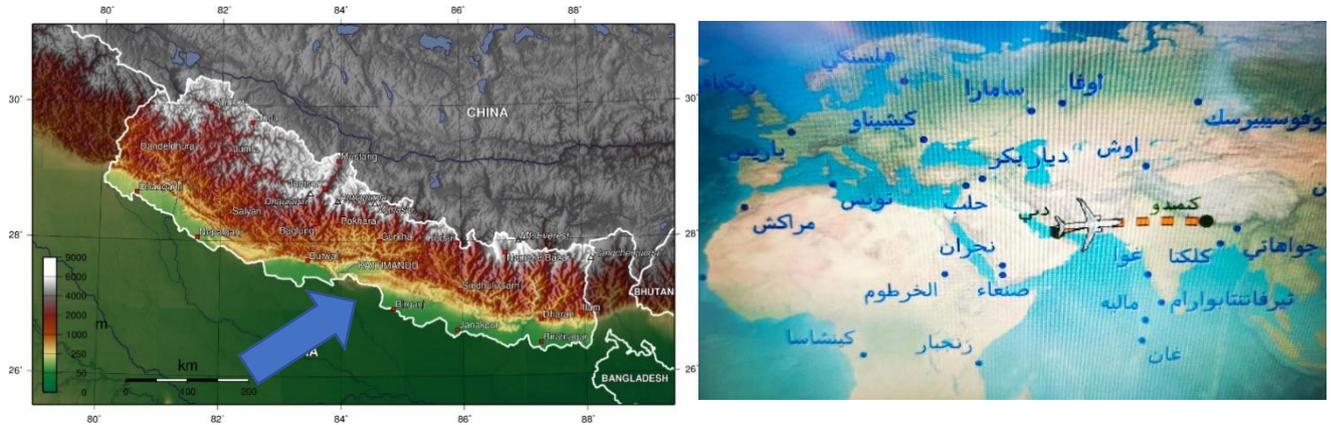


Goats in a land of rice

Nepal – A small country stuck between India and China politically and geographically

The only way to get there is through Dubai then on a cheaper airlink sort of thing to Kathmandu



It is an old tribal kingdom where the legendary Gurka soldiers come from who helped beat back the Japanese in World War 2. This is important as it is still one of there major exports.

For nearly two centuries, from 1857 the Indian revolution, hundreds of thousands of Gurkhas have been plucked from the foothills of the Himalayas to serve primarily in the British and Indian armies. On average Nepali farmers earn roughly \$300 a year. By contrast, Gurkha privates in the British army take home \$28,000 a year. Each year, the country receives \$1.1 billion in remittances — nearly 18% of the national GDP — from the Gurkhas and other 2 million Nepalis serving abroad.

It’s a new country in terms of democracy. A Constituent Assembly election was held on April 10, 2008. On May 28, 2008, the newly elected Constituent Assembly declared Nepal a Federal Democratic Republic, abolishing the 240-year-old monarchy. Nepal today has a President as Head of State and a Prime Minister heading the Government. The first election was held in 2015 after the new constitution was accepted.

It has open borders with India and no visa or work restrictions on Indian goods or people.

They are in the year 2076 which all their calendars follow. And of course no synchronisation to ours so the 19th October their month starts.



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Kathmandu the capital is very dirty- Kathmandu is considered one of the most polluted cities in Asia- Air and water. And traffic- a bit like if you tried to fit a million cars and motorbikes into Cape Town.

There are three main roads in the country and they are all single lane and unmaintained. Being driven around is a semi religious experience. Only cars need a licenced driver and I can't imagine the testing regime.



It took 6 hours to go 140 kilometres. And when you leave town it is a world of rice. Every square metre that is not steep.

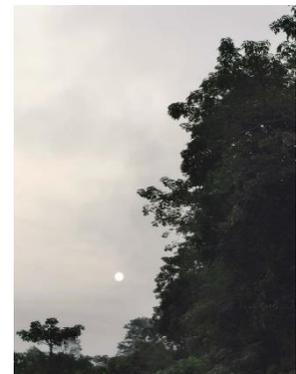
Nepal has over 2000 types of rice of which 83 have been hybridised to be high yielding varieties 75 percent of the working population is engaged in rice farming for at least six months of the year. Rice contributes 50 % of the country's GDP -Rice consumption, 2009: 79.7 kg milled rice per person per year



Nepal has amazing geography with the highest mountains in the world-over 8 kilometres high-dropping rapidly to very low river valleys that are at 300 metres above sea level- the tribes of this area used these diseased lowland swamps and river valleys as a natural barrier protecting any incursions from India. They were used as hunting grounds but malaria kept them clear of settlements – this lowland of course is where we went. A place called Chitwan. It is famous for its forests full of rhino, tigers and crocodiles.



