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Paper for Panel 31:

'The Local Party – A Force Of Development In Rural Nepal'

Abstract

In Nepal there is a strong demand for democracy, but an ambiguous feeling about political parties. Seen from Kathmandu, where corruption scandals and factionalism has run rampant, one could arrive at the conclusion that Nepal has been a country of 'bad politicians'. This paper tries to 'flip the coin'. It focuses on an aspect, which has rarely been studied in Nepal: the role of local as opposed to national level party organisations. The far majority of the Nepalese people have encountered party politics where they live: in the villages. How, then, did the activities of local party organisations affect local development? Based on evidence gathered in eight villages, the paper suggests that party competition mobilised villagers with political ambitions or 'political drive'. Politicisation of the Nepalese state has many negative connotations: factionalism, corruption, and political instability. Seen from the bottom up, however, did party competition drive development?

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The Local Party – A Force Of Development In Rural Nepal

By Hans Gorm Andersen, Ph.D. candidate

1 Introduction

In Nepal there is a strong demand for democracy, but an ambiguous feeling about political parties. It began in the 1950s when party politics led to factionalism and political instability (Levi, 1954). In 1960 a royal coup against a one-year old popularly elected government was followed by a ban on political parties and the introduction of an authoritarian regime, the Panchayat System. The King ruled for three decades striking down on any attempt by politicians to manifest their organisations. The major parties – Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communists – led an underground campaign against the executive monarchy. They were seen as bearers of democracy nurturing the hope for the return of political liberties and civil rights to the country. In 1990 the wave of democratisation hit Nepal. A popular uprising and external pressure forced the King to step down. General elections were held one year later promising a new era of multiparty democracy.

Only a few years after these dramatic events, however, many saw the parties in a different light. The glow of the once esteemed party leaders as patriotic liberators soon faded, as party politics took its course. Politicians became seen as 'corrupt' and 'selfish' with 'excessive passion for private gain (Dahal, 1999, p. 1)'. They were portrayed as making 'excessive political intervention' in the administration of the country, creating 'a situation of disorder, indiscipline, aberration and anarchy…undermining the laws, rules and regulations…and paralysing state organs (Hachhethu, 2000, p. 110)'. A public oppinion poll identified the 'political parties and leaders' as the 'main threat to democracy (Sharma and Sen, 1999)'. Gone was the view of the parties as the bearers of democracy. The rise of political instability and corruption led a Nepalese political analyst to comment that:

> 'Democracy has promised recovery and relief. But, in reality, democracy has multiplied social anamolies with continued political instability…manifest with habits of plundering the resources of the state (…) Politicians are the mainsprings of the rampant corruption in the country and a decade of politicking on national bureaucracy…has reduced it to a football by the politicians (…) A reform…requires a reform in politics and [in] the habits of politicians… (Kumar, 2000, p. 2)'.

In October 2002, there was yet a royal coup. The King explained – like his predecessor in 1960 – that political unrest and corruption at the hands of the parties had forced him to intervene and bring order to the country. As the transition to democracy was abruptly ended, many blamed the politicians even more. They had failed to take advantage of the liberation in 1990 to consolidate a multiparty system in the country. Seen from Kathmandu, one could arrive at the conclusion that Nepal has been a country of 'bad politicians'. It remains one of the poorest countries in the world with a rural population at around 90 percent – like fifty years ago – and some of the highest illiteracy rates in developing countries (UNDP, 1998). The failure of the politicians to concentrate on poverty reduction, to fight corruption, and to address rising political instability led many observers to conclude that politicians have a wrong 'mindset' at best and are corrupt at worst. Yet the rise of parties and politicians may also have positive implications. This paper tries to 'flip the coin' and focus on an aspect, which has rarely been studied in Nepal: the role of local as opposed to national level party organisations. The far majority of the Nepalese people have encountered the political parties where they live: in the villages. How, then, did the activities of Village Party Committees affect local development?

2 Introducing The Local Party

My interpreter and I collected evidence in eight villages in the months following the King's coup in October 2002. We were able to contrast information on the role of local parties before after the royal takeover. Contrasting these two scenarios allowed us to enquire: what had changed in these villages since the marginalisation of the parties? The coup was still too recent to make conclusive observations, as it had yet to fully sink in. This was a transitional period in which few were certain whether elections were pending or authoritarian rule had returned. Yet comparing the two scenarios gave insight into how local development may unfold when local parties are present and when they are absent. Before we examine the relationship between the activities of local party organisation, on the one hand, and local development, on the other, it is useful to place the local parties within the broader organisational framework in which they operate. Figure 1 gives a simple overview of the territorial levels of the state showing the different levels of government.

