

Disjunctured reciprocity: paradoxes of community-school relationship in Nepal

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Abstract

Community-based school governance has been promoted as a popular policy for decentralization of education around the world. Within this policy, schools are expected to create institutional spaces such as School Management Committees with an assumption of reciprocal relation between school and community. This article questions the simplistic assumption on community-school relationship through an ethnographic study of community-school relationship in Nepal. While these relationships may conflict with the kind of reciprocity assumed in school governance policies, we argue that this disjunctured reciprocity, firstly, reflects the gap between policy blueprints and action, and, secondly, reveals the competing logics of community-school relations which remain unacknowledged.

Keywords: reciprocity, community, schooling, decentralisation, Nepal

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Introduction

‘This school is built by the *community*,’¹ reported the ex-principal of Sunaulo School,² a so-called ‘community school’ located in a bustling hilly town, Nayadada, around 30 km away from Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. In fact, one of the school buildings was built entirely by money donated by people living in Nayadada, mainly the parents of then-students. The names of the donors were carved on the stone plaque above classrooms that were constructed with their donations. The school also owned sixteen shop rooms, popularly known as *shutters*, built with the donation from residents of the area. These *shutters*, lined against the school’s boundary wall and facing the road, were rented to shopkeepers and helped the school to raise some extra funds. Recurrent conversations that two of the authors, Pradhan and Shrestha, had with people, formally and informally associated with the school, during their fieldwork in 2016-2017, supported the ex-principal’s claim that the school was founded with generous donations from the inhabitants of Nayadada, mainly parents of then school-going children. Indeed, before the nationalisation of schools under National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971, schools were primarily constructed, maintained and ran by community donations of land, money and/or labour (MoE, 1997). However, with the government taking over the school management, the direct financial and regulatory support to school increased and made them less dependent on private funding (Khanal 2016:35), at least officially.

¹ All interview quotes are translated from Nepali. Italicisation is used to indicate the use of English words by informants.

² All names are pseudonyms.

Despite these changes in educational policy, Sunaulo school continued to rely on private donations to supplement the costs of temporary teachers' salary, regular maintenance of school premises, stationary and additional administrative costs, in addition to the state-funding that covers state-appointed teachers' salary, examination costs, scholarship for marginalised students, and books. However, present-day financial support seems to have changed and comes from a different set of stakeholders including (inter)national NGOs, business-men from Nayadada, ex-students of Sunaulo school, and other individuals with an interest in the school. The change in sources of donations, fundamental to the economic sustainability of the school, has taken place parallel with a change in the composition of the pupils. Before the spread of private schooling in 1990 (MoE, 1997),³ the majority of pupils were children of families residing in Nayadada. Today, almost two decades later, most Nayadada residents with a decent income have enrolled their children in private schools whereas the contemporary student population of Sunaulo School mostly represent the less affluent families from nearby villages. Moreover, the motivations for donating seem to have changed from a collective concern for the common good of the inhabitants of Nayadada to more philanthropic acts driven by moral obligations to contribute to the 'good cause' of education and the fulfilment of social responsibilities of the beneficiaries. This is also reflected in the types of donations – such as student scholarships, prizes for high-performing students, funds for stationery and other donations in the memory of their deceased family member. Sources and types of such private donations to public schools, thus, have changed from being strongly located with residents of Nayadada and parents of school-going children to a set of stakeholders with a more distant relation to the school.

³ See also Bhatta 2013, Carney and Bista 2009; Caddell 2004 for detailed discussions on emergence of private schooling in Nepal

This happened at a point in time when schools, as will be elaborated upon shortly, were formally given a status as ‘community schools’ and reveals a paradox in the forms of ownership aimed for and engendered by formalised programs of decentralisation. The introduction of community schooling rests on an assumption that when schools are actively supported by and nested within community networks, it ensures ownership and more efficient governance, which is seen to be essential for students’ performance, quality of education, monitoring, and education planning. Focusing on such complex and changing ideas of ownership to schools, this article picks up the thread of previous studies on decentralisation and the way in which globalised discourses on educational planning become localised, not least through the massive external development assistance provided to the country since the mid-20th century, and the impact it has had on national policy-making (Regmi 2017; Bhatta 2011; Carney and Bista 2009; Carney and Rappleye 2011; Carney 2009).

