Territorial management in indigenous matrifocal societies

Case studies on the Khasi, Wayuu, Shipibo-Conibo and Moso peoples
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As reiterated by FAO in different occasions, indigenous peoples are crucial allies in the fight against hunger, not only because they represent approximately 476 million people living in more than 90 countries, but also because for centuries, they have been and continue to be custodians of more than 80% of the world’s biodiversity and ancestral knowledge, thereby preserving natural resources for future generations.

Since 2010, FAO has a dedicated Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples guiding the Organization’s work with the world’s indigenous peoples. The Organization also accounts with a plan to implement this policy that was jointly developed with a Global Caucus of Indigenous Leaders. The plan is based on six pillars: 1) Indigenous Food Systems; 2) Free, Prior and Informed Consent; 3) Advocacy and Capacity Building; 4) Coordination, 5) Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure; and 6) Food Security Indicators. In addition, it focuses on two priority work areas: Indigenous Women and Indigenous Youth.

In 2017, following a request from the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus and given the arising global challenges, a seventh pillar was included in FAO’s work plan with indigenous peoples: Traditional knowledge and climate change.

Land, territories and natural resources do not only represent productive resources for indigenous peoples: these are the basis of their livelihoods, of their social and cultural organization, and even the roots of their identity. Management of their resources, therefore, is mainly collective and has an intrinsic relationship with their social and governance structure.

Regrettably, each year indigenous peoples are increasingly facing challenges in accessing these resources. Climate change, the implementation of megaprojects without their consent, the lack of recognition and respect for their human and collective rights as well as violence and death threats are increasing in frequency. These factors significantly affect indigenous peoples’ access and use of the land and ancestral territories in which they have lived for hundreds and even thousands of years.

Over time it has been demonstrated that the eradication of hunger and poverty depends largely on the way in which people and communities access land, fisheries, forests and other resources. This means that as long as there will be peoples, groups and communities with no access to resources to guarantee their livelihoods, we will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular the Zero Hunger goal.

In this regard, FAO joined forces with the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in order to contribute to the search for more sustainable development models contributing to the reduction of these gaps in accessing land and natural resources.

IWGIA is an international organization with an extensive experience in documenting the state of indigenous peoples. Since its foundation, over 50 years ago, it has worked closely with
indigenous peoples and their organizations to support the right to self-determination and self-development.

Then, why is it necessary to talk about indigenous matrifocal societies? IWGIA and FAO recognized the importance of adding elements to the global debate on the management of natural resources and land from a traditional perspective, an aspect often not sufficiently valued and taken into consideration.

In this study, FAO and IWGIA focused their attention on indigenous matrifocal societies in order to document the intrinsic relationship between the social and political structures of indigenous peoples and territory management which within these communities is characterized by a vision of reciprocity between men and women.

The study *Territorial management in indigenous matrifocal societies, Case studies on the Khasi, Wayuu, Shipibo-Conibo and Moso peoples* is the result of this collaboration. It portraits the social structure of four indigenous matrifocal groups as well as models for natural resources management.

A key aspect in this work is the focus on the rights of these indigenous societies regarding the access to and the control of their ancestral territories, the sustainable management of natural resources, and always according to their own culture, cosmogony and ancestral practices.

Through this publication, FAO and IWGIA seek to contribute to the understanding of traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples, to identify sustainable and inclusive practices for natural resource management and to increase the visibility of the many contributions that indigenous women bring for the development of their communities through productive, administrative, reproductive and sustainable resource management activities. Such activities have a greater impact when indigenous women have mechanisms that guarantee their access to land and natural resources, and when these instruments do not depend on their relationship with a man (father, husband, brother, etc.).

This publication provides evidence on the impacts on indigenous peoples of policies, projects and programs which affects their territories and are developed “disregarding” their right to free, prior and informed consent or are put in place without due consideration for indigenous peoples’ food systems, social, economic and governance specificities.

In this regard, the present work plays an important role because it does not only constitutes an important source of information, but it also counteracts stereotypes while inspiring policies and interventions which are culturally appropriate for indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples have a holistic view of the world, in which the land, the territories, the natural resources, human beings, biodiversity, culture and identity are part of an integrated and interdependent whole, which requires the same consideration and protection. Often, this holistic vision has an interpretation of a woman or a mother who generates life and that many peoples have reflected in their matrifocal governance systems.
Executive summary

Over the centuries, indigenous peoples have developed ingenious and dynamic ways of managing their constantly evolving territories while avoiding the depletion of natural resources. Some indigenous lifestyles have faced various challenges and have led to a less sustainable management of their resources.

The transformations experienced by indigenous peoples today result from a combination of environmental, social and political elements, in addition to internal and external factors. Nonetheless, the holistic nature of these life systems exposes them to serious threats. The modification of one element may alter its relationships with other elements and therefore affect the entire system.

One of the least studied effects is the impact generated by the weakening or alteration of the governance and social structures of indigenous peoples in the management of natural resources.

This publication, which brings together four case studies on indigenous societies with a matrilineal or matrilocal social organization system, seeks to contribute, without doing so exhaustively, to the understanding of the territorial management systems of indigenous peoples and their close relationship to political and social organization systems.

Even though the terms matriarchal, matrilocal or matrilineal may apparently be similar, they represent different concepts. According to various dictionaries, matriarchy refers to a social organization dominated or governed by women. Matrilineality refers to the kinship system that follows the maternal (uterine) line of an individual, while matrilocality refers to the habit of installing the residence of new marriages near or within the woman’s family’s home. In this regard, throughout this publication, the term matrifocal has been used to refer to those indigenous peoples who follow one or more of these principles.

The four peoples studied are from different regions. In Asia, we focused on the Khasi from northeast India and the Moso from southeast China. In Latin America, several authors analysed the Shipibo-Conibo located in the department of Uywacalli in Peru and the Wayuu, located in the peninsula of La Guajira, a territory shared between Colombia and Venezuela.

Through field interviews and documentary investigations, each case study details the characteristics of the communities’ territories, their cosmogony, their political and social structure, their models for natural resources management and the current challenges they face.

The 10 main findings of this research are described below, in hope contributing to...
the global debate on the search for more sustainable territorial management models, and to develop a better understanding of the vision of indigenous peoples in the world and their struggle for the respect for their rights, including the right to self-determined development.

**MAIN FINDINGS**

1) The principle of matrilineality is a mechanism based on complementarity and gender balance, which guarantees shared access to land and natural resources. All four case studies highlight how, traditionally, the lands were worked collectively and distributed among families according to the characteristics of the land and its function. When this principle is weakened, due to internal factors or external pressures, the result is a rupture of the reciprocity ties in the community and a greater political segregation, which increase the vulnerability of families and reduce their resilience to respond to climate or social crises.

2) When matrifocal systems are affected by patriarchal values of other dominant societies, the capacity of women to participate and make decisions is gradually limited, particularly with reference to their relationships with government authorities and institutions. These events are usually engaged by men to inform or provide training, in particular in relation to new technologies.

3) The case study on the Khasi people demonstrates how the generation of food is strongly linked to the principle of matrilinearity, the role of women in the transmission of knowledge, traditional indigenous techniques of cultivation and conservation of native seeds.

4) On the other hand, the study on the Wayuu people highlights how ancestral knowledge and experience acquired through years of observation and experimentation are essential in the management of the territory, especially in complex natural environments. In particular, during the rite of confinement (sutapualu) that marks women’s passage to adulthood, they receive instructions from the mother, grandmothers and aunts on traditional medicine their traditional food system, and spiritual knowledge. Nevertheless, this case study also shows that such knowledge is rapidly being lost, mainly due to the migration of young people, the development of new economic activities and the weakening of traditional leadership.

5) The four indigenous societies analyzed have experienced significant food crises due to changes in their food systems.

6) The four indigenous peoples studied illustrate the intrinsic relationship between matrilineal governance structures, natural resources management and land management. Likewise, we observed today at, after having survived for centuries, matrilocal structures and ways of life are being negatively affected by climate change, migration, tourism and pressures from external actors.

7) Integration into a globalized market has led indigenous peoples to move from a self-consumption economy to a commercial economy, directly affecting the use of natural resources and livelihoods of communities. This effect has been accompanied by a greater monetisation of transactions. The case of the Moso people allows us to observe how, as they relate to the market economy, new goods and the need to pay cash for basic services, indigenous communities are being forced to seek new livelihoods alternatives and abandon the traditional ones.

8) The growing need to generate economic resources observed in all four cases has led to more value being given to activities that generate higher economic returns, such as commercial crops or artisanal production.
focused on tourism, neglecting more traditional activities such as the production of subsistence crops, hunting, gathering and pastoralism. This trend, in turn, generates a high dependence on purchased food products, directly impacting the quality of foods and weakening the transmission of ancestral foods, medicine and spiritual knowledge that generally rely on women.

9) In the case of the Shipibo-Conibo people, it was noted how the displacement from their traditional lands and the processes of land titling that do not consider their collective systems and social structure of food production have resulted in a drastic deterioration of the quality of their diet. Consumption has shifted from mountain, river and communal-farms foods towards purchased and processed foods.

10) Indigenous matrifocal societies have very specific conflict resolution systems that deserve to be highlighted. The studies of the Khasi and Wayuu peoples clearly describe how this system works for each group. While the Wayuu people are focused on dialogue and compensation through the figure of the Palabrero who acts as an intermediary, the Khasi’s is based on collective consensus. According to the people themselves, these systems allow not only to regain peace, but also to restore social control mechanisms and guarantee respect for the role played by each of the members of the community, men, women, elderly, youth and children.

Finally, the four case studies highlight the resilience of indigenous peoples, which despite being continuously exposed to the influence of market systems and the practices of the dominant culture through media, legislations, state institutions (including schools and health centres), religious and political speeches, still manages to maintain the foundations of their culture, a matrifocal structure and their cosmogony.

As emphasized in the study, for indigenous peoples land represents many dimensions beyond just an extension of territory. Lands and natural resources represent the peoples’ identity and the basis of their economic and political organization.

In times of increasing concerns for climate change and the destruction of natural ecosystems, this study intends to draw the attention of experts, on the need to look at matrifocal and indigenous management and governance systems that, for centuries, have based their decision making processes on practices of greater reciprocity and in many cases, respect for the land and natural resources.
This publication has been jointly developed by the FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit in the Partnerships Division and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA).

FAO and IWGIA acknowledge and express their gratitude to the indigenous authorities and communities who shared information, organized interviews and facilitated the execution of this study in their territories.

Similarly, the work performed by the author of each case study is also acknowledged: Aurelius Kyrham Nongkynrih, Ruth Llacsahuanga Salazar, Luisa Elvira Belacnde Olshewski and Pablo Andrés Guerra López.

The coordination of this publication was under the responsibility of Yon Fernández de Larrinoa, Guido Agostinucci and Mariana Estrada from the FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit. Lola García-Alix and Alejandro Parellada coordinated the publication on behalf of IWGIA.

Significant contributions for the production of this publication were also received by Valeria Poggi, Alejandra Safa, Maurizio Furst, Diana Vinding, Emma Mcghie, Ida Strømsø, Cristina Veiga, Suzanne Lapstun and Laura Galeotti.

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This publication contributes to the efforts of the Global Campaign for the Empowerment of Indigenous Women for Zero Hunger.

Join the campaign!

#IndigenousWomen, #VisibleWomen

www.fao.org/indigenous-peoples
Women carry with the responsibility of the continuity, perpetuity and prosperity of the clan.

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Khasi

INDIA
Analysis of the Khasi people in India and their land and natural resources management system

Aurelius Kyrham Nongkynrih
Sociology Professor
ANALYSIS OF THE KHASI PEOPLE IN INDIA AND THEIR LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM


**Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.
### Glossary

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<th>Term</th>
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<td><strong>Bri-bam or ki rek</strong></td>
<td>Land given to village officials</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bri-puja</strong></td>
<td>Religious land and land given to priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dkhar</strong></td>
<td>A non-Khasi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İawbei</strong></td>
<td>Female founder of a clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İawbei Khynraw</strong></td>
<td>Young ancestress of the branches set up the daughters of the İawbei Tynrai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İawbei Tymmen</strong></td>
<td>In the absence of the knowledge of the İawbei Tynrai of the kpoh, some other female ancestress is considered as the founder of the kpoh, though distinguished from İawbei Tynrai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İawbei Tynrai</strong></td>
<td>Daughters of the İawbei (founders of kpoh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing</strong></td>
<td>Domestic groups or households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing-khun</strong></td>
<td>Referred by a husband to İing-la-jong of his wife (house where his children live)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing-kiaw</strong></td>
<td>House of the mother-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing-kmie</strong></td>
<td>Mother’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing-kmie-rad</strong></td>
<td>Mother’s mother house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing-la-jong</strong></td>
<td>Independent household set-up by elder daughters after marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing-meikha</strong></td>
<td>Father’s mother house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>İing seng or İing khadduh</strong></td>
<td>Ancestral house or the youngest daughter’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jymmow</strong></td>
<td>A process of preparing the fields after slashing and burning and spreading of seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka akor ka burom</strong></td>
<td>Etiquettes and manners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka aĩn</strong></td>
<td>Law/canons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka bailet</strong></td>
<td>Sacred ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka bBam Sohrat</strong></td>
<td>Commemoration of deceased parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Bei İaw</strong></td>
<td>Oldest living mother of the domestic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka bri or ka khydew ka syiap or ka jaka ka puta</strong></td>
<td>Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Dorbar Hima</strong></td>
<td>Council of the Hima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Dorbar-İing</strong></td>
<td>Household-group council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Dorbar Kur</strong></td>
<td>Council of a clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Dorbar Raid</strong></td>
<td>Council of the Raid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Dorbar Shnong</strong></td>
<td>Village Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Hima</strong></td>
<td>A traditional Khasi state</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ka hok</strong></td>
<td>Righteous path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka hok-ka sot</strong></td>
<td>The Principle of Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka Hukum</strong></td>
<td>Commandment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ka jingsneng</strong></td>
<td>Moral norms and values taught over generations by the elders</td>
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<tr>
<td>KHA REAL</td>
<td>HILL</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ka kamai</td>
<td>Earning/income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka khlaw adong or ka khlaw shnong or ka khlaw rijap</td>
<td>Forestlands of the clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka khlaw kur</td>
<td>Sacred forestlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka khlaw kyiitang or ka khlaw lyngdoh</td>
<td>Privately-owned forestlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka khlaw kyiitl</td>
<td>A field for cultivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka kper</td>
<td>Jhum field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka lyngkha</td>
<td>Forestland not used for cultivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka lytap</td>
<td>Mother Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka Mei-Ramew</td>
<td>Divine covenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka Nia Ka Jutang</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka niam</td>
<td>Self-acquired property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka nongkhynraw</td>
<td>Ancestral property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka nongtyammen</td>
<td>Women as keeper and care of domestic groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka nongri lîng</td>
<td>Participation and contribution by members of the clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka on kti</td>
<td>Pardonable sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka pap</td>
<td>Paddy field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka pyrthei shong basa</td>
<td>This world as a temporary abode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka rahkad</td>
<td>Adopted niece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KHA REAL</th>
<th>HILL</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ka raid</td>
<td>A village cluster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka rep ram or ka rep shyrti</td>
<td>Shifting cultivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka ri kur</td>
<td>Clan land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka ri-kyiitl</td>
<td>Privately-owned land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka ri-lyng</td>
<td>Communally-owned land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka rep shyrti or ka rep ram</td>
<td>Allegiance and reciprocation by members of the clan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ka lyng</td>
<td>Voluntary exchange of labour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ka Tip</td>
<td>Know man-Know God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briew-Tip Blei</td>
<td>To earn righteousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamai-ia-ka hok</td>
<td>Affines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kha</td>
<td>Without any female to continue and perpetuate the clan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khlem thniang</td>
<td>Term of address to the children of the males by the consanguines of these males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khun-kha</td>
<td>Name of regions in Khasi-Jiahtia hills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khynriam, Pnar, War, Maram, Lngam</td>
<td>Mother’s brothers or men of the clan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki burang</td>
<td>The seven domestic groups who are believed to be the progenitors of the society and are claimed to have descended from heaven</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki khun thymmai</td>
<td>Children from the second wife of a widowed husband</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki kñaia kha</td>
<td>Father’s sisters</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ki kur kynthei</td>
<td>Women of the clan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ki kur shynrang</td>
<td>Men of the clan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki mawbri</td>
<td>Boundary stones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki symbai heh</td>
<td>Larger size seeds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki symbai rit</td>
<td>Fine-grain seeds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kmie or mei</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kni</td>
<td>Mother’s brother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangbah</td>
<td>An adult male member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kpoh</td>
<td>First level branches of the Kur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ksuid</td>
<td>Evil/evil spirits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kur</td>
<td>Clan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kynum</td>
<td>Brother-in-laws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longrynieng</td>
<td>The non-physical self of dead person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meikha</td>
<td>Father’s mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj lands</td>
<td>Unclaimed land under the control of the chief in Jaintia hills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangbah kur</td>
<td>Elder of the clan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi kur - shi jait</td>
<td>Descendants of the common lawbei</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sohpent Bneng</td>
<td>Name of peak (naval of heaven)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syiem</td>
<td>Representative Head of Hima</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tang-jait</th>
<th>The process of Kur formation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thaiñ</td>
<td>Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ting-kur</td>
<td>When an orphan female child without any Kur is adopted by the ling in which she has been brought up and incorporated into the Kur of that ling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tymmen Shnong/ Rangbah Shnong</td>
<td>Village headman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U Blei</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U kñi rangbah kur</td>
<td>Eldest or senior most mother’s brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U pa-thaw</td>
<td>Oldest living father in wife’s domestic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U Ryngkew U Basa</td>
<td>Deity of sacred forestlands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

THERE ARE MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED DIFFERENT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE NORTHEAST OF INDIA. THE KHASI ARE LINGUISTICALLY DIFFERENT SINCE THEY SPEAK A VARIANT OF AN AUSTROASIATIC LANGUAGE

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the interests on the social world and the physical world of indigenous peoples have been on the increase, resulting in a gradual growth of literature on indigenous or tribal peoples of the world. Such works have provided an understanding on the situation of indigenous peoples. However, more studies are required on documenting indigenous knowledge and practices.

The current work was taken up as part of the appreciative inquiry and effort to contribute towards the body of knowledge on indigenous peoples’ social world and their landscape. The idea to conduct the survey on matriarchy and land systems came from the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (IPAFS), in June 2015. The organizers of the Second International Terra Madre meeting had already identified matriarchal societies as one of the key aspects for discussion in the programme. The survey was conceived as part of the initiative to present Khasi society in the thematic discussions related with matriarchal societies at the second International Terra Madre in the city of Shillong, India, from the 3rd to the 7th of November 2015. It was in this context that the survey was planned and designed. The proposal was forwarded to IPAFS and was accepted for implementation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists have used the term matrilineal or matriliney when studying the social structure of Khasi society. In this particular survey the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty suggested the research team test the concept of matriarchy in a redefined mode and to link it to land use and land holding strategies and use. Thus, the research problem was to test and validate the relevance of the revised matriarchy framework in the case of Khasi social structure, and whether land and land use is governed by
what type of social structure, thus providing a proper understanding of Khasi society. The survey was also to complement a nutritional study so that it should be carried out in those regions or villages where it was conducted. This is how two villages of Lngam\(^1\) region were selected. However, local produce and domestic consumption were not an emphasis of the survey beyond the gathering of preliminary information. Taking into account the background of the survey, the objective of the survey was: (i) to examine the Khasi system of land property, types of land and authority of land; (ii) to identify the social arrangements related to the practices of use of land; and (iii) whether there is any connection between the social structure, land and local production and domestic consumption.

**REDEFINING Matriarchy**

In their everyday life, the Khasi people would not be bothered by whether their social structure is matriarchal or matrilineal. The issue is a concern of the academic world and to generalists. The subject matter is interesting because anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists have used the term matrilineal or matriline when studying the social structure of Khasi and Garo societies of Meghalaya and the Nayar of Kerala.

Here, the term matriarchy is subjected to scrutiny. There is a body of literature which has provided an interesting theoretical framework by which the social structure of Khasi society can be examined. The theoretical framework is presented in the following discussion.

The term ‘matriarchy’ is not commonly used these days for the meaning and associations it carries. According to various dictionaries, matriarchy refers to a social organization or a social structure dominated by women or a society governed by women. In the opinion of Sanday (2008) this is based on a non-indigenous construction of domination in the context of social relations. Thus, in the academic discourse, the term matriarchy has been avoided and the term matrilineal is more regularly applied. The academic avoidance of the term matriarchy seems to have been caused by three factors: (i) a construct of understanding social relationships on the basis of power or domination; (ii) the equation with the term domination or a social system dominated by women; (iii) the comparative equation of matriarchy (domination of women) and patriarchy (domination of men). Thus, generally, matriarchy has been understood as domination of women.

Power and domination are two distinct terms and have different meanings. Power (Macht), according to Max Weber (1947) “is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests”. Domination (Herrschaft), refers to the probability that a command will be obeyed because it is legitimate. Legitimacy means accepting the command willingly. This kind of conceptual construction led to conceptual difficulties in using and applying the term matriarchy in the context of societies such as Khasi, Garo and others. Thus, the validity of avoiding the term matriarchy in academic discourse is scientifically reasonable. However, in the world of academics, concepts are subject of continuous scrutiny and analysis. Matriarchy, as a concept, has been reviewed, re-analysed and redefined by Heidi Göttner-Abendroth (2012) and others.

Today there is another conceptual framework for matriarchy. The opening remarks of the final report (2004) of the Second World Congress on Matriarchal Studies provide a preliminary idea on matriarchy. It states: “Matriarchal societies have a non-violent social structure. They are based on gender equality; their political decisions are made by consensus; insightful and well-thought-through principles and social guidelines ensure a peaceful life for all”.

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\(^1\) This is the correct spelling, not Lyngngam.
A similar view can be captured from the writings of Peggy R. Sanday (2008): “Matriarchy is not a system of governance of the family or society associated with exclusive female rule. Matriarchy is a balanced social system in which both sexes play key roles founded on maternal social principles”. However, for a better understanding and appreciation of the term matriarchy, we refer to the seminal work by Göttner-Abendroth (2012). The essence of Göttner-Abendroth’s definition of matriarchy can be understood by considering the essential dimensions covered under four criteria:

i) Economic Level: “Matriarchies are most often agricultural societies, but not exclusively so. Goods are distributed according to a system that is identical with the lines of kinship and the patterns of marriage. This system prevents goods from being accumulated by one special person or one special group. Thus, the principles of equality are consciously kept up, and the society is egalitarian and non-accumulating. From a political point of view, matriarchies are societies with perfect mutuality. Every advantage or disadvantage concerning the acquisition of goods is mediated by social rules”.

ii) Social Level: “Matriarchies are based on the union of an extended clan. People live together in big clans, which are formed according to the principle of matrilinearity, i.e., kinship is acknowledged exclusively in the female line. The clan’s name, and all social positions and political titles, are passed on through the mother’s line.”
Such a matrclan consists at least of three generations of women: the clan-mother, her daughters, her granddaughters, and the directly related men: the brothers of the mother, her sons, and grandsons. What is most important is the fact that women have the power of disposition over the goods of the clan, especially the power to control the sources of nourishment: fields and food. This characteristic feature, besides matrilinearity and matrilocality, grants women such a strong position that these societies are distinctly ‘Matriarchal’.

The clans are connected to each other by the patterns of marriage, especially the system of mutual marriage between two clans. Mutual marriage between two clans is not marriage between individuals, but rather a communal marriage. Therefore, matriarchies are defined as non-hierarchical, horizontal societies of matrilineal kinship”.

iii) Political Level: “The process of taking a decision is organized along the lines of matriarchal kinship. In the clan-house, women and men meet in a council where domestic matters are discussed. No member of the household is excluded. After thorough discussion, each decision is taken by consensus. The same is true for the entire village: if matters concerning the whole village have to be discussed, delegates from every clan-house meet in the village council. These delegates can be the oldest women of the clans (the matriarchs), or the brothers and sons they have chosen to represent the clan. No decision concerning the whole village may be taken without the consensus of all clan-houses. This means that the delegates who are discussing the matter are not the ones who make the decision. It is not in this council that the policy of the village is made, because the delegates function only as bearers of communication. The population living in the region take decisions in the same way: delegates from all villages meet to discuss the decisions of their communities. Every village, and in every village every clan-house, is involved in the process of making the decision, until consensus is reached at the regional level. Therefore, from the political point of view, matriarchies can be called egalitarian societies of consensus”.

iv) Cultural Level: “Matriarchal societies do not know religious transcendence of an unseen, untouchable, and incomprehensible all-powerful God. In matriarchy, divinity is immanent, for the whole world is regarded as divine – a feminine divine. This is evident in the concept of the universe as a goddess who created everything, and as Mother Earth who brings forth every living thing. And everything is endowed with divinity – the smallest pebble and the biggest star, each woman and man, each blade of grass, each mountain.

In such a culture, everything is spiritual. In their festivals, following the rhythms of the seasons, everything is celebrated: nature in its manifold expressions and the different clans with their different abilities and tasks, the different genders and the different generations, believing in the principle of “wealth in diversity.” There is no separation between sacred and secular; therefore, all tasks, such as sowing and harvesting, cooking and weaving are at the same time meaningful rituals. On the spiritual level, I thus define matriarchies as sacred societies as cultures of the Goddess”.

The four elements together provide the definition of matriarchy. In this sense the redefined conceptual framework seems plausible and can be applied in the study of human societies such as the Khasi society.

**METHODOLOGY**

Available secondary materials such as books, articles, census reports, government documents, vernacular articles, etc. were consulted, providing useful insights and understanding about aspects such as
matriarchy, social structure, and issues related to land and local produce. Primary data was collected from the field in the form of interviews and discussions and was tabulated and compiled for description and analysis. Given the limitations of the survey this study should be regarded as exploratory.

Fieldwork was conducted in two Khasi villages of Lngam region of the West Khasi hills: Nongmawlong and Langshonthiang. Both villages are located more than 10 kms away from the main road and at a farther distance from the Community and Rural Development Block located at Mawshynrut village. Fieldwork was conducted in 2015 during the monsoon season, between mid June and July, when this region receives heavy rain. In conducting the fieldwork, the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent was applied (according to art. 19 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and the following process was followed:

i) In tribal communities, the village authority is the representative head and it is practice for any outsiders to contact the village headman. The headmen of both villages were contacted, and separate meetings days and time according to their convenience were fixed.

ii) In the meetings with the two headmen the intention, reason and outcome of the work was shared. Formal letters were also given to headmen to present the matter in their respective villages. In the meetings with headmen come basic information about the village was gathered, including ownership and control of land, and cultivation and local produce and domestic consumption. The headmen informed the team about the land owned and control by the kur including aspects related with food production. The headmen also suggested meeting the residents of the village in groups, and separate meetings with members of the village council and members of the clan council were held.

iii) A couple of days later, the headmen of respective villages advised that both villages were willing to accept the research team to initiate the survey. The allocated number of days was fifteen the respective villages.

iv) Both villages requested the research team to provide one copy each of the draft final report before it is shared in the public domain.

v) The final report of the survey was prepared with suggestions given by respective villages have been taken into account.

Based on the background information provided by headmen of villages, the survey team reworked the plan for the interviews (Table 1). Respondents were members of the matriclans of the village, including men and youth. The data was collected through closed an open-ended interviews and focus group discussions with members of clan councils and members of village councils. Oral narratives by the eldest living women of the village were collected. The information gathered from the field was compiled and cross checked with selected persons from the region.

LIMITATIONS

According to the research plan, the fieldwork was to be completed in 30 days, spending fifteen days in each village. However, it took more than forty-five days because fieldwork was conducted during the monsoon season (June to July) when this region receives heavy rainfall. It was difficult to move in and out of these villages since they are located in the interior areas. Also, although village headmen and other elders were very helpful during this period and made the fieldwork possible, heavy rain delayed the gathering of villagers to attend group discussions.
The study has generated insights on the connection between social structure, land and indigenous methods of food production, and on the relevance of the revised matriarchy framework (Göttner-Abendroth, 2012). However, the study has its limitations because in-depth assessment on issues such as change in land use patterns, or the impact of government programmes with regard to agriculture, horticulture, soil and water conservation, on cash crop promotion and plantation; and issues of conflict and conflict resolution could not be studied. A comprehensive study taking into account such aspects, as well as the inclusion of more regions and villages, would contribute towards better understanding and to increase the scope of generalisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Respondents of Nongmawlong</th>
<th>Respondents of Langshonthiang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Headman and one executive member of the village council</td>
<td>Headman and 5 members of the village council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussions with Dorbar Shnong (village council)</td>
<td>Men, women and youth leaders (25 of them)</td>
<td>Men, women and youth (36 of them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussions</td>
<td>Working men and women of Dorbar Kur (clan council) of Mawlong clan (15 of them)</td>
<td>Working men and women of Dorbar Kur (clan council) of Mawsor clan (22 of them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussions</td>
<td>Elder living mother’s brothers of Mawlong clan (4 of them)</td>
<td>Elder living mother’s brothers of Mawsor clan (5 of them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussions</td>
<td>A group of 6 women</td>
<td>A group of 3 village school teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>One eldest living grandmother of the village</td>
<td>Two eldest living grandmothers of the village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Youth club leaders (5 of them)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Khavi society is one of the oldest indigenous peoples in North-East India. The term Khavi includes Khavi people inhabiting regions such as Khynriam, Pnar, War, Maram, Lngam, Bhoi, Nonglang and Jyrngam. According to a Khavi tradition its members consider themselves to be descendants of Ki Hyniewtrep Ki Hyniewskum. Their ancestor then came to settle on earth around the sacred peak called U Sohpet Bneng, namely the umbilical cord connecting the earth and the house of God. Ancestors are referred to with respect and reverence. Prokop and Suliga (2013:761) provide evidence showing that the Khavi people have lived in these hills for the last two millennia or more: “the radiocarbon dating of charcoal and the results of chemical, microstructure and phase composition of iron-ore and slags, indicate that the smelting of iron in the Khavi Hills was initiated at least 2 000 years ago”.

Historical contact with Europeans in this region dates back to 1826, when the British won in the Anglo-Burmese war and forced the King of Burma to cede the territory of the Ahom kings to them. The Khavi states were contiguous to the ceded areas and were therefore brought under colonial rule. The British called Khavi ‘Khavi States’. Traditional political institutions were politically subjugated under the colonial state. During the course of the colonial administration in Khavi and Jaintia Hills the British were also responsible for breaking and creating new kinds of political units known as ‘British Areas’ or ‘British Villages’. R.S. Lyngdoh reports that “the British in some cases established their authority by means of treaties and agreements; in some others, they claimed their sovereign authority by right of conquest, and in few cases, they established their sovereign jurisdiction over certain areas by right of purchase or by exchange of territories” (1996:41–42).

Background of Society, Region and Villages

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THE KHASI PEOPLE HAVE INHABITED THESE HILLS FOR OVER TWO THOUSAND YEARS
The British took control of land for setting up military sanatoria, administrative headquarters, etc. These lands were not returned to the indigenous tribes after the transfer of power in 1947. The colonial administration also created districts and mapped boundaries according to their wishes and for their own system of bureaucratic administration. For instance, the politico–administrative term Khasi and Jaintia Hills became common usage. The colonial rulers were the causal factors of the loss of ancestral land of the clans and the traditional political institutions. The loss of ancestral domain continues to be an issue in the present times.

It is important to have a glimpse of the history of hill areas and in particular the Khasi states during the years before the commencement of the Constitution of India. According to Syiemlieh (2014:25) “agreements were reached in the early July 1947 between Sir Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam and the heads of 25 Khasi States on the necessity of maintaining the unity of India… A few days before the independence, they signed the Standstill Agreement… Getting the states to sign the Instrument of Accession proved a difficult job for the Governor”. However, through coercive means the states had to agree.

Traditional political institutions were brought under the control of modern state in the post-colonial period. They continue to exist under the new politico–legal framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and under the provisions of Arts. 244 (2) and 275 (1) as to the administration of Tribal Areas, and under the Autonomous District Councils (ADC). There are three Autonomous District Councils: the Khasi Hills ADC; the Garo Hills
ADC; and the Jaintia Hills ADC. Traditional political institutions are under the control of ADCs. After the formation of Meghalaya, the state has a three-tier political administration: The Legislative Assembly and its modern bureaucratic organization, the Autonomous District Councils, and the Traditional Political Institutions. It should be noted that traditional political institutions come under the authority of the ADCs (Gassah, 1998).

Under the modern political administration, the state has eleven districts; the West Khasi Hills District, where the survey was conducted, is one of them. The district comprises an area of about 5247 sq. kms which is 23 percent of the total area of the state. It is bounded on the north-west by Kamrup district of Assam; on the north-east by Ri Bhoi district; on the east by East Khasi Hills district, on the south by Bangladesh and South West Khasi Hills district; on the west by East Garo and South Garo Hills districts. The Garo is the neighbouring tribe of the Khasi.

It should be noted that West Khasi Hills District has a number of traditional political institutions called Khasi States locally referred to as Ka Hima such as Nongstoi, Nongkhlaw, Maharam, Myriat, Rambrai, Mawiang, Langrin, and Nobosophoh; together with the three Sirdarships of Jyrngam, Riangsih, and Nonglang. Under the modern administration or traditional political institutions, the unit of human settlement is the ka shnong (village).

Villages are the settlement and political units of Khasi society. Over generations many villages were founded, formed and spread out in many parts of the Khasi and Jaintia hills. The ancestors of Khasi people had developed a method of clustering villages on the basis of their geographical location and landscape, using locally the term Ka Thai to refer to a region or an area (see Map 1, Langstieh and Reddy, 2004). When two persons meet and interact, they also refer to the region they come from. Villages and their residents of the upland plateau and running east to west are referred to as Ki Khynriam; those in the eastern part of the Khynriam plateau are referred to as Ki Pnar; those residing in the southern slopes bordering Bangladesh are referred to as Ki War; those in the western part of the Khynriam plateau are known as Ki Maram; the area between the Maram and Garo hills are called Ki Lngam; and Ki Bhoi are those who settled in the northern slopes bordering the plains of the state of Assam (Nongkynrih, 2001). The clustering of villages into regions was an indigenous method of classifying villages and their residents according to their geography and landscape.

On close examination, the term Ka Thai has distinct characteristics, for example regions are located on different altitudes: some on the upland, some on the lowland, some with steep hillocks or hills, and some with plain areas. The soil composition varies in all regions with variations at the level of food crops and wild edible plants. Each region has different kinds of forestlands including flora and fauna; and the temperature varies in all of them. Lastly, in these regions one can find varieties of local dialects, food items and festivals. Ka Thai provides for the understanding of the connection between indigenous peoples and their particular kind of geography and landscape. The variations of the landscape from region to region provide for the existence of varieties of agro-biodiversity including the kinds of indigenous practices of food production. Each region in this sense is a landscape of its own and carries and provides for varieties of agro-biodiversity, food production and food security. The indigenous idea of landscape can be a useful concept and process for agro-biodiversity frameworks and practices because it holds and provides the actual conditions about the region and the people inhabiting it.

**BACKGROUND OF THE REGION**

Lngam region falls under the traditional political institutions of Khasi States known as Ka Hima Nongstoi, Ka Hima Langrin,
and the sirdarships of Nonglang and Jyrngam. As a region, it is also sandwiched between Maram region and Garo hills. In this kind of geographical location, Khasi people of Lngam have had contact and interaction with the neighbouring Garo tribe. Due to this factor, writings by colonial bureaucrats, Christian missionaries and anthropologists have divided opinions and views about the identity of Khasi people of Lngam. In fact, the language of Khasi people of Lngam is Austroasiatic and linguistically part of the Mon–Khmer linguistic group, whereas Garo language is classified as a Bodo Garo subgroup of the language family.

According to Khongsdier (2004:2) “some Lngams claim that they are one of the Khasi sub-groups, and they dislike to be regarded as an offshoot of the Garos”. When discussing with residents of the region and villages about the issue of their social identity, most claimed being part of Khasi society; similar answers were given by people from the two villages studied: “we are Khasi and we are not Garo”. This aspect was corroborated by Witing Mawsor, a well-known teacher, local writer and a leader of the region who stated that, “orally it has been handed down from generation to generation that Lngam is a Khasi word denoting a thick and dense forest area, and isolated, and the first Khasi settlers of the area were also called Lngam; and the term Lngam was drawn from a Khasi word langam (to sink) in metaphoric sense it means something completely covered or obscure”. As a region, it still has thick canopy cover, a very difficult terrain and rich in natural resources. It was only in recent times that it has been easy to travel into this region.

H. Mawsor (2017:15) further elaborated that, “because Lngam is situated along the border with the Tibeto–Burman speaking tribe the Garo, many scholars and writers have created confusion about the ethnic position of the Khasi people inhabiting the region. The Garo People and plains People are the neighbouring communities and they called the earliest Khasi settlers of Lngam as megam or nunyas. These names were given by outsiders and we do not accept because we consider ourselves as Khasi.

Also, by living alongside with the Garo tribe there has been some exchange at the level of marriage and other cultural aspects. These kinds of cultural exchanges happen with all communities living in the border areas; however, such exchange does not change the fact of being Khasi”.

Based on fieldwork observations, one can say that Khasi people living in Lngam region belong to the Khasi society; they share a common social structure, beliefs and practices such as the clan system and clan exogamy, matrilocal residence, matrilineal descent, property under women, the traditional polity of village councils, and the land holding pattern. Another aspect that can be noted is the importance of the mother’s brother in the clan. In addition, out of twenty-nine clans found in the Lngam region, the majority are clans of Khasi society and few of them had some connection to Garo origin. Some of the prominent clans are Rongrin, Mawsor, Puwien, Shyrkon, Hahshah, Nongbri and Diengngan (Ehrenfels 1955, Khongsdier, 2004; Langstieh and Reddy, 2004; Nagaraja, 2004). It has also been pointed out that by Langstieh and Reddy (2004:21–22) that some of the clans found in Lngam region were originally located in different parts of West Khasi Hills District (WKHD) (table 2).
In North-East India there are many legends, some of them shared by all tribes, some not. One particular legend of the Khasi people of Lngam region is that of the tiger-man. According to the belief “each man has his own tiger. This tiger is part of the spirit of the man himself. The tiger is his other self. Each man possesses his personal tiger that protects him or takes revenge upon him or his behalf, or punishes him as his conduct demands… When the spirit of the man moves out from his body and is converted into a tiger, the man is alive but in a state of drowsiness. If someone shoots a tiger, the man dies automatically because the tiger is embedded with the spirit of the man… When the man dies, the tiger comes to claim the body… and [it is] believed that the tiger comes to eat the body of the dead man’ (Karotemprel, 1985:21). It can be pointed out that a similar belief is found among the Khasi of the Ri Bhoi region. The belief on the man-tiger is so intrinsic to the social world of the people and to this day there are countless stories. The belief in the transcendental transformation of man-tiger-man is still a part of social life in village communities in Lngam region and in other parts of Khasi and Jaiñtia hills.

