**UNIT 46**

# Limnu Hand-out 1: Welcome to limnu valley

*Disclaimer: the facts in this scenario are entirely fictitious. Any resemblance with actual facts is mere coincidence.*

#### General setting

Limnu village is located at an altitude of about 1200 meters in a valley in the mountainous north of the Kingdom of Lemnix. Limnu has 900 inhabitants in six quarters (neighbourhoods). Six kilometres west of Limnu is Mare village (with a population of 350 inhabitants and three quarters). There are no other villages in Limnu Valley, which forms one municipality. People from Limnu and Mare call themselves Valley people.

One road leads out of the valley. Never far from the Limnu river, it runs for 32 kilometres westward from Limnu to Talga City, the capital of Talga District (pop. 16,000), comprised of 28 villages, including Limnu and Mare.

People in Talga District speak Talga-go, the local language and Lemni-go, the national language. The media, administration and education at the country level only use Lemni-go. Children in Talga District are fluent in both languages from the age eight or nine; few people are literate in Talga-go.

People in Limnu and Mare, unlike other speakers of Talga-go, have preserved their traditional beliefs system that was once common in the north of Lemnix. That is why they are considered a minority, as opposed to people from Talga District and beyond, who embraced the monotheistic official religion of the country a century or so ago.

Traditionally, one does not marry a person from the same quarter; there has been much marrying between Limnu and Mare. The Valley people celebrate the Long Week together, which is a main ritual and festive event held each year.

There is no supply system for drinking water in the valley; there is no sewage system either, which causes pollution in the marshlands between Limnu and Mare. The road is old and very difficult to pass in winter. There is no regular public transport. Limnu has a primary school and a small shop; both are also visited by people from Mare.

Few families have a car; many have a horse. Virtually all houses have electricity, many of them have TV. Wood stoves are used for heating. There is no internet connection. Mobile phones function in Mare and at the western end of Limnu.

The land is in principle collectively owned, but families have the perpetual right to use specific plots. Most Limnu and Mare families still try to make a living from farming. Their farm allotments are in the flatlands surrounding the villages and on the adjacent lower slopes. Some Limnu Valley people work as professional potters. Other handicrafts are mainly practiced by farming families in their spare time.

There is not enough work or land for everyone. Most young people leave the village for further schooling, military service or work. Some stay away; many – especially men – spend a large part of the year outside the village, doing seasonal work.

Entertainment for the remaining youngsters comes largely from watching soccer and soap operas on TV. They like to go to the cinema or the disco in Talga City, if they have transport.

#### Organization and Administration

Parliament recently decided to put an end to the long-standing neglect of areas where minorities live and voted to include additional funds in the next four-year plan for infrastructural projects in minority areas.

Each quarter has a head, called an Elder and the nine Elders of Limnu and Mare form together the Council of Elders, recognized under the Regulation for National Minorities in Lemnix. The Council manages local affairs under the control of the district authorities in Talga City.

A Chief Elder is elected from among the Elders of the three oldest quarters. All Elders are men. When there are conflicts, the Elders try to address them, but their rulings are increasingly contested. Calling in help from Talga District level is unpopular. The district authorities would prefer if Limnu Valley used the formal legal system.

In the valley there are two associations of farmers, one in Limnu and one in Mare; there is a valley-wide association of potters, and one of weavers and costume makers. There is also an association of young people who organize the annual Festival of the Clouds. Dye-makers and performers also work together, without forming an association. Single mothers from the valley help each other on a systematic basis.

There are two people who practice traditional healing. The nearest public medical facility is a clinic in Talga City; with a rising incidence of diabetes and hypertension, the traditional healers are hard-pressed to respond.

The Municipal Centre in Limnu is used by the Elders and the associations for their meetings and young people go there to watch sports and other entertainment on a large-screen TV. Once a week a civil servant from Talga City goes there to provide advice on administrative and financial matters for Valley people. The Municipal Centre is close to the Long Green, an open space where festivities and some rituals take place, and where children play.

#### FARMERS

The villagers use the flatlands for farming; they also practise some terracing on the lower slopes, but less than before. The know-how for making the dry-stone walls and the walls around the courtyards in the villages support the terraces is no longer transmitted. Parts of the old irrigation systems still function in the lowlands, but the century-old terraces and their irrigation systems are in decay.

Rainfall irregularity is a constant problem. Water collection from rainfall used to be common practice in each homestead, with water being kept cool and clean in large clay drums. This activity fell out of practice after the district placed water tanks in Limnu and Mare that are filled by the District Water Company.

