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THE LOCAL IMPACT OF UNDER-REALISATION OF THE LUMBINI MASTER PLAN: A FIELD REPORT

Kate Molesworth and Ulrike Müller-Böker

Introduction

Before 1967 when U Thant, as Secretary General of the United Nations visited Lumbini, very little action had been taken to preserve or develop the nativity site of Siddhartha Gautam, the Buddha.¹ As a consequence of Thant's distress at the state of the site and his drive to address the situation, the UN formed an international committee for the development of Lumbini in 1970. In 1972 UNDP commissioned Japanese architect Kenzo Tange to design a master plan for the development of Lumbini (Coningham and Milou 2000:18) with a budget of US\$ 6.5 million (LDT 2000). Tange submitted his completed master plan for the extensive development and preservation of the site as a centre of Buddhist pilgrimage and world tourism in 1978.

As a spiritual, historical and archaeological site, Lumbini is unique. It is of major global interest and importance, and was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997 (UNESCO 1998:46). As such it has the potential to draw a substantial influx of visitors and revenue to this poor and under-developed area of Nepal. Indeed, one of the objectives set out in plans for developing the site was to encourage local economic development (Tange and URTEC 1977:7) by increasing the inflow of tourists and pilgrims into the area.

Although the development of the site was due for completion within seven years of its inception, almost a quarter of a century later, only some 20% of the master plan has been realised (Shrestha 2000:1). The slow rate of progress of the Lumbini development project has been linked to poor institutional organisation and inadequate funding (Lawson 1999). While reported patterns of changes in visitor numbers are unreliable due to a lack of credible recording, the development of tourism and pilgrimage has not met expectations.

The development of Lumbini has not been without controversy, both at the local and international level (Tripathi 2003; *Kathmandu Post* 2001; Poudel 2000; Lal 1999). While much of the literature concerns the project's lack of progress, its overall impact on local people has been neglected. This article examines the impact of the partial development of Lumbini on local people, in particular, those who originally lived within the area that now forms the master plan. It appraises the social and economic consequences of the master plan development on local livelihoods and access to natural resources.

Methods

Both authors have made a number of visits to Lumbini over the years. Ulrike Müller-Böcker's first visit in Lumbini was in 1985. Later she supervised a preliminary study of pilgrimage and tourism in Lumbini in 1999/2000 conducted by Elenor Roy (Roy 2000).

Kate Molesworth first visited in the site in 1990, and like her co-author, observed the old Maya Devi Temple with pipal tree intact, together with the Sakya Tank prior to its most recent renovation. Her second visit, and the main body of fieldwork on which this article is based, was carried out in the spring of 2003. During this time interviews were conducted with donors, agencies and businesses associated with tourism and development of the site, the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) (the transforming institution, which took over from the Lumbini Development Committee in 1985), local communities and business people, monastic institutions, development workers and refugees. Concurrent archive research was carried out on the documentation produced by Kenzo Tange Associates, the LDT and other institutions concerned in the development of Lumbini.

The historical discontinuity of Lumbini within the spiritual landscape

Although there is some disagreement among scholastic and Buddhist groups over the precise date of the nativity of the Buddha (Bechert 1995), there is general consensus that the location was in modern-day Lumbini, in Rupandehi District of Nepal, close to the Indian border. At the time of the birth of the Sakya Prince Siddhartha Gautama, his mother Queen Maya Devi was in transit between her marital home in Kapilavastu and her natal home in Devadaha (Bidari 2002:21). Early accounts such as that of Fa-Hsien around 400 AD, report that with the onset of labour, Maya Devi stopped at Lumbini, which at the time was a forest or garden of notable natural beauty (Falk 1998:3; Bidari 2002:23). There she bathed in nearby pond that according to Deeg (2003:17) was reported by Hsuan-Tsang² to have been known as "the bathing pool of the Sakya"³ and delivered her child in a wooded area, supported by the branches of a tree (Giles 1972). After the birth, she bathed in the nearby Telar River, noted for the oily consistency of its water (Watters 1961).

The nativity, regarded by many to have taken place in 623 BC (Mahasthavir and Bajracharya 2000:1; Gurung 1999:22-23) was within subsequent centuries, marked by a number of extant artefacts and described in contemporaneous travelogues. The earliest and perhaps most reliable marker of the site is the stone pillar erected in 249 BC (Gurung 1999:23) by Ashoka Emperor of Maurya⁴ illustrated by Plate 1. Although translations of the pillar's Brahmi inscription vary somewhat, it provides a clear statement relating to its date and the significance of the site as the birthplace of the Buddha (Falk 1998: 15-16). This and other monuments were also referred to

in reports written by early pilgrims to the site, most notably the Chinese monks Fa-Hsien and Hsuan-Tsang⁵ (Deeg 2003:17-23) who documented pilgrimages made to Lumbini in AD 403 and 636 respectively. Because of the preservation of their pilgrimage accounts, it was later possible for the location of Lumbini to be identified centuries after its abandonment and disappearance from the modern cultural and spiritual landscape.

Between the documented visit of Ripu Malla ruler of western Nepal in the early fourteenth century⁶ (which along with Ashoka's visit was marked with an inscription on the Ashoka Pillar) and excavation of the pillar leading to the site's rediscovery in 1896, the location of Lumbini became lost. There is no conclusive evidence as to why such an important pilgrimage site became abandoned, overgrown and ultimately forgotten. Muslim incursions and the restoration of Hinduism have been suggested as possible human contributing factors (Pandey 1985:52) and natural occurrences including earthquake, flood and malaria as natural causes (Falk 1998:3; Bidari 2002:80).



Plate 1: *The Askoka Pillar photographed in 1990.*

Whatever the cause or combination of causal factors, Lumbini's disappearance from the physical landscape and its situation in a remote area of a kingdom closed to outsiders until the mid-twentieth century has led to a general lack of awareness of Lumbini that persists today. Indeed, for the numerous backpackers and tourists who visit Nepal's historical sites and natural landscape, Lumbini is not part of their travel itinerary. Until recently, very few international travel guides mentioned Lumbini at all and those that now do, tend not to give it a high profile. Consequentially, many foreign visitors leave Nepal in ignorance of the fact that they have visited the land of the Buddha's birth.

