

# Jewels of Mesho

My name is Tsomo. In my thirtieth year, I came to live in Mesho, an area in Dege, Kham.

That is where all of the important texts of our culture are printed. And they are printed on the pulp of our trees.

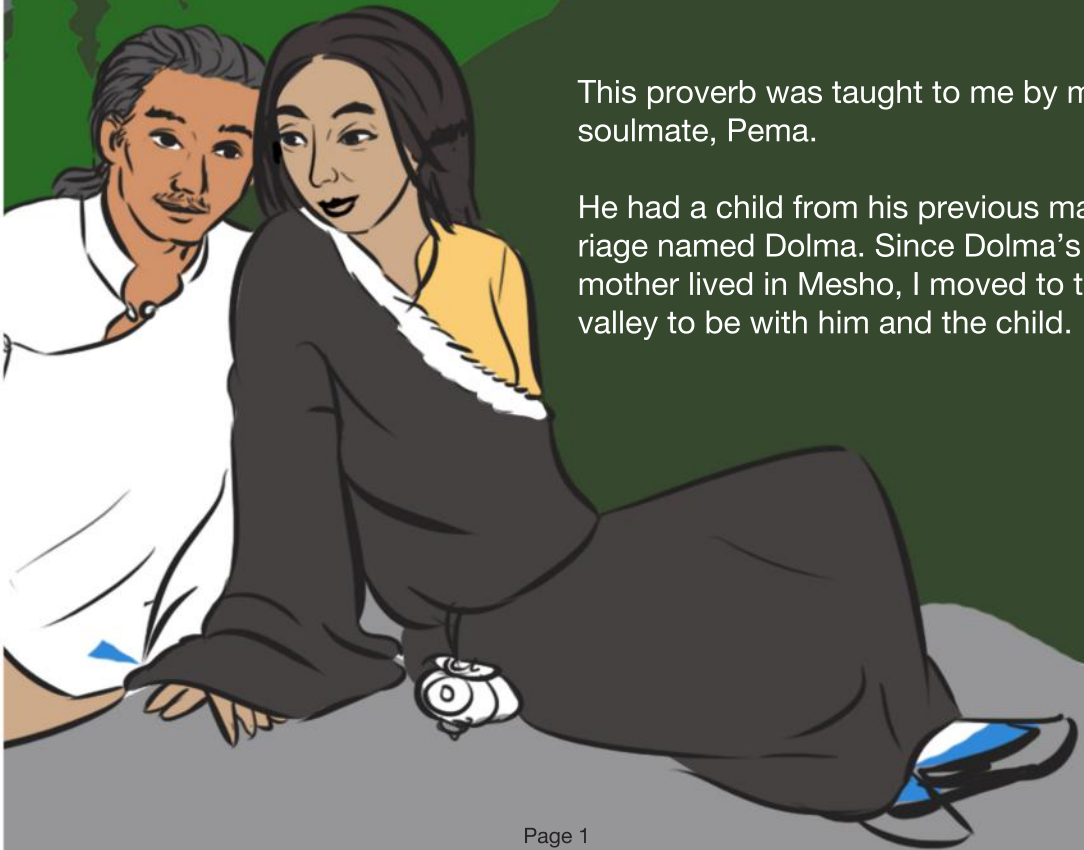
We grow barley, potatoes and turnips. Our fields run along the river and our mountains are covered with trees.

When people see Mesho, they see how rare and precious it is. I always tell them this proverb I know: 'The dense growths of trees and their bushes, are the jewelry of our hills.'



This proverb was taught to me by my soulmate, Pema.

He had a child from his previous marriage named Dolma. Since Dolma's mother lived in Mesho, I moved to this valley to be with him and the child.



Pema and I raised Dolma together for six years. That's six years of meals I cooked for her, six years of hugs, six years of soothing her cries.

In the spruce and fir forests, we sat and made plans to start a shop for knick-knacks. Other times, we simply sang songs and slept under the canopy of leaves. What I loved most was knowing that the two people dearest to me were always nearby.



I have something for you



We'll plant this next year.



A fir seed? But why next year?

I hope we'll have our child then.



Our child..?

Yes. A sibling for Dolma.



A family of four.

Then one day, while Pema and Dolma were going to Dege town, there was a landslide.

