THE KNOWLEDGE INTERFACES OF DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL - THE CASE OF NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS

By

Anett Kalvin-Toth

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Supervisors: Daniel Monterescu

Don Kalb

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to offer an ethnographic description of the various effects and local configurations of shifting development programs and policies in Nepal. By focusing on the case of recently introduced nutrition intervention programs in the country, I discuss the implications of the shift from welfare-type, state-centered development programs to decentralized, market-led approaches to development. To reveal the various ways of how macro-level changes embed within local livelihoods and knowledge systems, I will introduce the notion of knowledge interfaces that connects the political-economic and governmentality approaches to neoliberal development, but goes beyond the reductive framework of dominance and resistance. Drawing on this concept I will show the various possibilities and constraints that nutrition interventions have opened up, and through my ethnographic analysis I will illustrate the various ways that people navigate within these. I will argue that to fully understand present knowledge interfaces of development, they have to be seen as not only influenced by global level forces but also by previous local-level configurations of development programs. Knowledge interfaces when seen as situated on a continuum can introduce a wider variety of aspects to the analysis of development encounters that I will illustrate through a case study of a rural community in Jitpurphedi.

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1. Introduction

Nepal, among other countries in the Third World currently faces a paradox of international development policies. Despite the fact, that the country has been intensively targeted by foreign aids and interventions since the 1950s, it is still one of the most underdeveloped and undernourished country in the world. (Hindman 2002) Simultaneously, the international development community also came to realize the failure of their previous food security and agricultural development programs and came to the conclusion that hunger and undernourishment in developing countries cannot be solved by aiding a certain amount of food and increasing agricultural production only. Instead, as the now widely held consensus goes, one has to focus not on the inadequate quantity of food, but the inadequate quality of diets, such as the unbalanced intake of different micro-, macro nutrients and vitamins. (Ecker, Bresinger, and Pauw Karl 2011; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2012; World Health Organization 2013; UNICEF and The World Bank Group 2013; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2013)

Therefore in the past few years the issue of nutrition has gathered a renewed political interest among multilateral agencies and international actors have come up with refashioned development programs, which emphasizes the need to move from welfare-type food aids towards more sustainable solutions based on the social and financial empowerment of locals. According to this, local people are being offered trainings and education in healthy, nutritious food and lifestyle, as well as entrepreneurship trainings and micro-credits to be able to rationally (re)design their agricultural production, food consumption and behavior according to the

scientific rationales of nutrition interventions. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2013:23; UNICEF and The World Bank Group 2013:23–24)

Drawing on the notion of knowledge interfaces, the thesis ethnographically details the implications of these empowerment programs and investigates how the above mentioned shift in development discourse and practice materializes on the local level of development encounters and affects the life and livelihoods of Nepali farmers. The notion of knowledge interfaces refer to those encounters where global forces are getting incorporated into the life-worlds of locals, creating new ways by which "people categorize, code, process and impute meaning to their experiences" (Long 2001:189) These global forces are political, economic, as well as ideological, as I am going to illustrate it in my literature review, drawing on political-economic and governmentality approaches to neoliberal development. With the help of knowledge interfaces I will connect these two theoretical perspectives and introduce a more ethnographically informed and agency oriented approach that goes beyond the reductive framework of dominance and resistance.

As I will argue, in order to ethnographically grasp the shifting realities of development programs, it is more productive to analyze not only its present configurations, or interfaces, but also how present and past knowledge interfaces are related to and affect each other. Knowledge interfaces, when conceived not only as an ethnographic snapshot, but as a continuum of local and global configurations, can introduce a new analytical aspect to the ethnographies of international development, that incorporates both structure, time and path dependency to the analysis.

To address these issues I will outline Nepal's history of development and foreign influence in the third chapter of the thesis, which will also contain the insights of some selected

ethnographies from Nepal, which I have found relevant in terms of my ethnographic chapter. After I have discussed these and briefly introduced the development discourse of nutrition interventions as well, in the ethnographic chapter of my thesis I will illustrate how the macro-level tendencies are folded into the everyday lives of locals, creating a complex field of possibilities and constraints within which the subjects of development have to navigate. My ethnographic data is based on my participant observation, informal interviews, conversations and questionnaire among the people of a small rural community in Nepal, Jitpurphedi. I will detail here how nutrition is embedded in a diverse set of interconnected domains, such as women empowerment, agricultural practices, market relations, microcredit, education, and traditional beliefs, since "what people eat, what they grow, how they trade, who they turn to in need, are linked issues, and underpinned by social norms and actions, and susceptible to external influences" (Pottier 1999:26) In my concluding chapter I will reflect on the recent catastrophic events in Nepal, and discuss how the disastrous earthquake, which hit the country in April has affected the already vulnerable rural areas of the country, creating disruptions in the knowledge interfaces of development programs.

2. Theoretical Framework

The shift from welfare-type food aids to nutrition interventions in Nepal are part of that global change in development practices and policies that marks a decisive shift from state-led to market-led approaches to development. Nutrition interventions emerged from those set of incentives of the international development community in the late 1970s, which, realizing the "undesirable consequences" of the economic growth models of the 1950-1960s, started to focus on issues of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. (Escobar 1995:80; Fujikura 1996:298; Edelman and Haugerud 2005:41; Ferguson 1997:164) The solution to these problems of the Third World were to be solved by sweeping away top-down, state-centered planning, and implementing participatory forms of development by incorporating the needs, political demands and local knowledge of the poor, marginal and disempowered. (Henkel and Stirrat 2001) In practice, empowering local people, decentralizing power, maximizing employment, alleviating poverty and inequality were seen as best be advanced by "liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" and "ensuring access of the poor, usually small rural producers, to the means of production, the market, the financial systems, and technical knowledge" (Skerry, Moran, and Calavan 1992:178; Harvey 2005:2–3)

All these components together are constituting the political-economic background of nutrition interventions, which can be best characterized as a participatory form of neoliberal development. Neoliberal development has been exhaustively critiqued and assessed in existing anthropological literature, approaching the topic from two main theoretical perspectives as noted by Tejaswini Ganti in his review on the uses of neoliberalism. (Ganti 2014). The first is concerned with the effect of neoliberal macroeconomic policies on the livelihoods and social

reproduction of people, such as economic liberalization, privatization, the emergence of microcredit programs, or structural adjustment programs. The second one is focusing more on the ideology of neoliberalism and addresses how its values of entrepreneurialism, individualism and economic rationality shapes the subjectivities of people. As I will argue both of these aspects are relevant to understand and frame nutrition interventions, but they are insufficient to incorporate agency into the discussion. Therefore after I review the relevant literature, I will introduce the notion of knowledge interfaces into my analysis, to show how "the objectives, logics, ideologies and rules of neoliberal development are folded into and appropriated by contemporary local communities" (Kalb 2006: 581), and the nuanced ways by which people transform, negotiate, adopt or resist these forces.