Before his death, the Buddha made a clear pronouncement on the importance of pilgrimage to four locations relating to key events in his life and spiritual development. These are set out in the *Dighanikaya*.⁷

There are, O monks, four places on earth which a believing householder's son or a believing householder's daughter should commemorate as long as they live. Which are those four? Here the Venerable One has been born - here the Venerable One has attained the unsurpassable complete enlightenment - here the Venerable One has turned the threefold-turning, twelve-spoked lawful wheel - here the Venerable One has gone to the realm of complete nirvana. After my death, O monks, there (people) will come to circumambulate (my) caityas, venerate (my) caityas, saying: "Here the Venerable One has been born - here the Venerable One has attained the unsurpassable complete enlightenment - here the Venerable One has turned the threefold, twelve-spoked lawful wheel - here the Venerable One has gone to the realm of complete nirvana." Whoever (of these) fully appeased with regard to me dies there - all those will go to heaven with a rest (of karmatic substance).⁸

This passage illustrates the Buddha's prescription for his followers to visit the place of his birth (Lumbini), enlightenment (Bodh Gaya), first teaching (Sarnath) and death (Kushinagar). While Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar are located in northern India, Lumbini is the only one of the four key Buddhist pilgrimage sites to be situated in modern Nepal. It is unique within the kingdom and has the inherent potential to become a primary pilgrimage site for Buddhists worldwide.

Early documented visits to Lumbini serve to illustrate that prior to its "disappearance" after the fourteenth century, pilgrimage to the Buddha's nativity site was indeed undertaken. In spite of several centuries of discontinuity in Buddhist pilgrimage to Lumbini, the Buddha's pronouncements regarding pilgrimage, together with the importance of Buddhism in south Asia, presents a strong draw for visitors. Together with the global expansion of the popularity of Buddhism as a spiritual and

academic interest, Lumbini has great potential to attract international visitors to the area.

While the loss of the nativity site location will have greatly contributed to its current lower visitor numbers than the three Indian pilgrimage sites named by the Buddha, other factors have been implicated. As part of a comprehensive appraisal of the Lumbini development and its potential commissioned by UNDP in 1999, Dhakal suggests that the greater success of the other three pilgrimage sites might be due to additional factors:

Bodhgaya [sic], Sarnath and Kushinagar ... lie in India. These places are better presented in the interest of pilgrims and tourists, host significantly more number [sic] of tourists in quantitative and qualitative terms and are more aggressively projected in the international tourist market... The Nepalese side lacks a coherent approach to preserving these sites to potential tourists of Buddhist interest. There have been very limited efforts in systematic excavation of sites, historical and archaeological researches, publicity, promotion and creation of requisite infrastructure and superstructure to assertively project all the important archaeological, historical places related to Buddha's life lying on the Nepalese territory. As for the relative merit of these sites, archaeological, historical and documentary evidence is a sufficient testimony, which, however need broader publicity both at home and abroad. (1999:12-13)

Dhakal's appraisal indicates that even though pilgrimage is an important feature of Buddhist practice, compared with the three sites in India, Lumbini has been poorly preserved, developed or packaged. As a consequence, the influx of visitors and their impact on the local economy has fallen far short of expectations. In the following section we set out a brief overview of the intended development of Lumbini and discuss how implementation of the plan has impacted upon local communities.

Kenzo Tange's master plan and Lumbini's development

By the end of the nineteenth century when the Buddha's nativity site was rediscovered, very few of the local population were themselves Buddhist. Quantitative data collected a century later (Upadhyay 1999:7) found local communities to comprise primarily of Hindus (53%) and Muslims (42%). Only a minority (5%) of the local population are themselves Buddhist. During the centuries following the abandonment of the site as a place of Buddhist pilgrimage, villages arose in close proximity to and on top of Buddhist pilgrimage, villages arose in close proximity to and on top of ancient Lumbini's remains. Figure 2 maps out the location of seven settlements that existed within the core of the designated master plan area at the time of its design. Many of the original inhabitants were traditionally

subsistence farmers, however, Lumbini Bazaar previously located on the site of the Sacred Garden, was a settlement of traders and shopkeepers.

Tange's 1978 master plan proposed that 25 square miles of land would be incorporated into the overall development area (Tange and URTEC 1978:3). The central three square miles containing the most important archaeological monuments were to receive the greatest development input, with surrounding areas forming controlled development, conservation areas and parklands, surrounded by an outer agricultural buffer zone. The design concept was based upon a combination of Buddhist symbolism and ideology, "The form of a circle enclosing squares embodies the mystic symbol of the universe in the [sic] Buddhism with purity and simplicity" (Tange and URTEC 1978:19-20). It also incorporated the environmental context of Lumbini at the time of the Buddha's nativity. Tange's design for the master plan conceived that a substantial area of land would be returned to forest (Tange and URTEC 1978:62-63). A number of species were selected for their religious and historical significance, in addition to others chosen for their "... landscape effect, growth speed and availability" (Tange and URTEC 1978:63). These included *Shorea robusta* (the sal tree), *Saracca indica* (the Ashoka tree), *Cassia fistula* (Indian laburnum), *Delonix regia*, *Cassia javanica* and *Anthocephalus cadamba*. In the early stages of the development, the core master plan area was extensively planted with 500,000 saplings (Rising Nepal 2000). In addition to species set out in the master plan, fruit trees including mango and guava together with sisau (*Dalbergia sisoo*), a tree used for fuel and timber have been incorporated in the landscaping of the site.

The Monastic Enclave itself comprises two zones of monasteries of the Mahayana school in the western portion and institutions of the Theravada school in the east. In Tange's master plan concept a total of 42 plots were assigned for monasteries and two for meditation centres. In the period 1993-6, eighteen Buddhist organisations had signed agreements to lease plots from the LDT (Gurung 1999). In the spring of 2003 the monastic zone comprised a mixture of completed structures and fully functioning institutions, buildings under construction and vacant plots (these are illustrated in Figure 1).

