

**The Other Side of Migration in Rural Nepal:
Sociocultural Transformation and
the Women Left Behind**

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Thesis

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General Introduction



A traditional wooden house in the research area

This chapter introduces the study, giving an overview of what the study is about, presenting the research problem and the study's objectives. It also contains an extended case of a family to highlight the issues that are dealt with in the study. The chapter then provides a description of key concepts and their theoretical development, followed by the conceptual framework of the study. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background

The movement of people from one place to another is of all times and places in human history. Social, economic, environmental and political factors are responsible for this phenomenon. In the distant past, migration was mostly induced by trade opportunities, resource abundance, climatic disaster and warfare. Between the 11th and 19th century, Europeans colonised most parts of Asia, Africa, Latin America and other areas. However, after World War II when many former colonies obtained independence, the direction of the people's movement was dramatically reversed. In the Asian context, the economic growth in the Gulf countries after the discovery of oil in the 1970s attracted many foreigners to work on oil extraction plants and in infrastructural construction. They were followed by housemaids, factory workers and security guards (Russell, 1992). At present, Gulf countries, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong are the major migrant receiving countries, while Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines are among the major migrant sending countries. The causes and consequences of migration changed, and labour migration flourished. Spaan (1999: 1) notes: "As distinct from spatial population movements for the purpose of colonisation, the evasion of political or religious oppression (refugees) or tourism, one form has become ubiquitous in the contemporary world, namely labour migration."

Thus, the reversal of population movements during and after the 20th century is partly due to decolonisation, which encouraged circular migration, but also to pro-migration policies of the new states (Von der Heide and Hoffmann, 2001). The population movement within and across the country in the form of individual labourer-migrants is a distinct and relatively new form of migration (Jones, 1990; Skeldon, 1997; Spaan, 1999), constituting a significant part of contemporary international migration in South and Southeast Asia (Jones and Kittisuksathit, 2003). The process simultaneously operates in two distinct social and geographical spaces, affecting the lives of not only the migrants at the place of destination, but also the people left behind at the place of origin. Recently, this form of transnational movement is receiving attention as an emerging social field, especially since the last quarter of the twentieth century (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Mazzucato, 2004; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 1999).

In the annals of migration history, Nepal is not an exception. Situated in the southern lap of the Himalayas, Nepal has never been colonised by other countries, but the movement of people across its borders to India and China has a long history. Nepalese migrant workers have been sending their earnings to their family back home for over 200 years. In the past, population movement was mainly confined to pilgrims, political refugees and soldiers. Derived from the name of the place where the first Nepalese travelled, namely Lahore, to join the army of the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh, migrants are still referred to as

*lahure*¹. During the past decades, Nepal has increasingly become a labour exporting country (Kollmair et al., 2006; Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme and Wyss, 2005).

Since 1990, Nepal has experienced two political transitions resulting in rapid changes in its political structure, in information and communication technologies, and in people's socio-political awareness: the first popular movement was in 1990, the second in 2006. The 1990s movement restored the multi-party parliamentary system and promulgated a new constitution. The new political system was an open, liberal constitutional monarchy replacing the king's authoritative party-less *panchayat* system (Hachhethu, 2000; Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009). In 2006, there was another political transformation, which resulted in the abolishment of the monarchy and the transition to the system of a federal republican state.

Within this socio-political context, Nepal is witnessing profound changes in its social, economic, political and cultural landscape, such as the unprecedented out-migration of young adults in search of employment. The consequences have proven to be significant. Moreover, the decade-long Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) impelled many rural youths to leave their villages. This resulted in many contract labourers working abroad for whom migration has now become part and parcel of their lives. The migrant population increased from about 88,000 in 1942 (cf. Kansakar, 1984) to more than four million in 2008 (The World Bank, 2009). On the one hand, the political changes gave rise to an increased mobility of the people through improved infrastructure, increased socio-political awareness, and to better connections with the outside world through and access to information and communication (by expansion of landline and mobile telephone services in the rural areas). On the other hand, the changes could not meet the people's rising expectations about a better quality of life in the more democratic era. In other words, the changes gave them more freedom, but their living conditions, employment, and the sociocultural context did not improve as expected. This led many of them to look for alternatives elsewhere. At the same time, the 'oil boom' in the Gulf States increased the demand for international labourers (Russell, 1992).

From 2007 onwards, Nepal has embarked on a pro-migration policy, as is clear from the Foreign Employment Act-2007 that says: "To make foreign employment business safe, managed and decent, and protect the rights and interests of workers who go for foreign employment and the foreign employment entrepreneurs, while promoting that business" (GON, 2007: 1). The government has put up a separate department and a foreign employment promotion board under the auspices of this Act to promote migration. Remittances sent by migrant workers constitute a significant part of the national GDP, thus providing a good reason for promoting it. The Director of the Foreign Employment Promotion Board indicated that the government wants to make this sector an 'informed choice' for the prospective migrants (interview 20 January 2010). However, the Act remains silent about the people left behind.

¹ *Lahure* is virtually the Nepali name for Gorkha (or Gurkha) after the city of Lahore where Gorkha regiments once served in colonial history. At present, it also refers to the people who temporarily migrate for income, predominantly to urban centres within the country and abroad. Given their significance for the Nepalese economy, some writers want to designate them as 'New Lahure' (Seddon et al., 2001).

In this context, like many other developing countries in the world, labour out-migration has become a major factor in the rural transformation of Nepal (Kaspar, 2005; Seddon, 2005; Thieme and Wyss, 2005; Yamanaka, 2000). Yet most migration studies focus on the area of destination, the migrants themselves, and the causes of migration (De Haas, 2005; Kabki, 2007; Rodenburg, 1993; Shrestha, 1988), while studies about the countries of origin on the (mostly macro-level) economic impacts of remittances (Massey et al., 1993; Taylor et al., 1996a, 1996b). However, there are but few anthropological studies of migration that focus on its equally important social and cultural impacts (Sharma, 2008). The people left behind tend to be invisible and their role, experience, and wellbeing in relation to the phenomenon of migration are not well understood (Hadi, 1999; Nguyen et al., 2006). Moreover, due to changing migration patterns and the changing discourses on migration, the study of migration is becoming more complex and multifarious, and migration is gaining in significance as an issue in the discussion on sustainable rural development.

Increasingly, scholars are pointing to the linkages between migration and people's livelihoods in the areas of origin (Bracking, 2003; Kaspar, 2005; Mazzucato, 2004; McDowell and De Haan, 1997; Mosse et al., 2002; Smith, 2007), which is now referred to as the 'migration-left-behind nexus' (Jones and Kittisuksathit, 2003; Rigg, 2007; Toyota et al., 2007; Xiang, 2007). It is recognised that labour out-migration has a positive impact on the economic transformation in Nepal (Lokshin et al., 2007; Shrestha, 1988; Shrestha et al., 1993), but the literature about the social and cultural changes in the sending areas and the impact on the position of the women left behind, is still limited. As indicated by Sharma (2008), Gill (2003) and Seddon (2002), it is important to explore the social and cultural aspects of migration processes to understand how Nepalese rural livelihoods are changing. This thesis intends to fill in this gap in the migration-left-behind nexus by focussing on the actors and their networks involved in the process of male labour out-migration and its consequent impacts on the people, notably the women left behind.

In this framework I take 'migration' as a point of departure and look at the interconnectedness between migrants and their families at home and at what the migration means to the family members, notably the women, who stay behind. Specifically, I will pay attention to changes in motives for migration, in values attached to land and in perceptions of food security, as well as to how the women left behind deal with the 'feminisation' of agriculture and their own fate and wellbeing. Hence, what is relevant to my study is to find approaches that can link labour out-migration with the places of origin and view it as a process of interaction between two distinct social and geographical spaces in a transnational setting. As the title suggests, this study is about the 'other side of migration' because: a) not the migrant themselves but the women left behind are the focus of the study; b) it highlights the sociocultural aspects of migration rather than economic value of remittances; and c) the *terai* region of Nepal that has long been considered a migrant receiving area is now treated as a dynamic field of in- and out-migration.

The study aims to improve our understanding of sociocultural change in contemporary rural Nepal by examining how male labour out-migration has triggered rural transformation and sociocultural changes, and how this transformation in turn is promoting

labour out-migration in one of the biggest migrant sending areas of the country. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To document the changing discourses of migration in a changing society.
2. To examine how labour out-migration leads to changes in the valuation of agriculture for food security.
3. To document how land has become a decisive element in in- and out-migration in rural Nepal.
4. To examine the effects of male labour out-migration on agriculture and women's empowerment.
5. To examine the effects of male labour out-migration on objective and subjective wellbeing of the women left behind.

1.2 The case of DB Sharma-Thakuri

The case of DB Sharma-Thakuri is that of a migrant family who in the late 1960s came to the research area in search of land for rice cultivation and better livelihood opportunities. Now, the sons are migrating abroad in search of employment, driven by aspirations to a better and more secure future. The case contains in a nutshell the topics that are addressed in the objectives formulated above. Hence, this story of one family lays the foundation for the elaboration of the topics in the separate chapters of the thesis, thereby placing them in a holistic context.

Introduction

DB (63) is father of six sons and three daughters, living with his wife Ruku (61) and the wives of his two migrant sons, Sinta (28) and Pinta (23). His granddaughter (the second daughter of his first daughter) also lives with them (Figure 1.1).

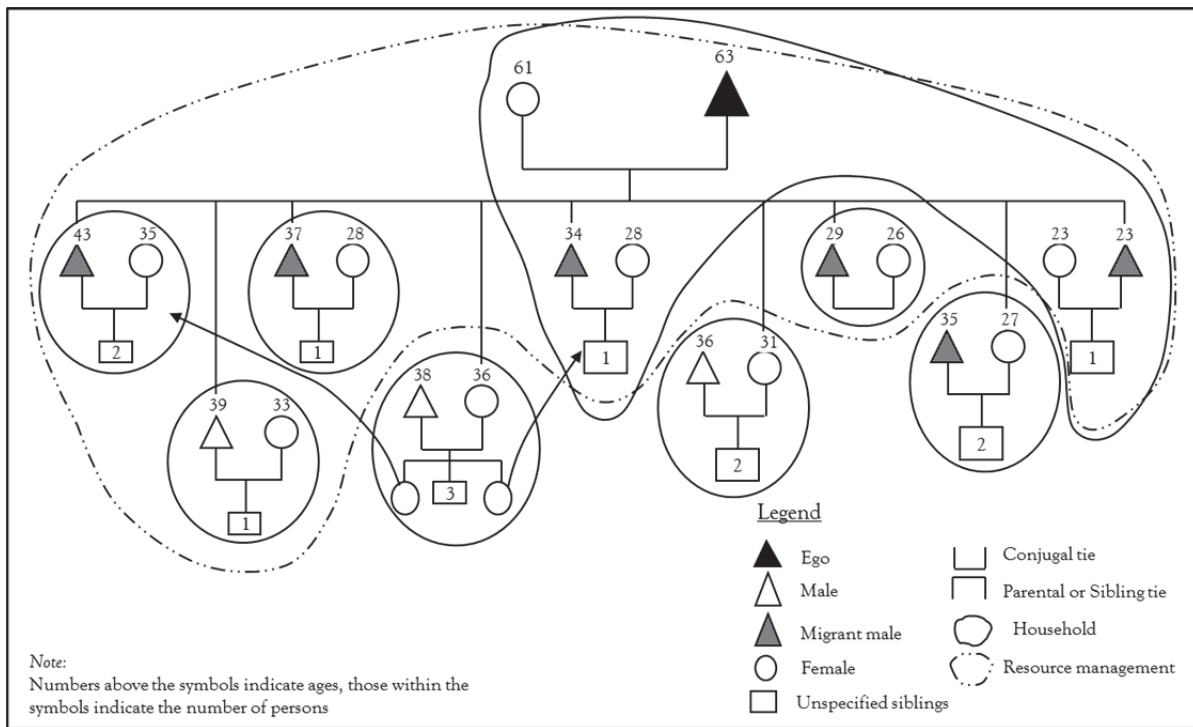


Figure 1.1: Genealogy of Sharma-Thakuri family.

He has not yet divided his property among his sons, so he is taking the overall responsibility for running the household with the financial contributions from his migrant sons. Four daughters-in-law do not live with him – the first two live nearby, one lives at Surunga (about 45 km away), close to her parent's place, while the fourth one lives at her parental home. All his sons have worked abroad once. Five are still migrant workers. Sabal (the second son) was a soldier in the Nepal Army until his retirement in 2007.

Moving into the terai

As many other people in the area, DB's family migrated from uphill. They migrated from Panchthar district, about 150 km from the area where they live now. DB was twenty-one years of age when he migrated from uphill in 1967. His first son Rotan (43) was one-year old at the time of their move. In 1961, DB got married with his wife Ruku at the age of 15, while Ruku's age was 13 at the time of marriage. Theirs was a traditional, arranged marriage. They did not have a chance to meet each other before marriage. The distance between the two families was a whole day's walk.

DB is a well-known farmer in the village. His father was also a farmer. In the hills, they practiced upland agriculture; a little rice could be grown in the river bank areas, far from their house. Other crops grown in the area of origin were maize, wheat, potatoes, and beans. Life in the hills was hard. Because their farming land was far from home, they had to carry loads of agricultural produce, grasses, firewood, and straw on their backs. The market was also very far away. Just to buy salt they took a long walk. Understandably, they were looking for a better place to live and leave the hardships of the hills. DB was looking for a place where land was cheap, since he did not have much money. His wife's maternal family, her

mother and two of her brothers, were already living here. The land was also good for cultivation. All these reasons prompted DB to settle in their present location.

At the time they came, the land was mostly covered with sal-forest (*Shorea robusta*). The forest was partly cleared by the government who made the land available for settlers. There were already small settlements of earlier migrants from India and some other migrants from the hills who had good connections with the former royal family. There were also a few leaders in the new village. They were seeking permission from the government to form settlements in the area. DB also gave some money to those leaders and occupied a plot of land of about two hectares. The land distribution was not well organised; those who gave more money or had a good relation with the leaders would get more land.

In the beginning, DB's family did not have a place to stay. Ruku's mother provided a room in her house for them. The family was not yet so big; they only had the first son. Immediately they built a thatched hut on their own land. Leftovers of wood from the cleared forest and bamboo stalks were used to make walls and dried grasses for thatching the roof. It was not allowed to saw tree logs at that time. Gradually, they accumulated resources and when they became more prosperous in 1980 the current house was constructed. It is big and has CGI roofing and wooden walls.

Out-migration of the sons

Although the size of their family was increasing, they could not add land. Having many children, they were becoming poorer with time. Rotan was looking for opportunities to do something about this after he failed the 10th grade exam. He could not get a job in or outside the village and was helping his father in agriculture. DB's second son Sabal had already joined the Nepal Army as a soldier after attaining an education up to 8th grade. Except for the youngest (Kumud) the other children were still in school.

In 1989, when Rotan was 23 years old, he met a man from their village who had moved to Kathmandu where he worked as a broker to send people outside the country. The man told Rotan attractive stories about foreign labour employment. Along with Rotan there were three other youths from the same village. Together they approached DB and convinced him about the promising prospects of working abroad. DB also agreed to send his son off with his friends. The broker happened to be a distant relative. At that time, no one from the village had gone abroad for work. In 1990, Rotan went to Kathmandu with the broker and to Malaysia thereafter, dreaming of making money abroad.

Rotan and his friends arrived in Malaysia and started working there. However, after some time something went wrong. They worked for two months and Rotan sent letters with good news from Malaysia. All of a sudden, the letters stopped coming. At that time, handwritten letters delivered by post were the only means of communication. Telephone services were available only at Damak (14 km away). After 6-7 months, the family received a letter from Malaysia. The letter was sent from prison by a group of 12 Nepalese men. The Malaysian government found them working illegally and had seized all the money they had. A Malaysian agent had helped them to post the letter. They wrote that they were in jail and if they could not arrange for a ticket home the Malaysian government would punish them.

They requested the Malaysian agent to help them, but this was not possible since they had illegally entered Malaysia. The broker in Nepal was no longer in the picture.

This news was a big shock to the family. They had to send money for their son's return, while they still had to settle NPR² 75,000 (>US\$ 1,000) of the debt they had incurred to finance Rotan's move. They did not have any savings. Ruku sold her golden jewellery and DB borrowed money from neighbours. Sabal was sent to Kathmandu with NPR 28,000 (about US\$ 400). Sabal was posted in Kathmandu but he was visiting his parents for Dashain³. He arranged everything for his brother's return and Rotan returned home within a month. Below is what Sabal said about his struggle to get his brother home:

At that time, I was posted in Kathmandu but I was at home to celebrate Dashain. I went to Kathmandu for the process of his return. I was totally surprised by the news that my brother was put in jail. First, I went to the office of Thai Airways in Kathmandu to know about the air fare. Actually, I wanted to know everything about what had happened⁴. There was a guy at the reception who did not treat me well, he just talked over the phone and was reluctant to answer me. I was not sure of whether the guy was deceiving me or not. I did not have much hope; I went there regularly for three days. I was accompanied by two other villagers whose sons were imprisoned together with my brother in Malaysia. (21 April 2009)

In those days, there was no labour agreement between Nepal and Malaysia. In Nepal, there were no officials to contact to assist workers in trouble. Hence, it was a difficult job to rescue Rotan and his friends. The only way to help was to send an air ticket through airline officials. Sabal explained how he got his brother back in the end:

There were a few manpower agencies but my brother and his friends had gone to Malaysia illegally. Let me explain how. The broker had gathered forty people, including my brother, in Kathmandu. Since going to Malaysia as a foreign worker was still illegal, going by air was no option. So they were first sent to Thailand and then taken to Malaysia by bus. The employer had already been alerted and they were directly brought to the company without any formal procedure. So, to bring him back I had no choice but to contact the airlines. I arranged everything and waited for his return. However, when we initiated the process on 23rd September 1991 I was told that the return flight was only on the 29th. I was wondering why it was taking so long. Later I discovered that they were looking for cheaper flights. They charged me NPR 18,000 whereas the actual airfare was NPR 13,000 from Kuala Lumpur to Kathmandu via Dhaka.

They arrived at 2:30 pm on 29 September 1991. I went to the airport with some other people who were also waiting for their relatives. [Laughing] We went there with clothes because they had been in jail and we thought they did not have any nice clothes. We had also heard that all their money had been taken. However,

² NPR stands for Nepalese Rupees.

³ Dashain is the biggest festival for Nepali Hindus.

⁴ Since the broker had already disappeared and there was no authorised agent in Kathmandu, Sabal had to contact the airlines for information.

we saw them in nice clothes provided by the company. They told us that everything they owned was safe including their suitcases. When my brother and his friends were released, the company boss came with new shoes and clothes. He also said, “I tried hard to get you free, but the agent from Nepal did not cooperate. If your Nepali agent would have come to Thailand⁵, I could have helped to get a work permit. Now I could not help you due to the negligence of your agent in Nepal”. The boss handed over everything he had taken and gave them 100 ringgits each as a token of sympathy. This is how my brother came back from Malaysia. I had struggled hard to get him back. (21 April 2009)

Rotan’s failure did not stop the family from thinking about sending the sons abroad for work, as it was the only option to improve their economic situation. Rotan took a break. In 2002, he went again to Malaysia, this time legally. Since then he has been working in Malaysia, joining his family every 2-3 years during his home leave. Hukum (the third son) was the second to attempt working abroad. Pembi (the fifth son) also went to Malaysia, together with his brother Rotan in 2002. They are working for the same company that produces food items for restaurants. Pembi works as a driver of the delivery van, and Rotan as a supervisor in the production unit.

Saman (the fourth son) went to Malaysia in 2001 for the first time and returned home three years later. He went there again in 2006 to do the same work (as a cook in a restaurant chain). At the time of fieldwork, he had come home because of the termination of his contract. He wanted to extend his contract, but the company had not renewed it because of the economic recession. Saman said he was trying to go to Iraq. He had submitted a photocopy of his passport and some 40,000 rupees as an advance payment to a broker who would take him to Iraq through backdoors as going to Iraq formally is not easy. In total, he was supposed to pay 400 thousand rupees to the broker to enter into Iraq and get a job there. Again, his motive is to make money, even though Iraq is risky. He said: “There is also violence in Nepal; if you are going to die you may die anywhere. I need money now and I get paid more in Iraq than in other country in the Gulf or in Malaysia” (24 April 2009). When I visited the family again, Saman had already left for Malaysia after his attempt to go to Iraq had failed.

Kumud (the last son) went to Saudi Arabia in 2007. I found him at home during my fieldwork, when he was there for a home visit after 18 months of staying abroad. DB’s second son Sabal, who used to be in the Nepal Army, now also wants to go abroad. Although his army pension and income from agriculture are enough to feed his family he thinks his income is not sufficient for a good education and a better future of his children. When I asked him whether his only motive is the future of his children he explained: “Yes, it is. If it would be only for me, I receive a pension of 5,000 rupees every month, which is enough to run the household. I have some land. I can actually save my pension since the produce from the land is enough to feed my family. I already have enough water pumps for irrigation. If I work hard on the farm, cultivate some vegetables, grow maize, wheat, etc., and cultivate rice twice a year, then that is enough! But again, what to do?” (21 April 2009)

⁵ At that time, there was no diplomatic mission of Nepal in Malaysia.

For the moves of his sons, DB had to find the money for the initial investment, at least for the first move. In return remittances are sent, but DB does not see those as a repayment. After the first investment, subsequent moves can be financed from incoming remittances. For example, Kumud's departure was paid for by the remittances from his brothers. Before he left for Saudi Arabia he used to stay in Kathmandu, at first to study but later he opened a restaurant there. He sold the restaurant and used the money to go abroad. In the case of Hukum, the initial investments were secured by his father, but this time Hukum had borrowed the money himself as his father was not at home when he was leaving.

Remittance use: conflicting interests between generations

DB always thinks of a good investment of the remittances sent by his sons. For himself, he said, he does not need anything from his sons in terms of money. The yield from his land is enough, but he is always worrying about his sons' futures. He would not like his sons and grandsons to run into hardship like he experienced in the past. He wants to invest the remittances in *khet* (agricultural land) so that he can distribute the land to his sons when the total area is large enough to run their separate households in the future. This is why they now have more than five hectares of agricultural land compared to less than two before the sons started migrating a decade ago. In addition to this, they have a plot of residential land at Birtamod (50 km away) bought from the remittances sent by Sabal, Hukum and Rotan and from own agricultural income. However, some of his sons are no longer interested in investing their remittances in agricultural land. They also do not think that they would continue doing agriculture after their final return. Pembi said: "I would never think of continuing agriculture after my [final] return. I don't like to do this dirty job anymore. I have just bought a piece of *ghaderi* (residential land) at Kakadbhitta [a town nearby Indian border, about 60 km northeast of the research area] where I can do business later on." (2 October 2008)

Now, DB himself is also thinking of not adding agricultural land. Partly because he has been facing pressure from his sons to that effect, but also because the manpower needed to work on the farm is decreasing. Two of his daughters-in-law live very far away from him so they cannot provide the labour that is needed on the farm. The only hope for male agricultural labour is himself (already getting old), and Sabal (always trying to go out). He has to hire many casual labourers during the peak season. However, until now, DB has not listened to his sons because he wants to acquire at least one *bigha*⁶ (0.66 ha) each for son. Irrespective of the amount of remittances they have contributed, all sons will get an equal share of the parental property, which is common practice in Nepal. Sometimes DB has to give in. He knows that he is not going to take the land with him when he dies. He just wants to have sufficient land for each of his sons to live on. He is doing it for them. He comments on the house that Hukum built at Surunga that otherwise would have been built by him (the father) anyway and that it is not a bad thing to build a house but that first priority should be given to (agricultural) land.

⁶ 1 *bigha* is equivalent to 0.66 ha. Conversions are: 1.5 *bigha*=1 ha; 1 *bigha*=20 *kaththa*; 1 ha=30 *kaththa*.

Apart from their father's investment in agricultural land, the sons have their own investments in residential plots. Rotan, Sabal and Saman have bought one plot each at Gauradaha (2 km away); Hukum has built his own house at Surunga, near his wife's natal home; Pembi has just bought a plot at Kakadbhitta. Kumud will also buy one in the future. Investment in residential plots is not just to build a house on, but also to increase their remittance income. For example, Sabal found it unwise to buy agricultural land considering the widening price differences between residential and agricultural plots of land. He explained:

We bought this land [where he lives, a separate house adjoining his father's] from my income and the money sent by my elder brother. This land is registered in my name and I have just built this house on it. I bought the land for 500 thousand rupees, but now I am not happy about it. If I would have bought some residential plot from the money it would have been more profitable. We were sort of forced to buy this non-productive agricultural land because it borders on our land [where his father and other family members live] and my father wanted us to buy this land. (21 April 2009)

It seems that there exists some sort of informal distribution of land for each of the sons who are by birth entitled to the parental property. Sometimes, the sons have conflicts over the allocation of the land, although not openly. The sons always judge and calculate the value of land, and take note of which land goes to whom. Sabal describes the current situation and their conflicts over allocations, even though they have not yet finally allocated the land:

The land (1.33 ha) where our family house is located is in my father's name. In *Rame kitta*⁷, one hectare is in Rotan's name and one in Saman's name. Hukum was interested to get *Birtamod ghaderi* (residential plot at Birtamod). It was okay as that was not so expensive when we bought the land – just 170 thousand – but the current value is more than two million rupees. It is difficult to accept his proposal now. Half of *Basnet kitta* was allocated for Pembi, but later on we agreed that as Pembi's wife does not work on the farm, it would be better if we gave him *Birtamod ghaderi*. However, because of the price, it is difficult to reach a consensus. Mother said to Pembi: "It would not be fair to the other brothers if you take that *ghaderi* of 2.2 million rupees." In a way, we will each have our portion of about a million when we get the parental property. Hukum is still claiming *Birtamod ghaderi*, but father got irritated and said: "If it is not agreed upon, I give you all the agricultural land and we (the parents) keep that *ghaderi* for ourselves." We are working on that. It will be arranged when the time comes. For now, all are out abroad and they don't need land yet. After their final return, they will get their share. We trust our parents that they will provide an equal share to all of us. Personally I don't care much about the money because one cannot take it into the

⁷ People give names to the land that is located in different plots. The naming is based on different criteria but most often it is named after the person from whom that particular plot of land was bought. In this case, *Rame kitta* means land acquired from a person called Rame. *Kitta* is a Nepali word for land. In fact, land has different names in Nepali – *kitta*, *khet*, *jagga*, etc. Likewise, residential plots are called *ghaderi* or *bhitta* in Nepali.

grave. I am not going to quarrel with my father and brothers. Whatever comes to me, I will be happy with that. If we can get enough food, clothing and income for the children's education, that will be enough for me. One has to have one's own place to stay so that nobody can ask you to leave the house. I think that should be sufficient for people. (21 April 2009)

Household and the land management

The household arrangement is not easy to describe on the basis of the conventional definitions of household. None of DB's sons have started their own household and only two daughters-in-law live with him. In Nepalese culture, when the sons get married they gradually set up their own household. If there are many sons the separation starts with the marriage of second son, so that the parents have at least one daughter-in-law in their household. During the process, the sons are entitled to get their share of the parental property. In DB's case, land and other (productive) resources are being managed by the father himself, while four of his daughters-in-law run their own households. If we go further into the details, the picture becomes more complicated.

Rotan lives with his family close to his father's house. They get rice and other agricultural produce from his parental land. His wife Kaveeta contributes much labour to the family farm. Since they (Rotan and his family) have not formally separated they cannot make decisions on the family farm. Moreover, Kaveeta does not get any cash income from her labour. So, they have to get the money for other household expenditures like clothing, salt, cooking oil, soap, and school fees for the children, by themselves. For this they use the remittances. As Kaveeta said, they do not worry much about this because she pays for her daily expenses from remittances and she gets support from her in-laws when necessary. Kaveeta is engaged in building a concrete slab house at Gauradaha (on the plot bought from Rotan's income), which was nearly completed at the end of my fieldwork. Sabal is organising everything in connection with the construction of the house. Rotan sends remittances and Sabal has to find the contractors and the building materials. During my fieldwork, Kaveeta was living nearby to her in-laws' house in the house of a neighbour currently living in Kathmandu. She is taking care of the house, for which she does not have to pay rent.

Sabal also lives separate from his parents. He has built his own house, next to his father's. The house looks nice, with bricks walls, a concrete floor and CGI sheet roofing. Sabal is using his pension for household expenditures. He says the following about managing the income from farming:

My father handles all the income from farming. He takes care of all the financial matters of the family. In the last season [referring to main rice growing season], we sold rice for about 100 thousand rupees, this season [spring season] we are going to sell for about 40 thousand. We don't account for maize, wheat, etc. even if they are sold for some thousands, mostly, they are consumed [home and livestock]. In total, we sell rice for about 140 thousand rupees in a year. Interestingly, we don't know where the money goes because we have to buy everything except for the rice and some cereals and seasonal vegetables grown in the kitchen garden. For example, out of a 100 thousand more than half is for hiring labourers [e.g. for rice

transplanting]. Other costs are hiring a tractor [for ploughing], fertilizers, and pesticides. We never ask for expenditure details of the income from our family farm. I know the burden of household management. (21 April 2009)

Sama (Hukum's wife) faces a different situation. She lives at Surunga, near her natal home. She has a one-storey house. Of the four rooms, she has rented out one for 800 rupees per month. She does not get anything from the family farm since she does not live there anymore. She runs her own household. She experiences more freedom than her sisters-in-law who live in with the in-laws or close to them. She always wanted to live on her own because she wants to add resources that are not to be shared with other members of the joint family. She runs her household from her own money as she does not want to spend remittances on daily household expenditures. She told her story of her decision about moving away from her in-laws:

After my marriage I stayed about three years at home. Our family was very big, of the six brothers of my husband, four were already married; all living together. The eldest brother (Rotan) already had two children, I had one. [Sabal was not yet married]. We were 12 people living together; four older sons had gone out for work. So we were living like all women do, with many people and much talk. Interpersonal relations were not so good, especially among the women. We did not have any open conflicts, but internal disputes were about to explode.

There was a lady from uphill, a relative of our family, living with us. In due time, I came to know that the lady was a trouble maker and a gossip. She told something bad about me to my *sashu* [mother-in-law], and then I had to answer a couple of questions. While I did not have any bad intentions my *sashu* did not treat me well. I felt so embarrassed. Another thing is that my father-in-law has a lot of agricultural land so I had to work on the farm, for which I think I was not properly compensated. So I was looking for an excuse that I could use to leave the house.

Meanwhile, I was badly caught by jaundice. I went to the *maita* [parental home] for treatment and rest. It took some time before I fully recovered. I did not want to go back home because the hard work there might result in a relapse. I was in search of a valid reason that would help me to get rid of dirty agricultural job in a not so good home environment. I discussed the issue with my husband over the phone. He said I was free to choose not to live with the joint family, but I would not sever the relationship with them. Then I did not go back home. I stayed at the *maita* for two years. I had also put up a small grocery nearby so that I could earn some pocket money by myself. While I started building this house I sold the shop as I had to oversee the construction. Since then I visit my extended family frequently and so far have a good contact with them. (12 April 2009)

For Sama, living out of the joint family is to secure and increase her own property. While she was living there, she did not have any authority. She lives on her own now. Her husband also does not exert much control. She is earning her own money to run her household, while the remittances are for future use. She explains why she decided to stay apart:

I think I made a good decision at that time. If I would be there till now, I can imagine it would entail hardships, facing quarrels and all sorts of tensions. So far, I am happy to stay here. Even though I am alone, I am no longer in subordinate position. One day everyone has to leave the extended family anyway, so why do I worry so much? I can tell you, living separately is to increase our private resources. Whatever we are doing here is increasing our own property, no claims from the other brothers. I am a beautician and I provide service at home, which is very helpful to run the household. I am also now and then involved in land transactions. If I find a buyer for my brothers who are involved in the real estate business they give me commission. Most of the time, I manage the household with my own earnings. I don't want to spend my husband's income on daily household expenditures. His earnings are for the big work and for the future. If I would still be staying with the other family members I would not pay much attention to these kinds of activities and become totally dependent on my husband and his family. (12 April 2009)

Sinta (Saman's wife) and Pinta (Kumud's wife) live with their parents-in-law, while Supria (Pembi's wife) lives at her natal home (about 55 km from her in-laws). Living at the natal home, Supria has been involved in teaching and operates a beauty parlour business in a nearby town. She did not stop these activities after her marriage and since her husband is also not living at home she decided to continue her business activities from her natal home. She joins her husband at her in-laws' house only during the time of his home visit.

DB's case is an example among many households in rural Nepal that are involved in strategies to enhance their livelihoods, generate resources, and invest in a better the future for themselves and their children. It also shows how migration has challenged the notion of living together that is part of the conventional definitions of household by showing the importance non-resident members to the household. Moreover, not only the migrant members, but also the daughters-in-law who are not living with their in-laws consider themselves members of their in-laws' household. For example, Kaveeta and Sushila (Sabal's wife) get support from their in-laws and contribute labour to the family farm. Sinta and Pinta live together with their in-laws and are part of the household's day-to-day activities. Their social position, autonomy, involvement in household and outside activities, decision making, and objective and subjective wellbeing differ according to the living arrangement. The case also illustrates the mobility of actors from one social and geographical space to another, with land as the central element. It also shows that the value attached to agriculture and agricultural land differs between the father and his sons. All these issues will be elaborated upon in the chapters to come.

1.3 Definition and discussion of key concepts

In this section, I will discuss the main theoretical concepts used in this study. Some concepts are well covered in the respective chapters, for example living arrangement (Chapter 2), food security (Chapter 4), feminisation of agriculture (Chapter 6), and subjective and objective wellbeing (Chapter 7), while other concepts such as income, generation (age) are more or less

self-explanatory and do not need further clarification. Some other concepts like socio-economic status, lifestyle, and social security, are reflected in the conceptual framework of this study and are referred to from time to time to explain other parameters, but they are not the major focus of the study. Hence, in order to avoid undue repetition, only the concepts that need explanation at a greater depth are addressed here.

1.3.1 Social change and rural transformation

The world is ever changing and researching social change is complex because it encompasses all aspects of human existence. Sztompka (1993: xiii) writes in the very beginning of his book: "Perhaps all sociology is about change". The changes can be at global and local, national, regional and international, formal and informal, individual and collective levels. Moreover, in this globalised world one can easily be overwhelmed and see social change in everything. Many scholars have written about globalisation, social change and rural transformation (Cameron, 1995; Dube, 1992; Ritzer and Malone, 2000; Robison and Goodman, 1996; Sarkar, 1995; Zurick, 1993), but not a single definition is provided. Some talk about the homogenisation of culture, rituals, and lifestyles such as the 'McDonaldisation' or 'Coca-colonisation' of society or the homogenising forces of technology like mobile phones (Ritzer and Malone, 2000; Robison and Goodman, 1996), yet, others emphasise the fact that globalisation forces create a disjuncture in the flows of materials, conceptions and technologies that result in different speeds and directions of changes between the different social, cultural and economic domains (Appadurai, 1990, 2003) and different effects and reactions at the regional, national and local levels (Castles, 2001).

Social change and rural transformation are indeed complex issues resulting out of multiple forces. Social change and rural transformation have several strands: social, political, economic, cultural, technological, and infrastructural, to name a few. What is important is to open up the black box of these 'container concepts' and select the most relevant dimensions for a particular study, which is what the scholars on social change and rural transformation have been doing. According to Castles (2001: 15), social transformation "implies an underlying notion of the way society and culture change in response to such factors as economic growth, war, or political upheavals." He suggests social transformation studies should use an interdisciplinary analytical framework that improves our understanding of global interconnectedness and its regional, national and local effects. Moreover, social transformation should not be seen as a process for a predetermined positive outcome, such as envisioned by the western model of 'development', economic growth and modernisation, because changes are not necessarily positive. In this sense, "social transformation can be seen as the antithesis of globalisation in the dialectical sense that it is both an integral part of globalisation and a process that undermines its central ideologies" (Castles, 2001: 15).

A book edited by S.K. Lal and U.R. Nahar (1992) covered many aspects of the transformation of rural society such as political development, public participation, women empowerment, negative transformation due to land disputes and wage differentials, and so on, and how they are intertwined in the development of the contemporary India (cf. Dube, 1992; Sachchidananda, 1992; Sethi, 1992). Sarkar (1995) sees agriculture as an important

driving force of rural transformation in India. In the Nepalese context, Zurick (1993) showed the importance of infrastructural development as a critical component of rural transformation processes, while Cameron (1995) observed that a changing mode of production from artisan-related production to capitalised agricultural economy led to women's economic empowerment in western Nepal.

Considering male labour out-migration a driving force in the changes in cultural and economic life, and social organisation in rural Nepal, this study uses the definition of rural transformation given by Koppel and Zurick (1988: 285):

Rural transformation refers to fundamental changes in the composition of rural economic life and social organization – changes that are associated with greater complexity and more pervasive linkages with 'non-rural' economic and social life. These are changes that can have significant implications for the management and valuation of rural natural resources such as land. [...] Transformation can be characterized by the imposition of relationships, structures and processes that can significantly modify and even displace existing patterns of rural resource management, economic development and social mobility.

1.3.2 Mobility and migration

The concepts of mobility and migration are put together because both refer to movement in one way or another, but differ in the way they have been used in this study. The former refers to the conceptual mobility of both human and non-human entities, particularly of land, while latter refers to mobility of human actors.

Mobility

Modern society is characterised by mobility and complexity due to the spread of technological interventions in people's lives. Transportation, infrastructure, information and communication technologies in the form of vehicles, trains, aircrafts, mobile phones, personalised digital assistants, to name a few, are dramatically compressing or shrinking time and space. "The technologies can carry people, information, money, images, risks, and flow within and across national societies in increasingly brief moments of time" (Urry, 2000: 191). The flow of people within and outside the territorial boundary relates to different desires of people for work, leisure, religion and so on. Moreover, mobilisation of spatiality in human interactions includes not just humans but also objects, symbols, information and images (Kakihara and Sorensen, 2001; Latour, 2005; Urry, 2000). For example, in Chapter 5, we apply the concept of mobility to describe the agency of land in the changing conceptualisation of food security and livelihood generation. Urry (2000: 186) uses the metaphor of *travel* to describe the contemporary diversity of mobility includes "imaginative travel, movements of images and information, virtual travel, object travel and corporeal travel".

Kakihara and Sorensen (2001) distinguish three dimensions of mobility: spatial (mobility of people, objects, symbols and space itself), temporal (mobilisation of actors through multiple temporal modes) and contextual or relational mobility (based on the actors' cultural background, their particular situation, and degree of mutual recognition). In this

study, I have used the concept of mobility as movement of human and non-human actors, such as land, in social, spatial and temporal spaces. This is because the concept of mobility is crucial to describe the phenomena of social change and rural transformation, which are closely linked to the process of globalisation (Appadurai, 1990; Castles, 2001; Ritzer and Malone, 2000). The conceptual mobility of human and non-human actors – like land – transcends the conventional territorial boundaries in time and space.

Migration

Before discussing the theoretical aspects of migration, it is important to describe the operational definition of migration adopted for this study. Labour migration is the temporary movement of individuals or groups of individuals from rural to urban areas both within and outside the country (Jones and Kittisuksathit, 2003; Skeldon, 1997; Spaan, 1999). The different forms of migration like immigration and emigration, temporary and permanent migration, rural-urban migration, rural-rural migration, in-country and international migration all have different motives, causes and consequences in both the areas of origin and destination. Rural-urban migration is the main focus of this study with special attention for the lives of the people left behind. When someone leaves his/her home for work it changes the economic situation, social organisation, household composition, and gender relations at his/her place of origin.

Studies on migration have adopted several theoretical approaches to its processes, causes and consequences. Originally a demographic field of study, the study of migration was gradually being taken up by economists, sociologists, social anthropologists and scholars of development studies, which led to changes in the conceptualisation, underlying assumptions, approaches, and frames of reference in migration studies. The dynamic morphology of migration testifies to the diversity of the underlying forces causing migration and subsequent impacts in the places of origin. In the absence of a single, coherent theory of migration, I will briefly review migration theory, after which I will summarise my own approach.

Theories on migration can be categorised into three broad groups: individualistic, structural and integrative approaches. Derived from classical and neoclassical economic theories, the *individualistic approaches* assume individuals to be the prime decision makers in migration processes and therefore tend to focus on why people take a decision to migrate. The classical and neoclassical economic theories view migration as a rational choice of individuals based on wage differences, labour equilibrium and income maximisation between the places of origin and destination (Massey et al., 1993; Taylor et al., 1996a, 1996b). “This approach uses the individual as unit of analysis and basically explains migration in terms of a rational-calculating and utility maximising individual making a decision to migrate or not on the basis of an evaluation of the areas of origin and destination” (Spaan, 1999: 21-22).

The model of ‘pull and push’ factors of migration has been very influential in the individualistic approach (Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 1993; Taylor, 1999). Surplus labour, scarce capital, population pressure and unemployment in the sending area are seen as push factors and scarce labour, surplus capital, high income and social amenities in the receiving area as pull factors, and the individual makes a rational decision for maximising income. Such neo-classical economic theories of migration are criticised for not paying sufficient attention to

the social, cultural and political aspects (Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Rodenburg, 1993; Shrestha, 1988). Spaan (1999) argues that volunteerism is not always the case and there is no free mobility of labour as assumed. These theories have given much emphasis on economic, objective and measurable factors, allegedly constituting the motivation for migration, whereas more subjective factors such as curiosity and adventurism are overlooked (Skeldon, 1997).

The *structural approaches* focus on the macro-level processes of human mobility and includes (neo-) Marxist theories, dependency theory and the World System theory under the broad umbrella of 'political-economy' or 'historical-structural' perspectives (Spaan, 1999). These approaches view migration as a result of processes of historical socioeconomic transformation, not something that occurs in isolation. The process is fuelled by capitalist development and accumulation in the centre and the (incomplete) penetration and subordination of pre-capitalist modes of production in the periphery (Massey et al., 1993; Shrestha, 1988). Rodenburg (1993) further illustrates that rather than seeing wages as positive inducements to move, Marxists consider the cash economy as an instrument to bind the migrants by deliberately creating such differentials between sending and receiving areas.

Integrative approaches like the new economics of labour migration, system's approaches, household strategy theory and network theory try to overcome the one-sided emphasis on either individuals or macro level socio-economic and political structures. Stark and Bloom (1985) is perhaps the most influential source on integrative approaches that link the migrants and the people left behind, while acknowledging the role of non-migrating household members in migration decision making as part of a household strategy. The new economics of labour migration views migration not as motivated by income maximisation but by minimising risk:

Unlike individuals, households are in a position to control risks to their economic wellbeing by diversifying the allocation of household resources, such as family labour. While some family members can be assigned economic activities in the local economy, others may be sent to work in foreign labour markets where wages and employment conditions are negatively correlated or weakly correlated with those in the local area. (Massey et al., 1993)

This perspective views (out-) migration as an economic strategy of households to allocate its human resources rationally to increase income and minimise economic risks (Goss and Lindquist, 1995; McDowell and De Haan, 1997). It has to be noted that migration is an important livelihood strategy, not only for survival and minimising risk for the households involved (Ellis, 2000; Gill, 2003), but also for improving standards of living (McDowell and De Haan, 1997; Niehof, 2004; Siddiqui, 2003; Thieme and Müller-Böker, 2004). Showing the importance of household strategy theory, Stark and Bloom (1985: 174) note:

Migration decisions are often made jointly by the migrant and by some group of non-migrants. Costs and returns are shared, with rules of governing the distribution of both spelled out in an implicit contractual arrangement between the two parties. [...] It does not view the family as an entity that splits apart as its independence-seeking younger members move away in an attempt to dissociate themselves from familial and traditional bondage, regardless of the negative externalities thereby imposed upon their families. Moreover, this approach shifts

the focus of migration theory from individual independence to mutual interdependence.