**BACKGROUND OF VILLAGES**

A proper understanding of the subject matter requires ‘fieldview’ assessment and this has been carried out by collecting information from two villages: Nongmawlong and Langshonthiang. Nongmawlong village was founded by the Mawlong clan whereas Langshonthiang was founded by the
Mawsor clan. Both these villages fall under the Mawshynrut Community and Rural Development of West Khasi hills District. These villages are also part of the traditional political institutions and fall under Ka Hima Nongstoiň (one of the Khasi States). Nongmawlong is located at a distance of 156 kms from Shillong, the capital of the state of Meghalaya, and Langshonthiang is 171 kms away from that town. To reach these villages one has to travel by road and trek on foot for more than an hour and it is more arduous to reach these villages during the monsoon season. These villages are also located further from the state highway, however, they do communicate frequently with other villages during the local market days of the villages of Umdang, Shallang and Riangdo, and on the occasion of other kinds of social events such as festivals.

The total number of households in both these villages is 28 and 133, respectively. The approximate proportion of literacy in the former village was 51 percent and 57 percent in the latter. In average the number of non-working persons in both villages was between 50 percent to 55 percent. In the context of livelihood, the working population of households in both the villages depended on traditional methods and practices of food production. The majority of the households in both the villages are Christians belonging to various Christian denominations such as Catholic, Presbyterian, etc.

As these villages are located in the interior parts of the state, their facilities are not very good. They do not depend on the public distribution system (PDS) for food. Their indigenous practice of food production has been the key factor of sustaining their livelihood and selling of produce in local markets. The indigenous method of food production has protected them and has ensured food security. By not having the PDS seems to have a positive contribution to the people rather than food dependency on the state. The only hardship for them is medical treatment. At the village level they have good knowledge about indigenous medicinal plants, in most cases they would use them, and they do depend on modern allopath for treatment of malaria, wounds, etc. Facilities at the village level are presented in Table 3.

The history of the formation of villages has a direct correlation with the Kur, and according to oral history Nongmawlong was formed by members of Ka Kur Mawlong many decades back, and it has its own demarcated boundary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clan name</th>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mawsor</td>
<td>Tyrsa</td>
<td>Nongstoiň area, WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shyrkon/Nongsiang</td>
<td>Mawlibah</td>
<td>Nongstoiň area, WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nongwar</td>
<td>Thang Jawnaw</td>
<td>WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langrin</td>
<td>Umdohlun</td>
<td>Kynshri river, WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawlong</td>
<td>Mairang Kynshi</td>
<td>WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ŵianglang</td>
<td>Nongtrait</td>
<td>WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangriang</td>
<td>Nongphlang</td>
<td>WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nongtngier/Marweiň</td>
<td>Langrin</td>
<td>WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puweiň</td>
<td>Rangblang</td>
<td>WKHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rongrin</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>WKHD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE 3 DISTRIBUTION OF FACILITIES IN VILLAGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Nongmawlong</th>
<th>Langshonthiang</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Public Health Centre</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>They have to go either to villages located farther away in Shallang or Riangdo or seek the medical assistance from the Catholic health dispensary located at Umdang village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Lower Primary Schools</td>
<td>Lower Primary Schools and Upper Primary Schools</td>
<td>Village Schools need more support and assistance particularly for teachers and students. Children of Nongmawlong have to walk a longer distance to attend Upper Primary, and for High School Education, children of both villages have to go out of the villages and attend school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Depend more on local springs</td>
<td>Public water supply and local springs</td>
<td>Do have good supply of drinking water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Erratic supply of electricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitation</td>
<td>Poorly constructed toilets</td>
<td>Both poorly constructed toilets and good toilets</td>
<td>Houses do have proper systems of sanitation except that some households have constructed permanent structures and others semi-permanent ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Distribution System (food security supply)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Lack of assessment by concerned departments of the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>Aircel</td>
<td>Vodafone and Aircel</td>
<td>Private mobile phone companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road</td>
<td>Very bad</td>
<td>Very bad</td>
<td>The link road is motorable only during the winter seasons and difficult during the monsoon seasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport system</td>
<td>They have to walk to another village located more than 4–5 kms away</td>
<td>There are four small private and semitruck vehicles providing transport services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANALYSIS OF THE KHASI PEOPLE IN INDIA AND THEIR LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**
The land within the village boundary falls under the control of Mawlong clan, locally known as Ri Kur Mawlong or the Mawlong clan land. There are other clans in the village such as Nongbak, Mawsor, Langri, Thongni, and Puweiñ. Out of 28 households, 50 percent belong to Mawlong clan, and 50 percent to other clans. In most cases these are clans of the \(\text{in}\)-marrying females or daughters-in-law of the Mawlong clan. These \(\text{in}\)-marrying females who married Mawlong males of the village have added to the number of clans. In general, Khasi men can bring and settle with their wives in their natal village, and in this case it is similar. According to the elders of the village, among the clans, the Nongbak clan has an interesting background. According to many elders, both men and women, the founding ancestress of Nongbak clan had a connection with the Garo tribe, but succeeding generations from this clan voluntarily adopted the Khasi matrilineal social structure including other customary beliefs and practices, and other cultural forms. As one elderly woman said, “since that time Nongbak clan became part of our society”.

Villagers of Langshonthiang village narrated some useful insights about its formation and history. According to them, the village is one of the oldest among all other villages in the Lngam region. The village was once an important centre where neighbouring villages and villages located at the farther distance would come and barter their local produce or locally-made products for exchange. It is said that the first settler who came, occupied the land and settled were \(\text{iing}\) of Kur Mawsor. In the context of the present times, majority of the households are from the Kur Mawsor. Out of the total of 113 households, 79 of them are Mawsor clan households. The 79 Mawsor households are divided into seven lineages and their descendants. There are other 54 households of the village from clans such as Nongbri, Hahshah, Puweiñ, Dkhar and Rongrin. These clans came later to settle in the village and the Mawsor clan provided them with access to use the clan land. One such example is the Nongbri clan, with only three households, who came and settled in the village much later. From the other four clans there were those households who came later; and there were those households whose fathers were from Mawsor clan and who brought their wives to settle in the village.
Social and political structure

SOCIAL CONTEXT

A proper understanding of Khasi people in Lngam region has to be placed in the context of Khasi social structure. According to the Dictionary of Sociology, social structure refers “to the enduring, orderly and patterned relationships between elements of a society” (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1984:391). A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952:179) accentuated that social structure “is thus defined as set of relations between entities”. The author also emphasised that “social institutions, in the sense of standardised modes of behaviour, constitute the machinery by which a social structure, a network of social relations, maintains its existence and continuity” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940:9). In other words, social structure is about organized patterns of social relationships determined by social institutions of kinship and marriage, polity, economy, religion and culture.

In analysing the Khasi social structure, the redefinition of matriarchy by Göttner-Abendroth was adopted. The redefinition has accentuated matriarchy as a kind of social structure where economic activities and relationships are guided by the principle of reciprocity; where kinship relations are “horizontal and non-hierarchical matrilineal kinship”, political decisions are collective and based on the principle of consensus, and the sacred and profane are intertwined at various levels of social life. Using the redefinition of matriarchy, the Khasi social structure has been examined from both ‘textual view and fieldview’.

A proper understanding of the social structure of Khasi society has to take into account kur and iing. In the context of Khasi society, two persons are kin if they trace descent from a common ancestress or if either of them descends from the other. The largest division in the society is in terms of Kur which is a near equivalent of clan. The kur is an exogamous unit and every member is a kin of every other person of the same kur. Hence, every member belonging to the same kur refers to each other collectively as shi kur or kin belonging to a single kur. The basis of this is that they all descend from a common ancestress. The kur affiliation becomes a unit of identification and all members belonging to the same generation within the kur accept each other as brothers and sisters on the basis of fictitious consanguinity. This affiliation also becomes a basis of identification when two strangers meet for the first time. The kur comes into being when the female children of Khasi women get married and perpetuate the lineage of their mothers by producing children. Each such married daughter starts what is known as ka kpoh, which during the course of time develops into a number of lineages which share the
same identification name with other lineages of ka kpoh (Nongkynrih, 2002: 33–35). Khasi society is made up of kur. According to the listing conducted by Spiton Kharakor there are approximately more than 3,363 kur.

All the members of a kur believe in a common female ancestress called Ka Íawbei Tynrai. A Khasi woman after marriage gives birth to a number of children and when her female children get married, they are supposed to perpetuate the lineage in turn by producing children. Each such married daughter of the Khasi woman starts a kpoh. During the course of time each kpoh develops into number of lineages, which share the same identification name with other lineages within the kpoh. All those women who started individual kpoh are referred to as Ka Íawbei Tymmen by their descendants, meaning thereby that they are the old (ancient) female ancestress of the kpoh though they are not the Tynrai (the root or the source of their existence). Each kpoh gets further split after the marriage of the daughters of Ka Íawbei Tymmen of the kpoh. These married daughters set up their own iing (domestic group) and subsequently acquire the status of Ka Íawbei Khynraw (the young ancestress as compared to Ka Íawbei Tynrai).

The most important functional descent unit in the matrilineal kin group is called ka iing. A iing can be seen commonly as a domestic group of three or four generations consisting of consanguine males and females and may or may not have any husbands in any generation residing with their wives and children and may also include married brothers living with their sisters, but without their wives and children. It is also the lowest order of clan segmentation, smaller than ka kpoh, which may include two or more iing. The central core of ka iing comprises two persons, one holding the authority and the other owning the property. The authority goes from the mother’s brother to the sister’s son, while the property is handed down from
mother to daughter. A man continues to be a member of the same ūng all his life whether he marries or not. A woman, if not an heiress, will branch off after her marriage and though she herself will continue as member of her mother’s ūng, the third generation from her will form an independent ūng. As members of a ka ūng, men and women have their share of roles and position (Nongkynrih, 2002).

As a matter of practice in the society, after marriage the elder daughters move out of their mother’s ūng to set up an independent ūng of their own along with their husbands (neo-local residence), whereas the youngest daughter continues to live (as a matter of obligation) even after marriage with her husband in her mother’s ūng (matri-local residence). Her elder daughters also move out after marriage and only the youngest daughter continues to stay with her mother. Thus, one can see that the youngest daughters perpetuate the original ūng in every generation. Such a perpetual ūng is called the ūng-seng. Úng-seng is the place, which signifies the unity of the lineage and is termed in that context as shi-ūng.

In short, ūng is primarily concerned with the sustenance and perpetuation of the Khasi society. The domain of the ūng (as the domestic group) consists of the events of marriage, inheritance, succession, besides the events associated with the various phases of its cycle of development. These events in the internal domain of the ūng are also simultaneously events in the external domain, i.e. the kur. It is through kur, that the ūng is integrated into the total social structure in its political, jural, and ritual aspects. The internal processes in the domain of ūng are governed and regulated by Kur. Thus, In the Khasi society, e.g. the rule of incest operates at the level of Kur which decides who can have sexual relations in marital terms or otherwise with whom. Similarly, the concern of the society is expressed through Kur in the event of childbirth, initiation, death, etc. occurring in an individual ūng. Thus, in actual practice Khasi kinship is organized at the kur level; and at the ūng level.

In general, ūng is considered both as a symbol of physical identity and social identity. In the former sense, it refers to a dwelling unit for the people. In the latter sense, it refers to the group of people living together and related to each other as primary kin. Interestingly, the word ūng is used by different persons differently, thereby indicating their relationship with a particular ūng. When, after marriage, a woman sets up her own house she refers to it as ūng la jong, i.e. her own ūng. But her husband will not use the same expression for his wife’s ūng. For him, it will be ūng-khun i.e., the house of his children. For the children, this will be ūng kmie i.e., the house of the mother. In turn, for the husband of the female children, this will be ūng-kiaw i.e., the house of the mother-in-law. For the children of the daughters this will be ūng-kemie-rad i.e., the house of the grandmother. After the death of the woman who had first set up this ūng-la-jong, her sons and elder daughters may either continue to refer to the ūng as ūng kmie or as ūng khadduh i.e., the house where the youngest sister lives. A woman would refer to the ūng of her husband’s mother as ūng kiaw and her children will refer to the ūng of their father’s mother as ūng meikha i.e., the house of the father’s mother. The point to be noted here is that whereas a woman other than the youngest daughter of her mother could have ūng of her own addressed as ūng-la-jong, the youngest daughter cannot refer to the house of

IN THE KHASI SOCIETY, AUTHORITY OF MEN AND WOMEN IS DETERMINED BY THE MATRIARCHAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE
the mother where she continues to live, even after her mother’s death, as her own house or ìììing-la-jong. The males, of course, do not have their ìììing-la-jong. They either have a house of their mother or the house of their children (Nongkynrih, 2002).

Another situation arises when a Khasi male marries a non-Khasi female. The problem now is in giving a Kur name to the children in conformity with the matrilineal principle of descent. Obviously, the children cannot inherit the Kur name of their father. Since the mother is a non-Khasi (i.e. someone who has not been brought up in the Khasi way of life) she cannot start a new kur. Ancestors of Khasi society developed a distinct method to solve this puzzling kinship problem called ka tang jait meaning the process of formation and naming of a new kur, and the integration of new kur members into the Khasi matrilineal kinship system. As per the Khasi kinship norms, children born out of such a marriage are socialised into Khasi customs and traditions and these female children after maturity are married to Khasi men. Each daughter born of such a union, after marriage, starts a new kpoh (jait) which is prefixed with the word khar (a short form of the word dkhar which means a non-Khasi or “an outsider to the Khasi society”). After this, the Khasi system of lineage formation continues. Subsequently, the non-Khasi mother assumes the status of Ka Iawbei Tynrai; her daughters become Ka Iawbei Tymmen for the kpoh set up by each one of them. Each daughter will be responsible for setting up a collateral group with a different jait name prefixed with the word khar or may share a common jait name with khar as a prefix. The suffix to the word khar may be the personal name of the non-Khasi ancestress, or the name of her occupation, or the name of the place where she had her Khasi husband for the first time, or some important event or any other characteristic of her personality. (Nongkynrih, 2002).

It should be noted that in matriarchal societies both men and women are given due consideration and importance, and each is assigned with distinct position and authority. In Khasi society, the position and authority of male and female in social relationships are determined by the matriarchal social structure. The woman is considered as Ka Nongri Ìììng. Ka Nongri Ìììng means the care taker and keeper of the domestic groups; and it also means that every woman is a potential mother. As a mother it is her role to care and support members of the domestic groups. At another level, she is the procreator and perpetuator of matrilineal kinship and traditions, and she plays the role of continuity and maintenance of solidarity of the domestic groups at the lowest level of the Khasi kinship on the one hand, and solidarity of the clan at the larger social level on the other. It should be noted that women as keepers of the domestic groups are also keepers of ancestral property and follow the principle of ultimogeniture. Lastly, it is through her that membership of both sexes in society is affiliated and recognised.

In the case of men in matrilineal societies, they play the role of father to children and mother’s brothers to his sister’s children. In Khasi society, men as kñì meaning mother’s brothers, play a role and authority at the level of the Kur or at the level of the ìììng of his sisters or in his mother’s house (Figure 1), and as the kpa, meaning father of his children and responsible for their upbringing including caring of his wife. According to Lyngdoh and Nongkynrih (2015:43) and Nongkynrih (2012:59) the mother’s brother has the following roles and authority:

i) He represents the kur and the domestic groups and acts as the decision-maker for and on behalf of the kur and the domestic groups;

ii) He provides protection, provides counsel and guides women and children;

iii) He cares for the well-being of his sister’s children, and his presence is sought in the rites-de-passage of his domestic groups or lineage such as birth, naming ceremony, marriage, sickness and death;
iv) He acts as an indulgent figure providing help and advice to his sister’s children;

v) He is responsible for socialising his sister’s children in etiquette and manners, rules of kinship, transfer of knowledge, and discipline of his nephews and nieces;

vi) He has a role and authority in matters concerning management of ancestral property, settlement of disputes, affairs related with performance of religious rites and rituals, marriage of his sister’s children, and in the everyday life of domestic groups or lineages;

vii) He holds the power of control over his nephews and nieces. He is also responsible for the maintenance of his sister and her children’s property and
upholding of the customary practices relating to inheritance of his sister’s daughter’s property; and he has a role in ensuring harmony and co-operation among the members of his sister’s household and of his sister’s daughter’s household; and

viii) Lastly, in his authority role, he represents the matrilineal descent group whenever required or needed, such as to ensure peace, harmony and cooperation in the matri-lineage and clan; and harmonious relations with other clans of the matrilineal tribe or any other communities.

Nevertheless, as pointed out by Lyngdoh and Nongkynrih (2015) the traditional role and responsibilities of mother’s brother has gradually been replaced by the father, although under the process of modernisation of Khasi society the mother’s brother can retain his position.

Examples of this from Lngam region can be cited as examples. Like in other regions and villages of Khasi Jiaňţia hills, Khasi people of this region follow clan exogamy and the line of descent is through the female or the mother. Thus, for instance, it is the duty of the man to introduce the woman of his choice to his mother’s clan. This is for the purpose of ensuring that clan exogamy is followed and for mutual agreement between clans. After the completion of this introduction the preparation for the marriage takes place. If the man and the woman elope, both of them as husband and wife will have to pay their respects to the husband’s mother, and on such occasion the daughter-in-law pays her respect by offering a token of gratitude to her mother-in-law. In this meeting, the daughter-in-law is introduced to other members of the husband’s clan. This practice is known as Kaikha or leit kai sha iiing ka kmie kha.

The parents and other members of the husband’s clan will reciprocate by giving a fully-grown pig (u niangtapja). It is part of their belief that after marriage the son moves away from his parental home. The giving of a pig by clan members and his parents are offerings of their blessings so that he and his newly formed domestic unit will prosper in economic or non-economic activities. This is followed by another ceremony from the wife’s household and clan. It is seen and considered by the wife’s clan that the in-marrying male has an important role in the reproductive life cycle of their clan, in taking care of children and wife, and his contribution for the welfare of his wife and children. In his honour, the wife’s clan pays their gratitude to his parents and his clan for having given one of their sons to them. The ceremony of gratitude is carried out after the matter has been discussed in the Dorbar Kur (council of the clan) of the wife’s clan. The responsibility in preparing and conducting this ceremony of gratitude is vested with Ki Burang or Ki kur shynrang jong ka kynthei meaning adult and working brothers and mother’s brothers of the wife’s clan. On the part of Ki Burang, collectively they contribute a gift and in today’s context usually cash for their Kynum (brother-in-law) as a mark of gratitude. This ceremony is called Kut Singkdok or Ka Burom Kynum.

Another kind of ceremony that is observed takes place at the time of death of married men. This particular ceremony is considered a sacred event between the wife’s clan and the deceased husband’s clan. It is believed that after marriage the longrynïeng of the man, meaning his ‘self’, that his body, mind and stature (non-physical self) gets transferred from
his mother’s clan to his wife’s clan. During his lifetime with his wife and his children his longrynïeng has made contribution to their lives and their welfare. After his death, it is considered important to bring back or to return back his longrynïeng to his mother’s clan so that the clan regains one of their sons. This sacred ceremony is carried out by offering an amount of cash. The offering in cash is paid by the eldest mother’s brother of the wife’s clan, and also representing the council of his clan. It is offered by handing it over to the women of the deceased husband’s clan and it is called Ka Bailet or Ka Bai Pynphai Ryngiew. If this ceremony is not completed by his clan (meaning deceased man’s clan) it is believed that the incurrence of retribution such as illnesses and all kinds of misfortunes may happen in his mother’s domestic groups. In this part of the region conducting this sacred ceremony is considered important for clans.

There is another kinship practice in this region that has been followed for generations. Elders of the region narrated that in the clan there have been cases of households without any female child to perpetuate and continue the matriclan meaning Khlem Thniang. Thus, the living sons or sons of such households are left without any female siblings. To fill this gap of matri-female descent they have a practice called Rangliang that ensures the continuity of existence of a female line of descent for such households. This responsibility is with the clan council. It will select a female member from the clan to take the role of Ka Rahkad or Ka Pyrsa (adopted niece) for such households. The adopted niece assumes the role of a matri-kin for mother’s brothers, both married or unmarried, and she occupies and lives in the mother’s house of her uncle. She will take care of and serve the maternal uncle during his life time. After his death, all the possessions and belongings will be inherited by Ka Rahkad. The niece is important also from the point of view of completing the sacred ceremony of Ka Bailet. Without her, the sacred ceremony after the death of men from such households would be difficult to complete.

Another practice in Khasi-Jaintia hills in general and in Lngam region in particular is worth mentioning. The honouring of parents after their death commemorated working sons and daughters of households with the erection of monuments called Bam Sohrat. Prior to the erection of commemorative monuments, sons and daughters have to get the permission from Ka Meikha or Ki Knia Kha (father’s mother or father’s sisters). This permission is needed because the father belongs to another clan and also after the completion of the sacred ceremony, the father (the non-physical self) is returned back to his mother’s clan. On the actual day of commemoration, clan members of the deceased mother’s side and clan members of the deceased father’s mother’s side gather together and celebrate in feast and merriment.

Taking into consideration the kinship description it becomes clear that Khasi villages cannot be single matriclan villages because the practice of clan exogamy is allowed. This explains the importance of the presence of diverse matriclans in the village. Also, the non-founding clans play a role in the affinal exchange between matriclans. The kinship structure and marriage rules are the basis for multi-clan villages.

**THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF KHASI SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

In many societies, the union of man and woman is not considered a private affair between two persons or an individual affair. Union and marriages are an affair between clans. The affinal exchange between them is observed by paying mutual respect and mutual reciprocation of token gifts and by the sharing of common feast. It also can be seen as the cementing of affinal bond which has fulfilled the rules of clan exogamy. In the case of the man, the marriage is not the end of the kinship connection between him and his mother’s clan. Thus, the pig symbolizes the meaning of this relationship, the protection of his clan, and the role of the man as a father.
As husband of his wife and father of his children, the man is also the member of his mother’s clan. When the man gets married, he is sent off by his mother’s ĭing and by his kur to support and care for his wife and children. This was not in any way a send off that breaks away his relations with his mother’s clan. His connection with the clan through his mother continues because that is considered to be the root of his self and his social identity. Therefore, his self (the non-physical dimension) is to be returned back by his wife’s clan to his mother’s clan. This final exchange completes the journey of a deceased married man’s life, from his mother’s house to his wife’s house and back to his mother’s house. It is like the rejoining of his umbilical cord with his mother and finally resting back in her womb. Theoretically, the husband is a contributor to the prosperity and perpetuity of another clan with his umbilical cord connected to his mother’s clan.

Under this type of social structure, the root of female descent acts like the connection with and between domestic groups of the matrclan. Any threat to the loss of the female descent root is a threat to the male in particular because of the loss of connection with his mother’s clan. A male is only a husband in his wife’s clan and father to his children. His identity as a member of the village, as a brother or as a mother’s brother comes from the matri-root of his mother’s clan. Ensuring and retaining this part of the kinship connection is seen as vital for the man and for his own clan. Thus, the process of adoption and the re-integration of the man as mother’s brother, and a female as adopted niece within the kinship structure is a case of continuity and perpetuity of the matriclan.

At the level of traditional political institutions, there is a tier system, either a three tier-system or a two-tier system. The village (slmongs) is the
basic political unit formed and constituted by Ki Ùng, and it has been a practice that male household representatives form Ka Dorbar Shnong (village council). The village council is the traditional authority represented by the headman. There are another two tiers with designated political boundaries and also larger political boundaries beyond the village and they are known as Ka Hima or Doloiship or Ka Raid. In the case of the last two tiers they have their own councils known as Ka Dorbar Raid or Ka Dorbar Elaka (council of cluster of villages) and Ka Dorbar Hima (council of villages and Raid). Adults representing households or their villages attend these councils. It should be noted that at the level of village councils there are many villages which have included both youth and women. All adult males representing their Ùng or their villages have their social legitimacy to do so on the basis of the principle of consanguinity or affinity and residence.

At various levels of the political tier, decision-making is based on consensus and the collective. There has been a misinterpretation with regard to the position of the Khasi male in matters of political authority. His position and role in the political institution is derived from the kinship domain. He is not an individual holding authority. He is a representative of his clan and domestic group while living in his mother’s house or in his wife’s house in case he is married. He cannot take any independent decision on his own without the approval or consent of the community or the clan; and if he is a holding a position of headman or syiem (representative head of Khasi States) he is given delegated authority.

An example of the traditional authority at the level of villages in the Lngam region can be cited. According to Max Weber (1947), authority means “probability that certain specific commands will be obeyed by a given group persons”. The acceptance of “specific commands” has its bases on legitimacy. In the context of traditional authority, legitimacy is derived from traditions, customary beliefs
and practices, sanctity of age-old conventions, norms and values. Khasi villages have traditional political institutions referred as Ka Dorbar Shnong (village council), as was discussed earlier. As a traditional political institution, usually it is men who represent the domestic groups or households of their wives or their mother’s. It is a social arrangement that adult men and specifically the adult brothers or mother’s brothers or husbands shall be representatives and take decisions for the welfare of households and not their personal welfare. It should not be read or understood as a case of representation by men only or male domination over women.

The functional aspects of the village council are many and to name a few: formulating and implementing rules, regulating social behaviours and manners, organizing funerals or cremations, control of community lands and forestlands, organizing village dances or festivals, and presently also as a development implementing body of the modern state. It is represented by a headman called U Rangbah Shnong or U Sordar Shnong and supported by a Secretary and other members. All decisions with matters concerning the affairs of the village are through the village council, without its consent and approval action taken by village representatives are not socially legitimate.

Village council plays an important role in the day-to-day life of indigenous peoples like the Khasi people. The significance of village councils can be understood by looking at two examples from the two villages in discussion.

During the period of the fieldwork, it happened that the village of Nongmawlong had convened the village council meeting. The research team was allowed to participate as observers. This was an emergency council meeting dealing particularly with the agenda of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, a developmental scheme of the Government of India. The team observed the participation of women in the council meeting. They inquired some adult male members of the village whether the participation of women was part of the practice of the village or if it was adopted recently, they replied that women were included many years back and they could not recollect the exact year. Men of the village further shared that in 2001, the village council elected a woman member of the council as the treasurer.

During the formal deliberation of the village council one can witness the active participation of women in discussions voicing their opinions and suggestions on issues concerning village affairs. According to one male adult, “our women are very active in clan council; they give their own suggestions to the mother’s brothers or to the clan council in general. Therefore, in the village council they take keen interest in village affairs and have been giving their views and opinions. Their suggestions are taken into account by the village council”.

In the village, households conduct social ceremonies related to rites-de-passage of individuals and also clan ceremonies. In such social ceremonies there are many items which are used and one of those is ka ïad Um (rice beer). This rice beer can be locally made either from millet or rice using an indigenous processing method. The rice beer has its own distinct social significance in this social world and the village council permits the making, use and distribution of this locally made rice beer during social ceremonies. In the past, consumption of indigenous made rice beer used to create brawls and quarrels. Due to this factor, the village council has imposed strict regulation and it gives the responsibility of ensuring decent behaviour in the village to the households holding or organizing such social ceremonies. This has controlled and brought about better conduct during such events.

The village council has been taking up other measures and decisions with regard to the welfare of the village such as: control and care of the protected forestland; conducting annual cleaning drives; cattle (cows) rearing should be farther away from the residence of the village and cows cannot be let loose but should have keepers to watch over them so that they do not destroy cultivated crops; fishing from the village rivers is permissible.
only by using fishing rods, however, and any other activities that may cause damage to the river and aquatic life is not permitted and is punishable. Lastly, in case of death in any household of the village, households have to contribute twenty rupees each, two bunches of collected dead trees or branches and two bunches of *ka sla met*, which is a very widely used leaf for packing or serving of any items such as food.

In the case of *Ka Dorbar Shnong* Langshonthiang, prior to 2003 the village council was only composed of adult male household members. After 2003, women and youth of the football club of the village were included as village council members. One of the reasons given by elders of the village on the inclusion of women and youth was to ensure that they be part of the decision-making process and implementation. According to the inhabitants, the village council is a very important institution of the village because it handles and takes care of varied issues concerning individuals, households and the village community. They cited examples such as proper regulation with regard to access and use of village forestland; regulation with regard to protection and judicious use of fish from the river known as *Weisar*, that is, to fish only for domestic consumption; rearing and domestication of cattle or pigs or chickens should be 500 meters away from the residential site; it organizes annual cleaning drives and proper disposal of waste; in case of death in the village, households must assist the bereaved household; and processing of rice beer in the village is not permitted as mentioned, except in the case of social ceremonies; the same rule is followed as in the case of Nongmawlong village. When asked about the significance of the village council, both men and women stated “the action taken by the village council has helped the village community in many different ways. It has improved our daily life and also in ensuring the social order; without the village council it will be difficult for us in the village to live as a community”.

It is interesting to observe the internal mechanisms of change at the level of political participation of women and youth in both villages. This process of change was gradual and without any external interference or imposition. As it was an internally voluntary process, it was collectively accepted. This has enhanced the position of women not only in the clan, control of clan property but also in political decisions. This can be referred as ‘shared political participation’, meaning men are no longer the sole representatives of matriclans or sole representatives of mother’s house or wife’s house. This gradual process of women sharing the political domain with men means the re-structuring of traditional political structure including the political role of men. Regarding the headman, it is a representative position similar to the representatives of the clan council. The only difference is the clan representatives get some benefits from the clan, but the office of the headman is voluntary. As a representative of the village council he is respected; and in the everyday life of people in villages, the village council and the headman have social importance and relevance.

Thus, the village council can be defined as the basic traditional political unit at the level of the village or locality. It is comprised of households of matriclans and represented by men or by both men and women from matri-households in case of ‘shared political participation’. The leader and assistants are chosen from among participants and they function on the basis of delegated authority. Real authority is vested in the council, and the council is guided by the principle of consensus. The village council is the total sum of parts and is the authority in extra domestic jural domain of matriclans and households.

**RELIGIOUS BELIEFS**

In terms of religious beliefs and practices, the indigenous religion of the Khasi is called *Ka Niam Khasi*. According to Nongkynrih (2002), *Ka Niam Khasi* is divided into *Ka Niam-Im* and *Ka Niam-Íap* (meaning beliefs
and practices related with the living and the dead). It contains the Khasi concepts of God (U Blei), the other world (Ka Dwar U Blei), this world (Ka Pyrthei Shong-Basa), and the spirits (Ksuid). It also contains the description of various rituals to propitiate God on various occasions (rites-de-passage), rituals performed to propitiate various spirits, rituals regarding agricultural activities, rituals performed at the change of seasons, and rituals relating to political activities. It also contains the prescriptive and proscriptive norms relating to social interaction and maintenance of social order in society. It lays down the norms regulating the interaction of humans with their natural environment.

During their station on ka pyrthei humans are supposed to pursue their purpose in accordance with the norms prescribed in ka niam khasi. They are required to perform all the rituals related to ka niam-im in their lifetime and follow and uphold kamai iâ ka hok, meaning to earn their livelihood in a righteous manner and Ka Tip Briew Tip Blei. According to Khyriemmujat (2013:35) Ka Tip Briew Tip Blei (know man, know God)“means that man could know God if man could know his fellow beings since God manifests himself through his creations... It is believed that when man loves and respects his fellow beings he loves and respects God”. Man is required to seek pardon from U Blei (God) before his death for any acts
of omission or commission during his lifetime. After his death, his kinsmen must perform his death rituals in accordance with ka niam-iap.

Ka Hukum prescribes a righteous path to be followed by people as members of iìng or kur; as resident iìng/kur of a shnong; as constituent shnong of raid; or as constituent shnong/raid of hima. This righteous path is known as Ka Hok. Ka Hok is understood by the Khasi through Ka Aiň (the canons). Ka Aiň containing the canons of ka niam (the Khasi religion), is not codified but is passed on from generations through the process of socialisation in the form of beliefs. Ka Aiň governs the relations of people in the society; of the society with God; and of the society with nature (both flora and fauna). According to Khriemmujat (2013:49), Khasi people “believe that rites assume a very important place in their lives. All life-cycle events were occasions for performance of rites”. In the context of Khasi society confirmatory rites are considered a significant part of Ka Niam Khasi.

It can be argued that the social structure of Khasi society is intricately embedded with matrilineal kinship practices and includes economy, polity and religion. Society is divided into several vertical divisions of unilineal matrilineal descent and large exogamous units called kur. Each kur as an exogamous group is made up of a number of 3–4 generation–deep lineages. Each lineage consists of a number of iìng, which are the offshoots of a particular iìng, referred to as iìng-seng. Interaction in such lineages was most intense and frequent. Iìng consists of consanguines of both sex and may or may not have affines (husbands of the womenfolk of any generation) residing there with their wives. In Khasi society iìng is a matrilineal, property-owning group, a socialisation unit, a political unit, an economic unit and a ritual performing unit, and the source of identity to its members in the society. It undergoes fission and fusion processes with the moving out of elder daughters after marriage. In general, livelihood is related to land and cultivation. The general welfare of residents of the village is dealt by the village council. Lastly, in this kind of social arrangement both women and men have specific roles and delegated authority. However, it can be observed that variations exist at the level of inheritance of property in some regions of Khasi society.
ECONOMIC SYSTEM

In the economic scope, every adult person must earn their livelihood by Ka Kamai, meaning working and earning. The earning of livelihood is carried out by working on the land or by making use of the land. Approximately 70 percent of villages in rural areas of Meghalaya are still dependent on agriculture (Government of Meghalaya, 2013–2014). In most Khasi villages, agriculture is the main economic activity on the land owned by domestic groups, and it involves all adult members. Cultivation of crops for domestic consumption or commercial or both is the activity of the adult able-bodied males and females. In this sense, the iing functions as a corporate group and members residing in it do make their contributions; and their earnings are considered as the earning of the group.

On the aspect of land, broadly, there are three groups of land: communal land which is of free access and use by residents of the village or the Raid; clan land is under the control of the clan and clan members can make use of it during their life time, and the clan may also allow other non-clan members to access and use by paying token fee in kind or cash; and private lands which are held by individuals or domestic groups. Private lands are usually given on rent to users. However, it has been a practice that clan land or private land allows the collection of dead branches or twigs from the forest without any fee for domestic use.

There is, however a distinction when it comes to property inheritance. In the case of property earned by one’s own effort during one’s life time it is considered as ka nongkhynraw (self-acquired property). The one who has this kind of property can make use of it in any manner. In the case of ancestral property, it is under the control and management of the Kur council. The ancestral property called ka nong tymmen is held under the custodian of women in general and in particular the youngest daughter referred as Ka Khun Khatduh of the iing seng or iing khadduh. The ancestral property provides for the common pool of resources for members of the clan and serves as social security for members. However, among the Khasi residing in War (southern region) some portion of ancestral or self-acquired property are given to sons too.

LAND SYSTEMS:
THE SOCIAL ARRANGEMENT

According to Baranyl and Weltzner (2006:2) land is life. It is a surface that people live on, an economic asset, a point of access for other resources like minerals, territory for states and peoples, and a central element informing certain communities’ identities and spiritual
worldviews. In the context of Khasi society and in everyday conversation, Khasi people generally refer to land as Ka Bri or Ka Khyndew Ka Shyiap or Ka Jaka Ka Puta. However, when land is given more meaningful importance, they say Ka Mei-Ramew which means ‘mother earth’. The term Ka Mei-Ramew takes into cognisance the meaning of land in the holistic sense, and it includes what is on the land such as living things and non-living things, and the subterranean aspect, including whatever resources it holds. According to one of Khasi village elder, “it is land that gives us our identity of living in a definite territory, land provides and sustains our livelihoods and includes other aspects of social life; and our knowledge, our history and our connection with our ancestors is from the land”.

Land in Khasi and Jaintia hills is held or controlled under various kinds of social arrangements. For the sake of providing insightful understanding we broadly distinguish two regions: Khasi hills (i.e., East Khasi Hills District, West Khasi Hills District, South and Ri Bhoi District); and Jaiṅtia Hills District.

In Khasi hills, the Land Reforms Commission Report noted that, broadly there are two categories of land: ka bri–raid (community or communal land); and ka bri–kynti (privately owned land). According to the report, in the former type of land, management and control fall under the jurisdiction of the “community concerned”. In this context, the word community may be a village which has such lands under its jurisdiction or a cluster of villages collectively constituting a unit known as ka raid (a second-tier political unit) and under its jurisdiction it has control on such lands or an Elaka (administrative unit) and the communal lands under its control (Rymbai et al., 1974:18).

The second category is ri-kynti (i.e., privately owned lands); oral history accounted by the same report stated that, [these]“are lands set apart from the time of the (ancestors) of the Elaka for certain clans upon whom were bestowed proprietary, heritable and transferable rights over such lands. They also include any part of ri raid lands which at a later time were bestowed upon a person, a family, a clan for certain yeoman’s service rendered to the Elaka. The same rights devolve on Khasi to whom such lands are disposed of by the original owners by way of sale, transfer on receipt of full consideration for the same”.

In the case of Jaiṅtia Hills, land can be broadly separated into two broad categories: the Hali land; and the High land. The Hali land is subdivided into four groups, which are:

i) Raj lands: these were unoccupied or unclaimed plots of land which were under the control of the former Syiem (chief) or Raja of Jaintia hills. During the period of the Jaintia chief, this land type was made available to residents; and residents who did not use or make any improvement on it such plots revert back to the control of the chief.

ii) Bri–bam or ki rek: are rent-free plots of land given to village representative heads such as the Doloi and the Pator. These are village officials who rendered their voluntary service for the purpose of administration of the area. Their voluntary service was remunerated by holding plots of land which provided their livelihoods.

iii) Bri-puja (meaning religious rites) lands: according to customary practices, villages set apart land for the purpose of religious rites locally referred to as Puja. Such plots of land were given to the Langdoh (priest) and such lands are exempted from any revenue collection. The priest made use of the land to sustain his own livelihood and also a portion of the benefit from the produce of the land was utilised for costs related to village religious ceremonies.

iv) Bri-kynti: these are plots of land owned and controlled by individuals or clans and were never assessed for revenue. Over generations such lands have also been transferred from one owner to another by mortgage and sale (Gassah, 2001).