2.1. Neoliberal Development

According to David Harvey, the main axiom of contemporary neoliberalism is that

> *human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (...) It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market.* (2005: 2-3)

This quotation captures the essence of neoliberal development ideology and practice, which is composed of the continuous domination of market based solutions within development, the retrenchment of the role of the state and the forging of autonomous, entrepreneurial, and responsibilized individual subjectivities. Anthropologist have been critically addressing these issues, usually drawing on a Marxist theoretical paradigm or a Foucauldian framework. The first

set of literatures have been successfully documented the various and subtle effects of neoliberal economic policies and economic restructuring on the livelihoods and social reproductions of local people at remote sites of the world. These accounts have drawn attention to the rising or persisting level of inequalities within and across nations as the results of primitive accumulation, or the international debt regime. (Sanyal 2007; McMichael 2008)

In terms of nutrition interventions Marxist approaches to neoliberal development are particularly fruitful from two aspects. On the one hand, they illuminate those global structural and political-economic forces that shapes the local formulations of interventions. According to this, nutrition interventions have to be understood in the historical context of the global "food aid regime" before the 1970s and the output oriented chemical farming of the Green Revolution. (McMichael 2008: 69-85; 106-108) McMichael in his book *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective* shows how the food-aid program of the United States in the postwar era created a food-dependency in Third World countries, resulting in the replacement of traditional peasant foods by "wage foods", in the vulnerable condition of peasant agriculture, rural poverty, and rural marginalization. As the author shows, after the Second World War, the United States started to export its surplus grains to Third World countries, which have resulted on the one hand in the declining prices and consumption of traditional peasant foods, which have undermined the livelihoods of peasants and in the systematic favor of the rapidly growing urban population on the other, which received the majority of the imported cheap food instead of the politically "insignificant" rural population. (McMichael 2008: 81)

Food-aid therefore left the rural population in a vulnerable position, and in persistent poverty, to which multilateral development agencies answered with poverty alleviation

programs, that channeled credit to smallholding peasants. But as McMichael shows, credit programs ended up supporting the more powerful rural operators, and forced peasants indirectly into commercial cropping at the expense of basic food farming, thus undermining their main form of subsistence, household food production. (83) The Green Revolution has been also reached Nepal in the 1960s, promoting the production of high-yielding varieties of hybrid seeds, especially macro-nutrient yields to produce wage foods for urban customers. (McMichael 2008:78–79; Rankin 2004:166) The focus on the production of macro-nutrients yields on the one hand have eliminated the production of traditional leafy greens, rich in nutritionally essential micronutrients such as vitamin A. On the other hand, their heavy dependence on chemicals, such as fertilizers, and pesticides have compromised soil fertility and made the farmers to engage in loans and debts to afford the regular supply of these fertilizers. (McMichael 2008: 78)

McMichael discussion of the food-aid regime and the green revolution situate nutrition interventions in a complex, interrelated forces of international political and economic relations. The main focus of these interventions is on the lack of dietary diversification of Third World countries, as most of the rural poor continue to feed on low-protein starchy diets and grains. (World Health Organization n.d.) Therefore after the mono-crop culture of the previous era, farmers now encouraged to switch to diversified farming, mixed cropping and invest in animal farming by using the financial means of micro-credits, as the main solution to the constant level of poverty and malnutrition in the country.

Micro-credit programs, as means of neoliberal development therefore are crucial to discuss in terms of nutrition interventions, especially the micro-credit schemes of women empowerment programs, since women are the ones in Nepal, and also other parts of the Third

World, who are responsible for the production and preparation of food, and at the same time they are in the most vulnerable position due to global restructuring of agriculture. (McMichael 2008: 107) Therefore women are the primary target of both poverty alleviation schemes by micro-credit programs and nutrition education, bearing responsibility for the health, and financial well-being of their families.

Anthropological accounts on micro-credit on the one hand showed, how market relations and the "economism" of neoliberalism transforms social networks and social capital into monetary relations to meet the political-economic objectives of neoliberalism. They have also illustrated, how neoliberalism, as an ideology works through technologies of government and forges kinds of subjectivities which will be compatible with its rationalities of competition, entrepreneurialism and individual autonomy. (Elyachar 2005; Karim 2011; Henkel and Stirrat 2001; Kimura 2013; Mosse and Lewis 2005; Murray 2007; Phillips and Ilcan 2004; Sharma 2008) To address the latter, scholars have mostly been drawing on a Foucauldian theoretical framework to problematize the ideological effects of neoliberal, market-led development on its subjects and to show how "consent to and complicity with neoliberal ideologies are secured" (Ganti 2014: 96).

David Mosse in *Cultivating Development* summarizes this position concisely when he writes:

> *[A] now extensive literature argues that, like those of colonial rule, development's rational models achieve cognitive control and social regulation; they enhance state capacity and expand bureaucratic power (particularly over marginal areas and people); they reproduce hierarchies of knowledge (scientific over indigenous) and society (developer over the 'to be developed), and they fragment, subjugate, silence or erase the local, all the while 'whisking these political effects out of sight' through technical discourses that naturalize poverty, objectify the poor and depoliticize development.* (Mosse 2005:4)

In terms of the ideological effects of neoliberal development, several authors highlighted the discrepancies between the types of individuals it fosters and the lived realities of its subjects, especially in terms of empowerment and microcredit programs for women. Aradhana Sharma (2008) analyzed women empowerment programs in India, Katharine N. Rankin (2001, 2007) and Lamia Karim (2011) microfinance programs in Nepal and Bangladesh and whilst they all highlighted some of the possibilities that these programs create for women, they rather have drawn attention on the structural forces of caste, gender and kinship that hindrances the possibilities of women to act like a rational and economic individual, and thus reinforcing their subordinated position.

As I am going to illustrate it in my ethnography, both of the political-economic and Foucauldian approaches are crucial to understand the implications of shifting development programs, as they draw attention to the various material and ideological forces of development. But these frameworks leave less space to address the dialectic relationship between macro-level forces and individual subjects, beyond the one dimensional framework of dominance and resistance. Development regimes are not always smoothly working machines of domination and power as governmentality theory asserts, but dynamic and changing constructs full of contestations, conflicts, and negotiations. (Rankin 2001: 23) Accordingly, subjects of development are not simple instruments of state power, but "actants, dynamic forces that constantly surprise those who would harness and control them" (Li 2007: 17).

My ethnographic findings are in correlation with those of Stacy Pigg, whose ethnographies in Nepal depict conscious individuals, who learned to adapt to the changing policies and practices of development and use it to their advantages. She argues, that

"development programs are acting on villagers who are already assuming and seeking certain kinds of relationships to development. And while planners equate development with objectives their programs are designed to achieve, villagers see development as a kind of social space to which programs give them access" (Pigg 1997:281). To further deconstruct this social space of development and to reveal the dynamic relationship between local and external forces of development, in the followings I am going to introduce the concept of knowledge interfaces, and argue that it is a viable concept not only to connect the political-economic and governmentality approaches to development, but also to guide an ethnographic analysis of nutrition interventions.

2.2. Knowledge interfaces

In terms of the inquiry into nutrition interventions, the notion of knowledge interfaces is particularly illuminating in several ways. The notion of interface, developed by Norman Long refers to those critical points of encounters where external factors, such as policy interventions enter and blend with the life worlds of actors, "creating emergent properties". (Arce 2010:304) The concept enables to approach ethnographically the intersections, where global meets local forces and mutually transform each other, resulting in unexpected outcomes, "new identities, alliances and struggles for power", as well as multiple, or "mutant modernities" (Pottier, Bicker, and Sillitoe 2003:7; Arce and Long 2000)

The notion of knowledge interfaces therefore not only has the analytical advantage to connect the macro-level with the micro-level, but also to explain social change and unexpected outcomes of development interventions. The subjects of development within this framework are knowledgeable, conscious actors, who by repositioning the said interventions within their cultural and knowledge systems, they necessarily transform it to make it meaningful and

empowering for themselves. (Arce and Long 2000; Escobar 2010) It also enables to think of interventions as not necessarily constraining and dominating, but also as a source of entitlements (Pottier 2003), emergent political self-awareness (Arce 2010) and ground of progressive social policies (Ferguson 2010).

