

NATALIA MAKSYMOWICZ

**Education, Tradition and Western NGOs in Dolpo  
– A Preliminary Report from the Fieldwork**

**Abstract**

Dolpo is one of the most geographically isolated, economically disadvantaged and the least populated areas of Nepal. It is a remote region where education is one of the most scarce resources. The aim of this article is to explore the context of setting up and managing two educational facilities located in Dolpo: Taprizha Culture School and Kula Mountain School. In both cases the underlying idea is to combine modern education with local cultural preservation. The main purpose is to give an access to education to the underprivileged children and to improve the quality of life of the local community. Both educational projects seem to exemplify successful joint effort of the local communities and western based NGOs. Schools are managed locally with financial and institutional support from Europe and USA with fullest respect directed towards local traditions and customs.

**Keywords:** Education, tradition, western NGOs, Dolpo, Nepal

**Introduction**

The present article is partly based on my preliminary research that was carried out in 2008 in Dolpo, which is culturally Tibetan enclave based in northern part of Nepal.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Dolpo region is poorly understood. Annually permission from the Nepal Government to remain in the region receives about 100 people from West. Researchers on Tibetan culture seldom study the subject of Dolpo and there are only a few references in the literature on it. Two important publications which allow to get to know the cultural context of Dolpo are: *Discoveries in Western Tibet and the Western Himalayas: Essays on History, Literature, Archaeology and Art*, Amy Heller, Giacomella Orofino, Charles Ramble (eds.), Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003, Brill 2007 and Ch. Ramble, "The founding of a Tibetan village: the popular transformation of history", *Kailash* 1983, 10 (3–4), pp. 267–290.

Between 1951 and 1974 the area was opened for research, but it was again closed until 1989 owing to tensions with refugee Khampa guerrillas hiding in the remote mountainous terrain.<sup>2</sup>

For most of its history, the inaccessibility of the high valleys of Dolpo have provided a natural refuge for the Bon religion on the periphery of the Tibetan heart-land. David Snellgrove in 1967 describes how lamas are locally regarded not only as the supreme ideal of Buddhist philosophers, but also as popular sage-magicians who can produce rain when it would not otherwise have fallen, and have the capacity to overpower local gods.<sup>3</sup>

Dolpo is an isolated and economically disadvantaged area where educational facilities are sparse and access to education is poor. In research that I have conducted, I explored the context of setting and managing two educational facilities located there and the role of local community, non-governmental organizations and volunteers from western Europe that play role in it.

First, I will discuss the case of Taprizha Culture School in Phoksumdo<sup>4</sup> Village Development Committee (VDC).<sup>5</sup> The underlying idea of the project was to combine modern education with local culture preservation. It is an example of successful long-term cooperation between local community and western based NGOs. I am going to discuss also the Kula Mountain School in Tinje Village Development Committee which likewise is a joint effort of Western NGOs and the local community. Above mentioned project aims to preserve native culture, and to give access to education for underprivileged children and to improve quality of life of local community. While discussing the Kula Mountain School I will focus on process of setting this educational facility and the role the local systems of distribution and scarce resources played there.

## Dolpo

In order to put my analysis into a wider context, I will briefly discuss socio-economic setting of Dolpo, educational system and infrastructure existing there.

Nepal remains one of the world's poorest countries. The General National Income (GNI) per capita in 2011 was just \$540. It is estimated that one fourth of the population lives in extreme poverty.<sup>6</sup> Dolpo is a remote region in north-western Nepal. It encompasses four valleys (Panzang, Nangkhoneh, Tsharka, Tarap) which is northern part of the country's largest district.<sup>7</sup> It is one of the most geographically isolated, economically disadvantaged

---

<sup>2</sup> Hay-Edie 2001: 55.

<sup>3</sup> Snellgrove 1967 (1992).

<sup>4</sup> In case of the name and spelling of *Phoksumdo*, I follow Kenneth M. Bauer. According to him a term *Phoksundo* is a result of early misspelling and he allows for it only in case of Shey Phoksundo National Park, which has entered common usage (cf. Bauer 2004: 205).