This valley is the start of the Ganges river was only settled in the 1950s with the help of DDT. It is the farming flatlands of Nepal. Big homes in rice farms – apparently many generations live in each home and the bottom floor is rented out. Doesn't look poor to these jaundiced eyes -probably just too green. And the sun never really shines you just aware of it through the haze. But its muggy and hot every day.



So why in the world are we there – a conference on goats in Asia – the President of the International Goat Association, Beth Miller, visited Msinga 18 months ago saw GAP work in the field and asked for us to present our work to this international conference.

Goats in nepal? I was also surprised

The world population of goats is about 921 million. Asia had the largest population of goats of about 60% (556 million), followed by Africa (311 million).

It's also the epicentre of aid with all the mysticism and European dewy-eyedness about poverty and beauty all in a little land locked collapsed economy. There has been more than R600 million spent on goat improvement program by one NGO. The world bank is running a parallel government program along the same lines and with a 1.7-billion-rand budget.



So to livestock

Basically, in a Hindu dominated country cattle are sacred. Goats and water buffalo are not sacred so are the meat for the population. They have government funded shelters for abandoned cattle which no longer produce milk and have to be allowed to die of old age.



But all these 6 to 11 (ha ha- both government figures no one can say why the disparity) million goats and 300 000 water buffalo are tied up and fed by cut and carried fodder their whole lives. They live in these sheds in the homestead. The buffalo are used mainly for milk though.



Everywhere you go you see people selling hand cut fodder. Grass and nettle and some herbs. Mixed with rice hay sometimes but no obvious signs of protein sources.



The whole focus of the Nepal goat program and thus the conference is to improve their goats to push back on the import of goats from India. These 200-300 000 goats are brought in annually to supplement 400-600 000 local used goats provide the meat needs of the country. These are all slaughtered at home and sold on the street. Goat farming is increasing as crop farming is affected by changes in climate patterns.



So increase goats and formalise the market- all the good ideas of buying and selling them online with smartphones, farmers selling into value chains and of course forcing abattoirs on the bush slaughter system. The goats face the problem of small herds that fit under houses and are fed grass so the herds reflect how much they can be fed on daily cuttings so herds or flocks are never more than 6 to 10 per home. Across hundreds of thousands of homes.



These are some of the local breeds from Nepal, they seem large in our eyes, - tick free seeing they don't go anywhere. But some very odd looking long ears. There are cashmere breeds, but they are mountain adapted so are not really for the meat market



The conference was a good experience. We presented on our work and used the platform to launch our third edition of the Indigenous Goat Production Handbook. It got a lot of interest from academics from other countries and invites to future collaboration specially in India and Pakistan. The difference in free ranging herds of 300 among thorn trees and rocks (us) compared to the housed goats in rice paddies (theirs) was a bit difficult to bridge in conversations and presentations. Many which we couldn't understand which native dialect they were presenting in only to find it was English just not English sounding.



The talks were often weird and wonderful –

- goats as companion animals in Japan- should the goat dung be used for manure or fuel
- male veterinarians' suicide rates are 1.6 the average rate and women 2.4 times higher
- fertility following different estrus synchronisation protocols during low breeding season in Pakistan's beetal goats
- localisation of aquaporins in the nephron

A big push in the sector on the search for **polymorphism** in goats using every avenue imaginable – I looked it up - *This is called polymorphism A person at the same time can have different characteristic. Like a man at the same time is a father, a husband, an employee.*



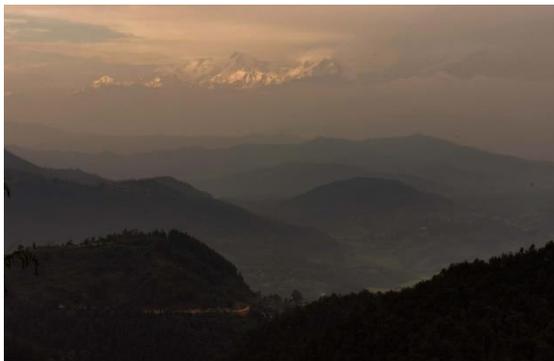
The conference food though was amazing 6 or 7 curries every day and slap chips and deep fried goodies for breakfast. Cooked in a tent next to the eating tent.

Post conference visit

The Nepal Agriculture and Forestry University and government set up the post conference visit to showcase the breed improvement program. The 1.5 billion rand World Bank one. We started at a commercial goat farmer who is keeping goats to breed up and sell to farmers at 50% 75% and 97% boer goat strength. He makes a lot of money on this he told us as the government subsidises farmer 70 percent plus to add boer goats to their indigenous breeds to make them bigger and more acceptable to abattoirs. As we learnt at the conference there are currently no goat abattoirs.



To assume Boer goats are from South Africa would also be incorrect these are all imported from Australia as there are diseases in South Africa we are told. These are from the Cadenza Boer Goat Stud in Gippsland, Australia ""There are no freight aircraft to Nepal, so these goats actually go on passenger aircraft, in the freight area in a special crate that is required to have a certain amount of space.