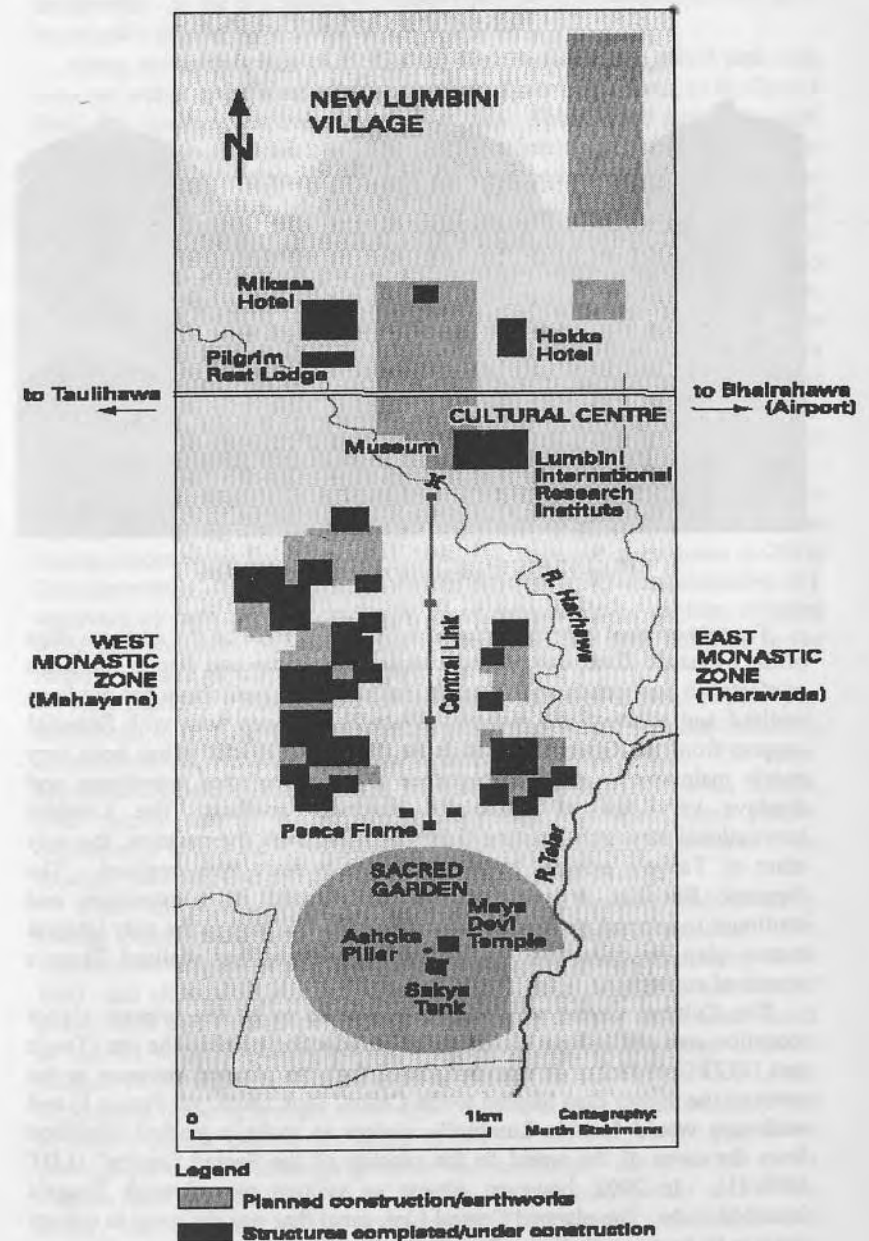


Figure 1: The Lumbini master plan.

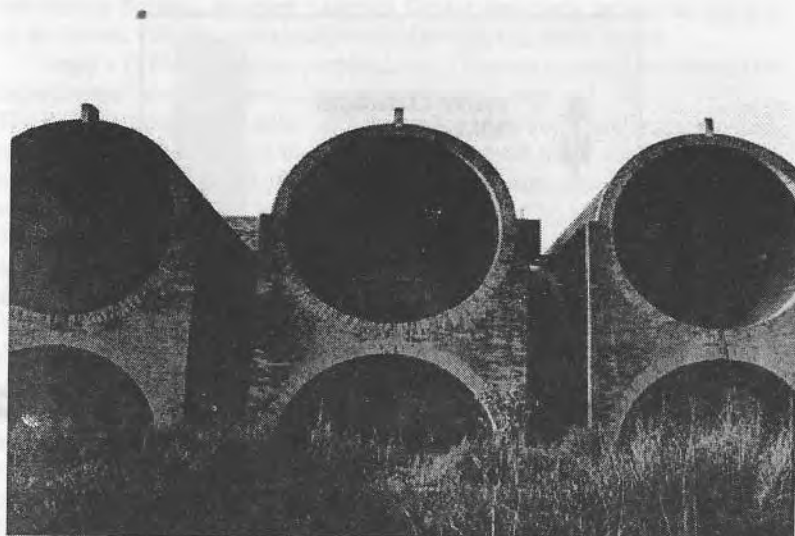


Plate 2: *The Museum in the Cultural Centre*

Tange's original concept included a Cultural Centre on the northern edge of the Monastic Zone, comprising a museum to house and display the site's artefacts, an auditorium and research institute. The auditorium has not been realised and although the museum (Plate 2) has been built with financial support from the Government of India (Pradhan 1999:9), it has been very poorly maintained. As a consequence it has a neglected appearance and displays very few of Lumbini's historical artefacts. The Lumbini International Research Institute (LIRI) is, apart from the museum, the only other of Tange's original building designs to have been realised. The Japanese Buddhist organisation Reiyukai funded its construction and continues to support its functioning. The LIRI building is the only integral master plan structure that is well maintained and has realised Tange's structural concept.

The Cultural Centre was originally planned to be the primary visitor reception area and to form a considered introduction point to the site (Tange and URTEC 1978:2). It was envisioned that the planned entrance in the north of the master plan leading to the Central Link canal (see Figure 1) and walkways would "enable Lumbini's visitors to make a gradual transition from the cares of the world to the sanctity of the Sacred Garden" (LDT 1990:11). In 2003, however, almost no visitors pass through Tange's intended route. The planned Central Link canal that was designed to convey visitors by boat, south to the Sacred Garden, is evident only as preliminary

earthworks. In the dry season of March/April 2003, it contained water only in naturally marshy areas along its 1,474 metres.

Along the western side of the Central Link earthworks, a gravel path runs from the bridge constructed over the Harhawa River in the north, to the Sacred Garden at the southern end of the master plan. This is used mostly by local cyclists, travelling to work on monastery construction sites, who have created dirt tracks from the Bhairahawa – Taulihawa Road in the north, to access the Monastic Zone. Occasionally visitors to the monasteries and the Sacred Garden are conveyed by bicycle rickshaw along the dirt tracks and gravel path that run along the Central Link. A few local people walk along this route to access the site or as a shortcut to villages to the east of the master plan. However, very few foreign visitors are seen on foot using the avenue that was originally conceived to be the main entrance to Lumbini. Contrary to Tange's concept, the walkways are used by motorised vehicles. Pedestrians using the walkways as the design intended, encounter heavy dust clouds produced by private cars, tourist buses and construction vehicles that speed along the gravel path.

Essential facilities that were planned to support the use of this path as the main route into the site, including benches, drinking water and toilets at resting places along the route (LDT 1990:11), were not in evidence in 2003. Consequentially, the Central Link and its pathway have the atmosphere of a neglected by-path, plied sporadically by occasional racing vehicles creating noise and pollution, rather than the intended tranquil main entrance to the nativity site of a global spiritual figure.