<sup>5</sup> The village development committee (VDC) is the smallest administrative unit in rural areas in Nepal.

<sup>6</sup> [www.data.worldbank.org](http://www.data.worldbank.org)

<sup>7</sup> Nepal is divided into 75 districts.

and least populated areas<sup>8</sup> in the country. Northern parts of Dolpo borders the Tibet Autonomous Region. According to Census 2011, 36 701 people live in Dolpa District (this is the official Nepalese name for Tibetan Dolpo). Less than 5000 people live in Dolpo and almost 90 percent of the region lays above 3.500 meters in elevation.<sup>9</sup> In order to survive in this inhospitable location, population must combine agriculture, live stock and trade. Dolpo is considered a culturally Tibetan enclave where majority of people belong to Tibetan-speaking minority and where many people became followers of Bön religion.

The Dolpo-pa<sup>10</sup> economy was based on salt trade between Nepal and Tibet. “Dolpo relied on yak caravans which transported grain to Tibet during the summer months and returned with salt to barter in the middle hills of Nepal. In winter, the salt was then exchanged in lower Dolpo for millet and barley with Thakalis who would carry the salt by sheep, goats, or horses down to the southern hills to trade it for rice and maize”.<sup>11</sup> Over a span of fifty years, due to political and economic changes, the Chinese put restrictions on salt trade and traffic across the border. Population living in Dolpo was forced to reinvent their economic and migration patterns and to readjust to slightly different way of life. At the beginning of 2000s as a result of boom in China caused by *yartsa gunbu* – a medicinal caterpillar fungus endemic to the Tibetan Plateau – a new economical niche has emerged.<sup>12</sup> Another important factor that brought social change to Dolpo-pa was in 1984 creation in Dolpa District Nepal’s largest national park called Shey Phoksumdo. Very important impact to the region had combination of the internationally recognized movie “Himalaya”,<sup>13</sup> increased presence of NGOs and creation of schools led by the volunteers from many European countries.

### **Educational system and school infrastructure in Nepal**

The first modern school was established in 1853 and it was designated solely for elites. Only children coming from the royalty and Nepalese higher class could get educated and attend it. Under Rana family ruling, education of ordinary people was strictly forbidden.<sup>14</sup> The regime lasted over century and was overthrown in 1951. Prior to Second World War there were only a few English schools, middle or high, in the entire country. After 1951 the importance of a general access to education was recognized by the state and new educational facilities started to emerge. Poor economic conditions in rural areas are

---

<sup>8</sup> According to Census 2011 in Dolpo District live 36 701 people, [www.census.gov.np](http://www.census.gov.np)

<sup>9</sup> Bauer 2004: 3.

<sup>10</sup> Dolpopa means people of Dolpo.

<sup>11</sup> Hay-Edie 2001: 55.

<sup>12</sup> Maksymowicz 2008–2009: 166.

<sup>13</sup> The famous movie “Himalaya, l’enfance d’un chef” by Eric Valli was shot on Phoskumdo location. In Nepal it was screened under the title “Caravan”. In 2000 it received an Oscar nomination for the best foreign movie.

<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, e.g. under Bim Shanser (1929–1932) fifty people were arrested and fined for setting a public library.

insurmountable obstacle for many children to get educated. The government provides tuition-free education to all children between the ages of 6 and 12, yet families often lack sufficient funds to cover non-tuition costs. Those can include books as well as clothing. Similarly, poor families often need their children to work during the day. As a result, many children start school at a late age, such as nine or ten, and dropout rates are rather high. Education is not compulsory, and only 49.7 percent of students completed the fourth grade in 1999 (...). Another barrier to education is a common perception that there is little value in educating females.<sup>15</sup>

Over a span of the last fifty years one may observe an advancement in the field of education. Number of schools are growing. Attendance rates have increased and illiteracy have decreased.<sup>16</sup> The majority of new schools was established in urban areas as well but there are still many problems and challenges that are related to social disparities. Those are based on class, gender, ethnicity and location. There is insufficient infrastructure and poor quality of education (in 2004 only one third of teachers had formal training).<sup>17</sup>

The educational system in Nepal is modeled on the one in the United States. There are three levels of basic education: primary (grades one to five), lower secondary (grades six to eight), and secondary (grades nine and ten). School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination is conducted nationwide at the end of the tenth grade. Grades eleven and twelve are considered as a higher level. Higher education is based on Bachelor (B.A.), Master (M.A.), and Ph.D. studies.