That decentralisation is not a new strategy in Nepal, but has been an integrated part of official educational policy since the 1960s is widely acknowledged (Edwards 2011; Parker 2008; Rajbhandari 2011). Though with a focus on the failures of ‘top-down’ implementation, decentralisation and related issues of community participation in Nepal, as elsewhere in the world (Blair 2000; Rose 2003; Kooiman 2003; Aiyer 2010), have mostly been examined through a perspective that portrays policy as a linear process of rational problem solving, based on a predetermined course of events with a predictable outcome (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Ferguson 1994; Mosse 2005). In other words, studies have emphasized the implications of decentralisation for ownership and empowerment of various local-level stakeholders such as school management committees and parents, yet without addressing already existing forms of socially embedded practices of ownership and engagement within which officially formulated ideas of ‘community participation’ are inscribed. As Aiyer, discussing the dynamics around

village councils in Indian villages, points out, ‘simply creating invited spaces, is not by itself enough to bring about real participation’ (2010: 211).

From an ethnographic perspective, the aim of this article therefore is to examine socially embedded ideas of ownership underlying such acts of donation - in forms of cash, kind, time and other voluntary engagements - and related to this, the obligations and expectations of return they entail. Analytically, we approach this paradox through a focus on the disjuncture in the kinds of reciprocity that underlie the interaction between changing stakeholders in processes of local school governance. This, we argue, leads to very peculiar forms of engagement in so-called community schools. Central to our claim is a critical approach to the notion of community itself, which in much development literature seems to be taken for granted as ‘... a “natural” social entity characterized by solidaristic relations’ (Cleaver 2002: 44). As pointed out by Carney et al. ‘local community’ is generally used as a technical and administrative term referring to the lowest spatial unit of planning (2007: 616); in a Nepali context often considered synonymous with ‘the village’ and other territorially defined small-scale neighbourhoods. However, longstanding anthropological debates have taught us that ‘communities’ are not necessarily territorial, but imagined (Anderson 1983) and symbolic (Cohen 1985), yet realised through social relations and practices often in very affective ways (Amit and Rapport, 2002).

Methodologically, the article is based on ethnographic fieldwork by Pradhan and Shrestha in Sunaulo School, Nayadada, in the periods of, respectively, July to September 2016 and October 2016 to April 2017 with a follow-up visit in December 2017. Drawing on Shrestha’s research on community participation in school management and Pradhan’s research on education scholarships, the ethnographic data were brought together on the common theme

of community-based financial contributions at Sunaulo School. This is supplemented by Valentin's longstanding ethnographic engagements on education in Nepal and expertise in the field of educational anthropology. The analysis was developed during several face to face meetings, regular cross-checking of factual information, and ongoing exchange of written materials during the entire writing period. The article draws on data collected both inside the school premises and in the residential areas surrounding the school. It consists of observations stemming from daily visits to the school and attendance in various activities such as morning assemblies, classroom instructions, interactions with parents, and occasional meetings with the SMC, the children's club, teachers and other staff. Informal conversations and interactions with the school principal and teachers, within and outside the school, combined with regular 'hanging out' in tea shops around the school proved to be other important sources of information about the social and socio-political dynamics of the school, including the importance of various present day donors such as ex-students and shopkeepers, otherwise not very easy to identify. In addition, we also conducted formal interviews with the principal, ex-principals, teachers, students, SMC members and parents.

In the following, taking our point of departure in the introduction of 'community-based schooling' in Nepal, we will problematize the underlying assumptions of the reciprocal relation between school and community that characterizes development discourse on school governance in general. Drawing on classical anthropological notions of reciprocity we suggest an analytical framework for comprehending the complex forms of exchange that are at stake in so called community participation. We then proceed with a discussion of the historically embedded forms of donations, which have been fundamental to Sunaulo School's continued existence, and thereafter on to more recent practices of philanthropy provided by more distant givers. The final section addresses the collection of funds in a situation of emergency, the 2015

earthquake. These three sections illustrate a variety of forms in which different actors express their ‘participation’ in the schools, often in ways that are not necessarily recognised or intended by policy initiatives. While these forms of relationship may conflict with the kind of reciprocity assumed in community-based school governance policies, we argue that this disjunctured reciprocity, firstly, reflects the gap between policy blueprints and the action, and, secondly, reveals the competing logics of community-school relations which may otherwise remain unacknowledged.