Figure 1 The Territorial Levels Of The State In Nepal – From Centre To Village

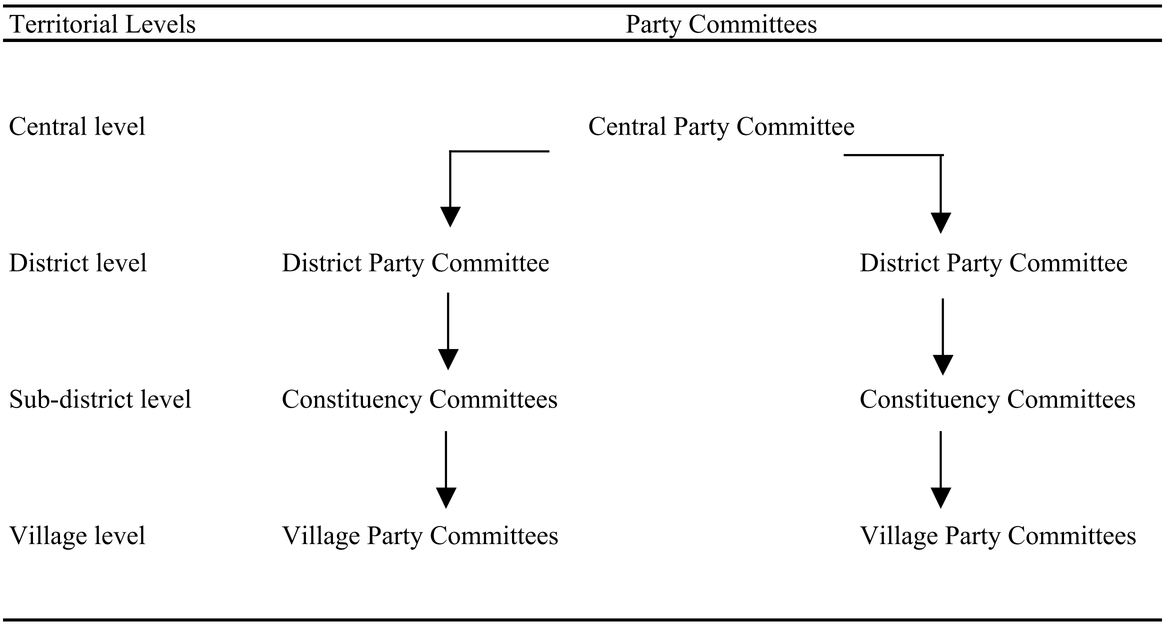
Territorial Levels	Local Government Sector	Other Sectors
Central level	Ministry of Local Development	Other ministries
	↓	↓
District level	District Development Committee (DDC)	Line agencies
	↓	↓
Village level	Village Development Committee (VDC)	Field Staff

Nepal has a local government sector under Ministry Of Local Development (MLD). MLD oversees two tires of local governments in the rural areas: these include the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and the District Development Committee (DDC).

Local elections were held in 1992 and 1997 on the basis of the party system. Until the royal coup, the political parties were in charge in these local bodies – mainly United Marxist-Leninist (UML) and Nepali Congress (NC). After the coup, appointed functionaries took over replacing the elected representatives. The VDCs received since 1995 an annual lumpsum grant from the government of 500,000 Nrs. (approximately 7,500 USD). This amount, however, was insufficient to carry out work of greater scope. Local governments, therefore, continued to depend on financial support from higher levels. The bulk of the resources – 95-96 pct. – were retained in the sector ministries and channelled through the line agencies or invested directly through centrally directed programs and projects. Every sector ministry in Kathmandu has line agencies at district level: line agency for education, health, agriculture, electricity, and so forth. The local parties, then, have been confronting two sectors: the local government sector and other sectors.

Local parties, in turn, are also placed within the framework of their respective party organisations. Figure 2 provides a simple overview of the territorial organisation of the parties.

Figure 2 The Territorial Levels Of The Parties In Nepal – From Centre To Village


Territorial Levels
Party Committees
Central level
Central Party Committee
District level
District Party Committee
District Party Committee
Sub-district level
Constituency Committees
Constituency Committees
Village level
Village Party Committees
Village Party Committees

This framework applies to every party organised at a national level. Each party would include a District Party Committee, a sub-district committee in each parliamentary constituency, and Village Party Committees at the level of the VDC. Competition over control of the VDC was, naturally, a key activity at the village level. Yet Village Party Committees of UML, NC, and other parties were engaged in many additional activities. Let us take a brief look at the size and members of the local party organisations before proceeding to examine their role in the promotion of local development in the selected villages.

2.1 Local Party Workers

Table 1 provides the results of a survey conducted in a random sample of settlements within the selected villages. None of the respondents categorised themselves as active members of a party. A total of 12 percent recalled an incidence, when a party worker had either asked them to 'take membership' by paying a small fee, or to sign a letter of signatures in support of a certain party. The Village Party Chairmen categorised these as simple members, but only in few parties were the numbers actually on file. Many of them had joined in the early 1990s during electoral campaigns and never renewed their membership. Yet it is noteworthy to observe the composition of the passive members. Firstly, men (16 pct.) had enlisted more frequently than women (4 pct.). Secondly, it was much more common among the more educated (35 pct.) to join than among those villagers, who had not been to school (7 pct.). The far majority had not signed up for membership.

Table 1 Villagers, Who Once Signed Up For A Party, By Sex And Education

	Total	Member	Not member
Total	**100**	**12**	**88**
Sex			
Men	100	16	84
Women	100	4	96
Years of school			
0	100	7	93
1<5	100	6	94
5<10	100	22	78
10+	100	35	65

The village parties were small organisations comprised mainly of middle aged and more educated men. The party organisation comprised between 9 and 31 party workers. Table 2 shows the number and the distribution of these members by sex, average age, and education. Among the 236 active party workers included in our survey, only 16 or less than 1 pct. were women. On average a party workers had been to school for 8 years, which is above average. In the selected villages more than 50 pct. of the population were illiterate (NPC, 2002). The category of 'back-up workers' includes those members, upon which the Village Party Chairman counted in addition to the party workers at the time of the elections. They would include notably the friends and relatives of the party workers and were expected to participate in the electoral campaigns. But it was the active party workers, who would be involved in the daily activities. How could these small organisations make a difference to local development? A brief look at their capacity is warranted.

Table 2 Party Workers In The Selected Villages, Thirteen Party Committees, 2003

Party	Party Workers	Party workers			Backup workers
		Women	Age, mean	School, mean	
Total	**236**	**16**	**44**	**8**	**1144**
UML	31	0	39	9	0
UML	20	1	42	8	0
UML	13	0	38	6	32
UML	17	2	40	11	97
UML	11	1	41	9	83
RPP	15	2	45	5	39
RPP	17	3	56	4	64
NC	11	0	45	8	38
NC	30	1	46	8	0
NC	21	0	45	7	0
NC	19	5	44	10	0
NC	22	0	49	7	0
JM	9	1	41	7	791

2.2 Organisational Capacity

The Village Party Chairmen stated that the bulk of the party funds were concentrated at central level. Only two of the Village Party Committees claimed to have savings exceeding a few thousand rupees. One boasted savings of 11,000 rupees (approximately 150 USD) whereas several chairmen claimed that they ‘don’t even have money for tea’. Village Party Committees would meet in private houses, at the school, or perhaps at the VDC office. Yet it was a general remark that the money at hand was too little to implement their ideas. There were only two formal sources of funding: membership fees and private donations. Part of the meager revenues, in turn, was to be transferred to the Central Party Committee at a fixed percentage. The financial capacity of these Village Party Committees was, in other words, modest. But some of them had another important asset: educated party workers. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the party workers by years in school. 55 pct. had been to school for ten years or more making them almost as educated as some functionaries in the district administration. This is, as we shall see, an advantage.