### Taprizia Culture School

Dolpo is one of the most disadvantaged regions in Nepal in terms of access to education. Illiteracy rates are high and educational facilities are sparse.<sup>18</sup> Primary education seems to be rather a luxury. As mentioned above, Dolpo is culturally a Tibetan enclave. This project aims to combine modern education while teaching local history, language and tradition. Particular emphasis is put on preservation of Bön religion.<sup>19</sup> Taprizia Culture School was established in 1998.<sup>20</sup> The facility is situated in Phoksumdo village

---

<sup>15</sup> *Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, Country Profile: Nepal*, November 2005: 8–9.

<sup>16</sup> From 1996 to 2004 the percentage of the population that had ever attended school increased from 34% to 46%. From 1981 to 2001 the adult literacy rate increased from 20.6% to 48.6%. Gender disparities in education have declined. From 1990 to 2004, the percentage of female students at the school level (grades one to ten) increased from nearly 30% to 45.9%. *Ibidem*: 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*: 9.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, there are four education facilities: Taprizia Culture School in Phoksumdo VDC, Kula Mountain School in Panzang Valley, Crystal Mountain School in Do Tharap and Tsharka Valley Mountain School.

<sup>19</sup> For most of its history, the inaccessibility of the high valleys of Dolpo have provided a natural refuge for the Bon religion on the periphery of the Tibetan heartland. See: Hay-Edie 2001: 55.

<sup>20</sup> Taprizia (Tib. Ta pi hri tsa) is the name of an important Bön master who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and who is the patron of the school.

development committee (VDC),<sup>21</sup> which includes the villages Ringmo, Pungmo, Rike and Renji. Most students come from these hamlets. The total population of Phoksumdo VDC is about 500 inhabitants.<sup>22</sup> The idea of establishing the school emerged in 1990s when Marietta Kind, a Swiss social anthropologist, did her fieldwork in Dolpo. The research was based on different aspects of rituals included in Bön religion.<sup>23</sup> She recalls: “During my fieldwork, the people of the village approached me with their desire for a school of their own. I took up their idea and supported their dreams by helping them with advice, contacts and financial support in the jungle of administration and finances.”<sup>24</sup> In 1996, Catherin Inman from the USA, who worked in Phoksumdo for Peace Corps joined in. While working for Shey Phoksumdo National Park she supervised works on Taprizza project. This collaboration proved to be very successful. As Marietta Kind said: “With our different background and deep insights into a local culture we were both able to introduce the project to interesting partners, officials, other NGOs and sources of advice and funding. From there it was a long way, with much community organizing and foreign organizing to the final opening and running of the school. Thanks to the very strong local motivation and strong bonds that developed between all of us during the last years, problems could be solved and the school finally was established in 1998.”<sup>25</sup> Another person who played an important role in the process of setting the school was Semduk Lama. He grew up in Pungmo village and was one of a few in the region who had School Leaving Certificate. From the very beginning Semduk Lama has been working in Taprizza as the school headmaster. His commitment as well as achievements have been recognized in 2010, and he got the National Education Award.

Currently, the school is co-managed by three NGOs: a community-based organization Taprizza Association for Social Help in Dolpo (TASHI-D), Taprizza Verein in Switzerland (with Marietta Kind as the president), and Friends of Dolpa in the USA. The project is supported by parents, local organizations, Phoksumdo village development and Bön centers in Kathmandu and India. The crucial part of financial contributions are donated from organizations based in USA and Switzerland. The number of students and classes has been constantly growing. Whereas in 2006 there were only 103 students, in 2010 were 172, which is almost twice as many. Whole process of education starts in kindergarten and it lasts there for two years. Taprizza is the only school in the Tibetan speaking part of Dolpo which has received the official permission of the Nepalese government to teach up to class ten. It gives students an opportunity to continue their education in one facility until School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination is conducted.