New Lumbini Village in the northern-most sector of the master plan was envisioned to be a complex of administrative and visitor services including accommodation, restaurants, a health centre, and post office. The basic infrastructure and public services planned in this zone, however, remain undeveloped and it is pertinent that during fieldwork local people encountered within the New Lumbini Village area, when questioned as to its location, said they had no knowledge of *Naya Lumbini Gaun*.¹⁰

Within the New Lumbini Village zone only developments undertaken by foreign organisations and private enterprises have been completed. The Japanese-owned four-star Hokke Club Hotel has been functioning since 1991, and although it endures long periods without substantial numbers of guests, staff also experience intermittent bursts of activity when coach-loads of tourists arrive for a night's stay. Although the middle-range Lumbini Mikasa Hotel was close to completion during the late 1990s, due to the stoppage of building brought about by a business dispute, it has never opened to receive guests. During the spring of 2003 it had a pervasive abandoned atmosphere over its unkempt grounds and buildings. Construction of the Pilgrim Rest Lodge, designed to provide for the lower-priced end of the sector, was financed by the government of Sri Lanka and leased to a

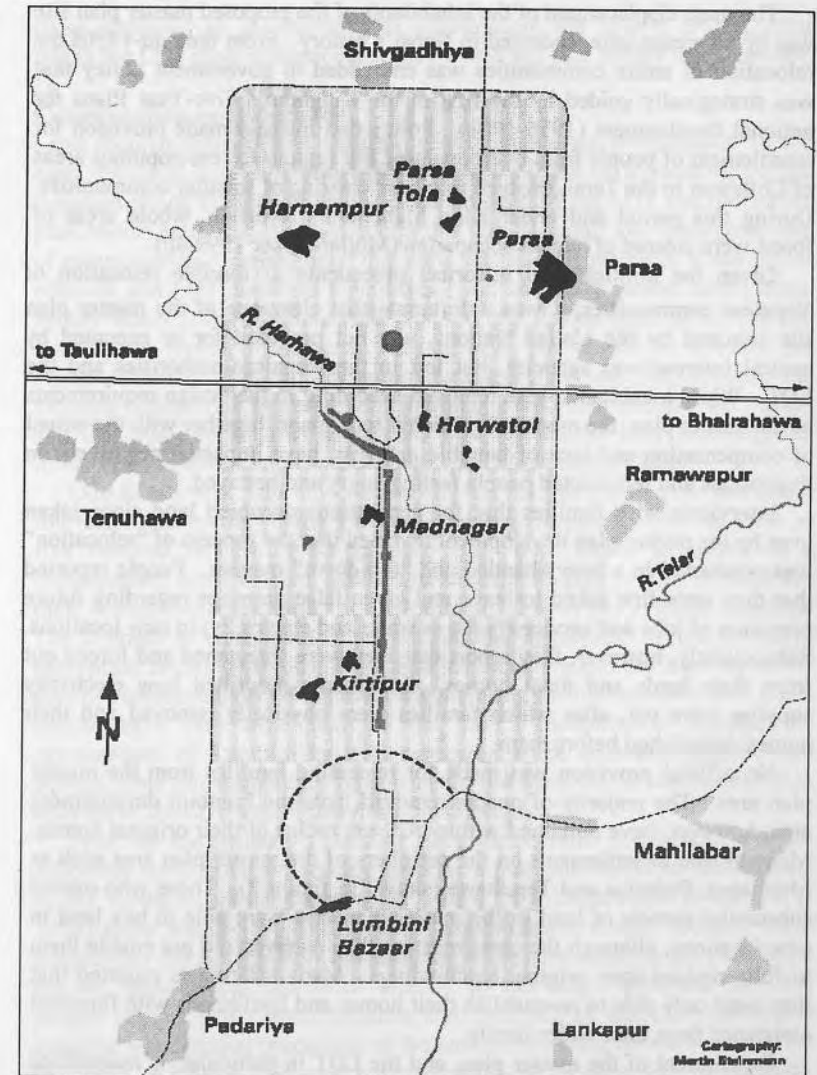
Nepalese entrepreneur. Although it was open to visitors, the building was in a poor state of maintenance, with a dishevelled appearance and dejected atmosphere. Tange's 1978 master plan was designed with the assumption that there would be a marked increase in visitor numbers and that 75% of these would stay overnight (Tange and URTEC 1978:11,13), although observations suggest that only a fraction of visitors spend more than a few hours at the site (JICA 2001:5-3; Roy 2000).

Costs and consequences of the master plan

Revised cost estimates for completion of the entire master plan are in the region of US\$ 57 (Gurung 1999:33) to US\$ 75 million (UNESCO 1995:95). However, clear, consistent accounts of the actual expenditure to date on the Lumbini development have proven elusive. The government of Nepal, itself, is believed to have invested approximately US\$ 10 million in Lumbini to date, with NR¹¹ 40 million (approximately half a million US\$) of the 2001/2 budget allocated towards the rebuilding of the Maya Devi Temple. Using LDT archive data we estimate that expenditure on basic infrastructure, earthworks, river diversion and the Cultural Centre to be in excess of 18 million US\$. This conservative estimate represents expenditure on public buildings, rather than those of private enterprise and monastic institutions. While it might be argued that there is very little visible development for such a high financial outlay, the human cost of Lumbini's development, also hidden from view, has nevertheless been substantial.

Communities displaced by the master plan

When the master plan was designed, land comprising the main development area was home to over a thousand people (Tange and URTEC 1978:4) living in and farming around seven villages (LDT 2000:5). The master plan required that all residents left the area: "It has been decided that the inhabitants of these villages will be resettled and paid compensation, in order to make way for the Lumbini Development" (Tange and URTEC 1978:4). Figure 2 illustrates the community landscape prior to and following clearance required by the Lumbini master plan.



Legend
 ■ Pre-master plan settlements, since removed
 □ Contemporary settlements
 0 1 km

Figure 2: The community landscape of the area prior to and following the commencement of works on the Lumbini Development.

The mass displacement of the inhabitants of the proposed master plan site was by no means unprecedented in Nepal's history. From the mid-1950s the relocation of entire communities was embedded in government policy that was strategically guided by the first of the Kingdom's Five-Year Plans for national development (1956-1961). Policy that initially made provision for resettlement of people from overpopulated hill regions to less-populous areas of Chitawan in the Terai, evolved into later clearing of squatter communities. During this period and under King Mahendra's direction, whole areas of forest were cleared of human occupation (Müller-Böker 1999:40).

Given the political and historical precedents of forcible relocation of Nepalese communities, it was unfortunate that clearance of the master plan site initiated by the United Nations, was not provided for or executed by neutral international agencies, but left to the Nepalese authorities and the LDT. While inhabitants were removed according to the design requirements of the master plan, the manner in which it took place, together with the extent of compensation and lack of tangible progress, have impacted negatively on livelihoods and left evicted people feeling angry and betrayed.