Table 3 Party Workers In The Selected Villages By Years In School

	Number	Pct.
Total	**231**	**100**
0	49	21
1<5	21	9
5<10	35	15
10+	126	55

4 Party Competition

We shall now examine how these quite small party organisations of relatively educated party workers would affect local development. It is important to bear in mind that in the selected villages, the needs were basic indeed. We conducted a survey showing that the three main demands to the VDC were about roads, electricity, and drinking water. Most citizens also demanded services of a more personal nature from their politicians, such as credit, help in dealing with officials in the district town, mediation in local disputes, or assistance in times of illness. As one politician noted, a Nepalese family has all sorts of needs and, therefore, politicians must serve all sorts of needs, too. Village Party Committees and, notably, their leaders would seek to serve at least some of their party workers and voters. In doing so, however, they found themselves in competition with other parties striving towards the same goal. In order to make their roles in local development intelligible, we shall focus on the local party organisations as competitive ones. They would compete over various issues but at the core, we would find competition for resources.

4.1 Organisational Control

The Village Party Committees were seeking to control the leadership of the various organisations in their community. The biggest price to be won was the VDC – at least measured in rupees. The VDC chairman would preside over the annual lumpsum grant of 500,000 rupees from the government. Insofar as the party were able to maintain domination, these funds would constitute a key source through which to serve a political base. But there were other important positions at stake, too. The party would seek leadership in other committees such as the School Management Committee, the Cooperative, the user's committee, the board of a local donor program, the Temple Development Committee, and so forth. Like parties do in general, it would seek to establish a strong presence where decisions of importance to its party workers and members were being made. The Village Party Chairman and other leading party workers were often found to hold representative positions in various other local organisations either as members, secretaries, or chairmen. As an engineer in a line agency explained to us:

> 'A man who is not a party leader cannot become a leader of anything; the party leader becomes leader of everything… Since everybody will ask for the chairman, it is important for the party to control the leadership everywhere. When NGOs or government agencies comes to a village they will ask for the chairman of whatever organisation they are seeking to approach. Moreover, users' groups try to select a good party leader, one that is strong and seems to be willing to balance their needs without discrimination. A leader has to be a politician – this is the kind of person that people will follow'.

In the selected villages, notably the Village Party Chairmen were found highly engaged with other organisational activities. Figure 3 provides three examples that are typical of our sample. Some Village Party Chairmen were members of less, some active in more local organisations. But in general this pattern applied. The purpose below is to show the variation in the types of organisations in which Village Party Chairmen were involved. The chairman of NC in Sanga, for instance, was also the leader of a youth club, the chairman of two School Management Committees, and a member of several other local bodies. As the engineer noted above, each organisation would potentially constitute a bounty for the chairman and the party workers involved. The chairman of the School Management Committee would enjoy control of the resources received from Ministry Of Education; the chairman of an NGO would access information first about opportunities for trainings or credit provided by a foreign donor; and so forth. Being the leader of a successful local organisation would, moreover, bring prestige to the Village Party Chairman and his party. These are, in fact, quite common characteristics of parties anywhere, yet they are important to note in order to show that local organisations were 'politicised' – made subject to party competition – if they were seen as politically significant.

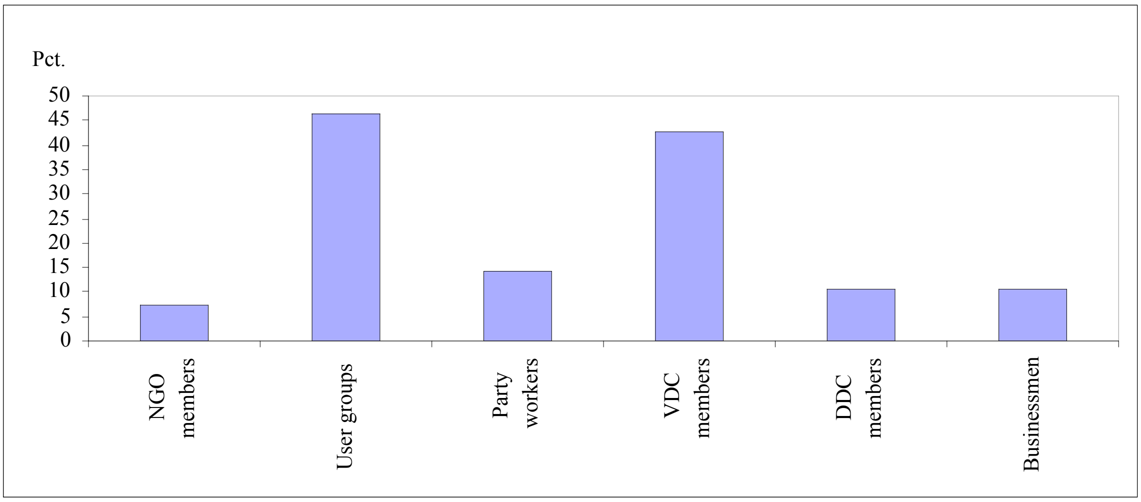
Figure 3 Examples Of Organisational Involvement Of Village Party Chairmen

NC chairman, Sanga	UML chairman Meghauli	UML Chairman, Kharel-thok
User's committee (water)	Buffer Zone Committee	School Management Comm.
User's committee (road)	Local NGO	School Management Comm.
School Management Comm.	School Management Comm.	User's committee (electricity)
Unesco Youth Club	Local Tourist Board	Temple Fund Committee
Health Management Comm.	Bazaar Committee	Board of Local Savings Coop.
Local NGO		Livestock Insurance Coop.