Community, reciprocity, and school governance

In the context of an increasing political urge for decentralisation in Nepal (Regmi 2017; Bhatta 2011; Carney and Bista 2009), in 2001, the Seventh Amendment of Nepal’s Education Act 1971 facilitated a massive transfer of all state-funded schools to local communities and renamed them as ‘community schools.’ This amendment, thus, divided the schools in Nepal into two categories: privately-funded ‘institutional schools’ and state-funded ‘community schools’. The term ‘community school’ stands for those schools that have obtained approval and will gain regular grant from the Government of Nepal [Education Act 1971, Seventh amendment. Art No 8, d (2)]. This policy was carried forward to the Eighth Amendment of 2017. In contrast to the previous policies, under National Education System Plan that attempted to create centralised public education, this provision marked the Nepali state’s aim to transfer service delivery to the local level and discursive shift towards the ideas of community ownership (Carney and Bista, 2009; Edwards 2011; Bhatta 2011; Parker 2008; Carney et. al 2007). This policy also created the locally-constituted school management committees (SMC)

as a formal space of community participation, where at least four members of the community were drawn from the parent body.⁴

This policy of community-based school governance was premised on two main assumptions. Firstly, the policy privileged the place-based notion of ‘local community’ as a key administrative unit for school governance. Secondly, the policy expected the parents to function both as consumers and governors of the school. Since it is assumed that parents are direct beneficiaries of the school, the policy also celebrates the capacity of parents to shape schools in ways that best fit the local needs (Carney et. al 2007). This was reiterated in the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP 2015:3), which emphasised a need to build stronger mechanisms and criteria ensuring equity and fair representation in School Management Committees to encourage the participation of disadvantaged and non-literate people. As stated in the School Sector Reform Plan, School Management Committees work best when they have leadership with close ties to the communities. Overall, as pointed out by Khanal (2016:38), the decentralized school governance policy has proven to be ineffective because of problems of, among others, uncertain financial sustainability at the local level, unclear roles of different stakeholders in school governance, and tensions between school teachers and School Management Committees.

In the process of transferring the formal governance of schools to School Management Committees, notions such as ‘local community’ and ‘parents’ have been positioned as central units in these ‘invited spaces’ (Cornwall 2002) of the community-based school governance design. These spaces, which are often backed up by the legal frameworks, are put forward as

⁴ School Management Committee consists of the following members: (a) A person selected by the parents from among themselves -Chairperson (b) Three persons, including One woman, selected by the parents among themselves -Member (c) The Ward President of the concerned Ward of the Village Development Committee or Municipality where the school is – Member (Law Book Management Committee, 2016)

the formal spaces where citizens are invited to become part of the state governance process. These programmes are also in line with the global trend of decentralisation, where the institutional reforms have been undertaken to open up spaces for local level participation in public service delivery (Blair 2000). By bringing state authorities closer to people, decentralisation is seen to open up possibilities for citizen participation, giving them greater representation and a significant voice in public policy decisions which would lead to greater accountability (Blair 2000; Aiyer 2010).

The assumption behind this push for ‘invited spaces of participation’ is that when the schools are nested within the ‘local community,’ it strengthens the ‘social contract’ between local stakeholders and the school (World Bank 2003a: 24). This emphasis on ensuring strong relationship between the ‘community’ and the school is quite prominent in the existing development discourse on school governance. According to the World Development Report 2004, *Making Services Work for Poor People*, a strong relationship between the service providers and their clients is essential to improve governance and efficiency of service delivery (World Bank, 2003b). Similarly, many scholars note the shift towards community-based school governance in contexts as diverse as Senegal (Clemons, 2007), Nicaragua (Gershberg, 1998), and Malawi (Rose, 2003). Thus, within these frameworks, community participation is understood as a shared responsibility in decision-making, in implementing policies, and allocating resources. Discussing the World Bank lending for Primary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, (Heneveld and Craig 1996: 19) identify five categories of parent and community support: (1) children come to school prepared to learn; (2) the community provides financial and material support to the school; (3) communication between the school, parents, and community is frequent; (4) the community has a meaningful role in school governance; and (5) community members and parents assist with instruction.

The notion of a social contract between schools and ‘community,’ assumed in the community-based school governance framework, expects reciprocal action between various actors. The French sociologist Marcel Mauss, in his much cited work ‘The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies’ (1954), argues that reciprocity is a fundamental form of social interaction and exchange. Reciprocity, therefore, manifests itself in an expectation of return between actors, the establishment of social bonds, and a strengthening of these bond as a result of this exchange. Scholars have thus variously defined reciprocity as norms of cooperation, or a sense of obligation to help others, along with a confidence that such assistance will be returned (Putnam 1993; Kleinman 1995; Mauss 1954). Mauss also posited that reciprocity entails a moral bond that is created between giver and receiver through the three acts: giving, receiving and reciprocating a gift. It reinforces relationships, but carries moral weight over the recipient until the obligation to reciprocate is eventually met. Mauss’ idea of reciprocity exhibits the mobile nature of a ‘gift’, in other words ‘circulation of the gift’ where the giver is the ultimate beneficiary of the ‘gift giving’ as the gift goes through a chain and ends at the giver (Mauss, 1954).

