should

be on the campaign trail but spent energy trying to get ticket. So his choice was not in line with his own motivation.

Rocket's most severe charge is of 'conduct unbecoming of an empowered individual'. In assessing this one concludes that even though Rocket took a good strategic decision, he reinforced the existing structural imbalance of power. If the goal of empowerment process is to close the gap between haves and have not's, then Rocket by supporting Pario since he had money was not serving the goal. I and people in Palin were left asking the question "why did Rocket act like that?".( some people even went to the extent of saying Rocket must have accepted money to withdraw which I personally don't believe). Mema and others felt they would have voted for Rocket even if he did not have a ticket ("we vote for individuals not for tickets"). So clearly Rocket did not act the way he was expected to. It is very tempting to project Mema as acting above and beyond the call of duty, but it should be remembered that Rocket completes Mema in a way. By not contesting, Rocket opened the 'opportunity structure' for Mema to act. The social and political capital that he squandered was instrumental in provoking the women to act. I will analyze this further in terms of non consequentialism, identity and moral courage.

But moving beyond this duality of outcome /performance, we can see empowerment as a performance. Sort of social drama, where people change the theatre and rules of the game.

### **Non-consequentialism:**

This is one of the major differences that comes up in the interviews of Rocket and Mema. Rocket's action is based on his risk perception of winning the elections. His



actions are based on the intention of winning the election. His desire to get congress ticket was to strengthen his chances. His subsequent abandonment was done since he felt without money his chances were nil. His counseling of Mema illustrates this point (“you will lose the election, withdraw”). Mema on the other hand was not guided by if she would win the election or not. She felt having Pario getting elected uncontested is not right and her ‘victory’ was achieved as soon as she contested. (She feel other wrongs); she filed nomination just to prove the point of ‘Do not take us for granted’.

Empowerment requires moving away from ‘well being’ at least in the short term.

To understand this leap in thinking from winning to participation one must understand the Arunachal mentality. Living in some of the harshest conditions, being pragmatic is one of the core requirements. One will notice that in the villages, children and adults play various games most of the time. Carrom, cards , billiards and gambling are the most common among adults. Coin throw, marbles and others are more common among children. There are no free games, you can only play if you bet something (“.....betting money will increase excitement and you will be serious about wining. Otherwise there is no fun in playing” someone advised me when I wanted to play carrom). Children bet anywhere between 1 rupee to Rs20 , for adults it can go to thousands of rupees (festivals –lakhs). Only wining matters and even then winning should serve a goal other the just the joy of winning; the spirit of the game and sportsmanship is not of consequence. So in such an environment, contesting elections for the sake of contesting is a clear conceptual breakthrough; a shift from pragmatism to idealism.

**Identity:**

The other distinguishing characteristic between the two is how they redefined their identities through the event. Mema always thought of herself as social worker, trainer and FGA staff. She had to recast herself as a politician and leader. Her initial apprehension was about who will carry on the FGA work if she contested. With no clear guideline from FGA's top management, she had to make a choice about her future career. She expanded the scope of a social worker to encompass politics. By being flexible about which identities defined her, Mema was able to stay close to her heart.

Rocket identified himself as a politician and a congress loyalist. His devotion to Takam Sanjay (and his relative Takam Pario) combined with inflexibility to see beyond 'congress' stood in his way of acting. His constituents wanted him to stand for election regardless of his party affiliation, but he ignored them. He could have redefined what being a congress worker meant?. But he didn't.

**Moral Courage:**

Mema and the women felt it was wrong to let Pario get elected uncontested. Rocket did not see anything wrong in that. He was still under the influence of political clientism and wanted to get into the 'favor system'. In light of what's happening in Arunachal at a broader level, it takes moral courage to stand against the tide.

The women acting in almost Don Quixote like fashion bring out the essential features of empowerment –non consequentialism, identity, autonomous motivation and moral courage. In retrospect the chances of getting empowered if one fears consequences is slim. Disempowered people will always fear consequences and not take risk. If one

does not know what one wants, how can we say empowerment has happened-that he is making choices on his behalf. And shouldn't empowerment be to close the gap between haves and haven't not-the word EM-POWER when split explains the goal. Prof. James G March says "Quixote teaches us that if we trust only if trust is warranted, love only when love is returned and learn only when learning is valuable, we abandon an essential element of our humanness". If empowerment is seen as part of human nature then acting with passion to what is close to ones heart is a must. To act in that way one needs to know who one is.

### **Towards Justice:**

Sen uses the Sanskrit words *Niti* and *Nyaya*. *Niti*-the role of institutions (tribal, governmental, FGA) and rules (Seed Scale principles and criteria), important as they are have to be assessed in the broader and more inclusive perspective of *nyaya*; *Nyaya* is inescapably linked with the world that actually emerges not just the institutions and rules we happen to have. In shrewdly planning to have Pario elected uncontested, the higher ups did not violate procedural requirement. Rocket by adhering to his principles of loyalty followed the *niti* of a supporter.

All this has to be assessed in terms of realized justice-*nyaya*. *Matsyanyaya*- Justice in the world of fish where a big fish can devour a small fish was to be avoided at all cost in human societies. When the women decided to contest, they were in fact protesting against *matsyanyaya* becoming a *niti* in the Arunahalee context (persons with money can do whatever they want). So *nyaya* not only judges institutions and rules but also societies themselves (Sen, 2009). Sen also states that once we realize something as

injustice, we should take steps to alleviate it and not wait for perfect just institutions to come to a rescue.(Seed Scale also acts much the same way, once a problem or need is recognized then human energy is mobilized to solve it.)