4.2 Access To Resources Outside The Village

The competition would also stand over access to resources at higher levels. When a Village Party Committee failed to control local organisations in which resources were accessible, the chairman and party workers would tend to scout for alternative opportunities. One of the places they would look is in the line agencies of the sector ministries. Figure 4 gives an indication of the frequency of such local visits to the district offices.

Figure 4 'Who Shows Up In The Line Agency On A Normal Day?' Staff Views In Pct



We asked in eight different line agencies among 28 random officials – 3-4 in each – who they would encounter at the office on a normal day. This brief survey only provides a loose estimate. Yet the result does give an idea about the frequency of visits from the village level. Albeit the distances involved – some villagers had to walk for three days to reach the district town – the rates were high. Politicians in the capacity of VDC members and users' groups chairmen were those seen most often in the line agencies – 40-45 pct. of the officers would meet them on a daily basis. NGO members, party workers, and DDC members were less frequent. We interviewed citizens, who had come to the district administration headquarters, asking about their business with the officials. Most of them were, indeed, village politicians bringing a matter to one of the line agencies on behalf of their village.

Local politicians that would venture outside their village in search of resources higher-up were known locally as 'dhaune manche' [those who go again and again] or 'runners'. In a state like Nepal where the bulk of the resources are located at higher levels, a runner is an important political asset for a local community. In lack of local funds a local politician may seek to approach a bureaucrat or political representative in the district town or in Kathmandu to have an irrigation project transferred to his area, more teachers allocated for the local school, or a road to pass through the village. Only certain villagers possessed the political will and skill to assume the role of the runner, as table 4 would indicate.

Table 4 Profile Of Runners Among VDC Members In The Selected Villages 2001-02

		Number of visits to line agencies 2001-02				
	Total	30+	20<30	10<20	1<10	0
Total	**40**	**10**	**3**	**5**	**6**	**16**
VDC ch.	7	6	1	0	0	0
Vice ch.	3	0	0	2	1	0
Ward ch.	30	4	2	3	5	16
Education, mean (years)	**7**	**10**	**9**	**7**	**7**	**5**
12+	7	5	0	1	0	1
10-11	8	1	1	0	2	4
6-9	11	2	2	3	2	2
1-5	3	1	0	0	1	1
0	11	1	0	1	1	8
Contacts, mean	**8**	**20**	**10**	**8**	**2**	**1**
30<40	3	3	0	0	0	0
20<30	3	2	1	0	0	0
10<20	5	2	0	2	0	1
1<10	17	2	2	2	5	6
0	12	1	0	1	1	9

Among a sample of 40 VDC members 10 had headed out to the line agencies in the district town 30 times or more in 2001-02 – their final year in office. Conversely, 16 had not. The runners in the peak category to the lefthand side in the table share certain characteristics. They include the VDC chairmen, who were, moreover, Village Party Chairmen, and a few Ward Chairmen. The Ward Chairmen are regular members of the VDC. The average runner has been to school for 10 years and has personal contacts among 20 influential persons at higher levels – such as MPs, party bosses, sectretaries, NGO leaders, and so forth. Those, who did not approach line agency officers, in turn, feature the opposite average characteristics: only five years in school and merely one personal contact. The data indicates that in the selected villages access to resources at higher levels was dependent upon the efforts of the local elite. It was not the privilege of any villagers to make contacts among more educated officials in the higher offices. Competition, then, stood mainly between local party leaders who were able to run higher-up.

The Village Party Chairman and the party workers approached many other higher offices than the line agencies. It was quite common to venture all the way to Kathmandu and approach the MPs, secretaries, and even the ministers. One village would compete against the others to have these superiours transfer resources to their area rather than the other. One official informed that local politicians had been a constant source of political pressure. Some were quite cynical about the political motives involved. They interpreted the actions of VDC members and users' group chairmen as being part of local party competition. An engineer in the line agency for education gave a typical statement in these terms:

> 'The politicians have a political reason to come… they don't care about the technical issues. So what the officers and the politicians want doesn't match. While the officers are concerned with rules and regulations, the local politicians are simply concerned with satisfying their own interest. They are selfish…that is their mentality… If the local politicians want something, they don't care about rules and regulations. They want to look good in the eyes of the people – this is why they are interested'.

Others found that the motives were a mix. Another engineer noted that local politicians were probably interested to serve both their popularity and local development at the same time, each reinforcing the other. We have seen here that Village Party Committees may seek resources through two avenues: control of local organisations and 'running' to the higher levels. The data has also shown that these political activities mainly involve the local educated elite, who has personal contacts at higher levels. In other words, the influential local politicians are skilled and connected and thus able to negotiate the obstacles that a politician would meet in a state like Nepal: difficult access to scarce resources, which are concentrated under the control of more educated officials and politicians.

5 The Political Drive

How, then, could Village Party Committees promote local development? We shall suggest that both in the quest for organisational control and access to resources higher-up, local politicians may be striving for popularity or some other advantage, on the one hand, but benefit local development, on the other. We should not necessarily expect party competition to benefit various development objectives intentionally. Moreover, the 'political drive' may marginalise the interests of one group of villagers – notably the opposition – while serving another. Equity or poverty alleviation is often on the line.

Political parties are often organised and focused to serve supporters rather than competitors and there is, therefore, an inherent probability that party leaders would provide services to some citizens before others. In some cases, party competition may, nevertheless, boost local development. We shall first provide an example showing that 'political drive' may, indeed, lead to unequal distribution of resources. But the paper then takes the issue a bit further by showing that this drive may, in certain circumstances, promote the organisation of citizens and push the delivery of public services and infrastructure. Let us first take a look at the distribution of the 500,000 rupees in the VDCs.

