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Killing the snake of poverty : local perceptions of poverty and well-being and people's capabilities to improve their lives in the Southern Andes of Peru

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Chapter 4

A dynamic view of poverty: snakes and ladders

During my first visit to Yanampampa in 2002, I talked with Señor Cornejo in his *kiosko* (kiosk), one of the many in Yanampampa. The products displayed in his shop were limited to some condiments, flour, bread, shampoo, beer and a few other items in very small quantities. Señor Cornejo told me that *kioskos* are not profitable, because there are too many of them in the comunidad. His kiosko was more of a storage place for products for the household's own consumption, and it was one of his many activities besides agriculture. When there was less agricultural work, he looked for temporary employment by, in his words, 'knocking on the doors of institutions'. He said that 'There is no work and agricultural products are too cheap'. He was one of the few people in the comunidad who considered the commercialization of cattle to be the only alternative in the light of declining agricultural prices and the scarcity of jobs.

On my second visit (in 2003), it was Señor Cornejo's wife who greeted me from behind the counter of the kiosko. Although the items on display had not changed much, she told me with a smile that their lives were gradually improving. They had just started the only bakery in the comunidad. Both she and Señor Cornejo were very excited that they now had a daily income to fund their children's education. Although the costs associated with the installation of the oven and the purchase of the machines had been quite high, they had bought them without the need for credit. They proudly declared that they had saved up the money because they did not like getting credit: they had seen too many people get into trouble because of it. They combined cattle rearing with a job as 'watchman' when the IMA opened its office in the comunidad, and from this and the income from the shop, they were able to save money.

One big problem with the installation of the bakery had been finding a good *maestro* to help them build the oven. They had been lucky, however, as they had heard from one of Señor Cornejo's acquaintances that there was a good maestro in Sicuani, and he had agreed to build the oven for them. Señor Cornejo had worked in a bakery when he was young and was able to use this knowledge to bake his own bread. When I visited their bakery, I was taken to a four metre square room containing a dough-making machine, an oven that was almost the size of the entire wall, and a table in the middle upon which the bread was made. I talked with Señor Cornejo while he baked the bread and his wife helped him to prepare the dough. 'This is much easier work than agriculture,' he said as he took a dozen loaves from the oven with a big wooden palette weighing about five kilos. They were just starting their business and had yet to find any clients. He admitted that there is a lot of competition at the level of the district and that it would be a tough business. Both husband and wife smiled as we discussed their business; they were full of hope.

When I called on Señor Cornejo during my third visit (in 2005), he welcomed me from behind the counter with his usual friendly smile. '*Otra vez por acá, señorita?*' he said. I learned that he had had an accident: he had fallen from the tricycle that he used to distribute the bread. He injured his head and was taken to the hospital, where he remained unconscious and hospitalized for some days. The transport by ambulance to Cusco, the operation, the bed and the medicines cost a total of 4,000 *soles*. They were able to pay this sum, but only after getting collective credit from an NGO, from which he borrowed 2,000 *soles*. Family members lent him another 2,000 *soles*. At the time of my visit they were busy trying to pay back the money. Although the bakery business was doing well, the

accident had turned their lives upside down. '*Hemos fracasado totalmente*,' they said, tears in their eyes.

While the previous chapter focused on local discourses of well-being and poverty, especially in relation to communal norms and values in access to the resources of the comunidad, in this chapter I explore the local perceptions of social mobility and the factors that play a role in the shaping of these perceptions.

This chapter is based on the in-depth interviews and life-story interviews that I carried out in order to uncover the changes that had affected the comuneros' livelihoods.¹²⁵ By making a distinction between households that have achieved social mobility (dynamic households) and the more static households,¹²⁶ I explore the events and/or circumstances that comuneros identified as helping them to improve their lives – I call these events 'ladders' – and those that are perceived as affecting them negatively, which I call 'snakes'.

Change and experiencing social mobility is the norm rather than the exception in most comunidades; the case of Señor Cornejo is only one example of the kinds of events that influence social mobility. In better times, Señor Cornejo had been able to save money and invest in a bakery, which brought economic improvement to his daily life. However, his accident forced him into *fracaso*, or negative downward mobility. Without any form of insurance, his accident cost him almost 4,000 *soles* (3,800 for the surgical intervention and 180 for the ambulance), which is 400 times the daily income he receives from selling bread. Whether he and his wife will be able to recover financially from this very much depends on future events, such as his rehabilitation, his bakery business, agricultural production, family members, their health, education, and so on. If the accident had not happened, Señor Cornejo would have been able to enjoy the profits of his business and could have invested in further activities, thus further improving their lives. As this example illustrates, people's livelihoods are far from stable; changes in their situation can have a variety of effects on their livelihoods.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first deals with the adverse circumstances in which the households operate (i.e. adverse environmental conditions, declining soil fertility, low prices etc.) and that are common to the Andes region. The second shows how different households respond to these adverse circumstances in different ways and with different results.

¹²⁵ As I mentioned in my methodology chapter (Ch. 1), I carried out 48 interviews with households considered poor, better off, improving or experiencing downward social mobility. From these, I took 20 representative cases to carry out a life-story interview.

¹²⁶ Here I use the word 'static' to refer to households which were seen as remaining 'rich' or 'poor'. However, as I argue, they were also vulnerable to changes in the context.

The context: adverse circumstances and increasing vulnerability

Studies of peasant economies and rural poverty claim that campesinos have become more vulnerable (De Janvry quoted in Loker 1999: 29). This study confirms that due to a number of trends the vulnerability of households has indeed increased. The factors that people in the comunidades say have affected their livelihoods include the deterioration of natural resources and adverse environmental conditions, including increasing land scarcity and overgrazing; the increasing scarcity of jobs; and the fall in agricultural prices. These factors were mentioned by the comuneros in all the comunidades, even though the gravity of the situation varies from place to place.