**Epilogue: Forces of dependency vs empowerment and the deer vs the elephant :**

It was not the first time nor will it be the last time that money won the elections in Arunachal, in India or elsewhere. Should one be surprised that bureaucrats disregard rules at the behest of politicians? No. Didn't the women bow down to men's pressure and withdraw? Yes. For all the drama that took place, was there any change in the election or subsequent outcomes. May be or may be not. The actors were same, the dialogue was more or less same and the ending as expected. What did change? Something did change, for instance I had a bleak outlook for Arunachal before I heard this event in detail. After hearing, I was filled with hope of a better future. As Perusek says "...it is as if the actors in a play, often through the unintended consequences of their words and deeds, manage to dismantle the theater and rebuild it, or part of it, in a different image". We might not know what has changed till future.

**Kiren Rijju and the MP election:**

Kiren Rijju was the BJP MP for Arunachal West constituency. During his term he had achieved numerous milestones and for the first time made Arunachal presence felt in the Indian Parliament. He was awarded the best young parliamentarian award and was on India Today's top 10 MPs list for raising the level of parliamentary debate. He was young , dedicated and dynamic. People knew about his achievements. He stood from BJP

ticket. Congress put forward Takam Sanjay as the opposing candidate. The Chief Minister rallied all the sitting MLAs (and their clients , supporters and others)to support Takam Sanjay The stage was again set for an epic David vs Goliath battle. One person against an army of all the MLAs and Takam Sanjay combined. MP election which was relatively mild in past (since MPs don't command big budgets) went into heated mode. Money started pouring in MP election for first time compared to past and there was a split among the people.

Bolo Raja the BJP MLA for Palin switched sides to Congress (since he was promised a Congress Ticket for MLA election). Rocket as always being a congress loyalist campaigned for Takam Sanjay even though he liked Kiren Rijiju. The Women (including Mema) rallied behind Kiren Rijiju. Kiren Rijiji lost the election by 1300 votes where 300000 votes were cast. He claimed moral victory. I was doing direct observation at this time.

### **The MLA election:**

I was in US and just heard reports from the field. Bolo Raja got the Congress ticket. Takam Pario resigned as ZP Chairman and contested for MLA as an independent. This time both Rocket and Mema supported Takam Pario and he won the MLA seat.

In a reversal of roles, Rocket came out of his recluse, sort of 'retired' from politics and began to give more time, attention and energy to Community Learning and Doing Center in Palin . The CLDC has grown in strengths from his efforts. So he became more a social worker the way Mema tried to be a politician. Now CLDC has the political patronage both at the local (ZP), state (MLA) and center (MP) level.

The forces of dependency seem to be on the ascent.

So what hope for the future? I take heart in Mema's advice to me. On our way to Joru , we were trekking for two hours. Climbing the hills in the densest jungles, I sat down tired, sweating after having gulped two liters of water. Mema who had not touched water since beginning with no tiredness to show told me, ' You take big big steps like deer and get tired very fast. You should keep foot close to one another (shorter strides) like an elephant. That way you can cover longer distances and steeper Mountain without getting tired'. Empowerment and Development at large takes place incrementally. It emerges and evolves over time, as people keep taking steps in an unsynchronized way towards the iso-empowerment line.

## CONCLUSION

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom”

Proverbs: 1:7 The Holy Bible

In the introduction I alluded to how one should have reverence for empowerment. The themes, events, quotes and metaphors that I have used to describe the dynamics of empowerment were intended to instill this reverence by bringing out the complexity of the phenomenon. Empowerment is an emergent phenomenon based in the interactive relationships of individuals and groups as they create and recreate their socio-political realities. Fred Kirschenmann(2006) states “ Modern science, rooted in seventeenth century thought, suggests that certainty can best be achieved through separation--- separating subject from object, mind from body, fact from value and humans from nature. This doctrine of separation taught us to see the world in fragments, rather than relationships.....” Systems thinking requires a holistic approach to understand how things influence one another within a whole; in contrast to Descartes’s scientific reductionism. Since empowerment is located in emerging relationships, the methods of science with exclusive focus on ‘objectivity’ are constrained to study the phenomenon. The various domains, indicators, indices and scales which act as proxy for empowerment study the fragments in depth but do a poor job about the relationships. Rocket and Mema show that empowerment is not just the accumulation of assets and capabilities but it is a performative action. It was performance of an empowering act which contrasted Mema and Rocket; Mema with much less assets and capabilities was able to re-identify herself from Rocket by acting on her values. Rocket acted strategically but not morally towards equity. The various fragments- identities, values, culture, social and political system,

groups, opportunities, economic base, natural ecology ,external factors,- that I have described are dynamically changing (sort of Brownian motion)within themselves and in relation to others. They give an illusion of stability which deceives one to use some fragments as reference in order to conclude that other fragments are changing. But in essence the relationship is changing while remaining largely invisible. Peruske(2006) states “A model of human relations after natural sciences is reductive, and harmfully so, as it strives to eliminate motives, strategy and learning, all vital to human life. Humans are fundamentally creatures driven to find and derive meanings, and meanings cannot be read off behavioral data.....The possibility of human reflexivity “free distance toward oneself” means objectivism of (natural) science methods is impossible” . Autonomous motivation, evolving strategy in a repeated game scenario, learning from experience and others and self reflection are some of crucial ingredients of empowerment. I feel that when we attempt to ‘measure’ empowerment, one needs to change the nature of ‘objectivity’.