5.1 Unequal Distribution

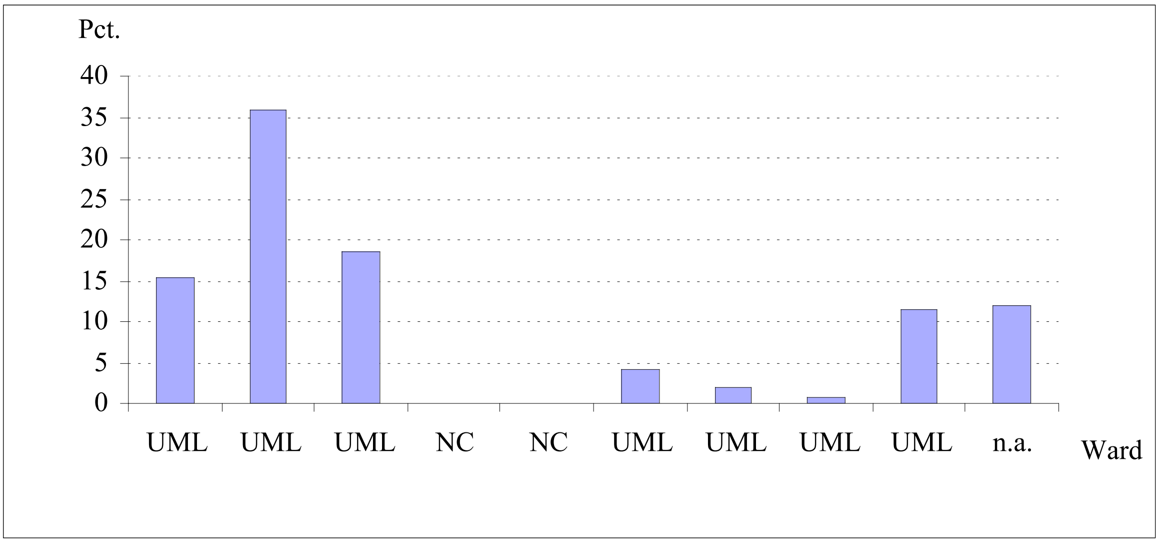
A VDC constituency is teritorially divided into nine wards that each elects a Ward Chairman. He (never a woman in our sample) is member of the VDC. The VDC chairman is elected from within the entire VDC constituency and thus has a stronger mandate. Those Ward Chairmen, who were members of the local opposition party, had in several cases gained less access to the government grant than those belonging to the VDC chairman's party. The funds were allocated among the wards at the Village Council Meeting, which would adobt the budget, and a monthly meeting in the VDC. The mechanism through which the majority party would dominate the minority was a quite formal one. Where the majority party could fill the 'quorum' in these meetings as set out by law, the VDC chairman and his Ward Chairmen could easily dominate the decision-making. Two statements suffice to indicate how the local opposition party felt being excluded:

> 'The UML is in majority in the VDC and can fill the quorum [at the Village Council meeting] themselves. So they don't need to invite the NC and RPP members, because they can make all the decisions by themselves… The decisions are written into the minutings even before the meeting starts. It is simply a formality. Sometimes we don't even go because they don't give us any voice anyway'.

> 'The VDC chairman had promised us 50,000 Nrs. for the water tank. It was an agreement. Within the five years we should get drinking water [in ward 4], and we had been waiting for so long time. It was heartbreaking [when the proposal was ignored at the final meeting]… But the NC doesn't have to listen to us because they have the majority. They could fill the quorum, so it is easy for them'.

In the selected villages, the party in opposition would accuse the majority of 'party discrimination'. We consulted the auditing reports in these VDCs to calculate the actual share that each ward had received of the 500,000 rupees over a five-year period. This data was the only source of information available to verify the validity of these party complaints. We shall provide a brief overview of some of the results. In some of the selected villages, the data clearly indicated that the party in minority had been ignored, while in others the pattern was more blurred. The village of Kharel-thok provides an extreme example. Figure 4 shows that the party in minority, NC, had been grossly marginalised and received next to nothing over a five-year period while the majority had benefitted.

Figure 5 Shares In The VDC Grant By Ward And Party In Kharel-thok 1996-2001



NC stands out as the big looser in – what we may term – the 'ward game'. There was great discontent among NC party workers in ward 4 and 5. Yet as some Village Party Chairmen pointed out to us, we should be careful not to explain unequal distribution of resources by party discrimination alone. For example, the data on Kharel-thok would hint to two additional aspects. Firstly, belonging to the majority party a Ward Chairman has no gurantees of a larger share. Wards 6 through 9 were UML, but they were not overly favored in comparison to wards 1, 2 and 3. Secondly, the ward in which the more influential VDC member lived – normally the VDC chairman – would receive a relatively larger chunk. In Kharel-thok the DDC member lived in ward 2. He was more influential than the VDC chairman in ward 8, which the allocation for ward 2 would also seem to indicate.

Table 5 shows that the trend observed inKharel-thok would fit most of the selected villages, Dhungkarka being an exception. The VDC chairman's ward would usually get a disproportionately larger share in the 500,000 rupees followed by the wards that support him.

Table 5 'The VDC Chairman's Ward Gets More' – 1996-2001, Selected Villages, Pct.

	VDC Chairman's Ward	Wards In Support Of the VDC ch.	Oppositional Wards
Mean	**21**	**11**	**7**
Hokse	21	11	9
Saathi-ghar	39	8	6
Kharel-thok	1	15	4
Kushadevi	33	8	-
Sanga	19	13	2
Dhungkarka	11	13	9
Gardi	20	9	10
Meghauli	27	10	7

This very brief presentation of some of the dimensions of how resources had been distributed within the selected villages suffices to highlight our main observation. The political drive may sometimes produce inequality. The VDC chairman would in most cases reserve around 20 pct. of the resources available for each ward to serve his own. In the words of a party worker, 'The VDC is in the political sector. The VDC chairman will always give priority to his ward and political workers first… He will not do anything on the ridge [where this informant lived] until he has achieved his goals on the valley [where the VDC chairman lived]'. When the party leadership controls an organisation, it seeks to benefit the core supporters before others – in Nepal notably the home area where ones friends and relatives also live. We should not equate this, however, with 'no development'. While equity suffers, it was typical that the VDC chairman's ward and perhaps neighboring areas would attain direct access to electricty, drinking water, roads, and other goods. Let us now proceed to examine alternative implications of the 'political drive'.

