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Migration to and from the Nepal *terai*: shifting movements and motives

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In Nepal, 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, in-depth qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and household survey were used for data collection, with considerable inputs from ethnographical fieldwork for about 21 months. The paper presents three types of population flows 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 paper exemplifies that poverty and lack of arable land are not the only push factors, but that pursuing a better quality of life is gaining 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.

Introduction

In-migration to and out-migration from Nepal and the *terai* is not a new phenomenon. Nepalese migration is generally attributed to poverty, destitution, unequal allocation of and distribution of resources, geographical variation of labour demand and so on (KC 2003). However, the trend, pattern, causes, consequences, and drivers are changing over time. This paper highlights how the perceptions, motivations and discourses of migration are changing across time and space. In the past, there was a high level of in-migration to Nepal, from both of its neighbours: China and India. Migrants from China were largely nomadic Mongoloid people who wanted 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. Other migrants from India (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 promising agricultural livelihood opportunities. Hence, hill-to-*terai* migration became a prominent demographic, socio-political and economic phenomenon. The fertile land, plain topography, easy access, and improved infrastructure were pull factors, while the uneven topography, lack of arable and fertile land, and the miserable

lives 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 within the country mobility of people, with regard to in-migration to the *terai* as well as out-migration from the hills. However, due to population pressure and the 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* increased after the 1950s, 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, inducing tremendous sociocultural changes in the region. Migration itself used to be considered a ‘last resort’ livelihood option, a shameful venture of unfortunate households inspired by the vision of better options elsewhere (Hutt 1998; Golay 2006). Now the situation has changed. Nepal is experiencing an

exodus of international labour migrants, the majority of them being from the *terai*, which historically had the image of a migrant-receiving area.

Against the background outlined above, this paper aims to shed light on the changing migration flows and shifting motives of migrants by focusing on the *terai*. Migration can be defined as spatial mobility of people, in the study of which the temporal dimension intersects with the spatial dimension (Jones 1990). Migration theory has long been dominated by neoclassical economics, which framed spatial mobility as the aggregated result of the rational decision of individuals in search of better economic prospects. New economic approaches to labour migration rejected this individualistic bias and emphasized the role of family, households and even communities in migration decision-making (Castles and Millet 2009). We concur with the latter view, which is reflected in our data. The social scientific literature on migration shows two main strands of investigation: research on the determinants of migration in the area of origin and research on the incorporation of migrants in the social structures in the area of destination. This paper addresses neither strand in particular. Instead, we intend to bridge the divide by taking the *terai* as the starting point, presenting it as a site that through time displays multi-directional population movement. In fact, what we do could be called a ‘social history of the *terai*’, much in

the same way as a study on Patagonia documented the ‘social life of a region’ (Blanco Wells 2009).

The following section presents the context of in- and out-migration history in Nepal and relating to this to the *terai*. We describe how the research area, located in the *terai*, became part of these historical and contemporary regional population movements. Subsequently, the data collection process and the main features of the research areas are described. In the empirical section, by analysing the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the field, the paper shows how in the *terai* not only people’s movements changed but also their motivation for moving.

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 featured in the Nepalese migration literature for a long time (e.g. Dahal 1983; Gartaula 2009; Gurung 2001; Kansakar 1984; Seddon et al. 2002; Sharma and Sharma 2011). The literature shows that the changing discourses of migration and its global-local interactions in relation to the global forces impinging upon local processes have become topics of academic interest.

In-migration to Nepal and the Terai

Migration from neighbouring countries into Nepal has been going on since the dawn of civilization. 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). The 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, Nepal sheltered many Indians who took refuge to

avoid being forcefully converted to Islam. Their number was so huge 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 people of Indian origin 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*, while the second regular immigration included people from India, Bangladesh and Burma. He reports five periodic flows of population into the Nepal *terai*: 1) Hindus from North India during eleventh and twelfth centuries as a result of the Muslim invasion in India; 2) About 16000 Tibetan refugees in 1959/60 due to political instability in Tibet; 3) Nepali-origin people from Burma because of the Burmese Nationalization Act in 1964; 4) 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, the *terai* 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 people. 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 lowland *terai* and Nepalese hill people went to the Indian hills.