Interviews with families that for generations occupied land since taken over by the master plan development revealed that the process of "relocation" was conducted in a heavy-handed and "top-down" manner. People reported that they were first asked to leave and given false promises regarding future provision of jobs and services (such as water and electricity) in new locations. Subsequently, however, they report that they were threatened and forced out from their lands and natal homes. Informants described how electricity supplies were cut, after which families were physically removed and their homes demolished before them.

No official provision was made for relocating families from the master plan area. The majority of people removed from the Lumbini development area, however, have remained within a 20 km radius of their original homes. Many moved to settlements on the periphery of the master plan area such as Mahilabar, Padariya and Tenuhawa (shown in figure 2). Those who owned substantial parcels of land in the master plan area were able to buy land in new locations, although the compensation they received did not enable them to fully replace their original landholdings. Many informants reported that they were only able to re-establish their homes and livelihoods with financial assistance from their wider family.

Resentment of the master plan, and the LDT in particular, is maintained by the persistence and worsening of poor living conditions in the settlements in which families relocated. Informants reported that in the first few years following their resettlement, they remained insecure, as it was feared that the LDT would again "capture" the land they occupied and they would again be evicted. It was not until after the introduction of democracy in 1990 that

those displaced by the master plan development felt able to protest, after which the LDT gave assurance that they would not face further displacement.

Compensation and relocation

Land requisitioned for the Lumbini development was compensated in the early 1980s at a rate of NR 1,000 per *bigha* (0.68 of a hectare). People maintain strong feelings of having been wronged by the LDT and the master plan, which arise from the perception this was an unfair and inadequate rate of compensation. Interestingly, this view was also expressed by a number of officials and LDT members themselves, who wished to remain anonymous. Müller-Böker (1999:42) notes that in 1986, the market price of land in the Inner Terai region of Chitawan was between NR 60,000 to 150,000 per *bigha*. While this region lies approximately 100km east of Lumbini, the extreme differential between Müller-Böker's recorded land market values and that made to landowners evicted from the master plan area supports informants' opinions that compensation was below market rates.

One family was paid only NR 14,000 for 0.15 of a *bigha* of land and a fourteen-room house. Other landless people were paid as little as three to five hundred rupees for the property they were forced to leave. As a consequence, many evicted families have not been able to fully re-establish their homes, business, farms and livelihoods to their pre-eviction standard. The strength of resentment is maintained and aggravated by the pervasive perception among local people of underhand dealing and profiteering on the part of representatives of the main transforming institution, the LDT. Local people have very little faith in the LDT's capability to manage the development of Lumbini as it is perceived to be both disorganised and corrupt. One female teashop proprietor on the periphery of the master plan referred to the LDT as a "money sick" institution.

Prior to the palace conceding to a democratic multi-party system, following the popular democracy movement that culminated in mass protest in the spring of 1990 (Gellner 1997:166-7; US Department of the Army 1993) there was a very low level of empowerment among ordinary local people who did not feel able to challenge authorities. During the *Panchayat* regime, when Nepal was ruled directly by the king (Whelpton 1997:47) people believe that certain officials and members of the LDT personally acquired a substantial proportion of the land surrounding the master plan. As the value of land in this zone has risen with the development of Lumbini, their speculative actions have been rewarded and they have become wealthy landowners. While officers of the Lumbini's transforming institution are perceived to have gained from the master plan, the economic situation of relocated families has deteriorated. Many families that farmed their own land within the master plan area, have become landless, waged farm labourers since their land was requisitioned. While wealthier families were able to

purchase adequate land to farm outside the master plan area, the lesser amounts of compensation received by smaller landowners reduced them to landlessness. The meagre amounts paid to landless families who were evicted from rented homes compounded their poverty and increased the economic disparities within local communities. Even landed and mercantile families that received more substantial financial compensation experienced deterioration in their standard of living. Unifying the various social and economic strata of local communities is the perception of the economic rise of outsiders and officials, whom they regard to have profited from land speculation and rising prices.

Chronic problems relating to the supply of services such as water and electricity to relocated households continue to act as a source of tension and dissatisfaction between families displaced by the master plan and the LDT. The area around Lumbini is naturally marshy and suffers from inundation and a high water table (Nippon Koei 2001). In some of the villages on the periphery of the master plan the quality of drinking water is poor and the majority of people cannot afford to purify it adequately. Although some NGOs have attempted to resolve the problem by installing hand pumps that enable water to be sourced from 2-300m below ground, the deep water has been found to contain high levels of arsenic (NRCS 2001). Villagers remain angry that they were promised service provision upon relocation, but continue to suffer from inadequate water and power supplies.

Some re-settlers, such as those that moved to Mahilabar, have themselves had to cope with problems associated with later waves of settlers. In recent years ethnic Nepalese driven from their homes in Assam¹² by civil unrest and racial attacks related to high unemployment, crossed the border back into Nepal as refugees. Of the many refugees that initially made their way to the regional town of Butwal, the authorities placed a proportion in Mahilabar village on the eastern periphery of the master plan (shown in figure 2). The more recent establishment of 90 landless refugee households in Mahilabar has placed additional pressure on the limited wage-labour market. Discord has arisen between refugee and more formally established households concerning the occupation of land. Because the refugees were not officially resettled in Mahilabar, families have no option but to build their mud houses on public and common land at the side of roads and on public tracks. Although there is a reasonable level of understanding that the responsibility for the refugees' resettlement lies with the authorities, there is friction between the different settler groups within the village. Disputes persist between residents regarding the perception that refugees' dwellings constrict public rights of way, such as the dirt track that runs through Mahilabar village. This is not only a problem of access, but landlords perceive that the way in which refugees have constructed their homes has caused the value of their land to fall.



Plate 3: Refugee mud and thatch dwellings (left) stand next to brick houses (right) of longer-term Mahilabar residents.

The already poor service supplies to the village have been placed under further strain by the needs of refugee households. As the electricity company will not supply power to mud dwellings erected by the refugees, they are forced to "sublet" supplies from neighbouring brick houses in the village. Because the refugees' supplies are unofficial and un-metered, the rates they are charged are fixed by individual suppliers. Consequently refugees believe they are charged at excessively high rates, which is a further source of discord with which relocated master plan families and refugees must contend.

Impact of the Lumbini development on local livelihood opportunities and enterprise development

The difficulties with which families displaced from the master plan have had to contend are also aggravated by a number of factors that have impacted upon livelihoods. These have had different consequences depending upon households' initial assets and economic situation.