I HEARD THERE WAS A HUGE LANDSLIDE OVER IN YÜBA VILLAGE! PEOPLE MAY HAVE BEEN TRAPPED.

YÜBA VILLAGE?

THAT'S WHERE PEMA AND DOLMA WENT!!!



I searched and searched, but they were buried under tons of rocks and dirt. I couldn't believe they were really gone.

The landslide took away the two people I loved most in the world. Suddenly I felt very alone, helpless.



When I went back to pay my respects in the forests we once enjoyed, I found that the trees were being chopped down. Truck after truck was being loaded.

All those trees that had taken decades to grow were being ripped apart in minutes. Underneath them, the mountainsides were starting to slip.



In my misery I knew I just had to do something. I was asked to speak at a community meeting about the tragedy. I decided now was the time to act.

TODAY WE ARE HERE TO DISCUSS THE RECENT TRAGEDY.



TSOMO, WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU. THIS IS A PART OF LIFE, NOTHING IS PERMANENT.



WE WILL PRAY THAT THIS NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN TO ANYONE ELSE IN THE VILLAGE.



NO.

I'M SORRY TO BE BLUNT. I APPRECIATE YOUR PRAYERS FOR MY FAMILY.



THE LOGGERS STOLE ALL OUR TREES - "OUR JEWELS" AS MY PEMA CALLED THEM.



TSOMO IS HERE WITH US. SHE LOST TWO FAMILY MEMBERS. SHE NEEDS HELP AND SUPPORT.



WE CAN'T BRING THEM BACK, BUT WE WILL HOLD PRAYERS FOR THEIR SPEEDY RE-BIRTH.



NO?

BUT PRAYERS WILL NOT STOP MORE LANDSLIDES FROM TAKING MORE LIVES.



PEMA AND DOLMA WERE MY JEWELS. THEY HELD ME TOGETHER. THE TREES ALSO HOLD THE LAND TOGETHER WITH THEIR ROOTS.

THE LANDSLIDE HAPPENED BECAUSE WE DIDN'T PROTECT THE JEWELS OF MESHO.



THE LANDSLIDE WAS NOT JUST AN ACCIDENT.

THOSE LOGGERS STOLE OUR TREES - AND WE DID NOTHING!

BUT THEY SAID IT'S FOR BUILDING HOUSES FOR THE POOR!

NO IT'S NOT! WE'VE BEEN DUPED! I FOLLOWED THEM ON MY BIKE...

I SAW THEM SELLING THE TIMBER TO CITY CONTRACTORS.

WHAT'S MORE, I FOUND OUT THAT THE WHOLE VALLEY WILL BE CLEARED IN 3 YEARS!

THAT'S OUTRAGEOUS! WE MUST DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS!

I KNOW WHAT WE CAN DO. WE MUST STOP THE LOGGERS.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

I SWEAR ON PEMA AND DOLMA'S GRAVE, THAT I WILL DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO MAKE SURE...