---

<sup>21</sup> The village development committee (VDC) is the smallest administrative unit in rural areas in Nepal.

<sup>22</sup> Nepal Census 1991.

<sup>23</sup> The result of her fieldwork was her M.A. thesis and a book (both under the same title): *Mendrub – A Bönpo Ritual for the Benefit of all Living Beings and the Empowerment of Medicine Performed in Tsho, Dolpo*.

<sup>24</sup> Vögeli 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Kind 2003: 4.

The aim of the Taprizza Project is to support Tibetan-speaking and religious minority. Since all the people of Phoksumdo Development Committee are followers of Bön religion,<sup>26</sup> an important goal is “to maintain ancient traditions and enable children to learn about it outside the monastic way of worship”. Previously, families who wanted their children to receive an education in Bön tradition<sup>27</sup> had to send them to Bön monasteries. One of those is Triten Norbutse Bönpo Monastery in Kathmandu and the other is Menri Monastery in Dolanji, India. Despite the fact that children were attending there free of charge, almost none of them could afford it. Prior to the foundation of Taprizza School the nearest one was in Dunai, the capital of the Dolpa District. To get there, the distance is approximately three days by foot. The majority of children from Phoksumdo VDC never had attended any school at all. Poverty and long distances between settlements are not the only obstacles. As Amanda Christie, secular missionary living in Dunai notes: “Children going to school located in a nearby valley would have to stay the night in a stranger’s home, and in a situation of conflict between the inhabitants of the valleys this is not possible”<sup>28</sup>

In Taprizza’s culturally familiar setting, students are provided with boarding facilities and are taught mainly by local teachers. They are mostly men since women don’t feel comfortable to live and work in such harsh conditions.

The school staff members are:

- school headmaster,
- teachers (mainly from local villages, but also those who are sent by the government),
- *geshe* (teacher who holds a Ph. D. degree in Bön religion),
- cooks,
- *amahs* (from Tib. *a ma* – ‘mother’) ‘school mothers’ who take care of the youngest children at the school),
- treasurer,
- storekeeper,
- nurse working part-time.

At the very beginning, when the school was created, despite the benefits parents were still very hesitant to send children there.<sup>29</sup> In order to convince them Semduk Lama came up with a brilliant idea. Together with children he prepared an artistic performance that included both traditional and contemporary dances, costumes and songs. When parents

---

<sup>26</sup> The Bön religion claims to have its roots in the ancient pre-Buddhist religion. But besides the different interpretation of its origin, most of its practices are in general strongly under the Buddhist influence. The English rendering of Bön and Buddhism is inappropriate; both of the traditions have their buddhas and consider themselves to be “Insiders” (Tib. *nang pa*, the term used in Tibetan for Buddhists). They can be distinguished only on the level of Tibetan by terms *chö* (*chos*, for so called “Buddhism”) and *bön* (*bon*, for so called Bön). Both terms are different renderings of the Indian term *dharma* in Tibetan. See: Kværne 2009; Kværne 1972.

<sup>27</sup> Kind 2003: 3.

<sup>28</sup> Fragment of an interview with Amanda Christie conducted by N. Maksymowicz in July 2008, from materials of the author’s archives.