Displaced people of all socio-economic strata agree that economic opportunities promised by the implementing authorities at the time of their eviction have failed to materialise. Some families who owned more

substantial land and property within the master plan area were able to re-establish businesses and farms, albeit to a lesser extent than their original concerns. One informant described how for generations his family ran a thriving store in Lumbini Bazaar (shown in Figure 2), which was demolished to enable the excavation and restoration of the Sacred Garden. While compensation for the family's substantial land and property holdings did not enable them to purchase equivalent assets outside the master plan, they were able to establish their household and a shop in one of the villages on the periphery of the Lumbini development site. The informant was embittered because the income generated by the shop established at the new location was lower than it had been in old Lumbini Bazaar. As the master plan has developed and new business opportunities arisen within it (such as snack, *paan*¹³ and souvenir stalls in the market in the car park to the east of the Sacred Garden) the family have failed to secure a niche within the site from the LDT. This is a protracted source of considerable anger, as the household head remarked: "We gave up our land and home to the LDT, but they do not allow us inside [the master plan to conduct business]. Buddha is the god of peace, but we are suffering for this project."

While the LDT as the transforming institution of Lumbini is held responsible for the lack of development of livelihoods by many local people, some of the more recently established spiritual institutions are also coming under criticism from local entrepreneurs. Some monasteries have constructed simple accommodation, which is offered to pilgrims and visitors. Financing arrangements are commonly donation based, however, some view these institutions to profit from their location in a way that local people are unable to equally participate. This view is shared by incoming hoteliers, who regard their substantial investments to be threatened by what they perceive to be business competition on the part of monasteries, who due to their prime location have an unfair advantage.

A limited number of small enterprise opportunities have emerged with development of the Buddha's nativity site. A few rickshaw-pullers work within the master plan area itself, but because the majority of visitors arrive by motorised transport and visit mainly the Sacred Garden, just a few minutes walk from the vehicle park, there is not a great demand for their services. A handful of individual entrepreneurs sell *lassi*¹⁴ and ice cream at the entrance to the Sacred Garden, although the majority of visitors, who are foreign Asian pilgrims, tend to purchase cold drinks and snacks from the single restaurant near the car park.

The main entrepreneurial niche that has opened up with the master plan development has been the twenty-five souvenir and three snack stalls in the visitor vehicle park near the Sacred Garden. Stalls (see Plate 4) are run by local owner-traders of a number of castes and religions, the vast majority of whom are male. Female members contribute to the family enterprise from

home by packaging sweets, *tika*¹⁵ powder and popped maize, and making bead necklaces and bracelets. In this way a single stall can generate enough revenue to maintain a household. Income from the stalls, however, is highly variable throughout the year, as visitor numbers fall as the temperature rises in the summer and are highly sensitive to the insecure political situation since the Maoist insurgency took hold in the mid 1990s. In spite of this, stalls remain open year round and trade from around six in the morning until between seven and ten at night.



Plate 4: A souvenir stall in the official master plan market

Since the inception of the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP) in 2001 (implemented by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation and supported by UNDP, DFID¹⁶ and SNV¹⁷) seven VDCs¹⁸ surrounding Lumbini have, together with six other national sites, been included in the pilot phase of the programme (TRPAP 2003:8). As part of local activities, TRPAP social mobilisers provide business advice to stallholders and work to encourage local craft production and their sale within the master plan. Although TRPAP was in consultation with both the

LDT and the official master plan market traders and had concentrated efforts on developing grass-weaving skills and adapting traditional product designs to the tourist market, in the spring of 2003 there were very few locally produced crafts on sale.

In the Lumbini souvenir market the majority of goods sold on the souvenir stalls are imported from Kathmandu and India (Varansi in particular). Stallholders report the most popular items they sell to be "sandalwood" *malas* (scented wooden-beaded rosaries), bead bracelets and cast metal images of the Buddha made in Lalitpur in the Kathmandu Valley. *Thankas*, hand painted canvas scrolls depicting Buddhist images sourced in Kathmandu are particularly popular among Taiwanese and Thai souvenir-hunters. Tourists tend to buy more goods than pilgrims, and Korean, Thai and Japanese visitors pay the best prices and spend more money than other nationalities. Europeans, who form the minority of visitors to Lumbini, spend the least according to the stallholders. The stallholders in the master plan commented that the simple small woven mats and coasters produced locally with TRPAP support were not in great demand. It was observed, however, that very few were visibly for sale on the stalls and were not actively promoted as locally produced, which might potentially increase their attractiveness within the tourist market.

Many local business people expressed the ambition to have stall within the master plan and as the LDT limits the volume of traders, competition for economic niches within the site is high. However, those who succeed in renting a stall in the official market in the master plan car park say they struggle to pay unofficial "tender" fees and meet the rising pitch rental. In the spring of 2003, the monthly ground rent for a stall was NR 2,225, plus a NR 200-225 monthly fee for electricity for two light bulbs. Stallholders expressed feelings of insecurity as the LDT has raised the ground rent in the past and had additionally proposed that it be increased to NR 3,500 per month. Although the stallholders have formed a cohesive traders group and protest at what they consider to be unfair rent increases, they do not feel they have much bargaining power as there are many people who are waiting to fill any openings in the master plan souvenir market. Stallholders report that paying rent in the summer months is particularly difficult due to the marked decline in visitor numbers and trade. When stallholders' rent falls into arrears, the LDT prevents them from trading by locking down stalls until the debt is paid and continuing defaulters are evicted. To avoid this situation and maintain livelihoods throughout the summer, many stallholders have adopted the strategy of moving their businesses to *melas* (fairs) around the country, although this too is hampered by the increasing insecurity of the Maoist insurgency.

In recent years an increasing number of unofficial souvenir "stalls" have started trading further within in the Sacred Garden and outside monasteries.

They most comprise a small number of goods that are usually displayed on a cloth placed on the ground that is packed away at the end of each day's trading. Stallholders who pay rent for official pitches in the master plan car park market claim that hawkers pay bribes to LDT officials, who turn a "blind eye" to their illegal trading activities. Market traders expressed the need for the LDT to fix a fair ground rent for stalls, enforce trading regulations and keep trading to officially designated areas. They also feel that the LDT should be more active in promoting Lumbini and encouraging visitors to stay overnight at the site, which would improve stallholders' incomes and those of many other sectors of the local community.

A major constraint shared by local people seeking waged-labour and emerging employers within the master plan, is the lack of required skills and the poor level of education locally. Well-remunerated skilled jobs that have been created with the development of the master plan, especially in the construction sector and the hotel and tourist industry, have been filled not by local people, but by better-qualified and experienced staff from Kathmandu and Pokhara. While hotel managers interviewed during fieldwork expressed the desire to train and develop the local skill-base, the fact that very few visitors stay over night in Lumbini and that political instability has reduced visitor numbers, contributes to the hotels' inability to reach profit and markedly reduces their staffing needs.