The farmers mainly produce maize; they produce less fruit and vegetables, now that the terraces are no longer maintained. Sheep and poultry are frequently kept as livestock. Not all families produce enough food. Some receive food parcels from a charity in Talga District.

Until recently, excess produce was exchanged at the Talga City market. People still go to buy vegetables and fruit from Limnu Valley there. Nowadays barter is extremely rare outside the valley and merchants have taken over the sale of valley products. There is one merchant in Limnu. Valley people have always acquired most of their cloth and textiles at the Talga City market.

Limnu Valley potters used to have a large production, from large water drums to small kitchenware and the Limnu clay drums. Until recently they used to sell pots at the Talga City market and elsewhere in the district. There are good clay supplies in the valley. Most potters are men.

Travelling merchants occasionally visit the village and sell cheap tableware and so does the village shop. The number of potters has shrunk to less than ten because of diminishing demand for their products both at home and elsewhere.

A factory near the capital started producing valley-style pots and selling them as ‘Limnu Valley ware’. Their pots are cheaper, of lower quality and have a slightly different shape. To make things worse, supplies of the wood needed for the ovens are becoming scarcer.

#### Weaving, banners, Textile and costume making

Traditionally, women have designed and produced the banners and the decorations on all pots. The designs and colour patterns differ from quarter to quarter and keep changing over time.

Valley women also prepare textiles that are exchanged in the village, or sold at Talga City market, where they are appreciated for their colourful patterns. Some women produce traditional costumes, for family members but hardly ever for sale.

For the costumes they use wool from their sheep. For the banners they use woven dried grass and reed which were traditionally collected by girls; nowadays they are collected by young women.

A few families, mainly in Mare, collect and grow herbs and plants, and prepare the natural dyes, which women in both Mare and Limnu use for dyeing textiles.

Special pots and cloths with distinctive patterns are produced and used at weddings, funerals and Long Week ceremonies; people in the valley like these special pots. The women can explain their symbolism, linking them to values long cherished in the valley. Youngsters don’t take the symbolism literally. They do like the designs and usually take some special pots and cloths with them when they leave the valley.

#### PERFORMERS

Most Limnu Valley people know and appreciate traditional valley stories, songs and dances. There are about ten traditional performers in the valley: singers, storytellers, drum players and *rutu* (a two-string violin made by a Mare family) players. None of the performers is more than semi-professional and they are paid in kind. They are not organized, but know each other well. Without them, rituals and festivities would not be complete. Apart from drummers, no performer is younger than 50.

#### The Long Week

Limnu Valley people do not like to speak in public about their beliefs and celebrations such as the Long Week, which for them confirms the relationship between the valley, its people and heaven. Fortunately, Lemnix policies towards local and religious minorities have become more tolerant in recent years.

The Long Week, which lasts for nine days, starts the last Sunday of May, with ceremonies by the Elders. For five days rituals are performed and gatherings are held within the quarters, culminating on Thursday in a final meeting of all quarters during which critical decisions are taken about the use of land and water, contentious issues are discussed and tasks are divided.

In the evenings, potters and weavers come together and sing songs that traditionally accompany their activities. They invite singers and storytellers to tell and sing about the past of the Limnu Valley. Many Valley people attend these Long Week evenings. Houses are cleaned, repairs done and last preparations are made for the Festival of the Clouds, which starts on Saturday after the Long Week.

People used to fast during the first five days of the Long Week, while various rituals were taking place, with musicians and singers performing. Most young adults no longer fast; many adults – especially in Mare – still do.

##### The Festival of the Clouds

For all valley residents the Festival of the Clouds, which comes at the end of the Long Week, is the major event of the year and it is the preferred occasion on which Valley people living elsewhere return to their home villages. People from Talga District come to the festival in hundreds. Most Festival events take place on the Limnu Long Green. People wear their colourful costumes. The quarters organize festive open-air meals at noon every day of the Festival. In recent years, there have been fairground attractions for the children.

The highlights of the festival are:

* Day 1: Solemn opening dance by the Elders; wrestling contest; evening: singers perform Memory Songs, accompanied by *rutu* players.
* Day 2: Elders visit the sick and elderly; Parade of the Quarters with the Burning of the Old Banners; evening: contest of singers; night: Secret Dance of the Elders to the music of drums.
* Day 3: Children dance and sing; afternoon: Parade of the Quarters presenting the New Banners; women ritually plant the first summer seeds. At several moments there is common singing and dancing, with musicians playing on the Long Green.

Last year, a group of foreign hikers attended the festival, and liked it. The Valley people are happy to welcome foreigners to the festival, though not to the initial days of the Long Week.