The concept also easily fits into the theoretical framework of nutrition interventions that I have outlined above and enables to incorporate their abstract and macro-level conceptualizations into ethnographic analysis. It keeps the importance of structure in the analysis, as it discusses the political and economic factors of the emergence of knowledge interfaces. (Pottier 2003: 5) But instead of perceiving it as an abstract set of political and economic forces, which constraints the actions of local actors, it views them as a flexible reality, that changes as actors continuously shape and transform it according to the everyday realities of their lives. (Ibid)

It also keeps the insights of Foucauldian frameworks of neoliberal development, as it admits, that despite the capacity of actors to shape the wider relational fields of power and capital, "the greater efficacy of the technology through which modernity manifests itself is seldom challenged". (Arce and Long 2000: 10) But as the authors add, the importance of knowledge interfaces is that it highlights those dynamic processes by which people appropriate hegemonic discourses, giving rise to "strategic language games" (Long 2001: 235). "In doing so, they de-essentialize them of their superior power, creating distinctive social spaces where contests for authority are fought out, often as a prelude to new power claims" (Arce and Long 2000: 10)

Norman Long for instance analyses a women empowerment program in Mexico, which encouraged peasant women to engage in market oriented production, by providing credits for

them to set up beekeeping businesses. (Long 2001: 79) He maps down the different identities that women have adopted in the newly generated social interfaces between women, state and village level authorities - the entrepreneurial peasant women, new style wives and mothers, etc. - and shows, how they learned to use and manipulate the discourses of this government project and "fashion it to meet their own conceptions of the already ongoing changes in the status of women" (81).

Knowledge interfaces thus present a view of knowledge that is socially constructed, dynamic, relational and processual, embedded in and aware of global conditions and practices, "albeit from very specific and utilitarian vantage points" (Kalb 2006:581). This conceptualization resonates with several of other contemporary views on knowledge in development, which criticized previous approaches as being too focused on discourse and ideology, as well as those which emphasizing too much the agency of local actors. (Jansen 2004) In terms of nutrition interventions knowledge interfaces draws attention to the importance of approaching local food habits and agricultural knowledge as not bounded cultural categories, but as continuously shifting constellation of global and local forces and tendencies, where interventions are not simply constraining and dominating processes but sources of new identities, possibilities, and entitlements.

Whereas knowledge interfaces proves to be a useful concept to grasp the various local realities of neoliberal development, it cannot provide an adequate tool to analyze what happens to knowledge interfaces within a shifting environment of development discourse and practices, which is the main objective of this thesis. How do the various constraints and possibilities of previous knowledge interfaces affect the current practices of locals? How do the assigned means

of export oriented, monoculture agricultural development interventions of the 1950s in Nepal relate for instance to the present knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions, which propagate the means of diversified agricultural production to reach sustainability? How do the various meanings, practices, codes and categories of previous knowledge interfaces relate to and shape the present dynamics of intersections?

This aspect has relevance not only at the macro-level, political-economic analyses of nutrition interventions but also in terms of the identities, awareness and current practices of actors as well.

As Mustafa Emirbayer argues in his *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* (1997):

> *Agency is always a dialogic process by which actors immersed in the duree of lived experience engage with others in collectively organized action contexts, temporal as well as spatial. Agency is path dependent as well as situationally embedded; it signifies modes of response to problems impinging upon it through sometimes broad expanses of time as well as space.* (Emirbayer 1997:294)

This means that the ethnographic inquiry into the knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions has to take into consideration that these interventions are not arriving in a 'sterile' social space, but in a dynamically shifting transactional, relational context of individuals and groups whose knowledge practices and symbolic, cultural systems of thought are already shaped by previous streams of development interventions, external influences and knowledge claims.

Therefore in the followings I am going to show how the previous development interventions in Nepal have affected the current knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions, by shortly outlining Nepal's history of development and introducing some of the insights of relevant ethnographies from Nepal. This chapter is not only going to introduce the political-economic context of agricultural development in Nepal, which nutrition interventions are a part

of, but also to illustrate some of the characteristics of the contemporary social reality of Nepal, which is significantly shaped by subsequent streams of development programs of the country.

3. The History and Effects of Development in Nepal

In this section I will briefly outline Nepal's history of foreign aid and development to reveal the macro-level, historical context of nutrition interventions, which constitute that wider context, within which the current knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions has to be understood. I will also introduce a set of contemporary ethnographies from Nepal, which further elucidate how the intensive streams of development programs of the past 60 years have shaped the identity, aspirations, values and knowledge systems of locals. My goal with the latter is not to suggest that there is a one-way causal relationship between some hegemonic discourses and local responses, but to outline some of the characteristics of previous knowledge interfaces that I still have found relevant in my ethnographic findings and so illustrate their interconnectedness.

After a broader historical review I will narrow down my focus and concentrate on the discourses of nutrition interventions, by reviewing some of the policy papers and documents. I will thereby illustrate how interventions situate within the history of development, what are their objectives, and what kind of subjectivities they propagate.

3.1. The blank state - Nepal's history of foreign aid and development

> *Exploring the history of the U.S. economic assistance program in Nepal is like being in a development laboratory. Few, if any, developing countries were as unexposed to the modern world as Nepal when we signed our first economic assistance agreement on January 23, 1951. (Skerry, Moran, and Calavan 1992 Foreword)*

The opening sentences of the USAID's review of their own assistance to Nepal highlights the country's unique relationship with foreign influence. Lacking a colonial past and ruled by the

autocratic, isolationist Rana oligarchy for decades, Nepal only opened up its borders for the Western world in the 1950-s, when a new government overthrown the rule of the Rana's. The country, so far unexposed to foreign influence has been seen by development planners as a textbook case of development, referred to as a "blank state", a "pristine society", a "development laboratory", which is in urgent need of development and modernization. (Skerry, Moran, and Calavan 1992; Hindman 2002; Fujikura 2001:285) International, multilateral development agencies therefore quickly populated the country, which under the rule of King Tribhuvan has been a welcoming environment for the technical assistance and political support of the United States. (Skerry et al. 1992: 4-5)

The upcoming four decades has been an intensive national push for development along the lines and following the shifts of global postwar politics and development apparatus. As the above mentioned USAID paper precisely documents:

> *In the 1950s, USAID (then known as USOM) concentrated on basic infrastructure and agricultural extension. In the 1960s, USAID pursued programs in agriculture, health, education, and industrial development. In the 1970s, programs targeted the rural poor, and in the 1980s, activities concentrated on macroeconomic policy reforms and support for the private sector as the engine for economic growth. As we begin the 1990s, USAID's programs reflect the worldwide movement towards support for democratic forms of governments and free market principles. (Foreword)*

These shifts has not only had a significant effect on the political-economic environment of the country, but also on the state of mind of Nepalese, who has been witnessing the dramatic transformation of their social landscapes and ways of living. Roads, hospitals, schools, irrigation systems have been built in their neighborhood, tourists and foreign advisors have fled the country, and they have been introduced to modern medicine, modern agriculture, and

commodities of a consumer culture. (Pigg 1996:172; Liechty 2003) Within a short period of time foreign aid and the development apparatus became the largest industries in the country, opening up the space for a burgeoning rank of civil servants and as a consequence, an emerging middle-class. (Hindman 2002; Pigg 1992)

Several ethnographers have been documented the effects of this intensive push for development and the reorganization of social fields on the subjectivity and identity of the Nepalese. Tatsura Fujikura have looked at the discourses of "awareness raising programs" of the 1990-s in Nepal, which systematically located the reason of the underdevelopment of the country in the lack of education and the awareness of its people on issues such as sanitation, family planning, savings, health or gender inequality. (Fujikura 2001:271) In his ethnography, he describes a strikingly similar situation to those that I have encountered throughout my fieldwork, when he documents one of his conversations of a woman, who recently had some bad investments with the local NGO's group-savings and credit program. Reflecting upon her ill fortune, she explained to him:

> *I didn't know anything before the NGO people came and talked to us. I still don't know much, but at least now I know I must learn. I am trying to learn whatever I can and trying whatever small things that I can do to improve our condition. (275)*

According to the author, this statement that highlights the woman's experience of the transformation her subjectivity, cannot be simply explained by the ideological effects of newly introduced awareness raising programs, where as a consequence of the technologies of government, individuals reshape their conduct to meet the rationalities of development. He argues that the source of this statement is rather have to be located in the shifting structural

characteristics of development programs in Nepal that has introduced new forms of public interactions into the lives of people, "as well as linkages that are different from, for example, kinship, local forms of collaborative work-groups, or those associated with membership in political parties" (Fujikura 2001: 301).