The simplistic idea of reciprocity, as an equal and circular exchange between social actors (Kottak 1986, 136), has now been widely critiqued. The emerging scholarly literature on community participation has increasingly pointed out that ‘community’ is a much contested concept, and is invariably shaped by the empirical realities of inequalities, social hierarchies, and resource limitations (Cleaver 2002; Shields and Seltzer 1997). The ‘myth of the community’ that promotes the cooperative and harmonious image (Cleaver 2002) often ignores the ‘trouble with the community’ (Amit and Rapport, 2002) brought forward by its inherent heterogeneity and hierarchy. In this context, a simplistic reciprocal relationship between the

schools and ‘community,’ as assumed in most community-based school governance policy, may not always be possible. Many studies in different parts of the world have repeatedly shown that the efforts to build community in schools do not always have the desirable effect. In these contexts, certain sections of the community might disproportionately benefit from ‘community participation’; a phenomenon that is often described as ‘elite capture’ (Farah and Rizvi, 2007; Prinsen and Titeca, 2008; Edwards, 2011). These studies point out that the focus on certain values over others may result in the alienation of members of the school population who do not share those values.

Given these complexities of social exchange, the conventional symmetrical relationship assumed in ‘reciprocity’ has now been revisited by several scholars. Eric Sabourin, a French socio-anthropologist in his work ‘Education, gift and reciprocity: a preliminary discussion’ (2013), develops Mauss’ (1954) idea further in two forms of reciprocity, first, direct reciprocity with mutual benefits between the two parties and, second, indirect reciprocity where returns are not given to ‘gift giver’ but to another group. This disjuncture in the circular and simplistic logic of reciprocity enables us to make sense of the complex empirical contexts and situations, within which both community and its social exchanges are embedded. The ‘disjunctured reciprocity’ may be seen, not as an anomaly on the logic of reciprocity, but as a productive analytical lens to appreciate the inner workings and complex webs of relationship between the community and the school.

Founding the school: Earning respect through collective responsibilities

Sunaulo School was the earliest school in and around Nayadada, which enrolled children from families residing in the area before the state-supported mass education gradually developed in

Nepal from the 1950s. According to stories narrated by the ex-principals of the school, it was in mid 1940s that two young men of Nayadada, who had returned after their studies in India, started to advocate about the importance of formal education. Initially, operated in a makeshift shelter on the land donated by local residents, the school was run solely on voluntary contributions. Sunaulo like any other education institution received no funds from the state until 1950s. In fact, donations are still vital to Sunaulo in such a way that the trend of donation exists in various form and through diverse sources in the present day.

One of the most captivating sights in the school premises are the names inscribed on the stone plaque above classrooms doors, on water tanks, the main entrance gate, and the memorial stone in the school garden. All the 21 classrooms in one of the school buildings were built entirely by money donated by the people living in Nayadada. The residents donated money to Sunaulo School in the memory of their deceased family members to mark special milestones in their lives or as regular contributions to support the school. As mentioned in the opening paragraph, the Nayadada dwellers also made financial contributions to the construction of 16 shop rooms; popularly known as *shutters*. Today, the rent from those has provided extra funds for the school. As we spent more time in the school, we heard several stories about how the ‘local community’, in the past, contributed to the establishment of the school in the form of money, labour and materials. The ex-principal of the school, a Nayadada resident and one of the earliest pupils of the school shared one of the most popular stories, which we also heard from several other people:

The people in Nayadada contributed to Sunaulo School in two ways: the families made ‘*muthi daan*’ [donation of a fistful of rice everyday], and the traders gave ‘*ana chanda*’ [donation of one percent of their daily net income]. I remember my mother putting aside a handful of rice while cooking meals as our family’s contribution towards school