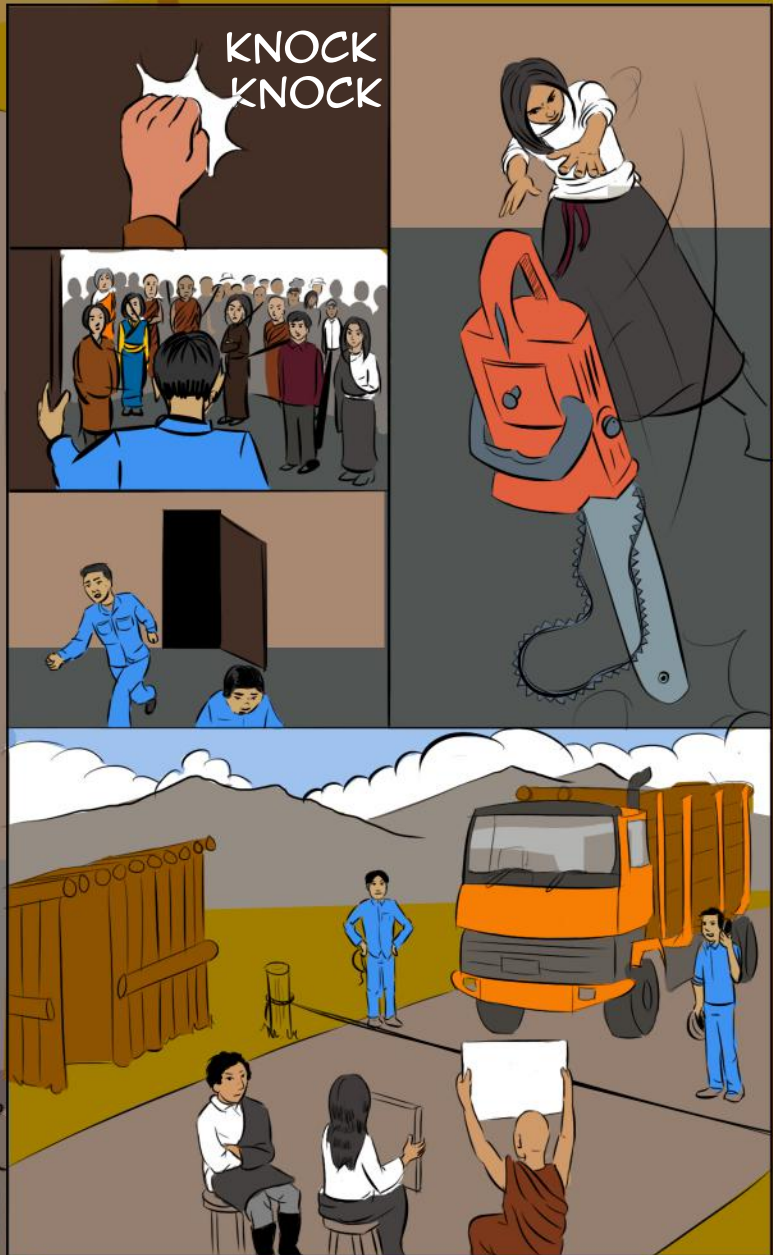
...THAT NOT ONE MORE TREE IS REMOVED FROM OUR LAND.

IF YOU TRULY WANT TO HELP ME, THEN HELP ME TO STOP THE DESECRATION OF OUR LAND.

We made a plan to halt the logging. All three villages, Puma, Dama and Yüba, stood together. Since the lumber bosses wouldn't negotiate with us, we needed a plan to stop them.

We decided to go to the logging camp. We broke their chainsaws and chased the loggers away. There were so many of us, they didn't know what to do.

We knew that the men would return, so we occupied the camp to protect the trees for good. To protect our homes, we were willing to give up our lives.