#### Land and climate, MIgration – Problems

The farmers are worried by the erratic rainfall, deterioration of the soil and landslides. These are caused, a researcher told them, by climate change, by deforestation and by the decay of the terraces.

Family disputes and disputes in and between quarters are more frequent than before, as the available land per homestead becomes smaller and its quality deteriorates. Wood supplies in the small forests high up in the mountains are running out and the festival is no longer concluded by a giant bonfire.

Changing weather patterns have contributed to crop failures, and diminished crops and other produce lead to increasing poverty, worrying alimentary conditions and a decreasing number of inhabitants. Over the last 30 years, the population of Limnu has decreased from 1250 to 900 and that of Mare from 600 to 350.

Some valley people work in Talga City; many men work in distant mining camps, or in the capital. The remittances they send home play an important part in the valley economy. Many such migrants are temporary, but at any given time close to half of Limnu Valley households are female-led.

#### Young people

After primary school, increasing numbers of girls and boys complete middle school in Talga City, the first two years of which are obligatory. Some of them try to find work there afterwards, but there are not many opportunities. Valley people are unhappy that there is not enough work in the valley itself.

Children used to learn various occupations in the fields and homesteads. Today they do so to a lesser extent as they go to school. Some young people still learn, however, to make pots, or to play the drum; some young women still make banners and clothes.

Young people know valley stories, and like valley songs, but they don’t value them in the same way as their grandparents. They are less interested in the obligations and secret aspects of the Long Week; they do enjoy the Festival of the Clouds. Limnu and Mare adults living beyond Talga District, when they come for the festival, encourage their valley relatives to continue their traditions.

#### ELDERS

The Council of Elders meets every second Thursday when questions and disputes may be raised before them, but their authority is crumbling. They are worried that young adults and children no longer fast during the Long Week. Of grave concern to them are youth apathy, the lack of employment and malnutrition.

Slowly, the Elders have come to understand that Limnu Valley is in crisis and needs a strategy to make living in the valley attractive for all, especially for young people. The Elders regret that they have not been able to undertake appropriate action. They believe, however, that the values taught through the common activities, rituals and practices of, for instance, the Long Week, with related crafts, storytelling, dancing and singing should be preserved for the benefit of all.

The Elders are happy that the Talga District authorities and the Ministry of Rural Development agreed to finance, from the special budget for development of minority areas, the upgrading of the road next year and the installation of a drinking water supply in three years. Talga District will ensure that there will be internet coverage in both Limnu and Mare within two years.

**WHY A SAFEGUARDING PLAN?**

Lemnix ratified UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage Convention two years ago. There is no ICH-specific legislation yet and no inventory so far. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Rural Development set up an ICH Task Force that was asked to develop, with local communities, pilot projects to test the possibility of restoring the viability of local communities through ICH safeguarding. Up to USD 200,000 is available for three or four realistic pilot plans. (Just for comparison, the Head Teacher’s annual salary is USD 6,000.)

Six months ago, the Chief Elder and the Weavers Representative attended a workshop on safeguarding ICH with a view to ensure rural development that was organized by the ICH Task Force. These valley representatives and a Task Force official agreed that Limnu Valley might be a good candidate for a pilot project.

Back home, they reported to the Elders who believed that a plan that would revitalize traditional practices while making them work for the development of the valley might solve some crucial problems. There was general support for this idea in the valley.

When the Chief informed the Task Force about that, he was told that a safeguarding plan should be prepared at short notice and that assistance could be given by a consultant. The Elders accepted the proposed consultant who had visited their festival last year. They decided with the consultant that a two-day intensive meeting would be organized, with broad participation, to work out the main lines of a safeguarding plan that should not exceed USD 200,000.

Meanwhile, the Elders organized consultations in the valley, asking for ideas. Various suggestions were made, not all of them ICH-related: restoring terraces, repairing irrigation systems; reintroducing traditional agricultural practices; modernizing agricultural practices; creating a mineral water plant in Mare; revitalizing pot making; providing legal protection for Limnu Valley produce; revitalizing Long Week rituals; promoting and modernizing the Festival of the Clouds; developing infrastructure for ecotourism, etc. There was a common understanding that the viability of drum playing, the Festival of the Clouds, traditional dancing, the local language, dye making and traditional healing is not impaired.

YOU are one of those invited to contribute to the elaboration of the safeguarding plan. You have strong ideas, specific expertise and interests but you are willing to make compromises in the interest of the Limnu Valley. If all goes well, provisions for a four-year safeguarding project could be made in the ministries’ work plan and budget, starting next year. Limnu Valley may be a different place soon.