The second group known as High lands are private lands and are held in the same way as private land under Hali lands (Ibid.).
Land also includes forestlands, and according to the customary beliefs and practices there are several categories of forestlands in Khasi - Jaintia Hills. The first category is known as ka khlaw kyntang or ka khlaw lyngdoh meaning sacred forestlands and set apart for religious purposes. Such forestlands are managed and controlled by traditional political institutions or clans where they are situated. Such forests have a variety of species of flora and fauna and water sources. They are considered communal lands; however, according to the customary beliefs and practices, residents do not use it for any purposes except ritually invoking and propitiating the deity (referred to U Ryngkew U Basa) that resides in them for the welfare and prosperity of the people. The second category is known as ka khlaw adong or ka khlaw shnong. “These are village forests reserved by the villagers as water catchment areas, or to enable members of the village or Raid as the case may be to get firewood or timber for their personal needs or for any such purposes as the village or Raid may decide from time to time’ (Rymbai et al., 1974). Finally, there are ka khlaw kynti, meaning privately owned forestlands, and ka khlaw kur, meaning clan forestland.

Like any other indigenous communities in the world, land in Khasi society is considered like a mother who holds and keeps together, provides life support to all living things, and is sacred. In the case of Khasi, the land is seen as a wholesome body including everything above it and below it, and land belongs to the people. Land has been divided into three sets of categories: communal, clan, and private. Under communal or clan land further sub-categories distinguish between sacred forestlands and other types of lands. It is in the non-sacred lands where land-based activities are conducted for the purpose of sustaining life. Such land may also include forestlands with a diversity of species, plants and wild edible plants, and they are like the storehouse of biodiversity. Lastly, there are variations from village to village or region to region with regard to control of land.

It has also been observed by Nongkynrih (2008:33–36) that communal land has come under pressure of being privatised. The process of privatisation has been due to factors such as emergence of an indigenous elite who occupy large tracts of communal land; the market economy; government policies and programmes;
Our knowledge, our history and our connection with our ancestors come from the land

LAND SYSTEMS IN LNGAM REGION

Landholding among the Khasi of Lngam region follows a pattern similar to that of the other regions of Khasi–Jaintia hills. According to Ehrenfels (1955:311) “individual land ownership is unknown among Lngams. Nor is there ownership of land by individual houses (i.e., matrilineal joint families) or by the Siem (the Khasi Chief of State, in the territory of which most Lngam-owned lands are situated). Land in the Lngam territory of Nongstoin State belongs to individual Lngam clans and is marked off from other Lngam clan land by boundary-stones, over the position of which legal disputes at the State Court of Nongstoin are not infrequent”.

According to Karotemprel (1985) there are different types of land such as clan lands, village lands, individual lands, and some lands are under the control of the Siem of Nongstoin. On such lands they grow rice, millets, maize, chillies, and also keep livestock such as chickens, cows or pigs. The method of cultivation found in the region is shifting cultivation. The region is equally rich in forest resources and non-timber forest produce; and it has rich deposits of mineral resources such as sillimanite, corundum, coal and others.

According to Nongsiang (in Rymbai et al., 1974:163), land in Lngam region can be broadly distinguished into two types: ri kur (clan lands) and ri kyniti (private lands). In Lngam most of the land is clan land. Some of the clans who control a major share of the land are Nongbri, Mawisor, Rongrin, Diengngan, Haishah, Puwein, Ryntong, Mangsang, Syntshiang, Rashir, Rynjiaw, Mawlong, Nongsiang, and Dkhar. The control and management of the clan land is under the matriclan, comprising mothers and married daughters, and brothers called Ka Dorbar Kur (clan council). The clan council has a manager, and the manager is selected from among the mother’s brothers of the matriclan. The selected mother’s brother, also known as U Rangbah Kur, is confirmed and empowered by women of the clan to manage the clan land. The control of the land and the control over the manager of the group is vested with the women of the clan council. It is the responsibility of the manager of the group to supervise and collect fees or rent from those using the clan land. The income generated from the clan land is shared only among women of the clan council, and men may or may not get any benefit. The manager does not get any benefit; however, for the service rendered by him the clan council usually compensates him in cash.

The second group of men are the in-marrying males or sons-in-law. Regarding clan land of their wives, husbands cannot exercise any authority or take control of their wife’s clan land. Only in exceptional cases, that is, if the clan does not have any adult male to manage the clan land, in-marrying males may be temporarily placed. In general, in-marrying males are outside the matriclan of their wives but may give suggestions to the manager on the issue of management of clan land.

With regards to privately owned land, “meaning those plots of land which have been
purchased by fathers for their children”, a common practice is followed. As long as the father is alive, he controls and manages the land. In case the father becomes a widower and if he marries another woman, he cannot take or transfer any part or portion of the land to his second wife and to ki khun thymmai (meaning children of the second wife). The land purchased during his lifetime with his first wife remains with the children of the first wife. In the case of a household with deceased father, the eldest living son takes over the position of his deceased father and he manages the land. The eldest son is usually compensated in cash by his mother’s household for the service rendered by him.

Unlike in other parts of Khasi–Jaintia hills, it seems that majority of the land in Lngam region falls under clan land and under the control of clan council. This mechanism of clan control over the land ensures equal say and equal access and use of the land. All clan members and households have the opportunity to support themselves and their households because of the availability of land. The restriction on the widowed husband who re–marries, with regard to the land acquired by him during his lifetime with his first wife is a social mechanism of protecting the interest of the children born from the first wife.

As elsewhere in Khasi and Jaintia hills, land is separated by boundaries made up of ki mawbri (boundary stones) and the surrounding contours of the landscape such as rivers, streams, hillocks, a tree, a gorge, etc. When erecting boundary stones all neighbouring owners are usually present. A religious ceremony is conducted when erecting boundary stones to propitiate and invoke the supernatural to protect and preserve them through the deity of the land and hills, thunder and lightning. In the beliefs and practices of the indigenous Khasi people, ki mawbri are not merely physical boundary stones. They are seen as sacred stones and if removed or destroyed, or any disrespect shown to them, is believed to result in damage to oneself.

**KA DORBAR KUR AND LAND IN VILLAGES**

In many indigenous communities, the manifestation of the collective can be observed in many ways. One important manifestation is through the institution of kinship, with clan members as a collective. The clan is derived from traditions and customs, and it has its own position and role in the social life of indigenous communities. One example can be the Khasi of Lngam region where Ka Dorbar Kur (clan council) is continued, upheld and followed over generations. The research team was also informed that the majority of villages in the region were founded by a single clan. Thus, in most villages, the clan council is composed of the founding clan. It is interesting to note that households belonging to various clans may have migrated or shifted their residence after marriage to another village. However, in their own respective village where their clans originated they have their own clan councils.

According to clan members, the clan council is an important customary institution in the social life. In their own words “the clan council was not something that was invented yesterday, it has been handed down and practiced over generations, and where both adult male and adult female members of the clan are its active participants”. It plays an important authoritative role in the life cycle of individual members and households of the clan. It deals with various aspects such as socialisation of the young, and it reminds adult members to abide by customary practices; it protects, preserves, and controls the clan; it takes care of those members in difficult circumstances; it ensures that rites–de–passage are followed; and it ensures that clan members in dire straits are assisted and provided with support and care. It has the authority above any individuals, domestic groups or lineages of the clan.

On the issue of land, Mawsor (2017:71–72) stated that in Lngam region the majority of the land is under the control of the kur and
not by any individual. Thus, the clan council, comprised of adult women and men of the kur, has to follow and uphold the customary beliefs and practices related with the control of kur land as follows:

i) To avoid disintegration of relations among households of the same clan, land should not be divided into plots;

ii) Any member of the kur who has committed incest is excommunicated from the land and does not have any right to the land;

iii) Households who keeps any livestock can use the land for grazing after prior information and consent from the clan council;

iv) Any resources extracted from the land and resources from the forest land of the clan can be transferred to the market after paying some amount of charge to the clan council;

v) Other members meaning non-kur residing and using the land for residential purposes cannot make permanent construction and economic activities such as farming, cattle rearing, etc., and have to pay charge to the clan council annually or as agreed between parties;

vi) Any government projects such as construction of roads or any projects by private agencies have to get prior permission and consent and pay compensation to the clan council for using any plot of the kur land.

For the purpose of the day-to-day running of the affairs of the clan, the clan council selects a few adult mother’s brothers who are
assigned with such duties and responsibilities. The selection of such persons is considered a very crucial decision-making process. Thus, clans have and follow a strict code that spells out clearly that such decisions cannot be taken unless all adult and working males and females attend the clan council meeting. In particular, the participation and views of women in decision-making related with any matters concerning land and any other matters is considered necessary and important. We were also informed by men that women of the clan are the most active participants in clan council meetings. The third aspect of the customary code usually followed in Lngam region deals with the selection of clan council representatives. It has been a regular practice that from among the Burang (meaning working mother’s brothers of the clan) the clan council selects the senior and adult mother’s brothers as its representatives. The selected mother’s brothers are assigned with specific duties and responsibilities such as socialisation of the young including other matters such as upholding customary beliefs and practices or the collection of contribution of funds and the distribution of collective contribution of funds. The clan representatives can be illustrated as:

i) U Khì Rangbah Kur (the eldest and most senior among the mother’s brothers) is the head representative and is called the Chairman. This has been followed over generations because he by age and experience has the knowledge and wisdom to guide and lead, and also because the junior mother’s brothers have respect for such an elder of the clan. As the head representative he has to organize the annual meetings of the council, deals with land-related issues and he may organize more meetings depending on need, particularly on matters related with the rites-de-passage.

ii) The Chairman is assisted by three other representatives such as the Agent, Secretary and Treasurer. The Agent is supposed to act as the liason and negotiator on matters concerning trading of forest produce such as timber or bamboo; and the extraction of resources such as stones or sand or any other land-based resources of the clan. The Secretary deals with record keeping, and the Treasurer as the keeper of funds.

iii) The clan council has an executive committee comprising of more than ten mother’s brothers to support and assist the clan representatives.

The assigned duties and responsibilities given to the clan representatives, however, do not entitle them with the exercise of authority. Authority is vested in the clan council, and only the clan council can exercise authority. The selected representatives cannot act or take any decision without the approval and consent of the council. Their role and duties are only to implement the collective decision of the clan council. Lastly, these representatives can continue to serve the clan as long as they have the trust and confidence of the members and particularly the women of the clan council.

In the preceding description some aspects related to customary beliefs and ceremonies that have to be conducted were highlighted. Such ceremonies are carried out collectively as members of the matriclan. One is to participate by physically being present and by giving contributions. This practice is referred to as ka on kti and ka shawkti.

All working members of the clan irrespective of age and sex are supposed to actively participate in the collective contribution called Ka On Kti. It is said that their ancestors used to contribute in kind because there was no currency or cash. Today the contribution is in cash. In the earlier times the Ka Bei Ïaw (the oldest living mother) of the household received the voluntary contribution directly in her hands. This was done because she could register in her mind all those who attended and contributed to the common good of the household. The oldest living mother would inform her children and grandchildren that they should reciprocate back in those households which had come to theirs. In the present time, every household keeps a
register, and in the register the clan members who came, attended, contributed and shared the grief or happiness with the household in mourning, or in celebration, is noted. In return this household will also reciprocate when there is a need in any of those households listed in the register. Such practice is known as Ka Shawkti. It should be highlighted that if a person’s name does not figure in the register of the household of the clan, that person cannot expect anything back in return.

Another example of the role of the clan council follows. Whenever any woman of the kur is under difficult circumstances, such as economic or any other, the matter is made known to clan members. It is the men of the clan who have to shoulder the responsibility and provide support to her. Such cases were mentioned in both villages, where men as kur brothers helped their kin-related sisters in the construction of their houses. Clan brothers may also contribute cash to help out in such situations. As one clan brother said: “there are such cases and we helped each other”. These brothers also do provide advice to their brothers-in-law on the ways and means of improving the generation of income and production of food.

On the issue of food and food production, members of the clan council in both these villages informed the research team that they discuss and provide support or help one another in matters such as the sharing of seeds. They highlighted two issues that deal with the role of the clan council and men. This was in the case of households who were unable to join in the annual cycle of jhum cultivation because of sicknesses and having no adult member. As they said, in such cases “the council sends helpers who will assist the households so that they can grow crops”.

A proper understanding of the clan council in the two villages would not be complete without taking into account the views and opinions of elderly women. Regarding this

**BOX 1 A MOTHER FROM NONGMAWLONG VILLAGE**

I Mei Mawlong (Mei in Khasi meaning mother, is a respectful way of addressing an elderly lady) has lived and worked her entire life of sixty-five or more years in her jhum fields. She attended primary school when she was very young and completed class II. She said, I was the only child and could not attend school because I had to help in domestic chores and in cultivation of the fields. She got married to a husband from the Mawsor clan of another village. She has nine children, four sons and five daughters, and out of nine children, three of them are married and she has grandchildren.

When I was young, my mother used to take me to the clan council meetings, and my mother used to explain to me about the role and importance of being a woman because of the continuity and perpetuity of the clan is the responsibility of women. I remembered my mother saying, the woman in our community, is the indispensable subject of the clan. She further elaborated that, without women of the Kur, the men-folk of the clan are not so important in decision-making because they require our consent on any matters related with the clan. She also added, as an elderly woman of the clan, the Burang would always seek my advice and suggestions.

On the matter related with clan council, she shared: the clan council is like the human heart providing life to the whole clan. It is through the clan council that the unity and solidarity of the clan is sustained and maintained. She also added that the working and functioning of the clan council is known because clan representatives have to share the report and also any matters concerning land, rites-de-passage, well-being of members are reported and discussed together. She also expressed that occasionally there have been cases where the Burang may not always agree when she seeks their assistance of voluntary labour. However, she said, this is not a big issue.
issue one elderly woman in each village was selected. Both these women are the oldest living women, respected by their respective clans and respective village communities. In a sense, they represented the women’s views (see Box 1 and Box 2).

All of this shows that the matriclan has two distinct aspects: the source of kinship and social identity, and the link between those who are related truly or fictitiously through the root of the female descent line; and the source of solidarity and unity of matri-kins. It is also a corporate owning and controlling authority related with property that is held together by the clan. The issue of authority assumes significance particularly in the case of its corporate entity as holder and keeper of clan’s property such as land. For this reason, authority is held and exercised collectively (by clan members) and is not shared or given to any person or group of persons in the clan. The mother’s brothers are only representatives of the clan and are given delegated authority; they are subject to the scrutiny of the clan council.

The collective plays a vital role in the decision-making processes on behalf of the whole clan and is constituted by both men and women. However, the importance of women takes precedence over men because the former are the key constituents and key decision-makers on the affairs of the clan. As women, they carry with them the responsibility of continuity, perpetuity and prosperity of the clan. Thus, decisions are scrutinised by them as circumstances like sickness or economic hardship they always turn to it for help. Through the clan council we contribute our labour, we contribute in kind or cash to needed members of the clan. She also said: We may not be wealthy in terms of possessing cash, however, we are satisfied with what we have because the land is a collective wealth of the clan and we have no fear because we have the clan council. Without the clan council, the wealth of the clan will also disappear, and we will become paupers.

She also added you may not realise that the clan council has two sets of members, that is, ki kur shynrang meaning men of the clan; and ki kur kynthei meaning women of the clan, both of them are real kins and they constitute the clan council. It has been a customary practice that from among the older men (meaning the generation of mother’s brothers) representatives of the clan are selected. They cannot take any decisions on any matters on their own without the consent of women. She also highlighted that women are given more preferential treatment, and in the sharing of any benefits from the clan land and its resources, women get the majority of the share.
In the earlier times, the Ka Bei law (the oldest living mother) of the household received the voluntary contribution directly in her hands.

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TIP-NESFAS
a mechanism of ensuring and protecting the larger interests of the clan and its members.

As the matriclan is also the representation of real or fictitious groups of brothers and groups of sisters, the dimension of collective is in reality expressed in the form of mutual reciprocation when in grief or in celebration. The mutual reciprocation also enhances the solidarity of clan members and it also acts as the reminder of collective responsibility. In this context, the role of men as protectors of the clan is emphasised particularly with care and support towards women.

**LAND AND ACCESS IN VILLAGES**

The majority of the land in the villages of Nongmawlong and Langshonthiang fall under the category of *ri kur*. *Ri kur* means those lands which have been occupied, demarcated and set apart by the founding clan of the village and conferred with proprietary rights, inheritable and transferable rights. In accordance with the customary practices in Khasi society this kind of land is held collectively by members of the clan and falls under the control and authority of *Ka Dorbar Kur*.

As the majority of the land is clan land, the village as a unit of residence does not have any plot of land under its control. To make the village more accessible for availability of residential plots, the Mawlong clan council has provided free residential plots to households of other clans who do not have any land. By providing free residential plots it has contributed to the expansion of households in the village and the adding of a larger number of clans. Such households can also access and use the land for cultivation without any fee. Another related matter to be highlighted deals with Mawlong clan married men. After marriage, the men of the clan can bring their wives to the village and they can access and use clan land. This is an interesting practice because the man is allowed to make use of the clan land for his *kamai iing khun*, meaning earning for his children. This was found to be a common practice in Khari villages. This also contributes to retain the mother’s brothers and refrain from moving out of their natal village. During his lifetime, he, his wife and their children have access only to use the land without any right of inheritance. After his death, the wife and her children can continue to use the land depending on the arrangement made by the clan council of her deceased husband.

The situation in Langshonthiang villages differs. Households without any land to set up of residence and kitchen gardens can avail of the clan land and have to pay a fee of hundred rupees per annum per household (equivalent to USD 1.5 per annum). In the case of cultivation plots the fee is 1 000 rupees per annum per household (equivalent to USD 15 per annum). There is no restriction on the amount of land to use. The size of the land for cultivation depends on the availability of working members of household.

With regard to households of the in-marrying daughters-in-law of Mawsor clan, they have free access and use of land. However, such households can enjoy this free access and use as long as the Mawsor husband–father of...
such households is alive. After his death and after completing the ceremony of the dead the kinship relation continues. However, free access and use of the Mawsor clan land ceases and daughters-in-law or "ki khun kha" (meaning children borne out of Mawsor fathers) have to pay a token fee for using the clan land for cultivation like other households.

As both these villages have no communal land under the village council, they depend on the clan land. Both the Mawlong clan and the Mawsor clan of the former and latter villages have provided a large tract of forestland to the village council called "ka khlaω rijap" or "ka khlaw adong," meaning protected forest. This type of protected forest is kept apart by the village council only for specific purposes such as natural calamities, cremation, or in case a household has lost its house due to damage caused by fire, for construction of a new house and for any contingent needs of the population of the village. In such circumstances the village council authorises the village population to cut and fell only full-grown trees and to chop bamboo. Households can also collect dead branches and twigs for domestic firewood. Only the permanent residents of the village enjoy access and use of the forestland.

This patch of forestland was given by the clan council to the village council with an understanding that the protected forestland falls under the control of the village council and other conditions apply: (i) the village council has limited authority, that is, only to control the access and use of the resources of the forest; and (ii) the village council cannot sell or transfer the protected forestland because ownership is with the clan council. The protected forestland provides village households, particularly those who do not have any land, for various domestic requirements such as timber and bamboo for house construction, collection of dead branches for firewood and collection of wild edible plants, etc. Lastly, village households can make good use of the protected forestland for their domestic purposes but they cannot commercialise any timber or bamboo or wild edible plants.

It can be argued from this that clan land is a collective ownership of immovable property including its mineral or natural resources. Access and use of clan land can be restricted or open access. In one village, clan members and others are given free access to use. In the other village, the restriction is on the basis of kinship relations: those having affinal relations with the clan that controls the land; and those without any affinal relations. Those in the category of affinal relations enjoy limited use of the land and it ceases after the death of the husband from clan that owns the land. The kinship ties and relationships do not change between the households of husband and the wife. The change is at the level of use of the land (the property of the father’s clan). Any interest to continue using the land means paying the token fee as for others. This is a symbolic expression of the clan having control and ownership over clan land.

The making of land available for the village council and for the other clans inhabiting the village allows for supplies and exchanges. It serves the affinal interests of all clans. It is a kind of voluntary sharing of the land with a definite social purpose. The founding of the protected forestland carries the same intent. The judicious control of giving and sharing of the protected forestland was a way of ensuring that it serves the communal needs and the common good of the village and its residents.

**CONTROL, USE AND BENEFIT SHARING OF RI KUR**

As highlighted in the discussions on the role of the clan council, all decisions related to land and its resources for any kind of use or for trading and extraction must have collective approval and consent, and in particular from the women. For example, when the clan council of Mawlong gave permission for the sale of timber from the clan land or allowed the extraction of stones or boulders from it, it
was the clan representatives who negotiated with the parties and reported to the clan council. After the approval and consent of the clan council, the clan representatives are given the consent to proceed with the business transaction.

After completion of the business transaction, clan representatives duly report to the clan council about the money accrued from such transactions. The sharing of the profit made from these transactions is done by the clan council; and the sharing is done in the form of cash. The sharing is only among those members who have contributed to the kur such as ka on kti. However, in this profit sharing most money (approximately 95 percent) goes to the women of the clan which they will share among themselves equally. Men may get around 5 percent to be shared among themselves. The same process is followed in the case of Mawsor clan. The only difference is the percentage in the profit sharing of the amount collected from such business transactions. Women of Mawsor clan get 70 percent and they share equally among themselves, and men get 30 percent to share among themselves.

The above description highlights the practice found among the clans inhabiting the two villages. On the matter of inheritance of property, the mother’s brothers informed the research team that immovable property such as land or forestland does not belong to any lineage or domestic groups. Such property is under the control and ownership of the clan council. Members of the clan cannot sell the land or the forestland; they can only use it not having the right to sell it, lease it or use it as collateral. Control and ownership of clan land is vested with the clan council. However, any kind of properties earned and acquired by parents in their lifetime (ka kamai nongkhyraw) and which has no connection at all with the ancestral property or the clan land can be given to their children, inherited by them or by living members of the household.

The mother’s brothers were also asked if by having been selected as clan representatives they can decide and take action on their own without the consent and approval of the clan.
council. Regarding this issue they said “we are only representatives of the clan and our role and duties have been clearly defined. We are managers implementing the decision of the clan council. We do not have any authority to sell or commercialise any land or forest”. In addition, one of the eldest mother’s brothers and a former Sordar (headman) said, “we in Lngam region cannot survive without the Kur, and the Kur cannot survive without the land, we are farmers and the land is our livelihood”. An elderly lady of Langshonthiang village concurred similarly that, “the Kur is the heart of our life, and the land is the supporter and life giver to the heart, and both of them are the basic structure of social existence for us Khasi in Lngam. You take away any one of them, you take away life and destroy the unity and solidarity of the clan”.

During the fieldwork the research team also tried to understand if there had been any cases of fragmentation of the clan land. When this question was posed to the clan council members of Nongmawlong village, they narrated an interesting case that had happened to the neighbouring clan of Kur Langrin. According to them, in recent times, some of the clan representatives of the clan council of Langrin clan had tried to introduce a fragmenting idea. After taking over as clan representatives, some of the representatives went about and instigated some women of the clan with the idea of breaking away from the customary practice of control and ownership of clan land under the clan council. Such members shared the idea that by dividing and fragmenting the clan land, households could reap more benefits because they could sell or do whatever they want with it. The real intention was to divide the clan land so that individual mothers of households could sell the land. This idea seems to have originated from those members who had moved out from the village and settled in urban centres. The matter became a sensitive issue of discussion among clan members. The majority of the elder men and women of the clan, including the younger members realised the danger, they did not agree and thwarted the idea. As of today, Kur Langrin continues to uphold, protect and preserve the ancestral practice of clan land and the clan council.

The insights that can be drawn from the discussions are interesting from two angles: continuity of the customary practice and challenges. Secondly, the integral dimension of clan land and clan council is observable at the level of use and benefit sharing. The share benefiting more women and less men of the clan is in consonance with the descent principle. Since the source of benefits comes from the property of the clan, thus, it has to go to women who are the nucleus of the clan. The lesser share men get results from the fact that they are supposed to protect the ancestral domain or ancestral land and clan, and not reap more benefits from it. Whatever men receive is a gesture of respect to them by the clan. It is also a reality that customary practices are under constant threat from the ideas of fragmentation and ideas of private lands and private properties, as has happened in other parts of Khasi–Jaintia hills.

**LAND AND FOOD PRODUCTION IN VILLAGES**

Land has many dimensions but here land is taken in partial discussion because the work
concentrates on the relationship with food production. In Meghalaya in general, and in Lngam region in particular, most of the economic activities for livelihoods are land-based; and agricultural activity occupies 70 percent of total economic activities. Agriculture continues to be the key activity for food security and well-being in rural areas. Across the State of Meghalaya there are some regions where cash crop plantation has been adopted (such as rubber, tea, cashew, etc). In other areas indigenous agro-biodiversity has expanded to fruit plantations, paddy fields, bamboo, vegetables, etc. Other kinds of economic activities are extraction of sand, petty trade and business, and the service sector (both public and private). In recent times the National Green Tribunal of India has banned mining of coal and limestone which were also relevant economic activities.

However, in the region and villages studied, the clan land in villages is used broadly in three ways: construction of residential houses, commercialization of some of the land’s resources, and food production. For the purpose of food production, inhabitants of villages classify the land into four groups: The first is Kper meaning a farm or a plot of land which is used for growing vegetables or crops. The Kper is further sub-divided into two kinds: (i) the garden around the residential unit; and (ii) the field which is located farther away from the residential unit. The second is forestland which has not been used for any kind of cultivation and it is called Lytap. Third, is Ka Pynthor Kba meaning wet paddy fields. The last is called Ka Lyngkha which is used for shifting cultivation, locally known as Ka Rep Ram or Ka Rep Shyrti.

Households in villages have developed an interesting mechanism in relation to food production. Take the case of the residential unit cum garden. Around the residential unit and garden, they plant a variety of fruit bearing trees such orange, jackfruit, guava, peach, papaya, sugarcane and banana. These fruit bearing trees provide a seasonal supply of food items. The kitchen garden is grown with a variety of crops such as maize, vegetables, ginger, pineapples, etc. In the second kind of garden they usually grow more of ginger or maize. The Lytap which is the forestland is where they collect varieties of wild edible herbs, fruits, leaves and tubers. Wet rice cultivation it is not very common in Nongmawlong village and few households can be found in Langshonthiang village because of the terrain and the landscape.

The last type is the land they use for shifting cultivation, ka rep ram. It is from this type of cultivation that villagers get their regular supply of food items for most parts of the year.

**SHIFTING CULTIVATION**

Shifting cultivation has been part of many indigenous peoples’ communities. The only distinction is the variation of landscape and the techniques they apply. Among the Khasi of Lngam region we find some interesting practices. As the land is under the control of the clan council there are steps which households have to follow. Such steps are:

1) Households identify and select the land for cultivation.

2) The size of the plot depends on the household, meaning on the availability of working persons in households and the capacity to make use of the plot.

3) Households have to inform the clan council and get its consent and clearance. In the case of those of households without free access to land, as in the case of Langshonthiang village, they have to get the clearance and agree to pay the annual fee at the end of the cultivation cycle.

The second phase is the preparation of the selected plot for cultivation. In this phase there are number of steps to be followed, such as:

1) Clearing of the plot. This is carried out in the third week of January. Usually it is the
men who have to do the clearing because it is not an easy task, like chopping trees and branches. Some women do assist the men. The chopped trees, branches and twigs are collected, piled and left to dry for about a month.

2) The burning of dried trees and other branches is done before the first week of March. However, before the lighting of fire and burning, households also visit the spot occasionally to inspect if the fallen trees and branches are dried. At the time of lighting the fire, men will also ensure that it does not pose any danger to nearby forest or to neighbouring plots.

3) Sowing of seeds: It is carried out the very next day or two days later after the completion of the burning. According to the people from these villages, ‘it is best time for seeds because the soil is very rich with natural nutrients’.

The first sowing begins with ki symbai rit meaning fine grain-like seeds such as millet, dark colour mustard, sesame, chilli, brinjal, etc. These are the first seeds to be sowed in the plot. The technique they follow is innovative: the seeds of all the plants are mixed together in a basket with the good soil. After mixing the seeds, women will scatter the seeds around the plot, hence sowing by scattering. A month later and in the same plot, the second sowing is followed by ki symbai heh meaning larger size seeds such as Job’s tears, pumpkin, maize, arum, potato and dry paddy, etc. These seeds are not mixed together, they are planted separately. In the case of dry paddy, they follow another planting technique called Jymmow.

4) Jymmow is the process of starting from the lower end of the plot and moving upward because it is easier to climb up, particularly for the men. Men carry with both hands two sharp-pointed wooden tools used to dig the ground making small holes called dynnek. The women and young children follow the men from behind and place the paddy seeds in the holes known as shinnai. This is also a way of expressing gratitude to the voluntary hands and sharing together of the first harvested crop.

In that case, without removing the soft husk the paddy is fried in a pan-like pot and when it is warm they pound the fried paddy flat and serve among themselves, particularly among those who helped in the harvesting. This is also a way of expressing gratitude to the voluntary hands and sharing together of the first harvested crop. During this season, households are busy exchanging their voluntary labour and enjoying the company of kin, relatives and friends.
5) Crops or plants grow at different periods of the season; when they are fully grown and ready for consumption, households collect them. Through this process of cultivation households get their supplies of a variety of vegetables or crops for many months. Dry paddy is harvested separately (see Box 3).

6) With regard to the cycle of land cultivation, elders informed that four to five generations back it was after fifteen years that the cultivated land was left fallow for that number of years. Today the cycle has become shorter, the fallow period is between eight to nine-year periods. This is attributed to the increase in the number of households and demand of food.

One of the crops that they depended on as a staple food is millet, which grows well in this region. One woman said, “our grandparents depended on millet and we too today to meet our food requirements from millet”. According to them, “when we plant millet in the plot of land cleared from the forestland the quantity of produce is good. When we plant in the plot where bamboo plants grow the quantity of produce is beyond our expectations. Millet grows better in bamboo grown plots”.

We collected information from villagers on the food they harvested. The list provided in both tables is not exhaustive and should be taken as examples. It should be noted that millet, maize and dry paddy are grains that serve as major staple foods which they produce locally for household consumption and harvested between November and December. They also get additional food items from their kitchen gardens. They revealed they use the local produce more for domestic consumption; in some cases only they sell the crops or vegetables, including with wild edible herbs, etc. in the local markets of Umdang, Riango, and Shallang which are held every seventh day. Households of Nongmawlong village usually consume their local produce; in the case of Langshonthiang village most of the local produce is consumed in their households but some of the items are sold in local markets.

Indigenous peoples have developed their own techniques to make use of land, taking into account the type of landscape and the land available to them for food production. The classification of the land into four categories is a practical strategy. Such classification of areas of food production or where food is available provides and ensures some degree of continuity of supply of food. This is also another way of dealing with any kind of threat to food security as a coping mechanism for food production security: if one garden fails another garden can supplement. In all the cultivated land, mixed crops are sowed. This secures having access to a variety of crops. It is like a bargain with nature: if one crop fails another crop will supplement.

Shifting cultivation has its own contribution to food production. It contributes to the preservation of diverse seeds, diverse food crops and food security. This is why shifting cultivation should be properly examined from a wider lens, and if any improvement could be made, various aspects should be taken into consideration rather than rejecting it outright as anti-environmental. On the other hand, shifting cultivation has a direct correlation with land holding, and in this case clan land which is used like communal land. Any shift in the technique of cultivation will also have an impact on land holding and the social structure. For example, the clan land is used on a seasonal basis, meaning that there is no permanent crop and no permanent use of the clan land. Any kind of promotion of permanent crop cultivation would indirectly lead to households occupying clan land plots for many years or generations so that chances of fragmentation of the clan land including emergence of landless households could take place in the near future.

Land and food production is one kind of connection; however, this connection also depends on seeds. During the interaction with villagers the team was informed that seeds are an intrinsic part of the cycle of food production and food chain. It seems that ancestors of indigenous peoples and communities
understood the aspect of seed-food production long before modernity, the entrance of companies and the like. This explains the practice of continuity of seed saving and seed sharing in indigenous communities. In the region and villages studied varieties of seeds of vegetables, and seeds of various kinds of crops are indigenous. These varieties of indigenous seeds have been inherited from one generation to the next, meaning from ka bei ïaw and u pa-thaw (referring to the previous generation of grandmothers and grandfathers).

These seeds were collected, saved and shared among elderly mothers of every succeeding generation. Younger generations of households (males and females) have learnt from their parents about collecting, saving and keeping of seeds. The elderly have more experience in selecting and differentiating between good and bad seeds. This is most important because according to the elders from the villages, “identifying and selecting good seeds ensure sustainable production and continuity; and bad seeds will affect food production leading to scarcity of food”. Villages learn and depend on elderly women and men on seeds selection. Collected seeds are dried and kept in bamboo containers and stored above the hearth; some seeds are dried in the sun. An appreciative understanding on this subject can be drawn the words of two elderly women of Nongmawlong and Langshonthiang villages.

“As young child I had to follow my mother to the cultivation field. Gradually she taught me about seeds of various vegetables and crops, and she also taught me about raising of nurseries and planting; and the separation of seeds according to the cultivation plot, the season and the seeds to be sowed or planted. I also learned about the separation of fine grain seeds and mixing them before plantation and the separate process for bigger seeds was shown to me by my mother. My mother also showed me to plant arum in bamboo grown areas and after chopping and burning of bamboo”. With regard to seeds she said, “the knowledge of seeds, differentiating good ones from bad ones, seed saving and sharing have been handed down from one generation to another, and it is the women who are the collector, saver and keeper of seeds”. Women informed that men do help and assist in collection of seeds.

When interacting with another elderly woman from Langshonthiang village she shared some additional information. According to her observation, the region is still rich in forest cover, flora and fauna, and other plants or species, and the land is fertile for cultivation. However, she observed that the fallow period is becoming shorter, from 15 years when she was younger to 9–10 years today. In her opinion, the shorter fallow period may impact the region in the near future. On the matter of land, food production and seeds, she said: “from an early age our parents and elders taught us about the process and technique of shifting cultivation, collecting, preserving and saving of seeds, identifying and collecting of wild edible plants or herbs. This same knowledge and practices I have also shared with my daughters, sons and grandchildren, and they also will do the same with the next generation. Through this mechanism we have handed down to our children and grandchildren all that we know by showing them in the fields and at home”. She too, was of the same view that women are the ones that collect and identify the good seeds and save the seeds for the next season. This is a key aspect of the cycle of food production.

The availability of land, the selection of cultivation plots in accordance with the landscape and the techniques of food production alone are insufficient for sustainable food production. Seeds are the other critical ingredient in the whole process of food production. Seeds provide the cycle of seasonal food production and sustaining life for living things including human societies. The agro-biodiversity of the landscape seems to be intricately connected and depends on the existence variety of seeds.

The importance of identifying good seeds (meaning resilient), saving and sharing of
seeds is a major part in the life of indigenous peoples and, as mentioned, women have a distinct role. It can be compared to her being the holder, keeper and caretaker of her clan. Women do the same for seeds since seeds provide food to her clan and its continuity. As the womb is to procreation of human life, seeds are the provider for life. In both these matters, women have a central role because they are both life giver and seed savers.

Wild edible plants have been another source of food for indigenous peoples throughout the world. Indigenous peoples make use of wild edible plants and other species and plants as food items and as preventive and curative medicine as well. The importance of wild edible plants in indigenous peoples is not new. It is for this reason that forestland is important in the life of those peoples.

Like anywhere else in the state of Meghalaya, Lngam region is also rich in biodiversity and its forestland has varieties of plants and herbs. Khasi inhabitants of this region have sound knowledge about various plants and herbs found in the forestlands and have been making good use of their forestlands by collecting wild edible plants, and other kinds of edible fruits, tubers, etc. In both these villages, wild edible plants and herbs are used for domestic consumption only. According to Borelli et al. (2015:107), “wild food includes varied forms of both plant and animal products, ranging from fruits, leafy vegetables, woody foliage, bulbs and tubers, cereals and grains, nuts and kernels, saps and gums (which are eaten or used to make drinks), mushrooms, to invertebrates…”. Some of the plants and herbs found in this region are also used for the healing of various ailments or sicknesses. According to one of the in-marrying daughters-in-law of the village, “all of us in this village do make use of the wild edible plants throughout the year. Our forest is rich with lots of different plants, trees and other species. In our homes we have been able to meet the partial requirement of food items from the forest”.

**LAND AND OTHER LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES**

Food production derives not only from cultivation plots and forestland. Other kinds of activities are connected to land and food production such as the domestic rearing of animals such as pigs, local chickens and cows among households. Such households keep only one or two such animals. In most cases these reared animals are consumed domestically by the households. In the case of cows only one or two households do keep them, and, as said, they have to keep the cows at a distance of more or less 500 meters away from the residential unit for hygienic reasons.

Usually Khasi villages do not keep cows; drinking milk was not part of traditional consumption. It came later on. In this part of the Lngam region, the history of cattle keeping resulted from outside influence. Villagers said that the Nepali farmers from Assam of the neighbouring plain would come to the side of Meghalaya and used to take clan land on lease. These Nepali farmers would also build temporary sheds in the leased land. The local Khasi farmers of the area were curious about cattle keeping and would interact with the Nepali farmers. Through this process of interaction and exchange between them, local farmers were able to learn about the basic skills of keeping cattle and processing butter and ghee including preparation of tea and milk. Today, in the majority of villages and households, tea and milk drinking is part of daily food items. A few households keep one or two cows for production of milk and milk products.

Langshonthiang village has added two other kinds of activities in order to obtain income. Recently, broom grass (Thysanolaena Maxima, locally known as synsar) has been adopted for cultivation by the people of this village and the same can be observed in other parts of the region. According to the villagers it grows wild in the forest and households have
traditionally collected it for domestic uses such as sweeping and cleaning of the house, veranda and the surroundings. The idea of planting it as an income-generating crop came through the market where broom grass has economic and commercial value. Broom grass plantation was never part of the commercial cultivation in this region. However, due to its commercial value, around 2005, villages started to grow it commercially. The cultivation has continued and expanded because growers get cash in return during the winter months. Today, one can observe many hillocks with broom grass plantations. When asked about the consequences of broom grass, villages and growers said they did not fully know.3

The second type of activity found in Langshonthiang is eri worm keeping. The majority of households in the village keep eri worm as an income-generating activity. The market price per kilo of the eri worm cocoon is approximately 500 rupees (USD 7.6 per kilogram) and the worm is 200 rupees (USD 3 per kilogram), and they are sold in local markets of Umdang, Nongstoin and Hahim of Assam. The supply of eri worm seeds comes from a neighbouring village of Nongmawlai. Eri worm is a food delicacy in the area.