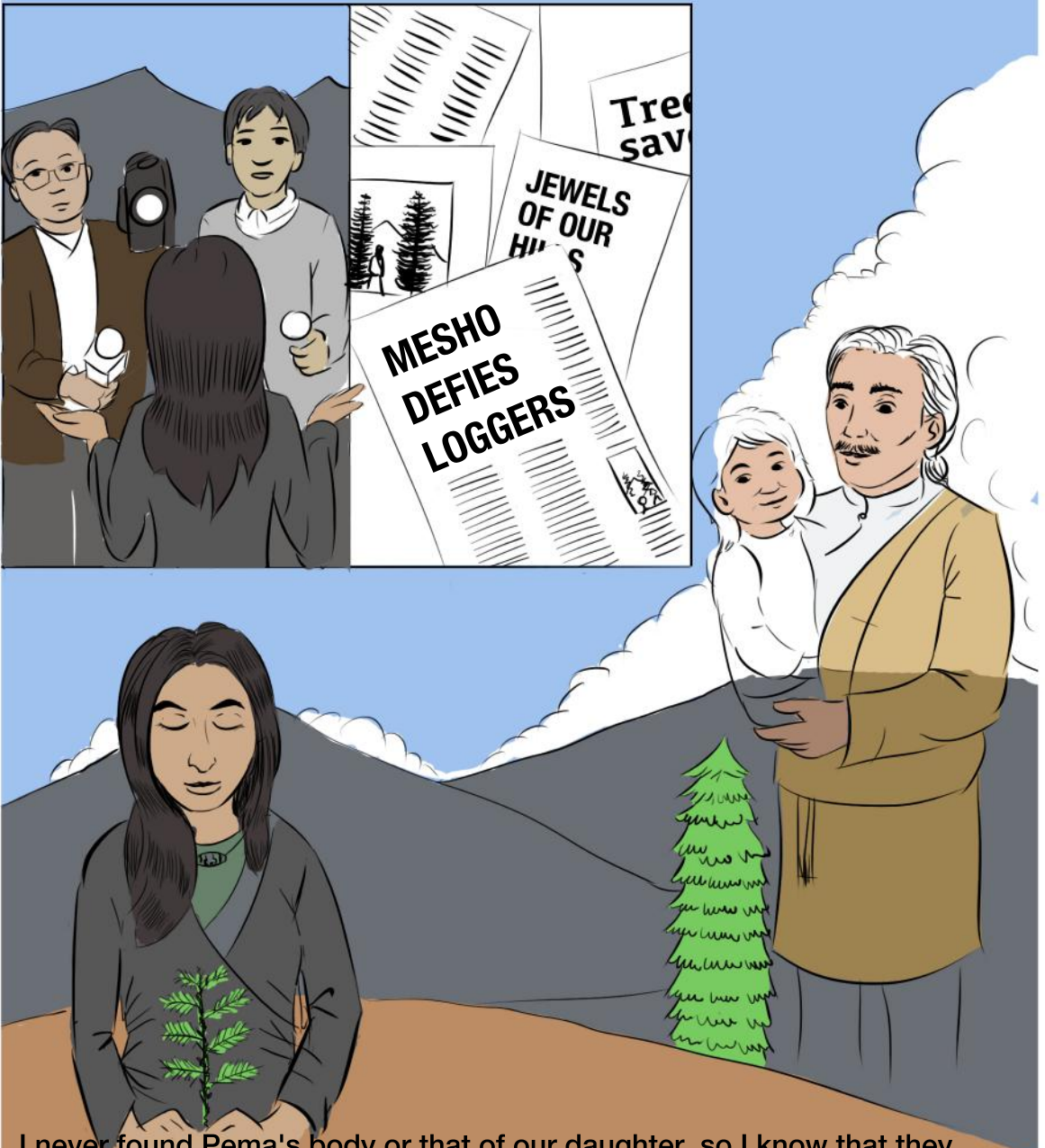


We built a simple hut at the entrance of the forest and put up a roadblock. People from all three villages took turns guarding the entrance.



We maintained the blockade for a year and no one dared cross through. Chinese journalists and environmental activists got interested in our story.

One man, Feng Yongfeng, a reporter and environmentalist, wrote about us. A group called Greenpeace China investigated the issue and found that much of the logging was illegal. The attention from Chinese groups and journalists was a gamechanger.



I never found Pema's body or that of our daughter, so I know that they are part of this land. Thanks to the courage of our villagers, we saved this land from further harm. We uncovered the lies, we organized, and we took action. We intervened directly to stop the loggers, and we saved the Jewels of Mesho.

# Saving the Trees of Mesho

## SUMMARY

In 2010, the people of Mesho directly intervened to stop logging and save their forests from destruction. Residents of three villages - Puma, Dama, and Yüba - took action together, chasing loggers out of their camp, sabotaging their machinery, and setting up a blockade to prevent further cutting of the forest.

The villagers had accepted the logging earlier under the impression that the timber would be used to build houses for the poor. But it became apparent that this wasn't the case. Some was being used to build houses that nomads would be resettled into, and some was being sold illegally. It seemed that local Chinese officials were using the construction of nomad settlements as an excuse to break a ban on logging.

Drawn by news of the villagers' bold action and the rampant deforestation taking place in the whole region, the co-founder of the Green Beagle Chinese environmental organization spent time with the villagers and reported on the situation for a prominent environmental website, ChinaDialogue.net. Greenpeace China also researched and reported on the situation in Mesho as well as problematic logging taking place in the broader Kardze region. As of 2011, the year-old blockade had successfully prevented further logging from taking place.

<b>ISSUE</b>	Rampant logging and environmental damage
<b>WHO</b>	Villagers of Mesho
<b>WHERE</b>	Puma, Dama, and Yüba in the Mesho valley, Dege County, Kardze Prefecture, Kham (Sichuan)
<b>GOALS</b>	To stop logging of the local forest
<b>STRATEGY</b>	Physically intervene to stop the logging  We don't have enough information to know for certain what the villagers' strategy was, but it appears that it was some combination of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Physically intervene to stop the logging</li><li>• Invoke the government's ban on logging and secure the support of Chinese environmental activists</li></ul>