The author points out that discourses of self-help and awareness have been already the part of development programs in the 1960-s in Nepal, but present programs are different in their structure and the desires they implement in the subjects of development. As state power has been decentralized, and the NGOs took over the implementation of development programs, the means and ends of development and affected subjectivities have also changed. According to him, state ruled development programs in the 1960-s "linked pedagogy and motivation to the development of villages and of the nation", whereas current awareness programs inflict a desire to improve the self and the community. (301-304) Kumala's statement therefore has to be seen as the recognition of those new sources, actors and platforms of development, that introduced new means and possibilities to reach improvement and development.

Stacy Leigh Pigg has been also documented the effects of the history of development in a series of ethnographies over the past decade from Nepal and showed through various examples, how people have "rendered [development and modernization] meaningful and concrete through their involvement with the ideologies and institutional practices of development" (Pigg 1996:172) Development, or 'bikas' has been turned into a booming industry over the course of the years, which has introduced new categories of social difference, mobility and stratification into the lives of locals. As she argues:

> *In rural areas, bikas is associated in people's mind with social mobility. There has emerged in Nepal a new kind of status that is correlated with economic advantage but*

> *not reducible to it. Being cosmopolitan, being relatively "developed" kind of person, is a form of cultural capital. It is both a requirement for entry into other economic spheres and a result of participation in them. (173)*

She claims, that images of progress, development and modernity "embedded in Nepalese conceptions of social difference", by distinguishing between who is a "modern type of person", and who can exploit the possibilities of development. Therefore the development apparatus and ideology in Nepal translates from an abstract hegemonic force into a pragmatic reality among Nepalese villagers, who see the advantages of development not much in receiving its benefits, but rather in the possibility to become "one of the salaried workers who implements 'bikas'" (Pigg 1992:511).

Mark Liechty in his book *Suitably Modern*: *Making Middle-class Culture in a New Consumer Society* offers a brief ethnographic description of the shifting programs and effects of development in Nepal. By investigating the cultural practices of a forming middle class within the space opened up by development, he documents the generational differences between modes and meanings of materialism, as the result of these shifting programs. He says:

> *Middle-class adults often spoke of the consumer values practiced by their parents and grandparents, who worked to accumulate land and gold. While earlier generations also wished to live comfortably, they viewed various forms of wealth primarily as something to accumulate in order to propel future generations into more desirable social circumstances. Now, however, patterns of accumulation and forms of patrimony have shifted to better fit the realities of a new social and material logic. (Liechty 2003:97)*

Within this new material and social logic, as he argues, the obligation of parents comes in the form of providing education for their children, even though they sometimes had to deplete the assets and savings of the family to do so. Young people, especially at the rural side also came

to see education as the primary means to accrue cultural capital and achieve social mobility, as Liechty creatively illustrates it[1].

What is important in all of these insights is that they both show how development knowledge embeds in the everyday life of locals in various ways that goes beyond assimilation, imitation, appropriation or resistance. They also show how Nepal's relatively short, but intense history of foreign influence has significantly affected the subjectivity, aspirations, values and identity of locals, that has a direct relevance to the inquiry into shifting knowledge interfaces. According to these insights the intensive stream of development programs inflicted the desire in Nepalese to improve their life and to reach modernity by the assigned means of development programs. This had a significant effect on the subjectivities of individuals, but instead of discussing these forces as abstract hegemonic forces of development discourses only, they rather locate them in the shifting structures and characteristics of both development programs and the lived realities of people, and discuss their pragmatic effect on the aspirations, practices and knowledge of subjects of development.

In terms of the knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions the above outlined history of development in Nepal draws attention on the importance to see the present configurations of development programs as they are already shaped by previous streams of external influences. The means and ends of nutrition interventions have arrived in a social space, which was already been imbued with categories of social difference, mobility and values of materialism, by which people rendered their experience with development meaningful and designed their strategies of

[1] He asked young people from both Kathmandu and rural Nepal a simple question: what would they do if they won 20000 rupees on the lottery? Whereas young people from Kathmandu would have spent that money on commodities of a rapidly developing consumer culture of the city, "out-of-town young people, assuming they were able to get past the novelty of even imagining the possession of 20,000 NPR", would wanted to invest the money in "things which would give me knowledge" (92)

how to navigate within its possibilities and constraints accordingly. In the followings I am going to look more into the case of nutrition interventions and by a short discourse analysis I will explicate the means and ends that these development programs propagate, and what kind of subjectivities they forge. The section also going to shed light on the position of nutrition interventions within the 60 years history of Nepal with development programs and foreign assistance.

3.2. Nutrition Interventions in Nepal

Since the 1950-s, nutrition interventions has gone through a significant reconceptualization, mainly due to the reflections on the unsustainability and insufficiency of early development programs. According to FAO:

> *The first edition of The State of Food and Agriculture, published in 1947, reported that about half of the world chronically malnourished, considered at that time primarily in terms of inadequate energy consumption. Malnutrition is a more complex issue, requires multisectoral cooperation and a nutritionally appropriate diet that goes beyond the role of agriculture in producing food and generating income. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2013:3)*

Whereas in the 1950-s malnourishment equaled undernourishment, that is the inadequate amount of calorie intake, today the concept includes under-, over nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies as well, such as the lack of vitamins, foals, or iron in the diet of people. Consequently, while the problem of undernourishment could be targeted by food aids, enhancing agricultural growth or importing crops, the issue of malnourishment is a more complex issue, therefore requires more complex solutions.