The word ‘measure’ I contend should be viewed as ‘praxis’ (action-reflection). Paulo Freire (1970,1993) describes that within a word there are two dimensions, reflection and action. Sacrifice of action reduces the word to verbalism and sacrifice of reflection ends up as mere activism. The purpose of ‘measuring empowerment’ should not be to prove ‘empowerment’ but to nurture ‘empowerment’. Researchers much like the women in Arunachal must perform a balancing act. If they maintain ‘distance’ in order to be objective then they risk reducing empowerment to verbalism. My thesis is concerned with nurturing empowerment rather than proposing a grandiose model which tries to link the various components of empowerment. Empowerment needs an enabling



environment to emerge and some principles can be derived to nurture such an environment.

Autonomy respecting assistance is a crucial component of an empowering relationship. This has two related aspects- the activities that a development organization encourages and the motivation that people bring to a specific task. Kitchen gardens were just one of the activities encouraged by FGA, so it is not a specific activity that is important but how the activity came into being and was implemented. Neither focusing on a specific activity extensively nor providing direct or indirect incentives for a particular action should be part of an empowering process. The other aspect of autonomy respecting assistance is 'autonomous motivation'. Programs should start from people's felt needs. There is tendency among professionals to view 'felt needs' as subjective and 'real (data based) needs' as objective. But as I have experienced in Arunachal, felt needs are also based on qualitative data of lived experience and as such should carry the same respect if not more than those data collected by professionals. Moreover the moment professionals try to impose 'real needs' on the community, they undermine autonomy and empowerment may be compromised. So starting from 'felt needs' makes both ethical and scientific sense. This sort of trusting mentoring relationship between organization & community, between teacher & student does not appear de novo. Rather it takes place over a period of time as each one tests, examines and understands the other by trial and error and in the process 'discovers themselves'.

In contrast to the extensive literature on power-over, power-with and power-to, my thesis has emphasized 'power within' (I would caution that seeing in terms of these four levels (fragments) has its own advantages and disadvantages. In reality, changes

takes place at all four levels with each influencing the other). Identity formation and moral courage are the results of an empowering process. Identity formation takes place at individual, group and community level. At individual level, a person explores various roles and tries to strike a balance based on his autonomous motivation. At group and community level, they try to overcome parochialism, resist external forces and influences. But at all levels they try to emulate role models within and outside the community. As such an empowering process should try to build bridges between communities and individuals in a non-specific nature. The main purpose of empowerment is realization of justice. As such moral courage and formation of values in a person is of essence. This cannot be imposed externally since that would compromise autonomy, rather it needs to be rubbed off from one person to another –from mentor to mentee, role model to emulator. Once a person finds his moral bearings and understands his motivations, he/she can't identify as anyone else. Their public and private faces fuse and they discard their masks overcoming the trappings of 'well-being'. This again does not take place de novo but by trial and error. Autonomous and heteronymous motivations switch back and forth between background and foreground confusing a person. It needs time and self reflection to get clarity.

This also means that we should view people as active agents. They are not profit maximizing homo economicus beings. If we view them as such then providing carrots and sticks would be the easiest way to achieve behavior change and empowerment. But human beings are complex reflexive creatures and treating them as such initiates a chain reaction that leads them to discover their potential. Since humans are not motivated by maximization alone, there is space for morality and for acting beyond well being.

The role of experts/professionals in nurturing empowerment is also important. They should not create dependency in the people. They bring new ideas to the community but at the same time their teaching is locally grounded. Though from time to time they do content based teaching, they also engage in locally relevant non-specific metaphorical lessons in an almost ‘Zen story’ like fashion. These give the students the flexibility to derive their own meanings (and discover themselves) and it forces the teacher to be more creative, responsive to the needs and broaden his own understanding of a topic. It is as if the teacher and the student co-create the curriculum through their interaction. Paulo Freire gives an excellent summary of the qualities required for this sort of ‘dialogic’ relationship (1970, 1993). They are

- Love-the act of love is commitment to their (oppressed) cause and it must generate other acts of freedom. This commitment is manifested in spending considerable amounts of time (like Ramesh) with the community. This engagement builds trust in the community for a mentoring relationship.
- Humility-experts like the people are constantly tempted by (non-empowering) desires. If people are way laid by focusing too much on ‘money’, the experts are similarly tempted to make things complex & exotic. Instead of trying to simplify universal knowledge for local situations they try to package local knowledge for universality. This humility means the experts also learn as much as the people from the interaction (and both of them move towards empowerment). Freire states “At the point of encounter, there are neither utter ignorance nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting together , to learn more than they now know”(Pg71)

- Faith: I have touched on this above, one needs to have faith in the student's 'autonomous motivation', communities 'felt needs', that humans are not 'profit maximizers'. Faith in viewing students as active agents and expecting them to come out with creative solutions.
- Hope- this is situated in the new possibilities that people imagine for themselves. When they see role models, other successful communities or their own past successes, they are filled with hope and confidence to change their reality. The experts need to have a positive attitude and not be cynical so that they with their students can hope for better situation.
- Critical thinking: this and self reflection are the foundation for an empowering process. Of all the capabilities that a person might have, the capacity to think critically and reflect on one's situation is paramount. This is what leads to conscientizaco (critical consciousness).