<p><b>PLANNED OR SPONTANEOUS?</b></p> <p><b>How did they get started?</b></p>	<p>Planned</p> <p>The villagers had been told that the logging taking place since early 2010 was to provide timber for houses for the poor. When they realized that this was not the case, they decided to intervene to stop more trees from being cut.</p>
<p><b>ISSUE FRAMING</b></p>	<p>The villagers presented the issue as being about environmental destruction and going against their cultural values of respect for the environment and all living things. They also emphasized that the timber might be being sold illegally.</p> <p>Allies like Greenpeace China, who got involved later, framed it as part of a larger issue being addressed by China that year - the UN International Year of Forests - to stop logging forests along parts of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers through a forest protection program. They suggested that local officials were using the excuse of building homes as a cover for breaking a ban on logging that came from higher levels.</p>
<p><b>LEADERS, PARTICIPANTS, ALLIES INCLUDING ELITES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's unclear if there were particular leaders of the action</li> <li>• The participation of three villages suggests that there was substantial community organizing to get widespread grassroots involvement. We don't know how many people participated, but they were able to staff a blockade checkpoint with three people a day for at least a year.</li> <li>• Allies: Somehow the villagers' initiative was communicated to Chinese conservationists and environmental organizations, who helped by publicizing the campaign and doing further research and reports into the issue of deforestation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>TARGET</b></p>	<p>The villagers chose the loggers as their target, deciding on a strategy that would physically prevent loggers from felling more trees.</p> <p>We don't know whether the campaign was successful in permanently stopping logging in the area. To get long term protection of the forest, the villagers might have needed to target officials in the county or prefecture government, not just the loggers themselves.</p>
<p><b>OPPONENT(S)</b></p>	<p>The likely opponents would have been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loggers who lost their jobs after the blockade</li> <li>• Corrupt officials in the local government taking bribes to allow illegal timber sales</li> <li>• Other officials in the local government who had approved the logging program</li> </ul>

<p><b>TACTICS</b></p> <p><b>low risk or high risk? dispersed or concentrated?</b></p>	<p>The villagers initially gathered information about what was going on. They then started spreading the word among the different villages in Mesho, and decided on a series of actions: first, destroying the logging camp, and second, blocking access to the forest.</p> <p>Allies did research - including asking various local and national government departments for information and responses to their findings. They publicized the campaign and the broader issue of deforestation in Kardze on prominent websites and on personal microblogs. They also sent copies of their reports to China's State Forestry Administration.</p> <p>The villagers' tactics were very high risk. Not only were they concentrated - everyone participating was in one place - the blockade tactic depended on the participants using their bodies to physically prevent trucks from passing.</p> <p>The allies' tactics were lower risk. They were mainly communicating with government departments, rather than physically taking action, and the environmental organizations were openly carrying out their mission of protecting their environment.</p> <p>The different tactics were effective together. The villagers' dramatic action gave legitimacy to the campaign, because they were the people being affected by the logging. The allies' lower risk tactics of research and publicity showed that many people were watching the campaign and this probably helped protect the villagers who were placing their bodies on the line.</p>
<p><b>RESPONSE BY OPPONENT</b></p>	<p>Unusually, the opponents to the villagers' action seem not to have responded in a forceful way. One official interviewed said they had no right to be blockading the forest.</p> <p>In response to the report Greenpeace China sent to the State Forestry Administration, an official was sent from Chengdu to investigate the situation. Other government departments at provincial, prefectural and county levels refused to cooperate with Greenpeace's investigations.</p>
<p><b>MEDIA &amp; MESSAGING</b></p>	<p>The villagers' message was: <b>Stop Logging in Mesho</b></p> <p>The story was covered extensively by ChinaDialogue.net, an English-Chinese website focused on environmental issues in China. Initial reports by Feng Yongfeng, the co-founder of the Green Beagle organization, were followed by detailed reports on an investigation by Greenpeace China, which did further research and reporting. The coverage put a spotlight on the villagers' campaign, placed it in a larger context of deforestation in the area, and connected it to Chinese environmental networks far away. This likely played a</p>

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	role in the mild way the local government seems to have responded to the villagers' blockade.
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## OUTCOMES

### What has changed and what is its significance?

- Logging in Mesho was stopped for at least a year. We don't know if the logging was permanently halted.
  - The destructive and often illegal logging taking place in Kardze was exposed and publicized.
  - Connections were built between local Tibetans and Chinese environmental organizations and individual conservationists.
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