On the one hand, healthy diets according to the guidelines of nutrition interventions have to include a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, livestock and dairy products, as opposed to the present diets of farmers, which consists of staple food, mostly cheap rice and maize. (Government of Nepal 2012) In addition to dietary diversification, farmers are encouraged to enhance the production of their traditional crops such as millet, cassava or tubers, which were crowded out by cash crops during the Green Revolution in Asia (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and World Health Organization 2013). Keeping up agricultural and economic growth, yet focusing on diversified agriculture as opposed to past practices of mono-crop culture is a complex task in itself. It requires the reconfiguration of consumption and production of farmers, by boosting their market access and purchasing power, as well as reformulated trade agreements between international stakeholders. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2013:4) As an FAO report summarizes:

> *In order for economic growth to enhance access to food that is adequate in quantity (dietary energy) and in quality (diversity, nutrient content and safety), three key steps are required. First, growth needs to reach and involve the poor and provide increased employment and income earning opportunities for the poor. Second, the poor need to use their additional income for improving the quantity and quality of their diet, water and sanitation as well as on improved health services. (The role of women is crucial in ensuring that these spending patterns are realized.) Third, governments need to spend additional public revenues on safety nets and key public goods and services such as education, infrastructure and public health measures. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2012:15)*

This in turn requires the concerted efforts of several sectors of national governments as well as the private and public sector, since access to nutritious diet is a complex outcome of several factors, such infrastructure, income, food prices, trade, public health services, and sanitation. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2012:15; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and World Health Organization 2013:2)

On the other hand as several papers point out, the issue of nutrition goes beyond the role of agriculture and food systems to achieve dietary diversity, access to healthy food and the sustainability of best practices. As experts argue:

> *[i]ndividual access to proper food is subject to intra-household resource allocation and care for the individual, both of which in turn depend on the characteristics of the decision maker and gender roles, information and education, cultural and social customs, and others (Ecker, Bresinger, and Pauw Karl 2011:12)*

Besides traditions and cultural constraints, the main issue that all the papers point out is the gendered nature of both agriculture in developing countries and nutrition interventions. Since women has a central role in food provision and production, as well as child care practices, therefore "mothers' (or caretakers') health, capability and knowledge are critical" (Ecker 2011:12). Teaching and raising the awareness of the mother how to use wisely her resources would result in improved care and nurturing practices at the most critical ages of the cognitive and physical development of children as well as the wealth and well-being of the household. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and World Health Organization 2013:2) As the argument goes:

> *Women who earn more income have stronger bargaining power within the household. This enables them to exert more influence over decisions regarding consumption, investment and production, which results in better nutrition, health and education outcomes for children. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2013:10)*

The main components of nutrition intervention programs therefore are agricultural diversification, income generation, awareness raising and women empowerment programs, which are in Nepal are being realized within the Multisectoral Nutrition Program (MSNP). Nepal

in its quest to reach the Millennium Development Goals was among the first countries to implement multisectoral nutrition programs in 2012, as a result of the cooperation of the Ministry of Agriculture Development, Health and Population, Education, Urban Development and the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development as well as several international agencies. The issue of nutrition became embedded into the poverty alleviation programs of Nepal, since "[m]alnutrition is not just a stark manifestation of poverty, it is also the 'non-income face of poverty' and it helps perpetuate poverty" that hinders the socio-economic development of the nation. (Government of Nepal 2012:2) Whereas Nepal has been long reached, even exceeded the average kilocalorie intake requirements (2536 Kcal instead of the ideal minimum of 2220 Kcal), dietary diversity is still a major problem across the country, which in national policy papers is ascribed to the characteristics of previous development pathways, namely:

> *Traditionally, the Government of Nepal and especially the Ministry of Finance used to perceive nutritional interventions as humanitarian aid and not as an investment for human capital or as the right of its citizens. It mainly remained the domain of development partners rather than that of national government. Therefore, outside emergency situations, nutrition has remained conspicuously underfunded. (Government of Nepal 2012: 9)*

Within the discourse of international development agencies, this underlying problem is accompanied by the narrow perception of the nutrition situation and the ineffective ways of local resource mobilization as well. (UNICEF and The World Bank Group 2013:8) In terms of inadequate development pathways the solution is hold to be the move from needs-based to rights-based approaches to development that is "from passive receipts of welfare benefits to active participation in, and management of local government and community-led efforts to

resolve nutrition problems" (ibid). To address the narrow perception of the problems of malnutrition, experts agree that awareness raising and education programs are needed not only among community and affected groups, but also among local government officials since "very few of those interviewed [i.e. local government officials and community groups] seemed to understand that the full spectrum of malnutrition includes stunting, micronutrient deficiencies and/or obesity" (15) Finally, in terms of resource mobilization, a greater degree of decentralization is required that would ensure that supplies and resources would be distributed more efficiently and righteously, since district and Village level development committees are still dependent on central-level financing, which hinders their efforts to "finance improvements, and/or maintain their health facilities". (16, 26)

In the followings I will discuss how these ends and means of nutrition interventions manifested at the chosen site of my ethnographic fieldwork, Jitpurphedi, creating a gendered knowledge interface of development.

4. Shifting Development Interfaces at Rural Nepal - The Case of Jitpurphedi

Jitpurphedi, the site of my fieldwork is a small community of approximately 900 households in the north-western hills of Nepal, 10 kilometers away from the capital, Kathmandu. On the narrow, steeply terraced fields people grow mustard greens, cauliflower, pumpkin seeds in the dry season and millet, potatoes and rice in the wet season, which means the main source of income and form of subsistence of more than 80% of the people in the era. Living in simple mud-and-brick houses, healing with the help of witch doctors and feeding on a monotonous staple diet, people in Jitpurphedi are an ideal target of development programs and nutrition interventions. Despite its closure to the capital, Jitpurphedi therefore is still a relatively isolated, and "undeveloped" rural part of Nepal, and the contrast between the lifestyle and living conditions here and Kathmandu, people experience every day when they travel there to sell their products on the market, or buy some new clothes or food.

In the followings I will ethnographically detail the knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions in Jitpurphedi, by describing its actors, characteristics and the various social, economic and cultural factors that shape these knowledge interfaces. According to the insights of the previous section that emphasized the role of women in nutrition intervention programs, my focus within Jitpurphedi is going to be on the women empowerment program. Through this case I can illustrate how the knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions are embedded in a set of gendered constraints and possibilities of market-based approaches to development. By the help of knowledge interfaces I will also describe how the subjects of development relate to these changes in multiple ways that goes beyond the one-dimensional explanation of dominance and

resistance and depicts a more complex reality of enduring aspirations, desires and practices of previous knowledge interfaces of development.

4.1. Method, source of data

The bulk of my ethnographic data consists of the insights of my participant observation and informal conversations that I have conducted among the rural community of Jitpurphedi. During my three weeks stay there I was living with a local family and I was volunteering for a local NGO in their empowerment program for women in agriculture. The first ethnographic encounter revealed the everyday realities of how development interventions are folded into the life-worlds of locals. The latter have given me the chance to get a broader picture of these encounters and see the different dynamics within knowledge interfaces that stemmed from the different socio-economic backgrounds of the community. I chose to volunteer in this program after I realized the heavily gendered nature of neoliberal development programs in the area, as both microfinance programs and nutrition interventions are targeting women peasants, as the most vulnerable and disempowered segment of the population. As a volunteer I visited approximately 25 households in the area and with the help of a local translator, I had informal conversations with women farmers about the microcredit program and their experiences, desires and difficulties at the rural side of Nepal. I also designed a short questionnaire to reveal the economic background of households before and after the microcredit program, to gather some additional information to reveal the shifting economic and social realities of the locals. These data have revealed some of the complex realities within which nutrition interventions are embedded, those shifting cultural, social and economic factors which are making up the fields of

constraints and possibilities of the subjects of development. In addition to my stay at the rural side, I have also spent a couple of days in Kathmandu, where I have been conducting interviews with nutrition experts and research agencies and I got access to some of the policy papers that I have used for my discourse analysis.

4.2 Shift of development programs in Jitpurphedi

The national-global level changes of the 1980-s in development focus and programs reached the site of Jitpurphedi in the late 1990-s. As the result of the wider decentralization processes in the country, state-centered aid- and crop-distribution projects have been supplemented by the programs of a recently installed local Village Development Committee (VDC), which has been conducting and designing development activities in Jitpurphedi since then, using both external and government resources. In Jitpurphedi there is one NGO which controls and generates these resources, by inviting volunteers from all over the world to help to "empower" the local population through education, health and income generation programs, with a special focus on women and children.[2] Jitpurphedi therefore constantly populated by young foreigners, who teach women English, farming practices, family planning and business management as part of their social empowerment programs. In addition, married women can also join the women's co-operative, and ask for micro-credit to invest in vegetable or animal farming, as part of their financial empowerment.