The deterioration of ecological conditions has direct implications for daily life: it is more difficult to find firewood and crop production is declining. In Yanampampa, where most people rely on wood for cooking, people complained that the distances they had to travel to find wood had increased considerably.¹²⁷ Complaints about decreases in the quality of crop production were mainly heard in Jilayhua, where for many years the comuneros had used fertilizers.¹²⁸ Production had been good for the first couple of years, but then suddenly decreased. Now they said that they were not able to get the *nativa* potatoes, which they could have obtained some years previously.¹²⁹ For the people in Mosocllaqta and Yanampampa, the decline in production quality did not seem to be a significant issue; they said that everything grew in these communities and they had not introduced the use of fertilizers as extensively as those in Jilayhua had.

Another issue brought up by many respondents was overgrazing. This is a common problem in the communities, and I encountered several discussions about the need to restrict the number of cattle or sheep put out to pasture. The need to limit the number of sheep a household can keep was often mentioned. In the case of Mosocllaqta, for instance, the number of sheep was limited to 100 per household, due to the danger of overgrazing the natural pastureland.¹³⁰

The kinds of negative events that were echoed by all members of the comunidad were the adverse (and variable) weather conditions; for example, the lack of rain and the frequency of hail or frost. Worries about these kinds of problems usually start in December, particularly in

¹²⁷ While in the higher communities *bosta* or cow/sheep manure are used, in the community of Yanampampa people used wood because of difficulty in getting 'dry' manure.

¹²⁸ Before the comunidad embraced cattle production, they were working with crop farming and were encouraged to use fertilizers by PRODERM for this activity. This led to the deterioration of their soil, and production becoming an extra stimulant for comuneros to switch to cattle production.

¹²⁹ Field notes 29 Aug. 2003 Yanaoca. Informal conversation with Señor Ancco. There were many others who echoed his concern.

¹³⁰ Interview 30 Nov. 2003. President of the community 2002-3, Mosocllaqta.

those communities that lack irrigation. The sowing season usually begins with the first drops of rain (before this the land is too hard for planting and the seeds dry out if people are unable to water them).¹³¹ However, due to increasing variability, planning is increasingly difficult: nobody knows whether those first few raindrops herald the start of the rainy season or yet more days of dry weather. Most people wait to start planting until they see other comuneros planting.

In communities with extended irrigation infrastructure (like Jilayhua) the lack of rain does not present a major problem, but being at an altitude of 4,000 metres means that frost and hail are serious problems. A hailstorm can destroy the entire year's crop and is therefore the event that those living in Jilayhua fear most.¹³² Many people gave the frequency of hail and the risk of losing one's harvest as a reason for switching to livestock, an activity that is less affected by hailstorms. Señor Ancco, the president of the irrigation committee, said that 'we cannot afford to lose all our work and production to this [hail]'. He told me that the comunidad is planning to extend the irrigated area with sprinklers (to be used as pastures for cattle farming); the higher parts that rely on rain should be used for growing crops for personal consumption.

Comuneros try to cope with these adversities by diversifying their agricultural production to different zones, so that if one area is affected they can still rely on the unaffected areas. This was especially the case in Mosocllaqta and Yanampampa, where they still manage altitudinal zones ranging from 3,600 to almost 4,000 metres above sea level, which allows them to produce a variety of products (using different agro-ecological zones as a strategy for risk dispersion).¹³³

Another trend that is perceived as negative by the comuneros is the increasing minifundization of land. With population increases and the continued distribution of land among siblings,¹³⁴ the land is becoming gradually fragmented and divided into distant areas within the comunidad. The problem of land scarcity and fragmentation is a major problem in the Peruvian Andes (see also Sheahan and Gavilano 2001). Comuneros often have to walk some distance to be able to work their various plots of land, and the scattered plots make it

¹³¹ Faced with these climatic events, it became clear that people develop different explanations and solutions. For instance, in the event of drought, people take recourse to singing songs and praying. This was a special event. All the children from the community gathered together at night in a specific mountain to excitedly sing the following song: *Señor dame tu agua, tu lluvia para mantener a mis hijos Quiero lluvia. Por favor Señor Mandame lluvia Padre mio* (Lord give me your water, your rain to sustain my children. I want rain please Lord. Send me rain My Lord).

¹³² In the case of hail storms, Señora Ccoto once explained me the reason for them during my early fieldwork. A member of the community had argued with his wife at a time most sensitive for 'hail'. She explained that these people were even fined by the Assembly because fighting with his wife had caused the hailstorm. Informal talk with Señora Ccoto.

¹³³ Murra has noted the importance that Andean civilizations have given to the notion of 'complementarity' of different altitudinal zones as a way of obtaining different sources. See Murra, J. (2002) *El Mundo Andino. Población, Medio Ambiente y Economía*. Lima: IEP, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

¹³⁴ System of inheritance whereby land is divided among all the children.

difficult to intensify the use of the land. Population growth and limited productivity in the Andean communities force people to migrate to urban areas (Golte 2001).

Due to minifundization and the decreasing prices of agricultural products, many rural peasants also do off-farm work (in the form of temporary migration) or seek work in neighbouring areas to supplement their agricultural activities (Zoomers 1998; Golte 2001; Kay 2005). Employment and migration opportunities, however, are also decreasing – a fact that was echoed in many of the interviews. Although there was an increasing tendency to migrate, people are finding it increasingly difficult to find work, especially in the tropical lowlands. Except for their agricultural activities, there are few other jobs. Those who work as teachers, in the transportation business, as civil servants, in dairy production and so forth are considered the lucky ones. At the same time, however, work as technicians or teachers is not as stable as it once was, because temporary contracts have now become the norm rather than the exception. Teachers have to move from contract to contract until they are given a *nombramiento*;¹³⁵ once they have obtained their *nombramiento*, they are in better circumstances and have better possibilities to find work closer to the comunidad, instead of in far away places.¹³⁶

Although fluctuation in agricultural prices is normal, a major problem mentioned by the comuneros is the low price level. During the government of Alan García (1985-1990), price levels were relatively favourable; but these prices dropped considerably after the abolition of subsidies and the opening of the market (2001: 103).¹³⁷ According to Escobal, prices in 1994 were 52.8% lower than in 1988 (1994:55). The adjustment programme under the Fujimori government (1990-2000) sought to put an end to the subsidies and price controls (Gonzales de Olarte 1996). Sheahan and Gavilano (2001) note that the price fluctuations that resulted from these changes have led campesinos to retreat both to the communities and to a subsistence economy.