However, 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 corroborates the above descriptions,

showing an increased population growth in the *terai*. The average annual population growth rate for the country during 1952/54-81 was 2.2 per cent, varying from 1.2 per cent in the mountains and hills to 3.3 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). Whelpton (2008: 123) reports, “by the 1980s, only 45 per cent of Nepal’s population lived in the hills, compared with 60 per cent twenty years earlier”.

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 form 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 migrant labourers are termed '*New Lahures*' (Seddon et al. 2001), while the word NRN (Non-Resident Nepali) is gaining popularity 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, without restriction on the movement of people of both countries. Hence, because of open borders, cultural similarities, and the fact that no papers are required for crossing the border, 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 (Seddon 2005; Hutt 1998).

In the recent history, Nepal is experiencing a huge out-migration and gaining status as a labour-exporting country. Out-migration of Nepalese youths to foreign countries increased especially after restoration of multi-party democracy and liberalization in 1990. Following a decade-long Maoist insurgency that ended in 2006, Nepal is experiencing a number of political transitions, for example, the abolition

of monarchy and the conversion of Nepal into a Federal Democratic Republic state with a President as an elected head of the state. However, the uncertain political and economic situation has been a major driving force for Nepalese youth to look for alternatives abroad (Bohra and Massey 2009; Ghimire et al. 2010; Wagle 2012). Consequently, the proportion of households receiving remittances has increased from 32 per cent in 2003/04 to 56 per cent in 2010/11 (CBS 2011). 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 (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. It is estimated that remittances have contributed to 30 per cent of the GDP (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, clearly 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 migrating 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 Gorkha (or ‘Gurkhas’)¹. The term was coined during the colonial period in India to denote a specific group of people originated from Nepal serving the then British East India Company. From 1768 to 1836, Nepal’s relation with the British East India Company was not harmonious. The then 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: 53). 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 police are involved in the UN peacekeeping force in many countries.

Golay (2006: 33) says, “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 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; rest of the districts are from the *terai*, changing direction of the Nepalese

¹The 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.

out-migration pattern. The district of Jhapa, the study area, ranks second in labour out-migration.