My thesis being located in the specific context of Arunachal Pradesh, supports the work of Freire, Ellerman and Sen. It would be interesting to make comparisons across their works. I have tended to see empowerment as a 'non zero sum repetitive game' rather than a one off game. This means I see empowerment taking place in incremental (elephant) steps than the small revolutionary hops (deers). The non-zero nature gives the space for both oppressors and oppressed to move towards new possibilities without feeling insecure. I have examined in detail -transformation that occurs in the oppressed but have not been able to the same for oppressors. How change occurs in them and why they compromise their power? I would like to do that using Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Sathyagraha (truth force).

The relationship between autonomy & cooperation has also been incompletely examined. I have tended to emphasize autonomy more in the thesis but I also recognize the importance of cooperation. While advocating for people to focus on individuality, I am also hoping that they will act morally as communitarians. How autonomy and cooperation permeate and sustain one another needs to be examined further. I have also given more attention to the bottom-up approach. Though my thesis focuses on how people change the structure from grass roots, it would be interesting to see how enabling top down policies affect empowerment.

Moving from the general to specific local context, my thesis has contributed to the documentation of the success of empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh. I believe that the Seed-Scale approach and the FGA program have done a tremendous job of empowering women. Their success against adverse forces of dependency needs to be appreciated. The Seed-Scale process has lot of potential. Their indirect approach with an emphasis on training rather than giving resources is working. The policy to send women to other communities (Jhamkhed) has resulted in awakening of inner energies. My thesis calls for a reexamination or rewording of two principles- action based on locally specific data and behavior change. The programs have faced problems in scaling up. The solution offered is more professionalization of staff, community members acting as experts and codification of lessons learned as best practices. I would exercise caution while doing that since there are many pitfalls that need to be recognized and avoided. The study could have been improved if I had taken more ethnographic courses and if I had learnt the tribal language. While listening to the interviews, there are many instances where I completely mis-read the cues or failed to follow up on the leads in interesting ways. The tremendous

transitions that the Arunachalee tribal societies are experiencing make it very difficult to draw firm conclusions and give concrete recommendations. This was both strength and a weakness of the study. It is a strength because it heightened the dynamics to be noticeable but a weakness since it constrains the findings in terms of application.

There were interesting leads in the data, which I could not present in the thesis in order to avoid digression. Some of the leads were: 1) the seed scale process theory and how it was adopted by the community and 2) the meanings they attach to equity, sustainability or the principles was interesting. A more in-depth analysis needs to be done of the seed scale. I have found potential leads comparing to quality improvement cycles and Hirshmanian themes of unbalanced growth that begs a more in-depth study. The management sciences can also throw light on the organizational culture that nurtures empowerment in a community. Theories of a learning organization may be particularly relevant though I did not find time to go further. The emergence of leaders in the community or key personnel who exercise moral leadership and give space for others to mature also came up.

For further research, I would like to compare and contrast other successful empowering grassroots programs like Jhamked by Aroles and Gadchiroli by the Bangs to see if some meta themes can be drawn. Since the purpose of empowerment is realization of justice, one needs to do more studies incorporating the themes of justice with empowerment process. I find appealing Sen's idea of a transcendental approach where instead of waiting for perfect just systems and institutions to materialize one takes steps once an injustice is recognized is appealing. This is similar to the seed scale process where people first recognize a need on which they can act and move towards it. There are

other such similarities between ideas of empowerment, justice and democracy the examination of which is not easy but needs to be done.

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## **Appendix A:**

### **Synopsis of SEED-SCALE**

#### **FutureGenerations**

##### **The SEED-SCALE Process of Community Change**

In the early 1990s, Future Generations and Johns Hopkins University conducted a disciplined review of how communities change. This research drew on evidence over the last century, involved UNICEF, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the experience of many organizations. The focus was on what has worked in the field of development over the last one-hundred years, specifically on how to take community-based successes to regional scale and how to sustain their momentum. Some of the exemplary cases reviewed included UNICEF's China Model Counties project, which scaled up primary health care to 100 counties reaching 400 million people, and the Green Revolution.

This global review identified core principles and activities that created the necessary enabling conditions to propel the world's most successful large scale and sustainable community change efforts. These key elements were simplified and packaged into a systematic process known as Seed-Scale. Seed is the process of activating empowerment at the community level and growing a local success. Scale is the expansion of this activity, both in geographic coverage and across development sectors for sustained improvement in quality of life.

Four principles underlie the Seed-Scale process. When a community employs these principles, momentum for change grows and solutions evolve to fit local circumstances.

The four principles are:

- 1) Build from Success: Strengthen what is working
- 2) Create Three-way Partnerships: Between community, government, and outside change agents
- 3) Make decisions based on evidence, not opinions
- 4) Seek behavior change as the primary outcome.