Price drops were large and crop production is hardly feasible. For instance, the price of an *arroba*¹³⁸ of potatoes dropped from 6 to 3 *soles* in just one year (2001-2002). However, because

¹³⁵ The process by which one gets a permanent contract for becoming a teacher. Before one can get a permanent contract, teachers are generally hired on the basis of temporary contracts. The *nombramiento* for public schools is provided by the Ministry of education after having fulfilled certain criteria e.g. having worked in a school at a rural community for some years and fulfilling local aptitude tests. However, recently aspirants to *nombramiento* have to pass a *concurso* (test) carried out by the Ministry of Education. Opportunities for *nombramiento* are, however, few. For more information see GRADE. Documento de trabajo No. 32 available at <http://www.grade.org.pe/download/pubs/dt32-maestros.pdf>

¹³⁶ Legally protected from being unfairly dismissed and has the right to a retirement.

¹³⁷ Sheahan, however, notes that at the same time the García government's economic policies subsidized imported products, therefore shedding doubt on the notion that policies were aimed at reducing poverty in rural areas.

¹³⁸ 1 arroba = 25 lb / 11 kg.

prices are so low, selling such goods is hardly worthwhile. The sale of agricultural produce is simply no longer profitable.¹³⁹ Mayer (2001: 220) warns that the decline in agricultural prices will lead Andean people to retreat from the market and switch to greater subsistence strategies, leading to increasing emigration rates as people look for opportunities outside the comunidad. This continues to be the current tendency as people seek alternative sources of income.

In sum, comuneros are suffering from push factors in the form of decreasing productivity, population growth and deteriorating climatic conditions, as well as from negative developments related to fluctuating prices for agricultural products and the diminishing alternatives for employment outside the comunidad (Kay 2004; de Haan and Zoomers 2005). While this picture of rural poverty provides a general view of the livelihoods of the comuneros as exacerbating their situation, a close look at the experiences of comuneros provides a more dynamic view. I look at this dynamism in the following section.

Ladders and snakes: a dynamic view of poverty

Although the above-mentioned trends point to an increase in vulnerability, Moser (Moser 1998: 3) reminds us that it will not necessarily lead to homogenous levels of poverty: ‘Although poor people are usually among the most vulnerable, not all vulnerable people are poor’. While the line dividing the poor from the non-poor is remarkably thin (Mayer 2001: 323), it is possible to make a distinction between people who do well and those who experience negative mobility. I asked the comuneros to mention the type of events that helped people to experience upward social mobility, and those that force people to move in a downward direction; their responses provide a dynamic picture of how under similar circumstances livelihoods may evolve in different directions. People during their lives have to deal with snakes from which they may be saved, whereas others are fortunate in finding a ladder (with the risk of falling down).

Snakes affecting individual households: accidents, robberies, death and sickness

Whether the comuneros experienced downward or upward mobility is in many cases very much dependent on encountering snakes, which may be related to various events and circumstances:

¹³⁹ ‘...el problema es como le digo no? Habas, cebada, maiz, no es costoso. Aborita la arroba de cebada esta en 5 soles. Nunca jamas en la agricultura uno puede ser tan rico[...] a pesar de que el campesino produce para el mercado todo. No nos al[canza]. Interview 12 Dec. 2003 with Señor Guevara, Mosocllaqta.

Accidents

A first example of a snake that played an important role in the lives of people is accidents. Accidents usually have a huge impact on the individual level, as in the case of Señor Cornejo, whose plans were changed by his tricycle accident. Although he was able to repay his debts through credit, his life was destroyed.

Even small misfortunes can have a disastrous effect on a person's livelihood. Señor Ancco, whose household was considered as one that was improving, told me about the tragedy that had forced him to migrate to Chincha¹⁴⁰ for a while. He had borrowed 100 US dollars from the IFOCC¹⁴¹ and left it on a wooden shelf, next to a glass of water. He had then gone out, and while he was away, the guinea pigs¹⁴² knocked over the money and the glass of water; upon his return he discovered that they had eaten all the money. He went to the IFOCC and asked for more time to repay the money, but they refused. He still had six months to repay the loan. Therefore, against his will, he had to go to Chincha to work as a *jornalero* so that he would be able to repay the IFOCC. However, he said that this had been an awful time for his family since he had had to leave them.¹⁴³

Robbery

Robbery is another snake that is often mentioned and that leads to *fracaso*. Robberies in communities that are close to roads are very common, because roads enable people to transport the stolen merchandise by car or van. This snake bit Señor Mendoza, who lived with his wife and three children; the oldest was in the third year of elementary school. Their shop was located along the main road in Yanampampa, one of the first shops that one encounters when entering the comunidad. However, at the time of my visit, all they had was some empty soda bottles. In addition, the room was flooded with water because of the heavy rain.¹⁴⁴ This seemed to be a recurrent problem but they did not have any solution to it, since laying concrete would be far too expensive. I later learned that this had been quite a successful shop and restaurant, as it provided a gathering place for people who came work on projects close to the comunidad. According to Señora Mendoza, they used to sell more, but the number of clients dropped due to the flooding. Since they do not possess any land, their only way to earn some extra money is through some kind of complementary activity. Señora Mendoza had

¹⁴⁰ Located at about 3 hours drive south from Lima, on the coast.

¹⁴¹ Instituto de Fomento a la Comercialización Campesina – an NGO that continued the activities initiated by PRODERM in the area of financial support.

¹⁴² Next to sheep, guinea pigs are one of the most important sources of meat. They are usually raised in the kitchen and fed on kitchen scraps, such as potato.

¹⁴³ Field notes 15 Oct. 2002 Yanaoca; informal talk with Señor Ancco.

¹⁴⁴ Also a snake, which is dealt under 'trends' as this is part of changing climatic conditions.

thought of starting a *chicheria*. Indeed, she had all the necessary items for this, including a TV and video recorder, which they had bought with the money they were able to accumulate from their migration to the jungle. However, the theft of the TV and video recorder had ruined their plan to open a *chicheria*.