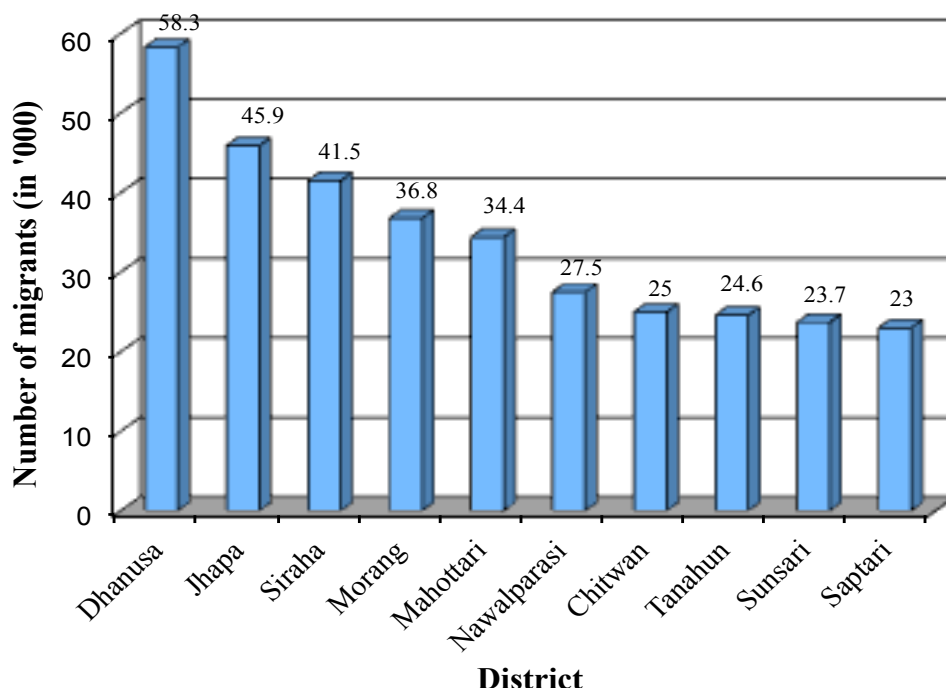


Figure 1: Number of migrants in the top 10 districts from 2003 to 2009. Source: Department of Foreign Employment, Government of Nepal

Methodology

The study is based on 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 village development committee (VDC), the research area. Purposes of this survey were 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-migration².

In the second phase (Feb-May 2009), the household survey was carried out among 277

households using a

stratified random sampling. 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 interview schedule was pre-tested with the households outside the study area before actual survey administration.

In the third phase (Aug-Dec 2009), 26 in-depth interviews were conducted with the actors

²Due to lack of official statistics, the choice of Maharani Jhoda VDC was checked with the information sought from 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.

involved in labour out-migration. The key informant interviews, focus group discussion and observation were done in all phases of the study. 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 were used for the analysis of quantitative data, while the qualitative data were analysed manually using qualitative content analysis technique (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009).

The research area

The fieldwork was conducted in Maharani Jhoda Village Development Committee (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*) that run from north to south. The *terai* is an extension of the flood plain of the Ganges River in India. Maharani Jhoda 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 (Figure 2). The available historical sources indicate that the settlement in Maharani Jhoda dates back 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 then royal family. The name of the VDC is derived from the words Maharani (meaning 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 the hill migrants from adjoining hilly districts started to migrate to this area.

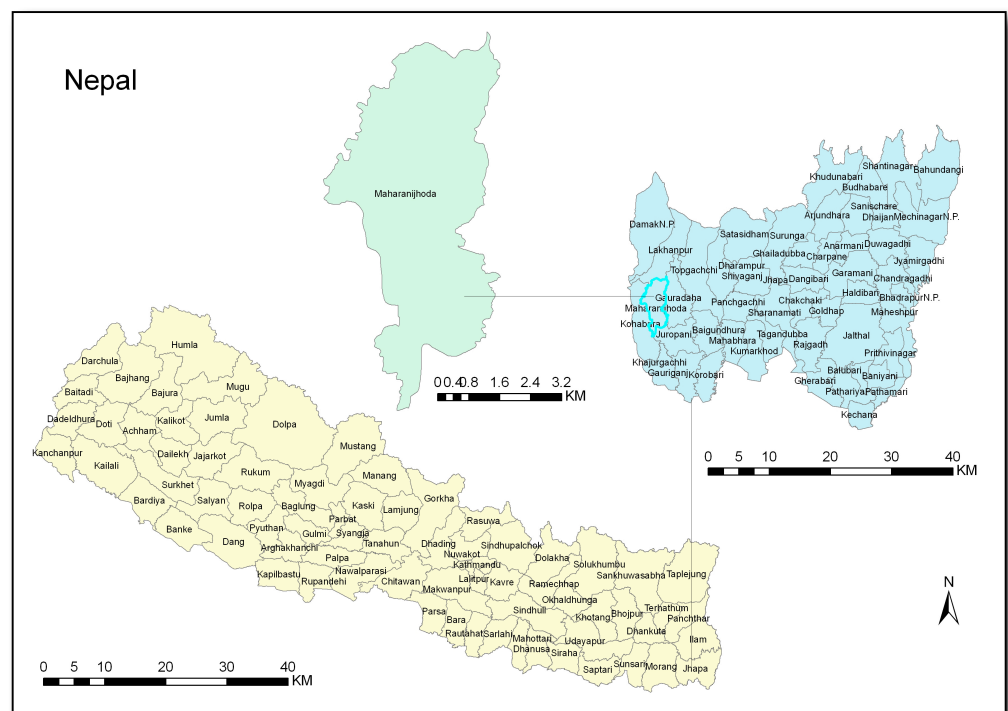


Figure 2: Map of Nepal showing the study area.