Using these principles, communities determine their own priorities and focus on practical solutions through the implementation of workplans. These workplans are implemented with the guidance of seven tasks. Create or recreate a Local Coordinating Committee  
Identify past successes to make more effective Visit other communities to learn methods that can be adapted Self-evaluate your community to gather evidence about needs and seek actions that can be achieved Focus on community priorities and create workplans  
Take action and encourage partners to do their tasks. Make needed mid-course corrections

In addition to sustaining momentum, this process extends change to regional scale. Successful communities become regional centers for action learning and experimentation that can rapidly train others. Successful communities in this second wave become extension sites themselves, and so on, creating an exponential expansion of change. Seed-Scale has been applied in varying degrees in more 22 countries within a diverse range of cultural, political, and economic contexts and across a wide range of sectors, including conservation, health, women's literacy, and peacebuilding. It is effective in reaching the previously unreached, the poorest quintile of humanity that is unable to access available services. Rather than extending services to these communities, Seed-Scale grows their capacity and confidence for self-help so that they may reach out and break through the barriers that had previously prevented access.

Field-practitioners, organizations, communities, and government may all use Seed-Scale to adapt and improve their existing work. Seed-Scale has also been used by foundations and organizations as an evaluation tool.

[www.future.org](http://www.future.org) . T. 304.358.2000 . F. 304.358.3008 . HC 73-Box 100 Franklin, WV  
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## **Appendix B:**

### **Topical Interview Guide for Women**

#### **Background:**

- Can you tell me a bit about your yourself?  
(probe where born, when married, how long in village)
- How much have you studied/ Can you read and write?
- How many children do you have? What are they doing?

#### **FGA:**

- Since when have you been associated with FGA organization?
- What is your role ?
- What does FGA do? How did it change you or the community/
- What trainings have you attended in the past?
- Why do you like (dislike) about FGA? (probe; specify things)

#### **Women's Group:**

- When did you form the women's group? Why?
- What are the changes that the women's group went? (probe; number of members in the past/present, bank account)
- What activities did you carry out in the past?
- How do you plan such activities/ can you describe how you carry it out?
- How does the LCC support the women's group?

#### **Kitchen Gardens:**

- When did you start kitchen gardens? Why?
- What vegetables/crops do you grow/
- What seasons do you practice?
- What do you do with the produce? (probe; consume how much, sell; where,etc)
- Why do you keep doing kitchen gardens?
- How does it compare with other activities like weaving or candle making?
- What are the factors which hinder you from practicing kitchen gardens?
- Can you describe the problems you face while doing kitchen gardens?

#### **Empowerment:**

- What changes have you noticed in yourself over the years?
- How did FGA contribute to this change?
- How are you different from women not with FGA?
- Have you noticed any changes in the village? In the community? What are they?



- Can you recall any event in the past that made you proud?
- Have you spoken with a public official?

**LCC/MCC/VWW/Public Leaders:**

- Who are the people who support women's group?
- How do they support the womens group? Can you give an example.
- What hardships do the womens face with respect to others in the community?
- How do you overcome such hardships/
- What role does VWW/LCC/MCC/Public leaders play in the village?

Would you like to ask me any questions?

## **Appendix C:**

### **Discussion of the Principle: Basing Action on Locally Specific Data**

On my first three visits to FGA project, I was explicitly charged with setting up the Management Information Systems for FGA. I learned that in the initial years FGA had done SEED surveys. They had selected health as a priority (over education) and had started sending women for training to CRHP, Jhamkhed. The women came back as VWWs and started keeping health registers. The SEED surveys in the initial years may have been analyzed, but I did not find any evidence for that. The surveys were lost when the office was shifted. The data from the VWW registers were not compiled or analyzed. On my training visits I found that the registers were inaccurate and not updated among illiterate (non numerate) VWW and to a lesser extent among literates. So the data was health oriented. Even though women had started kitchen gardens, adult education class, social service etc, -sadly records were not maintained. A huge pregnancy history survey was carried out in 2004 but again the data was not analyzed.

#### **Observation of VWW meetings:**

I have attended a total of about 8 VWW meetings. The VWWs hold a meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> of every month. It is attended by the Site Coordinator and may or may not be attended by the one or two LCC members. Some women from the women's group may attend with the VWW. The meeting is held in the site office. The VWWs take turns in rotation to conduct the meeting. The VWWs read out their report form which is a summary of registers for the past month. Afterwards all those present start discussing

issues. The issues are diverse and may be anything from planning a social service event in the coming month or conflict between ASHA and VWW in one village or arrangements for a FGA Guest from Itanagar. In the end they will have some refreshments and leave. Very rarely do they discuss issues arising from the registers (once they discussed when there was a child death). Sometimes the Site Coordinator uses the work plan to guide the discussion. Basically data was not being analyzed to guide discussion. This may be due to that health had become passé since the community had attained good health compared to before. Or there were more pressing relevant issues which the MIS was not able to capture.

#### **Observation of Annual WorkPlan Meeting:**

I attended an Annual WorkPlan meeting in Palin. It was sort of an big important meeting and everyone was serious. For the meeting VWWs, womens group members (2 to 8 per group) and Site Coordinator were present. All the LCC members were supposed to be present compulsorily but only 2 or 3 had turned up. One or two VWWs had not come but had sent the plan through a “Representative”. The work plan layout columns (Objective, activity, when, where, who inside , who outside etc) was neatly written on white board. After the initial welcome address and formalities, the VWWs started presenting the workplan for their village. All groups had around 2 to 5 activities. Social Service was a the most common activity among the groups. She would fill the columns on the white board and the site coordinator would promptly copy it in her notebook. Site Coordinator would make some minor modification –“that should go into who is outside column and not who inside”. I probed a little bit-

Myself: “why you want to grow citronella plants, will you be able to sell it”.