5.2 Organisational Proliferation

Local development is also about the mobilisation and organisation of citizens around the delivery, maintenance, or production of services and goods. The selected villages had seen only few local organisations until the transition to democracy was commenced in 1990. Over the next decade the number of community based organisations such as forestry groups, women's groups, savings groups, and so forth, would explode. The number of local organisations rocketed from an estimated 36 across the selected villages to a level ten times higher. In 2003 informants counted a total of 382 groups. These are approximate numbers and we should expect some error. The number may have been somewhat higher in the past, and the estimation of the present may exagerate the actual figures. Yet the trend is clear. The mushrooming of local organisations has to do in part with mechanisms at national level[1]. But in the selected villages part of it occurred as a result of party competition.

Two examples may illustrate how party competition had sparked mushrooming of local organisations in the selected villaged. The first is from Dhungkarka where the number of dairy cooperatives had exploded since 1990; the other is retrieved from our data on Kushadevi in which party competition had spurred the proliferation of local schools. We shall consider shortly whether what happened would seem to contribute to local development. But first consider how party competition set in motion the following processes:

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[1] In Nepal the organisational proliferation in – what is often referred to as – civil society has been related to two factors in particular. One is the increasing orientation of donors towards NGOs and other participatory arrangements in the course of the 1990s. The other is the role of the political parties. It is wellknown in Nepal that politicians formed a large percentage of the NGOs to set in place a mechanism to attract donor funding – known as 'dollar farming' (Shrestha, 1998, p. 4). In the selected villages, local politicians gave reference to both 'UML-NGOs' and 'NC-NGOs' explaining that 'the party has a link to the NGOs and the NGOs then come here to help'. One party would create NGOs and affiliate local groups inclusive of *their* supporters; the other party would do the same. While one NGO could have been sufficient, party competition would give rise to the formation of more and lead each to compete for funding among donor agencies.

Dairy Cooperatives in Dhungkarka The initiator and present chairman of the oldest dairy cooperative in Dhungkarka informed that local milk production had risen many times since he began collecting milk in 1987. Back then he would collect from nearby settlements and bring the produce down to the bazaar in ward 7 to conduct fat measurement, pour the milk into clean canisters, and load a pickup to transport the milk to the chilling plant a one hour drive away. By 1990 a total of four cooperatives had been formed covering most of the producers. Party competition, however, inflated that number manifold. The milk producers, he explained, would only deliver their milk to those collectors, who belonged to their own party. Similarly, the milk collectors only serviced those producers who were affiliated with *their* own party. Soon, cooperatives were mushrooming in Dhungkarka as the existing cooperatives split along party lines.

In the first local elections in 1992-93 NC won a majority in all the wards. UML members then formed cooperatives on their own. In the local elections in 1997, in turn, UML won a majority in three wards. At that time the number of cooperatives had increased to 19 and the growth continued at a slower rate. Table 7 shows the number of dairy cooperatives by wards in four selected years.

Table 6 Increase In the Number of Dairy Cooperatives In Dhungkarka by Ward

Ward	1987	1990	1997	2003
Total (ward 1-9)	**1**	**4**	**19**	**25**
1	-	-	2	2
2	-	-	2	3
3	-	-	3	4
4	-	1	2	2
5	-	-	1	1
6	-	-	2	3
7	1	2	2	2
8	-	1	3	5
9	-	-	2	3

There were other factors at play, which must also be taken into consideration when this data is assessed. The increase in the number of dairy cooperatives was also associated with more opportunities to borrow money to invest in buffalos or cattle and better market access. Yet the old cooperative chairman and members of other cooperatives stated that party competition had caused the *divisioning* of the cooperatives. The term factionalism may capture what had happened in these cooperatives. Similar stories were recorded in some of the other villages. In Saathi-ghar, for instance, a cooperative chairman explained that since the UML had split, they [his settlement] had formed their own cooperative moving away from ‘those up on the ridge who only think of themselve’.

Schools in Kushadevi - A teacher and former School Management Committee chairman affiliated with NC explained how his school had divided into two upon disagreement about the transfer of a new teacher. They had applied for an extra teaching position for the school – a socalled ‘durbandi’. The UML teachers were worried that the Minister of Education would transfer an NC teacher and, therefore, the chairman of the committee called all the teachers in a meeting. Below, his recollection is brought in citation as it shows well what party competition may involve:

‘In the meeting people from UML and NC were present, so as chairman I told everybody that when the new teacher arrives to our school he could belong to any party or any ideology and we have to accept whoever comes without discrimination…everybody agreed. So after some time a [NC] durbandi was brought… UML decided in their village party meeting that they would not accept the NC durbandi. Our argument was to accept the teacher and not let the durbandi go [otherwise hard to get] now that we had it in our hands, but UML refused… So, when the conflict could not be solved we on the management committee tendered our resignation. And the school divided – some of the teachers and students came to our side and we opened another boarding school called Nava Prativa [New talents] Primary English Boarding school, as a shareholding by collecting 1000 Nrs. each from 60 members… there were few UML members too. And the new durbandi was brought to Nava Prativa school. We rented an empty rice mill where there was a hall…’

There were similar examples inKushadevi. In the early 1990s, the government had given an NC durbandi to the secondary school. The headmaster and the teachers, who were all UML, had refused to sign the teacher’s attendance register thus blocking his salary. The NC teacher soon afterwards moved to ward 9, an NC area, where there were no schools at the time, and built his own NC school. In this manner, party competition had led to the proliferation of schools in Kushadevi. Table 7 shows the increase in the number of schools by ward and party from 1990 to 2003.