Death

Death is another important snake. Several comuneros in Jilayhua talked about the impact of the death of *vacuno mejorado* due to *timpanismo*¹⁴⁵ as an event that led them to *fracaso*. This was the case with Señora Barragán, who had lost several of her *vacuno mejorado* to timpanismo: 'Before we used to raise mixed race only.... Then ... we started to seed pasture. Then these cattle started to die from eating alfalfa, trebol, and so on ... their stomachs swelled. How many cows have already died? We had beautiful cows, but not any more'.¹⁴⁶

The death of a family member is of course much more important. This can have long-lasting negative consequences for a household, not only in terms of the expenses involved in arranging a funeral, but also due to the decrease in the household workforce. As explained in the previous chapter, the death of the male partner can have an enduring effect on a woman, especially because she no longer has access to male labour; particularly older persons are often not able to recover from such shocks. In the same way, the death of a husband while the children are still young makes it more difficult to recover from such events.

The case of Señora Choque, whose husband died during a thunderstorm while fishing on the lake, illustrates this well. On my first visit to Yanampampa I got to know Señor Choque as the owner of the only three-storey house in the comunidad. He was studying political science in Cusco while working as driver. His wife and children lived in the comunidad; his wife contributed to his studies through crop growing and fishing activities. Señor Choque proudly told me that he had been president of the fishery association, and that at the time there had always been fish in the lake, which provided those in the comunidad with some income. It was good, he said, since otherwise people had to migrate to find work. I learned that he had once been a mayoral candidate, but had not been elected. He had plans to stand as a candidate again, and his family was considered as upwardly mobile.

When I returned two years later, however, I learned that Señor Choque had died. He had been fishing in the lake at night with three other comuneros, and they had been struck by

¹⁴⁵ *Timpanismo* is a kind of reaction that cows get when they eat pasture early in the morning. It creates gases, leading to their stomachs becoming distended, which can kill the animals.

¹⁴⁶ *Antes criábamos chusquitos no mas...Después ya pues[...] pasto ya...hemos sembrado. Entonces, allí comenzaron a morir esas vacas, alfalfa, con trébol así. Todos...se hinchaba la barriga. Cuantas vacas ya hemos matado. Teníamos bonitas vacas...Ahora ya no ya.* Interview 18 Sept. 2003 with Señora Barragán, Jilayhua.

lightning. As soon as I greeted Señora Choque, she started crying and telling me how much she was suffering because she did not have any income. She lamented how, after all the money she had devoted to the education of her husband, she was left with nothing apart from the debts arising from his studies and the house, which amounted to 2,000 *soles*. She herself had to pay off these debts. She had been able to repay 500 *soles*, but had no idea how she would get the rest of the money. There was no work in the comunidad, and she was going to the jungle once in a while to buy fruits and sell them for a higher price in Cusco. Her two children were eight and nine years old, respectively, and she had to leave them with their grandmother. Her children did not like her leaving, but she had no choice: ‘What can I do?’, she said. When the fishing season starts, she would stay in the comunidad and dedicate herself to fishing. Now that she had to travel so much, she did not have time to do the *faenas*¹⁴⁷ or to take care of the cattle and crops. ‘At the beginning I suffered a lot. Although things are a little more stable now, I am still suffering a lot.’¹⁴⁸

Sickness

Sickness is a snake to which nobody is immune. What may at first sight appear to be a simple sickness can have serious consequences for a person’s livelihood, since comuneros do not have medical insurance. Señora Condori told me what it meant for her to get appendicitis:

‘It is appendicitis,’ they told me. ‘You have to go to Sicuani for the operation’. Ay...ay, señorita. I cried. Terrible. With what money? ... If I do not have money... What would such an operation cost, I was thinking. If somebody wants my small house, I’ll to sell it. I was thinking. That man [her ex-husband], where would he take me, where would that man take my children? But I’ll have to sell the house. Otherwise where will I get the money? That is what I was thinking.¹⁴⁹

She had had to find almost 1,000 *soles*. She borrowed some from her sister; neighbours and the comunidad collected some more to help her. In this way she was able to repay the amount. However, in order to pay off her debt, she had had to sell all of her animals, plus the mixer and the TV she had brought from Yanaoca.¹⁵⁰ When I met her for the first time she was still recovering from the operation; she told me that she had been left with nothing. Without ways

¹⁴⁷ Communal work.

¹⁴⁸ Field notes 3 Oct. 2005. Informal talk with Señora Choque, Yanampampa

¹⁴⁹ Interview 18 Oct. 2003 with Señora Condori, Jilayhua. ‘*Es apendicitis’ me dicen ‘Tiene que ir a Sicuani a hacerse operar’*. ‘*Ay...ay señorita. Ay he llorado, total siempre’ Con que plata...si no tengo plata. Que cosa...cuanto costara operación yo le decía. Mejor...si alguien va a tener esa casita, tengo que vender así no mas pensaba. Ese hombre [referring to her ex husband from whom she divorced] a donde me llevará, ese hombre a donde los llevará [children]...pero tengo que vender esa casita. De donde voy a sacar esa plata, pues yo me decía*

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

of getting any income, and with the expenses for the education of her children, she could barely think of how to make ends meet.

These stories show that apart from those who have a stable source of income (e.g. *profesionales*), the livelihoods of most comuneros are vulnerable to snakes. The ability of comuneros to deal with snakes, however, is also dependent on the amount of resources they have and, most importantly, their ability to migrate and find an alternative source of income. Given the vulnerability of their livelihoods, comuneros must diversify their activities in order not only to take advantage of ladders but also to deal with snakes.

Ladders affecting individual households: jobs, migration, dairy production and fishing

To the extent that people encountered ladders that allowed them to move up, this had often to do with their ability to find jobs that they could combine with their livelihoods in the comunidad, to accumulate wealth during temporary migration and/or to enter dairy production.