However, in most cases, the above approaches still focus largely on ‘who migrates’ and ‘why migrate’ typologies, often subsuming social and cultural factors under demographic, political, economic and structural contexts. Even though the literature on the integrative approach links migrants with their left-behind family members, it tends to focus on decision-making processes before migration (Chant, 1998; Willis and Yeoh, 2000). There seems a gap in migration theory to explain the connection between migrants and their family members not only prior to migration, but also during and after migration. A continuous connection between migrants and left-behind members is a significant phenomenon in contemporary international migration. In other words, traditional migration studies neglected the roles, experiences and wellbeing of the people who stay behind – the *migration-left-behind nexus* – and the interconnectedness between the sending and receiving areas. The interconnectedness pictures migration as *transnational* mobility of people in two social and geographical spaces. Both perspectives recognise the social and cultural aspects of migration.

Migration-left-behind nexus

In the literature on migration, two strands can be distinguished that link international migration with the areas of origin. The first is about the development impacts of migration and remittances in the area of origin, such as increased income of migrant households, the use of remittances for consumption and productive investments, the multiplier effects of remittances at community level through employment generation, and so on (Connell and Conway, 2000; Gundel, 2002; Hoermann et al., 2010; Sriskandarajah, 2002; Taylor et al., 1996a, 1996b). The second is more specifically about the role of migration and remittances in reducing poverty in the area of origin (Adams and Page, 2005; Kageyama, 2008; Lokshin et al., 2007; Skeldon, 2002). There are some recent developments in the literature that acknowledge the sociocultural aspects, for example Vertovec (2004), and Levitt and Schiller (2004), but these approaches are criticised for considering the people left behind as passive recipients, thus ignoring their role, experience and wellbeing. Toyota et al. (2007: 158) comment:

[...] In the limelight are still the migrants, while the left behinds remain in partial shadow. [...] How exactly the left behind experience and cope with absence, loss, and missing household or community members – the very nature of being left behind – has not been sufficiently addressed. Indeed, given the focus on migrants and the somewhat narrow ways in which migration processes have been defined, the migration literature can be said to have thus far ‘left behind’ the ‘left behind’.

One of the important consequences of a focus on the migration-left-behind nexus is that it implies seeing migration as a continuous relationship between migrants and the people left behind, and the aspirations and achievements that are imparted to their life. This sociocultural effect of migration on the world view of those left behind is neglected in previous approaches that focused on the decision making before migration or satisfying material needs at the places of origin. Toyota et al. (2007: 158) further argue:

In terms of their world view, aspirations and understanding of life, the left behind are no longer the same villagers as before they were left behind. We must thus take into full account the constant, dynamic interplay between migration and the left behind when assessing the impact of migration; it would be misleading to assume that the left behind would always hold on to 'traditional values' or remain static in their world views. [...] We thus call for attention to be focused on the 'migration-left-behind nexus' to provide a framework for disentangling the complex relationship between migration and the left behind, as well as for clarifying conceptual connections between the two in order to provide an innovative and fruitful means for theory building.

Hence, the use of the migration-left-behind framework does not only make visible how those left behind are mutually constituted in economic, social and cultural domains, but also brings them closer to the central stage of migration research, which will lead to new insights on migration and social change (Rigg, 2007; Toyota et al., 2007; Xiang, 2007). Migration then acquires cultural significance, as part and parcel of the lives of people who strive to improve their wellbeing (Gartaula, 2009; Rigg, 2007; Velayutham and Wise, 2005; Yeoh et al., 2005). In this light, the migration-left-behind nexus connects places of origin and destination, before, during and after migration, yielding a special sociocultural formation called transnationalism.

Transnationalism

DB's case above illustrates how people's lives in one place are linked to those in other places, within and beyond the country boundaries. DB provides money for his sons' migration, manages their remittances, and takes care of his sons' wives and children so that they do not have to worry about the daily household management. However, he does not have to rely on his sons' remittances for his own upkeep and his growing prosperity enhances his social status in the village. We could observe for ourselves that he is well-off, while the villagers also say that his family benefited most from migration.

DB's case is an example of many migrant households which enables us to see migration as a continuous process affecting the lives of both the migrants and the family members at home. Moreover, it shows the importance of the people left behind in decision making and in the strategic utilisation of remittances, not only for meeting basic needs but also the upward mobility of the actors involved. The literature shows an important shift in interest towards the social networks of migrants across national boundaries, the phenomenon is called *transnationalism*. Some authors focus on the resulting changes in flows of goods, money, practices and ideas (Portes et al., 1999; Saraiva, 2008; Vertovec, 1999), while others emphasise the multiple engagements (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Mazzucato, 2008), and feelings of solidarity (Levitt and Schiller, 2004), and belonging (Walker, 2011) across borders. Common to these viewpoints is the focus on linkages that bind people together in different social and geographical spaces.

Vertovec (1999) conceptualises transnationalism as the formation of social morphology, multiple identifications, cultural reproduction, political and economic transformation, and reconstruction of place or locality spanning across and beyond the

national borders. Transnational mobility has received attention as an emerging field of investigation since the last quarter of the twentieth century (Mazzucato, 2008). Portes et al. (1999: 217) describes it as the activities pertaining “to the creation of a transnational community linking immigrant groups [migrant workers] in the advanced countries with their respective sending nations and hometowns. [...] This [transnational] field is composed of a growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders.” The transnational network is composed of “migrants and the people they transact with, who are located in various countries, be they friends, family, colleagues or others” (Mazzucato, 2008: 201).

However, the notion of transnationalism is also criticised, especially for its fragmented setting, lack of analytical rigour, and for not adding much to the existing theories. After all, transnational mobility has existed for centuries (Kabki, 2007; Portes et al., 1999). Nevertheless, the rapid growth in information and communication technologies has made it possible to many migrants and their families and communities at home to live multi-sited lives, which explains why transnational migration is an emerging field of investigation (Levitt and Schiller, 2004; Mazzucato, 2008; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 2004). Migration should no longer be seen as leaving one country and settling in another, but as continuous movement between social and geographical spaces (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Kabki, 2007; Mazzucato, 2008). Grillo and Mazzucato (2008: 191) argue that a transnational perspective is essential to study contemporary international migration, although not necessarily from multiple locations: “The value of research located (physically) both ‘here’ and ‘there’ may [also] be apparent, though transnationalism may be observed from one site or many within a single social field.”

In this research, transnationalism covers the experiences of migrants and those left behind at home without actually following the migrants to their respective locations. Instead, it describes how the modern technologies (mobile phones) help people live transnational lives by looking at their situation back home. To sum up, while taking migration as a point of departure I explore the linkages between the places of origin and destination using the framework of the migration-left-behind nexus.

1.3.3 Actor, structure and agency

In this subsection, I discuss the interface between macro-level structural contexts and the micro-level everyday life of actors. There is an on-going sociological debate on whether the wider societal structures determine human behaviour or whether human beings create the structures in which they live. This phenomenon of how human beings create and reproduce institutions and other structural patterns within their social world, and how human behaviour itself is shaped by the same structures is called the *structure-agency dualism* or the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984). Criticising the hegemony of structural analysis of the society, yet acknowledging that society is not the creation of individual subjects, Giddens (1984: xxii-xxiii) argues:

Human agents or actors have the capacity to understand what they do while they do it. The reflexive capacities of the human actor are characteristically involved in a continuous manner with the flow of day-to-day conduct in the contexts of social activity. [...] What agents know about what they do, and why they do it – their knowledgeability *as agents* – is largely carried in practical consciousness. Practical consciousness consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to ‘go on’ in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression.

Structure-agency dualism plays an important role in the study of social change because of the question whether change is the result of structural dispositions or of the reflexivity of human agents. The way people interact in their day-to-day life practices and how they interact with wider societal structures and, thus, contribute to new forms of social relationships can be explained with the help of Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*⁸, which is constituted in practice and is oriented towards practical functions (Bourdieu, 1990). It is about how a society is imparted in persons in the form of trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in certain ways. However, the concept of *habitus* has been criticised for the hegemony of structure in shaping the actors’ behaviour and for its failure to acknowledge the conscious decision-making through their agency⁹, thereby leaving limited room for social change (Adams, 2006; Elder-Vass, 2007; Giddens, 1984; King, 2000; Long, 2001). King (2000: 427) argues:

If the *habitus* were determined by objective conditions, ensuring appropriate action for the social position in which any individual was situated, and the *habitus* were unconsciously internalised dispositions and categories, then social change would be impossible. Individuals would act according to the objective structural conditions in which they found themselves, and they would consequently simply reproduce those objective conditions by repeating the same practices. [...] the *habitus* formally rules out any external intervention which has always been a key motor for social transformation.

Hence, as Elder-Vass says, it is important “to recognise that human beings, social structures, and cultural entities each have their own distinct existences and influences on social outcomes” (Elder-Vass, 2007: 332). The situation of men and women, the older and younger generations, and migrants and the people left-behind is not only the result of what is going on in wider societal structures such as the global-local contexts, socioeconomic and political

⁸ *Habitus* is a “system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures. [...] Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor. [...] A product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more historical – in accordance with the schemes generated by history” (Bourdieu, 1990: 53-54).

⁹ According to Long (2001: 240), “agency refers to the knowledgeability, capability and social embeddedness associated with acts of doing (and reflecting) that impact or shape one’s own and others’ actions and interpretations”, while Niehof (2007: 189) considers agency as “conscious action aimed at achieving certain outcomes, with the actors concerned considering the efficacy and appropriateness of their behaviour in a given context that comprises the institutional and normative environment within which daily life enacted.”

contexts, and the history of the area. Also their day-to-day life experiences, interaction and negotiation give rise to new forms of social organisation that ultimately result in rural transformations. The motivation, inspiration and the underlying forces may change depending on changing circumstances and the level and scale of the influences may differ depending on the social position of the actors, but it is the interaction between actors and structures that causes change.

Having said this, two theoretical approaches, the Actor-Oriented Approach and Actor-Network Theory, are relevant to this study. Although these theories differ in defining actors and their agency, they have the notion of how changes occur through interaction in common. Moreover, since I apply the theories – with caution – in separate chapters and for different purposes, their possible differences are not problematic. To clarify: in the chapter on the conceptual mobility of land (Chapter 5) I apply actor-network theory to illustrate how land as a non-human entity can play a central role in the mobility and mobilisation of human actors by forming actor-networks in time and space, while otherwise throughout the book I use the actor-oriented approach to unravel the interfaces between actors and wider societal structures.

The Actor-Oriented Approach

The actor-oriented approach entails: “Identifying the actors relevant to the specific arenas of action and contestation, bearing in mind that neither actor categories nor relevance are uniformly defined. [...] Taking into account issues of social heterogeneity with a view to understanding the differential interpretations and responses to circumstances” (Long, 2001: 240). One of the important – probably the most influential – assumptions of the actor-oriented approach is that it recognises the conscious actions of social actors¹⁰ and that social change is the outcome of the interplay and mutual determination of internal and external factors and their relationships. The notion of interplay is an improvement to previous uses of actor-oriented approaches that were criticised for their voluntaristic view of decision-making and for paying insufficient attention to how individual choices are shaped by the wider cultural dispositions (Long and Long, 1992). The actor-oriented approach provides a cognitive framework that the people left behind individually or in a group, including women and men, have the agency, knowledge and capability to act meaningfully and strategically. Thus, it applies to how different individuals and social groups – migrants and left behinds or married women and their in-laws or fathers and sons, for example – interact, negotiate and develop their strategies to deal with the changing situation. In other words, how different social actors become involved in negotiations over resources, meanings and control, while attempting to create room for manoeuvre to pursue their own projects. As Long and Long (1992: 21) point out:

The social actors are not simply seen as disembodied social categories (based on class or some other classificatory criteria) or passive recipients of intervention, but

¹⁰ The social *actors* are those “social entities that can be said to have agency in that they possess the knowledgeability and capability to assess problematic situations and organise ‘appropriate’ responses. They appear in a variety of forms: individual persons, informal groups or interpersonal networks, organisations, collective groupings, and what are sometimes called ‘macro’ actors” (Long, 2001: 241).

active participants who process information and strategize in their dealings with various local actors as well as with outside institutions and personnel. The precise paths of change and their significance for those involved cannot be imposed from outside, nor can they be explained in terms of the working out of some inexorable structural logic.

For the use of actor-oriented approach, Long (2001) suggests to explore the critical interfaces¹¹ that depict the points of contradiction or discontinuity between the different (and often incompatible) actors' life-worlds¹² in order to describe such social heterogeneity. Through this token, the people left behind are not the passive recipients of the process of labour migration impacting on their lives but active agents who participate strategically for meaningful outcomes. This is how I have framed the actor-oriented approach in this study.

Actor-Network Theory

Actor-network theory started with the sociology of science and technology, arguing that technology is a social product and that the social does not only apply to human beings. The knowledge is produced from the combined effect of heterogeneous networks of both human and non-human entities such as technicians, lab equipments, machines, computers, etcetera, and appears in papers, preprints, or patents (Latour, 2005; Law, 1999; Law and Mol, 2002; Saldanha, 2003). However, the logic can also be applied in other domains of the social sciences. Law (1992: 381) notes:

What is true for science is also said to be true for other institutions. Accordingly, the family, the organisation, computing systems, the economy and technologies – all of social life – may be similarly pictured. All of these are ordered networks of heterogeneous materials. [...] We would not have a society at all if it were not for the heterogeneity of the networks of the social. So in this view the task of sociology is to characterise these networks in their heterogeneity, and explore how it is that they come to be patterned to generate effects like organisation, mobility, and transformation.

The basic tenet of the actor-network theory is that the outcome is neither from only the action of human or non-human actors nor their networks, but a combined product of an

¹¹ “A social *interface* is a critical point of intersection between life-worlds, social fields or levels of social organisation where social discontinuities, based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power, are most likely to be located. [...] Interfaces must be analysed as part of ongoing processes of negotiation, adaptation and transformation of meaning” (Long, 2001: 243). Though, in the general term interface is a point of interaction between two discontinuities it is much more complex in nature, containing many different discrepancies in values, knowledge, interests, relationships and modes of rationality and power (Long and Long, 1992).

¹² The concept of *life-world* “entails practical action shaped by a background of intentionality and values, and is therefore essentially actor-defined. Everyday life is experienced as some kind of ordered reality, shared with others (i.e. it is inter-subjective). This ‘order’ appears both in the ways in which people manage their social relationships and in how they problematize their situation” (Long, 2001: 54). Hence, “life-worlds embrace actions, interactions and meanings, and are identified with specific socio-geographical space and life histories” (Long, 2001: 241). Life-world is the ‘lived-in’ worlds and largely ‘taken-for-granted’ social worlds of particular individuals. “Life-worlds should not be viewed as ‘cultural backcloths’ that frame how individuals act, but instead as the product of an individual’s own constant self-assembling and re-evaluating of relationships and experiences” (Long, 2001: 241).

actor-network¹³. Latour (2005: 46) argues that the “actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it”. Law (1999: 3) explains that the actor-network theory “tells that entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities. In this scheme of things entities have no inherent qualities: essentialist divisions are thrown on the bonfire of the dualisms.”

In actor-network theory, anything that acts or causes action is considered an actor comprising both human and non-human entities (both called actants) and the qualities that represent their potential. In other words, an actant is endowed with a character that emerges in interaction with other actants (Akrich and Latour, 1992 in Stalder, 1997). For example, a piece of land in itself is not an actant, but when it acquires different values through interactions with other actors, it becomes part of the actor-network. Hence, actor-network theory in this study seems particularly apt to highlight the dynamics of human and non-human networks, especially of land-people relationships across geographical and social spaces.

1.3.4 Household and modified extended family

The terms ‘household’ and ‘family’ are often used interchangeably. In general, a household comprises family members or a combination of family and non-family members, and is mostly based on a marital relationship. In other words, a family is the building-block of a household. According to Chant (1997: 27), “a household is designated as comprising individuals who live in the same dwelling and who have common arrangements for basic domestic and/or reproductive activities such as cooking and eating”. Rudie (1995: 228) defines a household as “a co-residential unit, usually family-based in some way, which takes care of resource management and primary needs of its members.” This definition conceptualises a household as a family-based co-residential unit that aims at meeting the needs of its members through joint resource management, while Chant’s definition emphasises co-residence, but the family base. The idea of family-based entails how a household is formed, while co-residence and resource management entail how a household is maintained.

However, these notions of family-based, co-residence and joint resource management are challenged by diversity of living arrangements, new livelihood opportunities, and changing modes of generating livelihood. In particular the notion of co-residence is challenged by the importance of non-resident members in the running of the household, as in the case of out-migration and transnationalism. However, Rudie introduces the concept of support unit that may include non-resident members. It comprises “at least one productive person, possibly with dependents. It is a resource-controlling and right-administering entity that contains elements of all that is needed to be viable in material terms” (Rudie, 1995: 233). Instead of using the term support unit I prefer to speak of support relations as a part of a transnational support network of the household, which broadens the concept of household to a collective of both resident and non-resident members who strive for the wellbeing of its members by mobilising resources and fulfilling primary needs, both ‘here’ and ‘there’.

¹³ Actor-networks are the networks formed by human and non-human actors that are potentially transient, existing in a constant making and re-making, meaning that the relations between actors and networks need to be repeatedly performed to continue action (Latour, 2005; Law, 1999; Urry, 2000).

The geographical and occupational mobility of the family members modified the classical extended family to create the *modified extended family* that indicates the possibility to maintain a family or a household without living in the same household by using means of communication (Litwak, 1960a, 1960b). While originally coined in the context of the USA and other Western countries to apply to cases where household members move for employment in the industrial sector, recently some scholars have applied the concept to the developing world (Knodel and Saengtienchai, 2007; Toyota et al., 2007). Although there is a great deal of contextual difference between a developing country like Nepal and Western countries, there can be intriguing parallels in how family members back home adapt to the changes. Family ties, especially between migrant husbands and their wives, do not simply dissolve because of geographical separation (Knodel and Saengtienchai, 2007). The modern means of communication such as (mobile) phones also help them maintain the family ties. Recently, Elmhirst (2008) has conceptualised multi-locality of household livelihoods to explain the support relations among resident and non-resident members of the same household. Therefore, it is worthwhile to apply the concept of modified extended family in this research to look at the linkages between migrant workers and their families remaining behind.

Finally, the notion of resource management highlights the household as a unit of production and consumption. However, the capitalist mode of production led to viewing the household basically as a unit of reproduction, categorising the activities carried out in the domestic domain as non-productive work (Rudie, 1995). Niehof (2011) perceives a parallel between the rise of consumer society and the emphasis on household consumption that ignores its productive role. Additionally, due to differences in access to and control over resources among its members, the household as a single decision-making and resource managing entity has been contested in the literature. Agarwal (1997: 3) describes the household as a site of interaction and negotiation, while Sen (1990) sees the household as a site of both cooperation (adding to total availabilities) and conflict (dividing the total availabilities among household members). The social position of a member depends on a person's bargaining power that is based on how well-off that person would be if cooperation within the household failed (Agarwal, 1997). Niehof (2011) argues that the household structures people's daily life to provide for their needs and wellbeing, assuming responsibility for dependents and family members. Hence, in this study, a household is seen as the arena of day-to-day life of its members, regardless of their spatial place of residence at any particular moment, for generating and mobilising resources and fulfilling primary needs and achieving wellbeing.

1.3.5 Livelihoods, wellbeing and gender

The term livelihood is not new, but its current conceptualisation represents a new theoretical perspective (De Haan and Zoomers, 2005; Kaag, 2004). Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Ellis, 2000). The UK Department for International Development (DFID) and others distinguished five type of capital (natural, social, financial, physical and human) that together are modelled in a pentagon. The stronger the relations

between the capitals, the higher the resilience and strength of a household's livelihood (Carney, 1999). The livelihood approach was further advanced to include the concept of livelihood security. Frankenberger and McCaston (1998: 31) define livelihood security as "adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs (including adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing, time for community participation and social integration)."

However, human creativity and resilience in making a living seem to have been largely ignored in conventional livelihood approaches where resources are considered 'capitals' and viewed as accessible or inaccessible to people mainly based on structural factors. Ignoring the creativity and context-specific nature of generating a living yields a superficial picture of reality (Ontita, 2007). The language of 'capital' implies fixed rather than variable values relative to the autonomy of the actor(s) involved (White and Ellison, 2006). Because of this, Niehof and Price (2001) talk about resources in livelihood generation, seeing those as more dynamic than assets or capitals that people turn into resources in the process. Moreover, Arce (2003) argues that in a society where many resources are owned in the mixture of individual and collective ownership, and livelihoods are organised in more complex ways, "the term 'capital' cannot apply to them as a yardstick to judge their livelihood vulnerability or strength" (Arce, 2003: 205).

In the framework of the sustainable livelihoods approach¹⁴, the notion of capitals has been replaced by that of assets. Accordingly, "a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base" (Carney, 1998: 2). However, the frame of reference is still underpinned by neo-classical economic assumptions that largely ignore the balancing of the goals of economic viability and environmental sustainability in the pursuit of livelihood and underestimate the issue of value contestations that are shaped by everyday life experiences (Arce, 2003). Using the actor-oriented approach, Long (2001) elaborated the concept by explicitly including the actors' agency and valuation of their living, what they have and how they value what they do, as they always seek for alternative means to improve their material and social conditions. As he says, "livelihoods are made up of practices by which individuals and groups strive to make a living, meet their consumption necessities, cope with adversities and uncertainties, engage with new opportunities, protect existing or pursue new lifestyles and cultural identifications, and fulfil their social obligations" (Long, 2001: 241). Fishermen in sub-urban Kenya, for example, "try to cope with uncertainties by engaging in some lucrative ventures but they always keep to the safe side and go for security" (Gartaula, 2005: 66).

In the course of time, livelihood research began to pay more attention to culture and social and political contexts (Brons et al., 2007; Ontita, 2007; Wartena, 2006). Some scholars

¹⁴ The approach mainly advanced by DFID and researchers at the Institute at Development Studies, Sussex to combat poverty in the developing countries. Sustainable livelihoods approach is a way to improve the understanding of the livelihoods of poor people through the relationships between poverty and environment. It works with people, supporting them to build upon their own strengths and realise their potential, while at the same time acknowledging the effects of policies and institutions, external shocks and trends (Carney, 1999; Scoones, 1998).

now include ‘culture’ as a resource and emphasise ‘wellbeing’ as livelihood outcome (Camfield et al., 2006; Copestake, 2006; McGregor, 2004; McGregor, 2006; Newton, 2007). They all use an actor-oriented approach to understand the livelihood practices of the actors involved. The wellbeing approach in livelihood studies suggests that resources do not have a fixed meaning but are constituted through social practice. They are socially and culturally constructed having material, relational, cognitive and symbolic dimensions that people act upon to achieve wellbeing (McGregor, 2006; Newton, 2007; White and Ellison, 2006).

Studies of wellbeing largely applied an economic approach to poverty or development and nursing or health studies. However, they “offer a rounded, positive focus which includes not only material resources and social relationships, but also the psychological states and subjective perceptions of people themselves” (White and Ellison, 2006: 4). The emphasis on the significance of status and symbolic values for livelihoods (White and Ellison, 2006) resembles Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1990). Hence, it is worthwhile to see how the people left behind value the resources and their experience, motivation, and aspiration for a quality of life in the pursuit of their livelihood. Using a wellbeing approach, I hope my research will contribute to livelihood studies. It is evident that the concept of wellbeing places livelihood research in a wider perspective, especially by linking resources to agency and context specific values and meanings. For example, ‘education’ is basically a human resource, but when its value and meaning changes it can become a social or cultural resource, which is a major departure from posing capitals and assets as having fixed values and meanings (White and Ellison, 2006).

The next few paragraphs will discuss the concepts of living arrangement and gender, which are interlinked and integral aspects of the livelihood framework. Before doing so, I must first spend some words on multi-locality of livelihoods caused by labour migration. According to Elmhirst (2008: 69), “Multi-locality is understood in two senses: (1) in a temporal sense in terms of livelihood trajectories¹⁵ and movements through different spaces; and (2) in a spatial sense, in terms of networks that usually link household members as they each seek livelihoods in different places.” Multi-local livelihood actually corresponds to the notion of transnational living, an emerging phenomenon of contemporary migration (see above).

Gender is a cross-cutting theme in the livelihood framework, related to the division of labour and control over resources. Niehof and Price (2001: 20) note: “The gender-based division of labour within households is one of the most recognised aspects of how a household pursues its livelihood strategies. What men versus women do is in part reflective of their culture, that is, male and female roles are constricted by what is deemed fitting male and female behaviour.” Not only what men and women do, but also household headship and decision-making are important in the pursuit of livelihood. Traditionally female-headed

¹⁵ Researching livelihood trajectories entails the temporal analysis of households with transforming structures, institutions and organisations that shape the livelihood opportunities traversing from one social and geographical space to another (De Haan and Zoomers, 2005).

households¹⁶ are often portrayed as ‘poorest of the poor’ given the assumption that female household headship is associated with economic deprivation and insecurity (Hart, 1997; Kabeer, 1996). However, it is naive to generalise about women’s poverty and engage in superficial dualistic comparisons between male and female-headed households because female-headed households are not necessarily worse-off compared to their counterparts (Chant, 2004; Niehof, 2004).

In this research, the issue of gender is crucial in reference to the living arrangement and household headship that are altered by male labour out-migration. This is because differences in the living arrangement affect the wellbeing and the social, economic and cultural position of household members, which differ according to gender. For example, the wellbeing of the women left behind by their migrant husbands may differ according to the type of household they live in, as social and cultural contexts influence the way people understand and experience their situation (Camfield et al., 2007). As Elmhirst (2008) notes, the gendered livelihoods are the results of interconnected networks of relations traversing the levels of household, community and society. The wellbeing of a household member is an outcome of such networks. Thus, migration and multi-local livelihoods are an area in which appreciation of gender is a key issue to understand the intra-household relationships.

1.4 Conceptual framework and research questions

The conceptual framework of this study departs from the idea that rural life comprises an interplay of land, means of living (livelihood generation), living arrangement (household composition), and migration, which results in a certain degree of the actors’ objective and subjective wellbeing, and in which land is a central element. Abundance of land promotes in-migration, while scarcity of land can be a push factor for out-migration. The landless poor are generally excluded from out-migration because it requires investments and land as a source of security, especially in the case of international migration. The importance of land in the rural society requires no explanation, as there is no agriculture without land and agriculture is still the main occupation in the rural area of Nepal *terai*. While there seems to be no direct relationship between land and living arrangements, landholding matters in a context where kinship and culture determine the type of living arrangement of the women left behind.

The interaction of land, migration, and means and arrangements of living determines the actors’ social status, lifestyle, income, role of women in agriculture, food and social security and other livelihood outcomes, ultimately impacting on their wellbeing. Generation, gender, and caste and ethnicity are the cross-cutting variables. Gender and kinship are especially important, as wellbeing of the women left behind largely depends on whether they live with their in-laws or on their own. The conceptual framework is graphically represented

¹⁶ Female-headed households are defined as the households that are run by women in the absence of a co-resident legal or common-law spouse or other adult male such as a father or a brother (Chant, 1997). In this study, female household headship is distinguished into *de-jure* and *de facto* headship. The *de-jure* female household heads are those of whom the male partner is permanently absent especially due to death, while in the case of *de facto* female headship the male partner is temporarily absent due to migration and the woman runs the household with the husband’s support from abroad.

in Figure 1.2. The dotted arrow-line in the middle of the figure around land indicates that dynamic nature of the processes involved and the formation of actor-networks that are mediated by historical, political, global-local, and socioeconomic contexts and contribute to sociocultural transformation. The conceptual framework is built upon the notion of the dynamic relationship between actors and structures, to show how macro-level structural changes give rise to changes in the everyday life of actors at micro-level, and how micro-level changes influence the changes at macro-level societal structures.

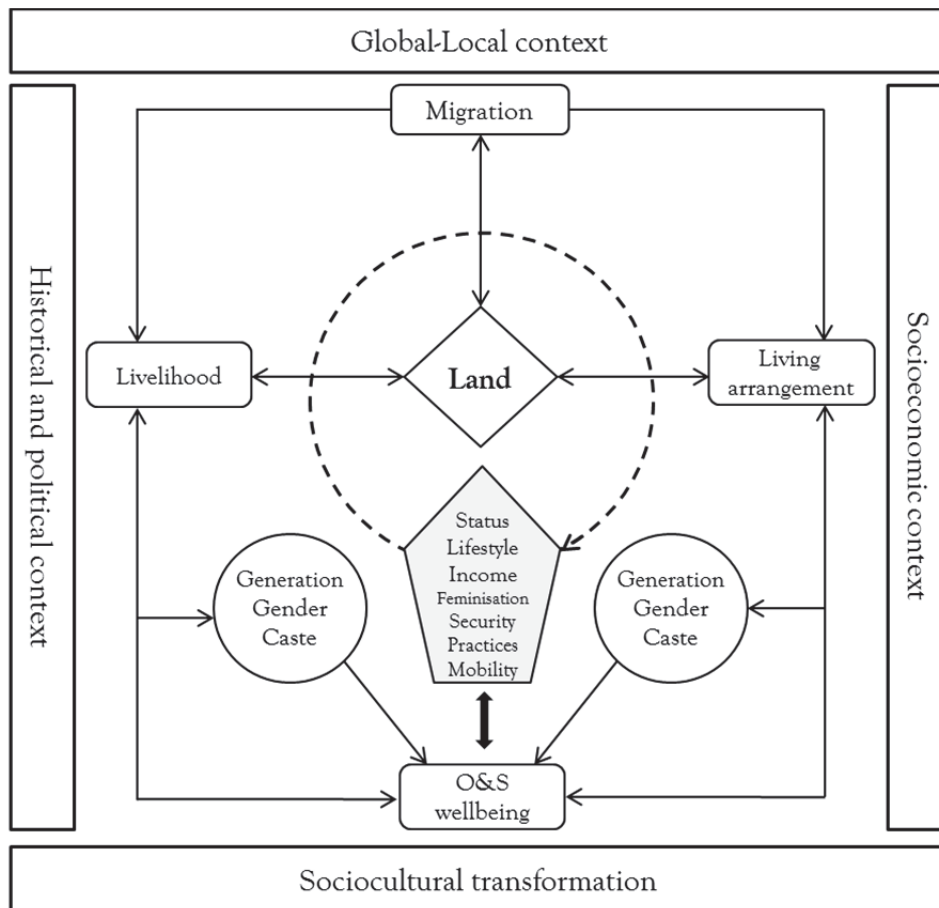


Figure 1.2: Conceptual framework of the study.

Given the objectives of the study specified in the beginning of this chapter, the study aims to answer the question of how male labour out-migration triggers rural transformation and sociocultural change, and how this transformation increases labour out-migration. Specifically, the study will try to answer the following research questions, each question being explored in the empirical chapters (Chapter 3 to 7):

1. How consistent is the notion of the *terai* region as a migrant receiving or sending area in the context of historical and contemporary social change?
2. To what extent does labour out-migration lead to changes in the valuation of agriculture for food security?
3. How did land become a central factor in the phenomenon of in- and out-migration in rural Nepal?

4. To what extent does labour out-migration affect the feminisation of agriculture and women's empowerment in the area of origin?
5. How does male labour out-migration affect the objective and subjective wellbeing of the women left behind, and to what extent is the fulfilment of objective wellbeing reflected in their subjective experience?

1.5 Structure of the book

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The following chapter (Chapter 2) presents a brief description of the study area and the methodological design of the study. Because the empirical part of the thesis is made up of papers that are either published or in the process of publication in international peer-reviewed journals, the specific methods are also presented in the empirical chapters. Hence, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the overall methodology and the rationale for choosing specific methods and techniques. It closes with a reflection on the challenges faced by the researcher when conducting fieldwork in his homeland.

Chapter 3 discusses the changing discourses on migration in the historical context of in- and out-migration in the research area. The chapter basically deals with the three types of population flows in Nepal: the cross-border movement of population during World War I and World War II, the migration from the hills to the *terai* within the country, and the contemporary individual labour out-migration. The focus is mainly on the second and the third population movements.

Chapter 4 discusses food security and the changing valuation of agriculture and agricultural land. While older people believe in having agricultural land for food security, younger people believe in access to sources of capital to obtain the financial means for food provision. Yet, they invest in land, not for agricultural but for residential purposes, and preferably in towns. The chapter elaborates on the perceived negative attitude of the younger generation towards agriculture and on their ambivalence in keeping the land for social status. They may end up owning land but not wanting to cultivate it, which ultimately could jeopardise the country's food security.

Chapter 5 presents land as a mobile entity as part of a network of migrants, land, and the women left behind in rural Nepal. The chapter analyses the dynamic interactions between land, labour and people, both socially and spatially. Evidently, there is no straightforward and linear relationship between land and in- and out-migration. Instead, a dynamic network of human and non-human elements contributes to people's mobility and to dynamic changes in land-people relationships for livelihood generation across time and space.

Although gender is a cross-cutting theme throughout the book, in Chapters 6 and 7 it is addressed more specifically. Chapter 6 discusses the feminisation of agriculture and the empowerment of women left behind. The chapter argues that the feminisation of agriculture is partly dependent on changes in other domains, notably domestic organisation and household headship, rather than on the husband's migration itself. It concludes that it would be premature to assume that the development of agriculture and poverty reduction will always benefit from the feminisation of agriculture and women's empowerment because

the research shows that particularly the younger women who are *de-facto* household heads want to move out of agriculture. The wellbeing of the women left behind is the central topic in Chapter 7. The chapter shows that material or objective wellbeing has evidently improved due to increased income from remittances. However, this may not be the case with subjective wellbeing because of the context-specific nature of the cognitive and emotional dimensions of family relationships.

Finally, in Chapter 8, the synthesis of the thesis, major outcomes and answers to each of the research questions are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion on areas for further research on sociocultural change and labour out-migration within the domain of agriculture and rural development.

Research methodology

*"If there were only one truth, you couldn't paint
a hundred canvases on the same theme."
(Picasso, 1966)*



An in-depth interview session

This chapter provides a general description of the research area and methodological approach adopted for my research. Since the book is based on articles submitted to journals, there is some repetition of methodological descriptions in the chapters. This chapter focuses on the rationale of using particular research methods, my reflections on the mix of research approaches and on conducting fieldwork in one's own homeland.

2.1 Introduction

This study embraces the methodological traditions of social anthropology, qualitative sociology and demography. It has a design that combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches, and that used case studies and survey as research strategies. Case studies are preferred when the answers of 'how' and 'why' questions are important, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 2003). A survey helps gain insight into the distribution of the research variables in the population because it strives to seek answers to 'what' questions to understand the research subject as a whole with relatively more control of the researcher in the process (Grinnell, 2001). Obviously, case studies are primarily built on qualitative information, while surveys often collect mainly quantitative information. In combining the two, I also intend to provide data on people's perceptions, motivations and valuation behind the quantitative data in the tables.

The study of transformation and change would have benefited from a longitudinal study design (Pennartz and Niehof, 1999). However, limited time and resources rendered a longitudinal study unfeasible. Nevertheless, temporal perspectives are incorporated in the study, for example, in the chapters offering a historical account of migration, and on the social, spatial and temporal mobility of land. This study uses primary data collected from the field and secondary information gathered from governmental and non-governmental organisations related to migration, agriculture and rural development.

2.2 Nepal and the study area

Nepal can broadly be divided into three ecological regions: mountains, mid-hills, and plain areas called *terai*. Starting at an altitude of 2,400 m above sea level, the mountain region has a low population density, a cold climate and limited rainfall. This is the region that harbours Mt. Everest and seven of the other highest peaks of the world. The mid-hill region lies at ranges from 800 m to 2,400 m above sea level. It has a subtropical climate in the lower river valleys and a cold climate on the high ridges. The *terai* region is an extension of the Gangetic plain along the Indian border and has a warm humid climate. The *terai* is considered the granary of the country because of its suitability for rice cultivation; rice being the staple food in Nepal. As elaborated in Chapter 3, the *terai* used to receive huge numbers of in-country migrants from the hills attracted by its fertile land, especially after the eradication of malaria in the 1950s. In recent years, the *terai* is experiencing an unprecedented outward flow of individual migrants in the form of temporary rural-urban migration to within and across the country boundaries. Of the top 10 out-migrating districts nine are from the *terai* region and

the study district Jhapa ranks second (DOFE, 2010). Table 2.1 presents some demographic data in relation to migration and other parameters of Nepal.

Table 2.1: Region-wise selected demographic information of Nepal

Region	Area (in '000 sq. km)	No. of districts	Total Population (in '000)*	Migrant population (in '000)**	% migrant population
Mountain	51.8	16	1687.8	52.2	3.1
Hill	61.3	39	10251.1	401.0	3.9
Terai	34.0	20	11212.5	414.7	3.7
Total	147.1	75	23151.4	867.9	10.7

*Total population figures are from the population census 2001. The current estimated population is about 28.04 million (ADB, 2010).

** Migrant population is based on the data obtained from the Department of Foreign Employment for the period between 2003 and 2009, it does not include migration to India.

Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001, Department of Foreign Employment, 2010

This thesis is based on fieldwork carried out in Jhapa District, which is situated in the south-eastern corner of the country (Figure 2.1). Among the 75 districts of Nepal, Jhapa is one of the more developed districts in terms of the human development index and other development indicators (ICIMOD, 2003; UNDP, 2004). Jhapa forms the *terai* section of the Mechi Zone located in the Eastern Development Region. The district is located at about 550 km from the national capital of Kathmandu, having Chandragadhi as its district capital, and covering an area of 1,606 sq. km. Jhapa borders on the districts of Ilam in the north and Morang in the west, and the Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal in the south and east. The district is divided into 47 Village Development Committees (VDCs)¹⁷ and three municipalities. The country's main East West Highway passes through Damak to Kakadbhitta (Mechinagar) and approaches to Pani Tanki of India through Mechi Bridge.

¹⁷ Village Development Committee (VDC) is the smallest political unit in Nepal that comprises 9 wards, each ward consisting of one or two small villages having a population of about 1200-1500. This means that one VDC is equivalent to about 18 villages with population of approximately 15000.



Figure 2.1: Map of Nepal showing Jhapa, the study district.

According to the Population Census (2001) the total population of the district is 688,000. The total number of households in the district is over 137,000 yielding an average household size of about 5. The population density of the district is 470 persons per sq. km (DDC, 2006). Table 2.2 presents some demographic data about Jhapa district.

Table 2.2: Demographic profile of Jhapa district

Parameters	Values
Total population (2006)	755,494
Migrant population	45,877*
No. of households	137,301
Average household size	5
Area (sq. km)	1,606
Population density (2006)	470

*This figure is based on data obtained from the Department of Foreign Employment for the period between 2003 and 2009, while other data are based on population census 2001 unless otherwise stated. Sources: District Profile of Jhapa, 2006; Central Bureau of Statistics 2001; Department of Foreign Employment, 2010.

Within the Jhapa district the research was carried out in Maharani Jhoda VDC (Figure 2.2). It has a population of 10,589, living in 1980 households (DDC, 2006). The VDC is located at a distance of 56 kilometres west of the district capital. The available historical sources

indicate that the settlement in Maharani Jhoda dates from 1912-13. At that time, people from India and some indigenous groups settled in the northern and western part of the VDC. Other parts of the VDC were still forest land, belonging to the then ruling royal family. The name of the VDC is derived from the word Maharani (meaning first or head queen) and Jhoda (meaning settlement after deforestation). In 1955-56, the government started logging in the forest. Later on, in 1959-60, when the land was still unoccupied, hill migrants from the adjoining hilly districts started to occupy the area. While this in-migration continued, out-migration began in the mid-1970s and has been increasing ever since. However, the nature of the in- and out-migration is different: in-migration took the form of permanent family migration, while out-migration is a temporary individual labour out-migration.

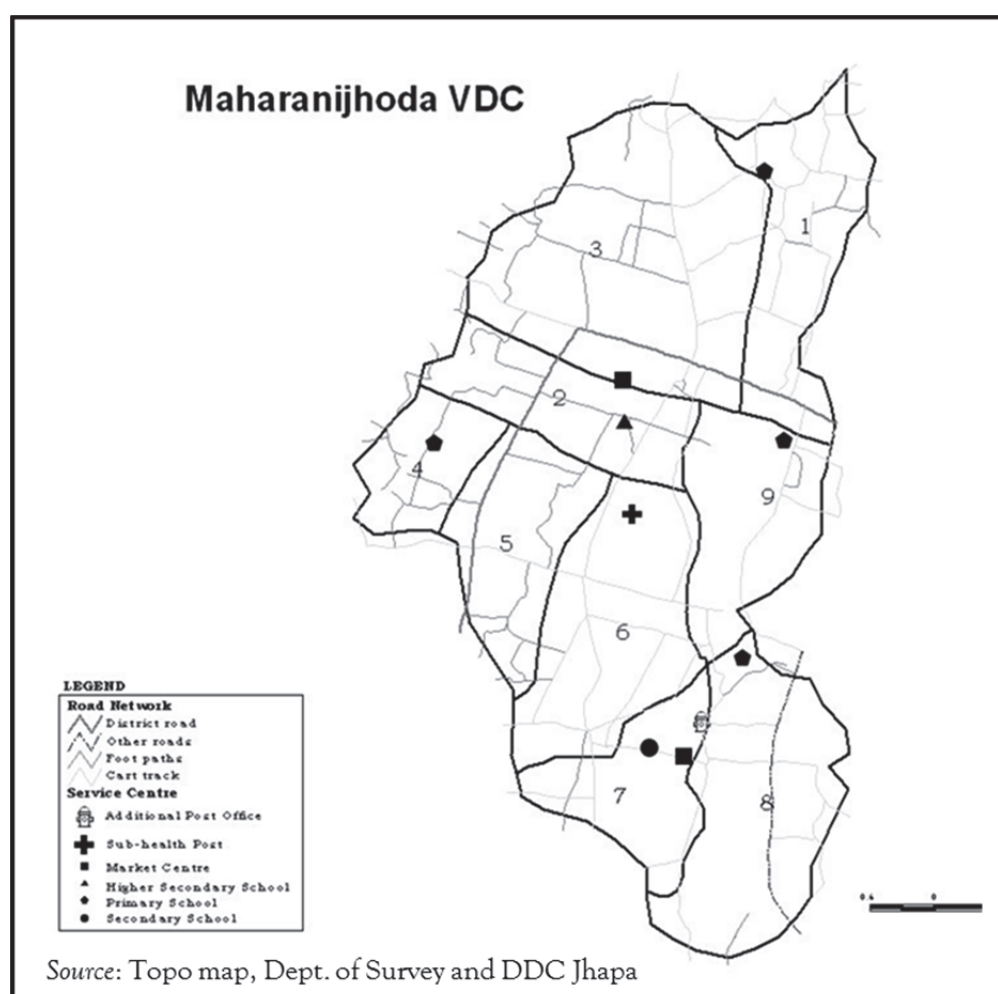


Figure 2.2: Map of Maharani Jhoda VDC showing the 9 wards.

2.3 The quest for validity and reliability: a mixed research design

Mixed methods are data collection strategies that combine elements of qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, observations, or focus group discussions with elements of quantitative method such as structured interviews and surveys, either in a sequential or a simultaneous manner (Axinn and Pearce, 2006). “Qualitative methods are acknowledged to

be more accurate in terms of validity, while quantitative methods are considered to be better in terms of reliability or replicability” (Scrimshaw, 1990: 89). Scrimshaw further notes that quantitative surveys are carefully designed to collect data in the most objective manner possible; they often suffer inaccuracies stemming from the respondents’ perceptions of their own behaviour, or their desire to please the interviewer with their answers. Moreover, in search of accurate data, a survey tends to focus on narrowly defined, specific variables, which have limited explanatory power. This situation can be overcome in a qualitative approach, which is open to add more categories during field investigation.