Table 7 Proliferation Of Schools And Their Party Affiliation in Kushadevi By 2003

	Schools	Schools by party 2003			
Wards	1990	Total	NC	UML	N.a.
1 to 9	**4**	**10**	**4**	**5**	**1**
1	-	-	-	-	-
2	-	-	-	-	-
3	-	1	-	1	-
4	1	2	1	1	-
5	-	1	-	1	-
6	1	1	1	-	-
7	2	3	1	2	-
8	-	1	-	-	1
9	-	1	1	-	-

These are but two typical examples of how ‘political drive’ had lead to organisational proliferation in the selected villages. Was this in the service of local development? We cannot provide any conclusive answer to this question. The main point here is the relationship between party competition and the mushrooming of local organisations. Yet a few comments recorded in Dhungkarka and Kushadevi are warranted. The spread of dairy cooperatives, on the one hand, and schools, on the other, had made these types of organisations and the facilities they provide accessible to more citizens in these villages. Whereas most organisations were hitherto concentrated around the bazaar, they now existed also in remote wards. In Kushadevi, pupils that once had to walk one hour along slippery slopes to reach the school could now make it in a few minutes as the school was in their neighborhood. One may question whether resources are used more efficiently when scattered across many organisations rather than concentrated in a few, but this calculation goes beyond the paper. It stands out that in quantitative terms, the sectors had developed.

5.3 Bridging The Gap

Party competition had another profound effect. We hinted in an earlier section that Village Party Committees were eager to bring resources to the local level in order to deliver services and goods to party workers and core voters. The 'runners' would bridge the gap between the village and the center by utilising their skills and personal connections to approach officials at higher levels. The runners would not only depend upon their capabilities. It was also membership of a party that facilitated their access to scarce resources higher-up. The party was a channel that would serve as a bridge or channel across the gap. Both the 'political drive' and the 'party channel' were important components in the mechanism that allowed village level politicians to access resources higher-up.

A common remark went, 'before there was one king, now there are ten'. It referred to the divisioning of the state along party lines. A chairman of the local government during the Panchayat System pointed to these divisions as an important aspect of the political changes that had occurred since the early 1990s as the parties began to compete for power:

> 'All the panchayat organisations were split partywise after the democracy came. The farmers union, the women, youth, x-army, teachers, and civil servants, all of these unions used to be under control from the center. But after democracy, the central control split into the parties and soon all of the organisations were divided according to the parties. As political leaders emerged people started choosing sides… all these organisations are now working for the parties. Although the teachers have been asked to join into one union, it is the same – they are like the "teeth of the elephant"… Under the Panchayats… there was only one entrance, one center, but now there are many'.

The effects of party competition at the level of the ordinary villager had been significant. A local politician compared the Village Panchayat under the authoritarian regime to the multiparty system. The introduction of parties had opened alternative channels of influence that rendered the authority of the VDC chairman weaker than that of his predecessor, the Pradhan Pancha. He explained the situation under the authoritarian regime:

> 'During the panchayat System, people were more willing to contribute [labor] than is the case now. When the Pradhan Pancha and the Ward Chairman asked people to participate [in local projects], they did so without objections, because they were compelled to go. If they did not, they would risk being fined or punished somehow. The Pradhan Panchha would for instance refuse to sign recommendation letters for citizenship or other important papers [needed to have ushc documents issued by the authorities]. Other means could be not to issue tax payment receipts because in that way people might loose their land ownership. The Pradhan Pancha would keep all these documents, so people were afraid…what the Pradhan Panchha commanded, the people would do'.

Party competition had made alternative channels of influence available to the local citizens. In case the VDC chairman refused to provide assistance, the other party might be able to help out by providing alternative routes through which to reach the district office or even decision-makers in Kathmandu. Party competition and the splitting of organisations and the authority they embody is an important mechanism that would distinguish the authoritarian eras in Nepal from periods under a multiparty system. Party divisions and factionalism occurred not only in the organisations mentioned above but also in the bureaucracy. 'Big shuffles' were common in which the party in government would replace senior officers and sometimes every staffer from the secretary to the local peon in order to ensure party allegiance within the administration, or to reward party workers with a job. During coalition governments, or to avoid conflict with the opposition, however, some ministries or departments could be carved out for other parties. We thus find an organisational landscape in which one party controls one agency, while others are the domains of its opponents. Seen from a national point of view, the implication may be mainly negative. A politicised bureaucracy may render the planning and notably implementation of policies an impossible exercise as goals and tasks are displaced. But here we are concerned with the village perspective, which entails quite different implications.

One implication may be illustrated by giving an example from one of the selected villages showing how the Village Party Chairman of NC and UML, respectively, had accessed resources for their party workers and voters through different channels. Figure 5 provides an overview showing which organisations they had approached to channel services and goods to their area. The party affiliation of these sources would usually match.

Figure 6 The Party As A Channel – Sources Used By NC And UML In Sanga

VDC chairman (NC)			VDC opposition (UML)		
Project	Funding	Party	Project	Funding	Party
Cattle raring	Line agency	NC	Irrigation	Line agency	UML
UNESCO club	Politician	NC	Drinking water	DDC member	UML
Toilets	NGO	NC	Road	DDC member	UML
Pond clean-up	MP	NC	Water tank	DDC member	UML
Cremation building	Local Mayor	NC	School	Private donor	n.a
Roads construction	DDC	UML	Small road	Private donor	n.a.
Electricity	Minister	NC	Cremation building	NGO	UML

The data shows how each party had accessed resources through various sources, which were typically, but not always, affiliated with their respective parties. There were accusations of party discrimination going in both directions. UML's Village Party Chairman and other UML members complained that the VDC chairman focused solely on NC's areas while neglecting UML wards and settlements. The VDC chairman, in turn, stated that the DDC member, who was UML, ignored Sanga except from those areas dominated by UML. The main observation to be made here, however, is that both the party in power in the VDC, on the one hand, and the opposition, on the other, had succeeded to find resources for their areas. Various sources had been available to them – line agencies, NGOs, MPs, and ministers – accessible through the party channel. The DDC was UML and, therefore, the NC had very limited access to this potential source of funding. But there were other options. The line agency for agriculture was NC and had supported the NC with significant resources. Conversely, the UML Village Party

Committee had benefitted from the DDC and the line agency for irrigation, which was also UML.