Since the 1980-s therefore the social landscape of Jitpurphedi have been changed dramatically. Whereas agriculture still counts as the main source of income and subsistence for locals, more and more farmers started look after wage work in the city, as the prices for cash

2 http://www.volunteersinitiativenepal.org/

crops have been dropped significantly. (Shrestha and Chaudary 2012) State subsidies have been replaced by the microfinance programs of the local VDC, and several community development programs have been set up to achieve "major improvements in the quality of life by the year 2000", by setting standards for food, health, adult education, and basic health services among others. (Skerry, Moran, and Calavan 1992:285) Nutrition interventions have arrived within this political-economic background of development, identifying women as the most vulnerable among the rural poor, yet central to put an end to hunger and malnutrition within the household. Due to their key role in nutrition interventions, women have been introduced to the advantages of diversified vegetable farming and animal source protein consumption, as it will contribute to the cognitive development of their children and to the general well-being of the family. To implement these they have offered micro-credits to set up a small vegetable garden or buy livestock, which would later offer them a sustainable source of food and income to buy those products that cannot be grown on the fields due to seasonality for instance. Women therefore became not only the primary targets of social and financial empowerment programs, but also the "responsibilized subjects" of development, who are now have been offered the means to take their own, their families and their communities' development in their own hands.

As I am going to show, women engaged with this responsibilization processes in a variety of ways that goes beyond the simple domination framework of Foucauldian approaches. Nutrition interventions with their main focus on women empowerment introduced such means and possibilities for women, that did not exist in previous development programs and women were eager to exploit these possibilities and actively contribute to the improvement of their families and community. The seemingly smooth incorporation of the means and knowledge of

nutrition interventions into the life worlds of locals therefore were not only the result of the passive incorporation of “universal values” and the identification with its propagated subjectivities, but rather an active engagement of conscious individuals with the means of development, that could give them access to various entitlements. The section also reveals the ways, by which women incorporated these forces into their lives and imbued them with significance and meanings, which were already part of their previous experiences with development programs as well.

4.3. The Possibilities of Nutrition Interventions

Whereas women always have had a significant role in taking care of the family land, planting, harvesting and cooking the meal for the household, these roles have become more articulated in the past few years. A growing number of men from the community started to work in Kathmandu mostly as taxi drivers, or factory workers for Coca Cola, in order to get some additional income for the family, as the descending or stagnating business of selling cash crops on the market could not offer a viable income for their extended households anymore. As a consequence, taking care of the family land became entirely the job of women, who now had the necessary financial means as well to rationally redesign the agricultural practices of the household and find their way out from poverty through micro-credit programs and smart investments.

The resulting responsibility were several times truly empowering for some women, as they said their role within the decision making processes within the family has grown, as well as their self-esteem, since they could significantly contribute to the income of the household. They also enjoyed the new platforms, which were introduced with the arrival of the VDC development programs. They could attend different classes, trainings, even travel to other communities within the programs of women empowerment, thus they have experienced a set of new things that made the interviewee of Fujikura saying that “she did not know anything before the NGO came”. There were new possibilities for identification as well, since beyond the roles of wives and mothers, they were also leaders of their saving group, students at English classes and potential entrepreneurs with the knowledge how to set up a business. Through their increased interaction with other women from the community, and the workers of the VDC, they also had more space

and possibilities to articulate their needs and problems, thus triggering some positive changes within their community[3].

New forms of development programs therefore has been seen by women as a new possibility to improve their lives, a new configuration of social space that gives them access to various entitlements and possibilities and as conscious subjects of development, they were quickly adapting to these shifting possibilities and turned it to their advantages. However, this does not mean that we can rule out the ideological effects of development, since when women faced the constraints and difficulties of microcredit programs, as I will going to show, they usually located the problem within themselves, instead of pointing out their structural constraints. The perspective of knowledge interfaces does not rule out this forces, but rather tries to ethnographically grasp the variety of ways, how the subjects of development have been engaging with these abstract forces and locating their rules and objectives within the concrete structures of development programs, leaving more space to reveal the dialectic relationship between macro-level forces and individuals.

In terms of nutrition interventions for instance, women were especially proud of the fact that they can contribute to the cognitive development and academic successes of their children, by providing them a nutritious diet. During one of my visits at a household in Jitpurphedi, I was talking with a middle aged women about the importance of nutrition, when she pointed at a picture of a young man on her desk and proudly told me:

> *This is my son, he studies to be a doctor now in Kathmandu! He always brings home good grades, and this is also my pride because I have made sure during his*

[3] Women for instance managed to make the VDC to raise the amount of loans that they can apply for, and they started to form their demands to organize a regular delivery of fertilizers to more remote sites of the community to ease their workload.

upbringing that he always has had nutritious food, and I never gave him junk food. (Interview 02.11.)

Nutrition interventions have therefore introduced a new possibility for women to improve not only their lives, but also to offer a better future for their children, through the means of their enhanced school performance. The issue of nutrition within these interfaces have translated as not only a health issue, but also as a tool to reach future social mobility, by ensuring the educational successes of children. If seen from the perspective of interrelated knowledge interfaces, this episode can be conceived also as the enduring significance of the previous configurations of knowledge interfaces, where education has been identified as the primary mean to fight underdevelopment and obtain cultural capital. (Fujikura 2001, Liechty 2003) The link between nutrition and education have triggered the enduring desire of locals to break out from poverty and underdevelopment through education, a desire that have been inflicted in the subjects of development long before the arrival of nutrition interventions.

However, even though the insights and teachings of nutrition science were appealing and potentially empowering to women, realizing these possibilities were often constrained by various economic, social and cultural forces. Paradoxically, the biggest constraining factor to reach this empowering effects of nutrition interventions were the families' growing expenses of education. Within the past decade, families have witnessed a sharp increase in the tuition and admission

fees of private schools in Kathmandu[4], and now the biggest part of their monetary income they had to spend on expenses of education[5].

I will get back to the discussion of this financial dependence of families, when I will discuss the constraints for women to reach their true empowerment and fulfill their responsibilities to offer a nutritionally adequate diet for their households. But first, I will describe my first ethnographic experience of the knowledge interfaces that my presence have triggered within my host family, to further elucidate the ways of how global forces, knowledge and values are incorporated in the life-world and knowledge systems of locals, as well as to further shed light on the women's, and also my position within these interfaces.

4.4 Knowledge Interfaces of Nutrition Interventions

Shortly after of a week of my stay in Jitpurphedi, we were sitting with my host family on the mud floor of the kitchen waiting for dinner and warming up next to the small clay furnace just as every other day of the week. I was also expecting the same dinner as always, rice with lentils and curried potatoes. But this time "grandma" prepared a traditional Nepali dish, "dhindo", which is made of wheat flour cooked in water. For this occasion, even the son has joined us, who was living in the same household with his wife and daughter, but usually has eaten what his wife prepared for him, separately from the parents. While grandma has portioned the food, the son explained to me that dhindo is really good to eat, because it raises more slowly

[4] http://www.nepalmountainnews.com/cms/2015/04/12/kathmandu-deo-hikes-private-schools-tuition-fee-by-22-pc/

[5] My information regarding the expenditures of households are the findings of my interviews that were guided by my questionnaire. According to the results, the biggest expenditures of the household were usually school expenses, which were followed by clothes, food, and medicines.

the sugar level in the blood than rice does. Surprised by the fact, I was even more excited to taste it, but when it was my round, I got the usual rice, since as they argued, dhindo is really difficult to digest for the "western stomach".