Work opportunities close to the comunidad

Employment is the ladder most frequently mentioned as having a direct impact on the ability of households to achieve upward social mobility. Few comuneros enjoy a permanent contract;¹⁵¹ in fact, only teachers and policemen do.¹⁵² Although a teacher's salary is lower than the income that can be derived from jobs, working as a teacher is valued because it is the only public position that provides job stability (Diaz and Saavedra 2000): once a teacher receives *nombramiento*, he or she is legally protected from unfair dismissal. Teachers with *nombramiento* also have the right to medical insurance and a pension. In this context, ensuring that their children had become *profesional* was regarded as the best inheritance that parents could leave their children.

It is now harder to become a teacher.¹⁵³ In the past, access to these positions depended on personal connections. This is reflected in the way in which Señor Gomez (a comunero from Jilayhua) became a teacher in the neighbouring comunidad of Pampamarca. While Señor

¹⁵¹ According to the survey, only eleven comuneros from Jilayhua, three from Mosocllaqta and one from Yanampampa were working as *profesional*. Of these only a fraction have enjoyed a permanent contract since in the beginning; they often have to work under temporary contracts.

¹⁵² In this section I consider the case of teachers, as policemen must move to different assignment locations and are usually not able to combine this profession with life in the communities.

¹⁵³ Explained in previous section about general trends. Since the change in system of *nombramiento* for becoming teachers, access to education has become an important condition in gaining access to a *profesión*. Because of the complex nature of education as ladder, I treat this subject in a separate chapter (Ch. 5).

Gomez was in his first year at university, there were many jobs. He had been there for only six months when there was a strike that lasted several months (almost a whole semester). He became increasingly frustrated and then heard about a vacancy at Sicuani, an institution that was hiring people as teachers, even if they had only a secondary education. Señor Gomez went to Cusco to obtain his teaching certificate, which he received within a week. He presented it to the institute and they immediately gave him a place in a comunidad in Chumbivilcas (a 6-hour walk from Jilayhua). He then worked in two other communities for five and four years, respectively, before starting in Pampamparca, which is just a 10-minute taxi ride from Jilayhua.

Another opportunity for work is in the municipality. Jobs as civil servants are much sought after, particularly by people in Mosocllaqta, given that the municipality is located in the comunidad itself. However, municipal contracts are usually only temporary. Job opportunities are also limited and depend on personal contacts; such jobs are therefore not stable. Señor Huayta from Mosocllaqta, for instance, had once earned 400 *soles* a month by working for a communal molino (flour mill); he had got the job because he had connections with the comunero who had been appointed mayor. However, when a new mayor was elected, from the neighbouring comunidad of Thumi, Señor Huayta was given work as a street cleaner, earning only 10 *soles* per month. Even so, he considers himself fortunate to have some kind of income. Municipal jobs (office work or construction) often go to men, while women are employed to perform more menial tasks, such as sweeping the square. Yet, even access to this type of work depends on personal contacts, favouring men over women.¹⁵⁴ In the past, working in the municipality was voluntary and involved no remuneration. The switch from voluntary work to paid employment was welcomed as a new opportunity for people who had access to the capital of the district where the municipalities are located. These positions are now viewed as important opportunities to earn a stable income, even if the contract is for only five years. Competition for these positions is very fierce, as reflected in the fact that there were seven candidates for mayor in municipal elections in a district with just 1335 inhabitants.¹⁵⁵ The municipality provides one of the few opportunities that people have to earn a stable income, but access to these positions depends on their relationship with the mayor.

In the 2003 municipal elections, seven candidates vied for the post of mayor of the district of Mosocllaqta. Although I was not really following the campaign, I was staying at the house of Señor Soto, a comunero from Mosocllaqta, while he was running for *regidor*.¹⁵⁶ At the end of

¹⁵⁴ Informal talk with Señora Condori. Jilayhua.

¹⁵⁵ Source: www.inei.gob.pe. Censo 1993.

¹⁵⁶ Those who support the mayor in his functions. Among their tasks are: proposing projects, standing in for the mayor when necessary, performing municipal procurement tasks, participating in ordinary and special meetings

the day, he shared his campaign experiences and difficulties with me while eating dinner. He said that he had put himself up for election because the mayoral candidate for Somos Peru had asked him to. The candidate for mayor was in his early 30s, and although he was from a poor family, he had studied at university. Señor Soto did not have any political plans or ambitions, but his situation changed when the mayoral candidate asked him to run as the party regidor. Señor Soto said that he had to go from house to house, sometimes at night, helping the candidate with his campaign. After his party had won the elections, he told me that he was happy about the stable income he was going to receive in his new post. There is great competition for municipal jobs, and only those with the right connections have any chance of getting them.¹⁵⁷

Another type of work is related to short-term employment, such as that offered by development projects. While most people could not take direct advantage of the projects introduced by NGOs – such as dairy production, credit, pasturing livestock, training (because of a lack of time), etc. – opportunities that came as ladders were related indirectly to the creation of work in the comunidad. In the case of Yanampampa, several people benefited from IMA's presence there. Infrastructure projects created construction jobs, the office required watchmen, staff from the institution bought goods from the shops, and so forth. Apart from the fact that people received training and support, these kinds of jobs were greatly valued in the comunidades.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, these jobs were usually accessible only to the few families with which the NGO staff had close contact.¹⁵⁹

Although some people engaged in other activities – such as commerce, transportation or selling textiles,¹⁶⁰ wool, wood, leather or *bosta* – their numbers were limited. Having a *profesión*, working for the municipality or being involved in projects for NGOs were the most desirable situations, because of the relatively stable income and other benefits. However, the comuneros favoured the acquisition of a *profesión*, as it provided them with the greatest security of income. In this context, access to education was and continues to be one of the most important goals of comuneros.

of the municipality, maintaining communications with base organizations and neighbourhoods in order to propose solution to problems, etc.

¹⁵⁷ People are appointed to these municipal posts through their social connections, and the situation that prevails is one of alliances and personal loyalties. In the words of a comunero from Mosocllaqta, people form 'mafia-like groups'. In this community, compadrazgo ties are therefore very important, since they are an important criteria for gaining access to these positions.

¹⁵⁸ Interview 17 Jan. 2004 comunera, Yanampampa.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ According to the survey, the number of comuneros working with textiles were limited: only two households said that they were working with textiles.