Qualitative methods are often criticised for their subjectivity and influence from the researcher’s personal interests, prejudices, practicalities and emotionality. However, it is argued that also a quantitative method is not free from subjective interpretation: “Positivist theories and models, formulas and diagrams imply an objectivity and truthfulness that are simply not the case. [...] Intellectual rigour goes together with personal convictions of the researcher” (Diefenbach, 2009: 876-877). It is needless to say that all methods have their own merits and limitations. It is important not to ignore ‘human factor’ in the research, but to minimise the downside of subjectivity in interpretation. Scrimshaw (1990) proposes a mixed research design to better understand the process being studied, obtain more accurate information and interpret it in culturally appropriate terms and meanings.

In such a mixed design, emic and etic approaches are also incorporated. Pelto and Pelto (1978) argue that the emic approaches comprise the insider’s perspective, idea system, qualitative or logical analysis and inductive methodological strategy, while the etic approaches comprise the outsider perspective, impersonal or material conditions, quantitative analysis and the methodological strategies ranging from inductive to deductive. My decision to work with a mixed design is that they complement each other in two ways. First, a quantitative method gives an overview of the situation, while qualitative methods provide in-depth knowledge on the research subject. Second, as Scrimshaw (1990) suggests, qualitative methods are more accurate in terms of validity, while quantitative methods offer better reliability of the research findings.

2.4 The fieldwork process

The fieldwork was conducted in Maharani Jhoda VDC, Jhapa district, from June 2008 to January 2010. Maharani Jhoda was selected because of its high incidence of labour out-migration, its dynamic history of in- and out-migration and my prior observation of changes which I wanted to investigate in a more systematic manner. The appropriateness of the site selection was checked against other secondary data, discussions with district officials (such as from the District Development Office and District Agriculture Development Office), leading manpower recruitment agencies within the district, and the local leaders as key informants before starting the actual fieldwork.

The fieldwork consisted of three partly overlapping phases: preparatory phase, quantitative data collection phase and qualitative data collection phase. The *preparatory phase* consisted of two activities: collection of secondary information and conducting a migration assessment survey. Prior to the collection of primary data, information from secondary

sources were collected from different government agencies like the Department of Labour¹⁸, the Central Bureau of Statistics, the District Agriculture Development Office, the District Development Office as well as from non-governmental organisations like the International Labour Organisation, registered manpower recruitment agencies located in Kathmandu, and local non-governmental organisations located in Jhapa district. The collection of secondary data was followed by a migration assessment survey conducted in the field, after preparatory discussions with district officials. Prior to the migration assessment survey, an extensive visit of the research area – combined with several informal discussions with local officials and villagers – was conducted to familiarise myself with the research area.

The *quantitative data collection phase* (February-May 2009) consisted of a household survey among 277 households. Both the migration assessment and the household surveys were carried out with the help of local research assistants. Finally, during the *qualitative data collection phase* (August-December 2009), qualitative data were collected using the methods of in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, group interviews and focus group discussions¹⁹ and participant observation. It is important to note that apart from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions qualitative data were collected during each of the three phases. Table 2.3 summarises the fieldwork schedule.

Table 2.3: Summary of the fieldwork activities

Phases	Duration	Methods and techniques
Preparatory	Jun-Aug 2008	Secondary data collection, migration assessment survey, observation visit
Quantitative data collection	Feb-May 2009	Household survey
Qualitative data collection	Aug-Dec 2009	In-depth interviews, focus group discussions
Cross-cutting	Jun 2008-Dec 2009	Key informant interviews, participant observation, group interviews, informal discussions, observation visits

2.5 Methods of data collection and sampling

Some methods were specifically directed to elicit an in-depth illustration on certain aspects, while others were to provide a broader picture. Importantly, the information gathered on historical changes in the study area through the ‘oral history’ of the early settlers, informal discussions with fellow villagers at kiosks and teashops, and frequent observation visits with

¹⁸ The Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) was not yet separated from the Department of Labour under the Ministry of Labour and Transport Management.

¹⁹ I conducted one focus group discussion each with the groups of older men, older women, younger men, younger women and wives of migrant workers to collect data specific to the group, gender and generational categories, and the remaining five were the group interviews.

no specific objectives in mind, contributed to the richness of information obtained during the fieldwork.

Sampling for the qualitative methods was purposive and the sample size was based on the 'saturation' point observed during the process because it was difficult to determine the sample size in advance (Kumar, 2005). For a quantitative method, especially for a household survey, stratified random sampling was adopted based on the relevance of the household categories for further investigation. All the individual face-to-face interviews (key informant, in-depth, survey) were conducted in the homes of the respondents or other familiar but somehow private places, in most cases, upon fixing appointments in advance (see photo at the head of the chapter).

Checklists were used to conduct key informant interviews, focus group discussions, group interviews, and in-depth interviews, while questionnaires were used for the surveys. Additionally, a diary was kept during the entire period of the fieldwork to record specific events and general observations. Detailed accounts of the specific techniques of data collection with the respective sample sizes and sampling techniques are discussed below. In the following chapters, data from different sources are used in an integrative manner.

Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews formed an important aspect of the data collection especially to provide an overview of the situation and historical changes in the area. Key informants considered were the earlier settlers, local ethnic and political leaders, men and women farmers, government personnel, representatives from manpower recruitment agencies, and representatives from non-governmental and community based organisations. The key informant interviews were conducted using an unstructured interviewing format²⁰ at the early stage and semi-structured format at the later stage. A total of 40 key informants was interviewed to collect information on the historical changes in the dynamics of land ownership and valuation, the village setting, practices of agriculture, in- and out-migration, and changing lifestyles in the village.

Focus group discussions and group interviews

Focus group discussions and group interviews are wellknown qualitative methods for data collection that have been used for years in a wide range of disciplines, either exclusively or in combination with other methods. A focus group discussion is defined as "a research

²⁰ Bernard (2002: 204-206) mentions four types of interviewing based on the level of control that the researcher maintains during interviews. 1) Informal interviewing: total lack of structure or control where researcher tries to remember conversation during the course of a day in the field, usually recorded in field diaries. 2) Unstructured interviewing: based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind. Unstructured interviewing is characterised by a minimum control over people's responses. The idea is to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, at their own pace. It is also called *ethnographic interviewing*. 3) Semi-structured interviewing: has much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing, but semi-structured interviewing is based on the use of *interview guide*. 4) Structured interviewing: people are asked to respond to as nearly identical a set of stimuli as possible. One variety of structured interview involves use of an *interview schedule* (set of instructions and questions for face-to-face interview), while others are self-administered questionnaires that are responded by the research participants themselves.

technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996: 130). It is important to discuss the difference between focus group discussions and group interviews, as they are often not clearly distinguished. Some ‘inclusive’ researchers (mainly sociologists) treat most forms of group interviews as variants of focus groups, while others (mainly marketing researchers) who use ‘exclusive’ approaches consider a focus group a more specific technique that differs from other type of group interviews (Morgan, 1996).

I used focus group discussions as an inclusive approach and conducted both focus groups and group interviews. Out of 10 group interviews, five were focused on the issues of specific groups, while the other five were more freewheeling and not specific to any particular groups. Morgan (1996) suggests 4-6 focus groups as a common practice to be included for data ‘saturation’ in exclusive design, while the group size varies if focus groups are used in combination with other methods. In my experience too, at a certain point in time the groups started giving the same information in response to my queries. The age category for younger groups (see footnote 19) was 18-35 and for older groups above 35 regardless of their migration status, while for the group of migrants’ wives age was not the criterion. For the group interviews, the composition of the groups was open, diverse, mixed and the discussion was more general. All focus group discussions and group interviews were conducted either at the public places in the village or in the meeting rooms of the local organisations such as office of the cooperatives or the VDC.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviewing is a method of data collection that involves intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce and Neale, 2006). In-depth interviews offer an opportunity for respondents to express themselves or their views in an open way, which in ordinary life is rarely possible. In-depth interviews were specifically used in case studies and life stories of the research participants. However, for case studies the same persons were visited several times in different settings: at home, on the farm, in the market, and as a guest for dinner. Some interactions were organised with prior appointments, others were just informal chats. Among the 26 in-depth interviews and life stories, five are presented in the thesis as ‘whole’ cases, while segments of the other interviews are used when required in the relevant chapters. I had the advantage of speaking the local language. Moreover, the interviewees – men and women – knew my family and relatives in the VDC, which made them sufficiently trust me and allowed me (a married man) to interview them (married women) alone, although most of the in-depth interviews with migrants’ wives were done with the help of a female research assistant.

Participant observation

Participant observation aims to understand the social world from the perspectives of the research population. This method enables the researcher to know about the people they want to study by engaging themselves in the social world of the respondents and observe their activities in a real-life setting, including the physical aspects of the situation (Spradley, 1980).

Bernard (2002) sees participant observation both as a humanistic and as a scientific method, producing the kind of experiential knowledge that lets the researcher present his work convincingly in scientific fora.

Also in this study participant observation played an important role. The research area was already well known to me; I stayed in the area for most of the time during the fieldwork, and visited the research participants at their homes and farms. I also visited the markets within and outside the VDC; I participated in the meetings of the irrigation channel committee and in the people's agricultural, social, and religious activities. I was invited as a guest in the annual events of the women and farmer organisations and paid visits to their group meetings. In a way, I was 'with them' during most of the 21 months of the fieldwork period.

Migration assessment survey

In 2008, a migration assessment survey was conducted among 1791 households covering 90 per cent of the households of all the nine wards of Maharani Jhoda VDC. The main purpose of this survey was to classify households and prepare a sampling frame for the household survey. The classification was based on the changing household composition due to male labour out-migration because it was impossible to find data disaggregated per household in the government statistics. The idea was to cover all the households in the VDC, but the remaining 10 per cent either could not be found or interviewed. A one-page questionnaire was administered in all the nine wards of the VDC. It focused on migration and demographic information. The survey resulted in eight household categories: non-migrant households, *de facto* female-headed households, households where migrant's wife lives with in-laws, households where migrant's wife lives at her maternal home, returned migrant households, households with unmarried male migrants, households with female migrants, and other mixed types of households. Table 2.4 presents the results of the migration assessment survey.

Table 2.4: Household categories

Household Categories	Number	%
Non-migrant	687	38.4
<i>De facto</i> female-headed	207	11.6
Wife living with in-laws	292	16.3
Wife at natal home	13	0.7
Returned migrant	150	8.4
Unmarried male migrant	212	11.8
Female migrant	41	2.3
Other type migrant (family migration or mixed types of migration)	189	10.6
Total	1791	100.0

Source: Migration assessment survey 2008

From the Table 4, four categories were selected for further investigation: non-migrant, *de facto* female-headed, wife living with in-laws, and returned migrant households. Geographically, five wards (Ward 1, 3, 6, 7, and 9) were selected because of their high incidence of labour out-migration and easy accessibility compared to the four other wards, which resulted into the following sampling frame for the household survey conducted in the following phase (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: Sampling frame

Household Categories	Number of households	Sample size determined 2008	% estimated sample	Actual sample size 2009	% actual sample
Non-migrant	493	148	30.0	118	42.6
<i>De facto</i> female-headed	135	41	30.0	45	16.2
Wife living with in-laws	188	56	30.0	71	25.6
Returned migrant	106	32	30.0	23	8.3
Mixed types	0	0	0	20	7.2
Total	922	277	30.0	277	100.0

Source: Migration assessment survey 2008

Household survey

A survey among 277 households was conducted, the results forming the main quantitative database of the study. About 30 per cent of households were selected from the 922 households in each of the specified categories, using a stratified random sampling. According to Bernard (2002), stratified random sampling ensures that key subpopulations are included in the sample. In this sampling technique, the sampling frame is divided into subpopulations, called strata, based on key independent variables, which in this research are the household categories (see Table 2.5) that were identified in the migration assessment survey carried out before the household survey. Then, every third household was selected from the list of each stratum to ensure a random effect (minimise bias). There are different opinions about the minimum sample size required; a general rule is the bigger the sample size the better the statistical inference. According to Grinnell (2001: 217), “Usually a sample size of one-tenth of the total population (with minimum of 30) is considered sufficient to provide reasonable control over sampling error. The same one-tenth convention also applies to categories of the population: One-tenth of each category can be included in the sample.”

However, the rule could not be maintained for all categories in the course of the survey administration. In the six months interval (August 2008 – February 2009) between the two surveys, household composition changed and the category identified for a particular household also changed. For example, a household might have been identified as ‘wife living with in-laws’ as a result of the migration assessment survey, while at the time of the household survey she started her own household and became *de facto* female household head. Or somebody started as an individual migrant but had migrated with his family during the household survey and was now classified as ‘other’ category. Total number of 277 households

remained the same, but the sample size per categories differed from the earlier estimation: 118 non-migrant households, 45 *de facto* female-headed households, 71 households where the migrant's wife live with in-laws, 23 returned migrant households, and 20 other types of migrant households like family or mixed migration.

The questionnaire was constructed covering topics like household characteristics, ethnic distribution, land use and agriculture, household income, out-migration (destination, reason, type of job, remittances, labour compensation), ownership of modern appliances, gender and household decision-making, and communication with migrants. The questionnaire was pre-tested among five households outside the study area, after which the final version was drafted.

2.6 Employment and orientation of research assistants

In both the household and the migration assessment survey, four enumerators were employed. They were strategically selected using criteria like education, gender, ethnicity and locality. As the study was focused on women, I employed female enumerators so that the female respondents would be willing to discuss sensitive issues like the relationship with their in-laws and husband. The enumerators had just finished their bachelor's degree in different disciplines, while one also had some field experience. All were from the same or an adjoining VDC, which made it possible to conduct the survey even at irregular times. Later on, one of the enumerators helped me conduct in-depth interviews with the wives of migrant workers. Selecting local enumerators is important to collect data on culturally appropriate meanings as they would have a similar understanding of the phenomena under study as the respondents. However, the danger is that they take the information from the respondents for granted. In this research, the latter situation was minimised by everyday follow-up discussion with the enumerators after they had returned from the field.

I was also accompanied by a full-time research assistant for over a year. The research assistant had a master's degree in management. He helped me organising focus group discussions, group interviews, village trips, data tabulation, and preliminary analysis especially the analysis of migration assessment survey data. All enumerators and the research assistant were trained for two days prior to the migration assessment survey and five days prior to the household survey. In training sessions, apart from discussing practicalities like how to approach informants and build rapport before starting the actual interview, I discussed all the questions one-by-one in order to ensure their correct interpretation of the questionnaire, to enhance truthfulness and comprehensiveness of the answers of the respondents.

2.7 Data management and analysis

The qualitative data were either audiotaped, videotaped, or manually noted in the field diary. The information obtained through participant observation and visits was written down, while some events were photographed and/or videotaped. In the beginning, the plan was to videotape all the interviews, but after I had discovered that the use of a camera was sometimes disturbing and distracting the interviewees, I decided to use only a voice recorder

(with the interviewees' consent) during all the qualitative interviews. The audio files were later on transcribed and documented, in most cases during the evening of the same day or the following morning. The transcripts were translated from Nepali into English and typed into MSWord during the break period deliberately made after conducting several interviews. The transcripts were then coded, interpreted and organised according to different themes related to the research questions using discourse analysis²¹ and qualitative content analysis²² approaches.

The quantitative data obtained through the household survey was first entered into Excel, after data cleaning to check for inconsistencies, and then exported into an SPSS²³ computer program for analysis, for which PASW Statistics 17.0 (see footnote 23) software was used. Cross-tabulations, bivariate correlation and regression analyses, and non-parametric tests were performed to provide descriptive statistics of and test for significant associations between variables under consideration.

2.8 The ambiguity of boundaries: the insider-outsider dilemma

I was born and grew up in the research area. I left home at the age of fifteen to pursue higher education and a career in Kathmandu. In the course of the last twenty years, I have rarely been back for periods more than two months, mostly during college breaks and official holidays. When my parents permanently moved to Kathmandu five years ago my visits to the research area were drastically reduced. As far back as I can delve into my childhood memories, the outlook of Maharani Jhoda has changed a lot. The people, the infrastructure, agriculture, lifestyles are different than from the past. The traditional wooden houses are being replaced by modern concrete buildings, farmlands are being converted into residential plots, muddy roads are gravelled, the bus connection to the urban centres has increased the local people's mobility, electricity, telephone, and much more has changed the organisation of social life in the area.

Although being one of their out-migrants, I still share ethnicity, religion, language, and culture with the local people. In this way, I would consider myself an insider in the area. However, at the same time, my presence as a researcher from a European university had alienated me from the locals so that I had to situate myself differently in many instances. Many of the people did not know me directly. I had to refer to my father to introduce myself and ease the discussion. While some people tried to avoid me, many others appreciated my return to the village for study, saying: "Oh, you came all the way from Europe²⁴ to study your

²¹ Discourse analysis is a technique of data analysis that involves "the close study of naturally occurring interactions" (Bernard, 2002: 460).

²² Qualitative content analysis is a technique of data analysis mainly used by anthropologists, qualitative sociologists and psychologists. It is used for subjective interpretation of the content of text data grounded on the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns that produces descriptions or typologies, along with expressions from subjects reflecting how they view the social world (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009).

²³ SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was the name of PASW (Predictive Analytics SoftWare) Statistics software, before the name was changed in January 2010.

²⁴ They know about Europe but they do not know much about the Netherlands.

own village, we are proud of you”, “you are doing a PhD abroad, it is a great news for us”. After some time, my regular visits and frequent interactions made them aware of my possible position as a development worker. With this identity, however, they were expecting something from me. The ordinary villagers’ expectation was to bring ‘development’ to their village, whereas the personnel of organisations wanted me to support them in drafting proposals for their projects. The manager of a cooperative, who also happened to be one of my classmates at high school, made it clear how he wanted me to help his organisation:

As I was heading to his (the manager’s) office, I found him at a teashop. We greeted each other: “Oh! Actually, I was thinking of you”. He told me. I asked, why? He explained: “I have a number of projects in mind; I wonder if you have time and could help me writing a proposal. (Field diary, 1 November 2009)

This situation made me realise that conducting fieldwork in one’s own homeland is to perform multiple roles, not just as a researcher, but also as a family member, friend, and a neighbour of the research participants. It was sometimes difficult to find a balance between objectivity and friendship (Basnyat, 1995), positional and personal attributes (Mullings, 1999), and to manage boundaries and rapport building (Sherif, 2001), which actually put the researcher in a dilemma. Therefore, my positioning in the *insider-outsider debate*, and *emic* and *etic perspectives* warrants some explication.

Many qualitatively inclined researchers discuss and illustrate the transformation of researcher identities with the aid of an imaginary continuum between insider and outsider especially while conducting fieldwork (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010; Mullings, 1999; Sherif, 2001). Karim (1993 in Sherif, 2001) notes that due to emergence of native anthropologists it is almost impossible to create a boundary and separate the researcher and the researched into two distinct categories. Hence, binary oppositions of researcher-native, self-other, insider-outsider tend to be(come) blurred. Moreover, knowledge is produced from the interaction between the researcher and the researched where the unequal position and power relationship between these two parties remain crucial for the interpretation of results and production of knowledge. Sherif (2001: 437) argues that “the realisation that knowledge is produced in a historical and social context by individuals has come to dominate, and the discussion about process and product has become political, personal and experiential.” The issue of power in knowledge creation was first raised by the feminist writers in connection with the unequal power position of men and women in the research process, but it is equally important in other research where age, personality, positioning, ethnicity, caste, class, citizenship, and feeling of belonging matter, which is reflected in both fieldwork and post-fieldwork situations (Mullings, 1999; Sato, 2004).

There are both advantages and disadvantages of being an insider or an outsider in terms of easy access to research participants, reliability of collected data, and the success of fieldwork (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010). No one can argue against the potential advantages of being an insider, but there can also be disadvantages to it. For example, “the insider may be perceived as being untrustworthy because of his or her knowledge of and connections to the community under study” (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010: 17). I also experienced this situation when I was conducting fieldwork, though I did not have problems in accessing informants like many foreigners experience when they conduct fieldwork in a foreign land. On many

occasions the participants were found to be reluctant to answer my question, because they assumed I already knew everything about them. I had to convince them of my role as a researcher. Ergun and Erdemir (2010) rightly argue that “researchers’ constant negotiation with informants is inevitably a never-ending process.” Moreover, jealousy (among peers) and self-centred analyses of what the village or individuals would get from my study appeared to be the biggest challenge to conduct fieldwork. I did not pay the informants directly in either cash or kind. Instead, I offered them snacks, tea or cold drinks while I conducted group discussions in the market.

Another way of framing the insider-outsider debate is by using the emic-etic opposition. Scholars like Franz Boas and Edward Sapir recognised the importance of preserving the original meaning of the information from insiders from the emic views (Pelto and Pelto, 1978). The terms emic and etic were coined in 1954 by the linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike in analogy with the concepts of phonemics and phonetics in linguistics (Headland, 1990; Pelto and Pelto, 1978). While the terms were originally used in linguistics, they were extensively used in other disciplines including sociology and anthropology after the terms had been adopted in anthropology by Marvin Harris in the 1960s. He criticised the semantic homogeneity of populations envisioned by the emic approach and showed the importance of the etic perspective (Pelto and Pelto, 1978). Headland (1990: 15) reports about the evolution of the terms:

Pike was the person who first coined the terms *emics* and *etics* and who first used them in print in 1954. [...] I suppose that the terms were a regular part of my own vocabulary by the early 1960s, but it was not until the 1970s that I realised how widespread and popular terms had become among anthropologists. And it was not until the late 1980s that I realised that the terms were being used in other disciplines unrelated to linguistics and anthropology.

According to Harris (1969: 571), “*Emic* statements refer to logico-empirical systems whose phenomenal distinctions or ‘things’ are built up out of contrasts and discriminations significant, real, accurate, or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves.” Likewise, “*Etic* statements depend upon the phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers. *Etic* statements cannot be falsified if they do not conform to the actor’s notion of what is significant, real, meaningful, or appropriate” (Harris, 1969: 575). Hence, the use of etic and emic perspectives basically refers to the language of interpretation. Harris (1990: 50-52) categorised four dichotomies where emic and etic perspectives can be applied in the social sciences, two of which are relevant here: subjective/objective and insider/outsider points of view. However, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them because participants and researchers can be both subjective and objective or insider and outsider. Harris (1990: 50-51) argues:

Participants can be both subjective and objective, and observers can be both subjective and objective. But the discrimination between emic and etic modes depends strictly on the operations employed by the observer. [...] To clarify the differences between subjective/objective and emic/etic, I suggest that we use subjective/objective to refer to operations from the point of view of whether they satisfy the general epistemological canons of scientific inquiry. [...] One can be an

insider or an outsider with respect to a labour union, for example, in the sense of being a member or non-member. Used in this manner, the distinction between insider and outsider does not come to grips with the epistemologically salient meaning of the emic/etic contrast.

I agree with Sherif (2001) that ambiguities and ambivalence are part of all research relationships and thus must be acknowledged accordingly. However, doing qualitative research in one's homeland provides a wider perspective across the culture. I would further argue that the position of a researcher as an insider or outsider is not that important because they are not mutually exclusive. Pelto and Pelto (1978: 63) argue that "if either the emic or the etic side of the argument is overwhelmingly correct in its assertions, the work of the other must of regarded as nearly worthless. [...] Having grasped the 'native's point of view', most anthropologists also go on to study actual behaviour in relation to more general theoretical problems." After all, field-based research is an iterative and reflective process in which the researcher develops his insights. By keeping a field diary and doing participant observation, I tried to validate my preliminary conclusions by discussing them with other informants or by raising the same issues again with the same persons as a check for consistency. Hence, what is important perhaps is to try to get as close as possible to the ground reality and build on the knowledge produced thereof while observing the standards of scientific rigour.

Migration to and from the Nepal *terai*



Left: A rice farm, some weeks after transplanting

*Right: Conveyer belt with a packed television of a returning migrant worker at
Tribhuvan Airport, Kathmandu*

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on Nepalese migration. In the literature, the *terai* region is usually seen as a receiving area because of its fertile soil, plain topography, easy accessibility and good infrastructure. The uneven topography, infertile land, and miserable life in the hills are considered push factors. The historical evidence shows that migration to the *terai* increased after the eradication of malaria in the late 1950s and has been increasing ever since. More recently, however, out-migration from the *terai* is rapidly increasing. By applying both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the chapter presents the three types of population flow in the historical pattern. First, the history of Nepal as an arena of population movement; second, the gradual opening up of the *terai*, leading to the hills-*terai* movement; and the third, the current outward flow as an individual migration for work. The chapter exemplifies that poverty and deprivation are not the only push factors of migration, but that pursuing a better quality of life is gaining in importance as a migration motive. We conclude that like movements of people, their motives for moving are also not static and cannot be taken for granted.

Keywords: Nepal, In-migration, Out-migration, *Terai*, Migration motives

3.1 Introduction

In the past, there was a high level of in-migration to Nepal, from both of its neighbours: China and India. Migration from China was largely of the nomadic Mongoloid people to escape the harsh climate of Tibet. The Indo-Aryans from India, especially the Brahmins and Rajputs were fleeing the religious crusades of invading Mughals and their suppression against Hindus; others (especially those from Bihar and West Bengal) were attracted by the agricultural potential of the *terai* land (Kansakar, 1984; Savada, 1991).

Within the country, the *terai* was (and still is) considered to be a frontier land for safe livelihood opportunities so that hill-to-*terai* migration was a prominent demographic, socio-political and economic phenomenon until recently. The fertile land, plain topography, easy access, and improved infrastructure were considered pull factors, while the uneven topography, infertile/uncultivable land, and the miserable life in the hills were the push factors. Based on a study carried out in 1988, Shrestha et al. (1993: 793) report, "At the core of this migration stream lies a large-scale relocation of people from the highland villages in the hills to the *terai* frontier in the plain, stretching east-west along the Nepal-India border. It accounts for nearly 80 per cent of Nepal's internal migration."

Until the mid-1950s, there was little in-country mobility of people, with regard to both in-migration to the *terai* and out-migration from the hills. However, due to population pressure and paucity of land resources in the hills, the eradication of malaria and the implementation of land resettlement programs in the *terai*, migration to the *terai* had increased, and was identified as lifetime internal migration in the 1981 census (Savada, 1991). Especially, since 1990, individual labour out-migration from the *terai* to urban centres in the country and abroad is an increasing trend.

Although Nepalese literature on migration considers the *terai* a receiving area, labour out-migration (from the *terai*) is now eminent and is inducing sociocultural changes affecting the everyday life of the people left behind. Migration itself used to be considered a 'last resort' livelihood option, a shameful venture of unfortunate households inspired by the vision of better options in the outside world. It was considered a painful experience for the people involved (Golay, 2006). In this context, this chapter aims to contribute to the Nepal's current literature on migration and social change by shedding light on the changing discourses of migration. In this chapter, we discuss why the *terai* was a recipient area and has become a sending area and how the discourses of migration are changing over time. We start by presenting the history of in- and out-migration in Nepal and the *terai* and continue to describe how the research area has become a part of these processes.

3.2 The setting: history of in- and out-migration in Nepal

The Nepalese history of migration is complicated and it is difficult to construct in a linear fashion. "Underlying the history of both hills and plains is the complex relationship between human beings and their physical environment. The middle hills offered early settlers a refuge from the enervating heat and the greater risk of infection on the plains. [...] More recently, population pressure in the hills and improved technology has made the *terai* plains more attractive" (Whelpton, 2008: 2). Different forms of migration such as internal, international, immigration, emigration, hill-to-*terai*, interregional, rural-rural, rural-urban, etcetera, have been dealt with in the Nepalese migration literature for a long time (see for example, Dahal, 1983; Gartaula, 2009; Gurung, 2001; Kansakar, 1984; Seddon et al., 2002). It shows that the changing discourses of migration and its global-local linkages in relation to the global forces that impinge upon local processes have become the topics of academic interest.

3.2.1 In-migration to Nepal and the Terai

Migration from neighbouring states into Nepal has been going on since the dawn of civilisation. The ancient migration flows from the north were largely of the nomadic Mongoloid people from Tibet, while those from the south were Indo-Aryans from India (Savada, 1991). Literature shows that in-migration from the north was voluntary in nature; people who came from the harsh climate of the Tibetan plateau were in search of a more agreeable habitat. In-migration from the south was involuntary; people sought shelter against political persecution and repression by powerful enemies in India (Kansakar, 1984).

After the unification of Nepal in 1768, the Shah rulers encouraged Indian people to settle in the *terai*, the lowland plains (Dahal, 1983). However, before the Muslim invasions in India, migration from India to Nepal was confined to the elites such as kings, nobles and their attendants. During the Muslim invasions (from 8th to 16th century), Nepal sheltered many Indians who took refuge to avoid being forcefully converted to Islam. Those refugees were in such a huge number that they encroached upon the fertile lands of the indigenous populations of the *terai* and drove them to the slopes of the hills (Kansakar, 1984). An analysis of the Nepalese economic history from 1768 to 1846, Regmi ([1972] 1999) reports

that the local administrators in the *terai* were encouraged to import settlers from India. Whelpton (2008: 125) notes: "A disputed number of Indians moved into the *terai*, where, before large-scale migration from the Nepalese hills began in the late 1950s, the great majority of the inhabitants were already Indian in language and culture." These facts, actually, explain the high presence of Indian-origin people in the Nepal *terai*.

Subedi (1991) distinguishes two forms of immigration to Nepal: regular and periodic. The first regular immigration was from Tibet to the hills and from India to the *terai* forest land, while the second regular immigration includes people from India, Bangladesh and Burma. He reports five periodic flows of population into Nepal *terai*: 1) the flow of Hindus from North India during eleventh and twelfth centuries as a result of the Muslim invasion in India; 2) the flow of about 16000 Tibetan refugees in 1959/60 due to political instability in Tibet, 3) the flow of Nepali-origin people from Burma because of the Burmese Nationalization Act in 1964; 4) the flow of about 10000 Bihari Muslims from Bangladesh in around the 1970s; and 5) a (return) flow of a considerable number of Nepali people who were forced to leave Nagaland and Mizoram in the late 1960s. With few exceptions, these people went to the *terai* (Subedi, 1991: 84).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, most of the migration to the *terai* was involuntary migration. Later on, it became an attractive place for immigrants. In the early twentieth century, Nepalese government encouraged migration from India as a means of opening up the *terai*, which up to then had remained largely undeveloped (Dahal, 1983). Yet, the *terai* did not attract Nepali hill immigrants. They preferred the northern and north-eastern parts of India because of cultural similarities (Subedi, 1991). The pattern was that of either hill-to-hill or plain-to-plain migration. Indians from the plain came to settle in the lowland *terai* and Nepalese hill people went to the Indian hills.

Dahal (1983) provides another explanation for the avoidance of the *terai* by Nepali hill people: "Settlement in the [*terai*] area had been avoided by the hill people because of the presence of deadly malaria. Up to the late 1950s, the whole *terai* region was then called a *Kala Pani* (Death Valley) by the hill people." In a similar vein, Gurung (2001) notes that migration before 1950 was mostly directed eastwards along the hill corridor. Only since the 1950s, when malaria was eradicated, the *terai* became an attractive destination.

The population structure of the country after 1950 shows an increased population growth in the *terai*. The average annual population growth rate for the country during 1952/54-81 was 2.16 per cent, varying from 1.22 per cent in the mountains and hills to 3.34 per cent in the *terai*. During the same period, the share in the total population living in the *terai* increased from 34.7 to 48.7 per cent. During the period of 1961-81, the *terai* experienced a 2.5 times increase in population and a 6.4 times increase in net migration. Whereas the hill region was experiencing negative net migration and had a lower population growth (Gurung, 1988: 67-68). According to Whelpton (2008: 123), "by the 1980s, only 45 per cent of Nepal's population lived in the hills, compared with 60 per cent twenty years earlier."

3.2.2 Out-migration from Nepal and the Terai

The history of out-migration from Nepal is more recent than that of in-migration, which goes back for about 200 years (Adhikari, 2006; Seddon et al., 2002). In the past, out-migration from Nepal was confined mainly to its neighbours encompassing pilgrims, devotees, political refugees, and soldiers. Another piece of evidence of out-migration found in the literature is when the first Nepali men migrated to Lahore (in present day's Pakistan) to join the army of the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh in early nineteenth century (cf. Thieme and Wyss, 2005). Later on, *lahure* became the nickname given to the people who join the armed forces of India, Hong Kong, Singapore, and United Kingdom. It is sometimes used to address all Nepali people living abroad. Recently, the working class labourers are termed 'New Lahures' (Seddon et al., 2001), while the word NRN (Non-Resident Nepali) is becoming popular in certain social and political circles. Being NRN seems to contribute to social status.

Nepal's international border with India and China remained almost open for the movement of people from both of her neighbours. With China, it became closed after 1950, while it has remained open with India till now with no restriction on the movement of people of both countries. Hence, because of the open borders, cultural similarities, and no need of visa, migration to and from India is of all times and even unaccounted. Throughout the nineteenth century and also into the twentieth, Nepalese men served in India, often accompanied by their wives and other family members and started living there permanently. As the Gorkha settlements in India increased, they also attracted Nepali workers seeking other kinds of jobs. The brothels that developed in these new centres may well have included women from Nepal and from the surrounding areas (Seddon, 2005).

During the last two decades, Nepal is becoming a labour exporting country. The proportion of households receiving remittances has increased from 23 per cent in 1995-96 to 32 per cent in 2003-04 (CBS, 2004). Since 1942, when the data were made available, there is an increasing trend of out-migration from Nepal. In this period, the migrated population increased from about 88,000 in 1942 (cf. Kansakar, 1984) to more than four million in 2008 (The World Bank, 2009). The calculations of the Nepal Rastra Bank show about US\$ 2.7 billion of remittances sent by the migrants working in other countries than India in the fiscal year 2008-09, which is about 22 per cent of the country's total GDP. Including India, it is estimated that remittances have contributed to 30 per cent of the GDP (The World Bank, 2009).

These out-migrants can be grouped into labour migrants, students, emigrants (under high-skilled immigration programs of different countries), the Gorkhas, and the people working in diplomatic missions and NGOs. Although all classified as the absentee population by the Central Bureau of Statistics, the out-migrants are not a homogeneous group. Their aspirations, motivations and reasons for migration differ considerably, sometimes even within the same group. Moreover, these figures do not include migration to India because of the open border. Government officials agree on the fact that the figures only include those who migrate formally; the almost equal numbers of people migrated informally and illegally are not part of the official statistics.

It is important to note that in the discussion about migration from Nepal, one always comes across the term Gorkhas²⁵ (or 'Gurkhas'). This dates from the colonial period in India. From 1768 to 1836, Nepal's relation with the British East India Company was not harmonious. The then reigning king Prithvi Narayan Shah was always suspicious about British influence in Nepal and thwarted captain Kinloch's expedition to the country (Sharma, 1973). After this, the British came to admire the Gorkhas for their loyalty, bravery and courage (Dahal, 1983). During World War II, it was difficult to get able-bodied men in the hills of Nepal because they had joined the allied forces (Kansakar, 1984). Mazumdar (1963) reports: "Three battalions of Gorkha regiments were raised as early as 1815. By the time the Sepoy Mutiny was crushed, the Gorkhas had proved their masters right. A series of recruiting depots came up along the long stretch of areas bordering Nepal" (cited in Golay, 2006: 32-33). Nowadays, Gorkhas are popularly recognized as good soldiers worldwide and the Nepal Army and Nepal Police are involved in the UN peace keeping force in many countries.

Golay (2006: 33) says that "by 1864, the British government issued a charter providing for the Gorkha Regiment to buy land for settlement stations at Dehradun, Gorakhpur, Shillong, etc. In Darjeeling, the Gorkha Recruitment Depot was opened in 1890, and it continues to draw recruits from in and around Darjeeling and neighbouring Nepal". Hence, as the Gorkha settlements increased in number and size, they also attracted Nepali workers seeking employment in other sectors like tea plantations, agriculture, as watchmen, household servants, and security guards (Kansakar, 1984; Subedi, 1991).

Comparing Nepalese in- and out-migration yields a contrasting picture. In-migration in the past tends to be a more permanent phenomenon, while out-migration now is a temporary phenomenon. Migration in the previous time was more from hills to the *terai*, from both within as well as outside the country, while recent data depict the *terai* as a migrant-sending area. Figure 3.1 presents the top ten districts that are pioneering labour export to foreign countries in the recent years. Among them, Tanahu is the only hilly district. The district of Jhapa, the study area, ranks second in labour out-migration.

²⁵ The word 'Gorkha' is derived from the small principality (now a district) of Nepal by the same time. The kingdom of Gorkha was established by Drabya Shah in 1559. It is located at about 60 km west of Kathmandu.

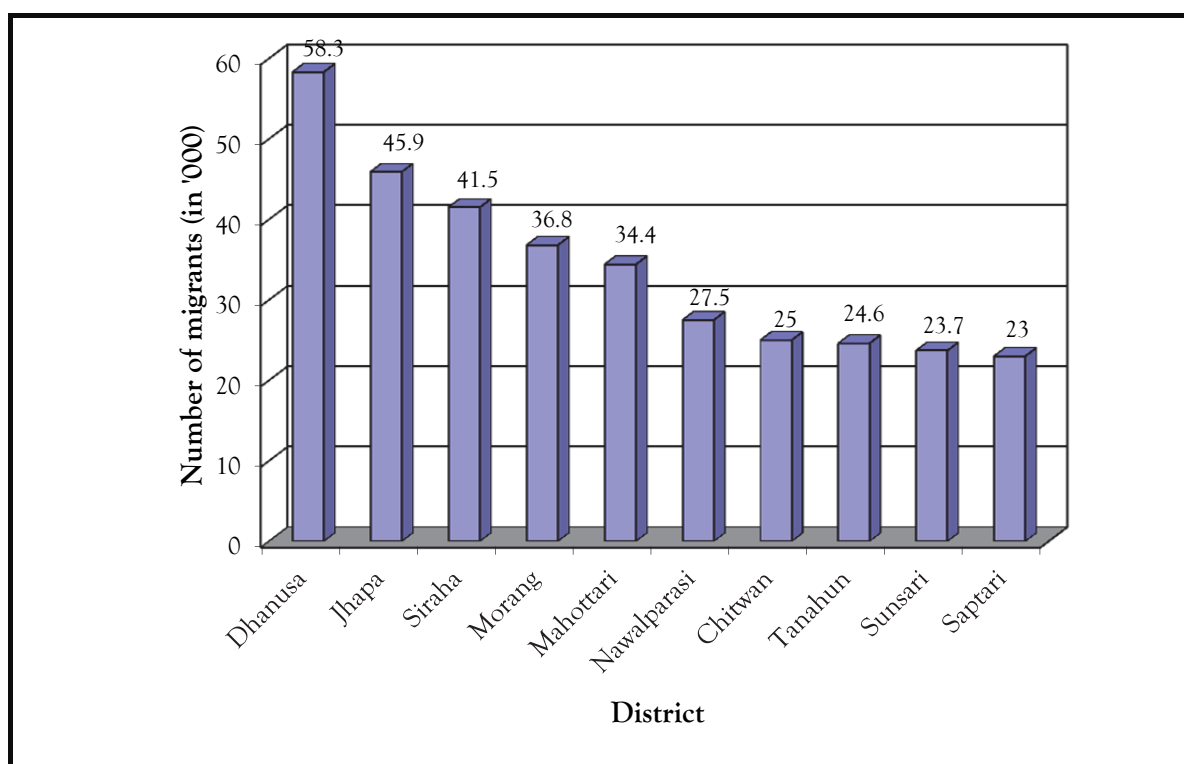


Figure 3.1: Number of migrants in the top 10 districts from 2003 to 2009

Source: Department of Foreign Employment, Government of Nepal

3.3 Methodology

This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The fieldwork started in June 2008 and consisted of three partly overlapping phases. The first phase mainly comprised a migration assessment survey among 1791 households that covered 90 per cent households of Maharani Jhoda VDC, the research area. The main purpose of this survey was to classify households based on the changing household composition due to male labour out-migration and prepare a sampling frame for the household survey conducted in the second phase. Maharani Jhoda was selected because of its high incidence of labour out-migration and its dynamic history of in- and out-migration.

In the second phase, the household survey was carried out among 277 households using a stratified random sampling frame based on the data collected in the first phase. Four female enumerators were hired and trained to carry out the survey. Topics included were household characteristics, ethnic distribution of out-migration per destination, reasons for out-migration, and ownership of modern appliances. The questionnaire was pre-tested among five households outside the study area.

In the third phase, 26 in-depth interviews were conducted with the actors involved in labour out-migration, while key informant interviews, focus group discussion and observation were done in all phases. The fieldwork was carried out with the help of five research assistants. Checklists were used to conduct key informant interviews, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. In addition, a diary was maintained during the entire fieldwork period. Excel and PASW Statistics 17.0 were used for the analysis of quantitative data, while

the qualitative data were analysed using qualitative content analysis technique (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009).

3.3.1 Description of the research area

The fieldwork was conducted in Maharani Jhoda VDC of Jhapa district. The district is located in the eastern *terai*, one of the three ecological regions of Nepal (High Mountain, Mid Hills and the *terai*). The *terai* is an extension of the Gangetic plain of India, the flooding plain of Ganges River. Maharani Jhoda has a population of 10,589 living in 1980 households (DDC, 2006). It is located at a distance of 56 km west from the district headquarters, Chandragadhi, and 550 km east from the country's capital of Kathmandu.

The available historical sources indicate that the settlement in Maharani Jhoda dates from 1912-13, when people from India and some indigenous groups settled in the northern and western part of the VDC. Other parts of the VDC were then still forest area, belonging to the royal family. The name of the VDC is derived from the word Maharani (meaning the head queen) and *Jhoda* (meaning the settlement after deforestation). In 1955-56, the government started logging in the forest. Later on, in 1959-60, when the land was still unoccupied the hill migrants from adjoining hilly districts started to migrate to this area.

While this in-migration continued, out-migration began in 1975 and is increasing ever since. However, the nature of in- and out-migration is different; the former in-migration was permanent family migration, while the later out-migration is temporary individual migration for work. In the phenomenon of labour out-migration, one or more members of households migrate to urban centres within the country or abroad for one or two years and return back home and usually make another round and the cycle continues for many years, sometimes until the retirement of migrant worker.

3.4 Results and Discussion

3.4.1 Household characteristics

The migration assessment survey covered a total population of 10,262 residing in 1791 households with an average household size of 5.7. More than half of the households (53.3%) have at least one migrant member, amounting to a total of 1538 migrants, of whom 13 per cent are women. On an average there is one migrant per household.

The average age of migrant members is 29.2 years with a maximum of 65 years; 58 per cent are married and the rest (42%) are unmarried. Likewise, almost 80 per cent migrants are of the age between 20 and 40 years. Migrants of ages below 14 and above 55 years are not necessarily labour migrants; they can be students or persons accompanying in-country migrants. The high proportion of migrants from the age group 20-40 can be explained as follows. First, these are the economically active ages, among which the employers want to hire their labour. Second, persons of school going age see their peers migrating while they are at school, while they know that it is difficult to find a job locally after finishing school. Third, as reflected in the narratives of the migrants (see below), they are also pressed by family

obligations especially when they get married, which forces them to engage in rewarding economic activities, of which out-migration has proved to be a good option.