Village people advise that during the dry months, from March to May, they face certain challenges with regard to availability of vegetables. They said that vegetables are available but scarce. On the issue of food self-sufficiency, villages informed that they have to buy other consumable food items and non-consumable items from the weekly local markets such as rice, meat, oil, sugar, tea leaves, soap, etc. Villages informed the research team about local spices which households use as part of their food items. One of the commonly known spices is tyrso iong, meaning very dark colour mustard leaves, known as a specialty of this region (see box 4).

Food production can be seen from a wider point of view in relation to cultural influence and cultural adaptation. The acquired skills of processing food items and the acquired taste of milk and dairy products are a positive influence, adding nutritional value for the indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the introduction of the eri worm, partly as an income-generating activity and partly as a food item, is an extended and alternative solution from the landscape and agro-biodiversity perspective. The same cannot be said in the case of broom grass because of its multiple effects, making money on one side and the loss of landscape and forestlands on the other side. This new market-driven economic livelihood strategy challenges sustainable development.

There are a few aspects that can be drawn from the entire discussion on land and food production. Land has a physical dimension with its own kind of landscape. Land has social

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3 In an earlier study of Khatar Shnong region under East Khasi Hills District, it was found that broom grass plantation has unintended consequences. There, it had been pointed out, bee keepers of the region complained of loss of trees, and loss of flowering of trees and bees were unable to get sufficient supply of food (Nongkynrih 2012: 49). It has been determined that this type of economic activity may be not beneficial in the long run and controlled cultivation is desired.
meanings in relation to the social structure of local inhabitants occupying and living on it, including land holding practices. The nature of the social structure provides the conditions of accessibility to land-use with a minimal reciprocating fee, thus, easy access to use the land. The use of the land is conditioned by the type of landscape, and inhabitants have broadly separated the landscape into two groups: the food production sites where seeds of crops are sowed, cared and harvested, and the natural sites where edible food can be collected for consumption. If food production, seeds and techniques are integral, in both these matters the inherited indigenous knowledge and practices handed down over generations particularly by mothers cannot be undermined. Thus, land and food production for sustaining life is a combination of many elements and are inseparable from one another. This also shows the difference between indigenous agro-biodiversity systems versus the sectoral approach of development adopted and followed by the modern state.
The present report has shown the existence and continuity of an indigenous livelihood system. However, it is equally important to place the present study in the context of the modern state and its agenda of economic development. It was observed that societies of North-East India in general and Meghalaya in particular, have their own indigenous system of livelihood practices “which supported the life of people for generations; and even in the present times such practices continue”. However, in post-independence India, and under India’s Five-Year Plan model (Nongkynrih, 2013:100), indigenous knowledge and practices did not get any attention and consideration in the developmental framework of the modern state. In recent years however, the Government of Meghalaya (2013:xii) has given it some consideration under the Integrated Basin Development and Livelihoods Programme that aims “to document existing traditional knowledge and juxtapose it with the modern knowledge and technology in different sectors...”. It is expected that this kind of initiative can lead towards the integration of indigenous knowledge and practices in the developmental framework of governments and organizations.

This survey has shown how social structure, land systems and food production are interconnected. In human societies where the continuity of traditions, customary beliefs and practices, norms and values is still part of the social life, the social structure is an important social institution. In the case of this work, the social structure of Khasi society is based on the overarching principle governing the nature of social life, social relationships of its members, and including control, access, use of the land for both economic and non-economic purposes.

Regarding the relationship between social structure and land, one can say that, matrilineal arrangements provide for the social identity of members of the society. This social identity works at two levels: as members of the Khasi society, and as members of a clan and domestic group. Through these two kinds of social identity, members of the society have access to land in two ways: in those villages where communal land is available, members of such villages have access to and can use the land through their domestic groups. In the case of those villages where only clan land is available, access and use to such lands is governed by another set of practices. It is open to clan members on the basis of the clan’s internal arrangements. In the case of other members, such as in-marrying affines and other Khasi persons who do not belong to the clan controlling the land, restrictive practices apply. In both cases, social identity provides access and use of the land. Secondly, clan land and matrilineality are inseparable here because of four reasons: (i) the clan controls the ancestral...
The interest that indigenous lands generate among private parties and states could be a major source of conflict in the near future.

Property (land) and the clan is also a corporate owning body; (ii) women of the clan are the custodians of ancestral property and mother’s brothers manage the clan land on behalf of the clan; (iii) mother’s brothers can make use of the land only during their lifetime; (iii) whether the land is communal or clan land, the rights to access and use the land derive from the social identity through the matriclean and domestic groups; and (iv) in the context of Khasi society, land is not merely a physical object; it is an embodiment of the social identity of the people, and their rights or control over it in a holistic sense. Thus, one can agree with the observation made by The International Land Coalition in its assessment of 41 case studies on common property regimes which stated that “customary systems remain an important source of legitimacy for access to the commons...” (Fuys, Mwangi and Dohrn, 2007:37). The same can be observed in the context of the present study where both social structure and land are intertwined, and Khasi customary beliefs and practices seem to define control, access and use of the land.

As observed by Ferguson (1994:38) in his work in Lesotho, in the Lngam Region of Meghalaya, where internal arrangements for the access...
and use of the land (communal or clan land) are taken into consideration for conducting economic activities and in providing opportunities for livelihoods of members: “land is allocated for use, but never bought or sold...”.

In matters related with food production there is an indirect connection with matrilineal and the role of women. This is at the level of transmitting indigenous knowledge, practices and method in cultivation and seed saving. There is no doubt that men have their distinct role in the indigenous food production system, and their contribution has to be accounted for. However, there are some aspects in the indigenous food production system where the role played by women can be considered critical, such as transmitting the inherited indigenous knowledge and practices related with seed selection, seed protection and seed saving. If today, indigenous villages people have continued producing indigenous food crops for their livelihoods and well-being, it is because of the inherited seeds passed on from one generation of mothers to daughters. This cycle has been occurring throughout indigenous peoples’ generations.

The indigenous method of dividing the land into regions is an interesting method of classification considering land and food production. This classification shows how indigenous knowledge understands and copes with diversity in agro-biodiversity. Now that, in the development paradigm and discourse, the ‘landscape’ approach is referred by many, this can be called an indigenous landscape model. It provides for a better understanding of regional variations in land tenure practices, agro-biodiversity and food production, etc. Also, landscape and food are connected. As Borelli, et al., (2015:120) have shown “pockets of traditional food culture remain strong in many parts of the world despite economic social and cultural change”.

Lngam region, as one of the indigenous landscapes has its own kind of social and agrobiodiversity characteristics. However, the model of indigenous landscape has never been properly understood or has been usually undermined or not taken seriously in the developmental framework of the modern state and international agencies.

On the issue of social transformation, unlike in other regions of Khasi–Jaintia hills, the situation in Lngam region is different. The land is held by the clan collectively. Individual domestic groups are not in a position to take any independent decision. Due to this factor, till the present times the influence by outside forces has been limited. The changes, if any, found in the region derive from endogenous decisions by clan councils themselves. As an example, in recent years, some clan councils in the region (not the two villages studied) have leased portions of their clan land to private parties for coal mining. However, today, coal mining in Meghalaya has been banned by the National Green Tribunal established under the 2010 National Green Tribunal Act.

Secondly, with regard to developmental interventions, induced-agriculture schemes or programmes of the Government of Meghalaya have not had the kind of effect in the villages of Lngam region as compared to other regions. The majority of villages of the region continue to use their indigenous seeds, apply their indigenous method of cultivation and food production. On their own they have added eri production to their economic activities. This could be one of the reasons why cash crop plantation is not seen in this region. The only cash crop is broom grass. Broom grass grows wild in the region and villages have converted it into large scale plantation since it fetches good economic value in local markets.

Social transformation can also lead to competition and conflicts. Thus, it is important to understand the aspect of conflict resolution in society. In Khasi society in general and in Lngam region in particular the mechanism for conflict resolution is usually carried out in two ways: private matters of domestic groups are usually resolved by adults of domestic groups under the guidance
of mother’s brothers. In the case of conflicts between two or more domestic groups of a clan, the clan council is the forum for resolving such matters. In the case of conflicts between residents of the village or cases of tranquillity disturbance in the village, the village council is the legitimate body to deal with it. However, in the present context, if people are not satisfied with the decision of domestic groups or the clan council or the village council, they may also take matters of conflict to the modern court of law for dispensation of justice or to the police. However, Khasi people usually avoid these last forms of recourse.

Other matters which Khasi society and Khasi people of Lngam region have to deal with are the modern state, market economy and other kinds of modernisation forces. Several challenges are posed by them: the propagation of modern ideas such as adopting the modern lifestyle and doing away with good indigenous practices; and the challenges from the spread of the market economy, cash crops and permanent plantations, ideas of privatisation of land, or leasing of land for extraction of mineral resources for profit making. In particular, the interest of private parties and the modern state on indigenous land for the purpose of extraction of resources can be seen as one of the major issues of competition and conflicts in the near future, both in Lngam region and in other regions of Khasi–Jaintia hills.

Lastly, another kind of challenge that matriclans of the Khasi people of Lngam region may face is the issue of privatisation of clan land. According to Jamir and Nongkynrih (2002) clan land in other parts of Khasi–Jaintia hills has been fragmented and privatised: due to fission and fusion of many domestic groups of the clans, land is fragmented after the passing of every generation and clan lands are increasingly becoming smaller. So far, under the control of clan councils of matriclans, the majority of villages in Lngam region have managed to resist and continue to uphold their ancestral domain and practices. Taking a holistic account and considering the present context, it can be said, that indigenous peoples such as the Khasi stand between resiliency and vulnerability.
Conclusions

This report has provided interesting information on the relations between land systems, land use and the Khasi social structure. Regarding the validation of the approach of matriarchy in a redefined manner, it appears to be relevant and academically plausible. One can argue the Khasi social structure seems to have some of the elements considered in the revised framework. In fact, the Khasi social structure is embedded with intrinsic values of reciprocity and sharing, kinship relation is based on matriclans, and matriclans are not ranked in any kind of hierarchical order. In this type of structural arrangement, men and women are construed as members of matri-descent groups, consensus is the guiding principle of the traditional political authority and in all matters concerning the politico-jural affairs of the society, and domination is absent because the primacy of any gender or clan does not exist. Also, it has a worldview of its own with symbiotic and intricate relations between the sacred and the profane, including rites and rituals. However, more intensive and extensive research is required before classifying the Khasi social system as a matriarchy.

The survey has also shown that it is important to properly understand and appreciate the indigenous peoples’ terms used and applied in various aspects of their life. Such terms carry significant meanings and insights. Indigenous words or terms carry with them meanings concerning various aspects related with the social realm as well as land and landscape, etc. It is in these words or terms that the indigenous knowledge and wisdom is held and can be transmitted from one generation to the next. Thus, appreciating and understanding indigenous terms is of great relevance.

One can find variations in social practices under the Khasi social structure. However, these variations do not mean significant differences. Traditional political institutions of indigenous peoples are a collective representation of matriclans, domestic groups and not of individuals. Community solidarity and unity of different matriclans and domestic groups is organized and held together by traditional political institutions, and consensus of the collective defines the very existence of traditional political institutions. Exchange and reciprocity at various levels of social life is carried out and defined by beliefs and practices, including confirmatory rites.

This work has highlighted that both directly and indirectly the Khasi social structure, the land systems and food production are interdependent. However, the matrilineal social structure seems to be the overarching principle governing social life, control, access and use of the land for both economic and non-economic activities and forms the basis of both giving and supporting life.

This is where the idea and practice of sustainable development and development
with identity can be located. Indigenous peoples have a view of their social world and their landscape, meaning their social structure, agriculture, horticulture, animal rearing, fishery, land, forestland, beliefs and practices, techniques of cultivation, indigenous knowledge, etc., and together they are a synthesis of interdependence and a whole. Under this kind of holistic worldview, they, as a people, have been customarily addressing their own needs. Secondly, in this kind of holistic arrangement, women are the womb and the base of the social world, and also the savers and keepers of seeds. Men in Khasi society are representatives, protectors and managers of domestic groups or clans. They retain, in a non-physical sense, the umbilical cord to their mother’s clan which is never disconnected. Lastly, the indigenous landscape has its own context, and with diversity in land practices and in food production practices, including other ways of ensuring food security, it appears to be the key to their resiliency over time. However, the market economy and modern state-induced developmental programmes can be a threat to indigenous peoples’ development with identity, including indigenous land, knowledge and practices, and the indigenous agro-biodiversity system.

Regarding indigenous agro-biodiversity, shifting cultivation is an important aspect as it contributes to conserve land, diversity of seeds, knowledge and practices. It can be the source to sustainable food security in the context of mitigating climate change and adaptation. Nevertheless, it can be improved by combining the best practices of modern science and the best practices of indigenous knowledge.

Lastly, the challenge to sustained indigenous agro-biodiversity and the continuity of social customs, beliefs and practices stems from the induced politico-jural modernisation of the country. Another set of challenges to indigenous agro-biodiversity is the market economy. Under the market economy, exchange and reciprocation at various levels of social interactions regarding fulfilling basic needs is based on and controlled by the system of monetary institutions, with money as the symbolic economic value and the rationally accepted medium of interpersonal economic exchange. Indigenous peoples and their indigenous agro-biodiversity have to deal with the market economy and are forced to generate goods, items or produce economic value for market exchange. It is a case of surviving and managing in the world of market economy and money. However, the study has also observed the resiliency of Khasi social system and practices in the midst of powerful modernisation forces.

What is the way forward? If sustainable development and indigenous identity are considered the central objective of government actions for the next decade, the following steps may provide the means to goals. They are as follows:

i) The social structure, land and indigenous agro-biodiversity system should be included in the nation states’ developmental framework, design and strategy;

ii) Bridging the relationship between indigenous knowledge with modern knowledge, or vice versa, with the intention of improving the well-being of indigenous peoples and their landscape;

iii) Appreciating, learning and taking the positive dimensions found and followed by indigenous peoples and their landscape;

iv) Sharing best practices and work towards improving the existing practices found locally, and evolving panacea against threats to both indigenous peoples and their landscape;

v) A judicious, evaluative mechanism and strategy towards sustainable income generating activities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The survey on land systems was conducted in two Khasi villages located in Lngam region of West Khasi Hills District. The intention was to highlight the importance of understanding indigenous beliefs and practices related with Khasi social structure, land and food.

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ANALYSIS OF THE KHASI PEOPLE IN INDIA AND THEIR LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Wayuu women participants of FAO’s project in La Guajira.
© FAO Colombia
2. Wayuu

COLOMBIA

Analysis of the Wayuu Matrilineal System, its territorial management system and the food crisis in La Guajira

Pablo Andrés Guerra López
Anthropologist

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ANALYSIS OF THE WAYUU PEOPLE IN COLOMBIA AND THEIR LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

| **Glossary** |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| **Akumajaa**    | Learning to do                   |
| **Alijuna**     | Strangers, outsiders             |
| **Apalanshii**  | Shore fishers                    |
| **Apūshii**     | Group of uterine relations. The word means “bound or united” |
| **Asauna**      | Children that are not brothers/sisters from the same mother |
| **Atūja**       | Learning                         |
| **E’irūkuu**    | Clan. The word means “flesh”     |
| **Igüaraya**    | Fruit                            |
| **Jawapi**      | Traditional medicinal drink      |
| **Kaswo´u**     | Traditional medicinal drink      |
| **Kuyamat**     | Creative, creativity             |
| **Maüna**       | Compensation given to uterine relatives of a victim of a Conflict |
| **Miichipa**    | Nuclear family home              |
| **O’upayuu**    | Uterine relations of the father  |
| **Oütsu**       | Shamans                          |
| **Palisse**     | Traditional medicinal drink      |
| **Pütchipü’u**  | Intermediary who carries the word or “word-bearer” |
| **Sutapaulu**   | Rite of confinement              |
| **Ta’łaüla**    | “My old one” or “my chief”: Traditional apūshii figure of authority |
| **Woumainpa’a** | “Our ancestral land” or territory belonging to a number of groups of uterine relations |
This study seeks to answer the questions raised by FAO: how are natural resources managed within the Wayuu’s matrilineal system? And how are conflicts between their political and sociocultural governance systems resolved?

These questions are relevant to the sustainable management of indigenous territories. In the Wayuu indigenous worldview, Mother Earth is a source of wealth. Air, land, water, minerals, wildlife, forests, and all renewable and non-renewable natural resources have provided the Wayuu population with their means of subsistence. The territory is also the place where the ancestors rest, which explains its importance.

To answer these questions, the features and developments of the Wayuu’s matrilineal system will be analysed. The analysis will focus on women’s knowledge, their social networks and the educational mechanisms used to transfer their knowledge. The case study outlines the political and socio-political system of the Wayuu, in the context of their matrilineal system. It further looks at the way in which the community administers women’s engagement in new economic activities, as well as the impact of matrilineal management on family wellbeing. In addition, the study considers the Wayuu community’s ability to cope with the current destruction of their land and living environments.

This report analyses the Wayuu people living on the Colombian side of the Guajira Peninsula, in the department of the same name. However, given the significance of cross-border mobility, it refers to the socio-economic relationships between Colombia’s Wayuu and their Wayuu families and partners living in the Venezuela.

Field work was conducted in two communities: La Raya¹, in Riohacha municipality, and Tucupao, in Manaure municipality, each with their own method of subsistence: fishing and livestock rearing respectively. Individual interviews and focus groups of women and men were held in these communities. The team also interviewed Wayuu “palabreros”, word...

† The true name of La Raya is Erapu, tierra de las rayas, or land of the rays. The name is related to the abundance of varieties of spotted eagle rays (Aetobatus narinari) that led to the founding of the settlement.
bearers\(^2\), along with traditional chiefs, traditional women’s authorities and leaders of women’s organizations. The information was then compared with that of local external experts and government officials\(^3\). We further reviewed secondary sources including ethnographies of the Wayuu people, studies on their current gender relations, government reports, reports from international bodies as well as proposed Wayuu life plans\(^4\). Also, regional governments and international bodies produced several studies on the food insecurity situation for the Wayuu, providing useful data on the current Wayuu way of life.

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\(^2\) Traditional male intermediaries that seek, by means of the word, to persuade families in conflict to come to an agreement to end armed action and restore balance and social harmony. These agreements can only be achieved through material reparation of the victims’ families.

\(^3\) Interviews were conducted with the Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Economic Development of the Ministry of the Interior.

\(^4\) Indigenous life plans are a planning tool that set out the development objectives desired by the indigenous people and how to achieve them. These tools have gained greater strength through the indigenous organizations’ demands that they be accepted by the regional governments.
WAYUU TERRITORY IN LA GUAJIRA

The Wayuu ancestral territory straddles two countries. It covers the Guajira Peninsula, located on the Caribbean Coast which is shared between Colombia and Venezuela. The Wayuu ancestral area is bordered by the Coquibacoa Gulf to the east, the Caribbean Sea to the west (Boca de Camarones and Laguna de Navio Quebrado), and the Ranchería and Limón rivers to the south.

La Guajira department is semi-arid, hot and dry. It is traditionally divided into three broad sub-regions according to its physical, agro-ecological and social features: Upper, Middle and Lower Guajira.

The Wayuu territory is largely located in Upper Guajira, where the Wayuu form 95 percent of the population. This vast region is semi-desert with small mountains and natural ports. Hydrological resources are scarce, with only two permanent water courses: the Ranchería River and the Carraipía stream. Other streams flow only during the rainy season (Guerra Curvelo, 1995).

It is an area heavily affected by drought. Rainfall is scarce, with a twice-yearly rainy season. The first light rains appear between April and May and are used by the indigenous people to sow fast-growing crops. More intense rains occur in October and November (Pérez Preciado, 1990). Although the rains are brief, they are very heavy. Temperatures are high, with a maximum of between 35° and 45°C, and a minimum of between 18° and 20°C. The prevalent wind direction is from east to west and east to north-west. Although the winds increase evapotranspiration and make it difficult to grow vegetation, the winds are considered to be important as they moderate the extreme temperatures. Soils are consequently poor and agricultural work is hard, a situation that is exacerbated by certain traditional activities, such as overgrazing of livestock and firewood gathering. In political-administrative terms, La Guajira is an example a border region with weak institutional presence. The department is characterized by high rural isolation, dispersion and the presence of an enclave economy (Arismendi, Guerra & Guerra López, 2011). 65% of their basic needs are unmet (urban areas 40 %, rural areas 91%). The municipalities Uribia and Manaure have the highest levels of unmet needs and also the largest indigenous population.

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5 The Guajira Peninsula covers approximately 15,000 km², of which 12,240 are on the Colombian side and 3,140 on the Venezuelan.

6 The territory of La Guajira department covers 15 municipalities comprising, in all, 50,236 towns and villages scattered throughout the peninsula, characterised by extremely poor access and communication infrastructure.

7 In 2015, the monetary poverty rate stood at 53% in the department, with extreme poverty reaching 24%. To these worrying figures must be added a high level of social inequality.
The Wayuu
Previously known as Guajiros, these indigenous people now self-identify as Wayuu. They form a large and diverse ethnic group that differs substantially from the rest of the population, whom they call alijuna. Despite their internal differences and conflicts, the Wayuu have a strong cosmogony and a strong sense of territorial belonging (Guerra 1995).

This Arawak-speaking people are the most numerous indigenous people in both Colombia and Venezuela. In Colombia, the Wayuu are estimated to account for 20 percent of the total indigenous population, with 278 000 people (Census 2005). Projections from the National Administrative Statistics Department (DANE) estimate their population to now be over 350 000 individuals (DANE, 2016; La Guajira Secretariat for the Interior, 2016). Yet, the Wayuu organizations themselves quote an even higher figure. Based on the 2005 Census the ethnic distribution of the population of La Guajira department is likely to be 46 percent of indigenous origin, 8.2 percent Afro-Colombian and 45.9 percent of no ethnic group (DANE, 2016). In other words, there are likely 453 078 indigenous persons a large majority of whom are Wayuu. On the Venezuelan side, the census records an even larger Wayuu population, 415 498 people. A large proportion of the Wayuu population are young, with 61 percent being under 15 years of age.

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8 They most probably descend from the native population expelled from the Amazonian forests in the east of Venezuela and who migrated towards the Guajira Peninsula before the arrival of the Europeans (Oliver, 1990), an event that is also noted in their oral history (Nemesio, 1974).

9 There are limitations to the 2005 census data as it does not cover all of the so-called rancherías, or groups of Wayuu homes, but instead estimates results on the basis of samples (La Guajira Ministry of the Interior, 2016).

10 Other indigenous peoples also live in the department but have considerably lower population than the Wayuu.

11 Given the Wayuu’s high mobility between both countries and their multi-residential nature there is, however, a certain risk of dual registration in the census estimates.
On the Colombian side, most of the Wayuu live in resguardos, special constitutionally-recognised collective indigenous territories. The legal recognition of resguardos enables the Wayuu to implement a land-holding system in line with their culture. It offers them autonomous territorial management, with the ability to maintain their own sociocultural aspects and incorporate the changes they require.

In La Guajira department, 62.9 percent of the area is taken up by indigenous resguardos for the Wayuu and other peoples (La Guajira Ministry of the Interior, 2016). Although there are 21 resguardos, most of them are small. Two resguardos cover more than half the territory: Kogui-Malayo-Arhuaco, inhabited by non-Wayuu indigenous peoples, and Upper and Middle Guajira, which covers the municipalities of Uribia and Manaure, Cobija and parts of Riohacha and Maicao. Despite the fact that the majority of indigenous Wayuu live in resguardos, we have for decades seen strong trends of migration towards the different urban centres in Riohacha, Maicao and Uribia, as well as towards Maracaibo and rural areas in Zulia state, Venezuela (Guerra Curvelo, 1995).
TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT IN INDIGENOUS MATRIFOCAL SOCIETIES

Social and political structure

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE WAYUU MATRILINEAL SYSTEM

This section will explain the basic principles of Wayuu social organization looking at territorial organization, the indigenous kinship system, social roles, ancestral knowledge in the framework of the matrilineal system and the different mechanisms of traditional education used to maintain the above cultural elements.

 Territory

The Wayuu settlement pattern involves a number of different contrasting aspects that need to be highlighted. Unlike other indigenous peoples who organize themselves into communities, the Wayuu settle in small dispersed neighbourhoods known as rancherías. These are inhabited by families united by kinship. The spatial distribution and territorial access of Wayuu families is not uniform, as some families have larger plots of land than others. Further, the geographic conditions, ecological and economic opportunities are variable; some rancherías are located in the mountains, others on the desert plains, along rivers or on the coast (Guerra Curvelo, 1995).

Wayuu territorial organization is guided by a matrilineal principle. Following this principle, the peninsula should be divided into vast territories belonging to specific maternal lineages. However, in practice the division has multiple deviations from the norm. Partly due to a weakening of traditional structures, besides the Wayuu’s flexibility in application of certain rules. Pressure on the scarce natural resources is another cause.

The Wayuu territory consists of three main elements:

1) Wounainpa’a, “our ancestral land”, is a territory that belongs to various groups of matrilineal or uterine relatives (relatives down the maternal line), which they recognise as their place of belonging. This

RIGHTS TO LAND ARE RECOGNISED ACCORDING TO THREE PRINCIPLES: PRECEDENCY, ADJACENCY AND SUBSISTENCE
extensive land comprises family graves, rancherías, houses and the different ecological resources needed for survival: water sources, pasturelands, land for hunting, growing and gathering.

2) The ranchería is a set of houses inhabited by people bound by consanguinity and kinship ties. These rancherías have concrete names and closer forms of economic cooperation than those seen at the level of woumainpa’a.

3) The Wayuu house, in which a nuclear family tends to live, is known as miichipa: mother, children and father (permanently or seasonally, depending on whether he has more than one wife). Wayuu homes comprise a number of buildings: a “house” with bedrooms; a kitchen, built several metres from the house; an “arbor” for receiving guests and holding family meetings; a livestock pen, as every family has at least a few goats; a bathroom; and crop growing areas, which are not present in all rancherías.

The Wayuu have different principles governing their rights to land which operate as mechanisms of territorial control (Guerra...
Curvelo, 2012). Rights to land are recognised according to precedency, adjacency and subsistence. Precedency, which can be seen through the presence of a matrilineal cemetery housing uterine relatives, is the main evidence that a territory has belonged ancestrally to a group of uterine relatives. Adjacency is established on the basis of the proximity of a house/cemetery and is evidenced via control over grazing lands, small farming areas and a water source. Subsistence is justified on the basis of a family’s actual use of the environmental resources of a territory.

Broadly speaking, the notion of land among the Wayuu comes from rights of possession and historic use. One is entitled to the land as long as another local matrilineally-organized group is not using it or does have it in its possession. With the exception of cemeteries, to justify one’s possession over a territory, all the different components of the territory must be constantly used or controlled. This requires a system of highly rigorous local territorial allocation: each goat pen and each vegetable plot is owned by a local matrilineal group and only this group can allocate the right to use resources to children (Observatory of the Presidential Human Rights Programme, 2009). Respect for matrilineal ownership of these territories is rigorous and, Wayuu families avoid social conflicts that could result in high compensation costs. It is unlikely that one matrilineal line would share collective resources with another (Uriania Municipal Council, 2001).

Although there are rules demarcating rights to territories, based on proximity to a house/cemetery and constant use of the territory the Wayuu settlement pattern is highly complex due to the high mobility of its people. At times of the year, families migrate to benefit from the environmental advantages of other areas, given the difficult, almost desert-like conditions. This in order to pasture their animals. While this pattern of high mobility has led to a classification of them as nomadic, it would be more accurate to consider them poly-residential as they always return to their main home once they have gained the maximum ecological advantage from other habitats (Guerra Curvelo, 1995). For this reason, some maternal lineages have a main territory as well as other areas to draw on seasonally. Other maternal lineages ask permission for the temporary use of the land of their family members or other close contacts (Epiayu, 2017).

The Wayuu men are more mobile than the women, particularly those with more than one wife. Polygamy, a surprising feature of this matrilineal society, is allowed if the man is able to take responsibility for maintaining each of his households. This indicates to ensure the women’s economic independence. Consequently, it is the men with most resources who are able to have a number of wives and households (Uriania R., 2017).

Wayuu kinship: clans and maternal lineages

The Wayuu have a tribal organization that is based on the existence of clans and lineages. Wayuu society is divided into clans known as e’iríiku: (a term that means “lesh”). However, these clans do not operate as a collective entity. As B. Sahler (1988) established, these clans are agamic, non-localised and non-corporate. Non-localised because they are

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12 Although the Wayuu try to avoid invading foreign territories in order to prevent future disputes, sometimes territorial offences are committed, such as when some indigenous peoples use territories without the authorisation of the owner.

13 It should be noted that, in some cases, men house their wives in the same district or nearby [La Raya, 2017]. When the wives do not belong to the same apushí, and the children are not brothers and sisters of the same mother, they are called asauna and it is believed that they share the same blood but not the same meat/body [which apushí share down the maternal line].
The ‘apūshii’, Wayuu maternal lineages

In collective terms, the Wayuu do not operate at clan level (e’irūkuu) but on a smaller level, that of the apišhii, i.e. between groups of uterine (matrilineal) relatives. These may be lineages (maternal lineages), also termed in the broadest sense apišhii. According to Mancuso (2006), the word apišhii means “to be bound or united”. Belonging to an apišhii means that these people, with whom they share an ancestral territory or with whom they unite in case of conflict, are the “highest form of connection or union with a relative”.

It can thus be said that the apišhii is a genealogically defined unilineal group of descendants, the common element being their identification as descendants from the same ancestors down the female line and the consanguinity between them (Guerra Curvelo, 1995). Unlike clans, these social groups may operate along corporate lines.

An apišhii is ancestrally associated with a territory or woumainpa’a in which one or more cemeteries may be found. These groups are exogamous (i.e. they must marry outside their maternal line) and, in principle, have strong bonds of social, political and economic reciprocity and solidarity. These uterine relatives are important for the political and economic security of a woman given that, in times of scarcity, conflict, or when necessary to meet a tribal obligation of Wayuu society, her children will receive support from them (Tucupao, 2017). Identifying an individual as a member of the Pūshaina or Uliana apišhii, in a certain place, is a public declaration that is understood by the others and the consequence by which solidarity is – or is not – activated.

14 A Wayuu person can, however, no longer be involved solely in the bonds of the maternal line. In some situations of social life, to receive more support, more weight or value may be given to actual parentage than to matrilineal descent. This flexible logic has been noted by Sahler (1988) as a constant in Wayuu society.
These insights have been discussed and dismissed following a major ethnographic investigation (Alarcón Puentes, 2006). Previously, it was assumed that the father’s status in Wayuu society is ancillary, insofar as he belongs to another apişhii. However, it should be clarified that the existence of a kinship system along matrilineal lines does not mean that the women take precedence over the men. According to Mancuso (2006), the importance of matrilineality as a principle of social belonging is heavily based on an “ideological” perspective in the context of “interclan” (between apişhii) conflicts. However, in practice people question matrilineality as the guiding principle of all acts and areas of social life. Thus, according to the matrilineal principle, it is the maternal uncle as head of his apişhii, that must be the one to consolidate it. He should pass on lands and livestock to his nephews/nieces, as the children of his sister, to maintain the strength and continuity of the matrilineal line. Possession of such resources is essential to meet collective obligations. However, in practice, the maternal uncle tries to ensure a balanced distribution of both kinds of assets between his nieces/nephews and his own children (Mancuso, 2008).

when a blood relative of the apişhii aliado is injured or killed.

In contrast, some ethnographies have previously commented that the father’s status in Wayuu society is ancillary, insofar as he belongs to another apişhii. However, it should be clarified that the existence of a kinship system along matrilineal lines does not mean that the women take precedence over the men. According to Mancuso (2006), the importance of matrilineality as a principle of social belonging is heavily based on an “ideological” perspective in the context of “interclan” (between apişhii) conflicts. However, in practice people question matrilineality as the guiding principle of all acts and areas of social life. Thus, according to the matrilineal principle, it is the maternal uncle as head of his apişhii, that must be the one to consolidate it. He should pass on lands and livestock to his nephews/nieces, as the children of his sister, to maintain the strength and continuity of the matrilineal line. Possession of such resources is essential to meet collective obligations. However, in practice, the maternal uncle tries to ensure a balanced distribution of both kinds of assets between his nieces/nephews and his own children (Mancuso, 2008).
While many of the matrilineal norms become blurred in practice and are more important in ideological terms, women continue to prevail as the coordinators of households and farms and they continue to be seen as the ones who “grow the clan”. Women’s importance is also highlighted by the significant role of the maternal family (Tucupao, Women’s Focus Group, 2017).

**Traditional mechanisms of education**

Like other indigenous societies, the Wayuu have a tradition of oral learning and learning by doing (akumajaa). Both the young men and women learn by observing and putting into practice the activities undertaken by
the adults. In building knowledge, there is learning (atiuja) that does not seek the memorisation of knowledge, but its reproduction and innovation. This means that a child not only memorises an activity or information, but that it uses the obtained knowledge creatively (kuyamat) (Ministry of National Education, 2013). The first source of a child’s education is the natural environment (Uriana, 2017).

Both men and women are involved in the children’s education. Their difference being that each one imparts knowledge to children of the same sex as themselves, giving them instruction to adequately perform their corresponding role. The father inculcates principles, values and standards of behaviour into his children, particularly the boys. The men also have to teach them their specific profession, e.g. fishing, hunting, pastoralism or land clearing (Uriana, 2017). The mother is also involved, teaching her daughters household tasks, plant cultivation, weaving techniques, women’s principles and behaviour. She also transmits knowledge and contacts with regard to trading with the alijuna on to her daughters. Grandparents tend to be the bearers and relaters of oral tradition and pass on knowledge indiscriminately to their grandsons and granddaughters, such as legends, Wayuu songs, histories and family trees (La Raya, 2017).

Unlike the men, the women undergo a ritual – the rite of confinement (sutapaulu) – that marks their passage to adulthood. Confinement begins when the girl has her first menstrual period. She is immediately isolated in a closed hut where she has to remain for a long period of time. During this time, she receives a special diet, based on traditional medicinal drinks (jawapi, kaswo’u and palisse), that is meant to cleanse her bodily and spiritually. Further, her hair is cut and she is constantly given baths (La Raya, 2017). While confined, her mother, aunts and grandmothers teach her the behaviour necessary of a woman, basic knowledge of traditional medicine, food and spiritual knowledge and rules of conduct for different events (Curvelo, 2017). The maternal uncles pass on knowledge to her associated with legal responsibilities related to the apiushii and like the aunts, they seek to strengthen social ties and training for work as defined by gender and stage of life. Part of this process is conducted in relation to the history and genealogy of her apiushii (Montiel, 2017). The mothers will also teach their daughters how to weave. Also during the confinement, they receive instruction on how to improve their handicraft skills through weaving (Tucupao, 2017). Traditionally, the time of a confinement used to vary depending on the status of the maternal line: women from the richest families would be confined for up to a year while those with fewer resources would remain so for just a few weeks. These days, the rite is still performed on many rancherías although not as rigorously as in the past.

Social networks

Women’s social networks cover two broad groups: family members and non-family members. The first group is divided into paternal and maternal relatives. The former do not tend to have so much influence over a woman’s life although this depends on the personal relationships the individual has developed with this family. It is with the maternal relatives that the closest relationships of reciprocity are generally formed. These represent the woman’s primary support network, they will help her with any possible

Access to formal education is still limited and illiteracy ranges from 54% among 13- and 14-year-olds to up to 83% or more among those over 45 years of age. In Manaure and Uribía municipalities, the school dropout rate is between 93% and 95% and this is due to the distance from schools, and a lack of school equipment, clothes and shoes needed to attend classes. Sometimes, the teachers abandon their jobs because they are not getting paid for their work. Ethnoeducation is provided in some centres (Fundación Cerrejón 2009).

There is no estimate of the proportion of girls today going through the confinement ritual.
THE WOMEN ARE THE SHAMANS \textit{(Oütsu)} IN WAYUU CULTURE AND ONLY THEY ARE ABLE TO REACH SACRED SPACES OR BODIES AND DEAL WITH EVIL SPIRITS

In principle, they must not be the object of attacks from other groups. Partly also because they are able to travel more easily than the men. For this reason, the women have developed better relations with the \textit{alijuna}, making them the primary traders.

Being in constant contact with the \textit{alijuna} through the sale of services or goods, Wayuu women establish relations with customers, contacts and partners. These contacts are passed on to their daughters so that they do not need to find new contacts. However, many of these intermediaries tend to be temporary customers or unreliable partners. Therefore, this part of a Wayuu woman’s social network tends to be constant but not strong.

It should be noted that a number of the abovementioned aspects of Wayuu society have been undergoing significant change, making the Wayuu face a complex and diverse reality. These changes particularly concern migration to urban areas, despite the migrants maintaining contact with their territories of origin. More importantly the Wayuu have over the last decade faced a severe food crisis leading to their implementation of different survival strategies which have, in turn, resulted in different cultural transformations.

economic or social problems. They are the people with whom she will work to carry out a task or project and they will support her in case of dispute or other obligation (Tucupao, 2017).

Non-family members is a more diverse and political group, and economic networks can be identified within this group. The most common are the economic ties Wayuu women form with the \textit{alijuna}. These also tend to be wider and more constant. In the words of the anthropologist, Guerra Curvelo (2002), the women are the primary contacts between “different” worlds. Precisely for this reason, the women do not intervene in inter-clan conflicts.
TRADITIONAL MEANS OF SUBSISTENCE

The Wayuu family economy comprises different productive activities. Although families may specialise in one particular productive task, they always undertake additional activities as a strategy to cope with difficult environmental conditions.

The economic activities of Wayuu families depend on the different environmental conditions. The two rainy seasons govern the seasonality of activities, given that it is only possible to grow fast-germinating crops during the rains (beans, squash, maize, millet, watermelon, etc.). The conditions for livestock rearing also improve during this season, with options for fishing and the possibility of selling surplus production. During the dry season, which is most of the year, conditions are more difficult in terms of preserving possessions and trading with non-indigenous groups.