*Temporary migration*¹⁶¹

Studies of livelihoods in the Andes point to migration as important for the diversification of activities (Zoomers 2002; Kay 2004). Initial migration (before establishing a family) is central to the livelihoods of the comuneros of these comunidades. Most comuneros migrate to a city or to international destinations for a longer period of time before they become formal members of the comunidad. However, the importance of migration differs per comunidad. Migration is considered important in comunidades where comuneros depend on crop farming (combined with fishing), such as in Mosocllaqta and Yanampampa.¹⁶² As mentioned in Chapter 2, these comuneros migrate in the period between January and April, when they are less busy with activities in the comunidad. In this period, some comuneros go to the jungle or to the city of Cusco, as there is not much work available close to the comunidad.

In Jilayhua, which was starting to switch to dairy production, migration was mentioned as something of the past; some comuneros claimed that dairy production is replacing migration.¹⁶³ However, an increasing number of households maintain a double residence, that is, they have a house in the comunidad and one in a city. This is generally done to enable their children to go to urban schools, which are considered better schools.

Thus, in general terms, migration is an important ladder that helps people to improve their livelihoods. Migration not only allows comuneros to accumulate capital to invest in the comunidad, but is also an important source of information and experience.

This is illustrated by the case of Señor Champi, who had migrated to Lima before he returned to the comunidad with his wife from Huaraz to make a living in the comunidad. They had some capital,¹⁶⁴ which they used to build one of the best kioskos in Yanampampa.¹⁶⁵ While migration is the most common strategy to accumulate capital, the knowledge and skills gained in the cities are also ladders that allow for investments in the comunidad. Señor Champi earns a considerable amount of money as an accordion player. He learned to play the

¹⁶¹ I make a distinction between long-term migration (migration for some years, leaving the land to family members or sharecropping), temporary migration (migration during the period that agricultural production is low, which is generally three or four months) and initial migration (migration before becoming an official comunero, usually while still single).

¹⁶² The survey showed that 34% of the comuneros in Yanampampa had some type of income through migration work. This was the comunidad with some cases of transnational migration. Among the countries of destinations mentioned were Japan, Spain, Venezuela, Korea and Chile. 10% of the comuneros in Mosocllaqta have some kind of income through migration and about 14% of them receive some kind of remittance.

¹⁶³ Field notes, 28 Oct. 2002. Interview Señor Martínez, Jilayhua. Only 3% of respondents in the survey said that they had migrated the previous year, while 35% said that they receive remittances from family members living outside the comunidad.

¹⁶⁴ 400 soles which according to her was a lot of money at the time. She lived in the beginning with her mother in law and gradually constructed her house and the kiosko.

¹⁶⁵ Interview 18 Jan. 2004 with Señora Champi, Yanampampa

accordion in Lima, where he did his military service and then worked for eight years in an ice-cream factory. He told me how learning to play has helped him in his life:

[In Lima] I gradually learned to play the accordion. At least I had that interest, dedication. If I had not even learned to play accordion, how would I be... I would continue only in the *chakra*. But thank God I learned to play, and, well, I earn my little money. It is incredible, but for only two or three days of playing the accordion I earn 400, 500 *soles*. That is why some people say: 'What are you, a lawyer, an engineer, that you can earn so much in only two or three days?'¹⁶⁶

Migration as a ladder seems to be related not only to the short-term accumulation of capital, but also to the experience that comuneros can acquire. In this context, migration to the city is preferred to migration to the jungle. Although most households say that what they earn in the jungle is only for daily expenses, there are also examples of households that have been able to invest in some commercial activities with the income derived from migration to the jungle.¹⁶⁷

In order to be able to migrate, people are usually reliant on a relative or a *compadre/comadre* to introduce them to a place where this short-term kind of labour is needed. For instance, whether one goes to the jungle or Cusco seems to depend on one's social networks. Those who go to the jungle usually do so through contractors,¹⁶⁸ or they accompany experienced comuneros when the latter return to the jungle.

Señor Soto from Mosocllaqta, who used to work in various projects, was proud of the engineers and architects who had become their *compadres* and *comadres*. He prided himself in the fact that he could get work in Cusco at any time because of these contacts.¹⁶⁹ Migrating without knowing somebody in advance may lead comuneros into situations in which people abuse them. Often those who go without connections end up being exploited, for example they are not paid or they are forced to work under harsh conditions.¹⁷⁰ People generally go to stay with relatives or *compadres*. Having connections outside the *comunidad* is thus an essential prerequisite for migration to the cities.

All in all, migration is important in comunero's access to financial capital, information and social capital, and comuneros can migrate long distances, even if – as mentioned in the

¹⁶⁶ .[En Lima] Poco a poco aprendí a tocar. Por lo menos esa afición, profesión he tenido no? Si no hubiera aprendido siquiera a tocar acordeón como hubiera estado...Seguiría en la *chakra* no más. Pero gracias a Dios he aprendido a tocar, bueno, gano mi platita. Bueno, increíble. Por 3 días, 2 días, traigo 400, 500 *soles*. Por eso algunos nos dicen, que cosa usted son, abogados, ingenieros, para que tanto ganen por 2 días, 3 días. Interview 1 Feb. 2004 with Señor Champi, Yanampampa

¹⁶⁷ Señor Mendoza for instance, said that he had been able to accumulate enough money to buy a TV and a video recorder. They were thinking of using them to start a *chichería*. Those who go to the jungle can earn an average of about 900 *soles* during the three months.

¹⁶⁸ Field notes 22 Oct. 2002. Interview with Señor Calla, Yanampampa.

¹⁶⁹ Field notes 9 Nov. 2003. Informal talk with Señor Soto, Mosocllaqta.

¹⁷⁰ Interview 18 Oct. 2003 with Señora Condori, Jilayhua

previous chapter – it can conflict with comunidades' requirements to do cargos and/or maintain strong social relations.

Diversifying production: 1) dairy production

Dairy production functions as a ladder, but not in all places. Conditions for dairy production are favourable only in Jilayhua. The possibility to start dairy production was created by PRODERM during the 1980s; the project has recently been taken over by IAA. These projects provided families with credit, in addition to the technology and training required to be able to start this activity. A considerable number of comuneros consider their situation to have improved since they switched to dairy production.