Woman: “yes, the woman’s group has been discussing this since 2 years.....we will set up a plant also”.

Myself: “Don’t you know the costs involved, is it really worth it”

Woman : “ yeah we have been through all that”

Site Coordinator “ Sir , I have talked to them very much, they really want to do it”

I was still left wondering, Have they collected enough data? Is it really feasible?

What is the probability of success?. Some of the items of some groups, were the same as previous years since they had not fully started or completed it. After the meeting , they had refreshments and left. The LCC had a separate meeting (I was not present) and the Site Coordinator , presented the plans. They added some items like maintenance of the CLDC Building and they also made a detailed budget for the next year. The plan would then be presented at MCC and where it will be modified and approved.

### **Implementation Issues:**

As can be seen, Data /MIS were one of the weakest areas of FGA. There were a number of implementation issues which is summarized in the table next page

### **Comparison between envisioned and actual implementation**

<b>Principle as envisioned in SEED SCALE</b>	<b>As implemented in FGA program</b>
SEED survey to be done on an annual basis	May have been done before 2003 , currently not practiced
Should start simple and evolve into complex	Started as simple, but has not evolved
Community to be involved in data collection -	Initial involvement, latest surveys being carried out by FGA Staff

Key indicators from diverse domains	Only health, none in other areas
To adapt participatory rural action methods	Not updated except for mapping which only VWW draws without community
Constantly updated and ongoing to monitor progress	Health registers and other registers not updated
Holistic balancing social needs, economic, natural resources and aspirations	Not being done properly
Data to be analyzed, presented in community , discussed and priority set	Not being done properly
Experts involvement in selecting locally appropriate indicators	Not being done properly

The management tried to strengthen the MIS in the past few years. But the main purpose of this was to show “results” to potential donors for funding rather than community priority setting.

**Process Issues:**

The main purpose of this principle seems to be to drive out opinions and feelings of the community and actors in order to present an “objective” picture. But as observed in field, the agenda was set more by public discussion in civic and FGA places than by analyzed data. Another advantage of data as per SEED SCALE is strengthening of three way partnership. Data is supposed to align the views of the partners to the greatest need in the community and change their attitude. As if the “wisdom of light” will dawn on all the three partners as they see the data and analysis.

But this is rarely achieved in field. SEED SCALE tries to do at community level (micro) what government, donor agencies, universities; think tanks have been trying to do at macro level i.e. to view policy making as a comprehensive technocratically rational process of surveying feasible alternatives, evaluating them according to some agreed

upon objective and choosing the most preferred alternative . Community involvement in data collection and analysis, simplification of indicators, relaxations of protocols, flexibility in procedure, inputs from experts and officials does not necessarily rule out the how analyzed data is interpreted, actors inherent biases, exercise of positional power and other factors- which influence what action is ultimately undertaken(policy). As such same cycle of events at macro level will replay at micro level with micro consequences. Charles Lindblom (1959, 1979) argues that limited cognitive capabilities (community capacity), complexity (Arunachal situation), uncertainty (of outcomes) and conflicting values (between three partners or within actors in a community) excludes any such “synoptic” policy making (workplan) (words in parenthesis added by author). He describes policy making as “disjointed incrementalism” and “muddling through” which matches my observations in field.

This principle has undertones of constructivist, social engineering, big push (small push?) balanced approach and may undermine the spirit of seed scale. Daniel Taylor in his presentation says “Thus the conventional “needs analysis” is demoralizing and nearly always results in proposals for outside gifts to be given”. The needs analysis even if done by community focuses on problems and not on successes, as such in a way it opposes the principle of “Build from Success”.

Seed Scale envisions data and indicators leading to action. But in the field the causal arrow was reversed. Women had started taking actions in education, income generation, kitchen gardens and other fields and at best the data /MIS of FGA were trying to “catch up” with the achievements. There is also conflict within Seed Scale since the criteria to measure progress (equity, collaboration, sustainability, iteration, holism, and

interdependence) may not be necessarily measured in the data collected or MIS. Annual Seed surveys may or may not have these criteria in the instruments used. The “mid course correction” in task seven refers to the objective in the workplan but progress in the ‘criteria of seed scale’ may have been made even without achievement of objective and seed scale does not give a clear guideline when this conflict arises. For instance, what if the achievement of the objective decreases collaboration?

“One thing leads to another” better describes the process that occurred in Arunachal. Women who had to take down the minutes of group meeting, realized the need for literacy and started taking adult education. Women who set up shops had to communicate in Assamese and Hindi and learnt the language leading to expansion of their network to non native language speakers, increasing mobility etc. So the actions taken by them can be seen as a sort of vertical and horizontal integration which overcame the bottlenecks and obstacles created by initial success. Hirschman refers to this as “initial small success will then create pressures through forward and backward linkages to foster both learning and change”. The bottle necks thus created were discussed, debated and solutions found in the spaces created FGA and outside FGA.