The dominant caste/ethnic group²⁶ in Maharani Jhoda is the Hill Brahmin-Chhetri²⁷ group (56.7%); followed by the Hill Janajati²⁸ (21.3%) such as the Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Magar, Newar; the Terai Janajati (12.3%), like the Tajpuriya, Rajbansi, Tharu, Satar; the Hill Dalit²⁹ (4.0%), and the Other Terai group (5.8%) that includes Muslims and others such as the Sah, Gupta, Thakur, etc. Though the research area is located in the *terai*, most of the inhabitants are hill migrants. If we relate ethnic composition to the migration status, hill migrants surpass the local *terai* people; 87 per cent of the hill migrants have out-migrated compared to 13 per cent of the *terai* people. This demographic change shows a contrasting pattern of migration flow, earlier in-migration and present out-migration; the in-migrant groups (Hill Brahmin/Chhetris and Hill Janajati), which were in the form of permanent family migration, are now engaged in individual temporary out-migration.

3.4.2 In-migration to the area: an early account

The qualitative data show that in the early days there was plenty of land in the area, as indicated by the informants below. The abundance of land has also been revealed by other studies in other areas of Nepal and the *terai* (Dahal, 1983; Shrestha et al., 1993). Though people did not have to buy land, the local leaders used to collect money from ordinary people for land that actually was not theirs. They could not offer legal ownership of land but still were taking advantage of the situation. The leaders' incentive to engage in the land distribution was the money they could generate in this way and other social benefits that would accrue to them as leaders.

The first mapping and registration (*napi*) of land was held in 1965. Yet, many people did not get the certificate of ownership. The registration at that time was not the way the farmers wanted it. They questioned its correctness because the land was registered as tenant registration (*mohi darta*) without title-deeds, as if the farmers were the tenants of the royal family.

In 1968, the land was allocated according to the plan of an Israeli engineer who was deputed to Nepal for land planning. According to that plan, the plan of roads should have

²⁶ In Nepal, the terms caste and ethnic group are used interchangeably in many cases. However, the caste system does not necessarily follow the ethnic division and vice versa. For details please refer to notes 27, 28 and 29.

²⁷ Brahmins and Chhetris are the dominant caste/ethnic groups (of Hindu origin) in Nepal in terms of their economic, political, and also religious order. These are also known as so-called the higher caste people. For detail description of caste system in Nepal: <http://countrystudies.us/nepal/31.htm> (accessed 27 February 2010).

²⁸ Janajatis (indigenous nationalities) are generally non-Hindu ethnic groups with their distinct identities regarding religious beliefs, social practices and cultural values (Nepal Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities - NDFIN, 2009: www.nfdin.gov.np, accessed on 25 February 2010). The foundation has identified a total of 59 Janajatis and based on their geographical habitation they are grouped into four categories i.e. mountain region (17 ethnic groups), hills (24 ethnic groups), inner terai (7 ethnic groups) and terai (11 ethnic groups).

²⁹ Dalit is a word coined to denote all the so called untouchable caste groups such as Kami (blacksmiths), Damai (tailors) and Sarki (cobblers) in Nepal.

been 50-feet width and at certain distances there should have been provision of nine feet streets to connect the two 50-feet wide roads. Land for grazing animals, ponds, and graveyards, and so on, was also allocated. Later on, the allocated land was invaded by people who registered those communal lands. Generally, the roads were not disturbed, but the narrow streets, graveyards, grazing lands, and ponds were infringed. However, this land mapping exercise was not successful and its results were never published. No records were found. Nevertheless, the present settlement is based on the 1968 mapping.

In 1978, a new attempt at land registration was made. Land was redistributed as per the criteria of a maximum of two hectares per family for which some money had to be paid to the government. The amounts to be paid to the government were NPR 700 for *abbal* (the top quality land), 650 for *doyam* (medium quality land) and 500 for *sim* and *chahar* (poor quality land). Of those who used to cultivate more than two hectares, the excess land was seized during the registration. However, clever people had already transferred the excess amount in the name of other family members. Some commissions were formed, of which the Rai commission was able to distribute many certificates of land ownership. After that, another Sitoula commission provided the remaining certificates. Hence, most people have got their certificate by now.

The section below presents the narratives of early settlers and local leaders. The narratives contain information on how they got land, the history of their land, how they found this area, what the incentives to migrate were, and what their experiences were in the earlier days.

The story of RKP

RKP (72) is one of the earlier settlers and was involved in the land distribution process in the area. Before he came to this place, he used to stay at Damak, the nearby town. There was a big forest in the southwest of Damak bazaar called Barhaghare, which was attractive to both the farmers (hill migrants) and the government people. Shantabir Lama, a colonel, was given responsibility to look after the land. The farmers wanted to have the land at Barhaghare for cultivation, while Shantabir wanted it cleared for commercial use for the royal family, which he ultimately did. Even today, part of the land is a tea plantation, while other parts were used for settlements.

As RKP and his fellow farmers did not get land at Damak, they continued to explore to get land. The two leaders at the time were Hinda Bahadur Rai (HBR) and Indramani Karki (IK). They were close to the government officials; RKP referred to them as the 'king's people'. The leaders applied for permission to distribute the recently cleared forest land and establish settlements in the area.

On the day of 31 January 1962, HBR and IK with the support from local people appealed to the king Mahendra Shah who had come for a royal safari. They stopped him on the road and submitted their petition. RKP explained:

We marched on his way and blocked the motor of king Mahendra with the help of women because being males we could not go in front of the king as we feared his police. They could easily arrest us. The king asked what we wanted; we told

him that as we did not have land and that is what we wanted. (RKP, 6 August 2008)

The king then ordered to distribute land ranging from two to five *bigha* (3.3 ha) per family. As the measurement was not so precise, people had a rough idea about the amount of land they hold. RKP said:

In the beginning I had about 11 *bigha* (7.3 ha) of land. As I was one of the leaders during land distribution process, I kept more land for myself. However, later on the system did not allow me to keep more than five *bigha*. (RKP, 6 August 2008)

According to RKP, there was a big Madhesi (people from the *madhes* or the *terai*) settlement in Khangta village (ward 1) and west of the VDC (ward 4). The remaining area was still forest land: the dense sal-forest (*Shorea robusta*). The hill migrants started to come to the area in 1961-62. Actually, the in-migration already started in 1959 but the high influx began in 1963 after the *Jhoda* (settlement) opened.

The story of DKP

DKP (64) is a political leader who was also involved in land distribution and registration. According to him, the forest was cleared in 1956 under the captainship of Shantabir Lama from Damak. The forest was in the name of the wife of the then reigning king. Out of the total 4,000 ha forest land, 2,000 ha alone was in Maharani Jhoda, the remaining land in Kohabara, Juropani and Gauradaha VDCs. The log-depot (the place where the logs produced from the forest were stored before they were sold out) was located at the present Dipu Chowk at Gauradaha.

DKP said there was no specific land distribution system; some people migrated from the hills just occupied the land and started its cultivation. There is a place called Dudhali in Juropani VDC where kings used to camp when they came for hunting. Once, when king Mahendra had come to the Dudhali camp, the earlier settlers of this area went to meet him and submitted their petition about the land. The king ordered to provide not more than 3.3 ha of land per family, and DKP and his fellow leaders started distributing the land here. Actually, they were already settled but then got permission from the king.

DKP told about his experiences during the entire period of the land registration and acquisition process:

There were many ups and downs during our fight for land here. I was also arrested once during the process. You know what happened? There was an informal agreement between leaders, officials involved (like the Chief District Officer and officials of the Survey Department) and the cultivators, farmers. The agreement was to collect levy of NPR 100 per *bigha* land from the farmers that was supposed to be provided to the officials as bribe so that the land would be registered as *doyam* or *sim* (even though it would have the *abbal* characteristics) to pay less tax. Some surplus land would also have been registered. So, they agreed to collect some 600,000 rupees from 6,000 *bigha* of land, though the issue was not spelled out clearly. I was also involved in the land registration process as I was the Ward Chair then. One day I was asked to report to the district headquarters. I wondered why, but later on I discovered that the higher authority wanted to

make me aware of the situation. I was not in favour of bribery. Some farmers came to ask me whether they had to pay the charge for the land. I told them not to give money to anybody, but they could consider whether they could benefit from bribing at a later stage. It took really a long time; we had to go up to Kathmandu. However, the bribing did not work. Later on, some local leaders collected bribes from some farmers personally, but it was not as common as planned. (DKP, 10 August 2008)

Asked about what people drove to migrate to this place, he said:

People came to this place in search of food. They did not have enough food (rice) in the hills. Agriculture was not so developed. Most of them first went to Burma, Manipur and Assam. Later on, they stopped going there due to political problems in India and Burma. Those who were already there, returned to Nepal. They did not go back to the hills but came to the *terai* instead, like here where agriculture was good and land was still unoccupied. (DKP, 10 August 2008)

The narratives show that there was plenty of land in the research area. However, the early settlers faced a number of problems in getting land. People came to the area in search of fertile land especially for rice cultivation. At that time, the economy was predominantly agrarian and having fertile land was not only a matter of food security, but also a status symbol.

3.4.3 The current outward move

The current scenario is entirely different. In-migration is rare, whereas out-migration is increasing. As described earlier, more than half of the households have migrant members. In terms of destination, after in-country migration, Qatar is the leading place in receiving Nepalese migrant workers, followed by Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates, and India (Table 3.1).

The ethnic variation shows that the hill groups (like Hill Brahmin-Chhetri, Hill Janajati and Hill Dalit) are dominant among the in-country migrants and in migration to the Gulf countries and Malaysia, while the Terai Janajati and Other Terai group end up staying in the country or going to India. None of the people from the Hill Dalit, Terai Janajati and the Other Terai group have migrated to Europe and America.

Table 3.1: Destination of migration according to caste/ethnic group

Destination	Caste/Ethnicity (%)					Total
	Hill Brahmin-Chhetri	Hill Janajati	Hill Dalit	Terai Janajati	Other Terai	
In country	479 (44.1)	85 (29.4)	10 (17.9)	25 (28.1)	5 (29.4)	604 (39.3)
Qatar	142 (13.1)	33 (11.4)	11 (19.6)	10 (11.2)	1 (5.9)	197 (12.8)
Malaysia	106 (9.8)	45 (15.6)	7 (12.5)	11 (12.4)	0 (0.0)	169 (11.0)
Saudi Arabia	104 (9.6)	52 (18.0)	4 (7.1)	8 (9.0)	1 (5.9)	169 (11.0)
UAE	113 (10.4)	18 (6.2)	7 (12.5)	5 (5.6)	0 (0.0)	143 (9.3)
India	64 (5.9)	19 (6.6)	10 (17.9)	22 (24.7)	8 (47.1)	123 (8.0)
Other Gulf states	42 (3.9)	21 (7.3)	6 (10.7)	7 (7.9)	1 (5.9)	77 (5.0)
Europe	12 (1.1)	3 (1.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	15 (1.0)
America	5 (0.5)	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (0.4)
Others	20 (1.8)	12 (4.2)	1 (1.8)	1 (1.1)	1 (5.9)	35 (2.3)
Total	1087 (70.7)	289 (18.8)	56 (3.6)	89 (5.8)	17 (1.1)	1538 (100)

Source: Migration assessment survey 2008

Using data from the Nepal Living Standard Survey 2003/04, Gurung (2008) outlines five forms of capital that determine the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups in the migration process: economic, human, cultural, social and geographical capital. He postulates: “The probability of migration is quite high ($p=0.208$) among the hill high caste groups. Historically, migration of hill groups has been higher than that of *terai* groups. There may be two reasons: first economic viability of hills and mountain is limited; and second, the state policies have been in favour of the hill groups. The former reason compels hill groups to look for new opportunities and the latter facilitates them to grasp the new opportunities” (Gurung, 2008: 17). He argues that social exclusion as measured by economic assets and human, cultural, social and geographical capital explains or is correlated with the migration decision and the choice of destination. This is exemplified by this study since the resource-poor Terai Janajati and Other Terai groups tend to migrate to India (Table 1). This would partly be explained by the lesser cost involved going to India and partly by the socio-political exclusion of Terai Janajati and Other Terai groups compared to Hill Brahmin-Chhetri and Hill Janajati groups.

3.4.4 Reasons for out-migration

The narratives of the earlier settlers show that they came to this place in search of a rice growing area. They saw the *terai* as their destination for life, something that would enhance their living compared to their previous life in the hills. The current population is not even the third generation but the situation has drastically changed. The sons (sometimes the grandsons) of the earlier settlers who are grown up and have economic responsibilities find that the local economy does not meet their rising expectations. They consider out-migration to make money for the future. Below, we present the narratives of two returned migrants to

show what drove them to migrate, and of some key informants to know how they are seeing labour migration in the area.

The story of JBP

JBP (38) went to Malaysia to earn money for the future of his family. After he got married he had to find ways to meet the growing requirements of his expanding family. Due to the division of the parental land among three brothers, he did not have enough land to support his family. This forced him to migrate, as there were no local jobs available. His two elder brothers had government positions. He explains his decision as follows:

I went to Malaysia in 2001 and worked there for three years. The idea of going abroad came spontaneously. What to do! I got married; the family size increased, and was running out of money. I did not go there immediately after my marriage, but after the birth of my daughter. Once the family size increased, I was pressed by the family obligations. I was afraid of my family's future security, as if they would die of hunger. I did not have any employment here and what would I do if not going out? (JBP, 2 November 2009)

The story of TBP

The situation of TBP (32) is not much different. He decided to migrate as he could not pursue his education due to a financial crisis at home. Also he had seen the examples of many people moving out:

I saw many youths going out for work at that time. The economic situation at home was not good. So, in 2000 I decided to go abroad for work and went to Saudi Arabia. I worked there for 3.5 years. Actually, I wanted to study more, at least up to the university level, but while I was in the 10+2 level, I had to face hardship to pay college fees. Then I thought if I could make some money first to continue my study later, but once I got involved in this [gold] business after my return my ambition to study has gone forever. (TBP, 12 November 2009)

These two narratives are typical of migrant workers and correspond with the version of key informants. Our conversation with DKP revealed that the most significant cause of out-migration is the low incentive from agriculture. Subsistence agriculture can hardly provide for two meals a day, but people need more than just food. DKP said:

Due to insufficient income from agriculture, people started going out for work. It is also due to lack of resources; people do not have much land, and there are no factories and industries around for employment. So they have to look for alternative sources of income. I think almost every household has migrant members. I can tell you, if remittances would stop, people would suffer from hunger. From rice (agricultural) production, food would be sufficient but other household expenses have to be met from outside income. If there is no income from off-farm or non-farm sources (mostly remittances) the farm production is hardly enough to cater for the family. (DKP, 10 August 2008)

GBP (68) is an ex-headmaster of a government school and is currently engaged as a social worker. He sees the unemployment situation, especially among the educated people, the low

salaries and the limited opportunities available in the country as the main reasons for labour out-migration. He says:

There are over 50 per cent of households with migrant members. We have to accept it, whether we like it or not. Why is the government not able to create opportunities for educated manpower? [...] If the educated migrants were employed, we would not lose the educated manpower. The establishment of private boarding schools has absorbed some manpower, but the pay scale is low. Let's face it, if a person is employed for a salary of 1,000 rupees per month, it means 33 rupees a day. You cannot imagine how they can survive! A person holding a BA or BSc degree, who has spent 15 years on education, think about yourself, can you work for a private boarding school for 1,000 rupees a month? (GBP, 4 November 2009)

The descriptions above elucidate the reasons for out-migration in the research area. The respondents have articulated an increased family size against decreasing landholdings, few off-farm or non-farm income-earning opportunities, low outputs from agriculture, and the rising expectations of the younger generation. On top of that, the situation of increased unemployment among educated people results in increased labour out-migration.

The descriptions are supported by the household survey data (Table 3.2). A total of 135 households with migrant members reported the reasons for their decision to migrate. The respondents were asked to rank the reasons for out-migration. Table 3.2 shows that among the six reasons mentioned, unemployment ranks first (24.2%): about 30 per cent reported unemployment as the first reason, 23 per cent as second reason, and 20 per cent as third reason.

Table 3.2: Reasons for out-migration

Reasons	Number of migrants (%)			Total
	As first reason	As second reason	As third reason	
Unemployment	40 (29.6)	31 (23.0)	27 (20.0)	98 (24.2)
Low agricultural income	29 (21.5)	33 (24.4)	27 (20.0)	89 (22.0)
Increased debt	33 (24.4)	20 (14.8)	15 (11.1)	68 (16.8)
Increased family size	12 (8.9)	18 (13.3)	23 (17.0)	53 (13.1)
Local income unsatisfactory	9 (6.7)	16 (11.9)	24 (17.8)	49 (12.1)
Capital formation	6 (4.4)	10 (7.4)	17 (12.6)	33 (8.1)
Keen on foreign experience	6 (4.4)	7 (5.2)	2 (1.5)	15 (3.7)
Total	135 (100.0)	135 (100.0)	135 (100.0)	405 (100.0)

Source: Household survey 2009

It is evident that the most frequently mentioned reasons for out-migration relate to livelihood and income from agriculture. When family size increases, people need to have more living expenses, which, coupled with unemployment and low agricultural income, ultimately leads to indebtedness. They may eventually get trapped in the vicious circle of

poverty if they would not find alternatives. In such a situation, land fragmentation further contributes to the problem. “In Nepal, inheritance of land property passes through the male line. The existing social system of equal inheritance of land amongst all sons has created fragmentation and increased sub-division of household plots to the extent that land sizes are progressively decreased and become insufficient to provide subsistence” (Regmi, 1994: 74). In a rural setting like the research area, if a household has little land, it has to diversify its livelihood activities by engaging in off-farm and non-farm activities like employment and business. However, if those opportunities are also limited, people try to find their way outside their home, which exactly what is happening. Moreover, there are aspirations of having modern consumer goods (such as expensive mobile phones, a big-screen coloured television, CD/DVD player, digital camera, etc.), and these would be hard to realise from the local small-scale employment.

In the research area, the average landholding per household is 0.8 ha. Over 45 per cent of households own less than 0.5 ha of land, 49.2 per cent own 0.5 to two ha and only 5.3 per cent own more than two hectares. Out of 262 landholding households (based on the household survey data), 51 per cent have migrant members. Among the 134 migrant households, only 43 per cent have less than 0.5 ha of land, 57 per cent have more than 0.5 ha of land. A significantly positive correlation (Pearson correlation coefficient=0.232, $p<0.001$) between landholding size and out-migration was found: the higher the landholding size the higher the out-migration rate. It is a clear shift from the migration motive of poverty and deprivation to the motive of upward mobility and improve the quality of life.

3.4.5 Return migrants: a source of inspiration

Out of 20 returned migrants, seven have changed their means of living after return. Three started a business in the local market centres, while two became bus drivers. Interestingly, two migrants, who were not involved in agriculture before, started doing agriculture upon return. The remaining 13 migrants continued working in agriculture. Though the returnees are few in number, their way of living after migration or the lifestyle of the members at migrant households are important motivating factors for the prospective migrants. The modern gadgets they own and their changed lifestyle become a source of inspiration. A calculation of the possession of five important modern gadgets (colour television set, mobile phone, CD/DVD player and digital camera) shows a higher proportion of ownership by migrant households than non-migrants (Table 3.3). Not only the possession per se but the brands and prices count. In most cases, migrant households possess the more expensive brands.

Table 3.3: Possession of modern gadgets by households

Gadgets	Households with gadgets (%)		
	Migrant	Non-migrant	Total
Colour television set	112 (56.9)	85 (43.1)	197 (71.1)
Mobile phone	93 (55.4)	75 (44.6)	168 (60.6)
CD/DVD player	44 (58.7)	31 (41.3)	75 (27.2)
Digital camera	31 (67.4)	15 (32.6)	46 (16.6)

Source: Household survey 2009

The following excerpts from focus group discussion give an impression of the differences in life-style between migrant and non-migrant households.

A simple example, many people you see around with expensive mobile phones are from migrant households. The mobile phones are either sent by migrant workers or bought from the money they sent. Ordinary people are not able to buy such expensive mobiles. (SGS, 24, FGD, 9 November 2009)

Labour migration has modernised people. For example, those who did not have many material things before now own expensive appliances at home. Those who even did not have black and white television now possess a colour television set, expensive mobiles, and so on. (YBK, 21, FGD, 9 November 2009)

Hence, it is important to note that increased possession of modern gadgets and a desired advanced lifestyle that migrant households may attain also puts pressure on others to move. Taking an example from Thai rural-urban migration, Mills (1997) concludes that commodity consumption is an important element in migration decisions. "Migrants' consumption is not simply a reflection of material interests or economic needs but is also a cultural process, engaging powerful if often conflicting cultural discourses about family relations, gender roles and [Thai] construction of modernity" (Mills, 1997: 54).

3.5 Synthesis and Conclusion

Even though the processes of in- and out-migration in the *terai*, in particular in Jhapa district and the research area have been going on for a long time, the area was always considered a place of destination. The motivation for migrating to the *terai* was the search for fertile rice-producing land. It is clear that the in-migration to the area still continues, but now out-migration is becoming more important to pursue a better quality of living. So, from being a migrant-receiving area, the *terai* is increasingly becoming a migrant-sending area.

Unemployment, low income from agriculture against the growing aspirations of the modernised younger members in the family, lack of local opportunities and low incentive for educated manpower are the main reasons for increasing out-migration in research area. In addition, the advanced lifestyle and consumption of modern gadgets by migrant families are becoming driving forces for migration. It means migration is occurring not only because of poverty but also to upgrade livelihoods and have a better life. Out-migration is no longer restricted to the deprived people as depicted by conventional literature but is a means for

upward mobility of relatively well-off households. In other words, the better opportunities in the place of destination are still a pull factor, but the enhancement of future livelihood security and the pursuit of another lifestyle have become push factors.

In a situation of extensive male out-migration, one of the significant changes, especially in relation to Nepalese culture, is the shift in gender roles. Male out-migration results in a relative increase of the local female population and (*de facto*) female-headed households. Consequently, women intensify their involvement in agriculture and respond to economic opportunities in agriculture, as they increasingly shoulder the responsibility for household survival (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2008). Such women's labour participation is subject to household arrangement: higher in case of (*de facto*) female-headed households than in cases where the migrant's wife lives with in-laws. Women who are *de facto* head of households can exercise more autonomy in decision making and control over their mobility, as in the latter case women are still under patriarchal control, not by their husbands but by their fathers-in-law (Gartaula et al., 2010). However, Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) report a decreased labour participation of women among migrant households. This seems contradictory, but latter study focuses on women's participation in the wage labour market, while our study focuses on women's labour participation in agriculture to continue the agricultural activities in the absence of male members of the household.

The results contradict the image of migration as just a coping strategy of the poor (Gill, 2003) and a shameful and painful experience (Golay, 2006; Shrestha, 1988). However, it corresponds to the notion of looking at migration as a strategy to improve the living standards (Niehof, 2004) of relatively better-off households, since the poorest households are usually excluded from the process (De Haas, 2005). Moreover, labour out-migration is becoming a cultural affair rather than an economic decision (Rigg, 2007).

Finally, the chapter dealt with the three types of population flows. First, it discussed the history of Nepal as an arena of population movement (the *longue durée*), as exemplified by the Gorkhas, and the across border flows with India as an effect of the open border between Nepal and India. Second, it discussed the gradual opening up of the *terai*, leading to the hills-*terai* movement, especially after the eradication of malaria, which concerns the recent history. The third flow comprises the current outward flow of population as an individual migration for work, the contemporary situation. The chapter focused especially on the second and the third population movements with the changing motives and inspiration of the population involved, while the first one rendered the historical setting that shows population movement has been of all times in Nepal. We were able to show that poverty and deprivation as the motives for migration have been changed to the aspirations for upward mobility of the actors involved, the shift of an area from being a receiving to becoming a sending area, and the emergence of lifestyle motives for migration. Hence, it is concluded that like movements of people, their motives for moving are also not static and cannot be taken for granted.

Shifting perceptions of food security and land



*Left: A traditional grain storage, installed outside the house
Right: A utensil shop of a returned migrant at the nearby market*

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ABSTRACT

Nepal is undergoing a number of changes with implications for people's livelihood and perceptions of food and livelihood security. Labour out-migration is inducing social, economic and cultural changes that are affecting the everyday life of the people left behind. This chapter presents the changing perceptions of agricultural land for a secure living and meaning given to food security by subsequent generations of people in an agrarian society in the eastern *terai*. In the *terai*, most households are food secure because of access to land and rice farming, but the valuation of land for food security is changing due to increased labour out-migration and a changing attitude of the younger generation towards agriculture as a 'dirty' job. Although the younger people acknowledge the cultural and social significance of farming and the social status of having land, they do not want to work on it. If this ambivalence persists, there is a potential risk of reduction in farm-based food production, which may have consequences for safeguarding national food security in the long run. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied for data collection, using techniques like survey, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

Keywords: Labour out-migration, Agriculture, Food security, Generations, Nepal

4.1 Introduction

Nepal is experiencing social, economic and cultural transformation resulting in remarkable changes in the meanings attached to agricultural land and food security. Labour out-migration is one of the important driving forces of such changes. Although Nepali migrants have been sending their earnings to their families for about 200 years (Adhikari, 2006), the growth of labour out-migration in the past few decades is unprecedented (Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme and Wyss, 2005). The migrated population has increased from about 88,000 in 1942 (cf. Kansakar, 1984) to more than four million in 2008 (The World Bank, 2009). In 2008/09, remittances contributed to about 30 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (The World Bank, 2009). Out-migration in Nepal is mostly transnational: 77 per cent to India and 15 per cent to the Gulf countries (CBS, 2001). While almost half of the world's migrant population is female (Ramirez et al., 2005), in Nepal 90 per cent is male (CBS, 2004).

In labour out-migration, the loss of labour and subsequent infusion of remittances greatly affects land, agriculture and food security in the source communities. Some studies postulate that labour migration undermines agricultural development and leads to loss of labour and abandonment of the agricultural sector because majority of remittances are spent on basic needs, education, health and conspicuous consumption. However, the literature also shows that remittances overcome labour shortfalls and provide capital inputs to agricultural improvement (Durand et al., 1996; Jokisch, 2002). At the same time, all over the world labour out-migration is an important strategy to enhance livelihood security of farming households (Adger et al., 2002; De Haan et al., 2002; Lipton, 1980). Since food security is an aspect of livelihood security (Frankenberger and McCaston, 1998), labour out-migration can be seen as a strategy to increase household food security. The common definition of food security is 'secure access at all times to sufficient food for a healthy life' (Maxwell and Frankenberger, 1992: 8), but subjective meanings and sociocultural manifestations of food security are equally important (Balatibat, 2004; Den Hartog et al., 2006). However, these latter aspects seem to be insufficiently acknowledged in the literature. Likewise, the

contemporary literature shows a narrow focus on poor, vulnerable, and food insecure households, while also food secure households attach certain meanings to food security.

This chapter aims to shed light on how different social groups perceive the significance of land for food security in Jhapa district, a district with a high out-migration rate, located in south-eastern Nepal. We show how people perceive the importance of agricultural land for food security and how this is changing over time between generations. We also consider variations among socioeconomic and caste/ethnic groups, but the main focus will be on the intergenerational differences.

The conventional way of looking at food security uses the perspective of its physical availability and accessibility (Maxwell, 1996; Maxwell and Frankenberger, 1992; Migotto et al., 2005), relating accessibility to entitlements (Sen, 1981). Starting from this, we then show the changing perceptions of food security across the generations, from (agricultural) land as a primary means to produce food to getting access to food from other sources, yet keeping land as a status symbol. These local perceptions are viewed in the light of two government policy papers: the Agricultural Perspective Plan (APP) – 1995³⁰ and the Foreign Employment Act (FEA) – 2007³¹, which have implications for livelihood generation and food security under conditions of labour out-migration. The former envisions development as primarily based on agriculture and natural resources, while the latter recognises the significance of remittances as an important element for development (cf. Sharma, 2008). Indeed, Nepal's conventional development discourse with its centrality on agriculture and natural resources is shifting towards the significance of people's mobility in generating livelihood and attaining food security. Through this chapter we invite researchers and policy makers to think about the future of Nepal's food security where male adults from land-owning households are migrating out and younger people look down on agriculture as a profession.

4.2 Land, migration and food security

Land is not only a natural resource, but also a social, economic, political and cultural resource, important for generating a livelihood. It is both a means of production and a status symbol, determining to a great extent one's chances of a better living in rural communities. In Nepal, the distribution and ownership of land is greatly skewed according to class, gender and ethnicity (Upreti, 2008b). Land has a complicated and multidimensional relationship with the phenomenon of migration. Scarcity of land is a push factor for people to migrate to other areas where there is plenty of land (Gartaula and Niehof, 2010), while the remittances may be invested in land on return. Moreover, Gartaula and Niehof (2010) argue that not only people move but that also their motives for moving are not static. According to them, while the motivation of earlier migration to the Nepal's *terai* region was the search for agricultural land, contemporary out-migration from the *terai* is inspired by the aspirations of upward mobility and a better quality of life.

Labour migration shows a variety of movements of individuals from rural to urban areas within and across country boundaries (Skeldon, 1997; Spaan, 1999). In this chapter, labour out-migration is the movement of individuals or groups of individuals to live

³⁰ The APP is the 20-year plan of the government of Nepal supported by Asian Development Bank (ADB) aiming to increase agricultural productivity, expand employment opportunity in agriculture, transform subsistence based agriculture to commercial one, and make agriculture as a precondition to economic transformation and prestigious occupation (Cameron, 1998).

³¹ The Foreign Employment Act aims "to make foreign employment business safe, managed and decent, and protect the rights and interests of workers who go for foreign employment and the foreign employment entrepreneurs, while promoting that business" (GON, 2007: 1).

temporarily away from home for the purpose of working and earning money, not for purposes like study or marriage. Migrant households are defined as households with at least one member absent for at least six months during the past five years to work elsewhere. Labour out-migration comprises two simultaneous processes: labour goes out and remittances come in. Remittances can have productive and consumptive uses, both relating to household food security. Productive use aims at longer-term security, whereas consumptive use satisfies immediate needs. The way remittances are spent largely depends on whether people find it important to spend them on immediate consumption or invest them for long-term productive use. The literature shows different uses of remittances pertaining to attaining food security. In Ecuador, for example, households invest remittances in agriculture. Few spend remittances on purchasing agricultural inputs, while the majority buy agricultural land (Jokisch, 2002). Mexican migrants tend to improve their housing back home instead of investing remittances in agricultural improvement (Durand et al., 1996). Similarly, De Brauw and Rozelle (2008) found a significant relationship between migration and investment in housing and other consumer durables in rural China.

Food security is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon comprising social purposes and cultural meanings (Den Hartog et al., 2006; Niehof, 2010). Moreover, objective indicators of food security do not necessarily correspond to how people value food and perceive food security. Balatibat (2004) compared different meanings of food security for men and women in coastal and lowland areas in the Philippines. Migotto et al. (2005) compared objective indicators with subjective perceptions of food consumption adequacy. Maxwell and Frankenberger (1992: 4) distinguish four conceptual categories of food security: i) sufficiency of food, defined mainly as the calories needed for an active, healthy life; ii) access to food, defined by entitlements to produce, purchase or exchange food or receive it as a gift; iii) security, defined as the balance between vulnerability, risk and insurance; and iv) according to time, where food insecurity can be chronic, transitory or cyclical. Common to all these aspects is the emphasis on availability of and access to food, which can be acquired either from own production or from purchase, exchange, borrowing of food and receiving food gifts. The study of food security has shifted its focus from the availability and access at regional or national levels to household-level access to food (Niehof, 2010). Since the seminal work of Sen (1981) there have been simultaneous shifts in the discourse from a supply orientation to one emphasising distribution and access through entitlements.

In the wake of modernisation processes and urbanisation, food provision by own production declined and the acquisition of food by other means increased. This chapter is framed within the changing social, cultural and policy contexts that act upon people's livelihood practices and access to food, which shows a shift from an agriculture-based economy to an economy based on flows of remittances and non-agricultural sources of income. Using this framework, we investigate how land, food security and labour out-migration, and the relationships between them are perceived differently by different social groups and across the generations, and how land acquires a 'new' meaning. By doing so, we advance the works of Sen (1981), Maxwell and Frankenberger (1992), Balatibat (2004), and Migotto et al. (2005) to define food security by incorporating the perceptions about accessing food among different social groups in the context of societal change.

4.3 Research location and methods

Jhapa district was selected because of its dynamic history of in- and out-migration and its location in the *terai* region, considered the granary of the country. Among the three ecological zones of Nepal (high mountain, mid hills and the *terai*), the *terai* is an extension of

the flooding plain of Ganges River in India. The *terai* is good for lowland rice-based agriculture. Hence, food security in Jhapa district is an important issue because changes in food production in the *terai* may have a direct impact on the overall food production of the country in the long run.

Within Jhapa district, Maharani Jhoda Village Development Committee (VDC) was the actual location of the research. Among the 47 VDCs and three municipalities of the district, Maharani Jhoda has a high incidence of out-migration. The available historical sources indicate that the settlement dates from 1912-13. At that time, there were few patches of settlements in the area. In-migration increased since the government opened up the *terai* for settlement after the eradication of malaria in the late 1950s. While in-migration continued, out-migration began in the mid-1970s and has been increasing ever since. However, the nature of in- and out-migration is different: in-migration took the form of permanent family migration, while out-migration is temporary individual labour out-migration. Maharani Jhoda has a population of 10,589 and counts about 1980 households (DDC, 2006). It is located at 56 kilometres west of the district headquarters and 550 kilometres east of the country's capital of Kathmandu. There are two market places in Maharani Jhoda: Doramari and School Chaun Bazaar. The latter is also the VDC centre where the VDC office and other governmental offices are situated. Two days a week, on market day people go to the market, even if they do not have anything to buy or sell. This is not just a custom, but also an indication of unemployment. In fact, the growth of these market centres has attracted manpower agencies and money transfer organisations to establish their offices, which facilitates the labour out-migration process.

Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were applied in this study. Qualitative data were collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions and group interviews, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, whereas quantitative data were collected through a survey. The fieldwork started in June 2008 and consisted of three partly overlapping phases. The first phase mainly comprised a migration assessment survey among 1,791 households (90 per cent of the households of Maharani Jhoda VDC). The main purpose of this survey was to prepare a sampling frame for the household survey conducted in the second phase (Feb-May 2009). The household survey was carried out among 277 households using stratified random sampling. In the third phase (Aug-Dec 2009), we interviewed 26 persons, comprising older and younger people, wives of migrant workers, returned migrants, local political leaders, and early settlers as key informants to gain in-depth knowledge and elicit subjective experience. We have used parts of these interviews for this chapter. Excel and PASW Statistics 17.0 were used for quantitative data analysis.

The sampled households were categorized on the basis of migration status, household headship, age of the household head and caste/ethnicity, to compare landholding size and food supply from own production. Table 4.1 presents the categories of households used for the quantitative analysis. We used qualitative content analysis techniques for analysing the qualitative data to provide subjective perception of respondents on land and food security. Qualitative content analysis is specifically used for subjective interpretation of the text data grounded on a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns to produce descriptions or typologies, along with expressions from subjects reflecting how they view their social world (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009).

Table 4.1: Household categories

Characteristics	N	%
Migration		
Yes	136	49.1
No	141	50.9
Household headship		
Male headed	198	71.5
<i>De-jure</i> female headed	34	12.3
<i>De facto</i> female headed	45	16.2
Age household head		
≤40 years	77	27.8
41-64 years	140	50.5
≥65 years	60	21.7
Caste/ethnicity		
Hill Brahmin/Chhetri	157	56.7
Hill Janajati	59	21.3
Hill Dalit	11	4.0
Terai Janajati	34	12.3
Other Terai	16	5.8
Total	277	100.0

Source: Household survey 2009

4.4 Results and Discussion

We first present the quantitative results, focusing on the aspects of availability and accessibility of food in relation to landholding, agriculture and market access to food in the research area. The qualitative results address the subjective perceptions of the value of agriculture and agricultural land for food security.

4.4.1 Respondent characteristics

The household survey covered 277 households and 1581 persons (average household size 5.7). For migrant households, the average household size was 6.3, for non-migrant households it was 5.1. The average size of younger households (age household head ≤40 years) was the lowest: 4.5, compared to households with heads aged 41-64 years: 6.1 and those aged 65 and above: 6.3. Likewise, the Hill Janajati group was found to have the highest number of household members: 6.2, followed by the Hill Brahmin Chhetri: 5.7, the Hill Dalit and the Other Terai: 5.3, and the Terai Janajati: 5.2. Among the 244 absent household members (0.9 per household), 189 (77.5 per cent) have migrated for work. Seventy-one per cent of the households were male-headed, 12.3 per cent were *de-jure* female-headed and 16.2 per cent were *de facto* female-headed households. Average age of the household head was 52 ranging from 18 to 95. It is important to note that migrants are considered household members.

4.4.2 Landholding and agriculture

Almost three-quarters (71.8%) of the sample households have land for both agriculture and residential purposes (referred to as total land in this chapter), while 22.7 per cent only have residential land and 5.4 per cent have no land at all. Average total landholding size per household is 0.80 ha, ranging from 0.008 to 3.99 ha. For agricultural landholding, the average is 0.94 ha ranging from 0.06 to 3.33 ha. Table 4.2 presents the distribution of total and agricultural landholding among land-owning households per category. As 15 households were landless, the total number of households with land is 262. Of those households, 63 did not have agricultural land, leaving 199 households with agricultural land.

Table 4.2: Landholding by household type

Household type	Total land (ha)			Agricultural land (ha)		
	Mean	SD	N (%)	Mean	SD	N (%)
Migration						
Yes	0.83	0.76	134 (51.1)	0.91	0.68	108 (54.3)
No	0.77	0.77	128 (48.9)	0.97	0.69	91 (45.7)
Total	0.80	0.76	262 (100.0)	0.94	0.68	199 (100.0)
p-value	>0.05			>0.05		
F-ratio	0.344			0.349		
Age group						
≤40 years	0.38	0.39	72 (27.5)	0.51	0.36	47 (23.6)
41-64 years	0.83	0.76	132 (50.4)	0.95	0.66	102 (51.3)
≥65 years	1.24	0.86	58 (22.1)	1.31	0.74	50 (25.1)
Total	0.80	0.76	262 (100.0)	0.94	0.68	199 (100.0)
p-value	<0.001			<0.001		
F-ratio	23.673			20.163		
Caste/Ethnicity						
Hill Brahmin/ Chhetri	0.97	0.80	152 (58.0)	0.98	0.72	134 (51.1)
Hill Janajati	0.82	0.66	55 (21.0)	0.95	0.55	43 (16.4)
Hill Dalit	0.09	0.15	10 (3.8)	0.22	0.21	3 (1.1)
Terai Janajati	0.45	0.64	32 (12.2)	0.74	0.63	17 (6.5)
Other Terai	0.08	0.09	13 (5.0)	0.18	0.12	2 (0.8)
Total	0.80	0.76	262 (100.0)	0.94	0.68	199 (100.0)
p-value	<0.001			>0.05		
F-ratio	9.621			2.019		

Note: The average of total landholding size appears to be less than the average agricultural landholding because 63 households do not have agricultural land. The size of residential land is generally smaller than that of agricultural land, which depresses the mean value of total landholding size because of the higher frequency of households without agricultural land.

Source: Household survey 2009

However, the differences are not statistically significant. The highly significant results on the variation of landholding size according to age of the household head indicate that younger households own less land than older households. The ratio of agricultural land to total land

is 0.65 among younger households (age household head ≤ 40), while it is 0.77 for the age group 41-64 and 0.86 for those aged 65 and above. The intergenerational differences can be explained by land fragmentation as a result of the inheritance system that leads to a declining size per generation. Regarding ethnicity, the Hill Brahmin/Chhetri group owns more land than the other groups. This result is in line with the group's political and historical dominance in the state machinery, which is reflected in their historical access to land and capital, more than that of other caste/ethnic groups (Upreti, 2008b).

To see whether there is an association between landholding and household types (including household size) we performed a correlation analysis. The correlation matrix presented in Table 4.3 shows that landholding is positively correlated with household size and age of household head, while it is negatively correlated with sex of the household head and caste/ethnicity. A positive, though not significant, correlation of migration with total landholding and negative with agricultural landholding seems to indicate that migrant households tend to buy residential land.

Table 4.3: Correlations of landholding size with selected variables

Variables	Pearson Correlation Coefficient			
	Total land	N	Agricultural land	N
Household size	0.417**	262	0.384**	199
Age household head	0.401**	262	0.410**	199
Sex household head (0= <i>de-jure</i> female, 1=male, 2= <i>de facto</i> female)	-0.217**	262	-0.270**	199
Migration status (1=Yes, 0=No)	0.036	262	-0.042	199
Caste/Ethnicity (1=Hill Brahmin/Chhetri, 0=Other ethnic groups)	0.263**	262	0.103	199

** $p < 0.01$

Source: Household survey 2009

More than 80 per cent of the households reported agriculture as the primary means of living, while 10.1 per cent depend on wage labour, 6.5 per cent on local business, and 2.2 per cent on the service sector. None of the respondents reported foreign employment as their primary source of income. As a secondary source of income, however, over 40 per cent households received remittances from their migrant members in the previous year. Though most of the respondents said to be farmers, the contribution of other sources to their livelihood has become increasingly important. Roa (2007) also reports that in her research area (in the Philippines) farming households engage in a mix of off-farm and non-farm work, such as seasonal and part-time work and part- or full-time migration. Although people say they are farmers, in fact their livelihood significantly depends on other sources of income. Hence, being a farmer (or fisherman, as in Roa's study) is not only a means of living, but also an identity. This would also explain why having land contributes to social status.

The wetland rain-fed rice-based cropping system is dominant in the study area. There is no surface irrigation system, but over 50 per cent households own motor pumps to draw water from underground bore-holes installed in their farms. Irrigation water from bore-holes is needed mainly for spring season rice (April-June) and other winter season crops like wheat, hybrid maize, mustard, potato, and green vegetables. Summer (June-August) is the rainy

season. It is the main season for rice cultivation, during which the water demand can be met by natural streams or small irrigation channels dug by the farmers themselves.

4.4.3 Food security: production and access

Rice is the staple food, even to the extent that rice is used as a metaphor for food. Not having rice to eat is considered not having proper food, no matter whatever other food may be available. Food security in terms of production of and access to rice does not seem to be a problem in the research area, considering both exogenous and endogenous factors. By endogenous factors we mean those factors that play a role in the farming system and household income generation. Exogenous factors refer to connections of households with the outside world. We estimated the share of five main food crops grown in the area. Out of 376 ha of land covered by the five main crops in the year prior to the survey, almost three-quarters (72%) was used for main-season rice and another 16 per cent for spring-season rice (Figure 4.1).

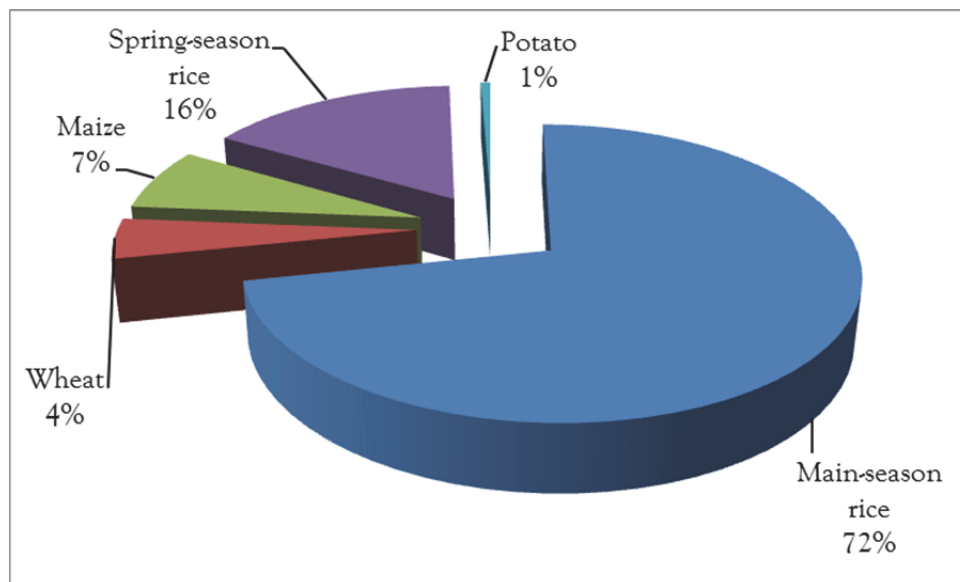


Figure 4.1: Land covered by five main crops in the year prior to the survey.