This was the case for Señor Ccoto, for instance. Señor Ccoto showed me the cover page of a newspaper supplement,¹⁷¹ which bore a picture of him wearing his apron and making yogurt. In the accompanying article, an NGO that was active in the region presents his case as an example of a successful campesino in a comunidad that has shown 'wonderful developments in the area'. Señor Ccoto told me that he came from a very poor family, and that he had had to migrate to the jungle, together with his brother, in order to pay for his school books. Their situation became far better after they switched to livestock production, improved the quality of the cattle and started dairy production.¹⁷² The yogurt they produce today is especially popular: it wins first prize in every competition organized by the municipality. They can sell a litre of yogurt for 4.5 soles. They sell about 7 litres a day, and thus have a daily income of about 31.5 soles, which is quite considerable in comparison to selling agricultural produce (e.g. 3 soles for about 10 kilos of potatoes.). Although several comuneros were trying to make the transition from crop growing to dairy production, people who do not have enough land, water and labour for dairy production are generally unable to do so.¹⁷³

Although Señor and Señora Ccoto were able to benefit from the training and support provided by the NGO, Señor Ccoto considers himself the 'inventor' from which the project took the idea. According to him, he developed the ideas that are now in the *plan predial* introduced by the IAA to promote dairy production to other households; it is based on his own creativity and experiences. They have a special room in their house for making dairy

¹⁷¹ Mirada, O. (2001) "Cusco contra la pobreza." *La Republica*. 4 de noviembre del 2001.

¹⁷² Interview Sept. 2003 with Señora Ccoto, Jilayhua.

¹⁷³ Generally, the agricultural path of development was only available to those who had enough land. There were also those who, without much land, have gambled in order to get a milking cow. Nonetheless, these are actions that have been taken by those who can afford to take such a gamble, as in the case of Señor Martínez, a teacher and comunero from Jilayhua. Although he did not have much land, he bought a cow, which produced a lot of milk. He explicitly said that 'we were very lucky' in finding such a dairy cow. This was the start of his successful dairy production business, which he combined with his teaching activities.

products; it is full of awards and photographs of their prize-winning cattle. They have a place to make cheese, some gas ovens, and some pans and plastic containers, which he said were used for the production of yogurt. His previous experience (he participated in events such as Pachamama Raymi¹⁷⁴ and travelled to other regions) gave him the insights required to design his own *modulo* for cheese production. His motivation was to find a way of financing his children's education, and he used his experiences and knowledge from training and communal livestock enterprises to start his own dairy business. According to Señor Ccoto, the IAA supported him in this and transferred his experience to other households and districts. Señor Ccoto and other members who work in dairy production regard this transition as a way to allow the comunidad to improve.

Dairy production is an activity that was made possible by development organizations and the collective action of comuneros.¹⁷⁵ At the household level, those who had the right information and a certain amount of assets¹⁷⁶ were able to access this relatively sustainable source of income. In the case of Señor Ccoto, this was reflected in the experience he had gained through training sessions and travel, as well as in his access to land, the pasture of the cattle association and irrigation infrastructure. It is important to note, however, that currently dairy production is now considered a household activity, in the past it was a collective activity.

Diversifying production: 2) fishery

Other opportunities have also provided temporary ladders for upward social mobility. One of these is fishing.¹⁷⁷ Thanks to this activity, some comuneros were able to follow higher education, which opened the way to become a teacher. This is illustrated by the case of Señor Suta, who considers his improved economic situation to be a result of becoming a teacher. He remembers his childhood as being full of suffering, with alcoholic parents who sometimes

¹⁷⁴ A methodology developed by NGOs to promote the propagation of traditional irrigation methods. After previous insights that the standard class methodology did not work, the NGOs (mainly PRODERM) decided that observation and celebration was a more efficient method of transmitting this knowledge. For more information, see van Immerzeel, W. and J. Cabero (2003) *Pachamama Raymi. La fiesta de la Capacitación*. Lima: DEXCEL-MASAL.

¹⁷⁵ Explained in chapter two.

¹⁷⁶ However, being able to produce enough milk to make dairy products and provide a daily supply of milk, not only meant that a cow had to yield considerable amount of milk, but also that they needed to have enough cows with calves.. A normal 'criollo' cattle produces 1 to 2 litres of milk per day. For a cow to be able to give a sufficient amount of milk, around 12-15 litres per day, it had to be of improved pedigree and had to get enough pasture. Considering that one cow requires almost half a hectare of pasture per year to produce such an amount of milk, households with only a limited amount of land were only able to take care of 2 to 3 local criollo cows at most. Having pasture required enough water for irrigation the whole year and also enough land to be able to cultivate pasture. People usually fulfilled their own consumption needs first and the rest they invested in pasture. Yet for most people this was not possible, because they only had a limited amount of pasture.

¹⁷⁷ This activity was started as the result of intervention of the ministry of agriculture in the promotion of this activity. For more information please refer to chapter two.

forgot to give him something to eat. In terms of possessions: ‘I did not have anything Only a donkey.’¹⁷⁸ However, he always dreamt of becoming a *professional*, even though he did not have the financial means to do so. He became a teacher not only because he had determined that he would become something other than a campesino (as his teachers always reminded him), but also because of the example his cousins had set: one had studied medicine at the university and the other was going to study at the institute in Tinta. Exchanging information with them was a trigger for him to try the path of pursuing *profesionalización*, even though he did not have the resources for this.

