“Everyone is leaving – who will sow our fields?”

The livelihood effects on women of male migration to the Gulf from the hills of Nepal (Khotang district)

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Nepal and Khotang District

Total Remittance amount (in billion NPR)

- Yellow: < 1
- Green: 1 - 2
- Light Green: 2 - 5
- Dark Green: 5 - 10
- Blue: 10 +
- White: N/A

Khotang district

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National migration context

• **Scale of foreign labour** migration to India, the Gulf and Malaysia – large and growing
• **1500 people** leave Nepal every day for work
• **3 million** are currently abroad – 1/3\(^{rd}\) of the male working age population
• Remittance constitutes \(\frac{1}{4}\) of national income and \(\frac{2}{3}\)\(^{rd}\) of income for remittance receiving households
• **Social demographics**: increase in women-headed households from 19.6% (2003/4) to 26.6% (2009/10)
• **Migration de facto core** of Nepal’s development strategy
National poverty context

- **Decrease** in absolute poverty from 1996 – 42% to 25% (NLSS III – 2011) largely due to remittances
- **BUT** - only provides **short-term national & individual growth**, deals with male youth unemployment, brings in new flows of money for investment in private assets
- **Many social & economic consequences** including diverting attention from drivers of internal growth & job creation
Khotang context

• Total official migration 2009-10 25-52% households foreign migrants (mainly Gulf & Malaysia)
• Remittance inflows to Khotang between Rs7-10 million per day
• Annual remittance flows: US$ 33-51 million compared to Swiss development funds of US 1.75 million
• High level of migration in study areas: 67% households have current migrants to Gulf and Malaysia (and most have had migrants in past)
• Range of remittances from Rs 6-10,000/month to Rs 100,000/month
• Most households in migration cycle (2nd or 3rd 2-3 year contract) – another 10 years before significant numbers of returnees
• Limited livelihood opportunities in hill and mountain regions
Changes in well-being household level

- **Changes in well-being over 10 years:** overall improvement across all well-being categories with poor and medium households most able to use migration well
- **Households without remittance:** only 13% of households showed well-being improvements
- **Effects on caste/ethnic groups** – very poor Dalits were more successful than very poor Rais or Brahmin/Chettris
- **Asset accumulation:** startling changes in land acquisition by Dalits – major changes in social status
- **Impact on land-renting practices** – softening terms and condition on land tenure helping mainly Dalits. And their empowerment.
Natural capital – labour changes

- **Agriculture and households under pressure** – less male labour available for work within household or for hire by households with no male labour (problem for elderly and women-headed households)

- **Loss of labour and access to innovation** – loss of high levels of male labour inputs necessary to maintain productivity – links to extension services

- **Increased wage labour rates**: 10 years ago – Rs30-100, now Rs500 for ploughing and Rs 200 (women) and Rs 400 (men) for digging

- **Changing landscapes**: more land under fallow and trees (direct response to labour changes)
Human capital effects: producing the next generation of migrants

- **Lack of interest** in formal education – low rates of retention of male youth beyond 8th grade, low quality education, no incentive to stay as no jobs locally or in Nepal, higher numbers of girls retained in 9th grade

- **Respect**: Lack of respect for low-paid teachers (migrants earn more), no respect for subsistence farming way of life

- **Behavioural** issues at home – difficulties for female-headed households and teenage boys to encourage them to study

- **High domestic work pressure** on teenage girls affecting capacity to study
Social capital: redefining social relations

**Redefinition of connection between land and labour** – conditions for land rental changed in favour of tenants (reduced availability of tenants, and increased need, less interest in low productivity, low return land)

**Changes in land ownership** – social geography altered – some high-caste households moving out and new land owners (mainly Dalits using remittance) moving in

**Economic independence of Dalits** - migration used to break old social and economic patron-client relations
Women’s well-being effects: pyscho-social changes

- **Migration is not a preferred strategy** but a necessary economic choice with high levels of social peer pressure
- **Intergenerational problems**: difficulty to manage teenage behaviours, social pressure on women and responsibility for husband’s parents and wider family
- **Financial stress** from non or low levels of remittance and pressure from local money-lenders,
- **Social stress** of social scrutiny of behaviour, and need for self-censorship in talking and communicating with others, mainly males, high levels of accusation of sexual impropriety
- **Mistrust**: newly married women high levels of mistrust and observed high and increasing incidence of marriage breakdown
- **Engage in male public arenas**: increases women’s exposure to criticism for behaving in a non-womanly way
- **Jealousy** of wider family to nuclear family progress through remittance pressure to share benefits widely
Women’s well-being effects: changes in workload

- **Increase in amount of wage labour** to be employed, particularly in agriculture – women manage male labour

- **Increase in women’s workload** – taking on many male tasks previously shared, increase in children’s workload particularly for girls

- **Increased presence in public arenas:** Men in non-migrant households retain membership & participation in village committees, women in migrant households take on these roles

- **Increased marketing control:** Total dominance of marketing surpluses by women in migrant households (shared in non-migrant households and divided on size/value of commodity)
Women’s well-being effects: voice within & outside the household

• **Male retention of major decision-making control (over mobile phone):** women with responsibility for household but not authority on large decisions (land purchase, large livestock, school selection); for some financial decision-making handed to close male relative

• **Small change in women’s decision-making:** crop selection, hiring of male workers, sale of small livestock, renting-in/out land

• **Uneven economic empowerment - moving outside domestic arena** but male pressure for women to stay at home to indicate successful migration, women want economic independence (source of tension)

• **Increase in women’s public engagement:** 85% of participation in community groups is women (exposure to new ideas, service providers) but limited time and declining interest, ends with husband’s return

• **Increased importance of women’s social solidarity groups** exit from extended families, increased need & use for female solidarity
Challenges for development approaches

- **Very fast changing** – difficult to adapt particularly local labour & agricultural systems
- **Move out of hills to urban areas** – those with money, need to understand rural-urban relationships
- **Major potential for social change** – class, gender relations, caste barriers
- **Women freed and constrained** by male migration – retreat into the house at same time demand by women for **economic independence**
- **Family breakdown and increased family tensions**: adaptation to stress faced by women-headed households
- **Educating for the future**: providing the next generation with the right types of skills to adapt to a fast changing global labour market for both boys and girls
- **Returnees next 5-10 years** – how to capitalise on skills, experiences and savings and support effective reintegration into households and communities- dealing with redefined gender relations
- **Challenges to conventional development approaches** - increased individualisation and less engagement in public goods activities, disinterest in low return agriculture & staying in the hills
Time to migrate or time to stay?

Thank you