



# Effects of large-scale male out-migration on the left behind populations and land: Insights from Nepal

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# Outline

- Overview of trends and trajectories of migration in Nepal
- Debates, findings and gaps in existing literature
- ‘Birds eye view’ and ‘zooming in’
- Research site and context
  - Who is going and who is left behind?
  - Socially differentiated engagement in migration
  - Effects on agriculture and forestry
  - Future prospects for left behind
- Policy considerations

## Overview of migration trends and trajectories

- Ranked as the 'largest recipient of foreign remittance as a percentage of GDP' globally. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of GDP made up of remittance.
- Over a thousand predominantly working age men migrate to Malaysia and the Gulf countries for employment purposes.
- Women make up 4.5% of migrant workers going to countries beyond India (DOFE 2014). Official estimates may under (12.4% of the 1.9 million absentee living outside Nepal for more than six months at the time of the census survey) (CBS 2012).
- Almost half of all households in Nepal have at least one migrant worker abroad or a returnee (World Bank 2011).

# Research on the effects of migration

- Broader Debate: economic growth and worker's safety. Is large-scale migration contributing to much needed economic growth in Nepal or is it a sign of deep-rooted economic and political problems in the country? (World Bank 2014 and 2016)
- Large-scale migration coinciding with decline in contribution of agriculture to economy (only 60%). But research on land use change limited.
- Existing debate - Land abandonment or heightened speculation over land?
- Recent research - Distinct trends in different socio-ecological landscapes (Chattre et al. 2008), but overall effects are reduced food production (Tuladhar et al. 2014, Ojha et al. 2016). Effects of migration on poverty reduction mediated by modes of inclusion (favorable and adverse) (Sunam and McCarthy 2015).
- Effects on women left behind—burden or an opportunity for empowerment? **BUT** Gender and generational dimensions not considered. Rooted in problematic understanding of intra-household relations.

# Research question and methods

How is large scale migration for employment purposes contributing to land and social change?

- Land use change – agriculture, forestry
- Social change – who is going, who is staying, why, and how is this changing: who owns what, who does what, who gets what, who benefits and who does not?

Research methods – census (250 HHs) and intra-household survey (60 households); Focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and oral histories (100 participants)

Context of Nalma village

- Social dynamics - two social groups, historical patron client relationship, skewed land ownership, sharecropping, practice of untouchability.



# Who goes and who is left behind? Why?

Male-dominated, but distinct patterns by ethnicity

Elderly, women and children are left behind. Gurung women more likely to join or migrate internally than Dalit.

Role of norms, division of labor, market asymmetries in why Dalit women are excluded:

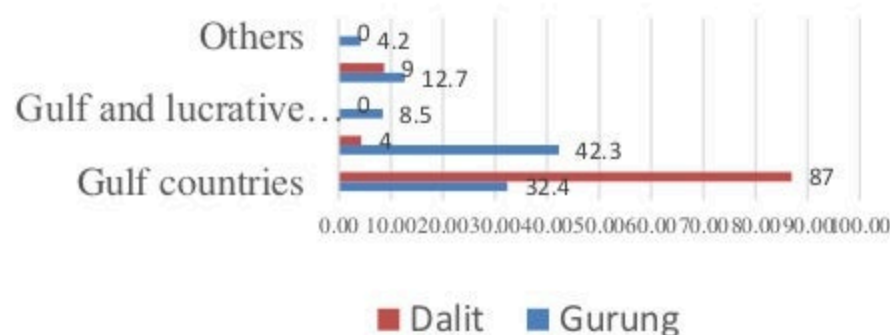
“Only loose women migrate.”

“There are no decent jobs for women”

“What is the point of women migrating. Who will look after our homes, our land, our children and our aging in-laws if we leave?”

“Men have to work hard as long as they can”

International migration by ethnicity



# Modes of Incorporation in Migration

## Gurung

- Only 5 men between the ages of 20 - 45 left behind in the village.
- Second generation of migration, expanded destinations, possibilities of family joining, internal migration to access improved services and non-farm jobs.
- Migration – aspiration, expectation, also lack of choice.
- Generational conflict

## Dalit

- Rising rates of migration between 20 – 45.
- Gulf and Malaysia. Circular. Semi-skilled work.
- Migration as a compulsion - make ends meet, repay debts, responsibility towards family, lack of mobility in village (difference in earning).
- ‘Fears and hopes of migration’ – debts, vagaries of market, employment conditions and uncertainties, managing split households, slide back to poverty
- Hopes – surplus remittance invested in education (55% and once debts repaid. Demand for improved education)

# Effects on agriculture and forestry: Mediated by gerontocratic structures

## Agriculture

- Remittance more important than farm and non-farm income. But limited investment of remittance on agriculture (7<sup>th</sup> rank, only 33%). Increase in food bought rather than produced.
- Over 25% of land in village classified as 'fallow' but no change in ownership status.
- Chronic labor shortage – labor pooling among Dalit women increased, but 'ploughing' still reserved for women.
- Wages not increased commensurate to scarcity of labor. 'Wages as fixed'.

## Forestry

- Lowered dependence on fuelwood among all income and ethnic groups but complete substitution only possible for a few.
- Private land – marginal land turning into secondary forests.
- Community forest - Elderly Gurung male domination in community forestry user groups.
- Withdrawal of support for monitoring, enforcement,



## Left behind: Future prospects

“All my children have left the village...they come during the Dasain holidays...we feel very happy when they are here. But when they leave, we cannot sleep for days. Who will take care of us? How will we survive?”

(Gurung elderly woman, one of the largest owners of land in the village)

“My husband is uneducated. If he is able to get a slightly better job than the one that he has right now, maybe my life will be more bearable. But I don't see my life improving substantially in the near future”.

(Dalit woman left behind, husband struggling migrant worker in Qatar, 2 children)

# Policy considerations: Going beyond silos of sector-specific policies

- Revitalizing rural economy – expanding options rather than narrowing them. Investing in farm and non-farm jobs. Provision of services. Social
- Equipping the left behind women:
  - Collaboration way of offsetting labor and land constraints (Agarwal 2015), and addressing limits to individual support (2015).
  - But existing forms limited – basic needs, production ('parma'),
  - Requires concerted efforts – finance, extension services, information, inputs, links to markets.
  - Drawing on existing systems (mother's group, CFUG, savings groups) rather than
- Tackling deep-rooted constraints that reinforce existing unequal relations – practice of untouchability, restrictions on access to land, cap on wages.
- Social protection and care.

# Sita's Story



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBrUEITjnGc>

A photograph of two women in a lush green rice field. The woman on the left is wearing a red headscarf and a pink cardigan, while the woman on the right is wearing a pink headscarf, a blue cardigan, and a patterned orange dress. Both are smiling and holding large bundles of harvested rice. The background shows a vast, green rice paddy field under a clear sky.

Thank you



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