Whereas from the perspective of nutrition science, dhindo is no better than rice, as it contains very few micronutrients, the situation is still telling of knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions in several aspects. On the one hand it illustrates how the universal, "Western" knowledge and guidelines of nutrition embeds in the life-world of local people and how it gets transformed and repositioned within their cultural and knowledge systems to make it meaningful. (Arce and Long 2000) The consumption of dhindo were getting justified before me, the western interlocutor, by impeccably using the reasoning and language of western science. On the other hand, the language of western knowledge was also used to draw boundaries, as I was still reminded of my difference through my "western stomach", an outsider, who cannot be part of the local ways of living entirely.

On other occasions, however, I have been rather reminded of my privileged position within the household, which was again revealing of the nature of knowledge interfaces in Jitpurphedi. On the one hand the family tried its best to offer me a diet, which they thought I am used to. They have incorporated meat in the meals at least two times a week, although only the cheapest cuts of buffalo they could afford, and apologized me several times that they could not put fruits on the table as it was really expensive on the market these days. There were special days however, when the grandfather got to go to Kathmandu and returned with some of the favorite western brands of biscuits of the family, that he then would proudly offering it to me as a unique complement to my traditional Nepali tea.

The best proof of my privileged position was however that I have been most of the time "treated as a men". When the only chicken of the family has laid an egg for instance, the family always made sure that I also get a piece of it, along with the men members of the household. I was also always eating with the men which I could not have done if I would not been a foreigner, since women in the household were usually the ones who ate at last and the least. The grandmother and the youngest sister had the task during dinner to serve the male members, and only after the male members had their second helpings as well and could not possibly eat more, could the women start their dinner.

These occasions have revealed me the characteristics of not only the knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions, were boundaries between western and traditional are continuously being washed away and reinforced in unforeseeable ways, but also shed light on the every days of a patriarchal society, where women still have a subordinated position within the family. The latter were an especially significant constraining factor in realizing the means and ends of nutrition interventions, as I am going to show in the followings, through the case of the microcredit of the local VDC's women empowerment program.

4.5. The Constraints of Nutrition Interventions

The microcredit program of the local VDC was the primary mean of nutrition interventions to reach its proposed objectives that is to offer the financial means for women to invest in diversified vegetable farming, or livestock production that would give them a sustainable source of nutritious food as well as income. Microcredit programs were really popular among women in Jitpurphedi, as they saw it as an exceptional opportunity to ease the financial hardships of the family. This popularity has been quite tangible, as at my time being

there, the program already counted 600 borrowers, who were applied for a loan at least once, which covers approximately two-thirds of the households in Jitpurphedi.

When I was trying to identify the allure of these programs, and asking women why did they take micro-credits, most of the women emphasized that it is the only way for them to directly contribute to the family's income and have some role in the decision making processes within the household. Central banks in Kathmandu, they said, usually perform a rigorous background check before giving out loans, and rural people, especially women who do not have savings, very rarely fulfill the requirements of a loan. The microcredit program of the VDC on the other hand is available to everyone, regardless of her financial background.[6]

Despite the popularity and opportunities of the microcredit program however, most of my interviewees could not report a significant improvement in their financial situation, neither could they implement diversified agriculture, or afford to buy nutritious food on the market. As I am going to show, this was the result of the various cultural, social and financial constraints of women to act responsible and reach their empowerment, as well as the households' enduring dependence on cash and markets, that were also party the legacy of previous development programs.

On the one hand, even though only women were entitled to apply for micro-credits, it was still the husband usually, who decided whether to take the loan and how to spend it, which was not always corresponded with the nutritional values that young mothers were told about, as the insights and knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions have been primarily designed to

[6] This has been possible due to the structural characteristics of the loan, which is based in the principle of group savings. According to this, women do not apply for a loan independently but as part of a smaller group of other women, where everyone has to pay a monthly fee of 100 Nepali Rupees, which the NGO then uses as a financial backup in case someone fails to pay back the loan.

reach women. Women therefore often had the knowledge and the awareness, but lacked the means to realize this knowledge. In addition, there were also power inequalities within the women of the household, as the mother in law has been also exerted a significant control over the decision-making and resource allocation processes within the family. This was particularly strong in the case of young mothers or pregnant women, who according to nutrition experts are the most vulnerable in terms of malnutrition.

During pregnancy and lactation period, usually the older women members of the household took care of their special needs and diet of the young wives, which was very often guided by the traditional notions of "hot" and "cold" foods, that would prohibit the consumption of certain food items for the mother, sometimes exactly those ones, that otherwise would be recommended by nutrition experts. According to the findings of a local research institute:

> *There are beliefs, which are confirmed during discussion with traditional healers, that some of these prohibited food items could lead to miscarriage, birth defects and inborn weaknesses, especially related to common cold and pneumonia. (...) General list of food items respondents described as not allowed to pregnant women includes Pumpkin, Papaya, Mango, Jackfruit, Yoghurt, Sour food, Pigs and Buffalo Meat, Milk (Cow or Buffalo), Honey, Green Vegetables, Mustard Vegetable, Kuvindo (Ash gourd, Benincasahispida), Spicy Food, Fish, Dried Spinach, Banana, Bamboo, Sour-hot, Chillies, Dry Food, Mulberry Fruit, Lentil/Daal, Soyabean, Yam, Stinging Nettle, Wheat Bread, Black Millet.* (RIDA and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health 2012: 44)

The efforts of women to fulfill the requirements of nutrition interventions were therefore often impeded by their direct cultural and social context, which put them in a severely disempowered position. Here, the perspective of knowledge interfaces can add another layer to the analysis of these constraints. Instead of looking at the practices of mother in laws for instance as blindly guided by traditional beliefs and resistant to the enlightening insights of nutrition science, it is more productive to think of them as the generational differences between

knowledge interfaces. Before the arrival of international nutrition experts, it was the shaman, who distributed knowledge of health and nutrition, which women tried to incorporate into their everyday lives, just as young women do it now with the advices of experts. The ends therefore to be healthy and nutritious by exploiting every opportunity has been remained the same, only the legitimate sources of knowledge and wisdom has changed throughout time.

The other main constraint to implement the goals of nutrition interventions and to fulfill the roles of a rational women was the structural constraints of the market. In the past decade, families were witnessing a sharp rise in their monetary expenditures, such as the already mentioned rising prices of tuition fees and schoolbooks, the arrival of "modern" medical expenses, and the rising food prices (Shrestha and Chaudary 2012). Within this shifting economic environment, traditional practices of vegetable farming proved to be a less and less viable way to cover the growing monetary expenses of the household. As Om, the vice president of the women's cooperative and the microcredit program told me, they tried to promote diversified vegetable farming among borrowers, but "women did not like it, because they could grow only as much as they could eat it, but it did not give them enough money". The scarcity of arable land in the middle hills prevented the further expansion of vegetable farming and the lack of easily accessible, good quality fertilizers and proper irrigation system in the dry season made vegetable farming an extremely hard and financially unrewarding job to do, especially on the exhausted soils of the previous mono-crop agricultural practices.