The Lumbini International Research Institute employs a number of local people in a range of positions, including cooks, cleaners, gardeners, security guards, and drivers, together with two library staff. The LDT itself employs local people for unskilled and semi-skilled positions such as security guards, car park attendants and clerks, but better paid, skilled jobs tend to be filled by outsiders.

The monasteries themselves have opened up new livelihood opportunities within the master plan area, which are concentrated at the unskilled end of the labour market. While, due to the lack of local availability, engineers and skilled construction personnel tend to be hired in (as has been the case with hotel-building and initial staffing), monastic institutions offer waged labour for the poorest strata of local society. While the extensive construction phase of the monastic zone is finite, it offers several years employment for a substantial proportion of the local labour pool. In the long term, monasteries employ local support staff as cleaners, sweepers and cooks as well as for building maintenance and running repairs.

Some of the Buddhist institutions have also responded to unmet needs of the most disadvantaged people in the area. Several, including the International Buddhist Federation (IBF), Lumbini Buddha Bihar and the Linh Son Temple offer free health care through purpose-built clinics and employ health workers who prescribe free medication and refer patients to specialists. From our fieldwork observations, we estimate that together these clinics

serve an average of 100 patients each day. In some cases these Buddhist organisations arrange transport and financial support of cases they refer for specialist treatment and care. This buffers the morbidity of people who rely on a daily wage and enables them to maintain their most valuable livelihood asset – their health – on which their capacity to work depends.

Linh Son Temple has addressed the need for skilled health workers by supporting five orphaned girls from marginalised communities to train as Assistant Nurse Midwives, who when qualified will practice in their communities in the Lumbini area. A number of Buddhist institutions conduct regular outreach activities targeting the most disadvantaged of Lumbini's communities. The IBF funds local manufacture and placement of filtering water pumps that have been designed to counteract the effects of microbiological and chemical pollution, arsenic being in particularly high concentrations in local drinking water sources (SAWTEE 2003: 22; NRCS 2001). Linh Son Temple annually donates three hundred blankets and warm clothing the poorest for the winter and directly supports 22 extremely deprived families, including a blind couple, with bi-monthly supplies of 7 kg of rice and NR 50 cash and new clothes annually. An additional 60 families are supplied with rice and cash support during the monsoon, when there is inadequate wage labour to meet their basic needs. In an attempt to address the necessity for sustained, long-term livelihoods for poor people lacking capital as well as that for pollution-free transport around Lumbini, the monastery has provided 39 families with their own, new rickshaws with which they are able to develop their livelihoods.

The World Food programme (WFP) also became involved in the Lumbini development project in the 1980s, offering food for labour during construction of the earthworks for the Telar River diversion, the Central Link canal and flood control levee as well as roads within and around the Sacred Garden (LDT 1990:8). Local people report that the programme had a positive impact upon their livelihoods for the eight years or so that they were able to take work "carrying mud on our heads". They recount how each worker received five rupees cash, two kilograms of wheat, 200g of *dal*¹⁹ and 100g of oil for each day's work, which provided a secure source of basic food requirements. However, auditing revealed accounting discrepancies and misappropriation of foods, which prompted the programme to withdraw. After this the poorest sectors of the local population have struggled to maintain their livelihoods within the restricted local wage-labour market.

Access to and management of natural resources

Prior to the development of the master plan, the site was an important source of natural resources, such as grasses, wood, mud, which have remained central to the livelihoods of many local people. In common with other Nepalese communities whose traditional homelands have been transformed

into conservation reserves or national parks (Gurung 1998:143), when Lumbini came under development, local people lost direct access to natural resources within the development area. In order to preserve the landscaping plantations and natural flora and fauna of the master plan, the LDT adopted a strategy of contracting out management of the site's natural resources. This was intended to both manage the natural environment and regulate local people's use of its natural assets. Grasses, for example, were managed and harvested by the contractor to reduce the incidence of fires and sold on to local people and a paper-making factory.

Given that prior to the development of Lumbini, there was free access to its natural resources, local people perceive the development and its transforming institution, the LDT, to have acted to constrain this traditional right. As a consequence, conflict has arisen between the LDT's responsibility to preserve the landscaping of the master plan and the requirements of local people for its natural assets, including forest products, wood, grasses and grazing.

In recent years, however, a dispute between the LDT and its contracting agent has led to a breakdown in the management of the natural environment and just as the progress of the master plan has stagnated, natural resource management has also come to a standstill. This has consequences for the natural environment of the master plan area and threatens the sustainability of its natural resources. The unmanaged parklands have uncontrolled growth of tall and abundant grasslands that renders flora and fauna highly vulnerable to fire. Outbreaks are not uncommon as was observed in the course of fieldwork in 2003, following a lightning strike.

In response to the breakdown of institutionally regulated access to the master plan's natural resources, local people have adopted other strategies to acquire the products and materials they require. While some people report making payments to the LDT in exchange for collecting forest and park resources, the majority take what they can while they are able to access it and pay unofficial "fines" to LDT personnel if they are caught. Cattle can be observed openly being grazed throughout the master plan area, including the Crane Sanctuary in the north. Local people report that certain LDT guards confiscate cattle they encounter on the site and impose a fee for their release of approximately NR 100 per head of cattle. Tall grasses, leaves and wood are also collected for a wide range of uses including animal fodder, fuel, construction and craft materials. In response to the disintegration of natural resource management of the area, many local people exploit what they perceive to be a temporary increase in freedom of access to the full. Consequently the forests and parklands of Lumbini have become a free-for-all and natural resources are exploited in an un-regulated and often non-sustaining manner.

The extensive tree plantations undertaken in the early phase of the development throughout the core master plan have become particularly vulnerable due to the lack of effective protection. People from surrounding villages use a technique of ringing the bark of trees to kill them, rendering them easier to remove and use for fuel. Trees are also sustaining damage from an increasing number of people climbing them to collect their fruit and flowers. It is estimated that of the 500,000 saplings planted according to Tange's design concept, only 191,000 survived to the new millennium (Rising Nepal 2000).



Plate 5: *The unregulated collection of natural resources from the master plan*

Mud, a traditional cementing and plastering material throughout Nepal and especially in the region, remains an important natural resource. The master plan is particularly marshy (see Benakdir's report to UNESCO 2001; Nippon Koei 2001; Coningham and Milou 2000:45) and many of the communities surrounding the master plan unofficially source their supplies from the site. The local demand for mud has remained high throughout the years due to the influx of refugees, who constructed new homes as well as poorer sectors of the communities, who require regular supplies for ongoing structural repairs. The unregulated collection and removal of mud not only

threatens the ecology of the area, but may also cause unquantifiable losses to ancient remains throughout the wider master plan, the majority of which has not undergone comprehensive archaeological investigation (Coningham and Milou 2000:26).