Source: Household survey 2009

Looking at the endogenous picture first, data show that over 75 per cent of the households can produce food for the year-round consumption. Table 4.4 provides a more detailed overview with variations according to household type: migrant, older generation and Hill Brahmin/ Chhetri households supply more food from own production than non-migrant, younger generation, and other caste/ethnic group households. Among the 67 households not producing enough for own consumption, about 57 per cent reported that they compensate from remittances, whereas 19 per cent depend on local trade and businesses, and 24 per cent manage their food from wages or salary.

Table 4.4: Food supply from own production by household type

Household type	Food supply from own production (%)						Total
	12 months and more	10-12 months	7-9 months	4-6 months	3 months and less		
Migration							
Yes	75 (49.7)	36 (61.0)	8 (50.0)	6 (54.5)	11 (27.5)		136 (49.1)
No	76 (50.3)	23 (39.0)	8 (50.0)	5 (45.5)	29 (72.5)		141 (50.9)
Pearson Chi-Square = 10.97, $p < 0.05$							
Age group							
≤40 years	26 (17.2)	17 (28.8)	7 (43.8)	8 (72.7)	19 (47.5)		77 (27.8)
≥41 years	125 (82.8)	42 (71.2)	9 (56.2)	3 (27.3)	21 (52.5)		200 (72.2)
Pearson Chi-Square = 29.28, $p < 0.001$							
Caste/Ethnicity							
Hill Brahmin/-Chhetri	103 (68.2)	38 (64.4)	4 (25.0)	5 (45.5)	7 (17.5)		157 (56.7)
Other ethnic groups	48 (31.8)	21 (35.6)	12 (75.0)	6 (54.5)	33 (82.5)		120 (43.3)
Pearson Chi-Square = 41.72, $p < 0.001$							
Total	151 (54.5)	59 (21.3)	16 (5.8)	11 (4.0)	40 (14.4)		277 (100.0)

Source: Household survey 2009

Comparing households based on landholding size and food supply from own production, interesting patterns can be observed. Firstly, the greater the landholding size, the higher the food supply and the higher the tendency of out-migration. While the former can be expected, the latter contradicts the notion of migration as a last-resort livelihood option for the landless poor (Gill, 2003; Golay, 2006; Shrestha, 1988) and supports the notion of migration as a voluntary strategy to pursue a better quality of life (Niehof, 2004). The findings are also in line with the argument of a disjuncture on the authoritative discourse of viewing migration as problem and migrants as aberrant, but see migration as the way of living of the actors involved (Sharma, 2008). Secondly, the younger households have lesser access to own production compared to older households, which is partly explained by their smaller landholding size and their disorientation towards agriculture, which is explained in detail in the relevant section below.

To illustrate the influence of exogenous factors, we present a section from the fieldwork diary of the first author:

In the afternoon, I went to School Choun to observe haat bazaar (open-market). It was market day. The market was getting busier compared to the previous market days. Many people came to do shopping or just to visit. This was because by now almost all households had finished rice transplanting. After *maijaro* [the last day of rice transplanting of the season], people like to go to haat bazaar, to meet friends and buy provisioning for their household needs. (Fieldwork diary, 8 August 2008)

This section of the diary shows the importance of the market in the research area. Men and women habitually go to market centres at regular intervals. On market days, most of the items sold are food items, especially vegetables, meat and fish. As we can see in the two pictures in Figure 4.2, people go and buy their necessities at open-air stalls in the market. The first picture shows the kinds of food items (seasonal vegetables) available in the market and the second shows the interaction between a seller and her customers.



Figure 4.2: Friday market at School Choun bazaar.

The circulation of food items has become easy due to good connections with other market centres. In the VDC, School Choun is the main meeting point of villagers. Since the time of its establishment in the mid-twentieth century, the market has undergone many changes in terms of accessibility. The area can be accessed by a gravel road and there is a bus service to Damak, a bigger town and a regional centre that connects to the main cities of the country through the east-west highway. It takes about 30 minutes by bus to reach Damak from School Choun.

4.4.4 Agricultural values and food security

During the past 20 years, the value of agricultural work and agricultural land has been changing. Here we present the views of people from different age groups. Case 1 shows the interface between a father and his sons of the same household based on several interviews with them. Case 2 is about a resource-poor household where remittances have been contributing significantly to household food security. Case 3 pictures an older couple, who values agriculture as the only secure means of accessing food. Finally, we present an excerpt from a focus group discussion with younger men, who are evidently caught in a dilemma.

Case 1: A matter of choice: agricultural and residential land in a well-to-do household

DB (63), father of six sons and three daughters, lives with his wife and the wives of his two migrant sons. All of his sons have worked outside the village at least once in their life. Currently, five still work abroad, while one has retired from the Nepal Army in 2007. DB would like his sons and grandsons to escape the hardships he experienced. He wants the best investment of the remittances sent by his sons, which for him means investing remittances in *khet* (agricultural land), so that in the future he can distribute sufficient land among his sons to run their households. This is why the family has more than five hectares of land now,

compared to less than two hectares before the first son migrated in 1992. But some of his sons are no longer interested in investing their remittances in agricultural land. The fifth son said:

I would never think of continuing agriculture after my final return. I don't like to do this dirty job anymore. I have bought a piece of *ghaderi* (residential land) at Kakadbhitta [a town nearby Indian border, about 60 km northeast of the research area] where I can run a business later on. (DPB, 2 October 2008)

However, till now, DB has not listened to his sons because he wanted to make sure each son will have at least one *bigha* (0.66 ha). As he said, he is not going to take land with him when he dies. He only wants each son to have sufficient land to live on.

Apart from their father's investment in agricultural land, the sons have their own investments in residential plots. For example, the first and second sons bought one plot each in Gauradaha; the third son has built his own house at Surunga; the fifth son has just bought a plot in Kakadbhitta; and the fourth son was looking for a plot somewhere in Gauradaha at the time of fieldwork. The last son is new in this business, but he will also eventually buy his own plot somewhere. Investment in a residential plot is not just to build a house, but also to get high returns of the remittances because the price of residential land is increasing unlike that of agricultural land. DB's second son said:

For the plots we bought at Gauradaha three years ago, we paid 250,000 rupees per *kaththa*, but now they can be sold for more than 800,000 rupees per *kaththa*. Sometimes, I feel like why did we buy so much of agricultural land instead of buying several residential plots in town? (SBR, 21 April 2009)

Case 2: Not a matter of choice: a resource-poor migrant household

What to buy and what not to buy is not so much an issue for resource-poor farmers, as they have very little choice. As a *de facto* female head of household, BMS (34) is living with her two children: a daughter (14) and a son (12), both studying at a private boarding school at School Choun. She wants her children to be educated as she herself did not get opportunity to go to school and is illiterate. For the last four years, her husband has been working in Qatar. Though his migration yields little surplus money, the remittances mean a lot to them. She said the following about her husband's migration and the use of remittances:

So far, I have no surplus from his earnings. I got terribly sick last year which took a huge amount of money, managed from the money he sent. I don't know what I would do if I would not have had his money last year. We had a very small house, which we replaced with this one. [...] Well, I am not sure whether my social position is getting better, but his migration is giving something to us. We were able to send our children to a private school [they used to go to the government school before] and we don't have to borrow food from others. As we don't have much land (0.17 ha) we would otherwise have to borrow money from money lenders to buy food. From his earnings, I have installed a tube-well on the farm and bought an electric water pump. Because of this, now I can grow rice twice a year, which is enough for us to eat for the whole year. (BMS, 23 December 2009)

The transcript reveals that BMS does not have much land for cultivation and depends on remittances to fulfil the needs of her family. She chose to spend remittances on paying previous debts, renovating the house, paying for her children's education and investing in a tube-well and a water pump.

Case 3: Proud to be a farmer: An older couple left behind

RKP (72) is living with his wife SKD. They have three sons and three daughters, none of them living with RKP and his wife. The daughters are living with their husbands' families, as is common in a patrilineal society. The sons are government employees, living within the country, but not with their parents. RKP says he has been suffering from diabetes, high blood pressure, and back pains, but there is no one to help him and his wife with the work. They have to manage their four hectares of agricultural land and all the domestic chores, but RKP seems to be proud of being a farmer. In response to our query about his thoughts on agriculture and the value of land, he said:

I can tell you, there is nothing bigger than agriculture. If you have land you can never go hungry. But the present generation considers agriculture a dirty job. It is obvious that working on the farm is not the neat and clean job the young people like to do. I don't understand why they don't want to be farmers. If you work hard, like when you work abroad, agriculture can give you a good living. At home they become lazy and shameful of their work, but outside they work hard whatever job they get. This is not a good mentality, in my opinion. (RKP, 6 August 2008)

Both Case 1 (DBB) and Case 3 (RKP) reveal that the older generation highly values agriculture and agricultural land. In their view, only agriculture provides a secure living, more than any other means of livelihood. The cases also indicate how remittances are spent. While it is difficult to assess the actual disbursement of remittances because household expenditure is not strictly planned and budgeted, the household survey provides indications about household expenditures related to land and agriculture. Table 4.5 presents the averages of these expenditures during the year prior to the survey per migration status of the household.

Table 4.5: Household expenditures in selected items during the year prior to the survey

Item	Migrant households			Non-migrant households		
	Mean amount (NPR)*	SD	N	Mean amount (NPR)*	SD	N
Agricultural inputs	9437.1	11343.1	120	8505.3	7699.9	113
Agric. technical services	1784.2	2357.6	76	2430.2	7079.8	79
Technology (irrigation, tube-well, motor-pumps)	4045.9	7204.1	95	3084.6	3040.2	87
Purchasing agricultural land	175000.0	106066.0	2	172500.0	83815.3	4
Purchasing residential land	216153.8	153489.3	13	192857.1	126057.4	7
Total	169814.3	130402.9	136	131941.1	251603.1	141

*1 Euro was equivalent to about NPR 100 during the fieldwork time.

Source: Household survey 2009

Table 4.5 does not show significant differences in the pattern of expenditures between migrant and non-migrant households. However, the migrant households have higher overall expenditures than the non-migrant households, which could be expected. Migrant households also spend more on agricultural inputs and technology than non-migrant households. At the same time, more migrant households than non-migrant households invested in residential land. So, the survey data present a mixed picture, showing that migrant households invest both in agriculture and in residential land. From qualitative

interviews, it transpired that migrant households are reluctant to spend remittances on day-to-day household expenditure. For example, RBG said, "Most of the time, I manage the household with my own earnings because I don't want to spend his income for household daily use. His earnings are for the big work and for the future" (RBG, 28, 12 April 2009). Another respondent said: "The money he sent is being saved in the Shubha Laxmi Cooperative at Gauradaha, which will be used to build a concrete house later on when he comes back" (KTS, 28, 22 December 2009). Both respondents are wives of migrant workers and represent the younger generation. Among the 20 respondents with whom qualitative interviews were conducted, only three bought or added agricultural land. Twelve reported to have bought a total of 21 residential plots in nearby towns, ranging from one to six plots each depending on the number of migrants in households.

Ambivalence: Excerpts from focus group discussion with younger people

To elicit the views of the younger generation, we conducted a focus group discussion with nine male adults aged 18-34 (ages indicated below). All participants have an education up to School Leaving Certificate (SLC) level. Some are studying at 10+2 (higher secondary) level and others at university level. Apart from their study, they help their parents in agricultural work, but their heart is not in it. They aspire doing something else in town. Three participants are migrant workers (who were home for a visit at the time of fieldwork). They left school after SLC and went abroad to work. Here we present part of the discussion on agricultural land and food security.

Researcher: Why are the young people so demotivated about agriculture?

CMG(29): In agriculture, you work hard but get less return. In such a case, when you work hard but get little income, who would be interested to do so?

YRB(34): If you calculate investment against production from a particular plot of land there is a loss. Once you sow the seed you have to wait for some months, but if you build even a one-storey house, you will get monthly returns regularly by renting it out. That is the reason why people are so motivated to buy residential plots rather than adding to the agricultural land.

Researcher: Then, why do people need land in the first place?

CMG(29): Well, the life cycle begins and ends with land, and you ask why do we need land? It is for everything.

SJK(18): The first thing to have land is to be equal in status with your neighbours; otherwise you will not be prestigious in society. Second, to get food from it: you need to have something as a basis for your existence. If you have land you will not die of hunger. Hence, people give first priority to land. We are discussing the preference for buying residential land. But that applies only if you already have some agricultural land; if not, you would never decide to buy residential plots instead of agricultural land.

YRB(34): Yes, you are right! Those who already have agricultural land never add to it; for those who do not have agricultural land their first priority is to buy some agricultural land. They only think of residential land afterwards, but their first priority is agricultural land. If you see transactions in land business, whether it is agricultural land or residential land, the main buyers are the migrant workers.

CMG(29): If we have agricultural land we can at least get food, no matter where we stay.

Researcher: The first function of the land is for a place to stay or for food production to eat?

All: The first function is to eat, you can stay on other people's land (renting) or whatever, but if you have your own agricultural land you will not die of hunger.

YRB(34): However, now it is also the other way around, people sometimes prioritize land for residence and then think about eating.

Researcher: Now, a slightly different issue. Who are mostly involved in agriculture in this area?

SGS(24): I can see many of them are the older people.

CMG(29): The youths are also involved in agriculture, but it is not out of interest. Those youths are landless, do not have own place to live, let alone going abroad for work. They are working on other people's land because they do not have an alternative.

YBK(21): It is out of necessity. If you have to, you will do that, but the question is whether they are doing it because they want to.

YRB(34): Yes, those landless people who do not have alternatives are doing agricultural labour. But there is another group of people also doing agriculture. They are the ones who have very little land, but have many household members. They need more rice than they get from their own farm, they have to rent in others' land.

YBK(21): So, main thing is employment. If they get employed they would not be working in agriculture.

YRB(34): The agricultural sector is becoming the last choice among youths.

(FGD, Younger Men, 9 November 2009)

From the above, the reluctance of the young men towards practising agriculture is evident. A returned migrant said: "Our family was having a tough time to continue our life. Running the household was possible only with loans from money lenders. So finally, being a responsible son, I decided to go out for work" (GPP, 7 November 2009). Another returned migrant stated:

I got married and I felt more responsible towards my family and parents. I did not have any jobs here. I saw everyone in the village going out and I felt like I was the only one left in the village. I saw people coming from abroad with good money, heard stories about the good life there. I thought I should also have such experience and see how the other world is. Then I decided to migrate for work. (NAP, 6 November 2009)

GPP and NAP did not practice agriculture for a living after their return. GPP bought a bus for public transport, while NAP started a shop at School Choun, but they never took up full-time farming again. They acknowledge the cultural and social significance of farming and the social status of having land, but they do not want to work on the land. They rather want 'dry and tidy' jobs.

The young men think that the land they already have is enough to produce food for their family. If they would add more agricultural land, they fear it would remain fallow. Only those who did not have land before their migration want to buy agricultural land, just for subsistence or for social status but not as a primary means of production. The younger generation does not disregard the importance of land and wants to keep it, but – at the same time – they do not want to work on it. The cases showed that the older generation is rather positive about agriculture, as an occupation and as a reliable basis for food security. In the past, it was their destiny to find the fertile *terai* land and practice agriculture as the best alternative among available livelihood options. However, the times have changed. The younger generation does not want to confine itself to village boundaries. The sons and

grandsons of the early settlers think that the local economy does not meet their increasing demands and rising expectations.

In a study carried out elsewhere in Nepal, Sharma (2008) reports that going to India or other countries is to open up the possibilities of being modern and developed, and to demonstrate a 'modern' conception of manhood, which does not only include assuming the role of breadwinner but also migration, as a pathway to experience the outside world while sending money home for the upkeep of the family. It is a clear departure from migration as caused by economic necessity or the result of exploitation to the ideological space of development and modernity (Mills, 1997; Sharma, 2008).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed how perceptions about food security are changing over time, especially with regard to the role of agriculture and agricultural land as primary means of production. The land and remittances help those left behind to attain food security, either through investments in agricultural production or by generating sufficient economic means to buy food. Few households in the research area proved to be food insecure, but the significance of agricultural land for food security is changing. Older people believe in having agricultural land for food security as land provides rice (food), while younger people believe in access to capital through other sources to acquire food. Yet, they keep investing in land, but not for agricultural purposes. They try to get out of the 'dirty' jobs with 'no money' in agriculture. The fathers want to add agricultural land, while their sons want to buy residential plots in town.

It is likely that young people will eventually move out of agriculture, which implicates to great extent Nepal's agricultural and rural development policies. On the one hand, the APP, Nepal's key policy paper for agricultural development and food security, supports the notion of food security by own production (Cameron, 1998). On the other hand, the Foreign Employment Act, motivates people to work abroad (GON, 2007). These two contradictory policies, coupled with the perceived influence of modernity on the mind-set of youths who no longer share the traditional notion of the pivotal role of agricultural land for food security, may jeopardize agricultural development in the future. At the same time, APP paralleled the 10-year Maoist insurgency, which forced many rural youths to leave their village. The Maoist insurgency did not much affect the research area, but country-wide the spread of conflict and political instability provided an incentive for migrant workers, for whom labour migration became part and parcel of their life. This eventually contributed to the declining valuation of agriculture as a rewarding profession and agricultural land as an essential source of food security.

The observed shift in the valuation of land may threaten food security in the future, not only in the research area but also in the country as a whole, because of the rapid conversion of agricultural land into residential land, the tendency of out-migration among land-owning households, and the negative attitude of the younger generation towards agriculture. Households may be food secure also because of income from remittances, but the total acreage for agricultural production will decrease. If this trend continues there is a potential risk of a reduction total food production in the country, which in the long run may put the country's food security at risk.

Mobility of land across social and temporal spaces



Left: Women transplanting rice

Right: Agricultural land split up for residential use

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Gartaula, H. N., Visser, L. and Niehof, A., Mobility of land across social and temporal spaces in rural Nepal.

ABSTRACT

Land plays an important role in the livelihood practices of rural families. Using actor-network theory this chapter aims to highlight the dynamic relationships between people and land that lead to opposed directions of mobility. Land appears to be ‘mobile’ within and across villages, through changes in labour availability, shifting access to land, and ethnic interactions. We conclude that the social and temporal mobility of land appears to be an inseparable component of land-people relationships through time and space, especially in the context of labour out-migration. The study is based on the complementary use of qualitative and quantitative data.

Keywords: Actor-networks; Livelihood practices; Labour migration; Mobility; Nepal

5.1 Introduction

In areas where few off- or non-farm employment opportunities are available, temporary labour out-migration becomes an integral part of livelihood and people’s everyday life, though not necessarily associated with economic deprivation. De Haan et al. (2002: 39) argue, “Migration is not an atomistic reaction to economic or environmental pressure, but is embedded in societal rules and norms”. In this chapter, we are interested in the adaptation of actors in their various social networks that have encouraged them to migrate into the *terai* lowland of Nepal in the mid-20th century, and to migrate out of this area in more recent times, especially after the 1990s. Taking the Nepalese *terai* as an example, focussing on the land-people interface in different forms, the chapter will describe how land and migration are intertwined in the constitution of people’s livelihood, and how land appears to be an integral part of processes of mobility and mobilisation of people in time and space. We recognise the active role of land to create, reshape and redefine social relationships within and outside the village as a result of the social mobility of people through in- and out-migration.

We have used actor-network theory, in which human and non-human actors such as land are “not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it” (Latour, 2005: 46). Supporting this view, Law (1999: 3) explains: “It tells that entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities.” In this theory, anything that acts or causes action is considered an actor comprising both human and non-human entities and their qualities which represent their potential. In other words, an actor is endowed with a character that emerges when it interacts with other actors (Akrich and Latour, 1992 in Stalder, 1997). Problematizing the social role of land, we concur with Appadurai (1986) that things have no meanings unless they are endowed with meaning by human transactions and motivations. In order to understand the transactions we have to follow the things themselves from one temporal, spatial and social space to another, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, and their trajectories. It is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social contexts (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986). Since these approaches focus on the meanings generated by the interactions between actors and things, they help us understand the dynamic land-people relationships.

The data presented in this chapter are derived from fieldwork conducted in Maharani Jhoda VDC of Jhapa district, which is located in the eastern *terai*. The *terai* is one of the three ecological regions of Nepal (High Mountain, Mid Hills, and the *terai*) that covers the lowland flat area stretching from east to west in the southern part of the country. It is an extension of the flood plain of the Ganges River in India. Maharani Jhoda is located at the distance of 56 km west from the district headquarters, Chandragadhi, and 550 km east from the country's capital of Kathmandu.

The chapter is based on a study that adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Between February and May 2009 a household survey was carried out among 277 randomly selected households. During August - December 2009, 26 in-depth interviews were conducted with the women left behind by the labour migrants. Excel and PASW Statistics 17.0 were used for the analysis of quantitative data. Qualitative data were collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions and group interviews, in-depth interviews and participant observation, and analysed using qualitative content analysis (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009).

In the Nepalese *terai*, we cannot properly understand the social movements of people into the area or out of it without accepting the key role of the shifting sociocultural valuation of land. We therefore begin with a historical account of the meaning of land, showing how the abundance of unoccupied forest land first attracted migrants from the north-eastern hills, and how more recently the scarcity of the land drives people out to look for alternative livelihoods in a globalising environment.

5.2 Migration into the *terai*: in search of fertile land

Historically, the whole *terai* region in Nepal, including the research area, was covered by dense rain forests. Few settlements were found in and around urban centres, and land was plenty (Ojha, 2000). Land use in most of the *terai* region was forest-oriented. Before the 1950s, only small numbers of indigenous people who had developed some resistance to malaria lived in the *terai*, practicing hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation. With the eradication of malaria in the later 1950s, migration from the hills to the *terai* and from across the border of Nepal and India resulted in a dramatic rise in lowland population (Dahal, 1983; Gurung, 2001).

In the 1950s, the Nepalese government invested in roads and resettlement programs, and started logging the dense forest land of the *terai* to open up the area for settlement and agriculture. In 1953, the government officially initiated a planned resettlement program in Chitawan, one of the *terai* districts. Afterwards, there was an influx of both authorised and unauthorised settlers in the *terai* regions resulting in a large number of people resettling in the *terai* finding their ultimate refuge at the edge of the forest. This led to further ecosystem degradation. Roads opened this once remote region to the outside world and the dense sal (*Shorea* spp.) and teak (*Tectona grandis*) forests of the *terai* came under intense pressure from migrant farmers from the hills and from India (Poffenberger, 2000). Shrestha et al. (1993: 789) report comparable policies: "State attempts to utilise the frontier's land resources frequently have been promoted as a policy of population redistribution and agrarian

development.” In the physiographic³² structure of Nepal, the hills and mountains are not suited for rice production, but the *terai*, consisting of the flood plains of the Ganges River, is very suitable for rice production and lowland agriculture.

The population structure of the country shows an increased in-migration to the *terai* after the 1950s. While the average annual population growth rate for the country during the period 1952/54 - 1981 was 2.2 per cent, the *terai* experienced a growth rate of 3.34 per cent compared to 1.22 per cent in the mountains and hills. Hence, the *terai* share of the total population of Nepal increased from 34.7 per cent in 1952/54 to 48.7 per cent in 1981. During the period of 1961-1981, the *terai* experienced a 2.5 times increase in population and a 6.4 times increase in net migration, whereas the hill region was experiencing negative net migration and had a lower population growth (Gurung, 1988: 67-68). In 2001, nearly half of the total population lived here (CBS, 2001), while the *terai* covers only 17 per cent of the total land area of Nepal.

5.3 The research area and the history of the land

The settlement in Maharani Jhoda VDC started in 1912-13. People from Bihar and North Bengal states of India and some indigenous people settled in the northern and western part of Maharani Jhoda, the rest was still forest land. Not only Maharani Jhoda but the whole area including the surrounding villages was covered by sal-forest. According to the early settlers, out of the 4,000 ha of forest land that belonged to the royal family, 2,000 ha was located in Maharani Jhoda. Its history is also evident from the name of the VDC, which is derived from the word Maharani (meaning the great queen) and Jhoda (meaning the settlement after deforestation). After the deforestation, there was plenty of land available which the early migrants could occupy at no cost, while later migrants had to buy the land from the first settlers.

Local history shows that none of the ethnic groups are native to this place; some came earlier, others later in the twentieth century. The government has classified a number of ethnic groups as Janajatis considering them as native to a particular place. Janajatis are generally non-Hindu ethnic groups with distinct identities regarding religious beliefs, social practices and cultural values (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009; NFDIN, 2009). The National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) has identified a total number of 59 Janajatis in Nepal. They are grouped into four categories based on their origin: from the mountains (17 ethnic groups), from the hills (24 ethnic groups), the inner *terai* (7 ethnic groups) and the *terai* (11 ethnic groups). This ethnic description is needed to explain the social mobility of land among the ethnic groups living in Maharani Jhoda. It is also important to note that ethnically Hill Brahmin-Chhetri and Hill Dalit look similar and so do the Terai Janajati and Other Terai. Their differences relate to the caste system. In this

³² Nepal is divided into five physiographic regions running in more or less parallel bands from south to north: *terai*, siwalik (inner *terai*), mid-hill, high-hill and high-mountain (the Himalayas). Each region has a distinct climate, population, agro-ecology, and land use pattern. In some cases, only three regions as mountain, hills (mid-hill and high-hill) and the *terai* (including the inner *terai*) are distinguished.

research, we focus on the socioeconomic differences between the groups, their differential access to resources and their involvement in labour out-migration, but not their caste or ethnic differences. Furthermore, like other scholars, we use the terms caste and ethnic group interchangeably.

The household survey data on ethnic composition reveals that the majority of sampled households in Maharani Jhoda belong to the so-called high caste Hill Brahmin-Chhetri (56.7%), followed by Hill Janajati (21.3%), Terai Janajati (12.3%), Other Terai (5.8%), and Hill Dalit (4.0%). The survey also shows a high in-migration into the area, as more than three quarters of the sampled households were found to have originated from the hills. People from the hills migrated to the *terai* to look for a better living, to access fertile land for rice production, to escape the hardships of life in the hills, and also because the plain topography and better infrastructure allowed for easier mobility. However, they often did not move downhill directly, but searched for land around the Nepal-Indian border. From there, some people went up to Burma for a better living. Going to Burma started during the First World War when many Gurkhas were recruited in the British army and taken to Burma to fight. Civilians also joined them, to work in other sectors (Whelpton, 2008). Most of these people finally settled in the fertile *terai* plains to practice rice cultivation, as the following interview fragment shows:

People came to this place in search of food. They did not have enough food (rice) in the hills. Agriculture was not so well developed. Most of them did not come to this place directly, but went to Burma, Manipur and Assam. Later on, they stopped going there due to political problems in India and Burma and those who had already been there returned to Nepal, but did not go back to the hills. Instead they came to the *terai* regions like here where agriculture was good and land was fertile. (DKP, 10 August 2008)

Thus, both hill migrants and local *terai* people found their way of living in a relatively pristine environment. The earlier settlers from before the 1950s (mostly Terai Janajati) brought most tracts of land under cultivation, while later migrants (Hill Brahmin-Chhetri, Hill Janajati, and Hill Dalit) could not do so anymore. Those classified as Other Terai do not show a specific mobility pattern, but mostly they also migrated after the 1950s. The ethnic-historical differentiation implies that the Terai Janajati group originally owned large acreages of land. DKP recalls: "I remember that the father of Jia Tajpuriya had 105 *bigha* of land before" (DKP, 10 August 2008). Another key informant narrates: "Many Tajpuriyas had bigger tracts of land. Some had even more than 100 *bigha*. My father used to have more than 55 *bigha*" (BCT, 15 August 2008).

Since later migrants could not acquire much land anymore, they largely depended on economic, social and political accessibility rather than on the availability of land itself. Moreover, land acquisition after the 1960s was also limited by the government's land policy that allowed only restricted land ownership. It proved difficult to find official land distribution records of the area, but the Land Reform Act of 1964 put a ceiling of a maximum of 17 hectares of land per household for the *terai*. However, according to the early settlers this provision made little difference in the research area as not many people had more land. On 31 January 1962, King Mahendra came to Dudhali (a place nearby Maharani

Jhoda) for a royal safari. The local leaders submitted their petition for land distribution (actually they wanted legitimation of the land they had already occupied). The king then ordered to distribute land in units ranging from three to five *bigha*, depending on the family size. RKP explains how he had to give back the land he had acquired before:

I had about 11 *bigha* before. As I was involved in the land distribution process, I had reserved more land for myself. However, later on the system did not allow me to keep more than five *bigha* so I had to give back the excess land. (RKP, 6 August 2008)

At present, the average total landholding size is 0.8 ha per household with a maximum of four hectares (Table 5.1). Almost 71.8% of the surveyed households have land for both agriculture and residential purposes, while 22.7 per cent have only residential land and 5.4 per cent have no land at all.

Table 5.1: Average landholding size among ethnic groups

Ethnicity	Total land (ha)			
	Mean	SD	N	P-value†
Hill Brahmin-Chhetri	0.97	0.80	152	0.704
Hill Janajati	0.82	0.67	55	
Hill Dalit	0.09	0.15	10	0.002**
Terai Janajati	0.46	0.64	32	0.003**
Other Terai	0.08	0.09	13	<0.001***
Total	0.80	0.76	262	
F-ratio		9.62		

†Inter group differences were analysed with the help of a Tukey HSD test

, * identify effects that are significant at 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Source: Household survey 2009

Table 5.1 shows the landholding size per ethnic/caste group. Hill Brahmin-Chhetri and Hill Janajati groups hold more land than other groups. This is particularly remarkable in view of the Maharani Jhoda's settlement history where the Terai Janajati were the bigger landowners and the in-migrants from the hills subsequently bought land from them. Further analysis of the differences in the average landholding size between ethnic groups shows that the average landholding size of the Hill Brahmin-Chhetri group is not statistically different from that of the Hill Janajati group, but is significantly larger than the other groups. In other words, over the past 50 years the original Terai Janajati settlers lost much of their land to later waves of hill migrants who today appear to be the biggest landowners.

This distribution is remarkable given the historical process of accessing land. Today, the Hill Brahmin-Chhetri are better positioned qua landholding size, as almost twice as many (7.2%) of their households have more than two hectares of land, compared to 3.6 per cent of Hill Janajati, and 3.1 per cent of Terai Janajati. None of Hill Dalit and Other Terai groups has more than two hectares of land. Only one Terai Janajati household has more than two hectares of land. So, in a period of 50 years the first landowning settlers sold large tracts of their land.

There are some political and cultural reasons behind this variation of landholding size among ethnic groups. Upreti (2008a) argues that Dalits and Janajatis were marginalised in land ownership as a result of the political and historical dominance of the Hill Brahmins and Chhetris in the state machinery after the geographical unification of Nepal by the Shah rulers that started in the 18th century.

Locally, people suggest that because the Terai Janajatis have a rich cultural life, they had to sell part of their land in order to cover the costs of the many rituals and festivities. BCT explains how their culture made the Tajpuriyas poor:

Tajpuriyas were richer before. There was a jimindari system³³ where jimindars had huge tracts of land and mostly Tajpuriyas were jimindars. The land size declined due to our internal problems. Just think of how the forest of Maharani Jhoda was destroyed and how the land size of Tajpuriyas also decreased. There used to be high expenses in wedding ceremonies. We used to spend a lot on Aghani (dance festival) after the rice harvest. The market price of rice and other agricultural products was not good. If one got indebted for two or four thousand rupees, one had to sell the land. The land was so cheap; you can imagine I sold some of my land at 3,500 rupees per *bigha*; now, it costs more than 350,000 rupees. Not only in this area; if you look at the situation of Tajpuriyas in other areas, can you see a similar situation. (BCT, 15 August 2008)

Apart from these social and cultural conditions, the land-people relationship has also changed due to processes of land fragmentation and socioeconomic modernisation. Land fragmentation has increased because of the combined effects of inheritance, increased land price and population growth. “The existing social system of equal inheritance of land amongst all sons has created fragmentation and increased sub-division of household plots to the extent that land sizes are progressively decreased and become insufficient to provide subsistence” (Regmi, 1994: 74).

A linear regression analysis was performed to determine the effect of socioeconomic factors on average landholding size among the survey households. In the calculation, we included agricultural landholding rather than the total landholding because the total landholding also includes residential holding, especially the plots bought in town. It is important to exclude this residential landholding from calculation as it might blur our understanding of what happens in the rural areas because of the high price differences between land in town and in rural areas. A focus on agricultural land also allows us to observe people’s shifting priority from agricultural to non-agricultural land use, especially in migrant households, which is clearly visible in Table 5.2.

³³ The official term is zamindari system, which is one of the traditional land tenure systems in Nepal and India. During Mughal and British era in India and during unification period in eighteenth and nineteenth century, it was a way of collecting taxes from the peasants. The landlord or zamindar would collect all the taxes from the peasants and hand over the money to the government authorities, keeping a portion for himself (Regmi, [1972] 1999). In Nepal, this system was officially abolished in 1990.

Table 5.2: Determinants of agricultural landholding

Variables	Mean	Un-standardised Coefficients	Standard error	t-value
Constant		-0.496	0.272	-1.824
Household size	6.24	0.092***	0.027	3.434
Age of household head	53.3	0.010*	0.004	2.458
Education of household head (1 = literate, 0 = illiterate)	0.79	-0.138	0.142	-0.975
Migration status (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.72	-0.232	0.124	-1.871
Income from the non-agricultural sector	233609.92	5.404E-7**	0.000	2.619
Ethnicity (Brahmin/Chhetri = 1, other groups = 0)	0.65	0.051	0.111	0.461
Household asset score (0-20 scale)	6.89	0.062***	0.142	3.160

*, **, *** identify effects that are significant at 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Dependent variable = agricultural landholding size (ha); *mean* = 0.93 ha; *n* = 131

Source: Household survey 2009

Table 5.2 shows that household size, age of the household head, non-agricultural income and household asset endowment positively correlate to having agricultural land. It means that the larger the household, the higher the age of the household head, the non-agricultural income and the household assets endowment, the more the tendency to have more agricultural land. Migration, on the other hand, negatively correlates to acquiring more agricultural land as migrants tend to buy residential plots in town rather than investing in the expansion of agricultural land. Interestingly, in the current situation, ethnicity does not seem to play a significant role anymore in whether or not a household invests in acquiring (more) agricultural land.

Regardless of caste/ethnicity, landholding size in the research area has been decreasing with the passage of time due to a changing land-people relationship. Shrestha et al. (1993) show that in the early stages, land acquisition was primarily a function of labour investment. As long as people had access to a considerable labour force (mainly through their extended family network) the early migrants had a pre-emptive advantage. However, later migrants encountered increased land scarcity due to both continuous in-migration and a natural population increase among the early settlers. As a result of this increased pressure on land, the ability of later migrants to acquire land is largely dependent on their capacity to buy land from the early occupants. Moreover, at present land acquisition is subject to other social, economic and cultural factors rather than availability of land and labour. This is what we call the social mobility of land: it's changing ownership among ethnic groups, whereas the temporal mobility of land refers to its changing ownership over time across different actors within and beyond the local community.

5.4 Dynamic land-people relationships

Land-people relationships in Maharani Jhoda over the past 50 years present a shifting picture. During early days of the migration of hill migrants to the *terai*, the migrant population was mainly composed of couples and their unmarried children. Agricultural production seemed to be enough for the family. People did perhaps expect not much else, as getting into *terai* was their mission to enhance their livelihood. With the passage of time, however, the younger generation started to lose interest in agriculture. Though recognising the cultural and social significance of farming and the social status of having land, they do not want to labour on land and tend to move out of agriculture due to its lack of incentive (Gartaula, 2009). RKP recalls the changes in land-people relationship:

Previously, land was fertile and the population number was small, so agriculture was sufficient for the people. Nowadays, the land quality is degraded due to chemical fertilizers and pesticides, but new technologies are introduced that increase the production. We used to grow rice varieties like Handiphor, Dumse, Sataraj, Doshara, Kuji, nowadays the improved varieties like Radha17, Radha11, BG1445, BG1442. We do not have those traditional varieties nowadays. People own motor pumps for irrigation, which has dramatically increased the agricultural production. (RKP, 6 August 2008)

The above statement points to the changes in agriculture following the introduction of water pump technology in the research area. At present, there is no canal irrigation facility, but over 50 per cent of the survey households own motor pumps for extracting water from underground tube-wells. Apart from the rainfall and underground tube-wells, the water is also obtained from natural streams or the small irrigation channels developed by farmers. After the start of electrification in the village in 1999/2000 and the introduction of electric water pumps, the outlook of agriculture in the village has further changed. The spring season rice is entirely the result of this new technology because underground water is used mainly for spring season rice and winter crops. Previously, only big farmers could afford petrol-driven motorised water pumps of higher capacities, but nowadays even poor people can afford small electric motor pumps. The following report from a poor household having small piece of agricultural land illustrates this:

I have installed a tube-well and bought an electric water pump from the money I received from my husband. Because of this, I can now grow rice twice a year, which is enough for us to eat for the whole year. As we don't have much land (0.17 ha) we would otherwise have to borrow money from moneylenders to buy food. (BMS, 23 December 2009)

The above transcript shows how the network of out-migration and the technological innovation of the electric water-pumps helped make BMS's household food secure. BMS is a *de-facto* female household head whose husband is working in Qatar. The small piece of land she got from her husband's parent is not sufficient to produce enough food for her family unless she produces spring season rice or uses remittances to buy food. Another respondent also reports that the water pump has helped her irrigate land for winter-and-spring season

crops: “I bought water-pump last year, which I use to pump out water for spring season rice, wheat and for winter season green vegetables” (ANK, 23 December 2009).

These two cases show a changing land-people relationship in different forms of actor-networks through the involvement of remittances or water pumps. On the one hand, the husbands who used to work on land are now absent, but still have a continuous relationship with land through remittances. On the other hand, the wives who did not have a direct management role before, are now involved directly in land management. This conceptual mobility of land in the research area shows the temporal and social dimensions of land-people relationships. This is visible in the shifting relationship of land with different caste/ethnic groups and the changing valuation of land over the generations from its value for food production to being a commodity, yet still a status symbol (see Chapter 4). Likewise, the introduction of water pumps changed people’s relation with the land, especially to increase agricultural production. Kopytoff (1986) elucidates that the values and positions of a commodity can transform from one space to another or from one individual to another. Therefore, it is also important to describe other major elements contributing to the changing land-people relationships in Maharani Jhoda – education and labour out-migration at a greater depth. Then we will see how actors form networks in certain spatial and social spaces, and reshape their relationships when they move on to other spaces.

5.4.1 Education

In the last two decades, Nepal is experiencing an unprecedented development in the field of education. In the research area, the younger generation generally has a higher level of education than the older generation (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Educational status of respondent household members in 2008

Educational status	Age categories (%)			Total
	≤15 years	16-49 years	≥50 years	
Having university education	0 (0.0)	86 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	86 (5.4)
Having 10+2 level education	0 (0.0)	131 (97.0)	4 (3.0)	135 (8.5)
School Leaving Certificate pass	0 (0.0)	96 (94.1)	6 (5.9)	102 (6.5)
Having secondary level education (grade 6-10)	126 (25.4)	341 (68.6)	30 (6.0)	497 (31.4)
Having primary level education (grade 1-5)	188 (64.2)	82 (28.0)	23 (7.8)	293 (18.5)
Literate but never to school	0 (0.0)	50 (43.9)	64 (56.1)	114 (7.2)
Illiterate	7 (3.2)	78 (35.6)	134 (61.2)	219 (13.9)
Not applicable	135 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	135 (8.5)
Total	456 (28.8)	864 (54.6)	261 (16.5)	1581 (100.0)

Source: Household survey 2009

There seems to be a growing awareness about the importance of education. Many migrant workers and prospective migrants said that they migrated (or would migrate) to earn sufficient income to pay for their children’s education. A clear indication of changing land-

people relationships is that people generally do not want their children to become farmers. A *de-facto* woman household head explained her motive to invest remittances she received from her husband into the education of two sons:

We have been doing agriculture for such a long time, but we never see the cash. So I pray for them [sons] to study and find another occupation. But, I don't want to sell this agricultural land. I will be doing agriculture, but I don't want them to be farmers. (DST, 16 April 2009)

Similarly, an ex-soldier in his late 30s said he wants to go out for work again because he needs more money for the future of his son. Evidently he does not want his son to be a farmer.

Question: You have just retired from your job and get a pension from the government. You have a plot of land for cultivation. Then, why do you want to go out again?

Answer: Again? [Laughing] It is the same [money]. People have hopes till the last breath. Being a human being one has to do something in life, it is difficult to live without doing anything. Again (showing his 2 years son), we have to do something for his future. (SBR, 21 April 2009)

5.4.2 Labour out-migration

The mobility of land has influenced people's livelihood practices and outcomes; among others, it is the phenomenon of labour out-migration in the research area. Also, the changing land-people relationships reshape and redefine the livelihood practices of the actors involved. The reverse applies as well: changed livelihood practices reshape and redefine the land-people relationships.

Although the basis of Maharani Jhoda's economy is still agriculture, since 81 per cent of survey households reported agriculture as their primary source of living, the secondary means of living are becoming increasingly important. Out of 277 households, 136 households (49.1%) have at least one migrant member and over 40 per cent received remittances in the year prior to the survey year. Most (92.6%) of the 189 migrant members of the 136 households are male, 78.3 per cent are married, and 20.6 per cent are unmarried.

Labour out-migration has caused labour reorganisation, land redistribution, and a changing valuation of agriculture and agricultural land for food security. In Chapter 4, we discussed the changing valuation of agriculture across the generations. Here, we elucidate the changing land-people relationships through labour reorganisation and land redistribution. Among the 134 migrant households that responded to the question of reorganisation of labour, 70 per cent reported that they hire labour to perform agricultural tasks, while 16 per cent exchange their labour with neighbours. The rest have enough remaining labour. In most of migrant households, male labourers are hired or exchanged with the available (female) labour. Those who hire labour reported that it is not only difficult to find labour in time but also that hiring labourers is expensive. Consequently, people have started renting out their land. Among the 21 households who have rented out land, 13 are migrant households. There is no specific pattern per ethnic group in renting in or renting out land; it is rather a matter of the (un)availability of labour. The following case illustrates this:

JLK (55) came to this place from a hill district called Bhojpur in the late 1960s. She has been a widow for many years. She has five children: three daughters and two sons. All of her daughters are married, living with their husbands' families. Her first son lives in Kathmandu with his family and another one works in Dubai. JKL had been farming with the help from her (first) daughter-in-law, but for some years she has rented out land because of lack of labour. She explains:

Yes, I have given all the land out for rent. There is no one at home to work on the farm. Till the time my daughter-in-law was here, we cultivated land on our own. We hired male labourers for ploughing, but we were handling the land. However, since the time she joined her husband in Kathmandu three years ago, I remained alone at home so I gave the land to others for cultivation; however, this is not my choice. [...] I get half of the harvest from my sharecropper. (JLK, 11 November 2009)

JLK's sharecropper used to be a wage labourer, but now he is cultivating JLK's land. It shows that reorganisation of labour has an implication for land redistribution. This is what we would like to call the social mobility of land: from a single use by the landowner to the shared use with a sharecropper.

Another changing land-people relationship is the people's preference to buy residential plots from their surplus income, which in this case mostly comes from remittances. Out of 20 households considered for in-depth interviews, 12 bought residential plots in nearby towns, while only three households bought agricultural land. The remaining six households did not buy any land. These findings are in line with studies carried out in Mexico (Durand et al., 1996) and China (De Brauw and Rozelle, 2008) where remittances were mainly invested in housing, which can be considered a redistribution of land from agricultural use to residential use.