The introduction of windmills during the 20th century encouraged a decline in seasonal migration to wetter lands. It thus encouraged greater sedentarisation of the native population (Guerra Curvelo, 1995) and a more diverse economy. This was given that the time and effort previously dedicated to feeding animals could now be used in other activities, such as agriculture and handicraft making.

Pastoralism is the most important economic activity among the Wayuu, particularly goats and sheep, although there are some families that rear cattle, horses, donkeys or pigs. Livestock ownership is a sign of wealth. Grazing animals serve both for subsistence and to maintain one’s social status within the community. This through meeting tribal obligations in relation to wakes, marriages or compensation following a conflict. The products of pastoral activity such as meat, skin, cheese and sour milk are sold in the peninsula’s urban centres (Guerra Curvelo, 1995). During dry periods, this activity requires substantial effort as people have to walk up to 15 kms to find pasture and water for their herds. Livestock are watered every two days, an activity undertaken by the women, while daily pasturing is undertaken by the men (Tucupao, 2017).

Hunting has been almost abandoned by the Wayuu, due in part to desertification caused by overgrazing. Although there are...
communities that continue to organize occasional hunting days, these no longer make any significant contribution to the food requirements of indigenous families. Gathering still complements household nutrition, and provides materials for house construction and for preparing medicinal preparations. However, similarly to hunting, fruit gathering has declined in recent decades due to a growing dependence on outside foodstuffs, severe deforestation and a loss of the traditional knowledge on the resource use. However, there are some forest fruits enjoyed by non-indigenous communities (iguaraya, mamon, corozo) that are still gathered and sold by Wayuu women (Tuupao, 2017).

In contrast, fishing is a pre-Hispanic activity that the Wayuu has largely maintained, albeit with many technical innovations. These days, fishing is closely linked to trade with the alijuna. Wayuu families that focus on fishing do not tend to be as rich as the pastoralists and are termed ‘shore birds’ or apalanshii, in a derogatory manner (Guerra Curvelo, 2015).

Not all of them fish on the same scale. Those operating on the smallest scale undertake inland fishing as they do not have the means to go out to the open sea. Most Wayuu fisherfolks are so-called “common” fisherfolks and account for some 60 percent according to Oxfam’s estimates (2014). Twenty percent of Wayuu fisherfolks undertake more specialized fishing. Finally, there are those who do not have their own boats and who simply provide labour in exchange for a small percentage of the profit. The men fish and the women

19 The “common” fisherfolks are the most vulnerable and even if they would like to increase their productive capacity, the cost prevents them from doing so (Uriana, 2017).

20 Fishing is also a seasonal activity. During the rainy season, the Wayuu tend to use the internal waters (lagoons and shores), while in midsummer they diversify their tasks (salt extraction, tourist services).
clean and sell the product once landed (Guerra Curvelo, 2015). Some women have their own boats but usually hire these out to male fisherfolks (Oxfam, 2014).

Wayuu horticulture is more important on farms located in the mountains. Unlike fishing, this is practised as a direct means of providing the family with food rather than as a way of generating income. Agricultural activities fall largely to the women, who prepare the land, tend the crops over the ensuing months and then harvest the produce. The men’s job is to clear the land and fence off the area (Sierra, 2016).

The Wayuu ancestral practice of exploiting the mineral resources of the coast continues. There is some traditional salt extraction, primarily in Manaure, and here this can form the main economic activity for some families. Gypsum is an additional product sourced by poor Wayuu families although there are few possibilities for extracting this during the summer months. Some Wayuu own the “pools” and allow other Wayuu to work them and, in turn, employ other Wayuu. Those who only provide their labour receive little income from this activity.

Although there are specific activities and norms among the Wayuu governing what men or women can do, this differs depending on a family’s position in the Wayuu prestige and wealth system. As Mancuso (2006) indicates, the usual sexual division of labour in the different subsistence activities is not as significant as variables of age and wealth. These factors, more than gender, regulate the division of labour. One example of this is pastoralism, usually a male task, for which a wealthy family might seek either a poor Wayuu man or woman to do this for them.

Men and women participate in all production activities albeit with specific allocated tasks. There are few traditional subsistence methods or practices that do not require the involvement of both sexes. For example, in relation to livestock rearing, the men graze the animals over wide areas while the women take them to the watering holes. In fishing, the men fish along the shores or out at sea while women tend to be involved in inland waters, gathering shellfish and scaling and selling the fish. In terms of crop growing, men help clear the land while the women sow the seeds, fertilize and tend the crops and are responsible for harvesting. Despite the shared responsibility, women are mainly responsible for the sale of the products, due to their networks and successful relationships with alijuna. In addition, they are considered to be better at managing the money obtained.

**Women’s knowledge**

Wayuu women tend to have highly specialized knowledge. Most notable is their knowledge of handicraft techniques, traditional medicine, shamanism and food. The first is the most well-known. In fact, the Wayuu are considered excellent craftswomen, weavers of hammocks, bags, bracelets and clothes. The second covers a wide range of knowledge and uses of potential medicinal resources drawn from the environment. The third reflects their spiritual dimension: the women are the shamans (oïtsu) in Wayuu culture and only they are able to reach sacred spaces or bodies and deal with evil spirits (Bernhard, 2015). The fourth covers knowledge of the natural resources and how to use them appropriately to improve the family diet. Unfortunately, these days, this is one of the weakest areas of traditional knowledge due to changes in Wayuu patterns of consumption (Tucupao, Women’s Focus Group, 2017; La Raya, 2017).

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21 Measures to protect this important skill [denomination of origin] have been taken in Colombia.

22 As Bernard notes (2015), the Wayuu turn first to family medication and then to a traditional specialist and, only as a last resort, to modern medicine. According to Rosado & Moreno (2009), the Wayuu use 155 species of medicinal plant to treat and cure illnesses. These belong to 64 different families, thus demonstrating a wide and in-depth knowledge of their environment.
This section analyses the changes in focus and predominance of female economic activities which, as noted, are occurring in the context of a regional economic crisis, and the causes of which are outside the Wayuu’s own possibilities for action and which ultimately limit this people’s capacity to respond in a way that will guarantee the sustainability of the family economy and environment.

The new role of women

In recent decades, significant changes have occurred that have had different effects on the scope of women’s action, changing women’s roles in the home and in the public sphere. These changes affect the adaptability of Wayuu society to cope with modernising challenges. Which factors that stand behind these changes is up for discussion between both academics and Wayuu women. Therefore, this section does not claim to offer a definitive answer to such an important question.

While some changes of gender roles have had negative effects on women and the social and cultural reproduction of their Wayuu traditions, others have permitted new leadership spaces to be accessed, enabling them to take up the defence of their territories and way of life.

One phenomenon contributing to the changing traditional gender roles with both positive and negative effects for women, is migration to urban or periurban areas. This exposes the Wayuu family to many different conditions, spaces and actors and requires them to adapt to a very different lifestyle. Researchers such as Watson-Franke (1976) have indicated that for women, the changes tend to be negative: her contact is limited and her support networks with uterine relatives weakened. This section analyses the Wayuu’s ongoing transition of economic activities, predominately those of women. The changes occur in the context of a regional economic crisis, caused by factors external to the Wayuu. The new economic activities ultimately limits the Wayuu people’s capacity to tackle the crisis in a way that will guarantee the sustainability of the family economy and environment. (Tucupao, Women’s Focus Group, 2017).

The weakening of support networks with uterine relatives weakens the identity link, and leads women to seek help from other actors in case of economic emergency. It is becoming increasingly common for Wayuu women to turn to state services such as the Colombian Institute for Family Well-Being (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar) before talking to other Wayuu, for example when reporting the father for not providing maintenance for his children (La Raya, 2017).

According to this approach, women lose a great deal of economic independence and, in most cases, there is a loss of autonomy and integration into informal work sectors. In the context of urban households, they have also
been dropping the practice of confinement through which knowledge and behavioural norms are transmitted. (Epiayu, 2017).

Professionalization is another, more positive engine of change in women’s roles. It is the change that has the most advantages for a woman and her household by enabling her to achieve a more stable income and greater recognition and prestige among her close family. In some cases, this can form important political capital as she is recognised as “doctor”, a social title that identifies her as a prestigious individual with higher status to speak to the aliúna (Uriana, 2017). Although many of these women tend to send money home to their apiushí, the fact that most professional women work in urban areas (except for teachers working in rural schools) results in limited interaction with their relatives. Most children of these professionals, brought up in an urban setting, do not show any great interest in maintaining relationships with their rural relatives (Curvelo, 2017).

It should be noted that these changes are set against a backdrop of the various crises of the 21st century, of an economic, environmental and political nature. These crises have led to a constant change in local traditions.

**Trade and new jobs**

Wayuu women have taken up many different and new occupations in the service industry, such as the marketing of farm produce, the sale of fish, dried shrimp, gathered fruits, traditional drinks, charcoal and illegal alcohol sales (Tucupao, 2017; La Raya, 2017).

In addition, since the 20th century, many Wayuu have ventured into different kinds of salaried work in the Venezuelan countryside. This immersion has created strong change and pushed many Wayuu to migrate to Maracaibo, a city in which a large population of Wayuu have settled. Today, in both parts of the Wayuu territory (Venezuela and Colombia), the rancherías tend to have one of its members in salaried work, generally informal. The money or food sent home by urban families to their rural relatives with fewer resources forms an important source of income. Until a few years ago, remittances from Venezuela were greater than those originating in Colombian cities (Guerra Curvelo, 1995).

Handicrafts deserve a paragraph apart. Although these are traditional cultural products, the production have undergone a significant transformation since European contact, resulting in a high degree of specialisation among the Wayuu weavers. It is believed that all women should learn how to weave (Tucupao, 2017). Wayuu rancherías complement their family incomes through the sale of handicrafts, as do urban households.

The Wayuu have been involved in smuggling since colonial times, trading with foreign powers that were the enemy of the Spanish Crown (Polo Acuña, 2005). In more recent times, the movement of merchandise to Venezuela has taken place along informal paths not known to the national authorities, or via parcel delivery service. Various Wayuu families are involved in this business, including women.

**Recent changes that affect food security**

A series of changes in the economic performance of Wayuu households and rancherías have come about because of events, which over a long period have affected the majority of the above-mentioned activities in the family economy. These have resulted in their diminished effectiveness to provide food security to homes.

One of the important structural elements refers to the situation of poverty in rural areas in Colombia. Data from the Multidimensional Poverty Index of the 2005 census, (Ramírez, Bedoya, & Díaz 2016) indicates that, at
higher levels of rurality, poverty levels are also higher. In addition, the geographic accumulation of poverty in rural areas, such as in the Wayuu population, is closely linked to the difficult access to services, employment and markets. On the other hand, there are economic initiatives that reach marginal areas related to extractive activity, such as the mining activities via concessions to private companies. These have surpassed the rights of the original population of the Guajira in the management and use of the territory. These initiatives have strengthened private actors’ role linked to economies of scale and have weakened traditional lifestyles that favour the access and consumption of local agricultural products and conservation of ancestral territories.

In addition, prolonged droughts from 2013 to 2015 resulted in the greatest ravages of Wayuu food security and their family economy ever seen. Other recent climatic events have also exacerbated the food crisis, such as the unexpected Harsh Winter (2010–2011) and the El Niño Phenomenon of 2015.

The impact of Venezuelan destabilization should also be noted, which has affected the trading networks that were enabling the Wayuu to supplement their limited incomes during summer months. Because of the crossborder fluidity of the Wayuu population, they used to depend greatly on different services offered in Venezuela, on state subsidies and remittances received from their families there, or from informal crossborder trade. As the situation in Venezuela has changed, the Wayuu people have begun to rely on the state services provided in La Guajira, which are very poor compared to what used to be offered in Zulia State. Because of the current context and the economic difficulties that Venezuela is facing, since 2010, Wayuu household incomes have decreased substantially. An Oxfam study (2014) puts their decline in income from trade with Venezuela at 75 percent.

Finally, there is a regional institutional crisis, exemplified by seven successive designations for departmental governor due to resignation or disqualification, in the last two governmental periods.

While La Guajira department as a whole is experiencing a worrying food security status, the main victims are clearly the Wayuu families. As has been noted (Bonnet Moron & Hahn de Castro, 2017), malnutrition levels among the Wayuu may be worse than suggested in successive National Nutritional Situation Surveys (ENSIN). Wayuu families have largely replaced their traditional diet with external products. Traditional food products (obtained from fishing, livestock rearing or agriculture) now have way less significance among the food consumed in the household as a whole. According to the

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24 According to the 2005, 2010 and 2015 ENSIN, La Guajira has one of the highest malnutrition rates of all departments, along with Chocó and Amazonas. In its modern history, the department has always had high levels of malnutrition; even before the advent of the Republic, the chroniclers noted the existence of poor Wayuu with problems in satisfying their food needs (Viloria de Lahoz, 2007).

25 This is due to the fact that this tool is departmental and so it combines the food insecurity situation of Upper Guajira with that of Lower Guajira, sub regions with distinct realities.
interviewed Wayuu women and leaders, this trend towards *alijuna* food culture has resulted in serious problems. Not only because of their high dependence on external food products, but because of the ensuing impoverishment of the family’s daily diets as well as, the loss of traditional knowledge and the devaluation of what is their own. According to a recent document produced by Prosperidad Social and WFP (2014), the Wayuu diet now largely comprises foods not produced on their farms. These are primarily carbohydrates (flour, pasta, rice), beans, sugars, fat (oil) and a little meat. Another recent report indicates that many Wayuu families survive on corn grits (Oxfam, 2014). It is for this reason that the national government has declared that the Wayuu population are suffering a food insecurity crisis that is particularly threatening the lives of their children (Bonnet Moron & Hahn de Castro, 2017). It must, however, be noted that there are other factors behind poor Wayuu child nutrition, such as dirty drinking water, poor household food habits and delayed medical attention.26

Concerning the Wayuu’s economic management, ongoing changes are clearly reflected by the new economic role of women. They are now far more integrated into the modern commercial dynamic and the products they sell are no longer solely traditional. Moreover, in many cases they are working as resellers of Colombian or Venezuelan products.

The fact that trade is becoming more important than production activities has contributed to women's greater importance for the household income. The handwoven textiles produced by Wayuu women are increasing in significance for household economies, being a regular (albeit insufficient) source of income for their families. The profitability of this activity compared to other traditional tasks has meant that men also now devote time to making handicrafts (traditional Wayuu bracelets and sandals) sold by their wives.

At household level, their economic struggles have led to families facing a need to decapitalise. To meet their basic food needs, they often decide to sell family assets, thereby making families vulnerable and increasingly poor. According to Oxfam (2014), the successive crises have led to a cumulative decapitalisation of 50 percent of all family assets. Reductions in their herds of sheep and goats are the most common, often of between 60 and 80 percent.

Further, it is important to note that these crises are deepened by the Wayuu people’s move away from traditional production activities and the loss of traditional knowledge concerning natural resource management. Wayuu families do not have the same food self-sufficiency as before, and in many cases they are not interested in eating traditional wild products or undertaking their ancestral production tasks. They increasingly prioritise income-generating activities over activities that provide them food directly.

A situation of growing impoverishment and vulnerability can therefore be seen among Wayuu households. In general, the problem of clean water remains the main obstacle to the Wayuu economy, as recognised by the local inhabitants and their authorities. Although the Colombian state has invested money, these interventions have largely been disjointed. It should also be noted that not all Wayuu communities benefit from all new investments, such as with the provision of windmills, where the management of the windmills is too complicated (Uriana, 2017).

The desertification of the territory resulting from cumulative overgrazing also adds to this growing vulnerability. In addition, the lack of access to the area affects the marketing and sale of services due to the high costs of transport. As noted, regional state authorities are unable to provide basic services to the population, and

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26 There is a controversy with the criollos over the causes of malnutrition among Wayuu children as they claim that the Wayuu do not share the upbringing of the children responsibly, that the children are not taken for regular medical checks and that they are allowed to live in a vulnerable environment. The Wayuu argue that they lack sufficient means to take their children to the health centre on a regular basis.
these insufficiencies are also a decisive factor which hinders development. In general terms, it can therefore be stated that Wayuu family well-being has declined considerably and that the traditional economy is collapsing, no longer able to provide sufficient income to meet the food needs of its members.

NEW LEADERS AND SOCIOPOLITICAL RELATIONS IN THE WAYUU PEOPLE

Sociopolitical relations within Wayuu society have experienced changes in recent decades that have carved out new roles for men and women, changing the traditional territorial management. The aim of this section is to briefly describe some of the most important changes in the Wayuu’s new political relations. These concern the status of the traditional authority of the apiushii (ta’laüla), the status of the leader, Wayuu conflict resolution mechanisms and, more specifically, the changes created by the new female leadership.

Traditional leadership and the Wayuu public arena

It has already been mentioned that men, and specifically the maternal uncle, take on the leadership of their apiushii as the traditional authority. Previously in Wayuu rancherias, which comprise groups of uterine relatives, an older respected Wayuu man would be identified as the ta’laüla (or “my elder”, “my chief”). This person was responsible for organizing the collective work, resolving conflicts within the community, and representing all the relatives in their disputes with other Wayuu (Sahler, 1998). In addition, he was responsible for managing and defending the collective assets of the extended family group (water sources and grazing land).27

27 In a high-risk conflict, the presence of the maternal uncle is necessary as he has the greatest recognition by virtue of his wealth, prestige, value or wisdom in resolving the dispute.

The ta’laüla needed to have wide knowledge of the Wayuu compensation system, training in managing genealogies (their own and outsiders’) and a familiarity with the word-bearer’s techniques of argument, rhetoric and legal language (Watson, 1970). The scope of action of this chief tended to be limited to managing relations between Wayuu; the ta’laüla would not generally lead talks with the alijuna. This traditional authority would tend to deal with issues with the alijuna only when they become enemies of the family in a dispute or war. In brief, the traditional chief played an administrative role, one of protection, leadership and conciliation, as a figure of respect.

Like other indigenous groups, the Wayuu developed front figures that would represent them before non-indigenous groups, someone who could speak with the government and alijuna and attract resources to the community. Such leaders would have to speak Spanish, a language that the more traditional Wayuu elders usually did not master. This thus led to the co-existence of two positions. Exceptionally, the two roles could be performed by the same person but the leader would usually not exercise the same role as the ta’laüla, as this latter was the one who “knows the word” and was capable of “resolving the problem” and of “commanding” within a group of uterine descendants (Epiayu, 2017). In fact, the person designated as “leader” is not always linked to authority and is often suspected of siphoning off some of the money he draws into the community. So, when a leader manages to attract resources for the collective, the person who really “commands” the people to take up the call or the tasks necessary for a specific project, is instead the ta’laüla (Mancuso, 2008).

Wayuu system of internal conflict resolution

The Wayuu have to deal with numerous conflicts between their members that arise for different reasons. Among those are territorial clashes, economic disagreements and social
or violent events. To resolve internal disputes, the Wayuu have developed a cultural method of solving them based on compensation and dialogue. This traditional regulatory system encourages dialogue between the actors at dispute through the participation of an intermediary, known as the word-bearer or *püchhipü’u*. The Wayuu word-bearer does not need to withdraw from society to train, as in the case of female shamans. This role depends on his capacity for persuasive speech, his conciliatory attitude, his experience of resolving cases, and on the instruction, advice or teaching of older word-bearers (Montiel, 2017).

This conflict resolution system has three basic principles: first, all harm must be compensated for; second, the victims should not claim compensation directly from the aggressor, but through the intervention of the word-bearer, who will transmit the compensation request to the relatives of the aggressor. The *püchhipü’u* thus transmits the “words” until an agreement has been reached between the parties, as there is no interaction until conciliation has been achieved. The third principle is that the payment should not be paid to the victim but to their uterine relatives, because the harm done affects not just one person but the collective, the *apišhi* (Perrin, 1980). The requirement for compensation is aimed at re-establishing the order affected by a breach of social norms. Reparation (*maüna*) comprises different material elements such as livestock, gold necklaces, coral and archaeological effects, arms and, more recently, money (Montiel, 2017).

Peace, according to the word-bearers, is not born out of the political will of individuals to cease hostilities. It comes from a re-establishment of the mechanisms of social control and effective economic compensation.

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28 This system is of colonial origin but follows a Wayuu cultural logic. It has been declared by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage.
of the affected group (Sahler, 1988). If a group opts for armed confrontation, it will recruit its combatants from among its *apišhii*, as it is on these people that the responsibility for obtaining vengeance traditionally rests (Guerra Curvelo, 2002).

**Changes in the public roles of Wayuu women**

In political or public relations, both in the *alijuna* and the Wayuu worlds, women’s social networks have been restricted and reliant on men, but in recent decades significant changes have been taking place.

The public sphere is restricted for Wayuu women. Women usually have influence over territorial resource management but they only exercise it “from the wings”, through advice to the men representing them before other Wayuu (Mancuso, 2006). They tend to devise strategies for obtaining resources or for territorial management that can be accepted by their close uterine relatives. However, if these are to be presented to other Wayuu, the men generally demand the presence of another man with whom to discuss (Curvelo 2017). As noted, Wayuu women are mainly involved as mediators balancing the requests of the *alijuna* with the needs of their own community.

Women can neither participate in inter-clan conflicts, nor in their development or in their conciliation. They must approach a man from their *apišhii* (this tends to be their maternal uncle, who acts as the highest authority of his *apišhii*, or a brother) to represent them and their group. This is because women are not involved in conflict management, there do not tend to be female word bearers. Conflict resolution therefore remains solely in the hands of men. The only disputes women do resolve are those within their own rancherías, although they are resolved more through advice than by exercising authority over others. It is neither usual for women to lead the community, although their ability to provide advice to men and ensure their restraint is acknowledged (La Raya, 2017). There is also a rule that women and children must not form the object of retaliation in a dispute, only adult males can (Guerra Curvelo, 2002).

As previously noted, by remaining outside of any Wayuu conflicts, women remain more easily able to move around the area and thus remain in constant contact with the *alijuna*. These days, the continued specialisation of their dialogue and trade process with outsiders has enabled Wayuu women to be recognised as experts in communicating with the *alijuna* world. This feature gives them a position of leadership but not one of authority. The recognition has enabled the appearance of hundreds of female Wayuu leaders, who maintain fluid and peaceful dialogue with public officials and commercial partners, in addition to attracting resources into the collective. In contrast, when a female authority resolves issues with another male Wayuu authority, cases arise in which the presence of a male contact is required, which demonstrates the cultural limits that Wayuu sectors impose on women leaders.

As in the case of many rural women, Wayuu women are acknowledged to have a better and more responsible economic management, and in contrast to men, they tend to spend income
on the household. Moving beyond solely gaining the possibility of acquiring a leadership role, this administrative skill has been a decisive factor for women to become traditional authorities regarding resource administration and lead people within their own collective. This change is also caused by their knowledge of the aliuna world and their great ability to dialogue with outsiders. (Curvelo, 2017).

There is, however, still great resistance from both Wayuu men and women with regard to a woman occupying this role and they tend to form the object of criticism (La Raya, 2017), something that did not occur in their more traditional role. Consequently, it is more likely that Wayuu women have influence as an authority within their community and with the Colombian state, and not in relations with other indigenous Wayuu communities.

Women’s new forms of participation can clearly be seen at regional level, given that they are acting outside of the traditional political structures and always call for dialogue with the aliuna. Therefore, in dialogue spaces with government, as in the meetings of the Wayuu state authorities, female authorities are recognized as legitimate spokespersons. This is a role in which they can demonstrate their skills. Yet, the majority of participants in these meetings continue to be men. In the context of the successive crises that the department has experienced, it is the women’s skills that have come to dominate, and which have acquired greater weight in maintaining the household. In addition they are taking forward demands to the national government with regard to the vulnerability of their people. In response to this situation, to address the needs of Wayuu families, various non-traditional organizations have been established. Some of these organizations do not possess the structure of traditional political organizations, something which has enabled many women leaders to participate as authorities or representatives (Curvelo, 2017)²⁹.

One important case of female leadership at regional level became apparent in the last decade, as a response to the paramilitary invasion of La Guajira³⁰. Wayuu women were the object of attack by the paramilitaries and the indigenous people were largely overwhelmed by them. Faced with this phenomenon, the women entered the conflict as a kind of word-bearer and denounced the massacres to the national government, even raising the issue of state negligence.

**IMPACTS ON TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT**

A consequence of territorial management, which has not been sufficiently studied is the weakness and, in some cases collapse of matrilineal groups of uterine relatives, the results of which have been noted throughout this document. Traditionally, the Wayuu matrilineal organization formed the basis of their territorial organization, regulated sociopolitical relations and support networks of distant relatives, and generally acted as an essential element of this people’s tribal organization. The weakening of these maternal lineages has resulted in greater political fragmentation and the breakdown of bonds of reciprocity. It has undoubtedly affected family vulnerability and led to poor response.

³⁰ In February 2002, the Northern Block of the paramilitary forces of the Self Defence Units of Colombia penetrated Middle and Upper Guajira seeking to take full control of strategic corridors that were traditionally used as routes for smuggling and drug trafficking. The Wayuu who controlled these corridors were displaced, assassinated, or subordinated to the paramilitary project. With this domination by the Northern Block, the entry of the paramilitaries into Upper Guajira with an army of occupation from another department was a devastating process for the region. Taking advantage of a conflict between apashii of the Wayuu people, the head of the Northern Block allied with some members of the Ipuana family, forming the Wayuu Counterinsurgency Front. However, following what was known as the Massacre of Bahía Portete, the Wayuu rejected the presence of the Self Defence Units, primarily because of the way in which these had targeted the children, elders and women during their incursion (López, 2011). The actions of the Self Defence Units were in open violation of the Wayuu rules of war.

²⁹ Other traditional authorities often demand the presence of a ta’lula man (La Raya, 2017).
capacity in the face of crises. It has also contributed to the territory’s lack of protection and disorganization, due to increasing conflicts and a weakening of traditional landholding systems within the now fragmented ancestral territories, woumainpa’a.

According to Mancuso (2006), the economic and social support networks have become weakened, thus also weakening the collective obligations that maintain the sense of identity of the matrilineal group. Because of this, women’s status is beginning to depend more on the nuclear family than on their relationships with uterine relatives. All of this detracts from women’s economic independence and the possibility of turning to other support in times of emergency. We must mention the different organizations and associations that have emerged to represent the Wayuu people in the context of this complex micro-political scenario. Many of the new leaders do not have adequate knowledge of the relationship with the alijuna nor of the value of fulfilling all commitments made. As has been seen, the oral word holds much weight amongst the Wayuu, and many of the new leaders who are replacing the ta’laïla in the negotiations give insufficient importance to fulfilling agreements and internal consensuses. This behaviour on the part of leaders reinforces the prejudices of some non-indigenous public officials who thus stigmatise the behaviour of all Wayuu. Nor have the Wayuu been particularly proactive in seeking political alliances. They rather tend to hope for help or for external actors to arrive with development proposals.

The weakening of the matrilineages has also resulted in a loss of respect and dispute precaution, affected the prestige and status of the ta’laïla and enabled the flourishing of power conflicts between Wayuu families (Curvelo, 2017). Although the political segmentation of the Wayuu is not a recent event, and has always created difficulties when interfacing with governments, their fragmentation is even greater today. This is in part due to the fact that young leaders with more education often lack an in-depth knowledge of the community’s problems and of the traditional social institutions, creating clashes between the new leaders and the ta’laïla. Female leaders are also participating in this conflict, seeking transformation that will enable greater leadership opportunities for women.

One particular effect of the political fragmentation and weakening of the maternal lineage, in the context of high Wayuu adaptability, is the impoverishment of the landholding system and territorial management. By not reaching agreement on the different problems facing a common territory, on who would be the most appropriate leaders of this ancestral territory (conflict between some leaders and ta’laïla) or on the possible solutions, the outcome is that the different leaders and their communities are implementing projects or actions that may be in opposition to, or harmful to the development initiatives being implemented by their Wayuu neighbours.

Another relevant factor affecting the territorial management of the Wayuu people is the weakening of the traditional knowledge

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31 Furthermore, given the recent economic and social transformations, a nuclear family model today predominates in place of the extensive matrilineal family, a phenomenon originally seen largely in urban and periurban areas, but which had not until now extended to other areas.


33 No organization has yet been created to represent all the Wayuu as this population is too large and the power of each traditional authority very small and localised given that in practice thousands of traditional authorities are unable to coordinate among themselves.

34 Like families, the community structures have become dependent on state resources, and few of them are devising sustainable projects for their territories or seeking potential alliances in other non-political spaces.
The Wayuu elders indicate that there are a number of resources in the forests that the youth are unaware of, but which would enable them to meet their needs in times of scarcity.

Some private individuals “buy” parts of the reservation, an action that has no validity whatsoever.

Among their youngest members. The ancestral knowledge of their environment is essential in such a fragile landscape as the Guajira Peninsula. The loss of this knowledge is largely due to young people’s current valuation of alijuna forms of income generation, rather than activities of livestock rearing, hunting and gathering. The generation gap means that young Wayuu are not learning from the experiences, failures and successes of previous generations. This loss of traditional knowledge has not only got an impact in economic and environmental terms, but also on the knowledge that forms the foundation of their social institutions.

At territorial level, although the Colombian constitution gives indigenous reservations guarantees as to the imprescriptibility, inalienability and unseizeability of their territories, in practice there have been multiple invasions of the Wayuu territory by the private sector. According to information from female Wayuu leaders, the territory has been invaded by various different megaprojects established in La Guajira, disrupting their traditional way of life. The lack of transparency and disclosure of these projects generate fragmentation of the Wayuu communities by the issuance and negotiation of permits that give access to Wayuu territory.

Nonetheless, the greatest risk currently does not come from direct invasions of the Wayuu territory, but from the economic and social impoverishment of the people in terms of their ability to manage the territory adequately, i.e. to manage it in a way that achieves development with well-being on their own sociocultural terms. The worst consequences of the different alijuna initiatives on Wayuu territories therefore arise from their lacking possibilities to draw on the potential positive benefits of these interventions. In addition, the communities are not able to work together to identify projects that may have a negative impact.

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35 The Wayuu elders indicate that there are a number of resources in the forests that the youth are unaware of, but which would enable them to meet their needs in times of scarcity.

36 Some private individuals “buy” parts of the reservation, an action that has no validity whatsoever.
Conclusions

Bearing in mind the different elements analysed throughout the text, it can be seen that the Wayuu matrilineal system has been severely weakened, primarily as a result of economic and cultural changes, migration to urban areas and environmental crises.

The economic transformations in the region have favoured a type of development based on the free market economy and consumption. This model of development has put the traditional life models that support the access and consumption of local agricultural products into a vulnerable position. In addition, this dominant model is based on a patriarchal society, which has an increasing penetration of minority populations such as Wayuu, imposing gender stereotypes that are alien to traditional ones, weakening traditional matrilinear systems and the leadership role of women. In this sense, foreign gender stereotypes tend to prevail, and it is increasingly assumed that the role of women should be reduced to the tasks of private and domestic life, care and support in the generation of income, something which is privileging the participation of men in the public–political sphere.

This pattern threatens the social fabric of the Wayuu population and it weakens the matrilineal and traditional leadership structures, violating their natural and symbolic resources and negatively affecting the management of their territories.

All these factors have, in turn, weakened the effective relationships of reciprocity between the apūshii, and resulted in their gradual impoverishment and the growing vulnerability of Wayuu families. There has been a proliferation of conflicts because the traditional leadership structures are no longer held in the same regard as in the past, and because the relationships of reciprocity that used to be effective within the maternal lineage are ever more limited.

Recent crises have gradually weakened the rural and urban economy of Wayuu families and have resulted in a decapitalisation of apūshii assets. It could, in fact, be said that the traditional Wayuu economy has collapsed. The decapitalisation, desertification, abandonment of traditional self-sufficiency activities and increased consumption of food products purchased through the market have all led, as noted by a number of studies, to a notable loss of food security among families. Against this backdrop, the experience and role of Wayuu women has thus extended to other spheres, through the emergence of non-traditional forms of leadership.
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- The importance of the ethnographic approach in the evaluations of development projects in La Guajira (2011) (author);
- La Guajira, a deep diagnosis: Economy, Society, Politics and Culture (co-author);

His current research focuses on the social and economic transformations that occur in Wayuu indigenous communities as a result of the recent food insecurity crises in La Guajira.
ANÁLISIS DE LA GENTE WAYUU EN COLOMBIA Y SU GESTIÓN DE RECURSOS NATURALES Y TERRITORIALES

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The Moso people live on both sides of the border between the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan in southwestern China.

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3.

Moso

CHINA
A matrilineal society in transition: the Moso people in Yunnan

IWGIA
International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs

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## Glossary

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<tr>
<td>Daba</td>
<td>Traditional Moso religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daba</td>
<td>Daba priest</td>
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<td>Dabu</td>
<td>Head of the household</td>
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<td>Dzeka</td>
<td>Commoners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ewer</td>
<td>Serfs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenpo</td>
<td>Spiritual teacher within Tibetan Buddhism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minzu</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nongmingong</td>
<td>Peasant-worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retu</td>
<td>Name for tisese used in mountain area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sipi</td>
<td>Aristocrats</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sizi</td>
<td>Group of people related to each other by blood through mother’s line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tisese</td>
<td>Walking back and forth – i.e., the visiting system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yidu</td>
<td>Household</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zimi</td>
<td>Central main dwelling</td>
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</table>
The Moso people (in Chinese: 摩梭, pinyin: Mósuō), also known as mosuo, mosso or musuo and self-called as na, live in the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan, in the southwest of China, around the Lugu Lake (or mother lake).

This study intends to paint the picture of the impact that in-country social, economic and political changes have on their own social and political structure, including productive activities and social roles.

As we will see in the following pages, their households, also called Yidu, include three or even four generations of relatives who follow matrilineal lines and generally have two figures as head of the family: a man (usually the maternal uncle) and a woman (often the grandmother). These households traditionally constitute collective units of production were domestic and agricultural tasks are shared among all members.

During feudal times and until 1956, the Moso society was based on a small-scale agrarian economy and a barter system that keep on being used until the 2000s for commercial transactions, including the payment of taxes and fees.

The matrilineal system and the role of women in the Moso society are key in the production of food, in their livelihoods and to guarantee their access to natural resources. In this way, as can be seen in the following pages, the national and local policies referred to the right of self-identification, family planning, development and tourism, among others, affect directly the food system and livelihoods of the Moso people.
TERRITORIAL CONTEXT OF THE MOSO

The Moso people are an ethnic minority group that live on both sides of the border between the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan in southwestern China. Their total population is estimated at 30,000 – 40,000 but the largest Moso population is found in Yunnan where the Moso are one out of at least 25 different ethnic minority groups. Together these groups represent almost 40 percent of Yunnan’s population (45 million as of 2009).

Yunnan is the third poorest province in China, but is renowned for its cultural multiplicity, its scenic mountain and plateau landscapes, and its high plant diversity. Most (57 percent) of Yunnan’s inhabitants are rural dwellers, and agriculture provides more than 80 percent of the government’s tax income. The province is rich in water\(^1\) and mineral resources\(^2\). Tobacco, logging, mining and tourism are the province’s main industries.

In Yunnan, the Moso people live in the Ninglang Autonomous Yi County (Lijiang City Prefecture) in the northwestern highlands around the upper reaches of the Jinsha River (Yangtze River)\(^3\). Within the county, the Moso are mainly concentrated in two rural townships: Yongning and Labo. Yongning has the largest population and lies on a 2,600 m high mountain plateau – the Yongning basin – that is traversed by several rivers and includes (at a distance of approx. 20 km) Lake Lugu, a plateau lake that straddles the border to Sichuan\(^4\). The basin is surrounded by forested mountain ranges (up to 4,332 m) where the Lado Township is located.

The Ninglang County has a mild subtropical highland climate but with local variations due to the topography and different elevations. The average annual temperature lies between 10 and 11 degrees with dry and sunny winters and warm and damp summers. Rain falls from June to September (between 1,000 and 1,500 annually) (Cai 2001). The natural environment is highly diverse, with alpine lakes, large valleys and basins, shrub and meadows, slope forests and snowy crests (Ogilvie 1996). While the Yongning basin is relatively flat with farm-, grass- and wetlands, the surrounding mountains are unfit for agriculture and covered by forests of pine trees, firs and chestnut trees. They are rich in animal and plant life.

The Moso consider the Yongning area as their old cultural centre. It was here the

\(^{1}\) Yunnan is traversed by the Jinsha (Yangtze), Lancang (Mekong) and Nu (Salween) Rivers.

\(^{2}\) Yunnan has China’s largest reserves of tin, phosphorus and zinc. Coal deposits are also abundant (YDHRSS and SBY 2016).

\(^{3}\) In Sichuan, the Moso live in the Yanyuan, Muli and Yanbian Counties.

\(^{4}\) Lake Lugu straddles the border to Sichuan. It was listed as a Grade II National Protection Zone in 1989.
headquarters of the chief were located, as well as the main Buddhist Zhamie temple (Shih 2010), and where festivities were held. *Hlidi Gemu* (the mountain goddess) overlooking Lake Lugu (the Mother Lake) is a religious landmark. In fact, the Yongning area is recorded as having been a part of the Chinese empire as early as the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to AD 220), and to have been inhabited by various ethnic groups, including the Ranmang who practiced matrilineal descent and regarded women as superior to men. The forebears of the Moso – a branch of the nomadic Qiang from the northwestern part of China – arrived in the late fifth century. By the 13th century (Yuan dynasty) the Moso’s native chieftains had become an integral part of China’s already well-developed bureaucratic hierarchy. In the 14th century, the Yongning chief Budugeji was recognised and officially appointed by the first Ming Emperor as hereditary aboriginal prefect. A convention further established that in each generation it would be the eldest son of the chief’s primary wife that would inherit the chief’s position while the second would inherit the position of Kenpo (spiritual teacher) of the Zhamie temple. The chief’s family would thus rule over not only the secular but also the religious life of their subjects.

Chief Budugeji’s descendants ruled for 600 years over a highly hierarchical society. There were three ranks: the *sipi* – or aristocrats – who comprised all the close and remote uterine (matrilineal) relatives of the chief; the *dzeka* – or commoners – by far the most

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5 The Moso chieftains’ patrilineal line of succession is usually explained by the fact that they are believed to be of another ethnic origin – Xifan or Pumi – allegedly because a Pumi or Xifan in the 12th century rescued a Moso chieftain and in gratitude was made chief of Yongning chief (Shih 2010).
numerous group; and at the bottom of the social hierarchy the ewer – or serfs who were bound to provide various prescribed menial services to their aristocratic masters⁶.