<sup>29</sup> An interview with Sher Badur Buddha conducted by N. Maksymowicz in August 2008, from materials of the author’s archives.

saw how beautifully children performed their doubts softened. Most of them changed their mind and decided to send their children to Taprizza.<sup>30</sup> Apart from standard government curriculum (Nepali, English, Maths, Science and Drawing) children are taught subjects related to their local culture and tradition. *Geshe* gives children lessons on local history and Bön religion. They learn the Tibetan language, traditional dances, songs and drama. Curriculum also includes local handicrafts, lessons of painting *thangka*<sup>31</sup> and woodcarving. There are also environmental classes that include collecting plants and herbs which are used in traditional Tibetan medicine. Children go on the field trips with specialists who share their knowledge of local plants and their various use. While living at school the classes are held from Monday to Thursday. Every Friday is committed to cleaning, sport activities, environmental classes and work at the school garden. At small shop located in the school building teachers and students are able to sell local handicraft and have chance to practice their entrepreneurial skills. Because of the harsh environment local community recognized that solar technology could become their only source of energy and older students are responsible for maintenance of solar collectors. They have an opportunity to acquire skills which in the future may turn into profession based on solar technology.

Another important factor associated to Tapritza school is an effort to educate girls and young women. In Nepalese society the presumption that women do not need an education is very strong. Following the statement of 17 years old Sherab Sangmo Lama from the 10<sup>th</sup> grade class gives us the feeling on how education towards women is perceived. Sherab says: “I would like to become a nurse, because in our area there is no good health care and it takes many days to walk to the closest hospital. I would like to return to my remote village, develop a region and open a small hospital. (...) My parents could barely support me in my education, without the Taprizza School and the Taprizza NGO and Friends of Dolpo my schooling would not be possible. (...) My parents think that educating a girl is pointless, because she will move into a different household (of the husband) and do field and house work there. I do not agree and I am eager to continue my education”.<sup>32</sup>

It should be noticed that while the three NGO’s projects are in progress and the Taprizza school is a main priority, there are other activities that are very important there as well.

In 2009, for instance, the villages workshops were organized, and the main focus there was directed to educate people on how to make and produce handicraft and how to attract tourists. The other effort was concentrated on how to donate and contribute towards local community and how to preserve Tibetan culture. The good example of innovative thinking are mobile phone cases made from traditional belts or cushions made from local fabrics. In order to protect cultural and religious heritage the conservation and renovation works in Bön monasteries are also being strongly supported. To improve medical attention and conditions, the traditional Tibetan medicine was successfully combined with Western

---

<sup>30</sup> An interview with Semduk Lama conducted by N. Maksymowicz in August 2008, from materials of the author’s archives.

<sup>31</sup> *Thangka* – traditional Buddhist scroll painting.

<sup>32</sup> Annual Report Taprizza NGO 2008: 8.

scientific knowledge. For example, three hospital rooms were built next to traditional Tibetan clinic.

Taprizza school complex is located at the intersection of several trading routes, and it has become an important social institution where people from local community can meet and interact with each other. The numbers show that the attendance of students is constantly growing. It should be noticed that graduates leaving the school continue their education at other locations. Good reputation of this educational facility is well known within Tibetan community. Taprizza school is constantly attracting more children due to the fact that many children want to attend there but only the ones from Phoksumdo village are admitted there.

### **Siddharta Kula Mountain Primary School**

Kula Mountain Primary School started its activity in 2001. It is located approximately 4500 meters above sea level in the region known for its remoteness and inaccessibility. The school is named after the sacred mountain in the Panzang Valley. It was founded thanks to the joint effort of the French NGO 'Couleurs Himalaya' and the local community.

The main responsibility for this particular facility rests on Dolpo Local Help Association in Tinje which was founded in 2002. The committee members include: the school headmaster, chiefs of villages from Tinje development committee, parents of the students and *amchis* (i.e. Tibetan doctors).

It should be mentioned that this project is possible thanks to the cooperation of Tenzin Norbu and Ann Lelong. Together they created very powerful enterprise that flourishes and has become very successful. Lama Tenzin Norbu is well-known *thangka* painter, who comes from Tinkyu village, and Anne Lelong is a French photographer, whose fascination with nomadic people of Himalayas brought her to Dolpo many years ago. Interestingly, they got to know each other thanks to the famous movie "Himalaya, l'enfance d'un chef" by Eric Valli. As a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris, Anne met Eric Valli and Thinlen Lhondup, who also played himself in the film. When lama Tenzin Norbu came to France to promote the movie, he painted the images that Valli used in the last scene of the film. When in 2000 Anne visited Nepal, Norbu invited her to his village, Tinkyu. During her stay she realized how isolated Panzang Valley is, and there she said "that they are too far and that school will never come there".<sup>33</sup>