A similar story was narrated by Kajiman, who was in his mid-70s and usually found sitting outside his small utensils shop in Nayadada. Also among the first students at Sunaulo School, he recalled: ‘I remember my mother telling me that I would go to the school, while she offered her *muthi daan*. It excited me a lot and I used to rush to the door to give rice when people showed up for donations.’ Similarly, we had an informal conversation with a group of elderly men as they were having their evening hang-out at the *chowk*.⁵ Belonging to a prominent family of traders, Rajaram, a man in his mid-60s, grew up in Nayadada but also spent some time in Sikkim. Enthusiastically he shared the story of his father and uncle who often donated to the school and described their action with the expression ‘*ko bhandha ko kam*’ (a Nepali proverb which loosely translates into English as ‘who is lesser than whom’). The emphasis was particularly on the fact that his father, uncle, and their friends competed to donate to the school. They added that donations indicated the donors’ social and economic position in the society. The more one donated, the more respect they received from the people. He also mentioned how people in the past made donations for the building of public properties like temples, taps or courtyards in the area. Nayadada served as a trader’s hub in the past, most residents were traders and merchants who frequented Sikkim and Darjeeling, towns in India for businesses. By giving more than one’s competitor, one laid claim to greater respect. This tendency accelerated the regularity of collective actions in the town. While the donations were narrated as an act of altruism, as above quotes show, they were also shaped by various underlying expectations of getting something in return. In this case, education for one’s child and prestige in the society.

⁵ A public space like a square that comprising of markets and houses. A typical Newari style chowk comprises of a temple as well

As many of our respondents recalled, the residents gradually developed a sense of collective responsibility towards what at the time was the ‘only school’ in Nayadada.⁶ In return, the school acknowledged these contributions in various creative ways. The carving of names in the school properties was one of the ways in which it recognised the contributions. Similarly, Sunaulo School was the only school featured in the book published by Nayadada municipality in 2010 to chronicle the history and heritage of the place. As the ex-principal, who wrote this contribution, mentioned, ‘The history of Nayadada is incomplete without Sunaulo School.’ Moreover, in the school magazine published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the school, the then-Assistant principal mentioned: ‘[...] the school has commenced the construction of its physical infrastructure... These new developments have become possible only through joint efforts made by its ex-students, local people, and the school family.’

These forms of community-school relations were very different from what was observed in the formal spaces such as the School Management Committees. While some of these donors from the past have formally joined the Sunaulo School’s School Management Committee exactly in their capacity as ‘donors,’⁷ most of them are not part of any legally-mandated school governance bodies. Many others have continued their support irrespective of their formal membership in Sunaulo School’s School Management Committees. Moreover, after the official announcement of the Eight Amendment of the Education Act in June 4, 2016 the existing School Management Committee were dissolved in Sunaulo School. There was a period from June to November 2016, before the new School Management Committees election, that Sunaulo School functioned without any formal governing body. All the activities in the

⁶ Although Ward No 2 of Nayadada, where Sunaulo School is located, has a total of 10 state-funded schools and 11 private schools.

⁷ According to the Article 8.12 of the Education Act, the chairman and the four parent-members of the SMC can nominate and invite ‘one person from among the founders of the School or donors to the school’ to formally join the SMC. Some donors have also joined the SMC as ‘local intellectuals or educationists’ since they had been actively working to promote education in Nayadada.

school were coordinated by the teachers in the school; especially the principal who still maintained very strong relationship with the key people in the locality, ex-principals, local politicians, and government officials.

These narratives on the strong relationship between the school and residents of the area seemed to be embedded in the collective memory of the senior teachers at Sunaulo School and older people of Nayadada. The high visibility of the stone engravings, quotes in the school magazine, and a dedicated page in the book on Nayadada all served as evidences of these connections and as a nostalgic reminder to the younger generation about a common past. While the material contributions were central to these exchanges between the school and the people, they also held a strong moral dimension. Although Mauss focuses on material and symbolic goods, he also emphasizes the competitive and strategic aspect of gift giving by the example of *potlach*,⁸ which takes honour as a huge part. Discussing the practice of gift-giving, Sabourin (2013) points out that any act of exchange creates a moral bond between giver and receiver through the three acts of giving, receiving and reciprocating a gift. The underlying motivations for these donation were clearly very diverse. As demonstrated in the empirical material presented above, firstly, since several residents of Nayadada sent their children to Sunaulo School, the parents were motivated by the shared concern towards the education of their children and contributed hoping that the school would function efficiently. Secondly, people also donated to gain respect and to indicate their socio-economic position.