In 1950, Ninglang was declared “peacefully liberated” and officially became part of the newly established People’s Republic of China (PRC). In 1956, the chieftain system was finally abolished, and by 1958, the Yongning area had become fully incorporated into the communist system and reorganized within the system of People’s Commune⁷, which, inter alia, abolished the matrilineal household functions⁸.

During the following two decades and until the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the Moso’s matrilineal system was under severe attacks culminating in 1975–1976 with the One wife–One Husband Movement and the obligation to register marriage⁹. The end of the Cultural Revolution opened up a new era for the Moso people, and the household again became the primary social unit in daily life and in agricultural production. With the passing of the 1984 Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, ethnic minorities including the Moso, were given legislative guarantees for their customs and traditions, education, language and writing, marriage, etc. The economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s monetized and diversified the Moso economy; new roads made the region more accessible; electricity was introduced, and social infrastructure (health centers, schools, etc.) was built. But it also opened up migration, tourism and a wide array of other social and cultural exchanges with the rest of China and the world – all of which has greatly transformed Moso society.

Ninglang Yi Autonomous County, nevertheless, still remains in many aspects a remote and poverty-stricken county, largely depending on agriculture, forestry and fishery¹⁰. Yongning is today an agricultural township with a population of less than 20,000 people (2008). Ethnically homogeneous until the early decades of the twentieth century, it is at present the home of 13 ethnic groups including the Han, the dominant ethnic group in China. The Moso, however, remain locally the largest and most influential group (Chia-Ling 2008).

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⁶ These ranks were distinguished by the way they dressed, the colour of their attire and a number of rules regarding their demeanor, their work, etc., and in case of the dzeka and the ewer, their total subjugation to the sipi and the chief.

⁷ Each Moso household was assigned one of seven class elements: hired hand, poor peasant, lower-middle class peasant, upper-middle class peasant, rich peasant and landlord. Hired hands and poor peasants became the nominal masters of the new society (Shih 2010).

⁸ Food, for instance, was supplied through the mess halls, which were set up in order to free women from the “drudgery of housework” and make them available for the more emancipated and glorious tasks of hoeing and dam building (Jones and Poleman 1962).

⁹ The New Marriage Law (1950) instituted the New-Democratic marriage system, based on the free choice of both partners, on monogamy, on equal rights for both sexes, and on the protection of the lawful interests of women and children. The official registration of any marriage contract was required, and a marriage certificate would be issued only when a marriage was found to be in conformity with the provisions of the New Marriage Law.

¹⁰ Ninglang has been on the register of “poor” counties since the criteria for the designation were first established in 1986. In 2008, GDP per capita was USD 630 (Zhang, 2017).
ABOUT THE MOSO

In Yongning Township, the Moso live in some 72 village groups\(^{11}\), spread out along the foot hills and within a short distance from each other. In Labo Township, village groups are more dispersed and, because of the very rugged terrain, sometimes difficult to access (Shih 2010).

The Moso people speak Naru, a language belonging to the Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burman subfamily of the Sino-Tibetan family (Shih 2010). Naru has no written form. As a result of the ethnic identification project in the 1950s\(^{12}\), the Moso people in Yunnan were classified as a sub-group to the Naxi and those living in Sichuan to the Mongols\(^{13}\). This means that the Moso people are not represented as a minzu (nationality) in provincial and national politics\(^ {14}\). Since the 1950s, group name and ethnic identity have therefore become the most important issues on the agenda of the Moso people as a group and they make unrelenting efforts to pursue the minzu status. Since the late 1980s they have been allowed to call themselves “the Moso people”.

Moso religious life is guided by coexisting beliefs – those of their traditional Daba religion in which the priests are called daba (sometimes spelt Ddaba) and those of Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism (Cai 2001). Within Daba, the Moso worship numerous goddesses and gods and most natural phenomena have their own gendered spirits as for instance the patron goddess of the Moso people, Hlidi Gemu or the Goddess Mountain that overlooks Lake Lugu, the Mother Lake\(^{15}\). Moreover, celestial bodies are gendered and, differently from other views: the Sun is female\(^{16}\), the Moon is male, Polaris is female and Venus is male (Shih 2010). All entities and forces of the universe are considered to be supernatural beings that wield strong influence over human affairs and are therefore all objects of worship. Daba has no written scripture and priesthood is usually passed down from one generation to the next by men\(^{17}\) within the same household.

Despite the persistent presence of Daba religion, the spiritual life of the Moso has been strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism (Shih 1998) introduced in the 13th century. The Moso chiefs immediately adopted Lamaism and the chief’s second and third son were born heirs to important positions within Lamaism.

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\(^{11}\) An administrative unit in ethnic minority areas that falls under the jurisdiction of six Administrant Villages, including Yongning, and Luoshui (Lake Lugu area).

\(^{12}\) As the result of the Project, over 400 self-reported groups were officially classified into fifty-five minorities. The ethnic ‘family’ of the Chinese nation officially comprises fifty-six members (minzu), the Han who are the dominant majority and fifty-five minorities (Wang 2016).

\(^{13}\) While the Moso people in Yunnan object to being classified as Naxi, the Moso people in Sichuan have accepted to be classified as Mongols.

\(^{14}\) The status of minzu also gives the right to a number of privileges in the form of positive discrimination.

\(^{15}\) The conception of females as being superior is deeply rooted in their legend of human genesis.

\(^{16}\) The sun has all the characteristics of a female since it is warm, bright, and brings about birth and growth to people, crops and animals (Shih 2010).

\(^{17}\) Cai (2001) mentions that before 1940 there were also female daba.
Buddhist monks became eventually the major conductors of all kinds of rituals – often in collaboration with a daba – and the most powerful challengers to the Moso matrilineal ideology, while at the same time exercising much influence on the political life of Moso society (Cai 2001). The patriarchal worldview of lamaism also successfully penetrated into every Moso household and considerably transformed the traditional Moso conceptions about males and females (Shih 2010).
A MATRILINEAL SOCIETY IN TRANSITION: THE MOSO PEOPLE IN YUNNAN

Social and political structure

THE SOCIAL SYSTEM OF THE MOSO

During feudal times and up to 1956, traditional Moso society was based on a small-scale agrarian subsistence economy; commerce and manufacturing were mostly undertaken by non Moso (Tibetans), and the system of bartering or paying in kind in the early 2000s was still used in some places for economic transactions, including payment of taxes and fees (Chia Ling 2008).

Their social system, on the other hand, was complex. Two kinship systems co-existed – a matrilineal, matrilocal and matri-centered system followed by the commoners and by far the most common in traditional Moso society – and a patrilineal, virilocal and patricentered system followed by the Moso chief and the aristocracy.

The following sections will give an overview of some of the salient characteristics of Moso social system and culture: the Moso matrilineal and matrilocal system; the three different systems regulating Moso men and women’s sexual relationships; and the socialization and education of children.

The Moso matrilineal and matrilocal system

The Moso commoners and serfs traced their line of descent through their mothers and belonged to a Sizi. The Sizi refers to a group of people related to each other by blood through the mother’s line (Shih 2010). Such a group was considered to be “(of) one bone” and shared kinship-related duties and obligations, e.g., the annual ancestral worship, and activities related to the initiation and funeral ceremonies (Shih 2001).

At the household (yidu) level, the Moso were matrilocal and matri-centered. A yidu usually had three or even four generations of matrilineal blood relatives living under the same roof: a grandmother (and her brothers and sisters and her sisters’ children), her daughter(s) and son(s) and daughter(s)’ children. There were no conjugal units within the household and household property was passed on from one generation of women to another.

Traditional houses were built to accommodate such large extended families and the tisese – the visiting system which was practiced by Moso men and women to fulfill their needs for sexual gratification and procreation. The houses would differ in size but consisted usually of several wooden structures, one or two stories
high and built around a central courtyard. Every house would have a zimi, a central main dwelling space where day to day life unfolded. Each sexually active woman in the household had a personal room where their tisese partners could visit them at night. The senior women lived in another room together with the children. The men in the household (brothers, sons) would eat with the other household members but did not have a room of their own since they were expected to visit their partner at night. If not, they shared a room with the unmarried men or boys living in the household. In the more affluent households, there would be a “sacred chamber” where the member of the household who had become a monk would live by himself and practice his religious routine.

Daily life was centered around the head of the household – the dabu – and the household was often known under the dabu’s name. Traditionally there were two dabu – a man and a woman. The male head (often a maternal uncle) would take care of the exterior affairs and the female head (often the grandmother) would take care of the interior affairs (Cai 2001). There was no prescribed order of succession, and in principle every household member was eligible for the position. The household functioned as a collective unit, and domestic and agricultural work was shared by everybody and the results of this work distributed equally. The dabu would run the household, take care of the annual distribution of clothing, the management of savings and expenses, the organization of work in the home and in the fields, the daily service of offering to the ancestors, and the daily preparation and serving of meals. Prior

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18 Shih (2010) only mentions one dabu per household and although there are male dabu, women dabu are said to be preferred. The number, age and sex of the dabu depended on the composition of the household, sometimes the two dabu would not belong to the same generation or there would only be one (Cai 2001).
to 1956, the female head went on behalf of the household to offer gifts to the chief on New Year’s Day (Shih 2010). The male dabu was mainly in charge of dealing with the land, livestock and helping other villagers on a temporary or annual basis. Men and women would share many chores, including child care and agricultural tasks. Some men also had their own distinct roles, e.g., being monks or long-distance traders.

In traditional times no one ever had to leave the household he or she was born into. Based in such households, Moso society knew no orphans, widows, widowers, or helpless seniors. Everyone was cared for and felt secure both in terms of psychological and material needs (Shih 2010).

The visiting system
The Moso people have three different systems that regulate their sexual relationships: the visiting system, marriage and cohabitation.

The most studied, analysed and vilified feature19 of the Moso culture is the tisese, the so-called visiting system. Tisese means “walking back and forth”20 and refers to the man walking at night to visit a woman in her household and leaving in the early morning to walk back to his own household21. Only men “visited” and the visit would take place either within the man’s own village or in neighboring villages (Cai 2001). As opposed to marriage, the tisese was non-contractual, non-obligatory and non-exclusive (Shih 2010). The only prerequisite was and is, since it is still widely practiced, a mutual agreement between the man and the woman to allow sexual access to each other. It did not commit them to exclusive and enduring relationships, and it did not involve any ceremony or exchange of gifts.

19 The first Chinese ethnologists to study the Moso culture in the 1960s characterized it as “primitive”, “the early stage of pairing marriage” or a Living Fossil of the Family”. See Shih, 2010.
20 Chinese Han usually call the tisese “visiting marriage”.
21 Amorous encounters could not take place in the house during day time and it was forbidden for the two partners to speak loudly (Cai 2001).
Marriage is called “drinking liquor and eating meal” since the wedding ceremony is marked by a grand feast intended to publicize the establishment of affinal ties (Shih 2010).

Interestingly, the chiefs and their families continued to trace consanguinity through the maternal line, i.e., children were consanguine to their mother (Shih 2010).

Tisese means “walking back and forth” and refers to the man walking at night to visit a woman in her household.

A tisese relationship could be short lived or enduring. A so-called “major” or long-term male partner who visited more regularly and openly his partner’s household could sometimes stay for some days and eat with the family. He could also bring presents but more as a token of affection and she could send – but never visit – presents to his household. It was also not unusual for a man to help his tisese partner’s household during peak agricultural seasons, but it was not required. The man’s contribution to the woman’s household was often greater than her requital to his household which was merely ceremonial or nominal. A tisese relationship could also develop into cooperation between two households, helping each other with agricultural labor or house construction (Cai 2001, Shih 2010).

Nothing prevented either partner to have more than one tisese visitor at the same time and people would be proud of having had a great number of tisese relationships. A tisese relationship could be terminated at any time and by either. It usually happened in a peaceful way since it was customarily understood that either partner was free to terminate the union (Shih 2010).

Social rank was no barrier. In traditional Moso society male members of the chief’s family and other aristocrats could freely visit female members of the lower ranks (commoners and serfs) and their female counterparts were also unrestrained from receiving male lovers of lower ranks. Buddhist monks were also known to practice tisese. The only limit was a sexual taboo prohibiting sexual relations with closely related matrilineal relatives (children of sisters and within at least 3 generations). This taboo was confined to the mother’s line, and children of the same father with different mothers were not restricted by it.

The tisese normally did not involve cohabitation: the two partners worked and had their meals in their respective matrilineal households. In other words, male and female family members remained in their maternal yidu for their entire life.

Marriage among the Moso

The institution of marriage existed side by side with the tisese system. Marriage was not common in traditional Moso society and was mainly practiced by the Chiefs and their families. It is believed to have originated around the 17th century when the succession procedure for the Moso chieftaincy was formalized by the Chinese emperor and eligibility to become a chief was defined by the marital status of the parents (Shih 2010). Marriage became an obligation for the chief’s eldest son and he was allowed to marry a woman from any social stratum (or another ethnic group). Other sons and daughters born to the chief’s official first wife belonged to his family and inherited the same (aristocratic) status as their father as well as land and other property when they left their birth home (the chief’s residence) and set up their own households. Following the patrilineal logic, a younger son could choose to marry or cohabit

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22 Marriage is called “drinking liquor and eating meal” since the wedding ceremony is marked by a grand feast intended to publicize the establishment of affinal ties (Shih 2010).

23 Interestingly, the chiefs and their families continued to trace consanguinity through the maternal line, i.e., children were consanguine to their mother (Shih 2010).
– even with a woman of a lower rank – but the residence pattern would be virilocal and his children would inherit his sipi status (i.e., the transmission of social status was patrilineal). The daughter of a chief could also marry below her rank but her children would belong to her husband’s stratum and not inherit their mother sipi status. The same patrilineal rules applied to the sipi (aristocrats).

People began eventually to consider marriage as a symbol of status backed by imperial authority and a few were registered in the Yongning basin area (Shih 2010). Marriage seems however to have been much more frequent in the mountainous areas in the western periphery of the basin, where people live under highly restrictive geographic conditions in small village clusters separated by deep valleys and steep ridges (Shih 2010). In some of these villages, tisese (or retu as it is locally called) was practiced, but every person was expected to get formally married at a certain point in life. Descent was reckoned along the father’s line but the family group was not hierarchical and it had no authoritative or formalized leading figure in the group. Nor did the group have any economic or political functions. Children born as the consequence of premarital or extramarital relations belonged to the mother. The concept of illegitimacy was absent.

According to Shih (2010), marriage in these villages can be seen as an adaptive measure to the existing topological conditions which make it extremely arduous to entertain retu relationships with partners living in other villages.

Co-habitation
A third traditional modality was co-habitation. This relationship meant that a person would move into his or her partner’s household without going through the formality of having a feast as in the case of a marriage (Cai 2001). Co-habiting partners would spend not only their nights together but also their days; they would work and produce together and share the fruits of their work. Co-habitation could be either uxorilocal (man moves to female partner’s household), virilocal (a woman moves to her male partner’s household) or neolocal (together the couple sets up a new home). In the two first forms, co-habitation was often adopted as a way to compensate for the lack of males/females within a household. In order to co-habit, there was one absolute condition that had to be met: the household that he or she was leaving should be large enough, so it would not bring about a shortage of male or female members.

Children, socialization and education
Tisese and cohabitation do not seem to have had any major demographic consequences. On the contrary, the Moso have had a lower rate of population growth than neighboring ethnic groups. Several factors seem to have been at play: late age at first menstruation (17 years) and at first birth (median 23 years); long birth intervals due inter alia to long lactation periods, and a high rate (16 percent) of childlessness (Shih and Jenike 2002). It should also be mentioned that the Moso took good care of their pregnant women, giving them special food and allowing them to stop work three months before delivery and three months after, so they could rest (Ibid.).

Cultural factors should also be highlighted. Moso girls enjoyed virtually total autonomy over their sexuality and procreativity and were under no obligation to provide sexual service to anyone. They engaged in sexual activity only when they wanted to. Most importantly, they were under no pressure to bear children

24 Retu differed from tisese since retu relationships were hidden to the family and the public (Shih 2010).
25 Reciprocal cross-cousin marriage was widely practiced, since this exchange between two families kept the bond strong (Shih 2010).
26 A lactating mother may also breastfeed her sister’s children if convenient (Shih and Jenike 2002).
for their sexual partner(s)\textsuperscript{27} and neither their brother(s) nor their mother’s brother(s) had a say in their sex-related decisions and activities\textsuperscript{28}.

Two major considerations would however affect a Moso woman’s decision to have children or not. One was if the continuity of the household had not yet been guaranteed by the birth of a daughter\textsuperscript{29} among her sisters in the household. Another consideration was to ensure a balanced gender composition which was a prerequisite for managing the household’s subsistence production. What mattered for the Moso was the number and sex of the entire group of children born within the household and whether having another child would upset this balance and ultimately the harmony of the household. Having an exceeding number of children could force a household to split up which was considered by society as a shame or an indication of failing to live up to the cultural ideal (Shih and Jenike 2002).

Children born to a tisese union belonged to their mother’s household, and many children had different fathers. However, a child was never considered illegitimate. In the household children lived with their mother but had little to do with their biological fathers, even if living in the same village or close by. Children would usually know who they were, but both would behave like non-relatives towards each other and there seemed to be little attachment between the two. However, if the tisese relationship was enduring, the two parties could forge a formal social alliance by celebrating the ritual of child recognition when the child was about one month old. It took place in the mother’s household and the father was not always present, but his household was represented by his sisters and gifts were exchanged, thereby establishing a tie between the two households. It also established a bond between child and father (Shih 2010).

Young children (and senior members) usually received better treatment in terms of food and clothing and no corporal punishment was used. The aim of socialization was realized through repeatedly referring to positive values and examples set by elder members of the household. Most boys would receive some training in Tibetan Buddhism from their mother’s brothers or their grandmother’s brother(s). Some boys were also sent to study in Lhasa (Tibet). Customs, traditional knowledge and skills would be both informally and formally transmitted by the heads of the older generation to the girls and the boys.

Initiation rites were held for girls and boys at around the age of 13. These rites were respectively called “the rite of wearing skirt” and “the rite of wearing pants”. In the course of the ceremony, the youngsters would take off their robe – a unisex garment for children – and put on their new clothes.

\textsuperscript{27} This in contrast to the Han Chinese in the area, where every couple was obliged to bear at least one son and quite often several unwanted daughters before the desired son is born.

\textsuperscript{28} A male member’s interest in the next generation lies with his sisters’ children rather than his own. He is responsible for helping to raise his sister’s children. They, in turn are collectively responsible for providing for him during his old age, as well as for any other members of his generation.

\textsuperscript{29} The first girl in a generation receives some special consideration, since she is the first warranty for the continuity of the hearth (Shih and Jenike 2002).
They would receive gifts and would at the end be declared a member of the Moso and of their household’s *sizi*. After the rite, the girl would be given her own room, thereby acknowledging that she had reached the age to start having visiting partners.

*A daba* would preside over the ceremony and chant verses, teaching the principles of harmony and diligence and giving advices about getting up early and working hard. The ceremony would be the same for the girls as for the boys and the
verses chanted by the daba to them were identical, thereby indicating that men and women were expected to conduct themselves on the basis of the same set of virtues and to ward off the same kind of evils (Shih 2010).

**Matrilineal Notions**

According to Shih (2010), “Moso culture is permeated by a set of notions or beliefs that are key to understanding the social organization in traditional Moso society”. These sets of notions which he calls the Moso matrilineal ideology are:

1. Mother who gives life is essential and irreplaceable whereas father is accidental and replaceable.
2. Relatives connected by blood through their mothers are of one root and are bound to stay together and support each other.
3. The relationship among matrilineal kin is unbreakable and perpetual.
4. As all women are potential mothers, the supreme reverence for mothers is extended to femaleness. From deities to human beings, the female is believed to be superior to the male. Women are considered not only mentally stronger, but also physically more capable, if not always more powerful, than men. And
5. happiness is defined as the ability to live in harmony with matrilineal kin, and “respect the old and take care of the young” (Ullmann 2017). In the Moso household-oriented society, where most people had no other social roles than their kinship ones, and the household was their only basic social affiliation, domestic interpersonal dynamics significantly affected the quality of life for every household member. Upholding and maintaining household harmony was seen as the ultimate meaning of life in this world. (Shih 2000, 2010).

**Productive activities and social roles**

People in traditional Moso society were self-sufficient small-scale farmers. Surplus products from agricultural activities were normally claimed as taxes and tributes by the chief. In order to match the levels of taxation, the Moso had to produce communally, as one family. Agriculture was their full-time livelihood, with hardly any diversification or specialization in crafts or trade. Household members would build their own houses, sometimes in collaboration with others and manufacture their own tools. Trade was in the hands of Tibetan and other ethnic traders with whom the Moso exchanged home made products (preserved pork, dried fish, cloth, etc.) for necessities like salt, tea and sugar. When the local market economy was liberalized in 1922, and a very small rural market emerged in the centre of the Yongning Township with food stores, restaurants, barber shops, tailors, cobbler and blacksmiths, no shops were opened by the Moso (Chia-Ling 2008).

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30 The father only helps in producing a new life. Unlike the mother, the father never has any tangible bond with the child (Shih 2010).

31 There were two forms of taxes: a national tax paid to the Central Government; and a local tax. Both were collected by the chief and could be paid in cash or in kind (Chia-Ling 2008).

32 These craftsmen were all immigrants from other ethnic groups, e.g., Yi, Naxi, etc. (Shih 2010).
Natural resources management

LAND TENURE AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN TRADITIONAL MOSO SOCIETY

Under the Guomindang Government (1911–1949), all land was partitioned among the inhabitants of the Yongning region, and the corresponding title deeds were issued by the Central Government. Three categories of land could be distinguished: public, private and collective land (Cai 2001).

Public land was assigned to the Chieftaincy’s administration and could not be sold. This land was located in the central zone of the Yongning basin and was cultivated under obligation by the local commoners. Its revenue paid the chief’s salary.

Private land was land held by the three social strata. Land held by the aristocratic households was cultivated by serfs. Selling land was only allowed within this stratum. The land held by commoners was divided among the households in plots which could be given away, rented or pawned but not sold. The commoners cultivated the land themselves. If they were unable to pay their taxes, land could be taken away from them by the chief. Serfs could also, but exceptionally, own land. (Cai 2001)

Collective land in the outlying zones was land given by the chief to commoners and used for different purposes.

Agricultural production

Land was cultivated on a subsistence basis using an annual rotation and fallow system. The central part of the Yongning basin is more fertile and more easily irrigated than land in the outer areas, but up to the 1960s the irrigation system was quite underdeveloped, and the agricultural implements rudimentary. Reportedly, there was little difference in agricultural technique between the Yongning basin area and the mountainous areas. Where irrigation was possible, wheat and oats were the main crops, while corn and potatoes were grown on the non-irrigable land in the outlying areas and on the mountain slopes. In gardens around their houses, the Moso grew flax, beans, pumpkins, etc. The only fertilizer used was manure from the stables (Cai 2001, Shih 2010).

- Commoners living outside the central zone instead paid a specified tribute to the chief each year.
- Since there were no latrines, human excrement was not used.
To the Moso in the 1930s and 40s, mules and horses began to be seen not only as means of transport and production, but also commodities in their own right, to the extent that they became symbols of wealth. The Moso also raised buffalo, cows, and from the 1920s, horses and mules. They would also keep chicken and pigs. Pork was an important and much appreciated part of their diet. Preserved in salt, it could keep for a long time and salted pork had multiple uses ranging from offerings at funerals to functioning as a kind of currency (Cai 2001).

As a supplement to their sustenance the Moso would also fish, and in the mountain forests there were both animals and a large variety of plants as well as mushrooms. The forests, however, were under the chief’s administration and the use of forest resources was under his control. The strong animist elements in the Daba religion also provided strict rules that effectively protected a system of holy hills including water and other resource areas. (He Zhongua 2004) However, minor forest products and non-timber forest products played an important part in the Moso domestic economy since they provided material for fabricating tools, implements, for fodder, fuelwood, and firewood (Ogilvie 1996).

**LABOUR DIVISION**

In Moso society tasks in both household maintenance and agricultural production were rarely divided on the basis of gender. There was no culturally prescribed gender preference or prohibition and most kinds of work, including cooking and child care, were shared by both men and women. In instances where sex-based division of labour did exist, labour by men was not more highly valued than labour by women.

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35 To the Moso in the 1930s and 40s, mules and horses began to be seen not only as means of transport and production, but also commodities in their own right, to the extent that they became symbols of wealth.
Young men and women would go and collect firewood in the mountains. The dabu – whether female or male – would tidy the household, sweep, dust off, and tend to the shrines in the sacred chamber. Elder members and children would do lighter household chores while older children would go to the field to collect weeds and leaves for pig feed. When men would come home from their tisese, they would join their sisters in the household chores like fetching water, grinding grains, preparing pig feed, cooking, brewing beer, etc.

In the peak agricultural season, most able-bodied men and women would work in the fields. In the slack season, a gender division of labour was more visible. Some jobs like fetching water, processing grains and taking care of domestic animals were usually carried out by women. It was also women who during the winter months span and wove flax for making clothes for the household members.

Jobs usually carried out by men included logging timber and constructing houses. Long distance trading using mules and horses started around 1920 and within twenty years almost every household was involved. Some of these trading trips could take up to a year. However, the manpower involved was rather inconsiderable and did not alter the basic pattern of household life. The trading was more a sideline of their economy (Shih 2010).

OTHER MALE ROLES

There were two exceptions to this order of things in which women and men had complementary roles and women a prominent status: being a daba and a professional Buddhist monk. As remarked by He Zhonghua (2004), the Moso’s two religious systems establish male supremacy, according a status higher to men by promoting their active worship and involvement in religious practices, whereas women play a spectator and ‘handmaid’ role. According to Cai (2001), daba practitioners have since 1940 always been men. What brought this change about he does not say, except that he quotes the Moso as saying: “Mother controls the wealth; (maternal) uncle controls the ritual” (ibid.).

Monks were privileged members of the Moso society. Living in their matrilineal household, they had the “sacred chamber” at their disposal and did not take part in any of the tasks described above. Since most households included a monk, it also meant that a very large number of adult males did not participate in any kind of productive activity and that women therefore had to sustain a larger share of the agricultural production. At the same time, monks who had studied in Lhasa and been influenced by the Tibetan male-dominant gender system would also challenge the traditional Moso matrilineal ideology by spreading the concept of the subordination of women (Shih 2010).

Due to low quality of soil, a harsh climate in Moso mountain areas and limited access to the area due to lack of roads, the Moso economy never exceeded subsistence levels, and life was far from easy. Ruled by a small feudal elite, people had to regularly work for the chief and his administration. High taxes and tributes had to be paid in kind. According to testimonials gathered by Chia-Ling (2008), food was scarce with only potatoes and corn to be eaten; and there was never enough (ibid.)

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36 They would buy goods from nearby Han Chinese areas and bring them to Tibetan areas where they would exchange them with locally made items (rugs, woolen saddle pads, etc.) to take back and sell in the Han areas (Shih 2010).
CHANGES IN THE MATRIMONIAL STRUCTURE AND GENDER ROLES

The period that started in 1956 with the final demise of the feudal regime has been a tumultuous one in the history of the Moso people, bringing far-fetching changes into their lives and deeply affecting their matrilineal ideology and their livelihoods.

From the introduction of the People’s Commune system to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the Moso experienced the abolition of the feudal social strata system and the assignation of new class labels to each household. Thus “hired hands” and “poor peasants”, which included the former serfs, became nominal masters of the new society and households labeled upper-middle peasant, rich peasants and landlords (the aristocracy) became the target of the leaders of the Cultural Revolution (Shih and Jenike 2002).

The highest authority was now vested in the Communist Party organization and Central Government organs; all property, especially land, was held collectively by the commune and farmers were restricted to keeping their homes and a few animals. All villagers had to eat in “Great Eating Halls” and the household lost its function as a social and economic corporation (Shih and Jenike 2002). Production teams were set up as the basic agricultural collective units, and income from agriculture was distributed to the members of the commune based on “work points”. During that period, the Moso were furthermore exposed to the enforcement of monogamy, to education, military service, promotion of native cadres, and the emergence of new jobs. From a “super stable society” Moso society became a “socially mobile” society opened to the outside world and new ideas (Shih 2010, Chia-Ling 2008).

The end of the Cultural Revolution (1976) opened up for a new era. Government control was relaxed, and Deng Xiaoping (1978–1989) economic reforms encouraged the development of a market economy and a private sector. The economic reform also opened up doors for tourism and a wide array of other social and cultural exchanges with the rest of the world (TV in 1980s; consumer goods from Shanghai and Hong Kong, etc.). The Moso society gradually changed from having a natural economy to having a commodity economy (Chia-Ling 2008, McCarthy 2011) and experiencing migration and new opportunities like tourism.

In the beginning everybody could have their meals for free. But after a while, food had to be rationed and eventually people were starving (Shih and Jenike 2002).
**Changes within the matrilineal household structure**

A major onslaught on the Moso’s matrilineal ideology has been the imposition of monogamy (1974) and the family planning policy (1981).

At the onset of the communist regime, several reforms – in 1958, 1966 and 1971 – attempted to do away with the Moso’s “backward marriage” customs. Successive work teams were sent out to try and persuade people to marry. With little success, since the Moso were violently against marriage which they saw as a Han custom; they also felt that bringing in “strangers” would threaten the harmony of the matrilineal household (Shih 2010). The majority of the couples that were forcefully formed therefore dissolved shortly after the work teams had left (Cai 2001). A fourth reform in 1974 introduced draconic administrative constraints. In order to enforce monogamy, the One Wife–One Husband Campaign instituted, among others, the illegality of *tisesse* and introduced a set of obligations that ultimately forced people to register their relationship. Women, for example, who had several children from different genitors, had to choose and marry one of them. A mother who did not know/reveal who her child’s genitor was would have the food ration for her child suspended. These constraints created social upheaval since those who disobeyed would lose their income of grain and cash in the year-end redistribution (Shih 2010).

According to Cai (2001), no other ethnic group in China underwent as deep a disruption as the Moso. The monogamy reform not only undermined the traditional household but provoked discord and conflicts when female members moved to their partner’s household (virilocal) or received their partner into their household (uxorilocal). In a few cases, partners would set up their own household. However, as soon as the Cultural Revolution started to wane, people immediately reverted to their preferred form of sexual union and household organization and most of the arranged marriages were dissolved.

In 1981, the regulations that suspended annual rations for a child whose genitor was unknown were cancelled; however, having a child out of wedlock was still considered immoral and illicit. In accordance with the Chinese Government’s family planning policy adopted in 1981, the Ninglang District Government introduced two new rules: 1) a yearly fine per illegitimate child unless the genitor took responsibility for the cost of raising a child until the age of 18; 2) each Moso woman had the right to have 3 children but if she had four her household would be fined a yearly amount until the child turned 18.

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38 The Chinese ethnologists who first described the Moso in the 1960s all had an evolutionist perspective and to them the Moso represented a missing link in the grand theory of social evolution promoted by Morgan and Engels. *Tisesse* was seen as being primitive and immoral, something to be corrected or civilized. (Cai 2001).

39 Prior to 1956, Luoshui had only seventeen large extended matrilineal households. As a result of the Cultural Revolution these households repeatedly divided, and by 1976, there were 72 smaller households (Stacey 2009).

40 This one-child policy only applied for urban areas. In the rural areas, it allowed 2 children for the Han peasants and ethnic minorities. Three children were allowed for ethnic minority groups with small populations as the Moso. This policy was changed in 2016 when couples were allowed to have two children.
41 According to Ting et al. survey (2013), the number of children per woman averaged 2.66 in 2008.

42 Based on a survey in the Lugu Lake district in 2011–2012 (Jia-Jia Wu et al. 2013).
EDUCATION, SOCIALIZATION, AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Formal school education is another sinicizing factor that challenges Moso matrilineal culture. School today is compulsory\textsuperscript{43}. Teaching in the lower classes is bi-lingual (Naru and mandarin Chinese) but in the higher classes only Chinese is used and young Moso tend to speak more Chinese than Naru. Since the Moso have no written language, all school materials are in Chinese, reproduce Han values and focus on Han Chinese history and culture, so the children can only learn about Moso culture from their families (Chia-Ling 2008).

Moso children often feel aggravated when their norms are at odds with Han norms, e.g., not having a father while classmates from other ethnic backgrounds do, and when the messages conveyed by text books are clear about Han culture being the only legitimate culture. This message is also replicated in the media, in particular by TV, which is watched daily, and which is the main source of information.

In their increasing interaction with non-Naru speakers (e.g., tourists), the Moso have to use Chinese to describe their own culture. In the process, the original meaning is sometimes lost, or misunderstood. For instance, there is no word in the Moso language for marriage, but other ethnic groups keep referring to the Tisese relationship as a “walking marriage”. As a result, the Moso have started to use the words “marriage”, “monogamous”, “husband” and “wife” to explain the Tisese relationship. In this process, they define a matrilineal relationship in the language and values of a patriarchal system, with the result that this system’s values insidiously become part of their mindset. Some young Moso, have even begun to use their father’s surname as a family name on their ID cards (Chia-Ling 2008).

In traditional Moso society, Daba and Lamaism played an important role in the education and socialization of the Moso. For two decades (1960–1980) all religious activity was forbidden; several temples and monasteries were destroyed, and their land confiscated. After 1980, the practice of major religions, including Tibet Buddhism, was allowed once more; the temples were re-habilitated, and monks have today resumed their activities. It is again a household tradition that at least one son should study Lamaism. Daba, however, was considered as superstition and remained forbidden until it was “rectified”\textsuperscript{44} a decade later. During all these years, Daba rituals were no longer conducted or had to be held in secret; ritual instruments were destroyed and daba priests were no longer able to have apprentices. This endangered Daba and the traditional knowledge associated with it since Daba religion has no scripture but has been passed on orally from one generation to another. Today, many villages no longer have a daba and the old rituals have been forgotten. In more remote mountain villages, however, the practice is still alive, and efforts are currently made to preserve it as a cultural tradition and a tourist attraction.

CHANGES IN THE LIVELIHOOD AND LABOUR DIVISION OF THE MOSO

Land ownership and land use

The Moso have experienced dramatic changes since 1956 with regards to land ownership.

\textsuperscript{43} The 9-year compulsory education was first accomplished in Yunnan in late 2009. For many years, school attendance was erratic, and it was in 2007, when school fees for elementary school and junior high school were first revoked that the situation improved. Annual tuition fees for senior high school and university however still limit access to higher education (Teng 2005, Chia-Ling 2008).

\textsuperscript{44} Rectified is a term used in China, mainly to describe the restoration of status after the end of a political campaign.
First, all the land in the area – including the confiscated holdings of the feudal chief, the aristocrats and the Buddhist institutions – was distributed. This was done on an egalitarian basis but stipulating that “where the inhabitants follow a matrilineal system the distribution of land will occur according to the residence of the men” (Cai 2001). However, it turned out that no Moso men showed the slightest interest in having their own land (ibid.). During the People’s Commune, Moso land was collectivized and farmed collectively. In 1979–1980, the Central Government introduced a new liberal policy known as the “Household responsibility system”. Land was decollectivized and Moso households were provided with land use rights for a 15-year period. Since then successive laws have increased the length of the use term to 30 years, introduced land-use contracts and imposed restrictions in land readjustments.

Today, Moso households hold a lease contract with the state and work the land communally, sharing the produce among the household members. Due to the 1956 land reform whereby land was distributed according to need, there are few variations in property sizes (Ting Ji et al. 2013), but there is a shortage of arable land in Yongning Township (Chia-Ling 2008). All available farm land is in use and is passed down collectively to all matrilineal offsprings. However, individuals are now able to make a claim to the government to separate off their own farmland so they can establish a new household, but this trend, which has been seen in the tourist areas, is not popular with the families as it potentially causes conflicts (Jia-Jai et al. 2013).

Yongning has remained an agricultural township without industry. In 2007, 56 percent of the Moso worked in agriculture (Guohua Liu et al. 2010). However, in some areas around the Lugu Lake where tourism is concentrated, a survey from 2005 shows that there have been changes in land-cover and that compared with 1990, farmland and wetland have decreased, whereas forest, grassland and residential areas have increased. An assessment of the impact of tourism on land cover showed that farmers had given up farming for off-farm jobs within the tourist industry. (Rencai Dong et al. 2010).

The majority of Moso are still largely self-subsistence farmers, but the introduction

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46 A Landesa report from 2011 concludes that the law is far from being effectively implemented.
of rice cultivation in the 1950s has been a major change since it has implied a totally new farming technique. It is now the main crop and covers much larger areas than the traditional crops (corn, wheat, potatoes, highland barley, etc.). The irrigation system for the paddy fields has been highly improved in later years (Cai 2001). Cash crops include fruit trees, which were introduced in the 1950s, but only amount to 4.74 percent of the production in the Yongning area (Guohua Liu. 2010). Animal husbandry – the ancestral means of subsistence – does not seem to have the same importance as before and wild life resources are now depleted (Shih 2010; Jai-Jia et al. 2013).

**Division of labour**

The changes occurred in the Moso society assigned the burden of domestic tasks collectively to the women in the household (grandmother, sisters, and daughters). Women also collaborate in farm labour and all household resources are shared collectively. In the peak farming season, women work in groups of 2 to 30 on their own household fields or help out a neighbour or a relative. Weeding, ploughing (with oxen), planting and watering are all tasks carried out by them. Watering is done by pumps that are only partly mechanized – or by hand.

During the commune period when all the production activities were conducted collectively by the production team, women continued working in the fields. But as many men had become surplus labour because their traditional work as members of caravans or as monks, had been rendered obsolete, a few traditional female farming jobs were taken up almost exclusively by men. During the Great Leap Forward in 1957, men were also sent out to build roads or engaged in the “Great Campaign of Making Steel, Iron, and Copper.” (Shih and Jenike 2002).

During the same period, the Moso learned the technique of rice-growing from the Han. However, they did not adopt the Han’s male-oriented division of labour. Transplanting seedlings, for instance, became a job for both sexes among the Moso, while within the Han community it was mainly done by the women. The logic behind this difference was that Moso did not perceive muscular strength as more valuable than other qualities and did not translate it into male superiority. Nor did the Moso give men more work points than women for the same work as was customary among the Han. The Moso’s point of view was that men may have more strength, but women have more stamina (Shih 2010).

Today, men within the household are generally in charge of constructing houses, trading in the market or helping their tises partners with field work (Ting et al. 2013). Households with more than two sons have resumed the old tradition of giving at least one to be a lama (Kelkar and Tshering 2004). The general overall impression is that women work more and harder than men and that they put fewer demands on men when it comes to work.