BTR, a former migrant, currently working as an agent for land and manpower businesses, refers to migrant workers as the main buyers of residential land. According to him, labour out-migration led to an increased investment in residential plots. Especially, the young adults try to settle in the nearby town, so that they do not have to work in agriculture. BTR explains:

The main buyers of the residential plots in this area are the migrant workers. Those who go out for 4-5 years and come with some money amounting about 6-8 *lakh* rupees (1 *lakh* = 100 thousands). Whatever money they make abroad, they don't want to buy agricultural land; they just want to invest in residential plots. Even if they have very little agricultural land like 10 *kaththa*, they don't want to add agricultural land; they rather like to buy even 0.5 *kaththa* of residential plot. [...] People's attitude nowadays is once they return from abroad they want to buy a plot in town, put up a shop and live an easy life. If father asks for buying/adding agricultural land they reply, 'who is going to plough'? (BTR, 14 October 2009)

Buying residential land is not only to escape rural life, but also a strategy to get higher returns for the land. The price of land in urban areas increases at a higher rate than that of agricultural land in rural areas. Regretting the purchase of agricultural land in the village, a returned migrant explains:

We bought this [agricultural] land for five *lakh* rupees five years ago, but I am not happy now. If we would have bought residential plots, we would have had hundreds of thousands of rupees. As land in the neighbourhood was for sale my father wanted to buy this land. I also thought that would be fine, but now I think we did not make a good decision. (SBR, 21 April 2009)

The above discussion reveals that although land is a physically immobile element, it has been moving from one social category of people to another and from one social space to another, acquiring different meanings from one point in time to another. This conceptual mobility of land does not run parallel to but is both a consequence and a cause of human mobility.

5.5 Conclusion

Considering land as an actor helped to explain the changing valuation of land across the social and temporal contexts in connection to human mobility. Its history shows that the land is more than a commodity in the changing network of land-people relationships. Moreover, the movements of actors and their networks are not linear or unidirectional. The paper shows the dynamic interaction between migration and networks of land, labour and people, both socially and spatially. Evidently, there is no direct and one-directional relationship between land and migration. At one point in history, fertile *terai* land attracted migrants considering agricultural land a major source of livelihood and a status symbol. While at another point in history, land scarcity drove people out as labour migrants, while agricultural land mainly retained symbolic and cultural value. In both cases, land as an actor became a central element in the human mobility in the historical process of shifting relationships between people and land through the influence of global and local forces.

We have observed the mobility of land from one social category to another not only within the village in the form of changes in the land-labour arrangements, but also beyond the village in the form of real-estate development projects attracting migrant workers to buy residential plots. Finally, the changing valuation of land and labour are an integral part of strategic decisions of livelihood transformation under the conditions of social change. All this testifies to changing land-people and land-labour relationships.

It is concluded that the social and temporal mobility of land appears to be an inseparable component of land-people relationships. At the dynamic interface of land and people, land appears to be mobile within and beyond villages, through changes in labour availability, shifting access to land, ethnic interactions, and changing life styles and livelihood practices.

Feminisation of agriculture



Women head-carting grasses from the farm

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ABSTRACT

In Nepal, male out-migration contributes significantly to GDP through regular remittances. This chapter looks at the effect of male out-migration on the women left behind in relation to labour participation and decision-making in agriculture. The literature speaks of feminisation of agriculture as a positive development for women's empowerment. A distinction is made between labour feminisation and managerial feminisation. As the two concepts indeed refer to two different roles, power positions and managerial practices, the chapter separately explores these practices and the actors involved. Data were collected for a doctoral research in Jhapa District, Eastern Nepal; a lowland area from where much male out-migration is taking place. The study shows a higher level of feminisation in a situation where *de facto* autonomous female heads-of-household are the decision makers and less in case of women who reside within the patrilineal household of their parents-in-law. Moreover, feminisation in the first case has the unexpected outcome that women seem to be moving away from agriculture. An interdisciplinary approach using anthropological in-depth interviews and demographic survey data shows that a concept like feminisation of agriculture needs to be understood in the wider social and cultural context of an expanding rural space.

Keywords: Male out-migration, feminisation of agriculture, women's empowerment, agricultural development, Nepal

6.1 Introduction

Currently, about three per cent Nepalese live abroad (CBS, 2001). Out-migration from Nepal is mostly transnational: 77 per cent to India and 15 per cent to the Gulf countries (CBS, 2001). While women constitute half of halves the world's migrant population (Ramirez et al., 2005), in Nepal, about 90 per cent is male (CBS, 2004). As more men migrate, women's responsibilities for the household, agriculture, marketing have increased. And so have their contacts with organizations (e.g. village authorities, money transfer agencies, agricultural service providers)

Causes underlying the feminisation of agriculture are reported to be male labour out-migration, the growing number of female-headed households, and the development of labour-intensive agriculture (Kelkar, 2010). Consequently, women have broadened and intensified their involvement in agriculture as they increasingly have to shoulder the responsibility for household survival and respond to economic opportunities in agriculture (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2008). Actually, empirical evidence for the process of 'feminisation' in agriculture is thin (Buvinic et al., 1996, cited in De Brauw, 2003) because women's involvement in agriculture is not a new phenomenon. Its contribution to women's empowerment is also debated. If many males are moving out of agriculture, it is important to study the reallocation of agricultural labour, which potentially leads to feminisation (Zhang et al., 2006).

Development organisations like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Food and Agriculture Organisation claim that there is an increased participation of women in agriculture. This phenomenon is referred to as the 'feminisation of agriculture'. The type and intensity of participation varies across the globe. In the past, women's involvement in agriculture was not so visible due to improper data collection methods and biased views on women's economic contribution. Recently, however, women's participation in agriculture has been recognised and put on the policy agenda, assuming a positive change for women's

empowerment. Nevertheless, whether the feminisation of agriculture also leads to women's empowerment is contested.

This chapter examines the effects of male labour out-migration on the feminisation of agriculture in rural Nepal for different domestic arrangements: female-headed households and households where migrants' wives stay with in-laws. The chapter strives to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does the male out-migration increase women's participation in agricultural labour?
2. To what extent does the male out-migration increase women's role in agricultural decision-making?
3. How does this differ between female-headed households and households where the migrant's wife stays with in-laws?
4. Does feminisation lead to women's empowerment?
5. What are the consequences of feminisation for Nepalese agriculture?

6.2 Feminisation of agriculture and women's empowerment

The term 'feminisation' refers to the increased participation and authority of women in certain domains. In agriculture, it refers to women's increased labour participation and greater role in decision-making. Feminisation of labour means either an increase in the number of women involved or the time devoted by women therein, or both. Traditionally, feminisation of agriculture is viewed as a result of industrialisation where men leave the farm to seek industrial urban jobs (Boserup, 1970, in De Brauw, 2003). Referring to a FAO (1999) document, Lastarria-Cornhiel (2008) shows that despite the overall decline of labour force participation in agriculture during the 1990s, the proportion of women working in agriculture is increasing, particularly in developing countries.

Zuo (2004) reports that the Chinese transition towards a market economy from 1978 onwards drove rural men to seek off-farm urban jobs, leaving farms to the women. This led to a 'men work and women plough' ideology, which substantially altered the gender composition of the agricultural labour force in rural China. Women became the farm managers (Song, 1998). Likewise, land fragmentation and population growth in Syria led to reduced landholding size that forced rural men to seek employment in urban centres and abroad, while women were often left behind with increasing responsibilities in agriculture (Abdelali-Martini et al., 2003). Mtshali (2002) found that because of male out-migration in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, women have to clear the agricultural land before planting, which she calls feminisation of agriculture. Lastarria-Cornhiel (2008: 2) describes feminisation of agriculture as: "Women's increasing participation in agricultural labour force, whether as independent producers, as unremunerated family workers or as agricultural wage workers".

The review shows that feminisation of agriculture has two aspects: women's participation in agricultural labour (the number of women and the time they spent on it) and decision-making. The former is called *labour feminisation*, the latter *managerial feminisation*. In this chapter, both aspects will be discussed. Managerial feminisation could be considered an aspect of women's empowerment. The Canadian International Development Agency defines empowerment as, "a personal change in consciousness involving a movement towards control, self-confidence and the right to make decisions and determine choices" (CIDA, 1997: 60). The Guidelines on women's empowerment of the United Nations Population Fund list five components of women's empowerment: women's sense of self-worth; their

right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally (UNFPA, 1995).

Thus, the concept of women's empowerment comprises their legal, economic, social, and political empowerment. For the position of Nepalese rural women in a situation of male labour out-migration, we used the following indicators: land entitlement, women's participation level in the social groups, control over their mobility and their voice in decision making. We investigated whether increase in managerial feminisation leads to women's empowerment. In order to understand feminisation of Nepalese agriculture, it is also important to know the women's position in a cultural environment characterised by patrilinearity, virilocality and patriarchy.

6.3 Methodology

The fieldwork was conducted in Maharani Jhoda village development committee of Jhapa district. Jhapa district is located in the eastern *terai* among the three ecological regions of Nepal (High Mountain, Mid Hills and the *Terai*, extended from north to south). *Terai* is an extension of the flood plain of the Ganges River. Maharani Jhoda has a population of 10,589 living in 1980 households (DDC, 2006). It is located at a distance of 56 kilometres to the district headquarters, Chandragadhi and 550 kilometres to the country's capital of Kathmandu. The in-migration to Maharani Jhoda started in 1912-13, while the out-migration began around 1975. The former is permanent in nature, whereas the latter is temporary.

The data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods included key informant interviews, group interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and in-depth interviews, whereas quantitative data were collected through survey. Since the quantitative part of the study used a cross-sectional assessment (household survey), a rigid impact measurement was impossible. This problem was addressed by comparing households in terms of the independent variables of migration status and women's position in the different domestic arrangements (see Table 1). In the qualitative part, changes due to male out-migration were discussed with the respondents, yielding a subjective picture of the effects.

The fieldwork started in June 2008 and consisted of three partly overlapping phases. The first phase mainly comprised a migration assessment survey among 1791 households. The main purpose of this survey was to prepare a sampling frame for the main household survey conducted in the second phase. Using this survey, we determined eight categories of households based on their migration status and selected only four categories: non-migrant, *de facto* female-headed, migrant's wife living with in-laws, and the return migrant (Table 6.1) for the main household survey that was conducted with 277 households. This survey formed the second phase of the study (for details of the phases of the study, please see Chapter 2).

Table 6.1: Household categories

Household Categories	N	%
Non-migrant	118	42.6
<i>De facto</i> female-headed	45	16.2
Wife living with in-laws	71	25.6
Returned migrant	23	8.3
Other type migrant (family, mixed)	20	7.2
Total	277	100

Source: Household survey 2009

Although qualitative data were collected throughout the fieldwork period, in the third phase we conducted 26 in-depth interviews with the actors involved in and affected by out-migration and labour reallocation.

Excel and PASW Statistics 17.0 were used for quantitative data analysis, while the analysis of qualitative data was done manually. An independent analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare the mean differences between household categories. Several activity and decision-making indicators were used to measure women's labour participation and their role in decision making at both household and agricultural domains.

The activity indicators were grouped into two categories: domestic activities and agricultural activities. The domestic activities include preparing daily meals, doing the dishes, fetching drinking water, firewood collection, child care, regular household shopping, going to mills (rice-hullers or maize/wheat grinders), and washing clothes. The agricultural activities include ploughing, hoeing, uprooting, transplanting, sowing/broadcasting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storage, carrying manure, milking cattle, cleaning livestock shed, feeding livestock, forage collection, and pulling hay from hay-stakes. Because of the predominance of rice farming, most agricultural activities were related to rice cultivation. The indicators were measured on a 5-point ordinal scale: activities performed 1) always by men, 2) usually by men, 3) equally by men and women, 4) usually by women, and 5) always by women. We then recoded the 5-point ordinal scale into a 0-1 dichotomy, where respondents scored 0 if they had chosen 1, 2 or 3 on the ordinal scale (activities predominantly not performed by women) and 1 if they had chosen 4 or 5 (activities predominantly performed by women). There were no missing values. Because the question was asked for eight domestic activities and 14 agricultural activities, the procedure led to a 0-8 scale and 0-14 scale for domestic and agricultural activities respectively. A higher value in the scale implies higher women's labour participation.

The decision indicators were also grouped into two categories: household decisions and agricultural decisions. The household decisions include the decisions on regular household purchase, occasional more expensive purchase, expenses on festivals/ceremonies, seeking group membership, the selection of schools for children, migration, remittance use, the selection of bridegroom for daughter, the selection of bride for son, expenses on children's marriage, building a house, and buying residential plot. The agricultural decisions include the selection of crops, the selection of farm implements, investing in technologies, selling grains, selling livestock products, mobilising farm income, buying livestock, and buying agricultural land. In both categories, they were ordered from operational to strategic decisions. The indicators were measured on a 5-point ordinal scale: decisions made 1) always by men, 2) usually by men, 3) equally by men and women, 4) usually by women, and 5) always by women. We then recoded the 5-point ordinal scale into a 0-1 dichotomy, where respondents scored 0 if they had chosen 1, 2 or 3 on the ordinal scale (decisions not predominantly made by women) and 1 if they had chosen 4 or 5 (decisions predominantly made by

women). There were no missing values. Because the question was asked for 12 household decisions and eight agricultural decisions, the procedure led to a 0-12 scale and 0-8 scale for domestic and agricultural decisions respectively. A higher value in the scale implies a stronger decision-making role of women.

6.4 Results and discussion

6.4.1 Household and occupation

The average household size is 5.7, with an average of one migrant member per household. Slightly over 12 per cent households are *de-jure* female-headed, 16.2 per cent are *de facto* female-headed, and 71.5 per cent are male-headed. Over 80 per cent respondents are farmers who reported agriculture as their main occupation. As an alternative source of income, remittance (30%) surpasses the others like business, wage labour, service sector employment, and agriculture itself.

6.4.2 Land, agriculture and division of labour

Seventy per cent of households have land for both agriculture and residential purposes, while 24.5 per cent have only residential land and 5.5 per cent have no land at all. The average total landholding size is 0.80 ha per household, while the average size of agricultural landholding is 0.94 ha and that of residential land is 0.09 ha per household.

Wetland rain-fed rice-based farming is the main farming system. There are no canal irrigation facilities. However, over 50 per cent households own motor pumps for extracting water from underground tube-wells. The rainy season (Jun-Aug) is the main season for rice cultivation. Apart from rain water, water is obtained from natural streams or the small irrigation channels developed by farmers. Underground water is used mainly for spring season rice (Apr-Jun) and winter crops like wheat, hybrid maize, mustard, potato, and green vegetables.

Most agricultural activities are done manually. Traditional wooden ploughs are driven by a pair of bullocks or male buffaloes. Almost every household has wooden ploughs. Only three households own a tractor for ploughing and operating a thresher. Tractors and threshers are used not only for people's own farms but are also rented out. In fact, tractors and threshers are replacing a considerable amount of manual labour. Even those people who keep bullocks prefer to hire a tractor due to its cost-effectiveness. Women are not the usual tractor drivers but they help during threshing to handle grains and straws, and prepare food for the workers.

Especially during the rice growing season, the men plough the land very early in the morning, after which the field is made ready for transplanting. Usually, the elderly women are left at home to prepare food and take care of children. If labourers are hired for transplanting, they join at 8-9 o'clock in the morning, if not, family members do the transplanting. After the men have finished ploughing, they will feed and hitch the bullocks. Their duty in the afternoon is maintaining the mud ridges to make sure that the water does not leak out. Other livestock would be taken care of during lunch break or by the people at home.

Traditionally, ploughing, hoeing, and threshing are male jobs, while sowing, weeding, and harvesting are done by both men and women. Depending on the household, milking cattle, feeding livestock, cleaning sheds, pulling hay from hay-stakes and carrying manure can

also be done by both. However, uprooting, transplanting, and forage collection are entirely a woman's job. If there is lack of men, women can take on other jobs but they cannot replace men for ploughing; they need to find someone for this. In the households of women staying with in-laws, these jobs are handled mostly by the fathers-in-law. By contrast, in case of female-headed households, women have to manage these jobs by themselves.

6.4.3 Women's labour participation in agriculture

Based on the qualitative data, an increased labour participation of women in agriculture is visible. In the absence of their husband, women have to take on agricultural work like pesticide application, milking cattle, feeding livestock, carrying loads, finding agricultural labours, etc. The subjective experience of women in different social positions (as *de facto* household head or as living with in-laws) shows that in the absence of their husband their involvement in agricultural activities has increased, which is illustrated below:

You can imagine the work done by two people now I am doing alone. [...] Running a household alone is like being pressed by a huge mass. The additional tasks are finding male labour especially for ploughing, finding transplanting labours, etc. Sometimes, I do not get extra labour in time; I have to dig the land which I have not yet ploughed. (BMS, 34, *de facto* female head, 23 December 2009)

When he was here he used to spray pesticides. I did not know how to do it but nowadays I have to spray pesticides. Carrying grain sacs is another job I did not do before. (PGO, 24, living with in-laws, 23 December 2009)

While he was here I did not have to milk the cow; I did not have to care much about livestock. I had to work only in the kitchen. Nowadays, I have to do everything. I have to work on the farm. My sister-in-law helps me but she does not know how to milk a cow, so milking is either my job or that of my mother-in-law. [...] As I am from the city area I had never done livestock care but now I can milk the cow. Everything, I am learning; I have no choice. (SUD, living with in-laws, 21 December 2009)

The experiences of these women do not much differ, whether they are autonomous or living with in-laws. Apart from fulfilling a number of domestic responsibilities, they also need to be involved more in agricultural activities as a consequence of their husband's absence.

Yet, in quantitative terms, women's involvement in agricultural activities is lower than in domestic activities (Table 6.2).

The households where the agricultural activities performed either 'usually by women' or 'always by women' are clustered at the lower end of the scale (mean 3.14). It means the women's share in agricultural activities may be increasing but not necessarily leading. However, women in *de facto* female-headed households are more involved than the women living in other situations. The quantitative results appear to contradict the qualitative picture but the latter reflects the feeling of women left behind, which sometimes are more of a burden than their actual involvement. It also shows how their wellbeing is affected when living apart from the husband. Our study, therefore, confirms an increasing women's participation in agricultural labour. We conclude that the share of women in agricultural activities, though not leading at present, is increasing and shows a trend towards labour feminisation in the future.

Table 6.2: Comparison of women's involvement in different activities between household categories (N = 277)

Household categories	Domestic activities		Agricultural activities	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Non migrant	4.71	1.94	2.44	1.86
<i>De facto</i> female-headed	6.84	1.70	5.16	3.27
Wife living with in-laws	5.23	1.72	3.24	2.50
Returned migrant	5.00	1.54	3.04	2.96
Other type migrant	4.40	2.56	2.55	2.84
Total	5.19	2.01	3.14	2.63
P-value	<0.01		<0.01	
F-ratio	11.64		10.16	
Scale	0.8		0.14	

Source: Household survey 2009

For lack of studies on feminisation of agricultural labour in Nepal, we compare our results with studies carried out in other countries. In China, Zhang et al. (2006) observe little evidence of feminisation of agricultural labour. They found that the number of hours worked by women on the farm declined compared to the number of hours worked by men. De Brauw (2003) similarly concludes that there is no evidence of feminisation of agricultural labour in China. Interestingly, these studies oppose those of Song (1998) and Zuo (2004) who argue in favour of a high level of feminisation of agriculture in China.

6.4.4 Women's role in agricultural decision making

Women living with in-laws have little voice in decision making. The parents-in-law control all the decisions. Daughters-in-law have to ask permission for almost everything, no matter whether it is related to personal or household matters. The two transcripts illustrate this:

I do nothing without asking my in-laws and my husband. Sometimes, I do not ask my husband as he is not here but I ask with in-laws. For example, to go to a picnic last week, I asked my mother-in-law but not my husband. [...] I have no role on deciding anything about agriculture. My parents-in-law do not consult me. [...] I have no idea how much they sell and how much income they get. (PGO, 24, living with in-laws, 20 December 2009)

I have no voice at home. My father-in-law does not consult with other members, especially the daughters-in-law, for any decisions. We just do the work. I have to ask for permission with my mother-in-law to go to the market and going to *maita* (maternal home); even to go to the neighbours. [...] I have no role in deciding which crops to grow. The father-in-law manages everything, including the shop at Gauradaha and the land business he is involved in. We are like 'working members' but not 'household members'. (SUD, 25, living with in-laws, 21 December 2009)

In comparison to the women living with in-laws, the *de facto* female heads have a greater share in decision making, notably for operational decisions. For strategic decisions, they have to consult the husband through (mobile) phones or other senior members of the family (mostly fathers-in-law) living nearby.

To make a decision on which crops to grow, I do not ask for advice from anyone. I make a strategy which crops would grow better and from which crops I can get green vegetables, I decide accordingly. My husband never asks which crops I am growing and the income I get [she sometimes sells mustard seeds]. (DST, 36, *de facto* female head, 16 August 2009)

I always ask him first before doing something especially those things that require more money. For other things like going to the market, buying something for home use, which crops to grow, I do not ask him. Sometimes I ask my father-in-law who lives in the next house, especially for agricultural issues. (BMS, 34, *de facto* female head, 23 December 2009)

It is not possible to query about every detail out there. I just ask some main things and proceed without asking for the smaller ones like treating the guests, going to the group meetings, allocation of income from crops, maintaining daily household expenses, and so on. My husband also does not ask for every details of the expenditure. (ANK, 36, *de facto* female head, 23 December 2009)

These stories correspond with the results obtained from quantitative analysis. Women's decision-making role is low, both in household and agricultural decision making. Table 6.3 shows that the households where the agricultural decisions made either 'usually by women' or 'always by women' are clustered at the lower end of the scale (mean 0.92). However, the role of women in agricultural decision making is higher in *de facto* female-headed households than the households where migrants' wives live with in-laws. In fact, women's empowerment seems to come from the absence of their husbands. Through managing the household and the farm during their husband's absence, wives gain knowledge and self-confidence (Kaspar, 2005).

Table 6.3: Comparison of women's role in agricultural and household decision-making between household categories (N = 277)

Household categories	Household decision-making		Agricultural decision-making	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Non migrant	1.29	2.21	0.55	1.72
<i>De facto</i> female-headed	3.02	2.32	3.02	2.73
Wife living with in-laws	1.17	1.59	0.53	1.54
Returned migrant	0.91	1.31	0.43	1.50
Other type migrant	0.85	1.14	0.30	1.34
Total	1.48	2.07	0.92	2.05
<i>P</i> -value	<0.01		<0.01	
<i>F</i> -ratio	8.67		17.56	
Scale	0-12		0-8	

Source: Household survey 2009

Kaspar (2005) notes a differential response in exercise of power by migrants' wives during migration, depending on household type. "Women living in nuclear households decide about operational decisions and attend community meetings. [...] In extended households, male out-migration widens gender disparities for daughters-in-law" (Kaspar, 2005: 135-136). Likewise, Zheng (2001) concludes no significant impact on migrant-wives' social attitudes towards traditional gender roles (in Xiang, 2007).

6.4.5 Women's empowerment and consequences of feminisation

As indicators of women's empowerment, we have described women's control over their mobility and their voice in decision making. In this subsection, we present data on gender differences in land entitlement and women's participation in village groups.

Sixty-eight per cent of the households have their land registered under the man's name, while 20 per cent is in the woman's name and the rest (12%) in the name of both (Table 6.4). Surprisingly, few women in *de facto* female-headed households have title deeds. There is no obligation for a man to transfer his title deed to his wife when he migrates. However, when the couple buys a plot of land in the husband's absence there is a possibility of registering it in the wife's name, as evident by the higher per cent of women's title deeds in returned migrant households.

Table 6.4: Land entitlement by gender (N = 262)

Household categories	Land entitlement (%)		
	Men	Women	Both
Non migrant	72 (67.3)	22 (20.6)	13 (12.1)
<i>De facto</i> female-headed	33 (73.3)	8 (17.8)	4 (8.9)
Wife living with in-laws	50 (72.5)	11 (15.9)	8 (11.6)
Returned migrant	10 (47.6)	8 (38.1)	3 (14.3)
Other type migrant	14 (70.0)	3 (15.0)	3 (15.0)
Total	179 (68.3)	52 (19.8)	31 (11.8)

Source: Household survey 2009

In terms of group participation, women of 67 per cent of the households are members of village groups. Among them, about 17 per cent have a leadership position, 83 per cent are just members. Despite their involvement in household and agricultural activities, women do not often miss group meetings. About 68 per cent reported that they always attend the meetings and 32 per cent attend the meetings every now and then. Involvement in the groups and having regular interactions with other women have evidently helped them feel confident in public. We observed that they can give a speech in public, calculate interests of the loans (from their group's funds), and make strategic plan for their groups. However, this kind of 'empowerment' is visible only in a women's group. Their situation in the household is different.

The result shows that, with some variations, women's participation in agriculture is increasing. *De facto* female household heads have a higher share in agricultural decision making. Given the situation, policy formulations are directed to women's control over agricultural sector to ascertain a long-term benefit from agriculture and realise poverty reduction, especially in the context of rapid male out-migration. It is assumed that women are the main actors of agriculture and their empowerment would benefit the development of this sector.

Like in other developing areas, the research area is a field of practicing development. There are about 200 groups formed by the governmental and non-governmental organisations. Those organisations include District Agriculture Development Office, Village Development Program of the UNDP, Sahara Nepal Microcredit, Jeevan Bikash Microcredit, Nerude Microcredit, and Small Farmers Agriculture Development Cooperative (SFADC). Most groups (86%) are either entirely composed of or led by women. For example, SFADC, comprising 120 groups with over 1,000 members, is entirely composed of and run by women.

All organisations reported that one of their main objectives in forming the groups was women's empowerment. Their assumption is that once women are empowered they can take care of agriculture in the absence of men.

This can be taken as a contemporary vision of rural development. Kelker (2010) argues that women's unmediated control and ownership of land, new technologies, and irrigation and management skills give them and their household a livelihood with dignity. However, women's empowerment and agricultural feminisation do not guarantee agricultural development. We observed that women in female-headed households have more autonomy in decision making, but at the same time they seem to want to move out of agriculture. This can be illustrated with the following transcripts:

After his return, I am thinking to shift to the city area and get involved in the business like a grocery shop. However, it depends on how much money he can earn abroad. (BMS, 34, *de facto* female head, 23 December 2009)

I do not want him to be a farmer because I have been doing agriculture and I know there is nothing that we can do from agriculture, just feeding the stomach. So, after his return, I would propose to do some business so that we could get rid of agriculture. (ANK, 36, *de facto* female head, 23 December 2009)

For rural China, it is reported that agricultural development is hampered by the fact that due to young adults' labour migration to urban areas, agricultural extension services should now focus on the left-behind older women who are doing most of the agricultural work, but they are not doing so (Yuan, 2010). In case of Nepal, Gartaula et al. (2010) report a tension between the older and younger generation, notably because the latter (including women) wants to move out of agriculture. The younger generation's attitude towards agriculture as a 'dirty' job could cause food insecurity in the future. Hence, feminisation of agriculture in eastern Nepal shows an unexpected outcome, namely that women may decide to move away and avoid agriculture.

6.5 Conclusion

When comparing households according to migration status it can be concluded that indeed male labour out-migration does increase labour participation of women in agriculture, though more significantly so in those cases where the left-behind women are *de facto* household heads than in cases where they live with their in-laws. The position of the migrant's spouse in the domestic arrangement also plays a significant role in the effect of male out-migration on women's role in decision making. Women, who in the absence of their husbands live with their in-laws, continue to remain under patriarchal control, not by their husbands but by their fathers-in-law. Contrariwise, women who are *de facto* head of households can exercise more autonomy in decision-making and control over their mobility.

The research findings show that the effects of male out-migration on women's participation in agricultural work and decision making are contingent upon the domestic arrangement in which they are part. Hence, the extent of feminisation of agriculture in both respects (labour and managerial) as a consequence of male out-migration relates to and is partly dependent on changes in other domains, notably domestic organisation and household headship. In this way, male out-migration triggers broader processes of social change in which feminisation of agriculture is a part. The extent to which this trend will continue or intensify in the future also depends on developments in the agricultural sector and on the relative importance of agriculture as a means of living and source of income.

Regarding the question of whether feminisation of agriculture leads to women's empowerment, as envisaged by development practitioners, the research findings do not

provide definite answers. Women's empowerment also has to be seen as a dimension of ongoing social change. There is increased women's participation in community groups and women in households of returned migrants have more entitlements to land (although the numbers are relatively small). However, even if these developments are seen as indications of empowerment, they are not necessarily due to feminisation of agriculture. The last question we raised in this article is about the consequences agricultural feminisation in Nepal's agricultural sector. It would be premature to assume that development of agriculture and poverty reduction will always benefit from the feminisation of agriculture and women's empowerment. In the research area, particularly the younger women, who are *de facto* household heads and have more decision-making power than other women, want to move out of agriculture. For this reason, we conclude that a concept like feminisation of agriculture needs to be considered and understood in the wider social and cultural context of an expanding rural space.

Wellbeing of the women left behind



Women's group meeting

This chapter has been accepted as:

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ABSTRACT

The concept of wellbeing is gaining popularity in the study of the quality of life and cultural significance of living. This chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of objective and subjective wellbeing by exploring the quality of life of the women left behind in a transnational social field. The chapter uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Its primary focus is on the life stories of the four women left behind by their migrant husbands, complementing by quantitative data obtained from a survey among 277 households. Taking an example from Nepal's eastern *terai*, the chapter shows that additional income from remittances has increased the objective wellbeing of the women left behind, but it has not increased their subjective wellbeing. Hence, it is concluded that improved objective wellbeing of a woman does not necessarily translate into her (improved) subjective wellbeing. The subjective experiences are rather complex, multi-faceted and context specific depending on the family situation, sociocultural disposition and prior economic situation of the actors involved.

Keywords: Objective wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, male out-migration, women left behind, rural Nepal.

7.1 Introduction

Movement of people from Nepal to India and other countries shows a history of about 200 years, encompassing pilgrims, devotees, political refugees, and soldiers. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, Nepal has increasingly become a labour exporting country (Kollmair et al., 2006; Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme and Wyss, 2005). Government statistics show that about three per cent of the Nepalese live abroad (CBS, 2001); many of them are labour migrants. Out-migration in Nepal is mostly transnational: 77 per cent migrate to India and 15 per cent to the Gulf countries (CBS, 2001). Male out-migration has not only contributed to the national economy, but it has also affected the people remaining back home. For example, one-fifth of the poverty reduction occurring between 1995 and 2004 is claimed to be due to labour out-migration (Lokshin et al., 2007). While almost half of the world's migrant population is female (Ramirez et al., 2005), in Nepal 90 per cent is male (CBS, 2004).

The revolution of information and communication technology coupled with increased labour demand in the developed countries has meant that many people are able to live transnationally "maintaining significant social, economic and cultural ties with countries of origin and with fellow migrants elsewhere" (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008: 176). Hence, the study of migration is no longer restricted to the conventional 'pull and push' factors causing migration as specified by the Harris and Todaro model (cited in Taylor, 1999). It rather demands an integrated study of the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the migration experience (Kaur, 2006; Sharma, 2008). This chapter highlights the sociocultural dispositions of women left behind by transnational migrants. While their

husbands earn a living by working abroad, especially in the Gulf countries and Malaysia, their wives are engaged in running the family and the household back home.

The migration literature often focus either on the conditions in the areas of destination or on the migrants themselves and their economic contributions to their home country, disregarding the sociocultural dimensions of their moving out that are equally important in migration research (Sharma, 2008). Moreover, the people left behind are often invisible, and their role, experience, wellbeing and interconnectedness with the practice of migration are not well understood (Hadi, 1999; Nguyen et al., 2006). However, scholars have recently started to explore the dynamics of the people left behind within the framework of 'migration-left-behind nexus' (Jones and Kittisuksathit, 2003; Rigg, 2007; Toyota et al., 2007; Xiang, 2007). It is also deemed important to focus not just on the transnational processes at the level of organisations, enterprises and communities, but also on the social practices of transnationalism as they affect the family or the household across the two spaces of origin and destination (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Yeoh et al., 2005).

This chapter contributes to these recent studies by exploring how the migration of their husbands has provided an objective wellbeing to the migrants' wives and how they experience and subjectively perceive their quality of life. There appears to be a marked difference related to their social position in two different household arrangements: those women living as *de facto* female heads of households and those living with in-laws. Taking an example from Nepal's eastern *terai* and its transnational networks, the chapter helps improve our understanding of wellbeing by exploring people's transnational experiences within the realm of a family or a household.

7.2 Left-behind women in the transnational social field

Even though transnational mobility is not a new phenomenon, it has not acquired sufficient attention as an emergent social field. The field comprises persons who are engaged in living simultaneously in two spaces: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through regular contact across national borders (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Portes et al., 1999). Portes et al. (1999: 217) define transnationalism as the activities pertaining "to the creation of a transnational community linking immigrant groups [migrant workers] in the advanced countries with their respective sending nations and hometowns". The transnational network is composed of "migrants and the people they transact with, who are located in various countries, be they friends, family, colleagues or others" (Mazzucato, 2008: 201). Most literature focuses on migrants, but it is equally important to include the experiences of those left behind, particularly the women because migration is not an individual decision, but it involves the whole family, albeit in different ways (De Haas, 2005; Velayutham and Wise, 2005; Yeoh et al., 2005). Moreover, migration is a cultural matter because it forms part and parcel of people's lives aiming to improve their wellbeing (Gartaula, 2009; Rigg, 2007).

The impact of migration on the source communities and those left behind is an evolving process rather than something that can be regarded as predictable and fixed (Rigg, 2007). Xiang (2007) reports that being physically left-behind by migrants, the rural

communities in China have also been left behind economically and socially. He shows not only the relationship between the two places of origin and destination, but also the (lack of) wellbeing of the people left behind. Hadi (1999) reports how labour migrants interact with their family members back home in many ways that help modify the traditional behaviour and values of the people left behind which also influence their wellbeing. Therefore, before we describe the Nepalese cases, we need to explain the family context by clarifying the local meanings of 'marriage' and 'household', and their significance for the 'wellbeing' of the actors involved.

The institution of marriage is the origin of a family that also entails household formation, and marriage symbolises a significant social transition in the life course of both men and women. In Nepal, monogamy and virilocal residency prevail. The newly married bride abodes for the rest of her life in her husband's house. The newly married couple forms a family, and generates a means of living and produces and rears children. In most cases they live with the parents or other members of husband's family, but in some cases the couple forms a nuclear family in a new home and earns a livelihood independently. In both situations, they realise that, as responsible persons, they should not continuously rely on their parents (or in-laws) for a living. In a context of virilocal residence, however, the social position and wellbeing of a married woman greatly differs from that of a man. The system compels the wife and daughter-in-law to live in a new place with strange people, as the marriages are traditionally arranged by the parents leaving little or no opportunity for bride and groom to get to know each other before marriage.

A household is "a co-residential unit, usually family-based in some way, which takes care of resource management and primary needs of its members" (Rudie, 1995: 228). Rudie also mentions about a support unit that may include non-resident members. This is a relevant notion in migration research. However, we prefer to speak of support relations as a part of a transnational support network of the household, which broadens the concept of household to a collective of both resident and non-resident members who strive for the wellbeing of its members by mobilising resources and fulfilling primary needs, both "here" and "there". This notion of a transnational network is in line with Elmhirst (2008) who conceptualises the multi-locality of (household) livelihoods corresponding to the notion of support relations among resident and non-resident members. Taking the De Haan and Zoomers' (2005) idea of 'livelihood trajectories' and Krishna's (2004) 'genderscape' respectively, she discusses the household and its networks traversing the temporal, social and geographical spaces for resource management and needs fulfilment (Elmhirst, 2008: 69).

The distribution of wellbeing inside the household depends on the preferences, interests and decision-making power of the household members involved. Agarwal (1997: 3) describes the household as an arena of interaction and negotiation among its members. Sen (1990) sees household as a site of both cooperation (adding to total availabilities) and conflict (dividing the total availabilities among household members). The social position of a member depends on bargaining power as the outside option that determines how well-off a person would be if cooperation within the household failed (Agarwal, 1997). Niehof (2011) argues that the household structures people's daily life to provide for their needs and wellbeing, and assuming responsibility for dependents and family members. Hence, a household can be seen

as the arena of day-to-day life of its members, regardless of their spatial place of residence at any particular moment, for generating and mobilising resources and fulfilling the primary needs and wellbeing.

Recently, the concept of wellbeing has gained significance in social anthropology and development studies by incorporating people's perception of the quality of life and cultural significance of resources in livelihood generation (Brons et al., 2007; McGregor, 2004; Ontita, 2007; White and Ellison, 2006). The study of wellbeing has two strands: objective wellbeing, normatively based on the universality of basic human needs required for a good life (Doyal and Gough, 1991) and subjective wellbeing, based on people's socially and culturally underpinned perception of their quality of life (cf. Royo and Velazco, 2006). Newton (2007: 4) incorporated both objective and subjective wellbeing to understand people's life in a holistic way: "Wellbeing is conceived as arising from a person's material/objective, cognitive/subjective and relational conditions". McGregor (2004: 345) notes, "at any point in time the wellbeing of an individual is the outcome of the resources they have; the needs that they are able to fulfil; and their subjective evaluation of their state of wellbeing. These three outcomes are interconnected and are reproduced in the process of interaction with wider structures of family, community and society."

Inspired by the Theory of Human Need (Doyal and Gough, 1991), this chapter considers availability and access to food and water, education, housing, employment, and care as need satisfiers for objective wellbeing. The subjective wellbeing, on the other hand, is based on self-reported experiences of migrants' wives on their life satisfaction and primary relationships with in-laws and husbands. This is because wellbeing of migrants' wives may differ according to their social position and residence, since social and cultural contexts influence the way people understand and experience happiness and wellbeing (Camfield et al., 2007). In Nepal, for example, women as heads-of-household would perceive wellbeing differently from women living with in-laws. The latter have less autonomy, social status, and self-esteem, but, on the other hand, women living with in-laws have other family members to share the burden of her husband being away. In this context, the present research can contribute to our understanding of wellbeing by looking at how Nepalese migrants' wives perceive their wellbeing, and how their wellbeing differs according to the type of household they live in.

7.3 The research

The chapter is based on a fieldwork carried out in Maharani Jhoda village development committee of Jhapa district in eastern Nepal in 2008-2009. Maharani Jhoda is one of the 47 VDCs and three municipalities in Jhapa district. Having a population of 10,589 living in 1980 households (DDC, 2006), Maharani Jhoda is located at 56 kilometres west of the district headquarters, Chandragadhi, and 550 kilometres east of the country's capital of Kathmandu. In the research area, the majority of the population belongs to the high caste Hill Brahmin-Chhetri (56.7%) and the Hill Janajati (21.3%) groups both of whom once migrated from the north-eastern hills of the country and dominate the current wave of labour out-migration.

Including data obtained from a survey among 277 households, this chapter focuses on the qualitative data pertaining to the subjective experience of wives of migrant workers who are either *de facto* heads-of-households or who are staying with their parents-in-law. The chapter particularly draws upon the experiences of four women, whose husbands were working abroad during the time of fieldwork. We have selected two women who are living with in-laws and two others who are acting as *de facto* heads of the household. The cases are constructed based on several observational visits and in-depth interviews in their homestead. The first author selected and instructed a female interviewer from outside the VDC to conduct the interviews. This was done to facilitate the interviews in more open atmosphere because: 1) as sensitive issues like the relationship with the husband and in-laws would have been difficult to discuss with a male interviewer, 2) since the interviewer was not from within their neighbourhood, the women would talk more openly to her than to a person from within the village who could be suspected to possible gossip about the information provided. The qualitative data are supplemented by the quantitative data from the survey.

All households in the research area are engaged in diverse economic activities. Non-farm labour outside the village both within and outside Nepal is one of the main sources of cash income. The majority of labour migrants are male (87%), married (82%), young (average age 29), and unskilled (60%), working in both formal and informal sectors at their destination. In 2008, more than 40 per cent of the sampled households received remittances from their migrant members.

7.4 Results and discussion

The results are presented in the order of objective and subjective wellbeing. Following Doyal and Gough (1991) the objective measurement of wellbeing is presented with the help of quantitative data, taking into account the availability of and access to food and water, education, housing, employment, healthcare, and childcare, considering these as the basic need satisfiers. Subjective wellbeing is presented as the personal experiences of the four women left behind by migrant workers in different household arrangements.

7.4.1 Objective wellbeing

Maharani Jhoda appears to have relatively good infrastructure, accessibility, ICT facilities, and agricultural production, all necessary conditions for meeting people's objective or material needs. Income is important for objective wellbeing, as higher income increases the capacity to satisfy human needs. The literature suggests a positive relationship between income and life satisfaction (Schyns, 2002). The average total household income of the VDC for the year 2008 was calculated as being NPR 176,000³⁴, while that of migrant households was NPR 277,000 and that of non-migrant households NPR 54,000. Remittances contributed 30 per cent of the total household income of the sampled households. Other sources of income are trade and business (28%), salary from formal sector employment (17%), wage labour (10%), cash income from agriculture (6%), income from rent and other

³⁴ The exchange rate at the time of fieldwork for EUR 1 was about NPR 100.

sources of income (9%), which indicates the relative importance of labour out-migration and other non-agricultural sectors as need satisfiers. These findings are supported by the literature, which shows that migration is positively associated with economic indicators (Kuhn, 2006; Massey et al., 1993; Taylor et al., 1996a).

In terms of availability and access to food and water, 71.8 per cent of the households have land for both agriculture and residential purposes, while 22.7 per cent have only residential land and 5.4 per cent have no land at all. The average total landholding size is 0.80 ha per household, that of migrant households 0.83 ha and of non-migrant households 0.77 ha per household. As there are no canal irrigation facilities, over 50 per cent households own motor pumps for getting water from underground tube-wells. Over 92 per cent households have hand-pumps to extract drinking water from bore-holes installed at their homestead, of which 47 per cent are migrant households. Other eight per cent have to depend on public sources for drinking water. In none of the cases below any problems in accessing food and water were indicated. The women in Cases 1 and 2 are food secure regardless of their husband's migration, while in Cases 3 and 4 they had experienced problems with accessing food prior to migration. The remittances being sent by their husbands are used either to buy rice directly or to increase agricultural production through input support.

The presence of two government secondary schools, government primary schools in almost all nine wards of the VDC, and five private boarding schools within the VDC shows that the area's educational facilities are well accessible to school going children. In addition, adjoining VDCs have almost equal numbers of both government and private schools. Almost 80 per cent of the surveyed population were found literate. The cases presented illustrate that women send their children to private schools, which are considered to provide higher quality education than government schools. For example, Ushadevi (Case 4) moved her children from a government to a private school, for which she has to pay monthly fees whereas government schools do not charge fees. Kuhn (2006) observed a positive correlation between children's schooling and out-migration of male household members in rural Bangladesh.

In terms of housing as a need satisfier, over 98 per cent households have their own house. Eight out of ten of the concrete houses of the sampled households have corrugated iron sheets roofing and the remaining ones have slab roofing. The rest of the households have a traditional type of houses with wooden/bamboo walls and thatch or corrugated iron sheets roofing. This indicates a gradual replacement of wooden houses by modern concrete ones. Their increase in number can be partly attributed to the scarcity and high cost of wooden materials and partly to people's increased access to capital, primarily through remittances. Case 4 has replaced the house at the same place, Cases 1 and 3 have bought residential plots in town and Case 2 has an aspiration to build a house if she could make a surplus of the remittances.