One successful aspect of implementing environmental protection in the early stages of the master plan development was growth in the population of a protected species of antelope *Boselephus tragocamelus*, known locally as *nil gai* (which translates literally as "blue cow"). The initial increase in forest cover and clearance of settlements are believed to have contributed to strengthening the *nil gai* population in the Lumbini area (JICA 2001:4-20). The master plan designed the site to be and it remains unfenced which allows the *nil gai* herds within it to freely access surrounding farmlands and local people hold them to be responsible for the considerable crop damage that impacts negatively on their livelihoods. Because of the antelopes' protected status, farmers face legal consequences if they harm *nil gai* in the course of preventing crop spoilage. They therefore, requested the LDT to fence the entire periphery of the master plan. However, the lack of effective action to confine the *nil gai* to the master plan has exacerbated the local communities' frustration with the Lumbini development and the LDT. The population of *nil gai* has subsequently fallen markedly in recent years. While this is due in part to disease transmission from domestic cattle and pesticide poisoning, there is also evidence of illegal hunting (Environment Nepal 2004).

Conclusion

Although the development of Lumbini has been severely hampered by issues relating to management, finance and political change, the original objectives of Kenzo Tange's master plan - to develop the potential nativity site as a centre of world pilgrimage and tourism - remain relevant. Lumbini, like Mount Everest, represents within the kingdom of Nepal a unique element of global interest and importance that has great potential to generate revenue at the national and local level. Unlike Everest, however, because of its relatively recent rediscovery and low media profile, Lumbini requires a concerted packaging and advertising effort to raise awareness of its existence among potential visitors, be they pilgrims, or tourists. It is essential that marketing of the site be combined with the construction of planned infrastructure to support and encourage visitors to remain longer in the area. Between 1999-2000 UNDP initiated a series of missions to review the Lumbini development so far and develop a strategy towards its completion. While there might no longer be economic resources available to realise Tange's master plan to its original extent, it is crucial that the project achieves some form of completion and achieves the original development objectives for the site and the local community.

Several, protracted features of the Lumbini development have fractured relations between the local people and the site's transforming institution, the LDT. This study reveals that relocated families, having relinquished their land and property feel excluded from the master plan area and any benefits its development might bring. Indeed, the early stages of the development of the Lumbini master plan have impacted substantially on local livelihoods with very different consequences for different sectors of society. Those less well-off feel that in the course of the development their economic situation has deteriorated, while wealthier sections of local society, those connected with the transforming institution and outsiders have benefited from Lumbini's investment potential. The persistence of difficulties relating to livelihoods and living conditions that local people, particularly families displaced the master plan, regard to be a consequence of the Lumbini development, renders it essential that efforts be focussed on maximising the site's potential to attract visitors and revenue to this impoverished area. Given that communities surrounding the master plan consist mainly of Hindus and Muslims and that only a minority of the local population are themselves Buddhist, Lumbini does not provide spiritual recompense to the majority of local people. Similarly, components of the master plan that have been completed - hotels, the museum, research institute, monasteries and temples - are also of little inherent value to poor local people, beyond any livelihood opportunities they might offer. In the current climate of civil unrest it is imperative for local people feel included in the benefits of the Lumbini development and that the widening breach between local communities and the LDT be addressed.

The monastic community of Lumbini recognises the urgent need for inclusion of local people and a more integrative management approach to the site. This was ratified in declaration xiv of the Lumbini Declaration of the World Buddhist Summit in 1998. Integrated conservation and development projects such as the Annapurna Conservation Area Project provide national models for the successful incorporation of local people and livelihood development in project decision-making and sustainable natural resource management (Gurung 1998; Bunting et al 1991). This approach should be adopted as a matter of high priority to address the lack of inclusion in the Lumbini development and unexploited opportunities to develop skills and enterprise among the most disadvantaged sectors of local society. Inclusion of local people in the management and decision-making processes regarding the natural environment of the master plan is essential to ensuring the sustainability and optimal use of natural resources.

The LDT has been widely held to account for the stagnation of the master plan, but it has also been left to complete a mammoth task that was initiated at the international level. The international committee that was formed in 1970 to oversee and raise funds for the development of Lumbini is not listed

on the United Nations website and has been described as "moribund for more than a decade" (Dixit 2002). In 2003 the Kathmandu Post attributed to the LDT's member secretary, Mr Janak Lal Shrestha the comment: "There is a lack of clear vision as to who is supposed to accomplish the jobs set by the Master Plan," he said, adding that [the United Nations Committee] for overseeing the development of Lumbini has remained inactive since its inception" (Kathmandu Post 2003). Given the emerging situation of civil unrest and conflict throughout Nepal, tensions between the LDT and the local community need to be relieved as a matter of urgency. There have been calls both from the national press (Spotlight 2003) and the Buddhist Community (Lumbini Declaration of the World Buddhist Summit 1998: declaration xiii) for the international committee based in UN Headquarters in New York to be revitalised to mobilise funds and take responsibility for the completion and management of the Lumbini development. Given that the international community initiated the Lumbini development, responsibility ultimately rests at this level to complete of the development objectives, preserve the heritage site and to maximise local inclusion in the process.

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Notes

1. The first notable interest in preserving and developing the site after its rediscovery was a donation made by King Mahendra in 1958 (Crystal Mirror Series 1994:23).
2. Deeg uses the transliteration Xuanzang for the name of the monk referred to here as Hsuan-Tsang.
3. The natural pool has been conserved with brick and other materials throughout recent history and has become known as the Sakya Tank, which is illustrated in figure 1.
4. Ashoka's reign was between 273 and 232 BC.
5. Transliteration of the Chinese traveller's names varies throughout the literature. Here we follow Bikkhu Ding Hui of the Chinese Monastery in Lumbini (see Hui 2000). Bidari (2002:77) sets out a number of versions used by different authors.

6. 1312 AD.
7. *Dighanikaya*, 16; *Mahaparinirvanasutra*.
8. Diacritics have not been included in this translation is from Waldschmidt (1950/51: 388, 390).
9. For further detail, see Bidari (2002:92).
10. New Lumbini Village.
11. Nepalese Rupee.
12. Refugees interviewed in the course of this study had left Megalai, in the Kathi Hills.
13. A mixture of areca nut, lime, spices and other flavourings, wrapped in a betel leaf that is chewed, producing a mild narcotic effect.
14. A non-alcoholic drink made from yoghurt, either salted or sweetened with sugar.
15. Coloured powder, usually red, used for ritual purposes.
16. British Government Department for International Development.
17. SNV (*Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers*) Netherlands Development Organisation.
18. "VDCs" or Village Development Committees are local administrative areas, known as *panchayat* prior to 1990.
19. Lentils that are a dietary staple and contribute an important source of protein.

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