Helping the ‘other’: Affective exchange through philanthropic action

⁸ A ceremonial feast among the North-West Coast Native American people, which includes giving away possessions, destruction and display of the wealth to enhance the prestige

Contrary to the profile of the early donors, who were mainly the parents of then-students and resided in Nayadada, later donors were more varied in their composition. At the time of fieldwork the school received donations from different (inter)national NGOs, local businessmen, ex-students, and other individuals who made one-time donations. Because of its central location- nearby all the government offices, on the way to tourist attractions, and very close to the main bus station – Sunaulo School was very visible in Nayadada. The teachers in the school corroborated that it was through these new kinds of donations that the school was able to buy 10 computers and build the computer lab in 2014. Mukesh, a tourist guide by occupation, who was central in raising funds for the computer lab, explained:

I have been bringing tourists to Nayadada for 15 years now, as this is a very popular hiking site. On our way to the hiking destination, many tourists notice this school and show interest to know more about Nepali schools. Many times when tourists visit, they desire to support the Nepalese schools so whenever my clients ask me for advice, I suggest them Sunaulo School. That is how I got funding for the computer lab. I now feel very much like an insider to the school.

As explained by Mukesh, despite his lack of connection with the school at the first place he decided to help Sunaulo School. Without being part of any formal committee he gradually built up relations with the school, and in his words he felt ‘like an insider’.

We observed many similar incidences and met diverse donors, who had come to the school. There were also several occasions when students had their photographs taken, posing with handwritten notes saying ‘Merry Christmas’ and ‘Happy New Year’. These photographs were usually sent to foreign sponsors, individuals who contributed money to cover school fees, stationary, books, and school uniform costs of some students. Ramesh, one of the co-ordinators of an NGO that raised funds from Australia-based donors, explained:

We work together with our team members in Australia to raise funds for education. In Sunaulo, we have been supporting 20 students for the last five years. We buy them school uniforms, stationary and books every year, as needed. Sometimes, especially during the festive season, we ask the students to write letters to their sponsors and send

them their photos. This way the sponsors and students stay connected, and it also helps us in continuing the fund-raising.

In the period July 2016 – December 2017, we noted at least 16 different sources of donations reaching approximately 70 students currently enrolled in the school. These private donations were in addition to the regular funds that the school received from the *shutter* rents and grants from the government of Nepal. The donors included NGOs (such as Save the Children), banks (such as Civil Bank), tourists visiting Nayadada, university students (such as students from Singapore Management Institute), and many local and international private donors. These donors partially covered the school-related costs of some students. Students were usually selected either on the basis on financial need i.e. if those who came from poor families, or on the basis of merit i.e. the students who scored high marks in exam. The support ranged from Rs 400 – Rs 10,000 per student per annum.

As one of the residents of Nayadada, who had set up a scholarship fund in his late parents' memory, explained: 'I donated this money to the school to help the children who are in need. My parents always taught me the importance of education. So, in their memory, I wanted to do something that reflected their values. And the government school children usually need more financial help.' Unlike the early days of Sunaulo School, when the majority of the Nayadada residents sent their children to what was then the only school in Nayadada, nowadays most residents send their children to private schools. The contemporary student population of Sunaulo School mainly belongs to less affluent families in nearby villages and in Nayadada. The donors therefore contributed to the school, in their words to 'pay-back,' to 'do good,' and to 'help the needy' students.

The school also had a five-member scholarship committee, as a sub-committee under the School Management Committee, to oversee and coordinate the activities related to student-support activities. The members included four staff members and one assistant-principal. Apart from the assistant principal, who was also the chairman of this committee, other members of the scholarship committee were involved in the committee activities. Sabina, one of the teachers, who was also a member of the scholarship committee explained: ‘I go to the committee meetings when some important decision are to be made. But the scholarship programme is quite a regular and predictable activity. So, usually the assistant principal coordinates it.’ The two assistant-principals of Sunaulo School shared several coordinating responsibilities, including the coordination of donations to the school. The chairman of scholarship committee mainly maintained the records of individuals and organisations, who made cash or kind contributions to the school and often presented their activities in the regular staff meetings. However, one of the assistant-principal also corroborated that the scholarship committee members were not very active. He explained: ‘We usually ask our teachers to become member of the committee as it helps them in their promotion application. When they apply for promotion, they gain some point for being part of school committees.’