The example shows that the dominated party, in this case UML, may be able to find alternative access to scarce resources for its supporters and, in turn, that the party in control of the local government may succeed in a similar manner to complement its resources through the party channel. We must stress that matching 'party color', though, was rarely sufficient on its own. Personal and informal connections are even more important. But the example above will suffice to show that party competition gives alternatives. When local politicians seek access through these informal channels, it may produce what would appears as corruption. At local level, however, the result is often more electricity poles, motor roads, drinking water posts, new school buildings, and so forth.

6 Political Demise

The royal coup quickly changed all this. We have now seen how the 'political drive' and the 'party channel' could provide impetus to local development. Only few months after the VDCs and DDCs had been dissolved and the political parties were relegated to a marginal position in the state, line agency staff reported that the local politicians had seemingly lost interest. There were fewer visitors in their offices indicating, perhaps, decreasing political drive. The following statements will serve as examples of this experience:

> 'Before, there used to be lots of political pressure, when local politicians and MPs would try to make us bring the projects to their areas. But since the dissolve it has decreased a lot. Now we can make plans and implement them without all this political interference. The politicians still come, but now they just make requests – they don't come with a pressure group anymore. They accept that they cannot put pressure right now… The politicians are now more like social workers'.

> 'The bosses were influenced by the politicians and that we hated. The right way would be that your boss should give the pressure but the politician was stronger. The MP had influence on the secretaries directly. The pressure would come from local people who would go to their MPs – and the MPs would then go to the secretaries. So, there was unnecessary influence of politics in the bureaucracy and bureaucrats are now happy in a way. The bureaucrats have become more free'.

The party channel had provided access to influence through various informal relations bypassing the formal chains of command. Line agency officials had been under pressure from local politicians, who enjoyed the support of a minister; engineers had served their party boss rather the policy when allocating public resources to avoid a transfer to a remote area; and so forth. The dissolve of the multiparty system and the King's appointment of a loyal government and top-level bureaucrats had blocked many of the channels. Former DDC members generally agreed. One of them gave the following comment:

> 'Before…the representatives would go and complain whenever villagers brought up a problem for instance about teachers. Now, however, they don't go as often. They don't feel the same kind of responsibility because now they don't have a mandate anymore. Although people still go to them as local leaders, they are less motivated to make an extra effort…because their political future is

highly uncertain. There might not be a future in local politics, which would otherwise make them look out for voters'.

The political drive had dropped. Once the political career was in doubt, less local politicians would be willing to expend the same energies as in the past. The runners were staying at home now. Among 24 VDC members listed in table 4 earlier in the paper as having approached a line agency official at least once in 2001-02, only 5 claimed to remain equally active as before the coup. 13 described themselves as 'less active' and 6 as 'far less active'. They had scaled down their activities to solve mainly two tasks: bringing applications for citizenship, birth registration, and other documents to the District Administration Office on behalf of villagers, and mediate in local disputes. A Ward Chairman explained that, 'since the dissolution, very few line agency officials look upon the VDC members as anything else than ordinary citizens. This is why we have far less influence with the line agency staff now than before'. A DDC member pointed to an additional factor. Left without the party channel chances of accessing resources at higher levels were slim. Citizens had discovered this in his constituency. The number of visitors to his house requesting him for help had 'decreased… it is much less… Normally, the people are "power worshippers" – whoever has power, they will go and see, whoever has not, they will ignore. They have realised that the DDC members cannot do much. Now they go to see the LDO [an MLD official]'. Many runners had stopped bridging the gap between central and local level, partly due to lack of motivation, partly due to lack of access.

While the political pressure had decreased, most of the line agency officials had experienced, however, that VDC and DDC members would still show up. Their chief concern now was mostly in matters of a personal nature. A planning officer noted that, 'before they used to show up on behalf of their village – now they come for their own purposes. Many of the VDC members are farmers with problems of their own, so now they tend to present their own problems and ask the staff to solve them'. The LDO explained that the local politicians, who had served as VDC or DDC members, had developed over the years informal relations with the line agency staff. They were now capable of obtaining access for themselves or their friends and relatives through these contacts. The contours of an authoritarian regime were emerging in which only the privileged few would benefit. Seen in this perspective the political parties had played an important part. Now the promotion of local development was mainly left to the government.

7 Concluding Remarks

This paper has briefly reviewed aspects of the role of Village Party Committees and local politicians in the promotion of local development – a key aspect of democratisation in Nepal. In a state where resources have been concentrated at the central level for many decades, the promise of democracy was in the minds of most villagers: village development. We have seen that local party organisations may have contributed to this process. Albeit financially weak organisations at the bottom of the state and party hierarchies, village parties possessed a capability that set them centre-stage: party workers were predominantly recruited among the more educated villagers. In a state where resources are concentrated in ministries and line agencies, the ability to negotiate and deal with state officials, who are more eductaed than the bulk of the population, is a prerequisite. Where educated and connected ‘runners’ with ‘political drive’ were present, local development could benefit. Runners served to bridge the gap between the villages and higher levels. In order to obtain access, however, alternative channels of influence were often needed. Parties provided such channels. In a context of organisations divided along party lines and split into factions, local politicians were able to find alternative channels of access, where another party dominated. The royal coup in October 2002, however, closed these channels as the parties were relegated to a marginal position in the state. The ‘political drive’ decreased and the ‘party channel’ closed. While political parties at national level in Nepal have often been deemed corrupt and of little benefit to development in their actual form, this paper suggests that *local* parties were, at least in part, conducive to organisational proliferation and the delivery of local services and goods.

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