Agriculture is considered a primary source of employment in the VDC. The majority of men and women work on their own land, while those who do not have land can work as agricultural labourers and also for them agriculture is their main occupation. However, people consider only non-agricultural work 'employment', which is a major reason for the current wave of young adults choosing foreign employment. While over 80 per cent of the

households reported agriculture as a primary source of occupation, 49.6 per cent reported foreign employment as the second source of occupation. Half of the sample households have at least one migrant member. The combination of agriculture and other sources of income contribute to meeting the basic needs of household and the individuals.

Considering healthcare, there are no hospitals and childcare centres within the VDC but there are four hospitals at a distance of about 14 kilometres. There are a number of private clinics within the VDC and in adjoining VDCs, which also contribute to the supply of health services in the area. Availability of healthcare facilities, however, does not imply equal accessibility because the latter also depends on income. Our research indicates a higher capacity of migrant households in assuring health services, which is supported by studies in India and Bangladesh that show an association between migration and good health (cf. Hadi, 1999; Nguyen et al., 2006).

The above shows that the additional income from remittances has helped enhancing objective wellbeing of the people in the research area. Remittances provide a safety-net for them. Moreover, as was also observed by Hoermann et al. (2010: 1) “the benefits of remittances are not limited to recipient households, but have a wider impact on the receiving society as remittances are spent, generating demand and jobs for local workers. Remittances improve living conditions, education, and health in the origin communities, and provide insurance against income shocks”. However, the subjective account of wellbeing of the women left behind tells a different story, which is described in the next section.

7.4.2 Subjective wellbeing

The cases presented below are compared along two axes: living arrangement and income class. The women of Cases 1 and 3 were living with their in-laws and they were from relatively well-to-do families. The women of Cases 2 and 4 were *de facto* female heads of the household at the time of fieldwork and they were less well off than in the women in Cases 1 and 3. Each case description starts with a general introduction of the women interviewed and their family, followed by the migration history and their involvement in the migration decisions, the use and strategies of using remittances, their experiences as being migrant’s wives, their relationship especially with the parents-in-law, and finally communication and bonding in their relationship with the husbands. In all cases the marriage was based on a traditional marriage arrangement. Except for the introductions, the cases use the translated verbatim language of the respondents.

Case 1: Suhana Dignita, who cannot share her feelings

Introduction

Suhana (25) was married with Pebi in 2002 at the age of 20. At that time, her husband was 27 years old. She has up to SLC (School Level Certificate) level education. Her husband has been working in Dubai for the last two years. Among her two brothers-in-law, one works in Qatar and another one works at another district for the Nepal Police. Her second brother-in-law (the one working in Qatar) is not yet married, but the last brother-in-law is married with Tama, living together with Suhana with their parents-in-law. Tama’s husband frequently

comes home as he is posted nearby, but other two brothers visit home at about a two years interval. The couple has one son, Susant (aged 4), enrolled at a private Kindergarten.

Migration: decision and involvement

"I was aware of his move from the beginning, but I was not involved in the decision-making. He discussed it with his parents and told me that he was going out. Actually, I have no idea why he wanted to go out; he just informed me about his going. When he told me I liked the idea, as everybody was going out to make money abroad, so I did not think otherwise of his idea of going out though I was not feeling happy about it.

As my father-in-law is a businessman³⁵, we did not have to borrow money from others; he paid all the costs. My husband also did not inform me about the costs. Before he went to Dubai, he tried to go to Saudi Arabia. He gave 70,000 rupees to a broker in Kathmandu, but the broker disappeared with our money and never showed up again. We have not recovered from the loss yet. I think my husband wanted to go out at least once so that he could recover the money taken by the broker and payback to his father.

Before he went out, he used to help his father in the shop at Gauradaha. His father always told him that he should go out and make money. My father-in-law used to treat us badly, as if my husband would not do anything in life. My second brother-in-law had already gone abroad and started sending money and the last one had joined the police force, while my husband was helping his father in the shop. However, my father-in-law thought that my husband was helping him because he was unable to find anything else.

Remittance: use and strategies

My father-in-law collects the money from his sons and makes use of it, usually by investing it in residential plots for a profit. He does not inform me about the amount of money sent by my husband but I know that he has bought three residential plots at Gauradaha from the money sent by his sons. However, he [father-in-law] does not discuss these things with his daughters-in-law. He also did not consult us about the purchase of these residential plots. I do not know which one is ours and which are for the brothers. I do not like this kind of the father-in-law, but I cannot do anything about it now. Perhaps after my husband's return, we have to discuss this issue with his father and get our share permanently.

Experience

I do not think that my position in the family and the society has improved as a result of his migration. I am treated the same as before. However, many people nowadays ask me for loans. One thing I have experienced is that money is everything for people. For example, before my husband went out, I was not treated well even by my in-laws, but now that he is out and making money, they cannot humiliate us anymore and say that we cannot do anything in life.

³⁵ Her father-in-law is a veterinary technician and operates an agro-vet shop at Gauradaha. He is also involved in the business of land brokerage for sometime.

Even though I do not feel comfortable living alone after marriage, I think it is the male duty to make money, so I have accepted this challenge. He has gone out to make money for our future. I do not complain much. However, I always miss him. I always think of him. Money is not everything for me; it should be enough for two meals a day and clothing. He is making money abroad, which sometimes gives me a feeling of being more valued by the other family members, but it is very difficult to be separated.

I find it difficult to discipline our child in his absence. Although my parents-in-law love their grandson a lot, I think that is not always enough. Sometimes, the child needs to be reprimanded to get him disciplined, but my parents-in-law love him so much that they have spoilt him. It is never like when my husband is present as a father for his son. I always feel this gap.

Relation with in-laws

Apart from caring for my child I do not expect anything from my parents-in-law. I cannot share my feelings with my mother-in-law, but I can share things with my sister-in-law. Our in-laws do not allow us to do anything without their consent; you can imagine what kind of relationship we [also referring to her sister-in-law] have with them. I can quarrel with my husband but not with the in-laws. I cannot tell you that I have a bad relationship with them because I tolerate everything. If sisters-in-law are living together, it is obvious that there are some frictions between them, but in our case these are acceptable. Sometimes, it is about the division of work, sometimes about the children [her sister-in-law also has one son, of about one year]. So far, my relations with my sister-in-law are good, we are like best friends. I have a better relationship with her than with the parents-in-law. We share everything, like dividing the household tasks. Usually, one takes care of the children, while the other works in the kitchen. We discuss everything.

Communication and bonding

Nowadays, I have a regular contact with my husband through my mobile phone, usually once a week. I bought this mobile almost at the same time he went out. During talks, we spend a lot of time on household matters and about his living there, not much on love; he is not that kind of person [laugh]. He even does not know how to talk about these matters, I can tell you. Even in this kind of situation where husband and wife live apart for a long time our relationship remains good. I think it is all due to our love and mutual trust." (Interviewed on 21 December 2009)

Case 2: Sardevi Pasphiria: not overburdened

Introduction

Sardevi's (36) husband Surendra (40) has been living abroad for about 17 years. He worked in India for 15 years, now he is working in Malaysia. She was 16 years old when she got married. She is living with her two sons of 17 and 16 years old. Her house is in the courtyard of her parents-in-law. She is a *de facto* head of her own household. In this ethnic group (Tajpuriya), people build a new housing unit within the parent's courtyard for their married

sons. It is rare to marry off a son without providing a new housing unit within the courtyard. The houses do not have partitions and it would be inappropriate for the newly married couple to sleep within the same unit as the parents.

Migration: decision and involvement

“He talked first with me when he wanted to go out and then with his parents. He had to go abroad for work because of the difficult situation at home. He tried hard to find a job here. He passed the examination of the Education Commission [to become a teacher] twice, but we did not have any connections and could not pay a bribe, so he failed to find a job. The boys were growing and we did not have a good economic situation. We had to find something for a living. I had to accept his going out as we did not have other alternatives.

Going to India (Meruth) was not expensive, costing only 1,000 rupees. We did not borrow money from moneylenders but borrowed from my parents. For his move to Malaysia, we had a debt of about 100,000 rupees. The money was borrowed from a cooperative and I had to pay the interest every month on my own, as he could not send his earnings immediately. I asked money from *sashu* [mother-in-law] but she refused.

Remittances: use and strategies

By now, he has sent about 700-800 thousand rupees, but we do not have a surplus. We acquired a huge debt because of the medical treatment of our daughter, who was a heart patient. But all efforts were in vain: she sadly passed away at the age of two. We had to settle that debt as well. I have to buy almost everything for the household. The cost of education is high, but we consider this an investment in our sons. We have not bought any residential plots, but I have kept about 200 thousand rupees in a bank. As the sons are continuing their education, I cannot guarantee that we can make a surplus to buy a residential plot in town; they are saying that after grade 12 they want to go to Kathmandu for a bachelor's degree. They are really smart boys. They always rank first or second in their class and want to continue their education. I hope the money sent by my husband will be enough for that because he is making a good income now, unlike when he was in India. Whatever money my husband makes abroad, he sends it to me, and I have to invest a lot in the kids.

Sometimes we discuss that if we would be able to make a surplus we will buy a residential plot at Gauradaha. My husband always tells me that after he makes money we would buy land elsewhere and move there. However, I have never thought of leaving this place. I would like to remain in this place that we got from our ancestors. I do not know why but I love it. However, if there is conflict of interest about where to live in the future, I will follow him.

Experience

During his first stay abroad, I was still living with the parents-in-law, accompanied by sisters-in-law and other family members. I could share the tasks with them but I had sleepless nights. I was dreaming of him all the time. Gradually I got used to the situation and learnt to live without him. My life was horrible when he was in India. He did not have a good income and

could not send (much) money. The economic situation was so bad that I could not even provide enough food for my children. I still remember that I skipped many meals. Imagine, at that time I was the most hated person in my in-laws' family! How could I survive! Gradually, especially after his move to Malaysia, the situation changed. Nowadays, I have also gained much hope, courage and confidence. I can go to them [in-laws] and ask what I need. I can quarrel with them if necessary, but at that time I was just hopeless.

In our community, women are always kept inside. They are supposed to work in the kitchen only, but not on the farm or outside. After his departure, I started going out. I learnt how to transplant rice and got to know the outside world. I got introduced to many people and started going to the market [where the money transfer agencies are located] to receive the money sent by my husband. In a way, I take these as positive changes. Though I have to manage the household on my own and work more than in the past, I do not feel overburdened. I am feeling good that I can go out, know many people, and can share my feelings with others.

So far, I am satisfied with my personal life, even if my husband stays separate. However, it is difficult to run a household as a single woman, especially if you are poor and surrounded by many problems. The society does not treat you well. Even if you go to market to buy something or to receive calls from the husband, people start talking about you: "Since her husband is not at home this lady is free, there is no one to control her, she goes wherever she likes". Leave alone the others, people within the family talk a lot, especially the sisters-in-law. Even when I go out of this courtyard, the family members talk about it. I have not heard much from outsiders though.

I do not have a problem to discipline my sons. My husband has been living out since they were very young and they do not know much about all these things. They do not wander around the village but focus on their studies. I am satisfied with them and have trust in them. They also obey me and are very understanding. As they are grown up, I have told them about the hardships that I went through in raising them. I do not have dreams of doing something myself, but just to support them. Whatever money he [husband] is making, we have been investing in their study. We have high hopes of them.

Relation with in-laws

While I did not have a harmonious relation with my in-laws before, now they help me if I ask them, especially when I have to go out for group meetings or to the market. Whatever disputes we have and no matter how much we quarrel, now they help me, especially after he went to Malaysia and started making good money. Sometimes, we do quarrel with each other. You know, this is common in the relationship of a daughter-in-law with her in-laws in Nepal, which is even worse in our community. Quarrels mainly happen due to bad treatment of the daughters-in-law by their in-laws. For example, if they ask me something, I have to attend to that at any cost, no matter whether I am tired or busy. Sometimes, there are problems in dividing the work. They always want more from daughters-in-law, which is not always possible. If the *nandas/amajus* [husband's sisters] are there, there is even more conflict.

In the beginning, while I was still living with the in-laws and my husband, I was treated badly, especially by the female in-laws. He left me with them, I did not know what I

should do, where could I get help from. One time, my son was asking for some food with his grandma, my *jethani* [husband's elder brother's wife] scolded him and chased him away. I was just looking at it; you can imagine how I felt. I was just crying all the time. I could not quarrel with them. What could I say to them; I did not know anything. At the time of marriage, I was just 16 years old. I was not mature and did not know what to do. Sometimes, when I was returning from the farm I would find my kids crying and nobody to take care of them. If my children fell sick, they [in-laws] never gave me money for treatment. They did not even care. Even if I fell sick, the same happened: they did not pay attention. However, I always got help from one of my *Dewars* [brothers-in-law]. He always helped me to take my children to the health centre. He did not give me money but he was a great help. I had to manage the cost anyway. Sometimes I got money from my parents and sometimes my husband sent his earnings. Nowadays, my sons are grown up and I do not need anybody's help.

Communication and bonding

I have got a mobile phone since the last six months, given by my brother. My husband has bought one for me and he is trying to find someone coming to Nepal to bring it for me. He calls me two or three times a month. Before I got this mobile, he used to call me only once a month. While he was working in India it was even worse, he used to call me only once in two to three months. We always talk about the future of our children, other household affairs, and about his experiences there." (Interviewed on 16 August 2009)

Case 3: Parsila Sanam, why did I marry?

Introduction

Parsila (24) got married with Dipu (35) in 2001. She is living with her parents-in-law; while her son (aged 7) is living at her *maita* [parental home of married women] studying at grade one. The private-boarding school is quite far from here (2 km) but it is close to her *maita*. She has up to 8th grade of education. Dipu has been working in Dubai for many years. He started working abroad before they got married. This time he is out already for six months.

Migration: decision and involvement

"I do not know the exact year when he started working abroad because he was already a migrant at the time we got married. Actually, I do not consider him living here. We lived together for a year after marriage. After that, we have never lived together for more than two months. This time, he is in Dubai. It is his fourth stay over there. I did not want him to go abroad after marriage. I did not like to stay behind for so long, but he convinced me that we would have a better future after migration, with the money he would be making abroad. I could not disagree because if had he not gone abroad he would have ended up unemployed, just hanging around with his fellow chaps, not doing anything productive.

Remittances: use and strategies

I do not know about the past, but since we married I receive the money he sends. When he sends money he instructs me what to do with it, like this much should be given to my father-

in-law for household use, this much to deposit in the bank or lending money to someone, and this much for my personal use. I do not spend much of his income, I do not buy much for myself; I want to save for the future. I would rather buy golden jewellery but not expensive clothes. I used to give him all the details of my expenditures from his earnings, but now I have decided not to do that anymore because I found it complicated to make a very detailed overview. However, sometimes I feel like we have to be very careful in spending the money earned abroad. He would ask me whether I made unnecessary expenses because he is working hard to make money and we cannot just spend it profusely here.

So far, we have bought two residential plots, one at Damak and another one at Gauradaha. We have not added more agricultural land because that would require more labour, which we do not have. We cultivate this land on our own; we have not rented it out.

Experience

I do not see any difference of being a migrant family, but people think that we have a lot of money. They frequently come to ask for money (loan), which I think was not the case before. Mostly, they come to me to ask for my personal money. Before, when I was still new to this family, people did not much interact with me but nowadays they come to ask me for a loan.

Although I am living with my in-laws, I always feel like I am alone. I do not feel comfortable being alone after marriage. For me, money is not everything. I know that my parents-in-law love me a lot, but it is never like living with a husband. Especially during the time when I get sick, I really miss him. Sometimes, I think why did I marry if I would have to stay alone? Wouldn't it have been better if I had remained single? At least I would not be thinking of my husband all the time. Anyway, I am not satisfied with being a migrant's wife, but I have to accept this challenge because sending my husband away is out of necessity rather than out of my free will.

I do not feel that I am free to move, because I am living with his parents. As he has kept me with his parents, I have to ask their permission for whatever I do. So far, they are good in-laws. They let me do what I want, like joining the groups and going to *maita*. I do not complain about living with them as such. The only difficulty is that I always feel alone in his absence.

Relation with in-laws

I should say that my parents-in-law are supportive and they are kind to me. They allow me to go out and I don't have to worry about the house as they take care of my duties as well. I tell them that as I am alone (without husband); I need the company of my friends and want to go out with them. She [mother-in-law] does not object.

Communication and bonding

My husband and I talk to each other over the mobile phone. We do not talk so frequently, sometimes once a week and sometimes twice a month. I have bought this mobile about one-and-a-half years ago. Before that, he used to call me over landline phone at home and even before when we did not have a connection at home, he used to call me at *maita* where my parents had a landline phone. We had a kind of schedule to go to *maita* to receive his call.

There was a public booth at Gauradaha and he also used to call me there but I always felt uncomfortable talking about personal matters in a public booth. I preferred to go to *maita*.

We always talk about love during the phone calls. What else, if you get an opportunity to talk to your husband, who would think of talking about other issues? Our talks over the phone are related to love, apart from small talk about our child. As I am not involved in household affairs, we do not talk about these things unless it is related to the use of his earnings.

Even in this kind of situation where husband and wife live apart for a long time our relationship remains as usual. I think it is because of the mutual trust between us. Whatever he does abroad, I trust him. I hope he would not do bad things there, like going to another woman. I hope that, like me about him, he is always thinking of me and missing me all the time. I cannot violate social norms because I trust him and I expect the same from that end.” (Interviewed on 20 December 2009)

Case 4: Ushadevi Presta, migration means a lot

Introduction

Ushadevi (34) was married to Chitra (43) at the age of 19. During the time of marriage her husband was 28 years old. Her husband is working in Qatar for the last four years. She is illiterate. The couple has two children: a daughter Trisna (aged 14, studying at tenth grade) and a son Suzan (aged 12, studying at seventh grade), both studying at a private-boarding school at School Chaun.

Migration: decision and involvement

“My husband is working in Qatar for the last four years. During this period, he visited us once. Before he went abroad, he used to work in the factory as a labourer, as we do not have sufficient land for farming. He was paid very little, which made him decide to go abroad. He discussed this with me. When he told me, I did not feel bad because we were in debt so badly that there were no ways to redeem it. I thought once he goes out we would have more income, could payback the debts, and could send our children to better schools. So, I actually liked his idea of going out for work.

We did not have the money for his migration. We borrowed money from the money-lenders at the rate of three rupees [monthly interest of 3%]. Together we looked for the money needed. Though he has gone abroad and sends money back, his income is not so high and it took a long time to payback all the money we borrowed. In total, we spent 120 thousand rupees for the whole process.

Remittances: use and strategies

He earns only about 8,000 rupees per month. He always complains about the situation over there and that he is not making good money. Every time he calls me he complains about his income. As he has to spend it on food, making phone calls here, personal use, he cannot save much money to send to us. He has not sent money since he sent 10,000 rupees during the last Dashain. Till now, he has earned just enough to pay the debts. We have no surplus. I got

terribly sick last year. I spent a huge amount of money. We had a very small hut which we replaced with this house. [The house is not that big but enough for four people. It is not a concrete house; it has CGI roofing and mud and bamboo walls.]

Usually, he instructs me on the use of the money he sends but sometimes I spend it on my own. Especially if he has promised money to someone whom he has borrowed from, he instructs me to pay this much to this person. However, if it is meant for household use I decide by myself.

Experience

I cannot say much about my social position, but my husband's working abroad means a lot for us. We were able to send our children to the private school [they were in government school before their father's move]; we do not have to borrow food from others though we have not added assets like a television, land, etc. As we do not have much land we would otherwise have to borrow the money from moneylenders to buy food. I have installed a tube-well on our land and produce rice twice a year. Before his migration, I can tell you, people would not trust on us even for 100 rupees, but now if I ask money they easily lend to me as they see that my husband is making money abroad and I would pay them back easily.

However, running a household alone feels like a huge burden. The additional tasks include finding male labour especially for ploughing, finding other labours for transplanting, and so on. Being involved in these activities takes a lot of time. I do not complain about my situation as I am managing well on this end. Apart from the additional tasks, I have no complaints about my living alone because this is something I am taking as a challenge and he is doing something for the family. So, why would I make a fuss?

I do not have any problems in disciplining the children; though I faced a lot of problems when they were young. I did not get any help from my in-laws and he has never been at home. It is very hard for me to explain, but I remember going through a lot of hardship. Now I have no problems regarding my kids. They even help me in the calculations of interest on the money we borrowed.

I have to say that I am satisfied because I have no choice but accepting this situation. The tragedies and hardships are in my heart, why should I expose them? We are obliged to live in this situation because of our poverty. It is a necessity for them [the husbands] to go out for work and it is our fate [of the wives] to run the household.

Relation with in-laws

Sometimes, I get help from my in-laws in all sorts of difficult tasks. Especially, when I get sick they come here to do the household chores. So far, I have a good relationship with them, unlike in the past. They have been helping me in times of need. Yet I do not expect much from them; as I am separated, I am supposed to run my family on my own.

Communication and bonding

We talk over the mobile phone, which he sent to me last year. Before that I had to go to School Chaun [public telephone booth] or sometimes to my in-laws' house where they have a landline connection. At that time, the frequency was once in two weeks or once a month, but

now he calls me almost every day, at least twice a week. We mostly talk about household matters and his living over there. We talk less about our personal feelings. Before, as I had to go out or at a public place we did not talk about love, but this mobile is really handy to talk with him about personal things.” (Interviewed on 23 December 2009)

7.4.3 Analysing the cases

Common to all the women’s stories is that they seem to be satisfied with the improved economic situation since the migration of their husbands, but they have mixed experiences in terms of subjective wellbeing. Some have problems with disciplining children in the absence of fathers (Case 1), while others miss their husband all the time (all cases). Dwiyanto and Keban (1997) also report difficulties in disciplining children in a situation of male out-migration (cited in Nguyen et al., 2006). However, all women wanted their husbands to work abroad to improve their economic situation. The remittances sent by their husbands inspired them to endure the present situation in order to earn a secure future for themselves and their children. For them, it is a challenge to stay behind, but they are accepting it ‘for the future’. Our findings are similar to those of a survey carried out in Uttarakhand, India, which showed that the majority of women were happy about the migration of their husbands as the women believed it was necessary to secure a better future for their children (Hoermann et al., 2010).

One of the important changes brought about by male out-migration is an increased labour participation of women in agriculture. Especially *de facto* female heads of households show a higher degree of participation in agriculture as compared to the women living with their in-laws (Hom Nath Gartaula et al., 2010). Studies have also demonstrated that the women left behind due to male out-migration are facing greater responsibilities and an increased workload (Gardner, 1995; Hadi, 1999; Kaspar, 2006). This does not only include their physical participation, but also their mental feeling of being overburdened by the additional work. A review of studies in Nepal and India also concluded that “the increased workload has a detrimental impact upon women’s health, leading to a rise in mental tension and physical stress, particularly for women heading nuclear families, as they cannot depend on other male relatives in the absence of their husbands” (Hoermann et al., 2010: 22).

In the case of women living with their in-laws, many of the additional tasks are shared by other household members, while the women who are *de facto* heads of households have to perform them all by themselves. Case 1 shares her tasks with a sister-in-law, while the parents-in-law help the woman in Case 3. Case 4 clearly illustrates that running a household by a single person is a burden because of the additional tasks to be performed in the husband’s absence. Interestingly, the woman in Case 2 does not feel overburdened, though being a *de facto* head of the household she has to engage more in agriculture, household and community affairs than before. She rather considers these as positive changes in her life that have increased her self-confidence and agency. Hoermann et al. (2010) also observed an increased self-confidence of women due to male out-migration.

On the one hand, the women seem to agree on the idea that ‘money matters’ when talking about migration, remittances, and their imagination of a future living a better life. On the other hand, when we talk about staying separate they easily agree that money is not

everything in life. During the interviews, we noticed their body language when speaking about their subjective experience of living apart from their husband: they would turn their face downward and blush, and we could observe that they were not satisfied at all with their situation. These facts cannot be 'measured' by objective indicators of wellbeing as stated in the literature (Doyal and Gough, 1991).

The case studies further confirm that money contributes to people's wellbeing to the extent that it satisfies the material needs, but that subjective wellbeing is subject to prior economic situation and relative to overall living environment of an individual (see Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002). The income from remittances means a lot to the women in Cases 2 and 4 to improve their basic living conditions and they seem to be more satisfied than the women in the other two cases, although Case 4 reported low earnings of her husband. Whereas for the women in Case 1 and 3 the income from remittances is used to buy residential land, jewellery and other assets, which is for future benefits rather than improving their everyday present life. In Case 3, the woman acknowledges the challenge of living separately and no longer forming a sexual union because of long-term migration, in a culture where extra marital relations are not permitted. Analysing the fulfilment of their sexual desires, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter, the situation shows their state of wellbeing where they have to stay alone for most of their sexually active age. In such a situation, a long time separation from husbands can result into a feeling of marital insecurity among the women left-behind. This was observed by Hoermann et al. (2010) where respondents in India were afraid of their migrant husbands developing extra-marital relations in the cities.

The women seem to believe that their relationship with husbands has not weakened due to the mutual trust between husband and wife. They have a regular contact with their husband through mobile phones. Before the introduction of the mobile phones, the communication between wives and migrant husbands was less frequent. Except for the hand-written letters, the landline phones in the village and market centres were the only means of communication. Due to the introduction of mobile phones, the women's communication with their husbands has not only become more regular, but also more personal. This enables the wife to experience a transnational living through a continuous interaction with her husband. In all the cases presented above the women talk about household affairs and the children's education. Only in Case 3 the woman reported talking more about love. In all cases, husbands instruct their wives about the disbursement of remittances and household affairs. In this sense, husbands are performing a double engagement (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008) by being involved in both the household at home and at their destination.

The above descriptions clearly show the patriarchal control over household resources, either by the husbands or the father-in-law, depending on the woman's living arrangement. The women who are living as *de facto* head of the household can exercise more autonomy in resource mobilisation and their own mobility than the women living with in-laws, who are still under the control of the parents-in-law. The women in Case 2 and 4 were well involved in decision making during their husbands' migration and they also have some autonomy to use and allocate the remittances, though they are still controlled from abroad. The wife in Case 1 did not have any voice in decision making and does not know what the remittances is

used for. Hoermann et al. (2010) likewise report that in joint-family households the remittances are usually received by the in-laws and spent according to their own priorities, while some wives receive a small amount of money from their husbands without the knowledge of their in-laws. The wife in Case 3, however, seems to have more control – though instructed by the husband – over the use of remittances than her parents-in-law. This may indicate an important power shift in the use of the sons' earnings from parents to wives.

The examples also reveal that the relationship of these daughters-in-law with their parents-in-law varies from very cold (Case 1) to more harmonious (Case 3). They still get support from their parents-in-law in performing the household tasks. Those living with their in-laws receive direct material and physical support, while those living as *de facto* household heads receive more indirect support and counselling, especially in agricultural activities. For example, in Case 1 the woman gets help from her mother- and sister-in-law in household work and taking care of her son. It seems common for two sisters-in-law to share their tasks as well as their feelings, about which the parents-in-law are not very sympathetic. However, even a good relationship with the in-laws cannot compensate for the absence of the husband (Case 3).

The situation of women living as *de facto* household heads is different as they live separately and run their household independently. The wife in Case 2, however, gets support from her in-laws to enable her to go to the group meetings and to the market. Her relationship with her in-laws improved since her husband moved to Malaysia. Although with age and after childbearing women's autonomy and self-esteem generally increase (Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1996), the autonomy of the wife in Case 2 can be attributed to her increased income from remittances and reduced dependency. Her enhanced self-esteem has to do with her involvement in groups and cooperatives. Indeed, joining groups and cooperatives helps women increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. However, this is visible mainly where women are among themselves, like in a women's group, but not necessarily in the home situation (Hom Nath Gartaula et al., 2010). The latter applies especially to women living with in-laws. It could be concluded that women living as *de facto* heads of households have a better subjective wellbeing than women living with in-laws, despite – but maybe also because of – the former's increased responsibilities and workload to run a household and function in the public sphere.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined objective and subjective wellbeing of migrants' wives using the framework of the migration-left-behind nexus in a transnational social field. The material or objective dimension of their wellbeing has evidently improved because of increased income from remittances sent by their husbands. In general, the economic status, access to food and water, child education, housing, and access to health services have been improved due to the out-migration of their husbands. However, the cognitive and emotional dimensions of relations with immediate kin (in-laws) are more context specific, and have often not improved. In this respect, remittances do not increase the subjective wellbeing of migrants' wives, particularly of those who are living with their in-laws.

The four cases allow for two comparisons: the first one is between women of poor and more well-to-do households, the second between women acting as *de facto* household heads and women living with in-laws. Regarding the first, it seems that migration for women in poor households relieve them from economic hardship, which makes them more satisfied than women in relatively well-to-do households. The latter did not have to endure much economic hardship before and their situation does not change much with the increased income from remittances for a basic living. They rather like their husbands to stay with them. The second comparison shows that women as *de facto* heads of the households can exercise more power and autonomy when their husbands are absent, which appears to be satisfying. Migrant wives who are living with in-laws are sometimes under even stricter control in the absence of the husband, and this seems to make them less satisfied with the situation. They always have to ask for permission from their parents-in-law, which is not easy if the in-laws are not supportive. Finally, women as *de facto* heads of the household have more responsibility in household management and face an additional workload in the absence of their husbands, whereas women living with in-laws can share their work with other household members and the households are managed by their parents-in-law. However, it would be naive to assume that increased responsibilities have a negative impact on wellbeing. The woman in Case 3 clearly shows that she considers these things as positive changes in her life. Hence, it can be concluded that the subjective and relational dimensions of wellbeing are complex and multifaceted.

In the literature, the transnationality of migrants has been well described. Grillo and Mazzucato (2008) observe that although it is important to assess the value of transnationalism by doing research that is physically located in both the places of origin and destination, it is not a necessary condition: "Transnationalism may be observed from one site or many within a single social field" (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008: 191). This chapter supports their argument, but it does more. By focussing on the women left behind we have shown that they also experience a double engagement. Like their migrant husbands they also experience living transnationally, not by changing places but by using modern means of communication such as mobile phones. During telephone talks, they spend as much time on household management as on the situation of their husbands abroad, and they make plans together that are important for the future of their children and for their own wellbeing. The husbands abroad experience this double engagement by directing household affairs and keeping distant control over the use of remittances.

Finally, this chapter challenges economic theories that view migration as a free choice intended to maximise utility from scarce resources (cf. Shrestha, 1988) and theories that emphasise migration as a rational decision of the individual migrants themselves based on wage differences, labour equilibrium and income maximisation between the places of origin and of destination (Massey et al., 1993; Spaan, 1999). We have been able to illustrate that in practice the decision making about migration is a collective household decision or a decision between husband and wife, even if the wife has little power to direct the final outcome. Migration is not a one-time spatial movement, like Xiang (2007) asserts for China with the notion that those physically left-behind are also left-behind socially and economically. Instead, migration should be regarded as a continuous spatial and temporal process.

Furthermore, the women left behind are not passive observers but are actively engaged as strategic participants in that process. The chapter shows that the women left behind are strongly engaged in migration decisions, not only to let migrants leave but also to redeem the debts incurred in the process and in the utilisation of remittances. Hence, migration is more a family or household decision than an individual choice of the migrants themselves (De Haas, 2005; Massey et al., 1993; Yeoh et al., 2005). However, it would not be correct to consider the women left behind as one undifferentiated social category as their involvement, autonomy, and influence depend very much on household arrangements. The women who can act as *de facto* heads of a household have more power in decision making than the women living with their in-laws.

Conclusions and synthesis



A modern concrete house in the research area

This chapter presents the overall findings of the study by answering the research questions formulated in the first chapter on the dynamics of in- and out-migration in the *terai* (Chapter 3), the changing perceptions of food security and land (Chapter 4), the conceptual mobility of land (Chapter 5), the feminisation of agriculture and women's empowerment (Chapter 6), and the subjective and objective wellbeing of the women left behind (Chapter 7). The chapter concludes with a theoretical reflection.

8.1 Answering the research questions

Research question 1: *How consistent is the notion of the terai region as a migrant receiving or sending area in the context of historical and contemporary social change?*

One initial finding of this study is that a place cannot be labelled as merely a migrant sending or a migrant receiving area in the static way, as the *terai* region has often been depicted in the migration literature on Nepal. The lowlands or *terai* have long been receiving migrants from the hills. Especially the eradication of malaria and the opening up of the area for settlement in the 1950s led to the in-migration of people from the hills to the lowlands. However, since the 1990s population movement in Nepal have taken a different path: the *terai* has become a prime migrant sending area. The study district, Jhapa, which is one of the *terai* districts, ranks second in terms of the total number migrants per district, among the 75 districts of the country. Moreover, nine out of the ten districts sending the highest numbers of migrants are located in the *terai* region.

Unemployment, low income from agriculture, lack of opportunities and low incentives for educated manpower as well as the rising expectations and perceived modernity of migrants are the main motives for out-migration in the research area. In addition, the advanced lifestyles and the acquisition of modern consumption goods by migrant families appeared to be a motive in migration decisions. Out-migration is no longer restricted to the oppressed people as depicted by conventional literature (Gill, 2003; Golay, 2006; Shrestha, 1988), but is also a means for upward mobility of relatively well-off households (Niehof, 2004) because the poorest people are usually excluded from the process (De Haas, 2005). In other words, the better opportunities in the places of destination are still a pull factor, but push factors like enhancing livelihood security and the pursuit of another lifestyle have become more prominent. The thesis shows that like movements of people also the motives for moving are not static and cannot be taken for granted.

Research question 2: *To what extent does labour out-migration lead to changes in the valuation of agriculture for food security?*

In this dynamic context, the perceptions of attaining food security are also changing over time, especially with regard to the view of agriculture and agricultural land as the primary means of production. The older people believe in having agricultural land for food security as land provides rice (the staple food), while younger people believe in access to capital through other sources to obtain food. Yet, the younger generation keeps investing in land, not for subsistence but for social status. Hence, it is likely that young people will eventually move out of agriculture, which has far reaching implications for Nepal's

agricultural and rural development policies. Comparing the Agricultural Perspective Plan – of 1995 and the Foreign Employment Act – of 2007 reveals contradictory policies on sustainable development. The 1995 plan envisions a central role for agriculture in development, while the 2007 act recognises the significance of remittances as an important element for development (Sharma, 2008). Moreover, the country's political instability in the past decade forced many rural youths to leave their village, and labour migration became part and parcel of their life. Their connection to the outside world and experience abroad also changed the way of looking at their life, which eventually led to the image of migration as part of an advanced and modern lifestyle. Together these developments contribute to the declining valuation of agriculture as a rewarding profession and of agricultural land as an essential source of food security.

In this light, the shift in the valuation of land may jeopardise the country's food security in the future. This is because of the rapid conversion of agricultural land into residential land which decreases the total area of production, the tendency of out-migration among land-owning households, and the negative attitude of the younger generation towards agriculture. The attitude of the younger generation towards agriculture as a 'dirty' job and their ambivalence in owning land but not cultivating it, affect the productive function of land. If this trend of land conversion and the lack of interest of youths in the agricultural sector continue, there is a potential risk of decline of a declining total food production.

Research question 3: *How did land become a central factor in the phenomenon of in- and out-migration in rural Nepal?*

This thesis shows how land can play an active role in the mobility and mobilisation of human and non-human actors in time and space. Through the dynamic interaction between migration and the networks of land and labour, both socially and spatially, land has become a central element in human mobility. These changing land-people relationships are fuelled by the interactions between global and local forces. At some point in history, fertile *terai* land attracted migrants considering agricultural land a major source of livelihood. Later on, the declining value of agriculture and agricultural land drove people out as labour migrants. While agricultural land retains symbolic and cultural value, it is no longer seen as a sufficient means of production to satisfy rising expectations. The study shows that the changing valuation of land and labour are an integral part of livelihood adaptation in circumstances of social change.

Research question 4: *To what extent does labour out-migration affect the feminisation of agriculture and women's empowerment in the area of origin?*

It is evident that when men migrate, women have to take over (some of) the men's roles and responsibilities back home. The extent to and the way in which they do this depends on their living arrangements. I compared the situations of the left-behind women living as *de facto* heads of households and those living with in-laws in two ways. Firstly, I looked at women's participation in agricultural activities, their involvement in agricultural decision making, and their empowerment. Secondly, I analysed whether their husband's migration had increased their wellbeing, using both subjective and objective indicators. It was

observed that male labour out-migration has increased women's labour participation in agriculture, more significantly so for women who are *de facto* household heads than women who live with their in-laws. Women, who in the absence of their husbands live with their in-laws, continue to remain under patriarchal control, not by their husbands but by their father-in-law and elder brothers-in-law. Women who are *de facto* head of their household can exercise more autonomy in decision making and control over their mobility. Nevertheless, regardless of their situation, the women left behind want their husbands to go abroad and make money in order to realise their dream of a 'better' future for themselves and their children.

The extent of feminisation of agriculture relates to and is partly dependent on the changes in the domestic domain, notably domestic organisation and household headship. This study shows that male out-migration triggers broader processes of social change of which feminisation of agriculture is a part. The trend and intensity of feminisation of agriculture also depend on the development of the agricultural sector and on the relative importance of agriculture in people's everyday livelihood practices. The question of whether feminisation of agriculture leads to women's empowerment has to be seen in the wider context of processes of social change in rural Nepal. There is an increased women's participation in community groups and women in households of returned migrants have more entitlements to land. While this can be seen as an indication of empowerment, the change is not necessarily due to feminisation of agriculture. Feminisation of agriculture in Nepal would benefit agricultural development and women's empowerment, especially in the case of *de facto* women household heads, who have more decision-making power than other women. However, this does not guarantee the improvement of the agricultural sector because the younger people (including women) want to move out of agriculture. It is concluded that a phenomenon like feminisation of agriculture needs to be considered and understood in the wider social and cultural context of an expanding rural space.

Research question 5: *How does male labour out-migration affect the objective and subjective wellbeing of the women left behind, and to what extent is the fulfilment of objective wellbeing reflected in their subjective experience?*

The increased income from remittances appears to have improved the material or objective wellbeing of the women left behind. Their economic status, access to food and water, children's education, housing, and access to health services have improved due to the out-migration of their husbands. However, the cognitive and emotional dimensions of relations with immediate kin (in-laws) are more context-specific and have often not improved, particularly for those who reside with their in-laws. Migration for women in poor households in particular has relieved them from economic hardship, which makes them more satisfied than women in relatively well-to-do households. The latter did not have to endure much economic hardship before and their situation does not change much with the increased income from remittances. They would rather like their husbands to stay with them. Women living with in-laws are under stricter control in the absence of the husband, which affects their wellbeing. Women who are *de facto* heads of the household have more responsibility in household management and face an additional workload in the absence of their husbands,

while women living with in-laws can share their work with other household members and the household is managed by their parents-in-law. Although this points to a bigger burden for women household heads as compared to the women who live with their in-laws, it should not be assumed that the increased responsibilities of the former have a negative impact on their wellbeing. As reported in Chapter 7, a woman living as *de facto* head of the household told us that she considers her entry into the public sphere as a positive change in her life. Thus, the subjective and relational dimensions of wellbeing are at least as important as the material conditions.

8.2 Theoretical reflections

In this section, I discuss the findings of this research in the light of the literature on the key concepts that I have applied, like male/female household headship, gender, land, labour, mobility, migration, transnationalism, the people left behind, food security, agriculture, livelihoods, and wellbeing. I will not discuss them separately, because they are all interconnected within the broader framework of economic, social and cultural transformation of which the analysis transcends conceptual boundaries. To quote Castles (2001: 14): “As transnational linkages pervade all areas of social life, national boundaries become more porous and local autonomy declines, communities and regions become increasingly interconnected and mutually dependent.” This thesis shows that also labour, land and the position of women left behind prove to be closely interconnected. Therefore, I describe them together in the following discussion on broader thematic schemas.

This research started with the use of the household as the unit of analysis. However, as discussed below, in migration research a household cannot be treated as a single unit of analysis. Furthermore, we should open this ‘black box’ and give more consideration to the interactions of its members to throw light on intra-household power differentials and value orientations. This research also suggests that it is not enough to consider the ‘women left behind’ as a single social category; we need to be more specific with regard to their living arrangements in order to gain insight in the objective differences in decision-making power and their subjective experiences of the quality of life, intra-household gender differentiation, and the feminisation of agriculture.

8.2.1 Household, living arrangement and livelihood

Male labour out-migration changes the demographic structure of households and communities. This greatly influences the significance of household boundaries, living arrangements, livelihood activities and the gender relations within the household and the community. Firstly, male out-migration challenges the conventional definition of a household as a co-resident social unit of people who share food and resources on a daily basis (Chant, 1997; Hart, 1997; Rudie, 1995). From the cases and other data presented in this thesis, it is evident that male labour out-migration affects a household’s living arrangement, livelihood activities and the people’s everyday life in the place of origin. The women (wives) and their parents-in-law who are left behind still consider the migrated husband/son as a household member. The same holds for the migrant members themselves. In a study carried

out in China, Yuan (2010) notes that for migrant workers their household in the rural area is not only their official home, but also the place where they can leave their (wife and) children, and where they can resettle upon their return, after they have earned enough money to build a house or start a business. In fact, in Nepalese language there is no specific word for household. For census purposes the government uses the term *ghardhuri*, meaning a unit of cohabitation, but this term does not carry the sense of belonging as captured by the term 'home'. In the past, it was impossible to maintain a regular and frequent contact with the people left behind, and migrant workers would not play a role in the day-to-day household affairs at home. However, due to the developments in information and communication technology, contemporary migrant workers and their families can regularly communicate by mobile phones and migrants can send remittances immediately if there is urgent need of money at home. This shows the double engagement of migrants, who remain actively involved in household decision making and take a significant part in household matters, while at the same time maintaining their way of life abroad (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008). Therefore, apart from remaining objectively involved in household matters, also the subjective feeling of belonging, the notion of home, is actively reconstructed in the daily conduct of the migrant and his family by this 'living-apart-together'.

This study also contradicts the notion of a unitary model of a household with an altruistic household head as in the New Household Economics, which indeed has already been contested in the literature (Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 1991). In the arena of everyday life that constitutes the household the gendered and generational differences between household members in interests, expectations, power and aspirations have to be made visible. In our case this is particularly evident in the valuation of agricultural labour and food security. Increasingly, conflicts of interest and a continuous negotiation between the older and younger generations indicate that perceptions about the ways to attain household food security are changing. The older people, like the parents-in-law of the woman left behind, value agriculture as a secure source of food security and agricultural land as a means of production. The younger generation, the woman left behind and her migrant husband, however, considers land an identifier of social status but does not want to use it for agricultural production. Where land attracted migrants in the past, it has become a push factor in recent times. This dynamic interaction of ideas, motives, and practices is essentially taking place within the sphere of the household, but in the more fluid sense of the term as discussed above, where the forces of globalisation, urbanisation and modernisation affect those left behind as much as the migrant himself, through continuous communication and negotiation. Rudie (1995) talks about support units that provide safety-nets for households. Apart from the problematic notion of unit, even if we were to speak of support relations (Niehof, 2004), the non-resident members who send remittances are still seen as external to the household. This external positioning of support relations ignores the spatially fluid essence of 'home' and the migrants' sense of belonging. Migrants and the household members at home can be apart physically, but they are connected through continuous interaction and negotiation about managing the resources to meet the needs of and achieve wellbeing for all of them. In the case of migrant households, the migrants are part of these processes. As Kabeer (1994) points out, the household is still a relevant concept in the

analysis of daily management of resources and is the routine context of people's lives. A place-defined household can be taken as a point of departure in livelihood and migration research, provided it acknowledges intra-household differentiation and the significant role of non-resident members (Agarwal, 1997; Niehof, 2011; Sen, 1990).