The above cases challenge normative ideas of ‘community’ as a bounded entity. As illustrated in this section, various groups of people who are linked through these scholarship programmes - the scholarship committee, the donors, the students, the Nayadada residents, and the parent body - do not necessarily overlap with each other. Neither do they follow the circular and symmetrical logic of reciprocity. Instead the community-school relationship with different groups of people take different forms and are motivated by varying logics. As Sabourin (2013), challenging the assumption of symmetrical relationship in reciprocity, points out, reciprocity does not always manifest itself in a direct relationship, where there are mutual benefits between

the two parties. It can also take form of indirect reciprocity, where returns are not given to the ‘gift giver’ but to another group. Moreover, reciprocity could be maintained through its affective dimensions such as trust, social ties, belongingness, and emotions such as the pictures sent to donors and charities in the name of loved ones as demonstrated through empirical material discussed in this section. It is this complex manifestation of reciprocity that has a potential to maintain the web of relationships, which shapes the locally embedded ideas of ownership.

Rebuilding the school: Strengthening belongingness through softening rules

When the earthquake of magnitude 7.9 Richter scale hit Nepal on 25th April 2015, Sunaulo School faced unprecedented physical destruction. The school building that was built by the local beneficiaries was severely damaged and thus marked as ‘unsafe’ for use. One building completely collapsed, and another had numerous cracks on its walls and staircases. None of the three buildings of Sunaulo School could be used as classrooms. As the teachers and students recalled, the school did not have any class for approximately three months after the earthquake. Some make-shift classrooms were constructed with the relief material that was distributed by the District Education Office and other donors. However, after the initial ad-hoc relief support the Government of Nepal mandated all the school School Management Committees to form an Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee (ERC), as a sub-committee under School Management Committees, to mobilise, coordinate, and manage the reconstruction activities.

Sunaulo School’s Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee included several members of the School Management Committees, well-known people of Nayadada, and the principal, none of whom were parents of the current student body. The seven people committee consisted of

three ex-principals, the current principal, the chairman of the School Management Committees, and two local body representatives. The principal acknowledged that Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee was formed ‘in a hurry’ because, firstly, it was the time of emergency and, secondly, it was the body that was mandated to approve any funds for reconstruction. Explaining the selection of the Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee members, the committee was according to the principal, an important body which many people were interested in becoming part of, as it had a responsibility to manage a lot of funds. Therefore, the School Management Committee had to be careful about choosing the members. ‘We decided to select some of the trustworthy people [...],’ said the principal of the school. Eventually, when the Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee was formed, none of the members were parents. ‘Trust’, has been discussed by different scholars, as a product of a successful reciprocal relationships (Crapanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In this case, this ‘trust’ was based on the previous social relations with the School Management Committee members and the principal. Sunaulo School was preparing to receive 10 million Nepalese Rupees from a reputed international donor organisation for the school reconstruction. The Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee would have played an important part in managing this money, but the donor withdrew without giving any reasons, after several round of preparatory meetings without any apparently valid reason.

The withdrawal of the donor came as a shock to Sunaulo School, its School Management Committee and the Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee. However, this moment of crisis was also the time when other groups such as the ex-students of the school came forward to help the school. As the Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report (GoN 2015: 11) identifies, the immediate post-disaster need, for all the schools, was establishment of temporary/transitional learning spaces, provision of textbooks/learning materials, debris

removal, and detailed structural assessments of facilities. Due to the large scale destruction across the country, the Post Disaster Recovery Framework (GoN 2016: 47) encouraged the School Management Committees to mobilise as many local resources as possible. The framework encouraged volunteers from different walks of life to be involved in reconstruction activities in collaboration with local government agencies. Operating within this guideline, the 1978 cohort of Sunaulo School collectively donated NRs. 100,000 (US \$ approx.1000), which helped the school to rebuild its wall. This cohort had several members who were employed in good positions in renowned banks, the army and the university etc. Though they did not necessarily live in Nayadada anymore, but they kept in touch through social media such as Facebook and Whatsapp. They occasionally organised picnics and get-togethers to plan activities for various philanthropic activities, mainly to support Sunaulo School but also other schools in Nayadada. One of the ex-student of the school, Rajanish, who lived very close to Sunaulo School, explained:

That yellow school wall was built by us. We, the cohort of 1978 students, collected money for it and also supervised the construction. Our school was in trouble, so we had to help. But the school management hadn't realised that ex-students of the school are significant to the school until the aftermath of earthquake. [...] Students after leaving the school were not given any chances of being involved in the school affairs, we have never been officially invited to the school for any programs. Also during the earthquake the school did not ask help with us but with NGOs and projects, however ex-students voluntarily came forward with donations. Now I hear rumours that the school will invite those to honour them for their contribution which I think is very important to motivate the good works.