She noticed that there are many obstacles that are not allowing parents to send children to school freely. Not only the poverty and long distances, but also political conflicts between the valleys stand in way for next generation of young Nepalese to gain proper education and exposure to the outside world. As Lelong notes: "It is difficult even to send children to Do Tarap and it's also political problem between one

---

<sup>33</sup> Fragment of an interview with Anne Lelong conducted by N. Maksymowicz in July 2008, from materials of the author's archives.

valley and another valley. The valleys of Dolpo are like small kingdoms. One valley is a kingdom, the next is another kingdom. It still works like this".<sup>34</sup> In consequence of those problems children are sent to distant Kathmandu to become properly educated. After returning to France Lelong raised money by selling photographs she has taken while being in the Himalayas. With the money that she was able to raise she established NGO "Coulers Himalayas".

Having learned how things are settled locally, she decided to establish a school in accordance to the local law. Lelong first wanted to estimate how many children lived in the valley. Going from house to house, she counted 400 children aged 1 to 15 and 200 of them were in the age that qualified them to attend primary school. It was obvious that admission of such a great number of children would be far beyond the capacity of the school. She recalls: "How was I to decide, which child would go to school? I followed a set of principles that guide the Dolpopa when they do not have enough water. Someone, usually a lama, acts as the leader and decides who will receive water this year. They do this because if all the people had water, then no one would have a enough of it. They dig a channel, open it, and the water flows to a chosen families, so if you send water and give a bit more to one family and a little bit more to another, these families will have plenty of water of a good quality. The other villagers share the small amount that remains. The next year, another family will receive water, and this is how it's been done for years. I decided that we would do the same with teaching children. I learned how to act and make decisions according to local traditions".<sup>35</sup>

Lelong adapted those local systems and created something new and fresh, while traditional and innovative customs and values remained unchanged. Those traditions have been described by Bauer in his seminal book *High frontiers, Dolpo and the changing world of Himalayan pastoralists*.

Each system is based on equal distribution of scarce resources. There is a lottery system of water distribution (*chu gyen*), the pasture lottery (*lhe gyen*), and the system of sharing the fuel (*rame*).<sup>36</sup> *Rame* is based on the rule that each household sends only one member of the family to collect fuel in groups for three days at a time.<sup>37</sup> The lotteries consist in throwing the dice or drawing of lots in the presence of a lama.

The method that Lelong employed appears as an interesting combination of the above. Each family could choose only one child to apply for admission to school.

While the lottery is conducted, the adequate proportions must be kept with equality between sexes being taken under strong consideration.

The names of children were written down on the small pieces of paper, and were put into three buckets (one for each village) and selected at random. In the first year, after

---

<sup>34</sup> Fragment of an interview with Anne Lelong conducted by N. Maksymowicz in July 2008, from materials of the author's archives.

<sup>35</sup> Fragment of an interview with Anne Lelong conducted by N. Maksymowicz in July 2008, from materials of the author's archives.

<sup>36</sup> Bauer 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Bauer 2004: 58.

the program was introduced, only 15 children were selected and classes were conducted at community tent. School as an institution has received from nearby village very old building which became restored by the local inhabitants. By mutual agreement Lelong requested that parents should commit to work on behalf of the school a few days a year. Their obligation was to provide a certain amount of wood which would be used to rebuild old structures, and to make necessary repair that old building was requiring. Whenever families were extremely poor, yak dung was gladly accepted. It was burned and used as a source of fuel at the school's kitchen.