A 3 hour drive later we are at the main tourist town of Bhandipur and at last we can see the Himalayas – well sort of – this used to be the main trading town on the Nepal trade route but was abandoned because of the tar road to Nepal.

The Nepal Goat Research Centre is right next to the tourist trap town – (intrestingly Indians and Chinese are the most numerous tourists in Nepal). Breeding different levels of Boer goats into the local population. One gets a sense from the painting on the main gate that breeding is a bit of a thing here.

Apparently the Boer goat genes are available in rams various percentages and priced accordingly so the government institution sells them to local farmers and gets a refund from the World Bank program. There are some warnings from scientists about increased vulnerability to diseases of these cross breeds and farmers in the meeting complain that they not picking up weight like was promised but this is not really seen as a real issue. The black ram is the indigenous local breed being kept for research purposes.



Heifer visit

The next day Heifer Nepal hosted us to a field visit to see their goat project – I had a feeling that having the Chair and Vice Chair of the international Goat Association tagging along helped motivate the visit.

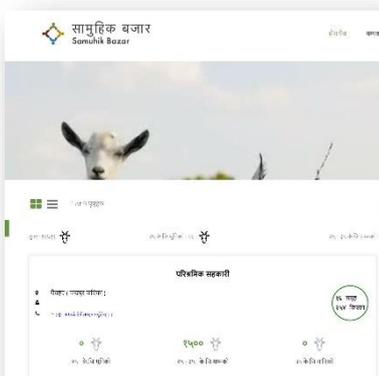
Basically they have a value chain support process to commercialise the goats in Nepal. They look at breed improvement, feed improvement, bulking of goat numbers at co operative level and sales of these through smart phones and then look at branchless banking, soft loans on agricultural production purchases, as well as insurance of goats and buffalo. Much of it seems subsidised by foreign funding. A lot of the work is premised on farmer field schools and the use of Community Agro-Vet Entrepreneurs (CAVEs).



The feed improvement program involves planting various types of fodder trees and plants to be bulked up and spread among the farmers' plots. Many of these are what South Africans would call invasive species, like Syringa and Moringa trees and Napier and Bermuda grasses. These are then cut and carried to the goats and buffalo.



The cooperatives bulk the goats for sale and put them onto a website called Samuhik Bazar which then coordinates pick up and payment for the goats.



The CAVEs, 407 of them reportedly, sell medicines and their services to cooperative members, which according to Heifer is about 140 000 members. The agrivet shop we visited and farmers we saw mainly stock vitamin, liver and appetite tonics of various types. These made up 90% of the stock in the shops. The Heifer representative suggested that these help goats recover from things like liver fluke and poisonous plants.





Most of the shops in of towns are made up of clothes and dry goods shops. There are no malls or supermarkets. We did not see any cold chains or refrigeration systems except for cool drinks. The colours are vivid and mainly greens and reds with local seamstresses making clothes while you wait once you chose the material for a kurta suruwal, the traditional dress for Nepalese women.

The cities are covered in wires, huge nests on every corner. Stray dogs, sacred in the Nepalese culture, wander the cities and towns, fed by the community and often in packs fighting for territory.



The traditional food is momos, a dumpling which can have a variety of fillings such as vegetables or buffalo. Rice, daal and achar are served at every meal with some type of curry.





The caste system is still very strong, although illegal, with 36 castes including the Dalits or untouchables. Within this untouchable caste are the Dhobis or the clothes washers who can be seen along all the rivers. Signs on some of the buildings show no tolerance to the caste system. These castes are not immediately obvious to an outsider. Begging has been banned and there were no beggars on the streets.

Diwali

Little did we know that the conference had been organised to end at the beginning of the Diwali, also known as Tihar, preparations. A five day celebration- one day each for honouring crows, dogs and cows. As it is also known as the festival of light, buildings, hotels and cars were adorned with flashing lights like a million Christmas trees. Marigolds seem to be the central visible symbol of Diwali. As it got closer, more and more shops, buses, dogs and people were adorned with various ways with marigolds or plastic in marigold colours of orange and yellow. There are also piles of multicoloured tika which as far as we could understand is used to daub onto the foreheads of family members and guests to protect them.





And so...we finished the trip back to Kathmandu with a 20 minute flight that ended taking 4 hours in a 3 hour traffic jam caused by this single cow. We did see Mount Everest but only from the propeller driven Yeti Airlines flight.

A thought from the cooperative presentation....

- Cooperative education and mass sincerity सहकारी शिक्षा र समसामयिक विषयमा आम सचेतीकरणका कार्यहरु
- Contribution based appreciate and prize योगदानमा आधारित पुरस्कार तथा सम्मानको व्यवस्था