I feel rigorous data based on participatory methods would be wonderful but the absence of them does not affect the success of Seed Scale. Women bring their own lived experience as a sort of qualitative data for discussion. This should be respected and capacity in the community can be built for better methods. But we should start from what they know, not Tabula Rasa.

## **Curriculum Vitae Manjunath Shankar**

### **Personal Data:**

#### **Current Home Address:**

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**Place of Birth:** Bangalore, India

### **Educational :**

**PhD in International Health (Program-Health Systems)** **August 2010**  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health  
Baltimore, USA

Dissertation; Dynamics of Empowerment: Identity, Capabilities, Civic Spaces and  
Autonomy respecting Assistance in Arunachal Pradesh.

**Master of Health Administration** **May 2003**  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
Mumbai, India

Thesis: Cost and Non cost-effectiveness of Revised National Tuberculosis Control  
Program: A Study of Select Centers in Two Cities

**Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS)** **April 1999**  
Bangalore University  
Bangalore, India



## **Work Experience:**

### **Department of International Health, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health,**

September 2005 to October 2009

*Teaching Assistant for following courses*

Microeconomics I and II , 1st and 2nd terms in 2005 and 2006, 1st term in 2009

Case Studies in Primary Health Care-, 3rd term 2006,

Managing Health Services Organization 1st Term in 2009

Approaches to managing health services organizations 1st term in 2009

- Clarified doubts and guided students in the respective courses
- Updated course syllabus, addressed student queries and coordinated with guest lectures for sessions.
- Updated course plus website
- Graded exams and finalized grades of students for Registrar office.

### **Future Generations, March 2007 to March 2009**

*MIS Consultant*

- Set up MIS for organization
- Trained the staff in computer skills, data flow, qualitative methods and survey techniques.
- Lead the organization in its Kitchen Gardens project
- Assisted in other incidental matters affecting organization like analysis of data, fund raising, report writing, arranging meetings of Board of Directors etc.

### **Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, January 2001 to August 2007**

*Research Assistant*

- Reviewed abstracts and articles on chronic maintenance therapy and treatment of acute exacerbations in cystic fibrosis.
- Assisted in the development of data extraction forms
- Extracted and complied data from published articles into the pre determined format.
- Reported findings to the Guidelines review Committee

### **Academy for Education Development: September 2006 to March 2007**

*Consultant*

- Searched using key terms in Pubmed, Scopus and Web of Science databases.
- Literature review of childhood blindness disease burden.
- Compiled findings of economic evaluation of interventions to address childhood blindness diseases.
- Presented and reported the findings to the AED team .

### **Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, May 2004 to August 2005**

*Regional Manager-STI*

- Implemented the Sexually Transmitted Infections component of Project SANKALP (Scaling up HIV Prevention in Karnataka)

- Coordinated with various stakeholders such as partner NGOs, local governments and medical colleges
- Trained doctors in syndromic case management and STI strategy
- Set up STI clinics and a referral system to provide quality STI care
- Provided technical assistance to NGOs

**State Health Resource Center, Raipur, India.** April 2004

*Consultant*

- Conducted a study on profiling of the private sector in two taluks of Chattisgarh as part of a pilot project to establish public-private partnerships (PPP)
- Authored the background document for the workshop on PPP in Raipur
- Coordinated a workshop on Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) II Planning for Chattisgarh State.

**Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad,** May 2003 to March 2004

*Trainee Academic Associate*

- Assisted in program on ‘Management Development Capacity of State/District Level Administrators and Managers in Health Services, Chattisgarh’
- Evaluated the effectiveness of the above program in field.
- Assisted in writing grants, scientific abstracts and project reports.
- Wrote manuscripts for publication in peer reviewed journals.
- Compiled and analyzed data

**Community Health Cell, Bangalore, India** , January 2001 to March 2001

*Project Assistant*

- Assisted in a research project entitled “ A pilot study on the Quality of care in Indian Population Project VIII in Bangalore” in terms of designing data collection instruments, data collection and analysis.

**Research Experience:**

**Kitchen Gardens in Arunachal Pradesh: Using Capability Approach to explore linkages between food security, women’s empowerment and sustainable development**

Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

**Exploring Synergies between Empowerment and Gender and Comprehensive Primary Health Care in three tribal districts of Arunachal Pradesh,**

Future Generations Arunachal

**Systematic review of evidence for treatment of Acute Exacerbations in Cystic Fibrosis,** Department of Internal Medicine and Health Sciences Informatics, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

**Economic Evaluation of childhood blindness Interventions,**

Academy for Educational Development

**Systematic review of evidence of chronic maintenance therapy in Cystic Fibrosis**  
**Department of Internal Medicine and Health Sciences Informatics,**  
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

**Assessment of Active Management of Third Stage of Labor in Honduras**  
Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

**Cost and Non cost-effectiveness of Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program:  
A Study of Select Centers in Two Cities,**  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences

**ADDITIONAL TRAINING AND CERTIFICATIONS:**

**Sexually Transmitted Infections capacity Building Workshop**  
Family Health International ,WHO and Avahan-India AIDS Initiative  
Workshop for managers of STI programs.

**Basic Issues in Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV /AIDS**  
Indian Canadian HIV AIDS Project  
CME program on STI and HIV/AIDS

**Economic Analysis and Economic Environment and Policy I**  
Indian Institute of Management  
Credited the Microeconomics and Macroeconomic courses taught to MBA  
students at Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad

**Data Analysis in Social Sciences**  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
Advanced skills training in SPSS statistical software and research methodology.