As a consequence, more and more women started to take the loan for livestock farming, as they have witnessed the financial successes of their neighbors, as well as the rising prices of meat, eggs and milk on the market. Even though the increasing local investments in livestock

and thus the supposed consequence of the rise of protein consumption was the main goal of nutrition programs, in reality only wealthier households could afford to invest in more than one cow or buffalo, thus spend their resulting income on better quality food or keep part of the products for consumption and thus meet the requirements of interventions. Poorer households on the other hand had to sell all the products on the market to get access to cash, which, after they paid the expenses of their extended households consisting of 8-10 people sometimes, was just enough to put the usual rice and lentils on the table.

In addition, investing in animals often put poorer women borrowers into a perpetual circle of loans and debts, as in case the only animal that they invested in died, they had to ask for additional loans from neighbors to be able to payback their loan for the VDC. Therefore, whereas the micro-credit program had the potential to facilitate the financial empowerment of women, in reality, as McMichael has also showed, it was only made the already powerful more powerful, and subjected the poorer to perpetual economic hardships, thus deepening the economic inequalities within the community.

Listening to the hardships and difficulties of women with microcredit programs, the most striking fact was for me their lack of criticism of the program. Instead of questioning the overall viability of microcredit programs and locating their issues in their structural dysfunctions, they have rather identified minor mishaps within the program and their own lack of knowledge as the cause of their wrecked situation. In one case for instance, a local women was complaining about her bad faith that the only buffalo that she invested in all her savings died and as she argued, that if she would have had more knowledge in animal farming, she would have been able to prevent this situation.

The lack of criticism and the failures of microcredit programs are on the one hand a powerful illustration of the constraining local structural and the material and ideological forces of neoliberalism that hindered efforts of women to reach their financial and social empowerment, creating fractures between the promises and realities of neoliberal development programs. On the other hand, the same programs and forces have introduced new possibilities for empowerment, identification and power claims for women, which complicates the dominance-resistance framework of development approaches.

Shifting development programs therefore affected the everyday lives of people in several ways, by introducing new means for subjects to navigate within the various possibilities and constraints of development. With the notion of knowledge interfaces I tried to show the variety of ways by which people engage with these means and processes that in some cases contributed to their empowerment, but sometimes only reinforced already existing inequalities within the community. A couple of month ago, a different kind of force have redrawn dramatically the knowledge interfaces of nutrition interventions as a series of earthquakes hit the country and redefined once again the means and ends of development programs.

5. Knowledge Interfaces after the Earthquake

In April, one month after I have left Nepal, two subsequent earthquakes struck the country with a magnitude of 7.8 and 7.3, killing more than 8000 people and destroying the houses and livelihoods of millions of Nepalese. Besides the urban areas, where most of the historical sites, buildings and temples have been completely demolished, the rural side has been also hit hard by the earthquake, further disrupting the already vulnerable food security and livelihoods of locals. The earthquake struck during wheat harvest and just before the time when farmers have to sow their primary staple food crop, rice[7] . Therefore farmers at the affected areas are not only lost their yearly harvest of wheat, but they will also lose harvest of rice, if they do not start to sow it in its imminent planting season. According to the FAO, this would "deprive families of a year's worth of food supply, wipe out anticipated income and prolong dependence on external assistance".

In Jitpurphedi, as one of the member of the local NGO reported to me, most of the livestock which people are invested in died under their collapsing sheds, and people have left with only a loan, without a significant source of income to pay it back. Crops and stored food have been destroyed due to the landslides, and the bad conditions of roads are slowing down the flow of emergency assistance. Therefore, people in Jitpurphedi became once more dependent on food aids and external assistance, and the empowerment programs of nutrition interventions have continued to live on in the lives of families only in the form of their outstanding amount of loans and credits.

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7 http://www.fao.org/emergencies/crisis/nepal-earthquake/en/?page=2&ipp=10&no_cache=1&tx_dynalist_pi1%5Bpar%5D=YToxOntzOjE6IkwiO3M6MToiMCI7fQ==

The market-based approaches of previous development programs and the dependence of families on cash had however also contributed to keep households afloat within the sudden and disastrous effects of the earthquake. By navigating within the constraints and possibilities of shifting development programs, people in Jitpurphedi have developed multiple livelihood strategies throughout time, and supplemented their income from agriculture with various jobs in Kathmandu. As the agricultural sources of their livelihood have collapsed, these wages are now the only means for locals to navigate within the social landscape of development, which has been dramatically redrawn by the earthquake.

This situation draws attention to the viability of those approaches within the anthropology of neoliberal development, which aim to deconstruct not only development, but also forms of neoliberalism and instead of simply opposing every form of neoliberalism as it is necessarily constraining and disrupting, they draw attention to those elements, which can be sources of entitlements and empowerment. James Ferguson, a significant critic of development programs for instance shows in a recent paper of him, that neoliberal forms of cash transfers in Africa are indeed successful alternatives to state-centered, top down food aids. Whereas the latter cannot accommodate properly the various needs and problems of the subjects of development, market-based approaches, put more control into the hands of its subjects, who know best the solutions to their difficulties. (Ferguson 2010)

In my thesis I also tried to show the complex reality of neoliberal forms of development, as they are not only hegemonic and abstract forces of domination, but also pragmatic sources of new identities, entitlements and possibilities. The notion of knowledge interfaces as I have argued is a viable tool to ethnographically capture these complexities, and by introducing a

broader perspective of time into the analysis, the concept can be also accommodated to analyze the shifts in the realities of development programs. The main limitation of my research was to fully incorporate this perspective into my analysis as I could spend only a limited time within the community, thus I could only reveal a few hints where the connection between present and previous knowledge interfaces could be detected. A longitudinal ethnographic analysis however, that would focus on the shifting meanings, desires, values and identities in relation to shifting development programs throughout time, would introduce a more comprehensive perspective to the analysis of development encounters, that could incorporate not only structure into the analysis of local knowledge system, but also time and path dependency, as well as it could reveal more aspects and motivations behind the practices of individuals, as they navigate through the shifting social landscapes of development programs.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

	General questions	
1	What is your name?	
2	How old are you?	
3	How many family members live in your household, incl yourself?	
4	Which women-group are you a member of?	
5	Since when did you become involved in the cooperative?	
6	Which part of the community do you live in?	
7	Which training classes do you attend?	
8	What is the occupation of your husband?	
	Loan	
9	Why did you take a loan? Why not from the bank?	
10	What amount?	
11	What purpose?	
12	Did you use a part of the loan for consumption?	yes / no
13	If yes: how much of the loan? And for what purpose?	
14	Do you manage to pay off the loan?	yes / no
15	If not: what is the reason for that?	
16	Do you have any difficulties in producing the loan supported goods/or growing seeds?	
17	**Economic empowerment - questions**	
Before getting involved with the cooperative:		

18	Apart from daily work in and around the house, did you have other activities to earn money?	yes / no
19	If yes: which activities?	..
20	If yes: how much monthly?	
21	Monthly, in which things did you spend the money you earned ?	
22	How much did you contribute to the total family income?	% (total:)
After getting involved with the cooperative:		
23	Apart from daily work in and around the house, do you have other activities to earn money?	yes / no
24	if yes: which activities?	
25	How much do you earn per month? (incl. all activities)	
26	Monthly, in which things do you spend the money now?	
27	How much do you contribute to the total family income?	%
28	How is the amount of loan divided in the family?	
29	If your husband also working in agriculture, is he also benefiting from the loan? How?	
30	Has your living standard improved after receiving the loan? And how?	
31	What did you start to produce after the loan? Is the production sustainable?	
32	How does the access to the loan contribute to your…	
	A. decision making processes?	

	B. economic freedom?	
	C. control of resources? D. Other….	
33	What are your future plans?	
34	If you could change something in the microcredit program, what would it be?	

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