He was able to finance his studies with the money he earned by fishing in the middle of the night.¹⁷⁹ However, it meant that he could not help his widowed mother in the fields, even though he was the only child:

When I was studying, I had a terrible life ... there was not even a grain of maize, of beans, wheat, nothing... On Saturdays and Sundays, since I used to work on my research thesis, I was too busy.... I had to give priority to my research.¹⁸⁰

I had my net, with that I used to fish in the lake. As I told you, I used to fish at around midnight ... Yes, I fished. Then the following day, very early, I used to go to Tinta with everything ready. Then I could finance [my studies]; I used to sell the fish and I had some money. With that I used to buy something. But I did not fish daily. Not daily.¹⁸¹

Although finishing his professional education did not automatically lead to a stable job, he was finally able to get his *nombramiento* after five years of working under temporary contracts in distant comunidades. The acquisition of a *nombramiento* meant for him the start of a new life: ‘From that day on, I felt some security, some tranquillity. I was no longer desperate, I was no longer worried’.¹⁸²

Several people said that fishing is a ladder that allows people to achieve upward social mobility. However, only a few had been able to take advantage of the large number of fish that were available during the first years before the number of fish decreased due to

¹⁷⁸ Interview 8 Dec. 2003 with Señor Suta, Mosocllacta. ‘yo no tenía nada absolutamente nada [...] un burrito no mas teniamos?’.

¹⁷⁹ As explained in Chapter 3, this was the time where fishing was not yet commonly practised by the comuneros and there was not yet a fishery association.

¹⁸⁰ Interview 8 Dec. 2003 with Señor Suta, Mosocllacta. ‘Cuando estuve estudiando, gravísimo era mi vida[...]no había un grano de maíz, de haba, de trigo, nada [...]Los días sábados y domingos, como estaba haciendo mi trabajo de investigación estaba muy ocupado [...]yo priorizaba más mi trabajo de investigación.’

¹⁸¹ Tenía mi mallita, entonces, con eso pescaba en la laguna. Como te decía a media noche entraba.[...] Si. Sacaba pescadito. Entonces la mañana siguiente tempranito, con todo listo, con el pescado me iba a Tinta, entonces financiaba [mis estudios], vendía eso y ya tenía mi platita. Y con eso a comprar también algo. Pero no diario pescado. No pescaba diario. Interview 8 Dec. 2003 with Señor Suta.

¹⁸² ‘Desde ese momento yo me sentí algo firme, algo tranquilo. Ya no estaba desesperado, ya no estaba preocupado’

overfishing. The availability of fish depends entirely on the *albinos*¹⁸³ that were put into the lake by the ministry, which were often not sufficient for the large number of people engaged in this activity.¹⁸⁴ Although several people continue to fish, this activity is now organized in the form of an association, which several comuneros have joined, and the availability of fish is very limited. This president of the fishery association told me that:

... before, in Mosocllaqta there were not many fishermen. There were only six, five fishermen, so we had a lot of *pejerrey*. ... But not now. Since we are so many. We fish, let's say... One week ago we fished an acceptable quantity. Because there are many fishermen, they fish them all. Now we have only a few fish. Little production. Why? People say that there is no more food in the lake for the silversides.¹⁸⁵

Having the right information and the right insights¹⁸⁶ had enabled Señor Suta to get ahead of others and thus take advantage of the opportunities presented by fishing. While fishing provided an opportunity for upward mobility to some, today it is regarded something of the past. Only those who saw the possibilities of fishing in time profited from this new ladder.

In conclusion, if one looks at livelihoods through the metaphor of snakes and ladders, one can see that the livelihoods of comuneros are more dynamic than general studies of poverty often suggest. Although comuneros seem to be experiencing increasing levels of vulnerability, an exploration of the livelihood paths of individual households has shown that some comuneros were able to take advantage of new opportunities brought by changes in the context and experience that their lives are improving. However, there are many snakes that will complicate their ways out of poverty.

Final remarks

This chapter explored the dynamic side of poverty through an exploration of households that were moving in and out of poverty. While the previous chapter stressed the importance of resources such as land and livestock and social capital, the focus on vulnerability stressed the

¹⁸³ Young fish.

¹⁸⁴ In order for people to grow *albinos* for their own consumption people had to have *mallas* or construct their own *pisicigranja*. This required investment and was seen as risky business. Previous attempts in the community of Mosocllaqta had attempted to work with this. Collective efforts from Club de Madres failed when fish turned up dead from one day to the other (some people say they were poisoned, others, that there was a change in water composition that caused the calamity). Private efforts failed because of the lack of training or their fish being poisoned by other people in the community.

¹⁸⁵ '[...]más antes, en Mosocllaqta no habían pescadores hartos. Solamente habían seis, cinco pescadores, entonces de lo cual había bastante *pejerrey*. Entonces con eso casi estudiaban para entrar a los institutos. [...]Ahora no. Como somos hartos. Agarramos, digamos unos....hace una semana agarramos bien. Después de harto pescadores, se lo acaban. Ahora poco hay. Poco reducción. Por que? Porque dicen que en la laguna ya no hay comida, para los *pejerreyes*'. Interview 3 Dec. 2003 with the president of the fishing association, Mosocllaqta.

¹⁸⁶ In Mosocllaqta there was a belief that 'mermaids' lived in the lakes and those who entered the water would be drowned by them. There were some people who recounted how they sometimes heard the mermaids singing.

importance of snakes and ladders, and provided new insights (not everybody suffers equally from negative trends): dealing with snakes and taking advantage of new opportunities is essential in dealing with vulnerability. Well-being and poverty are related not only to access to communal resources and good social relationships in the comunidades, but also to access to information, the availability of job opportunities (which is linked to education, see Ch. 5), as well as possibilities for the diversification of production (dairy production, fish). According to Room (*ibid.* 409):

Snakes and ladders do not, however, affect all their victims or beneficiaries equally. In the case of a snake, a person will be more or less vulnerable, depending once again on their various endowments, which can act as buffers in this particular crisis. ... In the case of a ladder, people will be more or less able to take advantage of it, depending on how far they have the necessary passports.

At the level of the household, whether people can make use of ladders and/or survive snakes depends not only on the availability of financial assets (money), natural assets (land and livestock), social assets (social networks), human assets (education) and physical assets (irrigation), but also on whether people have access to information and/or have previous experience (collective action). Access to information enabled some of these households to perceive new, unexpected events as ladders (i.e. dairy production or fishing). While this chapter has dealt with ladders and snakes in relation to the livelihoods of the comuneros, it has shown that collective action is also an important determinant. Given the importance of 'access to information' and/or 'finding a job', people give much importance to improving their children's level of education. The relevance of education for enhancing social mobility (and providing a 'passport' to citizenship and modernity) is explored in the following chapters.