Although Rajanish portrayed the ex-students involvement in the school as a volunteer act, his implication on 'honour' as 'motivation for good works' shows that the act was not an altruistic act for him. Rajanish's grievance that they have never been given a 'chance to be involved' opens up an understanding that access to participation was generally controlled by the school's management committee, whereas in the times of crisis the authorities were let loose and

involvements/participations were freely welcomed. He also talked about an ‘official invitation’ and ‘honour for contribution,’ utterances which revealed expectations of reciprocity as it reveals some kind of appreciation in return. This eventually did happen. In an emergency meeting that was called after the withdrawal of the international donor, Bardan, the ex-mayor of Nayadada, who was invited as the chief guest of the meeting, addressed the 1978 cohort:

I am very sad to hear the news of betrayal by one of the reputable organizations [...]. I tell all of you that we have not lost. [...] This is the time we have to show our unity. The school needs us more than ever today, every one of you are important. [...] Sunaulo needs every one of you present here to be committed for the school until we reconstruct the building.

Although the Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee was established to oversee the management of the reconstruction donations and activities, it rarely played an active role except in the initial phase of reconstructing the makeshift classrooms. When the School Management Committee was dissolved in early 2016, the Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee also got dissolved. Despite all the deliberation on the selection of the members, all the anticipation of the huge reconstruction budget, and various plan to use it in different ways, the Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee never had a chance to function as it was intended to. It was rather the group of people, such as ex-students and residents of Nayadada who had developed a strong sense of connection with the school, who came forward to support the school in the time of need. One of the local residents, Laxmi, who was also a member of School Management Committee a few years back, recalled her experience during the earthquake:

As soon as the earthquake stopped, we [the residents] ran to check on our beloved school. It had lots of destruction. At that time, there were some families from the neighbourhood and the principal who came to check the school. None of the SMC members were there. Since some students also live in the hostel, we brought food and supplies. Later some committee was formed in the school. And the locals were not allowed to bring donations without their permission. That was ridiculous!

As illustrated in this section, in the time of unprecedented crisis, Sunaulo School's community-school reciprocity relied highly on the 'belongingness' to the school. While the formal bodies of the Earthquake Rehabilitation Committee and the School Management Committee played a crucial role in facilitating the formal relief funds, it was the informal sense of belongingness of ex-students and Nayadada residents and their sense of obligations towards the school that was mobilised much before the formal sources of funding. In this context of belongingness, the ideas of 'responsibility' towards the school and the expectations of 'recognition' from the school were constantly invoked to establish reciprocal relationship between school and the community.

Conclusion

Studies on 'community participation' in different parts of the world have shown that 'invited spaces' can take up a range of meanings and may thus not function as expected (Cornwall, 2002; Cooke and Kothari, 2000). The reciprocal relationship assumed in these participatory approaches has been widely criticised for making naïve assumptions about communities and collective action by overlooking the complexities of local power relations, deeply entrenched social inequalities, and the attendant costs that community participation entails (Aiyer, 2010). The empirical material presented in this article shows that actual practices of so called community participation, in this case through donations, reveal peculiar forms of reciprocity, which do not always align with the symmetrical reciprocal relation assumed in the community-based school governance policy, such as Seventh and Eighth amendment of Education Act in Nepal. Through examples of different forms of exchanges and between different actors in Sunaulo School, we have shown that community-school relations can be expressed in variety of ways in both formal and informal spaces. Although the formal bodies of school governance

such as School Management Committees and their sub-committees were a very central part of the school governance system, they were not the only spaces where parents and stakeholders could engage, express their ownership, and fulfill their obligations towards the school.

Drawing on Sabourin's (2013) interpretation of Mauss (1954), we claim that the simplistic logic of symmetrical reciprocal relation assumed in the community-based school governance policy may display differently in different situation and that the existing social context may create a disjuncture in the sense of reciprocity. As illustrated in this article, several groups such as ex-students, foreign donors and Nayadada residents maintained strong ties and contributed to the school without any formal membership to the bodies of 'community participation.' We argue that paying close attention to the forms of reciprocity that may not necessarily follow a linear logic, enables us to uncover a variety of forms in which different actors might express their 'participation' in school. This 'disjunctured reciprocity' is not an anomaly in the logic of reciprocity. Instead, it reveals a complex web of community-school relationships and competing logics of participation which may remain unacknowledged in the policy blueprints. Moreover, an ethnographic perspective on school-community relations can help unpack the idea of community itself and thus go beyond taken for granted ideas of what and who constitutes a given community.