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47 The traditional Moso chief prohibited the cultivation of rice which was seen as a Han culture (Cai 2001).
48 The production of pigs has increased in the Lake Lugu district as a result of tourism (Guohua Liu. 2010).
49 In 1956, monks accounted for between a quarter and a third of the adult male population.
Married Moso males are also less likely to be seen working in the fields than married Han males; they are also seen less than married Moso females (Jia-Jia Wu et al. 2013). Due to tourism, the situation in the Lake Lugu area differs somewhat (see below).

THE MOSO AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In 1979–1980, in connection with the introduction of “Household responsibility system”, forest land also reverted to village control, and households were allocated forest access in proportion to family size (FAO n.d.). However, mismanagement during 1956–1979 when the traditional norms in forest management practiced during the feudal period disappeared (He Zhonghua 2004) and not least the long continued illegal logging had led to massive deforestation, and in 1986, the forests were once more taken over by the state and a logging ban instituted (FAO n.d.). Following this, efforts in afforestation have been made.

The Moso make an extensive use of minor forest and non timber products, and their consumption of charcoal and firewood for cooking and heating is very high. Forests are furthermore used to gather medicinal herbs, mushrooms, and pine needles as well as hunting small animals and birds (FAO n.d.). Moso women are directly concerned by deforestation problems since they are the ones to collect firewood and other forest products. Yet, and although they have traditionally made decisions about resource use within their households, their position of power has weakened, particularly when they deal with institutions and authorities.
where patriarchal values prevail (Kelkar and Tshering 2004). This is the case in villages where tourism is being developed: women’s knowledge and experience within agroforestry is not acknowledged and when ‘technology’ is introduced only men receive training. The result is that men do not use the training and women continue to do the work! On the other hand, in more traditional villages, women still have a say and they often play the greater role in voluntary afforestation and participate in fighting forest fires (He Zhonghua 2004).

Another environmental concern of Moso women is the pollution of Lake Lugu (Morais et al., 2005). The Lake is renowned for the quality of its waters but is now threatened by overcrowding, misusages by entrepreneurs and trash left by tourists (Dong 2004). None of the main tourist areas around the lake have viable sewage or septic systems and the lake’s fishery resources have been depleted (Jingzhu and Hongyu 2010).

Both local Moso people and researchers (e.g., Yan Yan et al., 2010; Jingzhu and Hongyu 2010) agree that traditional religious beliefs and the matrilineal life style have played and could play an important role in natural resources management and environmental protection. However, the problems that are faced today will also need totally new solutions (Yan Yan et al., 2010).

**FROM A NATURAL ECONOMY TO A COMMODITY ECONOMY**

With the exception of the tourist sites around Lake Lugu, the Moso economy at the turn of the 21st century was still very much a natural economy. The Moso planted more food crops than cash crops and bartering for goods was still common (Chia-Ling 2008). The emerging businesses within tourism development offered few employment possibilities and most positions were occupied by non-Moso, or even outsiders.

However, as they increasingly became confronted with China’s burgeoning market economy, new consumer goods and the need to pay cash for health care service, school incidentals and from 2003, annual taxes, Moso people were compelled to interact with mainstream values and find new livelihoods.

**Migration**

The tax reform was designed to accelerate the industrialization of China by drawing workers into urban areas. In Yongning, the migration of “Nongmingong” (or “peasant-worker”) which had started in the mid-80s, increased dramatically as it also coincided with the construction of roads in the region (Ullmann 2017). More than 4 000 men and women are reported to have left Yongning Township between 2002 and 2004 (Chia-

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50 See Web page of Lake Lugu Mosuo Cultural Development Association 2018 at www.mosuoproject.org

51 In 2006, the New Rural Cooperative Medical System (NRCMS) was introduced in an attempt to make medical care affordable in the rural areas (Chia-Ling 2008).

52 The 2003 tax and fee reform meant that the Moso no longer had to pay fees, but the new tax was twice as high as the old one (Chia-Ling 2008).
Ling 2008). Although the collection of taxes and fees in rural areas was discontinued, migration continues, involving mainly young people (Ullmann 2017). Many of them remain in the province, but others may go as far as Shanghai and Beijing. Their motives for migrating include supporting their family economically; a desire to see the world and the hope to fulfill an education or a career. The significant number of Moso women who migrate show that they are less averse to risk than women from other ethnic groups. Women and men work in many different sectors, including tourism (e.g., ethnic theme parks)(ibid.). Men have also worked on salt farms on the coast or served as guards for companies in other provinces. Migration affects the gender and generational balance within Moso matrilineal households and contributes to the sinification of Moso society since the migrants who return to their home village bring with them mainstream (patriarchal) values (Chia–Ling 2008).

On the other hand, migration has also benefitted Moso society through the remittances people receive from their

MORE THAN 4 000 MEN AND WOMEN ARE REPORTED TO HAVE LEFT YONGNING TOWNSHIP BETWEEN 2002 AND 2004
emigrated family members and which they use to renovate their houses and purchase modern commodities (cell phone, TV sets, motorbikes, etc.).

Tourism

Tourism took off in the late 1980s, when the Chinese government started promoting the development of ethnic tourism (Milan 2012). Because of its scenic landscape and its prominent place in Moso history and culture, the Lake Lugu district was chosen to be developed. It was considered at the time a poor and underdeveloped multi-ethnic rural community of around 14 000 inhabitants (Walsh 2005, Jingzhu Zhao and Hongyu Jia 2010). Within a few years, the area was transformed – roads were rehabilitated, electricity introduced and cultural centers as well as guest houses and eventually three-star hotels were built. Already in 1995, it had become a popular destination with 82 600 visitors per year, a number that in 2008 had increased to 480 000.

This experience of ethnic tourism has all along been very much shaped by the state and the Lijiang Lugu Lake Provincial Tourism Zone Management Committee. This institution has to a large extent taken over the development for the area from the local committees who originally organized the various tourist activities and managed the proceeds with the stated objective of avoiding competition and conflicts between the implicated households. Today, however, this situation is under threat as outsiders have come in and opened up bars, shops, teahouses, etc., in premises they rent from local households (Li Yang 2013).

The impacts of tourism on the Lake Lugu communities are both positive and negative. Most Moso people and researchers agree that tourism has lifted the local Moso households out of poverty. It seems, however, that it has affected the Moso people’s tisese relationships and matrilineal household structures. The frequency of engaging in marital or cohabiting unions is higher among Moso living in tourist-impacted areas than among those living in farming areas (Mattison 2010) and, neo-local couples – i.e. couples who have broken out of their respective households to set up their own – account today for more than 30 percent of all households (Jia Jia Wu et al., 2013). This can be seen as a direct effect of tourism since the purpose for gaining access to their own share of their maternal household land – by agreement or by making claim to the government – has been to build a tourist hotel or start a non-farming business (ibid).

The tourist industry has provided various livelihood opportunities for Moso women who work as hosts, boat rowers, snack vendors, have come in and opened up bars, shops, teahouses, etc., in premises they rent from local households (Li Yang 2013).

53 Lugu Lake became a provincial natural protected area in 1988.

54 The new Lugu airport is expecting an annual passenger throughput in 2020 of approximately 485 000 persons.

55 The entire Lige village, e.g., was moved 60 m. away from the lake shore in order to give room to tourist facilities (Milan 2012).

56 Teams composed by one member from each household were organized to deliver tourist activities and the proceeds are shared equally between the households. The committee also allotted some of the overall income from tourism to support farmers (Guohua Liu, 2010).

57 Some outsiders have also married into Moso families and provided them with a startup capital. This has become for some residents a method to join in tourism development (Walsh 2005).
Moso women worry also about the misrepresentation of their culture.

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etc. (Kelkar and Tshering 2004) and produce handicraft (weaving) for sale. A survey shows that Moso women appreciate the fact that they no longer need to do heavy agricultural work (Duarte et al., 2005). On the other hand, they are also unhappy with the value changes they experience (crime, drinking and gambling) and the fact that Moso girls fall in love with outsiders, something that threatens family harmony (Duarte et al., 2006).

Moso women worry also about the misrepresentation of their culture (Ibid). The image tourist brochures and the media give of the Lake Lugu area is not only of an exotic place but of a “kingdom of women” and a land of sexually free and promiscuous young girls. Moso girls and women are being used and misused to “sell” Lake Lugu and Moso culture. Performing a distorted Moso identity in various entertainment activities has become an important component of young Moso women’s lives.

Tourism has also affected the gender-equitable balance of power that characterized traditional Moso society. Moso men have traditionally been responsible for dealing with the household’s “external affairs” and moving within the public sphere. Tourism has for them been an opportunity to develop this role but on a much larger scale and responsibility than before since it includes dealing with both the political, social and economic aspects of tourism. At present, men represent their household when soliciting loans, negotiating with local authorities, making agreements with suppliers, etc. This has given them a new status and a leading role within the household. In contrast, the women see their role as dabu and important members of a household reduced to “housekeepers”, working as receptionists, cooks and cleaners in their own guesthouses. Although women may still be part of the decision-making processes within the household, it is the men who carry them out (He Zhonghua 2003). There is thus a marked shift and the former gender equitable balance of power seems to be tilting in favor of men.

### MOSO SOCIETY TODAY

There are remarkably few references to Moso women organizing themselves, participating in local politics, or having a leadership position. At the same time, Moso society is often being called the “kingdom of women”, a place where “women rule”, etc.

This apparent contradiction is based on the misconception that traditional Moso society was a matriarchy. While Moso women had a prominent position, they never dominated the Moso men; the “dabu” – very often a woman – did not have any privileges but strived with all the other male and female members of her household for an equitable gender and generational balance so that harmony could be upheld. By the same token, men did not dominate women, did not control her sexual and reproductive rights, and until the advent of the Communist regime their traditional role within the public sphere – economically as well as politically – was very limited or non-existent.

After 1956 things changed and both Moso women and Moso men became publicly involved. For many women, this involvement did not last. It is for instance reported that in the 1950s and 1960s, 40 percent of the political leaders of the collectives were Moso women but in 2001 there were less than 10 percent women working for the local government or participating in public affairs (Luo 2002 cited in Chia-Ling 2008). When tourism to the region began in the early 1990s, Moso women became members of some of the local committees, but already a few years later this was no longer the case (Chia-Ling 2008). At the regional or township level, women are usually only appointed to work on women’s issues. In the early 2000s, the head of the Women’s department in Yongning was a Moso woman (Chia-Ling 2008)\(^58\).

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\(^{58}\) It should be added that a few Moso women have achieved national fame as for instance Yang Erche Namu, a well-known singer and writer.
As regards men, a number of Moso were trained as cadres, and eventually became village head of their village. Today, Moso men may also be appointed as public servants—but only if they are married (Chia-Ling 2008, Michaud 2009). In Yongning, the mayor and the municipal secretary were both Moso in the early 2000s (Chia-Ling 2008).

The fact that most Moso officials are men is seen by many women as a division of labour as they feel men are better suited to represent them and act on their behalf. Chia-Ling (2008) quotes a 35-year-old Moso woman for saying that “men are always undertaking important matters and big business, because men are supposed to do so”.
In the course of the past 60 years, Moso society has been subjected to dramatic changes in their matrilineal way of living and in their matrifocal livelihoods and culture. However, it is probably the changes that have taken place within the last two decades that have affected the Moso the most, even if these changes have been introduced without the coercion and brutality of the past.

Three main factors have been at play: 1) the pervasive contact with main Chinese Han culture, including language, values and norms through school education, media and migration; 2) the integration into a monetized and growing market economy; and 3) tourism.

Migration and tourism are probably the most problematic issues. Migration because it involves the young generation. In other words, those who are supposed to ensure the continuity of matrilineal households and the matrifocal way of life. Even if they continue to consider the Moso area as “home” and return often for visits (Ullmann 2017), they each time bring back a new outlook, new aspirations and thereby contribute to the sinification of their families and neighbors.

Tourism has – besides the effects already mentioned – created socio-economic disparities and tensions not only within households and other ethnic groups living in the tourist area but within Moso communities who are not on the tourist trail (Walsh 2005). Although still restricted to the Lake Lugu area, tourism has also had spin off effects in Yongning Township and the ever-expanding tourist industry is bound to look for and find other interesting destinations within the Moso area.

However, culture is resilient as the history of the Moso proves. Tisese is still very much part of the Moso’s lives and is even being adopted by the Pumi, an ethnic group living in the Lake area (Stacey 2009). Many traditions that had waned are now being revived, both for tourism purposes but also as the result of more locally based concerns regarding the survival of Moso culture and language. The greatest concern is of course that many of the valuable traditions that have characterized Moso culture, notably their respect of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, their equitable gender balance at home and at work, and their quest for harmony may surrender to the invasive patriarchal values.

See, e.g., the Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association at http://www.mosuoproject.org
INTERNATIONAL WORK GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS (IWGIA)

The IWGIA is a global human rights organization dedicated to promoting, protecting and defending indigenous peoples’ rights.

Since 1968, IWGIA has cooperated with indigenous peoples’ organizations and international institutions to promote recognition and implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples. IWGIA works to empower indigenous peoples through documentation, capacity development and advocacy at a local, regional and international level.

IWGIA was founded in 1968 by anthropologists alarmed about the ongoing genocide of indigenous peoples taking place in the Amazon. The aim was to establish a network of researchers and human right activists to document the situation of indigenous peoples and advocate for an improvement of their rights. Today indigenous peoples from all over the world are involved in IWGIA’s global network. Still, the key drivers for change in our work are documentation, empowerment and advocacy.
A MATRILINEAL SOCIETY IN TRANSITION: THE MOSO PEOPLE IN YUNNAN

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For the Shipibo-Conibo, their territory is the non nete, or the space in which they live and which they perceived as their world.

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TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT IN INDIGENOUS MATRIFOCAL SOCIETIES

4. Shipibo-Conibo

PERU

The Shipibo-Conibo matrifocal system and their territorial management system

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THE SHIPIBO-CONIBO MATRIFOCAL SYSTEM AND THEIR TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

## Glossary

| **Ainbo** | Women |
| **Benbo** | Men |
| **Cahuispo** | Restingas, highlands that are not submerged through normal flooding |
| **Cochas** | Lakes |
| **Eseya** | A person able to implement real and practical coexistence |
| **Huá** | Farmed land |
| **Huená náhue** | Fallow land |
| **Jacona jati** | Living well |
| **Jakon Nete** | World of the sun and the moon |
| **Jene Nete** | World of water |
| **Jonibo** | People (self-identifying name) |
| **Kené** | Geometric design |
| **Lán** | Cocha, lake |
| **Mai** | (Space on) the land |
| **Míi** | Forest or wild world |
| **Mingas** | Community work |
| **Nai** | (Space of the) sky |
| **Niwe** | (Space of the) air |
| **Non nete** | The land and the different spaces that make up the world |
| **Panshin Nete** | World of evil spirits |
| **Ramáima náhue** | A plot that is no longer productive |
| **Shinanya** | Good men and women |
| **Tashbá** | Tahuampa, low wet zone that floods annually |
| **Tashbá mai** | Lowlands, flood plains |
| **Tashba jema** | Floodable communities or lowlands |
| **Tipishca** | Channels |
| **Tseweta iki** | Scalp tearing ritual |
This study analyses the situation of the Shipibo-Conibo people in the Ucayali region, focusing on the matrifocal nature of their relationship to territorial management. The team conducted a bibliographic review of the Shipibo-Conibo people and identified three representative communities to visit as well as organizations and community members and leaders. The native communities chosen were:

**NATIVE COMMUNITY OF PAOYHAN**

In Padre Márquez district, Ucayali province, Loreto department, on the border with Ucayali department. Paoyhan community is eight hours by river from Pucallpa and has a population of approximately 900 inhabitants.

**NATIVE COMMUNITY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

In Yarinacocha district, Coronel Portillo province, Ucayali department. One hour from Pucallpa by river or an hour and a half by road. It was founded more than 100 years ago and registered as a community in 1975, with an area of 1 413 ha. The community is known for its pottery production. It has an estimated population of more than 4 000 inhabitants.

**NATIVE COMMUNITY OF NUEVO SAN JUAN KM 13 500**

In Yarinacocha district, Ucayali department, between Km points 13 and 14 on the Federico Basadre highway, linking it to Pucallpa. It was founded in 1984 by Shipibo families from distant native communities seeking a better life and greater job and educational prospects than their rural life could offer them. The community is still not registered. There are currently some 180 families living there.

For the research, a semistructured interview guide was produced. This gave us information on the families and the current gender roles, their household economy, territory, food supply and their perception of problems and possible solutions.

Eighteen women were interviewed: eight from Paoyhan community, five from San Francisco and five from Nuevo San Juan. In addition, a leader from Santa Clara de Uchunya community was interviewed, and female leaders from the Ucayali Indigenous Women’s Organization (ORDEMI).

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1 It was not possible to visit this community due to the current danger — weeks prior to our arrival, six community members were murdered following the invasion of their territory by a company.
THE SHIPIBO-CONIBO TERRITORY

The ancestral land of the Shipibo-Conibo people is centred around the alluvial plain of the Ucayali River. Its name arises from the confluence of three related but originally distinct ethnic units: the konibo or “eels” (Upper Ucayali), the shipibo or “tamarin monkeys” (Middle Ucayali) and the shetebo or “turkey vultures” (Lower Ucayali). Today, the Shipibo-Conibo live largely along the Ucayali and its tributaries upstream and downstream from Pucallpa, in the regions of Ucayali (Coronel Portillo province), Loreto (Ucayali province) and Huánuco (Puerto Inca province). They share this extensive territory with other indigenous peoples (Cocama, Cocamilla, Asháninka or Piro) and mestizos (population originally from San Martín, the mountains or coast, Brazil etc.). The town of Pucallpa lies at the heart of this territory.

The area’s climate is humid and tropical, with generally constant temperatures (average annual 26°C) and high annual rainfall (average of 2 000 mm).

Situated between the foothills of the Andes and the Amazonian plain, it is a region of largely lowland tropical rainforest (0 to 500 m.a.s.l.) with a highly diversified range of forest species and great biodiversity. It is one of the largest timber-producing areas in Peru and has the highest rate of deforestation in the country. Significant hydrocarbon concessions are also to be found in this area.

The Ucayali is a meandering river. Over the years, these twists and turns have changed and developed into new water courses. When the meanders become cut off, they leave behind them a whole set of lakes (cochas) and channels (tipishca), flood forests and marshes.

The Ucayali is also a river that regularly bursts its banks, this flooding largely determining the way in which the territory is used. While the greatest floods – approximately every seven years – can destroy houses and crops, annual flooding with less volume of water tends to have a positive effect because the alluvial soil deposited along the banks when the water recedes make them ideal for seasonal cultivation.

The indigenous populations have been able to adapt to these land features (floodable or not floodable) and have a system of moving their settlements in case of flooding or drought. Some communities, known as maná jeman, are located far from the reach of the largest floods while communities close to the river are known as tashbá máín mea jéma. In recent decades, settlers interested in the non-floodable lands, which are suitable for livestock

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3 Members of this extended ethnic unit generally consider themselves to be Shipibo, and the language they speak is known in scientific literature as Shipibo-Konibo (or Shipibo-Conibo). The Shipibo-Conibo self identify as “jonibo” (“people”).

4 The first archaeological indications of the Pano linguistic group date back some 2 000 years.

4 The following section is based on the 2002 Ministry of Health report.
rearing, have been taking over the Shipibo-Conibo highlands and displacing many of the communities to the lower sectors.

For the Shipibo-Conibo, their territory is more than just a given number of hectares: it is their *non nete*, or the space in which they live and which they perceive as their world. “They make no distinction between what non indigenous culture considers real and unreal, because in their culture everything exists, and everything is life. The *non nete* is not simply an area of land but different spaces that make up their world: water (*jene*), land (*Mai*), air (*Niwe*) and sky (*Nai*). The people’s world vision for their life space is cyclical and related to ‘living well’. Moreover, it is binding, given that it

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**SOME INDIVIDUALS ARE RECOGNISED TO HAVE THE CAPACITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE SPIRITS, TRAVELLING TO OTHER WORLDS AND BEING ABLE TO CURE**

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The ancestral land of the Shipibo-Conibo people is centred around the alluvial plain of the Ucayali River.

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relates to plants, birds, animals, stars, spiritual beings, i.e. everything that exists and is linked with their life” (CILA 2012).

THE SHIPIBO-CONIBO

The Shipibo-Conibo belong to the Pano linguistic family\(^5\). With a population of approximately 35,000, they are one of the most numerous ethnic groups in the Peruvian Amazon.

While they share numerous linguistic and cultural features with other Pano peoples, they are clearly differentiated from them in terms of their kinship system and social organization.

Traditionally, the Shipibo-Conibo were semi-nomadic and grouped into clans. They would regularly move around the alluvial plains of the Ucayali in small groups, living an isolated life in large huts comprising various related families (Morin 1996).

Different extractive booms in the Amazon have seriously affected the Shipibo-Conibo. There was a huge upsurge in demand for zarzaparrilla (Smilax officinarum) around 1850, facilitated by the start of steamboats, and this then moved on to the rubber boom (Hevea brasiliensis), which caused havoc among the whole indigenous population given that it was based on slavery. Following the decline in the price of rubber at the start of the 20\(^{th}\) century, timber became the most coveted material and so the indigenous people thus became the victims of forced labour once more.

From the 1930s on, Protestant missionaries began to replace the Catholic missions, who were abandoning the Amazonian indigenous peoples in favour of the new mestizo settlers who were beginning to move into the region. Tax exemptions, nascent oil exploitation and the construction of the Lima–Pucallpa highway meant that Pucallpa was a town in constant expansion. Between 1940 and 1950, its population grew from 1,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. Faced with this invasion of migrants, the Shipibo-Conibo retreated to more remote lands, for which they held no property title and where they were consequently at the mercy of the deceitfulness of the new settlers. At the start of the 1950s, The Government assigned linguistic-faith based organisations with the responsibility of teaching indigenous peoples how to read and write. In practice, this actually meant that they became indigenous peoples’ guardians. When schools were established, this required the permanent regrouping and sedentarisation of the Shipibo-Conibo people along the banks of the Ucayali. In addition, the generalised form of writing that was taught contributed to wiping out the different dialects of the Shipibo and the Conibo, the “Shipibo ethnolinguistic group” being considered a new category, and thus a cultural-political entity based on a common language (d’Ans 1982:205).

In 1974, the Law on Native Communities and Agricultural and Livestock Promotion in the Forest and Cloud Forest Regions (DL 20653) introduced a new political-administrative structure with the concept of Native Communities and, so far, some 77 Shipibo-Conibo communities have thus been titled in the Ucayali region.

Most of these communities are now settled along the Ucayali River itself. Others are settled in interfluvial zones along the lower courses of its tributaries. Each one has an average of 170 inhabitants although there are 23 communities with more than 300 people and, in contrast, 12 with no more than 50 inhabitants. Communities also vary in size (the average being 4,500 ha), their ecological systems and the presence or not of public services and institutions. Huts have been replaced by smaller houses grouped into hamlets which are generally organized into neighbourhoods, in the spaces indicated by the authorities and near to community

\(^5\) The first archaeological indications of the Pano linguistic group date back some 2000 years.
institutions (school, church, etc.). The houses tend to form a home for one nuclear family.

The mortality rate has been gradually declining since the 1950s, due to vaccination policies and medical assistance and the Shipibo-Conibo population has increased considerably. The Shipibo-Conibo territories are characterised by a young population with a generally very high fertility rate (9.6 children per woman in 1993) but also a high infant mortality rate⁶, and rates of poverty and extreme poverty that result in chronic malnutrition among 29.9 percent of children under the age of five (INEI 2010).

The Shipibo-Conibo are known for their great mobility and for their capacity to establish in urban areas. In the 1990s, they began to migrate from the communities to Pucallpa town, with human settlements being established in Yarinacocha district, albeit with strong links to their communities of origin. Lima department is also home to a Shipibo-Conibo population, Cantagallo being the most well-known and numerous Amazonian indigenous settlement in Metropolitan Lima, located in Rímac district.

The Shipibo-Conibo spiritual world continues to be of particular importance to this people. Like their Amazonian counterparts, albeit more strongly than other Pano peoples, the Shipibo-Conibo have managed to preserve shamanism despite pressure from the missionaries, who demonised the shamans.

The Shipibo-Conibo have a rich and complex world vision that reflects their environment in myths and rituals based on the belief that the powerful spirits of plants and animals live in “our world” (Non Nete)—the space inhabited by humankind and other living beings—and have the same needs as us because they are equal to us. It is in this space that the spirit of ayahuasca and other master plants (Rao) are found and which the shamans use in their rituals to communicate with the other dimensions⁷, to have dreams, thoughts and to cure. Some individuals are recognised to have the capacity to communicate with the spirits (generally from birth), along with that of travelling to other worlds and being able to cure. In recent years, there has been greater interest in the shamanic practices of the Shipibo-Conibo and the use of ayahuasca treatments, including a growing number of foreigners traveling to the Ucayali.

The rituals of puberty have always occupied an important place in Shipibo-Conibo social life and various researchers indicate that, being almost exclusively female practices, they are interpreted in relation to matrilocality and a preference for girls (Morin 1973).

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⁶ Día Encinas and Meza Arquiñigo 2002. The demographic dependency ratio is 101 dependents for every 100 individuals of productive age (Ibid).

⁷ There are four spaces in the Shipibo-Conibo world vision: Jene Nete (world of water), Non Nete, Panshin Nete (the world of evil spirits) and Jakon Nete (the world of the sea and the moon) (CILA 2012).
The Shipibo-Conibo people are distinguished from other Pano peoples by their family structure. Residency is based on matrilocal or uxorilocal (Morin 1998) which means that, when a man marries, he moves to live with his wife’s family, and has to work for a time for his in-laws. After the birth of their first child, the new couple are permitted to build their own home, close to that of his in-laws. Births of girls are valued more highly than boys because this is how you obtain more sons-in-law to meet the needs of elderly parents. There is also an established ban on marrying cognatic relatives, in particular cousins, and the incest group extends to all those descendants from an individual seven generations back. It is not, however, a matrilineal society – there are no maternal lineages or matrilineal clans (Bodley 2011) that would inter alia define the system of inheritance – but rather a society in which “women who are closely linked – mothers, daughters and sisters – form highly important nuclear groups and are de facto dominant in society” (ibid).

Such a system, characterised by the importance of women in social organization and, in particular, in residency, is termed matrifocal. In some cases, matrifocality is associated with single-parent families, where the men are absent or only intermittently present and the women take most of the responsibility for bringing up the children and their economic maintenance. Matrifocality can, however, also exist in cases where the men live most of the time with the family and where the responsibilities and decision-making are shared between men and women.
following culturally specific systems of gender relations. There is complementarity but this may be more or less symmetrical and balanced.

The traditional social life of the Shipibo-Conibo people is set within a context of matrifocality and complementarity and has the following particular features:

1) Traditionally, marriage was decided by parents and, if they were young, both the boy and the girl would have to submit to their parents’ decision. The girl’s parents would seek a future husband within genealogically and geographically remote families (Ministry of Health 2002).

2) The rule of matrilocality not only required the man to come and live in the house of his parents-in-law but also to show respect and cooperation with them during a period of intense work known as the “bride service”. In addition, the man would be required to provide everything his wife needs for her kitchen. All the cooking utensils would be made of wood, the appropriate wood being chosen for each one (CILA 2012).

3) Women would frequently have their first baby shortly after menarche, around the age of 15. According to the traditional Amazonian practice of the couvade, the man was considered ritually responsible for the well-being and health of his wife and the baby throughout the pregnancy and in the first few months after giving birth. During this period, the father would have to comply with certain ritual restrictions in order to prevent the mother or child from becoming ill (Tournon, 2002).

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11 Researchers believe that Shipibo women would have some decision-making capacity with regard to marriages agreed between their parents (or grandparents) and the parents (or grandparents) of the man (Valenzuela and Valera 2005: 81). This was also the case with men, who might want to meet a woman they had not chosen themselves.

12 For example: the father of a newborn must not go into the forest where these trees grow and must remain in his house, respecting a kind of “confinement” to prevent his child from falling ill (Tournon, 2002).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family composition</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAO1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with spouse and is bringing up two children of a daughter who has gone to Lima to study.</td>
<td>3 girls and 2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with spouse in her mother’s house (father no longer alive) with three sons.</td>
<td>2 girls and 3 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Extended family: Single mother lives with her parents and daughters aged 14, 5 and 6 months.</td>
<td>3 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with spouse, five children and a grandson from the second daughter.</td>
<td>3 girls and 3 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Nuclear family: Lives with her spouse, who is a teacher and six-year-old son. Other children have migrated to Pucallpa and Lima.</td>
<td>4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with her 58-year-old spouse who is a carpenter and is bringing up her grandchildren.</td>
<td>2 girls and 2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with her grandmother, mother, father, sisters and nieces/nephews.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Nuclear family: Lives with her spouse and children.</td>
<td>2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFRA1</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with two children and three grandchildren. Bringing up a grandson as her own.</td>
<td>4 girls and 2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFRA2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with her son and two granddaughters from another son.</td>
<td>3 girls and 4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with her husband, 5 children live in San Francisco and one has migrated to Lima.</td>
<td>3 girls and 3 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with her mother, her eldest daughter and younger children and looks after two grandchildren from two daughters who are working and studying.</td>
<td>4 girls and 3 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with her spouse and four children with their partners and children.</td>
<td>2 girls and 4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Nuclear and mixed family: Is married to a mestizo and they live with their four youngest children.</td>
<td>4 girls and 2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Nuclear family: Lives with her children who are not yet of adult age and her spouse.</td>
<td>2 girls and 2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Nuclear family: Lives with her spouse and 4 youngest children.</td>
<td>4 girls and 2 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Nuclear family: Lives alone with her spouse.</td>
<td>2 girls and 4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Extended family: Lives with her youngest son and two grandchildren. With her first spouse a year. Her second spouse died.</td>
<td>5 boys and 1 daughter died</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ill. These restrictions also applied to young people under the age of 18 (Tournon 2002).

4) The relationship between husband and wife was mediated by the good understanding that the former had to maintain with his mother-in-law, sisters-in-law and other in-laws, always demonstrating his capacity to be a good son-in-law, spouse and father by means of highly ritualised rules aimed at avoiding any friction with them. If, after a period of coexistence that could range from a few months to a few years, the parents-in-law considered the young man to be insufficiently hard-working, they could reject him, and he would have to leave (Morin 1998; Tournon 2002; Tierra Nuova 2011). Such separation would not form a serious problem for the Shipibo-Conibo family as the woman would not have to leave the family or the home; moreover, she would retain all her children, both boys and girls. It was common for the woman to take up residence with another man shortly after the separation.

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION MECHANISMS

The socialisation of children focuses on preparing girls and boys to take on complementary and gender-differentiated social roles in the future. They learn to imitate their mother or father from an early age. They are treated in a relatively lax way and tend to have access to almost all their parents’ spheres of existence.

The aim is that their children should become shinanya (good men and women), or better still eseya (people capable of coexisting well). The grandparents are considered as shinanya and eseya. For this reason, they are responsible for transmitting knowledge to their grandchildren. They get them up very early each morning to educate them in the Shipibo-Conibo principles of “living well” (jacona jati). They talk to them about their past and their ancestors (Terra Nuova 2011).

The whole family is involved in training a girl or boy as eseya although their social and environmental background is very important, as are the plant-based treatments they are administered. If they do not manage to be eseya, the fault is not theirs. The responsibility lies with their elders, with their grandmothers, grandfathers, their mother and father (CILA 2012). Laziness is considered the worst defect among the Shipibo-Conibo and associated with a poor upbringing. A lazy person is not desirable as a partner and has difficulty in finding a spouse. A person who “lives well” is a man or woman capable of producing whatever is necessary for the couple to live, complementing each other’s services and activities, and is someone who is generous in sharing their produce (Terra Nuova 2011).

13 This also forms a significant difference from other groups in which the children are considered as being part of the spouse’s family and the woman can lose her children (or at least some of them) (Carpo 2006).
From six years of age, children’s play activities begin to contribute more specifically to supporting the family. In addition to looking after their younger brothers and sisters, the girls help their mother in the domestic and handicraft tasks. They learn to weave, embroider and produce pottery, reproducing the great variety of forms and designs that are passed down from mother to daughter (Terra Nuova 2011). Likewise, the boys learn how to look after the land, to hunt and to fish from their father, and the secret rituals of becoming a good hunter are passed down to them. They are allocated harder tasks, for example, carrying heavy objects, helping in construction etc. At the age of 13, or after puberty, girls and boys are now adolescents and sufficiently prepared to undertake the activities of an adult person (Ministry of Health 2002).

**TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT: PRODUCTIVE WORK AND SOCIAL ROLES**

The indigenous territory covers a specific area and is collectively owned. The lands are used both by the a family and at a collective level and two systems of labour are recognised in the community: a) family: when a community member works individually with their family; and b) communal: when community members participate in collective work for the common good (*minga*). In other words: communal fields, grasslands, hunting, fishing, timber extraction, reforestation, path cleaning, building construction and other communal uses (National Superintendence of Public Registries – SUNARP Guía General para Comunidades Nativas 2014).

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14 In other words: communal fields, grasslands, hunting, fishing, timber extraction, reforestation, path cleaning, building construction and other communal uses (National Superintendence of Public Registries – SUNARP Guía General para Comunidades Nativas 2014).
women – regardless of their civil status – have the right to access land simply by virtue of the fact that they belong to the Shipibo-Conibo people. Community members have the right to participate in the natural resources necessary to meet their family’s needs, preserving the environment for present and future generations. Women’s rights to access land are not limited to their community of origin. A Shipibo-Conibo woman who goes to live in a different community has the right to access a plot just like any other community member.

The Shipibo-Conibo have based their economy around the diversity of aquatic, wildlife or forest resources available to them and not on intensive agricultural farming.

They carry out their subsistence activities within four spaces: the home, the farm, the countryside and the river. Traditionally, productive and domestic tasks are culturally assigned according to gender and age. While most domestic tasks are the responsibility of the woman, there is greater complementarity in the activities undertaken outside of the home but still within the family sphere.

The home is the women’s domain and where they undertake some of their tasks. These tasks are multiple, ongoing and may involve great physical strength such as fetching water and firewood over some distance. Women have domestic tasks (such as washing, cooking, sweeping, mending the clothes, childcare, etc.) and it is within the house that they produce different handicrafts both for family use and for the market. These activities are shared within the domestic units of related women (mother, sisters, cousins) but do not involve the men (Ministry of Health 2002).

In the lowland communities, women have family vegetable plots around their houses in which they grow a wide variety of plants.

15 Ibid.
for different uses: traditional medicine, food and handicrafts (Tournon et al., 2001).

**The Chacra or the farm**, is a space which, whilst it does not form part of the original Shipibo-Conibo culture, has become extremely important for their people’s subsistence. Communities are generally self-sufficient. There are, however, some communities that specialise in growing rice or producing handicrafts, such as San Francisco, which buys a large proportion of its food.

The farmland soils are classified not only into lowland and highland but also by type and quality in order to be able to establish their specific uses. The summer season is the time to prepare farmland. It is a long process of cutting back the vegetation with machetes, felling large trees, cutting branches and so on. Afterwards everything is burned and they then proceed to sow. The variety of ecosystems explains the diversity of crops that are grown on the farmland.

In the highland and lowland communities, they practice shifting cultivation. In the lowland communities, there are permanent banana trees growing in the restingas; some cornfields in the “tahuampas”, rice, chiclayo, groundnut, etc. along the river banks and in family vegetable plots (Tournon et al., 2001). Rice is a new crop but one that is expanding rapidly.

As previously mentioned, the regular bursting and receding of the rivers by season is a decisive factor in agricultural production. During the rainy season, which normally starts in October, the women rush to harvest the yuca to make flour and the bananas even though they are still green. This is the worst season for fishing as the water is murky and choppy. It is, in contrast, the best time for hunting as the animals are concentrated in the restingas. When the dry season returns, farming activities commence and turtle eggs are collected along the banks.

To meet their subsistence needs, the Shipibo-Conibo implement two kinds of horticulture, depending on their soil. One is a seasonal agriculture, growing crops with a short planting season (yuca, beans, rice, maize, etc.) along with a more rotational farming for bananas, citrus fruits and other fruit trees.

The environment around the hamlets can be classified into four categories (Behrens 1989:85): the forest or wild world (mií), which includes not only the plants and wild animals but also mythical creatures and dangerous spirits; the cultivated farmland (huá) where both women and men spend many hours at work each day; the farmland that is not currently being cultivated (huená náhue) but which may be used productively again after five years of fallow and, lastly, farmland that is no longer productive at all (ramáima náhue).

While banana and yucca are subsistence crops, maize is grown both for domestic consumption and for sale. Moreover, since

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16 Even community members who have migrated to the city still have plots of farmland back home in their communities of origin.
17 In Peru, restingas are seasonally-flooded areas.
18 The tahuampas are floodable lowlands where fertile sediments are deposited by the river waters.
the end of the 1950s, rice has been introduced as a commercial crop. Traditionally, working the fields was done on a family level, in line with a gender division of labour: men in charge of cutting and burning fields and women responsible for sowing, weeding and harvesting. Agricultural labour is estimated to take up a good part of the day, between 3 to 5 hours (Ministry of Health 2002).

Farming is vulnerable to rains and flooding and it has always been necessary to supplement family food production with products from the countryside and the river.

The monte or countryside is not only a source of edible resources but a space in which the beings that make up their world vision live and where species considered sacred are found. In addition to gathering fruits from the countryside, the main food resource has traditionally been wild game. Hunting is practised almost solely during the rainy season and so is a secondary source of protein.

The Shipibo-Conibo currently practice foraging in areas around their hamlets, devoting less time to it than in the past (Chirif 1977). This activity provides them with a supply of wild fruits, medicinal plants and various raw materials, particularly different species of palm for house construction and for bow making. The fruits of the different palm trees, especially the aguaje (binón), are gathered by the women and children. Palm trees are an extremely significant resource and therefore an important criterion when choosing a settlement. Another highly valued traditional resource are the eggs from river turtles which are gathered during family expeditions.

The river (jene) is a space for fishing, one of the traditional activities which, according to Shipibo-Conibo myth, have been practised since their very origins. Fishing, which is the main source of protein for this people, is practised either individually or collectively, using different methods and capturing a wide variety of fish. Fisherfolks therefore play an important role in the community because, in addition to providing food for their families, they generate income through the sale of the fish.