When I asked Anne whether children who attended school did not lose a chance to learn how to perform domestic tasks, she responded to me saying: "This is why we only accept one child from each family. Usually, the eldest son ran the family business, the second usually became a monk, and only the youngest could get an education. That is how it was before. I decided that we would accept only one, and this was usually the youngest boy in the family. As some boys could not attend because of their responsibilities at home, we offered them a place in the following year. We are open six to seven months a year, so there are still a few months when pupils spend all their time with their family working in the field".<sup>38</sup>

Similarly to the Taprizia School, the Kula Mountain School aims to provide education to the underprivileged children. Its goal is to protect and to promote native culture and to improve the quality of life of the local community. At this point, about 90 children who attend the school are offered an education up to the fifth grade. Apart from the government curriculum, children are taught Tibetan language, so they are able to read their histories and to keep their cultural traditions alive. The school also offers courses of reading and writing for adults. The main focus is to work with community members and help them to develop necessary infrastructure, such as telephone lines, solar lights, solar cookers, solar water pumps and fuel efficient stoves.

The long-term projects run by the school embrace working with local *amchis* and offering them help to create a traditional clinic in Tinje. Dolpo museum is an ongoing project and is also a cultural center for local community. New technologies allow to create solar-heated school buildings and local greenhouses. There are also vocational training programs that teach traditional arts and handicrafts, such as *thangka* painting. Tenzin Norbu spends several months each year there where he teaches people the local handicraft. He currently lives in Kathmandu and was the one who set up Dolpo Artists' Cooperative, which produces hand-stitched leather goods. They produce leather bags that are modeled on Tibetan saddlebags. The portion of the proceeds from all of his exhibits go to support the local school. Anne Lelong moved to Kathmandu and is still engaged in the project.

---

<sup>38</sup> Fragment of an interview with Anne Lelong conducted by N. Maksymowicz in July 2008, from materials of the author's archives.

## Conclusions

Tapriza Culture School and Kula Mountain School seem to be examples of a successful joint efforts of Western based NGOs and local communities.

The key elements are long-term commitment and partnership cooperation. Constant support of the volunteers from Western countries (Switzerland, the USA or France) helped to build educational facilities that otherwise would have no chance to develop. It should be emphasized that local communities took very active part in the process of setting them. The management of schools is a shared responsibility of local people and NGO's. The paternalistic attitude on the 'Western part' is not visible here. On the contrary, important decisions are made with respect for local traditions and existing systems.

Both projects give children from the economically disadvantaged and the geographically isolated region access to education. It should be noticed that in Dolpo region education is a luxury that should not be underestimated. Most children as well as adults would have no chance to get even basic education since most families cannot afford it. The school curriculum embraces not only modern education, but also studying the local handicrafts, language, tradition and history.

The fact that children have an opportunity to learn in a culturally familiar setting have very positive impact on development of the region. Previously, children who were sent to study in distant schools were losing contact with their families and with local communities for years to come. In consequence, their ties with place of their origin have been gradually diminishing. Whether children educated in Tapriza Culture School and Kula Mountain School will use their skills and knowledge on behalf of their communities, remains to be seen.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my thanks to Semduk Lama, Anne Lelong, Amanda Christie, and my interpreter Sher Badur Buddha, for time they shared with me and for introducing me to the Dolpo people and their way of life.

I also would like to give my special thanks to Nicole Graaf for her consent to use some of her photographs, and to Alex Leszek Mróz for his help in choosing the most suitable pictures for this article and for his creative criticism.

I am very grateful to Dr. Anna Szymoszyn from the Polish Academy of Sciences for her trust and for giving me an opportunity to be a part of her research team in Nepal.

## Bibliography

- Annual Report Tapriza NGO 2006, [www.tapriza.org](http://www.tapriza.org), accessed 29 September 2012.
- Annual Report Tapriza NGO 2007, [www.tapriza.org](http://www.tapriza.org), accessed 29 September 2012
- Annual Report Tapriza NGO 2008, [www.tapriza.org](http://www.tapriza.org), accessed 29 September 2012.
- Annual Report Tapriza NGO 2009, [www.tapriza.org](http://www.tapriza.org), accessed 29 September 2012.

Annual Report Taprizia NGO 2010, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 29 September 2012.

Bauer, K.M., *High frontiers: Dolpo and the changing world of Himalayan pastoralists*, Columbia University Press, New York 2004.