**Clinical Internship:** Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Medical College Hospital, Bangalore India &  
K.C. General Hospital, Bangalore, India

**Internships (as part of MHA course):**

- **APNALAYA**, a NGO based in Mumbai. Conducted a survey to assess the socio-economic status and health needs of the people living in Shivaji Nagar slum.
- **Public Health Department of Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM)**. Studied the functioning of health department of MCGM in terms of its divisions, mandate, organizational structure and constraints facing the department .
- **BAIF Development Research Foundation, Pune**. Carried out three concurrent evaluation studies of District Action Plan of Satara-an initiative under the Sector Investment Program supported by the European Commission
- **Directorate of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Karnataka**. Studied departmental activities at multiple levels. Reviewed the Health Management Information System of the department and made recommendations

- **Community Health Cell (Block Placement):** Evaluated the implementation Health Inter-network Project of WHO. Prepared posters for No Tobacco Day and coordinated public rally for the same. Assisted in Life Skills Program of the NGO. Presented on Strategic Management for NGOs.

### **Publications:**

1. Frick K, Clement L R and **Shankar M** , ‘Screening for refractive error and fitting with spectacles in rural and urban India: Cost-effectiveness’. Ophthalmic Epidemiology 2009 Nov-Dec; 16(6)
2. Frick K and **Shankar M** . Report on “Economic Evaluation of Childhood Blindness Interventions” Draft copy Submitted to Academy for Educational Development.
3. Mavalankar D and **Shankar M**, “Sanitation and Water: The forgotten Infrastructure” In: India Infrastructure Report 2004, Ensuring Value for Money. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; 2004. p 314-321
4. Robinson KR, Agarwal RK, **Shankar M**, Cheung T, Kisalu A, Yi SS, Yu KJ et al, ‘Review of Evidence for the Pulmonary Guidelines Committee of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation: Chronic Maintenance Therapy’ Draft Report . 28th August 2006.
5. Robinson KR, Saldanha I, **Shankar M**, Odelola AO, Sengupta S et al, ‘Review of Evidence for the Pulmonary Guidelines Committee of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation: Treatment of Acute Exacerbations’ Draft Report . 05th December 2007
6. **Shankar M**, "Kitchen Gardens: Raising Women’s Empowerment in Northeast India" Future Generations Autumn 2009 Newsletter

### **PRESENTATIONS**

1. Mavalankar D, **Shankar M** and Maheshwari S, “Human Resource Issues in Maternal Health: Delivering Effective Emergency Obstetric Care” American Public Health Association’s Annual conference Public Health and Environment was presented in Washington DC on November 9th 2004. (Oral)
2. Resource Person for Special Session of “National Youth Parliament on HIV and AIDS” held in New Delhi, India on November 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 2005.

## **GRANTS :**

### **CLF Innovation Grant**

Agency: Center for a Livable Future, Johns Hopkins University  
Project Title: Kitchen Gardens in Arunachal Pradesh: Using Capability Approach to explore linkages between food security, women's empowerment and sustainable development,  
Role: Principal Investigator  
Amount Awarded: \$17,800  
Date Awarded: 10/2007,

### **New Research and Research Training in Comprehensive Primary Health Care**

Agency: Teasdale Corti University of Ottawa  
Project Title: Exploring Synergies between Empowerment and Gender and Comprehensive Primary Health Care in three tribal districts of Arunachal Pradesh,,  
Role: Principal Investigator  
Amount Awarded: CAD17,200  
Date Awarded: 07/2008

### **NVIDIA Community Grant**

Agency: NVIDIA Foundation  
Project Title: Scaling up Environmental Awareness Campaigns in schools of Arunachal Pradesh  
Role: Project Manager  
Amount Awarded: \$4000  
Date Awarded: 06/2007

## **Honors and Awards:**

1. Center for a Livable Future's Eating for Future Pre-doctoral Fellow 2008-09
2. The Baker Reinke Taylor Scholarship in International Health 2008-09
3. The Cynthia and Robert Lawrence Scholarship Award 2006-2007
4. Johnson and Johnson Community Healthcare Scholar 2006-2008
5. The R.D.Sethna Scholarship Award 2005-2006
6. The Ratan Tata Travel Grant 2005
7. Secured 905<sup>th</sup> Rank in Common Entrance Test 1994 for admissions to Medical Colleges from over 100,000 students across the state of Karnataka
8. Award for securing highest marks in Physics at college.
9. National Cadet Corps A certificate
10. Numerous prizes in college wide sports and cultural events(Quiz, Dumb Charades, Mad Ads).

**Languages:**

English (Read: Excellent; Write: Excellent; Speak: Excellent)  
Kannada(Read: Excellent; Write: Excellent; Speak: Excellent)  
Hindi (Read: Good; Write: Fair; Speak: Excellent)

**Volunteer:**

Clinic Coordinator at Margaret Comstock Memorial Health fair at Maryland Correctional Institute, Hagestown MD

Immunizer in Polio Eradication drive- National Immunization Day 1997 and 1998 at Bangalore, India.

Community Volunteer in Water Supply Scheme to Beedganahalli Village in Kolar, India under National Service Scheme.

Donor at Blood Donation Drives in Bangalore and Ahmedabad.

**References:**

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