A certain complementarity of gender roles can be seen in these activities, for example, when men’s, women’s and children’s labour is required in the fields. Although hunting and fishing are male activities, women may accompany the men, and prepare the tools and bait for hunting and fishing. They are also responsible for preparing the catch. In contrast, it is the men who find and transport the clay used by the women in their pottery.

It should be noted that there is another public space in which men take on a series of communal tasks that are of collective responsibility (mingas): this involves maintaining common areas and services (cleaning the roads, fields, bridges, building communal facilities etc.).

Some of the products are marketed. When this involves agricultural products, the income is managed by the husband but, when it comes from handicrafts, as we shall see further on, it is managed by the women, which gives them a certain independence. Shipibo-Conibo women enjoy high status for their essential role in domestic work and because they generate monetary income. It is for this reason that they have greater autonomy of movement than other Amazonian indigenous women (Ministry of Health, 2002).

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

Some of the women’s tasks involve work that requires highly specialised knowledge and talents specific to them. The women have extensive ethnobotanical knowledge and use a wide variety of medicinal plants which they gather in the countryside or which they grow on their family plots. They also know how to handle “powerful” plants “to affect the behaviour of others: to teach, strengthen, create love, control fertility, etc.”
THE WOMEN HAVE EXTENSIVE ETHNobotanical knowledge and use a wide variety of medicinal plants which they gather in the countryside or which they grow on their family plots.

(Tournon 2006), and may be herbalists, traditional healers and birth attendants, acting in a similar way to their male colleagues.

The handicraft and textile production of Shipibo-Conibo women is one of the most famous in the Peruvian Amazon and is known for its sophisticated geometric designs.

They have developed the greatest skill in pottery, an art form that women learn from a very early age. Traditionally intended for daily use, pottery items are now, in many cases, the main source of income for women, produced with a view to selling. The clay used is highly malleable and with it they make pottery items of different sizes and uses. The women then paint these pieces with geometric designs (Soldevilla 2010) that
The designs are known as “kené” and have their origins in this people’s world vision inspired by the anaconda. In 2008, *kené* was declared Cultural Heritage of the Peruvian Nation.

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19 The word “piri piri” in regional Amazonian language designates a variety of plants of the Cyperaceae family.
Although pottery is an essentially female task, men are becoming increasingly involved in this activity as well as producing different articles from wood, cane, stone and bone.

The women also use different animal and fish parts to make ornaments, cultural instruments or other forms of handicrafts or for medicinal use (CILA 2012).

Since the 1960s, the Pucallpa region has become an attractive area for tourists and collectors of ethnic art. This demand has boosted the market for Shipibo-Conibo art. In recent years, the production and sale of handicrafts has taken on more significance in the economy of many families. The articles are produced individually by the women or through the hired labour of others. Some choose only to focus on their own production, and others prefer a mixed way of working. A number of families have benefited from their proximity to the town of Pucallpa as a market, and they also travel to other towns to sell their work.

To preserve the high quality of their handicrafts and circumvent the many intermediaries who buy pieces in the communities at very low prices, a cooperative of indigenous artisans was formed and promoted in Pucallpa in 1976, known as Ján Máròti Shóbó (Sales House). However, all of the women interviewed indicated that they produce and sell handicrafts more or less depending on where they are at any particular time. Some women still sell in their communities, others organize product sales among women belonging to the same matrilocal group or with closely related matrilocal groups (sisters, cousins or sisters-in-law). They designate a number of women to travel to towns such as Pucallpa or Lima to sell their products. These women act as representatives for their associates and, in return, receive a share of the income generated (Terra Nuova 2011). The income is generally used by the women to buy non indigenous products or to pay for their children’s education.

**THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

With the process of regrouping indigenous peoples around missionary posts, the position of chief or “curaca” was adopted among those converts who best understood basic Spanish and were able to fulfil the role of intermediary between the white people and the indigenous groups, such as the intermediation during the rubber boom. Subsequently, a space for a new kind of leadership for bilingual teachers who were generally trained outside the indigenous settlements began to open up. Being able to read and write plus familiarity with the mestizo world, conferred greater prestige upon them. With the enactment of the Law on Native Communities (D.L. 20653) in 1974, a new political–administrative structure was established in each hamlet, along the lines of the mestizo model, appointing a “Lieutenant Governor” as community representative, elected by an assembly, generally among younger people who knew how to read and write Spanish. In addition, for the first time in Peruvian history, this new law guaranteed the legal existence of the communities. This law has enabled the Shipibo-Conibo communities to demarcate and title their lands and has given them control over their civil affairs, as well as over their police and justice systems (Morin 1996).

The highest authority of the community is the Communal Assembly, comprising all adult members aged 18 years or over and belonging to the Shipibo-Conibo ethnic group. An individual who is not indigenous or belongs to another indigenous ethnic group can only become a member if their application is approved by the assembly.

The Communal Assembly elects the head of the community and the management committee through a democratic process. According to the women interviewed, Shipibo-Conibo women have the same opportunity
THE SHIPIBO-CONIBO WOMEN RECOGNISE THE ASSEMBLIES AS A SPACE IN WHICH THEY ARE ABLE TO TALK PUBLICLY WITHOUT FEAR AND WHERE THEIR IDEAS ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

As men to participate in the decision-making process within the community and there has been an increased number of women holding political–administrative positions. In two of the three communities, there are or have been women leaders. The head of San Juan is currently a woman, as are five of the 11 members of the management committee. In San Francisco, there has been a female head of community. In Paoyhan, however, there are no women holding leadership positions. The women do, however, participate in the communal work and in the assembly of representatives, thus being involved in the community’s decision-making processes.

The Shipibo-Conibo women recognise the assemblies as a space in which they are able to talk publicly without fear and where their ideas are taken into account, particularly if they are more mature women. These spaces promote participation although the women are aware that not all of them speak because they may be nervous or embarrassed to do so. The presence of women in the assemblies has created more confidence among them, and this is opening up the possibility of women participating in more public spaces. Paoyhan community has the least female participation locally. According to the women, this is because they are busy in their homes or because their partners often do not allow them to attend. The women therefore have to act strategically if they wish to participate: “When there is a meeting, I get up at five in the morning so that I can finish early and get there in time. Sometimes if the meeting goes on a long time, I get home late and find my son crying; taking him to the meeting would also be difficult, the mosquitoes bother him and it is tiring having him there so I am unable to make my opinion heard. My husband knows that I go because he knows that I’m doing something in the community. My husband doesn’t like the thought of me being in charge. They are very sexist here …” (PAO5)

Some women have managed to achieve positions of authority within the municipality, where they take more wide-ranging decisions. One woman from Paoyhan has been deputy mayor, councillor and lieutenant governor. In San Francisco a number of women have been councillors. In San Juan they are health workers and there are women in public security positions who play an important role as mediators with the public institutions.

The indigenous movement of the Peruvian Amazon is organized within the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Forest, AIDESEP, and its regional organizations, including the Regional Organization of Ucayali, ORAU. The women have gradually managed to occupy different posts within the four federations of Shipibo-Conibo communities that make up ORAU’s grassroots. Shipibo-Conibo women are also represented and hold positions within the Organization of Indigenous Women of Ucayali (ORDEMI).

Nationally, some Shipibo-Conibo women hold posts within the National Organization of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous Women of Peru (ONAMIAP) and, in AIDESEP, the technical person responsible for the Indigenous Women’s programme is a Shipibo-Conibo woman. Through these organizations, Shipibo-Conibo women have an opportunity to participate in training, conferences and to share experiences with other indigenous women from Peru and beyond in international meetings.
Sedentarisation, environmental deterioration and a difficult economic situation have resulted in many challenges for the Shipibo-Conibo people. To tackle this situation, the men and women have had to adapt their survival strategies and seek new solutions to their problems. This has resulted in new divisions of labour when the work was traditionally established along lines of gender and complementarity. It should be noted that the indigenous women of the Amazon have a very long and active life: among the under 14 year olds, it is the girls that take on most of the tasks in the household and in the fields and 35.3 percent of women aged between 80 and 84 still remain active (INEI & UNFPA 2010).

Women’s commercial transactions with national society currently take place largely on two levels and, in general, to their disadvantage. Firstly, through travelling sales people who travel around the communities exchanging products such as sugar, alcohol, fabrics, etc. for money or other goods such as rice, maize or animals. Others prefer to travel to the towns of Pucallpa or Contamana where they sell their products to wholesalers. The main problem is the cost of transport and the need to stay in the town, which results in minimal profit.

According to the women interviewed, Shipibo-Conibo family nutrition has deteriorated both quantitatively and qualitatively and the families have been forced to reduce the amount of food they eat each day. This situation particularly affects the under-fives and the mothers because there is a belief that men must eat better to keep up their energy for work (Ministry of Health 2012).

This situation is due to an erosion of agricultural production and a reduction in the aquatic, wildlife and forest resources that previously formed an important part of the daily Shipibo-Conibo diet. However, it is also due to changes within the families and communities due to their growing integration into the non indigenous world.

Traditionally, the Shipibo-Conibo people lived in small groups and had access to vast areas from which to sustain themselves by means of fishing, hunting and some farming. Now they live in communities and “by being owners of

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20 First-level malnutrition has been observed, along with tooth decay, pallid complexion, etc. (Ministry of Health 2002).
Ucayali, [they have] become ‘owners’ only of the community to which the state has given them title, because the Ministry of Agriculture decided how many hectares the applicant population needed” (CILA 2012). However, the titling was very often done without considering relevant aspects such as natural increases in the population, the right of all families to have a space to grow crops and infrastructural developments in the settlements (schools, wells, landing strips, etc.), which have taken much land from them.

The result is that there is overexploitation of the soil in many communities and a lack of land to plant new fields or simply to enable crop rotation given that plots are exhausted.

Indigenous women of the Amazon have a very long and active life: among the under 14 year olds, it is the girls that take on most of the tasks in the household and in the fields, and 35 percent of women aged between 80 and 84 still remain active.

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THEIR NUTRITION HAS DETERIORATED, BOTH QUANTITATIVELY AND QUALITATIVELY, DUE TO THE REDUCTION OF THEIR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AS WELL AS OF WILDLIFE, AQUATIC LIFE AND FOREST RESOURCES
after a few years and need to lie fallow to regenerate. They also lack new spaces for hunting, fishing and gathering as resources are running out in the areas close to their settlements. There is also a scarcity of restingas due to the establishment of farms along the banks of the Ucayali.

To all this must be added climate change, which has increased the Shipibo-Conibo’s traditional agricultural vulnerability. Instead of occurring every 5 to 10 years, intense rains and massive bursting of the banks of the Ucayali River now take place every year\(^1\). At the same time there have been periods of drought\(^2\) and the women interviewed state that the temperature has been increasing in recent years. It was also noted that there are more pests and unknown physical changes affecting the plants. In terms of farming, it was noted that men now show more interest in and devote more time and land to growing commercial crops while the women work more on their household plots. There is, however, a tendency to significantly reduce the variety of crops being grown and there is a perceived lack of family labour: the children are at school, and the young people are not interested in farming. Nor does the local environment (school education, technological institutes) promote traditional agriculture.

In the last decades, Peruvian agriculture has seen an important growth, mainly agriculture linked to the food industry and export has been developed, leaving family agriculture and subsistence behind, with low indexes of productivity and scarce technology.

In the Shipibo-Conibo agriculture, the lack of suitable land for farming means that, when children start their own families, they continue to grow crops with their extended family. These household plots are thus being divided up between more family members than in the past and part of the harvest is being destined for sale. This limits the quality and quantity of produce intended for domestic consumption (Ministry of Health 2002).

Women are aware of the loss of a large part of their agricultural knowledge and the disappearance of indigenous seeds and fruit varieties (CILA 2012).

It is becoming increasingly difficult to supplement the daily diet with the produce from hunting and fishing. Women state that, previously, an abundance of animals and fish enabled them to eat more than twice a day and to share the produce with their friends and families. Now they note that, due to the degradation of the forests, there is no longer an abundance of wild animals. To be able to hunt, men have to travel further and spend several days seeking out large animals. Not many of the young people are involved in hunting any more as they are busy with other work, in the logging industry or studying in the city.

It is the same with fishing. The women interviewed indicate there has been a decline in the number of fish and that the fisherfolks have to travel further and further to find them. The Shipibo-Conibo women say that if they want to eat fish in any quantity, they have to buy it as it is now considered a luxury item.

Given this decline in the availability of subsistence crops and food from the countryside and river, families are choosing

\(^{1}\) Substantial flooding has taken place annually since 2010 [http://www.actualidadambiental.pe]

\(^{2}\) In 2010, the Ucayali River fell to its lowest level in many years [Ibid.]
to keep chickens or ducks for their own consumption and also for sale. With the money they obtain, they can buy other goods such as beans and rice. This change in their diet, from eating natural foodstuffs from the countryside to relying on purchased goods, combined with a decline in their own food production, has led to the appearance of illnesses such as anaemia.

**TRADE IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND SMALL LIVESTOCK**

In the communities visited, husbands and fathers generally help to grow agricultural products; we only came across one case of a woman who received no support (SJU4) and, in the case of PAO8, her husband had begun to work outside of the community although the primary economic input was from the woman’s sale of handicrafts.

Growing agricultural produce and rearing livestock are normally subsistence activities but there are currently attempts to commercialise them. Fish, meat, chicken, yucca, rice, banana, cocona, maize, flour and achiote leaves are all being sold. Some women sell within their communities because, they say: “A lot of people no longer work their fields” or they travel by river to nearby communities; others prefer to take their produce to Pucallpa.

The women of San Juan are unable to engage in this kind of trade because the minimal produce they obtain from their land is only sufficient for their own consumption.

In terms of handicrafts, as in other businesses, the marketing channels are very often unfair. Through need, some women, especially in Paoyhan, sell their products or produce to other people at derisory prices that bear no correspondence to the amount of effort invested in their production. PAO6 comments: “… They come and order embroidered pieces and only pay 15, 20 or 30 sols. Well I don’t want to

embroider at that price because I’m making a loss … There is a mestizo that comes and gives us all the materials, trousers too, and he pays us 15 sols. A lot of the women don’t want to embroider but when he comes to the community just you see how the women flock around him to do his embroidery for him because they need the money.” The products bought from them can be sold at five or six times the price outside the community, and sometimes even more.

All the women interviewed indicate that there were more women now only producing textiles (embroidered and painted) and bead jewellery. These two kinds of handicrafts have increased considerably while there are few young women who know how to weave or make pottery.

The raw materials for dying the cloth have not changed over time: mahogany bark (pocoti) and clay (mano). Some state that it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain these materials. José Guillén, former director of a handicrafts project in the Ucayali zone states: “…There is no more mahogany bark in many areas, the loggers and transnational companies have covered their lands with palm trees and so now it’s difficult to obtain raw materials… It’s been like this for over a year.”

The women obtain the bark for dying in a sustainable way: “… We don’t cut the whole tree down we just take the bark off and wait for it to grow again. Not like the palm oil companies who cut down the whole tree to sow palm.” (PAO5).

There is also a resource problem for those craftswomen who make pottery. The resin that gives their pottery a lustre is now very difficult to find and they’ve had to revert to synthetic glazes “… I need a resin to act as a sealing wax but it is running out, the loggers have cut down everything, there isn’t any anymore I’ve looked and there isn’t any… It ran out maybe 10 years ago” (SFR1).

**OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Women are also involved in other important economic activities such as the sale of...
traditional medicine services, the taking of ayahuasca, working as a traditional healers, etc. Two women from San Juan are working in traditional medicine. One offers ayahuasca sessions (SJ1) with her brother and the other is a traditional healer (SJ5).

Another important activity is the sale of food and supplies. With the exception of the shop run by two women from San Francisco (SFR1, SFR5), who had their store well stocked and displayed, the shops visited were not well supplied. Finally, there is work-day labouring on nearby farms, where young men and women work in the papaya or palm oil plantations, or in more distant areas such as Ica or Cañete. Some young women work as kitchen assistants for the palm oil companies or collect the remains of the palm fruits left by the oil palm harvest into sacks. They may be paid between S/.40–S/.60 per day for this, and it is exhausting work. The women of San Juan work as day labourers in the charcoal factories, stating that more women than men work in charcoal production. The working day runs from Monday to Saturday, sometimes up to 12 hours a day. They are paid per sack (S/. 3 sols per sack) and can make up to 30 sols a day. Some women are no longer able to work in this activity because they have contracted TB (SJ1). However, they indicate that if there were a pressing need, they could go back to this work.
In recent decades, Shipibo-Conibo women and men have undergone social transformations that have deeply affected their traditional structures, their self-sufficient economy and their cultural norms. School enrolment, income-generating capacity, institutional participation and access – albeit insufficient – to the national health system have all clearly been significant advances that have enabled them to improve their living conditions and the civic participation of both genders, particularly women. And yet this gradual integration into national society has sometimes weakened women’s role in Shipibo-Conibo society.

The testimonies of the 18 women in this study describe how the residency and composition of families has been adapting to the new context and the priorities and resources of their members.

Matrilocality is no longer as common as it was due to two main factors. The first is the search for job and educational opportunities outside the community, both on the part of women and men. Along the way, young women sometimes marry outside of the maternal household. At the same time, it is felt that youngsters should leave their homes on reaching puberty to go and find out about other places and opportunities through travel to the city or to other Shipibo-Conibo communities. The second factor is that married couples from the community are tending to become more independent and are leaving for the city or for other communities where there are more resources with which to set up a new household. If it is a mixed marriage, it is more likely that they will not remain in a matrilocal setting, as is the case of the daughters of SJU4, who have married mestizos and no longer live in the community. These changes are reflected in the trends within many communities towards smaller, nuclear family homes that are increasingly similar to those of the mestizos.

As can be seen from Table 2, there are still some households where all the daughters and their families live within the maternal home. In the case of SFR5, they state that if they had had to leave they would have felt that they lacked the maternal family support and that “if the man wants you he has to come here”, but the survey also shows that matrilocality is losing ground at the level of the third generation (daughters of those interviewed). According to the survey, matrilocality was fairly widespread in the first generation (17 of the 18 mothers interviewed) but with those interviewed in the second generation, there were six cases of nuclear families (i.e. a woman with husband and children). These can be broken down geographically as follows: two cases in Paoyhan (out of a total of eight families); none in San Francisco and four in San Juan (out of a total of five). This latter community is close to Pucallpa and includes migrant families that have only
### TABLE 2 MATRILOCALITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; generation (mother)</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; generation (interviewee)</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; generation (daughters)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAO1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>None of her daughters are matrilocal (all have left home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Young daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Single mother in mother’s home</td>
<td>Young daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal (but mestizo spouse has gone to work outside the community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal, mother and sisters emigrated to Lima and Pucallpa</td>
<td>Has no daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Matrilocal to begin with, then went to her husband’s community</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>1 matrilocal daughter, 1 daughter has left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Has no daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal to begin with, left temporarily due to spouse’s job</td>
<td>Has no daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFRA1</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Went to her husband’s community</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>1 matrilocal daughter, 1 daughter has left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFRA2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>All her daughters have left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>1 matrilocal daughter, 1 daughter left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>All her daughters have left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal (all her daughters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Not matrilocal</td>
<td>Only daughter of marrying age has left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal and subsequent move</td>
<td>Young daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal and subsequent move</td>
<td>Data lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal and subsequent move</td>
<td>All her daughters have left home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Matrilocal</td>
<td>Matrilocal and subsequent move</td>
<td>Only daughter died (matrifocal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
been there for around ten years. The four interviewees lived matrilocally with their partners until their migration but, when they moved, it was only with their nuclear family. The 12 extended families in which the remaining interviewees were living were of two kinds: ten reproducing the traditional model of three generations (grandparents, parents and grandchildren) under the same roof and two differing in that they only housed two generations (grandparents and grandchildren). As regards the third generation (children of those interviewed) it was noted that many of the daughters were already living away from home.

Mixed marriages (Table 3) are now more common. Only one woman interviewed came from a mixed family and she was married to a mestizo “but I feel Shipibo”. In her case, both her father and her husband had joined the community where they were living with their wives but, among the third generation, there were a number of daughters interviewed who were married to mestizos (four cases), to another ethnic group (three) or to foreigners (two) (see Table 3). While most of the women interviewed would prefer their daughters to marry a Shipibo-Conibo, arranged marriages are no longer the norm and the women who are in them indicate that these relationships are difficult in the beginning.

At the same time, they comment that there are no great differences between mestizos and Shipibo-Conibo although there are some “bad mestizos” who do not understand indigenous traditions, such as sharing food and household spaces with the family or supporting more distant relatives. In addition, the mestizos may not want their children to speak the indigenous language or they may force a woman to break her close relationship with her relatives. In the case of SFR5, she has a very good relationship with her son’s mestizo wife as her daughter-in-law helps her around the home with the cooking and cleaning and they even make handicrafts together. There was only one case (SJU4) in which all her children had married mestizos and were living outside of the community in which she lived. “None of my grandchildren speak Shipibo-Conibo but all I can do is respect their decision,” she indicates heavily. In the case of interethnic marriages, some women state that they are even better than Shipibo-Conibo ones, as in the case of SFR5 who has a Sharanawa son-in-law who lives with her and who says, “He is the son-in-law that helps most in the fields and with hunting, more than my other Shipibo-Conibo son-in-law.” In the case of SJU5, her Matsigenka daughter-in-law, who lives nearby, helps with all the domestic chores so that she can go and sell handicrafts or do other activities. She is teaching her Shipibo-Conibo embroidery.

There were a couple of cases of marriages to foreigners, for example one of the daughters of PAO6: “To begin with I didn’t want him to marry my daughter but now my Brazilian son-in-law shares Shipibo traditions and is a part of the community.” This foreigner has a space to grow his crops granted by the community and the grandchildren speak Portuguese, Spanish and their indigenous language.

**IN RECENT DECADES, SHIPIBO-CONIBO HAVE UNDERGONE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS THAT HAVE DEEPLY AFFECTED THEIR TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES, THEIR SELF SUFFICIENT ECONOMY AND THEIR CULTURAL NORMS**
These changes perhaps reveal one of the most significant transformations – that of the method of selecting and choosing a spouse. Research by the Ministry of Health (2002) reveals that the main criterion for young girls when selecting a husband is no longer his skills in fishing, hunting or farming but that he should be a professional or public employee with access to a regular income. With this increased independence in choosing their partners, such choices no longer always follow cultural guidelines.

The mixed school system, in particular, has contributed to breaking down the traditional marriage structure, by judging parent-arranged marriages as obsolete and encouraging young people of both genders to make their own sentimental and matrimonial decisions (Terra Nuova 2011).

The women interviewed feel that these new situations have led, in many cases, to single mothers and abandoned children. This is something that rarely occurred in the past but now, especially in communities near urban centres, it is increasingly common and is one of the great concerns of parents (Belaunde 2011). There was one single mother in our survey (PAO3) who had had two mestizo partners that had left her with three daughters. Most of the women state that it is generally Shipibo women who are abandoned by mestizos but that now it is happening to the men of the community as well. As SFR4 stated: “It is the mestizos that abandon the women. When Shipibo-Conibo people leave the community to work sometimes they don’t come back anymore”.

The women are seriously affected by the changes that have taken place in the matrilocal structure. The system for reproducing marriage and relationships of authority between parents-in-law and sons-in-law...
has broken down and it was this which, in turn, maintained the gender relations and the upbringing of the children and grandchildren. Increased consumption of alcohol, particularly among men, has resulted in increased domestic violence and abandonment of the children (Terra Nuova 2011).

Parents continue to endeavour to create responsibility and knowledge in their children so that they can face the challenges of setting up a new household. All the women interviewed state that the handing down of the customs and knowledge of the Shipibo-Conibo culture continues to be a maternal role to ensure that knowledge is not lost (Table 4). As SFR2 says: “The mother is like a school”. The mothers and grandmothers teach the young girls to paint, design, embroider, sew, use a loom and make pottery.

The adults can see the changes that are occurring, however, and state that the Shipibo-Conibo women’s knowledge was more highly valued in the past. The number of women embroidering has declined; the use of traditional dress has diminished (particularly among the men) and things that used to be used on a daily basis (pottery and clothing), and which all Shipibo-Conibo women needed to have knowledge of, are these days simply commercial products. The new generation does not generally have the same interest in traditional knowledge and, although the maternal line of education still exists, not all daughters want to learn how to produce handicrafts any more. The women also note that some young people no longer speak in Shipibo-Conibo when they reach the city, creating a feeling of cultural loss.

School plays an important role and women feel that formal education has had a positive impact on the young people (women and men) and on the community and can help them cope with cultural contact with the non indigenous world. In the past, parents and grandparents showed a lack of trust in the school system and there was an idea that “women learn at home”. This was why few women used to attend school. Now, however, there is no difference between men and women. Both attend school “so that they don’t end up like us” in the words of a 42-year-old woman with a teenage daughter. To access higher education, the young people need their parents’ support and if they do not have this it will be difficult for them to study. In Paoyhan, the student population declines as the pupils go up the levels or grades for financial reasons due to a lack of resources to purchase school equipment and the fact that the parents need their children at home to help with daily chores.

The women feel that the introduction of intercultural bilingual education at kindergarten and primary level in some communities could help strengthen the Shipibo-Conibo identity and culture by offering relevant educational materials in both Spanish and in their native language: an education that would benefit young people and which could help improve the community.

In Paoyhan, for example, education is as intercultural as possible. Every Thursday throughout the year, the girls and boys have to attend wearing their traditional dress (women: shitonte embroidered skirt). In addition, they have a timetable which includes the elders (mostly men) teaching the children songs, dances and the different activities carried out in each period of the year in the fields and in the countryside. However, a loss of identity and traditions specific to the area can still be seen among the pupils.

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23 Ethnolinguistic Research Project in the Native Community of Paoyhan, Ucayali 2009. https://es.slideshare.net/vabalbin056/diapositiva-de-proyectos-productivo-pedagogicos


### TABLE 3  MIXED MARRIAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Mestizo/other ethnic spouse</th>
<th>Mother, sisters or daughters with mestizos/other ethnic group/other nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAO4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Daughter with mestizo husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sisters with mestizo husbands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Daughter with Brazilian husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO7</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>Sister with Cocama husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Son with American wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Daughter with Sharanawa husband, son with mestizo wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU1</td>
<td>Yes with mestizo</td>
<td>Mother and sister with mestizos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All her sons and daughters had married mestizos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Son married to a Matsigenka woman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 4  LINES OF EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Who taught them?</th>
<th>Who are they teaching?</th>
<th>What are they teaching?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAO1</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Eldest daughter, granddaughters</td>
<td>Embroidery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO2</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Daughters</td>
<td>Cotton spinning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO3</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Eldest daughter</td>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO4</td>
<td>Mother, grandmother</td>
<td>Daughters</td>
<td>Embroidery, weaving, painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO5</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Nieces</td>
<td>Embroidery and painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO6</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Daughters and granddaughters, daughter-in-law</td>
<td>Kenë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO7</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Is apprentice</td>
<td>Embroidery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO8</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Is apprentice</td>
<td>Embroidery and painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR1</td>
<td>Mother and elder sister</td>
<td>Daughter and son</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR2</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Daughters</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR3</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Sons and daughters</td>
<td>Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR4</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Did not say</td>
<td>Weaving and embroidery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR5</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Daughters and granddaughters, daughter-in-law</td>
<td>Pottery and cotton spinning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU1</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Daughters</td>
<td>Weaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU2</td>
<td>Simply learned by watching</td>
<td>Daughters</td>
<td>Embroidery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU3</td>
<td>Mother and grandmother</td>
<td>Daughters</td>
<td>Painting, embroidery and spinning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU4</td>
<td>Mother and grandmother</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Did not say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU5</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>Daughters, granddaughters and nieces</td>
<td>Weaving and embroidery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 5 DAUGHTERS’ OCCUPATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Age of interviewee</th>
<th>Age and occupation of daughters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAO1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34 teacher and craftswoman, 32 secretary and teacher, 27 English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18 higher studies, 5 school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14 school and handicrafts, 5 school, 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20 studying education, 19 primary studies and handicrafts, 17 school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Has no daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34 teacher and craftswoman, 28 teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Has no daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFRA1</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>39 teacher, 37 potter, 30 teacher training, 22 studying environmental engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFRA2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>45 potter, 37 craftswoman, 22 farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28 craftswoman, 21 craftswoman, 11 school and craftswoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>33 secretary, 28 traditional medicine, 21 accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFR5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28 ‘mother’s guide’, 25 nurse and ‘mother’s guide’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20 cashier in Pucallpa, 12 school, 7 school and handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9 and 6 school, help with handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25 completed secondary, 12 and 10 school and handicrafts, 10-month-old baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>41 seamstress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJU5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The women and men would like there to be more space within the community for the young people to develop professionally, both in terms of studying and applying what they have learnt outside. The fact that there are no opportunities for professional work is one of the reasons why young professionals migrate to other cities (Tubino and Zariquiey 2007).

The number of women migrating temporarily to Pucallpa or Lima to study is also increasing, resulting in later first pregnancies and, very often, a lack of space and recognition on their return to the community.

### CHANGES IN WOMEN’S ROLE

In order to tackle these social changes, Shipibo-Conibo women have, over the years, developed alternative income-generating activities to ensure they are able to meet the daily needs of their families.

Table 6 shows all the economic activities being undertaken by Shipibo-Conibo women to maintain their families. These cannot be considered individual economic activities, however, but family activities, i.e. activities through which other members of the family also contribute to the family’s basic needs.
The women interviewed undertake their daily work, remunerated or not, in different spaces. The first space is the household, where they do housework and household care, either totally or partially, given that some still rely on support from other female family members if they live with them or nearby. The trend towards nuclear families, however, is resulting in a decline in or the disappearance of this cooperation and help from the maternal family.

Women have seen their domestic workload increase in many communities as the pattern towards nuclear settlements means they are living ever further from sources of firewood and water. However, in the three communities visited, access to clean water has now been facilitated because every house has a water tank and they only use river water to wash their clothes. The household is also the space in which women spend time making handicrafts for sale and, if they have time,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Handicrafts</th>
<th>Sale of agricultural products</th>
<th>Sale of ducks, chickens, etc.</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Shop or provision of supplies</th>
<th>Traditional medicine</th>
<th>Charcoal day labourer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAO1</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO3</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAO4</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAO5</td>
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<td>●</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>PAO8</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>SFRA2</td>
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<td>SFR3</td>
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<tr>
<td>SJU1</td>
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<td>SJU5</td>
<td>●</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
they tend the family’s vegetable plots near to the house.

The second space is farmland, where produce for their own consumption and/or sale is grown. Fields are a highly important space for the family’s current subsistence, but which is subject to increasing competition from commercial crops being grown elsewhere.

The third space is the community itself although women’s income-generating activities – selling, providing labour or services – are increasingly taking place outside of their own community.

**NEW ROLES FOR WOMEN**

Some women note that the division of labour is changing. In the past, working in the fields was largely a male task. As PAO3 indicates: “In the past, the men would go to the fields and the women would focus on handicrafts. Now the women also go to the fields and the men help with handicrafts.” Such is the case of a woman in Paoyhan who has only male children (PAO5) and so they help with the housework and with the handicrafts, activities that were clearly female in the past. One of the older boys of a potter from San Francisco (SFR3) helps his mother in the family business they have set up and she tells us that, previously, men were not allowed to touch the potter’s clay because it was thought it would affect their sexual organs negatively. She teaches this work to male and female children because in her words “handicrafts are a business now” and she can’t provide sufficient items alone.

Shamanism falls within the area of traditional medicine, and it is worth noting that the growing interest in shamanism and spiritual tourism among foreign tourists has meant that some women are now able to work as shamans. This may also be due to the fact that the Shipibo-Conibo arts and crafts market is becoming saturated and some Shipibo-Conibo women are seeking new income-generating activities (Herbert 2010).

**IN PAOYHAN, EDUCATION AIMS AT BEING AS INTERCULTURAL AS POSSIBLE. EVERY THURSDAY GIRLS AND BOYS ATTEND SCHOOL WEARING THEIR TRADITIONAL DRESS**

**ORGANIZING: NEW LEADERS AND NEW CHALLENGES**

With the sedentarisation of the communities, the women now have greater opportunities to organize and they are participating in many activities of responsibility outside of the family sphere, both within the community and elsewhere. This has, however, led to new challenges to their gender relations.

In all three communities, the women participate in the state social programmes (women’s clubs, milk committees and local canteen), and there are a number of handicraft associations. The latter are recognised by the women interviewed as being the most important because they help to sell and promote handicrafts through local and national fairs, and some offer training. These organizations have, in some cases, exceeded their original objectives, becoming spaces in which women’s participation and social influence is created (Terra Nuova 2011).

Football is the main pastime in all the communities, both among men and young women. This is particularly the case in Paoyhan where there is a strong women’s football team, recognised in all the communities. Each year, an interethnic football championship is held known as the
“Shipibo World Cup”, and this year (2017) women participated for the first time.

In terms of conflicts within the communities, women play an important role in family disputes while disputes in the wider community tend to be resolved through the community authorities (men or women).

This fact highlights the predominant role of women in the family sphere, giving space to men in public or community spaces.

As regards the legalisation and defence of communal territories, Shipibo-Conibo women have thus far played a limited role, although they are affected by climate change, forest degradation, and the constant threat of invasion from settlers or companies, resulting in some cases in the partial loss of territory or possible eviction of the community.

The communities visited have had or still have problems of territorial security. San Juan community has been involved in disputes over its territory with the former landowner since 2015 and the community has still not been titled. Paoyhan has been facing problems due to land ceded by the community to a timber company. The company did not comply with the contract but logged other spaces illegally and was fined 300,000 sols (less than USD90) by the Ministry of the Environment. The community is no longer handing over any land to logging companies and is only using timber for wooden slats or for housebuilding.

A community monitoring committee has been created to monitor the community’s territorial boundaries and maintain the marker posts. Only members of Paoyhan community are allowed to use (and only for their own personal use) the natural resources of the area, which comprises 1,017 ha of intangible forest.

The indigenous organizations have taken various initiatives to help defend the Shipibo-Conibo communities’ territory, both environmentally and legally. The “Vive BOSQUE” campaign is an initiative of the regional indigenous organization, ORAU, and the Association for Integrated Research and Development (AIDER) that is seeking to promote community forest management. The national indigenous organization, AIDESEP is promoting the titling of lands given that not all Shipibo-Conibo communities are yet titled. In turn, the women’s organizations, ONAMIAP and ORDEMI, are organizing workshops on territorial governance so that women have a better understanding of the issue, can be more actively involved in the territorial management process and can participate in the titling process on an equal footing.
The fact that the Shipibo-Conibo live along one of the busiest rivers of the Amazon region has exposed them to many external influences: missionaries, extractive companies and growing access to urban centres.

In recent years, foreign models of life have permeated traditional culture with greater force due to the growing dependence on non-rural employment, the increase in migration and the decrease in natural resources (flora and fauna).

With the formation of new communities, the way in which they live has changed substantially and they now cohabit as families that do not necessarily have bonds of kinship.

The establishment of educational centres has been a key factor in the sedentarisation and growth of communities. The Shipibo-Conibo place a high value on education and even migrate to larger communities so that their children (boys and girls) can go to school.

Shipibo-Conibo women and men are currently experiencing an integration into national society that is forcing them to readjust and deal with challenges of a social, cultural and economic nature. A clear weakening of the extended family structure based on matrilocality and matrifocality can be seen, as can the complementarity of gender roles. This in turn weakens women’s social networks and the traditional transmission of the knowledge that has thus far sustained the Shipibo-Conibo culture and its philosophy of “living well”.

Consequently, we can affirm that the weakening of the Shipibo-Conibo matrifocal system has a negative impact on social cohesion and forms of community organization, even though traditionally women do not have a fundamental role in territorial management.

The family subsistence economy, based on agricultural production supplemented by resources from the countryside and the river, is suffering a crisis due to climate change, environmental degradation, a lack of land, poor access to credit and technical assistance, and a lack of interest among young people to work in the fields. At the same time, the Shipibo-Conibo people are experiencing a need to generate income and are investing increasing amounts of time in the production of cash crops and the sale of handicrafts, to face the food security crisis.

The production and sale of handicrafts, especially pottery, remains an important source of income for Shipibo-Conibo families and this gives women a favoured role in family income generation that consequently complements the production of their own food. In addition, in a number of communities, more men are also now focusing on handicrafts.
It is important to note yet again the importance of the “kene” design for the lives of the Shipibo-Conibo people. Although the geometric decoration of houses has fallen into disuse, it still remains a distinctive element of their richly decorated clothing (particularly the women’s), face painting and handicrafts, particularly fabrics and pottery. Although it remains an element of their cultural identity, it is being increasingly used economically to supplement fishing, hunting and agricultural activities.

Women continue to hold an important status with regard to healing with medicinal plants, associated also with shamanism, which is generally in their husbands’ hands. Medicinal plant treatments and the use of ayahuasca during shamanic sessions have attracted a growing number of tourists, generating significant income for some families.

Women have also been gaining space within the current political structures of Peru’s indigenous movement, both at community and national level through ONAMIAP and AIDESEP, promoting indigenous women’s rights. The National Indigenous Women’s Organization, ONAMIAP, for example, has
questioned why all communities do not include or respect women as qualified community members and is generally critical of the fact that native community and peasant farmer laws do not specifically include a gender focus and that texts generally talk about community members in male terms. In any case, notable progress has been made in terms of women’s participation in the area of political representation.

Lastly, it is important to note the Shipibo-Conibo people’s adaptation to the urban environment, maintaining their identity and adapting to the possibilities and limitations of the cities. Frequent travel to their communities of origin provides them with some of their food and handicrafts, which are one of the main sources of income in the urban environment.

Such is the case, for example, of the Guía General para Comunidades Nativas 2014.
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(LIMA, 1962)

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• Artesanal fishing: [https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/5041940.pdf](https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/5041940.pdf)
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The transformations experienced by indigenous peoples today are the result of a combination of environmental, social and political elements, in addition to internal and external factors. One of the least studied effects is the impact generated by the weakening or alteration of the governance and social structures of indigenous peoples in the management of natural resources.

This publication, which brings together four case studies on indigenous societies that have a matrilineal or matrilocal social organization system, seeks to contribute to the understanding of the territorial management systems of indigenous peoples and their close relationship to political and social organization’s systems.

In the actual context of climate change and in the search of more sustainable models of natural resources management, FAO and IWGIA make a call to the international community, Governments and academia to look at indigenous and matrifocal management and governance systems that over time have allowed these communities to guarantee their food and livelihoods, preserving the land and natural resources for future generations.