*Discoveries in Western Tibet and the Western Himalayas: Essays on History, Literature, Archaeology and Art*, edited by Amy Heller, Giacomella Orofino, Charles Ramble, Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford 2003: Brill 2007.

Hay-Edie, T., "Protecting the Treasures of the Earth: Nominating Dolpo as a World Heritage", *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 2001, 20-1, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, pp. 46–76.

Kind, M., *Taprizia Lobtra. A community based cultural school and its history*, *Proceedings of the Conference on Development Assistance to Ethnic Tibetan Communities, Taipei 2003*, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 29 September 2012.

Kind, M., "Our graduate's vision of the future", *Taprizia NGO. Annual Report 2008*, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 29 September 2012.

Kværne, P., "Bon and shamanism", *East and West*, 2009, vol. 59/1-4, pp. 19–24.

Kværne, P., "Aspects of the origin of the Buddhist tradition in Tibet", *Numen*, 19/1, 1972, pp. 22–40.

Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, Country Profile: Nepal, November 2005, [www.lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf](http://www.lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nepal.pdf), accessed 17 October 2012.

Maksymowicz, N., "Women of Himalayan Dolpo", *Ethnologia Polona*, vol. 29–30: 2008–2009, pp. 165–180.

Mathiessen, P., *The snow leopard*, Penguin Books, New York 1987.

*Nepal Population Report*, [www.mohp.gov.np](http://www.mohp.gov.np), accessed 15 October 2012.

Ramble, Ch., "The founding of a Tibetan village: the popular transformation of history", *Kailash* 1983, 10 (3-4), pp. 267–290.

Snellgrove, D., (ed. and trans.) 1967 [1992]. *Four Lamas of Dolpo: Tibetan biographies*, Kathmandu: Himalayan Book Sellers.

Szymoszyn, A., "The spreading of Bon Culture Among Tibetan Refugees. Polish Implications", *Ethnologia Polona* 2004, vol. 25, pp. 117–133.

*Taprizia Verein Newsletter* 2008, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 25 September 2012.

*Taprizia Verein Newsletter* 2009, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 25 September 2012.

*Taprizia Verein Newsletter* 2011, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 25 September 2012.

*Taprizia Verein Newsletter* 2012, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 25 September 2012.

Thornton, T.L., Riccardi, T., *The Himalayas: a syllabus of the region's history, anthropology, and religion*, Association for Asian Studies Occasional Papers Series, Michigan 1995.

Valli E., Summers, D., *Dolpo: hidden land of the Himalayas*, Aperture, Michigan 1988.

Vögeli, Ch., "An interview with Marietta Kind", *Globetrotter* 1999 No. 53, [www.taprizia.org](http://www.taprizia.org), accessed 29 September 2012.

[www.bonfoundation.org](http://www.bonfoundation.org), accessed 15 October 2012.

[www.census.gov.np](http://www.census.gov.np), accessed 15 October 2012.

[www.data.worldbank.org](http://www.data.worldbank.org), accessed 18 October 2012.



Photo 1. Dunai Dolpo District Headquarters  
(Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)



Photo 2. Children playing at the main street of Dunai.  
Dolpo is the birthplace of Maoism in Nepal. Banner with Maoist slogans  
(Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)



Photo 3. Building of the Taprizza Culture School. In the background a Himalayan mountain range  
(Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)



Photo 4. Taprizza School courtyard where children on regular basis pray and play  
(Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)



Photo 5. Children studying in the classroom of Tapritza Culture School  
(Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)



Photo 6. From left to right: Samduk Lama, who is co-founder and manager of the Tapritza School, Rimpoche and the author  
(Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)



Photo 7. A traditional Nepali dance. Children from Tapritza School performing here, celebrate the *puja*. In Thasang Tsholin Gompa on Lake Phoksumdo, every 12 years the *puja* is being celebrated. Pilgrims from all over the Upper and Lower Dolpo come to participate in it (Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)



Photo 8. Anne Lelong, the co-founder of the Kula Mountain School (Photograph by Natalia Maksymowicz, June 2008)