The concept of the modified-extended family can improve our understanding about the significance of non-resident members in household and resources management (Knodel and Saengtienchai, 2007; Litwak, 1960a, 1960b; Toyota et al., 2007). However, this concept emphasises family and kinship networks in relation to the mobility of actors. Using the notion of multilocality of livelihoods, Elmhirst (2008: 69) sees the household and its networks as traversing across social, temporal and geographical spaces for resource management and needs fulfilment, which is more appropriate than the notion of support relations as by definition external to the household (cf. Rudie, 1995). We need to improve our understanding of the household as an arena of interests of resident and non-resident members of a modified-extended household who are engaged in continuous interaction and communication. Moreover, the relevance of a concept like the modified-extended household over that of the modified-extended family is that the former captures mobilising resources and generating livelihood, while the latter focuses on kinship relationships.

The change of living arrangement of some of the women left behind leads to an increase of *de facto* female-headed households. In the literature, there are two strands of arguments on how female-headed households are portrayed. The one assumes that female-headed households are prone to economic deprivation and insecurity due to gender inequality (Hart, 1997; Kabeer, 1996), while according to the other they are not necessarily worse-off compared to male-headed households (Chant, 2004). Recent research in Africa has shown that female-headed households do not constitute a homogenous category and that the conventional distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* women household heads is too simple. Differentiating factors are the women's access to resources such as land (Karuha, 2008), household composition and the proportion of dependents (Wieggers, 2008), culturally granted mobility of women (Mtshali, 2002), and the different social positions of widows, divorcees and separated women (Koster, 2008). Ellis (2000) even denies any universality of gender inequality, as women's subjective construction of their wellbeing and self-identification largely depends on specific cultural and livelihood conditions. In this study we found that – irrespective of their individual agency – *de facto* female heads of autonomous households have more power in decision making and more autonomy in mobility and resource mobilisation than the women living with their in-laws.

8.2.2 Livelihood and wellbeing

We observed considerable shifts in the labour arrangement and redistribution of land within and across the village as an effect of male labour out-migration. This has consequences not only for everyday life, but also for the livelihood practices of the actors involved. In the economic literature, land and labour are treated as two separate analytical domains which represent two of the three classical factors of production: land, labour and capital (Todaro, 1997). The livelihood studies emanating from the DFID model (Carney, 1998; Scoones, 1998) tend to undervalue the actor's creativity and adaptation to make a living by calling

resources 'capitals' (Arce, 2003; Niehof and Price, 2001), seeing those as accessible or inaccessible to people mainly because of structural factors. Moreover, resources (or capitals) are largely defined from a materialistic point of view. The actor-oriented approach (Long, 2001; Wartena, 2006) broadened the definition of livelihood by including people's actions in response to new opportunities and choices of value positions. In this study, we have shown that land and labour are intertwined in the constitution of people's livelihood and are constructed and transformed together through the process of labour migration. As Ontita (2007) argues, it would be a superficial analysis that ignores the context-specific nature and creativity of the actors in generating a living in rural everyday life.

We saw that the women left behind do not feel vulnerable nor weak. They have agency, they can think and act strategically – together with their husbands – for the pursuit of a better life in the future, although they feel frustrated living with in-laws during their husband's absence. They have more opportunities when living in a household of their own, but then they experience the burden of managing the household, taking decisions, and disciplining their children in the absence of their fathers. So, agency, autonomy and quality of life very much depend on the social position and living arrangement of the women concerned. A study conducted in India (Desai and Benergi, 2008) also found that for women who live in nuclear families (our *de facto* female-headed households) the effects of out-migration of the husband differ substantially from those of women living in extended families (with in-laws). This shows that if we do not look into the relative position and subjective experiences of the women left behind, our understanding of their lives and livelihoods would remain superficial. This study has demonstrated the significance of material, human, social and cultural resources, not only in the pursuit of livelihood but also with regard to its outcome in terms of wellbeing. The wellbeing approach of livelihood studies brings us closer to the experiences of the women left behind in generating their livelihoods in different social situations. This approach suggests that resources do not have a fixed meaning but are constituted through social practices. They are socially and culturally constructed, having material, relational, cognitive and symbolic dimensions that people act upon to achieve wellbeing (Camfield et al., 2006; Copestake, 2006; McGregor, 2006; Newton, 2007).

8.2.3 Migration, labour and land in relation to motives and values of the actors

In this thesis it is shown that decision making about migration is done collectively at the level of the extended-family household or between husband and wife, even if the wife has little power to determine the final outcome. Migration is a family or household decision, not just a rational decision of individual migrants based on wage differences and labour equilibrium between the places of origin and destination aiming at maximising income, as in economic theories of migration (cf. De Haas, 2005; Massey et al., 1993; Shrestha, 1988). Migration is definitely more than a one-time spatial movement of people. It should be regarded as a continuous spatial and temporal process that encompasses both migrants and their family members back home. In the contemporary world, the process of labour out-migration should no longer be seen as leaving one country and settling in another, but as a continuous movement of people from one country to another, and maybe to a third country, through

time and space. This phenomenon is referred to as transnationalism (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Kabki, 2007; Mazzucato, 2004). The continuity, simultaneity and reciprocity of this transnational mobility are possible thanks to the unprecedented development of information and communication technologies in the last decade.

This study also shows that the women left behind are not passive observers, let alone 'victims', but that they are actively involved as strategic participants in the migration process. This is the opposite to what Xiang (2007) found in rural China where the people who were physically left behind were also socially and economically left behind. We saw that in our case the women left behind are strongly engaged in the process of migration, not only to let migrants leave in the first place, but also to redeem the debts incurred in the migration procedure and in the utilisation of remittances. They are found well engaged in the management of land and other household resources and are involved in strategic decision making to invest remittances productively. Still, it would be misleading to consider the women left behind as one undifferentiated social category because of their involvement. Their agency, autonomy, and influence depend very much on household composition and collective arrangements. As said above, the women who can act as *de facto* heads of a household have more power in decision making than those living with their in-laws. In either situation, this study justifies the application and further development of a 'migration-left-behind nexus' as proposed by Toyota et al. (2007) to better understand the contemporary phenomenon of labour out-migration and also to take into account the socio-cultural transformation and rural development in the area of origin.

To describe the issues of labour reorganisation and redistribution of land, I used the concept of mobility, which covers not only the physical, geographical and temporal movement of people, but also the mobility of land in a metaphorical sense. The mobility of land appears to be neatly linked to the movement of people, both as a value (in attracting in-migrants, and, recently, in pushing people out) and as having agency to mobilise people by forming actor-networks in time and space. The actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) proved to be most suitable to understand the changing perceptions of land across social groups or in the passage of time, from its use as a means of agricultural production to an object of investment for future use or for social status in a community that is rapidly losing its rurality. These processes warrant attention because they have direct implications for the valuation of land, whether as a source of food security (older generation), a symbol of social status, or a productive capital investment (younger generation).

8.3 Future research and policy implications

Migration definitely is a (partial) solution to the current unemployment problem in the research area, and remittances have increased the household income and the objective wellbeing of the people left behind. At the same time, migration has little contributed to agricultural development. We have seen that the younger generation is not much interested in practicing agriculture but aspires to move out of agriculture and pursue a different lifestyle. In such a situation, there is a risk of the depletion of indigenous agro-ecological knowledge. Moreover, if potential farmers are no longer interested in agriculture and the

trend of out-migration from land-owning households continues, the future of the *terai* as a rice-producing area is endangered. This may threaten food security in the future, not only in the research area but in the country as a whole. Households may be food secure because of income from remittances, but the total acreage for agricultural production will decrease. In this context, it would be interesting to conduct policy research about the reduction of the area of cultivated land due to the conversion of agricultural land into residential land and its consequence for total food production. It would also be interesting to see how labour out-migration is affecting the transfer of agro-ecological knowledge in order to gain better understanding of agrarian change and rural transformation in Nepal.

In the context of the socio-cultural transformation in rural Nepal, specifically in the *terai*, one could also think of another scenario, namely that of redistribution of agricultural land. While the younger generation may move out of agriculture, the total food production could still be sustained if – as we could observe occasionally – the previous wage labourers start cultivating the land of migrants who have been renting out their land. From the group discussions with youths it transpired that they agreed on the importance of keeping some land for agriculture, before investing remittances in residential land. The agricultural land kept could be rented out to others for cultivation. If that would be the case, it can be anticipated that the region would attract migrants from other areas and that the *terai* could again become a place of destination. This would entail another wave of labour reorganisation and redistribution of land that would further prove the crucial role of land as an important element in the dynamics of in- and out-migration.

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Annex: Household survey questionnaire used for the study

Household Survey 2009

Namaste,

In order to conduct research on the impact of labour out-migration on Nepalese society we came here from Wageningen University, the Netherlands. This research is entirely for academic purpose. The information you have provided will be treated confidentially. The objective of this research is to look at the impact of male out-migration on agriculture, food security, daily life, and wellbeing of the women left behind. Your support, help and encouragement will be highly appreciated. We would also appreciate in receiving your consent that the information you gave is not by force.

Wageningen University, the Netherlands

Received date:

Signature:

© Hom Gartaula 2008

A. Survey information

1	District	<input type="text"/>	2	VDC	<input type="text"/>
					dd mm yy
3	Ward No	<input type="text"/>	4	Interview date	<input type="text"/>
5	Village/hamlet/street	<input type="text"/>			
6	Name of interviewer	<input type="text"/>			

B. Household (HH) information

7	Household Code	<input type="text"/>
8	Name of HH head	<input type="text"/>
9	Age (years)	<input type="text"/>
10	Sex	<input type="text"/> male-1 female -2
11	Name of interviewee	<input type="text"/>
12	Age (years)	<input type="text"/>
13	Sex	<input type="text"/> male-1 female -2
14	Relation to the household head (refer to question 18 for code)	<input type="text"/>

15 Caste/Ethnicity

1. Hill Brahmin/Chhetri
2. Hill Janajati (Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Rai, Magar, Gurung, Newar)
3. Hill Dalit (Kami, Damai, Sarki)
4. Terai Janajati (Tharu, Tajpuria, Rajbansi, Dhimal, Satar, Jhangar)
5. Terai Dalit (Mushahar, Chamar, Dom)
99. Other (Specify).....

16 Which of the following occupations does this household consider as the main occupation?

1. Farming
2. Trade/business/shop keeping
3. Wage labour
4. Foreign employment
5. Service sector
99. Other (specify).....

17 What are the sources of your means of living?

Source	Rank*
	*Rank by importance for living

Source	Rank*
	*Rank by importance for living

C. Household roster

18 Members of household (size and composition)

Member Code	List all members of the household (mark the HH head)	Age	Sex	Relation to HH head	Marital status	Education	Occupation
		year	male 1 female 2	*	**	***	****
	<i>present members</i>						
M1							
M2							
M3							
M4							
M5							
M6							
M7							
M8							
M9							
M10							
	<i>absent members</i>						
M11							
M12							
M13							
M14							
M15							
M16							

Total Household size

Total working members

****code: relation to HH head***

1. Spouse 2. Child
3. Daughter-in-law
4. Grandchild 5. Parent
6. Uncle/aunt 7. Sibling
8. Cousin 9. Niece/nephew

*****code: marital status***

1. Single
2. Married
3. Widow/widower
4. Divorced (legal)
5. Separated (not divorced)

******code: education***

1. Not applicable (age <5)
2. Illiterate
3. Literate (but never to school)
4. Finished primary (grade 5)
5. Finished secondary (grade 10)
6. School Leaving Certificate (SLC)
7. Finished higher secondary (grade 12)
8. Bachelor degree and above

*******code: occupation***

1. Not applicable (age <10)
2. Agriculture
3. Salary/wage
4. Foreign employment
5. Self employed
6. Extended family enterprise
7. Job seeker
8. Household work
9. Student
10. No work

D. Housing and daily life

19 Do you live in your own house? ☐ yes ☐ no

20 If yes, what type of house do you have? ☐ concrete, RCC roofing ☐ concrete, GIS roofing

☐ wooden, thatch roofing ☐ wooden, GIS roofing ☐ thatch hut

☐ concrete/mud bamboo, thatch roofing ☐ concrete/mud bamboo, GIS roofing

Comments and observations:

21 What is your source of drinking water? ☐ piped water ☐ own well ☐ own tube-well

☐ public tube-well ☐ other.....

22 The distance of the source of drinking water from home.

23 Who fetches water and for what purposes?

Purpose	Who	Remarks

24 What do you use as fuel in your kitchen? ☐ firewood ☐ Kerosene ☐ guintha ☐ LPG

☐ biogas ☐ others

25 What do you use for lighting at home? ☐ Electricity ☐ kerosene lamps ☐ biogas

☐ LPG ☐ other.....

26 Do you have your own toilet? ☐ yes ☐ no

27 If yes, what type of toilet do you have? ☐ modern with flush ☐ modern without flush

☐ pit ☐ open ☐ other

E. Material resources/assets

28 Can you please give information about the material assets you have?

SN	Asset/ resource	Number	How acquired *	When acquired Year	Value when acquired NRs.
1	Radio				
2	TV				
3	Cassette/CD player				
4	Clock				
5	Camera				
6	Telephone				
7	Mobile phone				
8	Iron				
9	Fan				
10	Gas stove				
11	Biogas plant				
12	Refrigerator				
13	Large pump set (>4hp)				
14	Small pump set (<4 hp)				
15	Bicycle				
16	Sewing machine				
17	Thresher				
18	Tractor				
19	Car/Taxi				
20	Grass chopper				
21	Computer				
22	Motor cycle				
23	Residential land				
24	House				

***code: how acquired**

1. Bought
2. Inherited
3. Dowry
4. Brought by migrant worker(s)
5. Temporary user right
6. Rented in
7. Self built
99. Others (specify).....

F. Land use and agriculture

29 Land holding and ownership

Categories	Pakho/bari			Khet			Jungle			Total			Ownership	
													1 male	2 female
Own cultivation														
Rented out														
Rented in														
Others.....														

30 Quality of land

Categories	Abbal			Doyam			Sim			Chahar			Total		
Own cultivation															
Rented out															
Rented in															
Others.....															

31 How much land is accessible for irrigation?

--	--	--

 area

32 What are the sources of irrigation?

Sources	Land irrigated			unit	Remarks
Groundwater					
Rainwater					
Stream/canal					
Others.....					

33 Can you please give information about the land under use last year?

Land	Season-1			Season-2		
	Area			Area		
Own cultivation						
Own fallow land						
Rented in land						

34 Do you see changes in cropping pattern in the last 10 years?

☐ yes ☐ no

35 If yes, what changes do you observe?

☐

1. High diversity, low intensity
2. High intensity, low diversity
3. Increasing fallow land

mention if any other:

36 What would be the reasons behind such changes in cropping pattern?

--

G. Household production and income

37 How many months can you eat from your own production?

1. 12 months and more
2. 10-12 months
3. 7-9 months
4. 4-6 months
5. 3 months and less

1

38 How do you manage food for deficit months?

9

1. Income from services
2. Income from salary/service
3. Income from wage labour
4. Income from remittances
99. Others (specify).....

39 Can you please provide information about the food production and consumption situation of last year?

Crops cultivated last year (list all food and vegetable crops)	Production				Sale						Home consumption			
	Land cultivated		Production		Did you sale ?	If yes, how much did you sale?		Per unit selling price	Where did you sale?	Transport cost, if any	Home consumption		Balance in store	
									1. sold locally 2. local market 3. middleman 4. cooperative 5. others..... .					
<i>Complete a cycle</i>	Area	Unit	Qty	Unit	1.yes 2.no	Qty	Unit	NRs.		NRs.	Qty	Unit	Qty	Unit
													</	

40 Can you please provide information about livestock production of last year?

Name	How many did you have?		Current estimated price		If sold last year, how many?		If sold last year, per unit price		If purchased last year, how many?		If purchased last year, per unit price		Remarks
	Number		NRs/unit		Number		NRs		Number		NRs		
	Adult	Non-adult	Adult	Non-adult	Adult	Non-adult	Adult	Non-adult	Adult	Non-adult	Adult	Non-adult	
Cattle													
Buffalo													
Poultry													
Goat (s/he)													
Pig (Swine)													
Duck													
Pigeon													
Others.....													

41

Income from the sale of animal products (last year)		
Product	Monthly income (NRs)	Annual income (NRs)
Milk sale		
Curd/yogurt		
Ghee (clarified butter)		
Meat		
Eggs		
Others.....		

42

Annual household non-agricultural income (last year)	
Sources of income	Annual income (NRs)
Salary	
Pension	
Wage labour	
Remittances	
Trade/business	
Cottage industry	
Local technical service	
Others.....	

H. Household expenditure

43 How much did you spend/invest last year as per the following items?

Sector	Expenditure (NRs)		
	Monthly	Yearly	Occasional
Agricultural inputs			
Food purchase			
Electricity bill			
House rent (if any)			
Fuel and energy (fuel wood etc.)			
Other household expenses (salt, oil etc)			
Education			
Health/medical			
Telephone bills			
Technical service (agri., vet)			
Technology (irrigation, pump, motors etc)			
Marriages			
Clothing			
Festivals and ceremonies			
Buying agricultural land			
Buying residential land (ghaderi)			
Investing other members to migrate			
Entertainment (travel, holidays)			
Durables/jewellery			

44 If you have a surplus income, how do you manage?

46 How do you prefer to save your income?

bank saving

land purchase

jewellery

savings in the group

others

47 Why?

J. Migration and remittances

48 Do you have any members in your household who has currently migrated for work?

☐ yes☐ no*If no, go to Question 56*

49 How many members have migrated? Or how many members are not at home currently?

Name	Age	Sex	Marital status	Education	Where	Recruiter	Job	How many times
	years	1 male 2 female	*	**		***	****	
M1								
M2								
M3								
M4								
M5								
M6								

<u>*code: marital status</u> 1. Single 2. Married 3. Widow/widower 4. Divorced (legal) 5. Separated (not divorced)	<u>**code: education</u> 1. Not applicable (age <5) 2. Illiterate 3. Literate (but never to school) 4. Finished primary (grade 5) 5. Finished secondary (grade 10) 6. School Leaving Certificate (SLC) 7. Finished higher secondary (grade 12) 8. Bachelor degree and above	<u>***code: recruiter/network</u> 1. Self 2. Relatives/friends 3. Broker/agencies 4. Government 99. Others (specify).....	<u>****code: job type</u> 1. Unskilled manual 2. Skilled manual 3. Service sector 99. Others (specify).....
--	--	---	--

Recruiter can be **asked only** for those who have migrated **abroad** but not for the in-country migrants for work

50 How much did you spend to send the following members for work?

Name	Place	Process	Cost	Financing	Interest rate
		*	NRs	**	***
M1					
M2					
M3					
M4					
M5					
M6					

<u>*code: process</u> 1. Self initiation (direct contact with manpower agents) 2. Use of brokers 99. Others (specify).....	<u>**code: financing</u> 1. Own resources 2. Local money lenders 3. Bank/cooperatives 99. Others (specify).....	*** mention the interest rate in local term (% per year or NRs. Per month
--	--	--

51 Can you please order the following causes of migration in terms of importance in your case?

a	Increased family size	
b	Low agri-production	
c	Unemployment	
d	Unsatisfied income	
e	Foreign experience	
f	Increased debt	
g	Capital formation	
h	Others	

52 Do you receive remittances from the migrant members? ☐ yes ☐ No

If yes,

53 How much did you receive as remittances from the migrant members during last year?

Name	Place	Means *	Amount NRs.	<i>*code: means</i> 1. Money transfer 2. Bank transfer 3. Hundi 99. Others (specify).....
M1				
M2				
M3				
M4				
M5				
M6				

54 How do you compensate the reduced family labour to work on the farm? (order by importance)

a	Sufficient remaining labour	
b	Seek help from relatives	
c	Seek help from neighbours	
d	Hire paid labour*	
e	Others.....	
f		
g		

* If it is paid labour, how much do you pay for?

Rs. Per day or
 Rs. Per month or
 Rs. Per year

55 How is their availability?

Readily available
 Difficult

56 Do you have any returned migrants at your household who has decided not to migrate anymore?

yes ☐ no ☐

57 If yes, why has s/he decided not to go for foreign/distant employment?

Name	Duration of stay	Number of times	Reason *	Total amount earned NRs.	<i>*code: reason</i> 1. Retired (old) 2. Aim fulfilled (earned enough) 3. Bad experience 4. Demotivated at work 99. Others (specify).....
M1					
M2					
M3					
M4					

58 Have the returned migrants changed the means of living after migration? yes ☐ no ☐

59 If yes, what do the returned migrants do for living now?

Name	Means of living before migration	Means of living after migration
M1		
M2		
M3		
M4		

Remarks, if any:

60 Have any members from this household who tried to migrate abroad for work but failed? yes ☐
no ☐

61 If yes, can you please give the following information?

Name	Place	When	How much did you lose for that?	How did you manage to get that money?	How were you able to recover the lost money?
M1					
M2					
M3					
M4					

K. Household division of labour

- 62 Now we would like to ask you some questions about who does what in your household. Please tell us who does the following tasks in your household. (tick the appropriate box)

Activities		always M	usually M	M and F about equally	usually F	always F	Not applicable
		1	2	3	4	5	8
	<i>Domestic</i>						
1	Preparing daily meals						
2	Doing the dishes						
3	Fetching drinking water						
4	Collecting firewood						
5	Attending children/child care						
6	Shopping for daily needs						
7	Going to mills (hulling, flouring)						
8	Washing clothes						
	<i>Agricultural</i>						
9	Cleaning livestock shed						
10	Feeding livestock						
11	Cutting grass (collecting forage)						
12	Pulling hay from the stack						
13	Ploughing						
14	Hoeing/using spade						
15	Uprooting rice						
16	Rice transplanting						
17	Sowing/broadcasting seeds						
18	Weeding						
19	Harvesting						
20	Threshing and storing						
21	Carrying manure						
22	Milking cattle (cow/buffalo)						

L. Household decision making

- 63 Can you please tell us who makes decision about the following issues in your household? (tick the appropriate box)

Decisions		always M	usually M	M and F about equally	usually F	always F	Not applicable
		1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>Domestic</i>						
1	Routine purchase for the household						
2	Occasional more expensive for the household (clothes etc.)						
3	Selection of schools for the children						
4	A family member to migrate						
5	Make use of remittances from the migrants						
6	Selection of bridegroom for daughter						
7	Selection of bride for son						
8	How much to spend for child marriage						
9	Building a new house						
10	Buying land for housing (in city)						
11	Seeking membership from a group						
12	How much to spend in the festivals and ceremonies						
	<i>Agricultural</i>						
13	How much to sell the agricultural products						
14	How much to sell the livestock products						
15	Make use of income from the sales						
16	Buying new agricultural land						
17	Buying new livestock (cattle, goat, pig etc.)						
18	Which crops to grow						
19	Which farm implements to buy						
20	Invest in (new) agricultural technologies						

M. Group membership and communication

64 Are any women members of this household a member of the groups/committees in the village?

yes ☐ no ☐

65 If yes, can you tell us who is a member of which group?

SN	Name	Code from HH roster	Name of the groups/committees
1			
2			
3			

(The following questions go to first daughter-in-law or wife of the male household head)

66 How often do you attend group/committee meetings you are a member of?

SN	Member code	Special function		Participation in meetings		
		yes*	no	always	now & then	rarely/none
1						
2						
3						

*If yes, which group?

a.
b.
c.

(The following questions go to the wife of the migrant worker in that household, if there are many ask the first one)

67 How do you communicate with your husband?

means	freq.	observation	
now			
5 years ago			

68 What matters do you talk with your husband during your communication?

--

69 What decisions do you take on your own?

--

70 Whom do you consult first if you have to take some difficult decisions?

	husband		others (specify)
	father-in-law		

71 For what decisions do you to have to ask with your husband?

--

72 For what decisions do you to have to ask with your father-in-law or others?

--

Summary

In the last few decades, Nepal is witnessing remarkable changes in its social, economic, political, and cultural landscape, such as the unprecedented outward flow of young adults in search of employment. Labour out-migration is becoming a major factor in the rural transformation of Nepal. Most migration studies however focus on the area of destination, the migrants themselves, and the causes of migration. In the areas of origin, studies tend to focus on the economic impacts of remittances, mostly at macro level. Anthropological studies of migration focusing on the social and cultural dimensions, which are equally important, are largely ignored. The people left behind often remain invisible and their role, experience, wellbeing and relationship with the phenomenon of migration are not well understood.

This study aims to improve our understanding of the sociocultural transformation of contemporary rural Nepal by examining how male labour out-migration has triggered sociocultural transformation, and how – in turn – this process stimulates labour out-migration in one of the biggest migrant sending areas of the country. The specific objectives of the study are: to document the changing discourses of migration in a changing society; to examine how labour out-migration leads to changes in the valuation of agriculture for food security, to document how the land has become a decisive element in the phenomenon of in- and out-migration in rural Nepal; to examine the effects of male labour out-migration on agriculture and women's empowerment; and to examine the effects of male labour out-migration on the objective and subjective wellbeing of the women left behind.

The study is based on the fieldwork carried out in Jhapa District of Nepal, in the period of June 2008 to January 2010. Situated in the south-eastern corner of the country, Jhapa is one of the more developed districts (among the 75 districts) in terms of the human development index and other development indicators. Jhapa forms the *terai* section of the Mechi Zone located in the Eastern Development Region. Within Jhapa district the fieldwork was conducted in the village (VDC) of Maharani Jhoda. Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were applied. Qualitative data were collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions and group interviews, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, whereas quantitative data were collected through a household survey among 277 households. The fieldwork consisted of three, partly overlapping phases: the preparatory phase, the quantitative data collection phase and the qualitative data collection phase. Participant observation was done during all stages of the research.

In terms of respondent characteristics, the Hill Brahmin-Chhetris were found to be the biggest ethnic group, followed by the Hill Janajati, the Terai Janajati, the Other Terai group, and the Hill Dalit. The average household size proved to be 5.7. Most of the respondents are smallholder farmers with landholdings of 0.8 hectares on average. Almost half of the households in the sample had at least one member migrated for work and over 40 per cent received remittances in the year prior to the survey. Most of the migrant workers are male, young and married. In-country labour migration concerns the rural-urban moves of migrants to find jobs in the urban centres. Major destinations of international migration are Qatar, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and India.

Unemployment, low income from agriculture, lack of employment opportunities, low incentives for educated manpower, and the rising demand for money, were found to be the main motives for out-migration. Aspiring an advanced lifestyle and the desire to acquire modern consumption goods such as owned by migrant families, also appeared to be motives in migration decisions. Hence, like the movements of people, also their motives for moving are not static and cannot be taken for granted. The *terai* has long been receiving migrants from the hills, especially since the eradication of malaria and the opening up of the area for settlement in the 1950s. However, in the recent history of population movement in Nepal the *terai* has also become a prime migrant sending area. Jhapa, one of the *terai* districts, ranks second in sending migrants among the 75 districts of the country. The study shows that the *terai* region cannot be labelled as either migrant sending or receiving. It may be both, though at different points in time.

The study shows that land, even though a physically immobile entity, can play an active role in the mobility and mobilisation of human and non-human actors. Through the networks of land and labour, both socially and spatially, under the influence of global and local forces land has become a central element in the human mobility that is part of changing networks of land-people relationships. At some point in history, the fertile *terai* land attracted migrants for whom agriculture was the primary source of livelihood. In contemporary times, the declining value of agricultural land drives people out as labour migrants. Although retaining its social and cultural value, agricultural land is no longer seen as the mainstay for livelihood enhancement. Moreover, the changed perceptions of land and labour among the younger generation have become an integral part of strategic livelihood decisions in conditions of social change.

It was found that male labour out-migration has increased women's labour participation in agriculture, more significantly so in those cases where the left-behind women are *de facto* household heads than in cases where they live with in-laws. Similarly, in the case of *de facto* female heads of households, their role in agricultural decision making has increased. Women, who in the absence of their husbands live with their in-laws, continue to remain under patriarchal control, not by their husbands but by their father-in-law and elder brothers-in-law. Women who are *de facto* heads of the households can exercise more autonomy in decision-making and have more control over their own mobility. Thus, the effects of male out-migration on women's participation in agricultural work and decision making are also contingent upon the domestic arrangement in which they find themselves. As for the question of whether the feminisation of agriculture leads to women's empowerment, the research does not provide definite answers. The issue of women's empowerment has also to be seen in the wider context of on-going processes of social change in rural Nepal. We observed that the material or objective wellbeing of the women left behind improves with receiving remittances. However, the cognitive and emotional dimensions of women's relationship with their immediate kin (in-laws) often do not improve. In other words, remittances do not necessarily increase the subjective wellbeing of migrants' wives, particularly when they are residing with their in-laws.

Migration definitely is a partial solution to the current unemployment problem in the research area even though remittances have increased the household income and the objective wellbeing of the people left behind. At the same time, we have seen migration has contributed little to agricultural development. While the older generation believes in agriculture and agricultural land as reliable means of attaining food security, the younger generation is less interested in practicing agriculture for food security and aspires to move out of agriculture and pursue a different lifestyle. Nevertheless, also the younger generation keeps investing in land, not for agricultural but for residential purposes, preferably in towns. The negative attitude of the younger generation towards agriculture while keeping the land for social status may result in their owning but not cultivating land. In such a situation, there is a risk of the gradual depletion of indigenous agro-ecological knowledge across the generations. Similarly, if potential farmers are little interested in agriculture and the trend of out-migration from land-owning households continues, the future of the *terai* as an agricultural area becomes doubtful. Households may be food secure also because of income from remittances, but when the total acreage of agricultural production decreases, total food production will decline. This could ultimately jeopardise food security, not only in the *terai* but also in the country as a whole.

Yet another scenario is also conceivable, namely that of the redistribution of land. The younger generation may move out of agriculture, but the total food production could still be sustained if wage labourers start cultivating the land of migrants who have been renting out their land. If this would happen, the region could attract migrants from other areas and the *terai* would again become a place of destination. This would entail another wave of labour reorganisation and land redistribution, which would further prove the role of land as a crucial element in the dynamics of in- and out-migration.

Samenvatting

Gedurende de afgelopen decennia onderging Nepal belangrijke veranderingen in zijn sociale, economische, politieke en culturele omstandigheden, zoals de ongeëvenaarde trek naar het buitenland van jonge volwassen mannen op zoek naar werk. Arbeidsmigratie is een belangrijke factor geworden in de rurale transformatie van Nepal. Toch richten de meeste migratiestudies zich op het bestemmingsgebied, de migranten zelf, en de oorzaken van migratie. Studies over het herkomstgebied richten zich vooral op de economische gevolgen van de geldoverboekingen, meestal op macro nivo. Antropologische studies van migratie die zich richten op de sociale en culturele dimensies, welke niet minder belangrijk zijn, worden grotendeels verontachtzaamd. De achterblijvers blijven dikwijls onzichtbaar en hun rol, ervaringen, welzijn en relatie met het verschijnsel migratie worden niet goed begrepen.

In dit kader wil deze studie bijdragen tot een beter begrip van de sociaalculturele transformatie van het huidige rurale Nepal door te onderzoeken hoe de emigratie van mannelijke arbeidskrachten deze sociaal-culturele transformatie op gang heeft gebracht en hoe, op zijn beurt, dit veranderingsproces de arbeidsmigratie in een van de belangrijkste migratiegebieden van het land gaande houdt. De specifieke doelstellingen van deze studie zijn: verslag te doen van de veranderende opvattingen over migratie in een veranderende samenleving; te onderzoeken hoe arbeidsmigratie bijdraagt aan veranderingen in de waardering van landbouw als bron van voedselzekerheid; vast te leggen hoe land een doorslaggevend element is in het verschijnsel van immigratie en emigratie op het platteland van Nepal; te onderzoeken wat de effecten zijn van de arbeidsmigratie van mannen op de landbouw als ook ten aanzien van de emancipatie van vrouwen; na te gaan wat de effecten van de arbeidsmigratie van mannen op het objectieve en subjectieve welbevinden van de achterblijvende vrouwen.

Het onderzoek is gebaseerd op veldwerk in het Jhapa district van Nepal in de periode van juni 2008 tot januari 2010. Jhapa, gelegen in de zuidoostelijke hoek van het land, is een van de meer ontwikkelde districten (van de in totaal 75 districten) gemeten in termen van de *human development index* en andere ontwikkelingsindicatoren. Jhapa behoort tot het zogenaamde *terai* (laagland)gebied van de Mechi Zone binnen het Oostelijk Ontwikkelingsgebied van Nepal. In het Jhapa district werd het onderzoek uitgevoerd in het dorp (VDC) Mahartanijahoda. Zowel kwalitatieve als kwantitatieve onderzoeksstrategieën werden toegepast. Kwalitatieve onderzoeksgegevens werden verzameld door middel van interviews met sleutelinformanten, focus groep discussies en groepsinterviews, diepte interviews, en participerende observatie, terwijl kwantitatieve gegevens verzameld werden met behulp van een huishoudsurvey onder 277 huishoudens. Het veldwerk bestond uit drie, gedeeltelijk overlappende fasen: de voorbereidende fase, de fase van de verzameling van kwantitatieve gegevens en die van de verzameling van kwalitatieve gegevens. Participerende observatie vond plaats gedurende alle fasen van het onderzoek.

Onder de respondenten vormden de Hill Brahmin-Chhettri de grootste ethnische groep, gevolgd door de Hill Janajati, de Terai Janajati, de Overige Terai groep, en de Hill Dalit. De gemiddelde huishoudgrootte bedroeg 5.7. De meeste respondenten waren kleine boeren met een gemiddeld landbezit van 0.8 hectare. Bijna de helft van de huishoudens in de steekproef leverde tenminste een arbeidsmigrant en meer dan veertig procent had geld (*remittances*) ontvangen in het jaar voorafgaande aan de survey. De meeste arbeidsmigranten waren man, jong, en getrouwd. De binnenlandse arbeidsmigratie betreft de trek van migranten van het platteland naar stedelijke centra. Belangrijke bestemmingen van internationale arbeidsmigratie zijn Qatar, Maleisië, Saoedi Arabië, de Verenigde Arabische Emiraten, en India.

Werkloosheid, lage inkomsten uit landbouw, gebrek aan arbeidsmogelijkheden, lage beloningen voor geschoold personeel, en de toenemende vraag naar geld, bleken de belangrijkste motieven te verschaffen voor emigratie. Het verlangen naar betere levensomstandigheden en moderne consumptiegoederen bleken eveneens motieven te zijn voor emigratie. Zoals de bewegingen van de mensen zijn ook hun motieven om te migreren niet statisch noch vanzelfsprekend. Reeds lang ontvangt het laagland migranten uit de heuvels, vooral nadat in de jaren vijftig van de 20e eeuw malaria was uitgeroeid en het gebied was open gelegd. In de recente migratiegeschiedenis van Nepal is het laagland echter een belangrijk uitzendgebied van migranten geworden. Jhapa, een *terai* district, behoort in rangorde tot het tweede uitzendgebied van de in totaal 75 districten van het land. Deze studie laat zien dat de *terai* niet eenduidig aangemerkt kan worden als een uitzendgebied of ontvangstgebied van migranten; het kan beide zijn, maar op verschillende momenten.

De studie laat zien dat land, hoewel een fysiek onbeweeglijk element, toch een actieve rol speelt in de mobiliteit van menselijke en niet-menselijke actoren. Zowel sociaal als in de tijd, en onder de invloed van krachten op lokaal en mondiaal niveau, is land een centraal element geworden in de menselijke mobiliteit die onderdeel is van de veranderende netwerken van land-mens relaties. Op een bepaald moment in de geschiedenis, trok het vruchtbare laagland migranten aan voor wie landbouw de belangrijksre bron van bestaan was. In het huidige tijdsgewricht zorgt de afnemende waarde die aan landbouw en landbouwgrond wordt toegekend ervoor dat mensen de *terai* verlaten als arbeidsmigranten. Landbouwgrond behoudt weliswaar zijn sociale en culturele waarde, maar wordt niet langer meer gezien als het belangrijkste middel ter verbetering van het bestaan. De veranderende kijk op land en arbeid onder de jongere generatie zijn een integraal deel geworden van strategische beslissingen ten aanzien van het levensonderhoud in veranderende sociale omstandigheden.

Gebleken is dat de emigratie van mannelijke arbeidskrachten de arbeidsparticipatie van vrouwen in de landbouw heeft doen stijgen. Deze stijging was significant groter onder achterblijvende vrouwen die de facto als hoofd van het huishouden optraden dan voor vrouwen die bij hun schoonfamilie inwoonden. Vrouwen die de facto huishoudhoofd waren hadden ook een grotere stem in de besluitvorming ten aanzien van de landbouw. Vrouwen die gedurende de afwezigheid van hun mannen bij hun schoonfamilie inwonen blijven onder patriarchaal gezag, niet zozeer van hun echtgenoot maar van hun schoonvader en oudere zwagers. Vrouwen die de facto het hoofd van het huishouden zijn kunnen meer zelfstandige beslissingen nemen en hebben een grotere bewegingsvrijheid. Met andere woorden, de effecten van de emigratie van mannelijke arbeidskrachten op de participatie van vrouwen in de landbouw en op besluitvorming zijn mede afhankelijke van de huiselijke omstandigheden waarin de vrouwen zich bevinden. Wat betreft de vraag of de feminisering van de landbouw ook leidt tot een versterking van de positie van vrouwen verschaft het onderzoek geen eenduidige antwoorden. Het vraagstuk van de versterking van de positie van vrouwen moet ook begrepen worden binnen het grotere kader van de vigerende processen van sociale verandering op het platteland van Nepal. Wij constateerden dat het materiële of objectieve welbevinden van achterblijvende vrouwen toeneemt door de ontvangst van *remittances*. De cognitieve en emotionele dimensies van de relatie van de vrouwen met hun directe (schoon)familie verbeteren daarentegen dikwijls niet. Met andere woorden, het inkomen uit migratie leidt niet noodzakelijk tot een verhoging van het subjectieve welbevinden van vrouwen, met name voor hen die bij hun schoonfamilie inwonen.

Het is zeker dat de emigratie voor een deel een oplossing biedt voor het huidige werkloosheidsprobleem in het onderzoeksgebied en dat *remittances* het objectieve welbevinden van de achterblijvers hebben verhoogd. Tegelijkertijd hebben we geconstateerd dat de emigratie

in het algemeen weinig heeft bijgedragen aan de ontwikkeling van de landbouw. Terwijl de oudere generatie haar geloof stelt in de landbouw en in landbouwgrond als een betrouwbare basis voor voedsel- en bestaanszekerheid, is de jongere generatie steeds minder geïnteresseerd in het bedrijven van de landbouw en koestert zij de wens de landbouw te verlaten voor een andere bestaanswijze. Toch blijft ook de jongere generatie in land investeren, niet zozeer voor de landbouw als wel voor huisvestingdoeleinden en met name in stedelijke gebieden. De negatieve attitude van de jongere generatie ten opzichte van de landbouw kan ertoe leiden dat zij land bezitten om redenen van sociale status maar het niet om het te verbouwen. In zo'n situatie bestaat het gevaar van een geleidelijke teloorgang van de landbouw-ecologische kennis als die niet meer van de ene generatie op de andere wordt doorgegeven.

Als potentiële boeren weinig geïnteresseerd zijn in de landbouw en het proces van emigratie onder de land bezittende huishoudens doorzet, dan wordt ook de toekomst van de *terai* als landbouwgebied twijfelachtig. Huishoudens kunnen hun voedselzekerheid dan wel veilig stellen met inkomen uit migratie, maar als het totale landbouwareaal vermindert zal ook de voedselproductie afnemen. Dit zou uiteindelijk de voedselzekerheid in gevaar kunnen brengen, niet alleen in het laagland maar ook van het land als geheel. Een ander scenario is evenwel denkbaar, namelijk dat van herverdeling van het land. De totale voedselproductie kan nog steeds op peil worden gehouden als, zoals wij reeds incidenteel konden observeren, landloze boeren het land van migranten tegen betaling (of oogstdeling) gaan bewerken. Als deze ontwikkeling doorzet, dan zou de *terai* opnieuw mensen uit andere delen van Nepal kunnen aantrekken om zich er te vestigen. Dit zou kunnen leiden tot een andere vorm van organisatie van arbeid en toegang tot land, welke de betekenis van land als cruciaal element in de dynamiek van immigratie en emigratie zou bevestigen.

About the Author

Mr. Hom Nath Gartaula was born on 7th August 1975 and raised in a village in Jhapa district, Eastern Nepal. In 1998, he graduated from the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science, Tribhuvan University with a BSc degree in Agriculture, specialising in Soil Science. The next year he started his career as an Agriculture Officer for a non-government organisation in rural Nepal, where he provided training and technical support to farmers on vegetable production and cooperative management. In 2001, he joined another NGO as a Project Coordinator for a project on women's empowerment and local governance in the hills of Nepal, working together with managers of cooperatives, government and NGO officials, women groups, farmers associations and donor agencies for the effective implementation and sustainable outcomes of the project.

In 2003, Mr. Gartaula was accepted in the Netherlands Fellowship Programme to pursue further studies at Wageningen University, the Netherlands. He graduated in 2005 with an MSc in Management of Agro-ecological Knowledge and Social Change (popularly known as MAKS), with a specialisation in Rural Development Sociology. Applying ethnographic research methods, his MSc thesis looked into the knowledge interface among the development actors of the Integrated Coastal Area Management programs in Kenya.

During 2005-2007, Mr. Gartaula was teaching undergraduate students of Purwanchal University in Kathmandu and did short-term consultancies and research for projects related to intersectoral water transfer, water governance, groundwater irrigation and agriculture policies. During the same period, he also was involved in the monitoring and evaluation of country-wide agriculture and rural development projects in Nepal. The job mainly involved policy research-related tasks such as data collection and analysis, literature review writing, report writing, workshop organisation, and coordination with policy makers.

In September 2007, Mr. Gartaula started his PhD studies at Wageningen University under two research groups: Sociology of Consumers and Households and Rural Development Sociology. His PhD study was funded by the Wageningen University Sandwich Fellowship Program and his fieldwork in Nepal for his PhD thesis was sponsored by the Neys-van Hoogstraten Foundation, based in The Hague, the Netherlands.

Mr. Gartaula recently accepted a post-doctoral researcher position for an IDRC-Canada funded project related to food and nutritional security of women and children in South Asia. For this work he is based at the University of Manitoba and the Canadian Mennonite University, both located at Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Name of the course	Department/Institute	When	ECTS*
I. General part			
Research Methodology I: From topic to proposal	MG3S/ CERES/ SENSE	2007	4.0
Information Literacy including introduction Endnote	WGS	2007	0.6
Quantitative Research Methodology	MG3S	2007	4.0
Techniques of writing and presenting a scientific paper	WGS	2008	1.2
Methods, techniques and computer tools for qualitative data collection and analysis	MG3S	2008	2.3
Philosophy and Ethics of Food Science and Technology	VLAG	2008	1.5
Scientific Writing	WGS	2010	1.8
Career Perspective	WGS	2010	1.6
II. Mansholt-specific part			
Mansholt Introduction course	MG3S	2007	1.5
Presentation 1: Youth, Globalization and Social Transformation: 34 th All India Sociological Conference	Indian Sociological Society, Jaipur, India	2008	1.0
Presentation 2: Mansholt PhD Day	MG3S	2010	1.0
Presentation 3: Third International NHF Workshop: Food and Nutrition Security in Transition	Neys van Hoogstraten Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia	2010	1.0
Presentation 4: Advance Research Seminar	RDS/WUR	2010	1.0
Presentation 5: Eleventh Thinking Qualitatively Conference	International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, Edmonton, Canada	2011	1.0
III. Discipline-specific part			
Rural Gender Studies + special arrangement for PhD (individual paper)	SCH50306	2007	6.0 + 1.5
Anthropology and Rural Development	RDS32306	2008	6.0
TOTAL (minimum 30 ECTS)			37.0

*ECTS stands for European Credit Transfer System, 1 ECTS = 28 hours