Source: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

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. They usually do this more than once and the cycle continues for many years, sometimes until the retirement of the migrant worker.

The survey data show that the dominant caste/ethnic group³ in Maharani Jhoda is the Hill Brahmin-Chhetri⁴ group (56.7%); followed by the Hill Janajati⁵ (21.3%) such as Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Magar, Newar; the Terai Janajati (12.3%), like Tajpuriya, Rajbansi, Tharu, Satar; the Hill Dalit⁶ (4.0%), and the Other Terai group

(5.8%) that includes Muslims and others such as 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 flows between the earlier in-migration and the present out-migration. The Hill Brahmin/Chhetris and Hill Janajati who at the time moved to the *terai* did so in the form of permanent family migration, while now they are engaged in individual temporary out-migration from the *terai*.

Results and discussion

In-migration to the area: an early account

The narratives from the early settlers in Maharani Jhoda indicate that in the early days there was plenty of land in the area, as indicated below. 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

³In 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 4, 5 and 6.

⁴Brahmins 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).

⁵Janajatis (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).

⁶Dalit is a word coined to denote all the so-called untouchable caste groups such as Kami (blacksmiths), Damai (tailors) and Sarki (cobblers) in Nepal.

generate 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 king.

In 1968, the land was planned according to an Israeli engineer who was invited to Nepal for this purpose. According to his plan, the roads should have 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, people invaded and registered most of those communal lands. Generally, the roads were not disturbed, but the narrow streets, graveyards, grazing lands, and ponds were infringed. The land mapping exercise was not successful and its results were never published. No records were found. Nevertheless, the present settlement is based on the outlines of the 1968 mapping.

In 1978, a new attempt at land registration was made. Land was redistributed using a maximum of two hectares per family, for which 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, the Sitoula commission provided the remaining certificates. Hence, most people have got their certificate of land registration 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 (72, Male, Brahmin):

RKP 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, a nearby town. There was a big forest area 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 land at Barhaghare for cultivation, while Shantabir wanted it cleared to develop it for commercial use for the benefit of

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 the possibilities to get land. The two leaders at the time were Hinda Bahadur Rai (HBR) and Indramani Karki (IMK). 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 forestland and establish settlements in the area.

On the day of 31 January 1962, HBR and IMK with the support from local people appealed to the then 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 the land and that is what we wanted.” (RKP, 6 August 2008)

The king then ordered to distribute land ranging from two to five *bigha* (1 *bigha* is equivalent to 0.66 ha) per family. The measurement was not so precise, but people had a rough idea about the amount of land they hold. RKP says,

“In the beginning, I had about 11 *bigha* (7.3 ha) land as I was one of the leaders during land distribution; 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 forestland: the dense Sal-forest (*Sorea 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 (64, Male, Chhetri):

DKP 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 then king's wife. Out of the total 4000 ha forestland, 2000 ha alone was in Maharani Jhoda, the remaining land in Kohabara, Juropani and Gauradaha VDCs.

DKP said there was no specific land distribution system; some migrants from the hills just occupied the land and started 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 the DKP and his fellow leaders started distributing the land here. Actually, they were already settled but then got permission from the king. 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 virgin.” (DKP, 10 August 2008)

In this description, the trend and patterns of in-migration to the research area among different ethnic groups show different picture. The hill people (Brahmins/Chhetris, Hill Janajati and Hill Dalits) came from hilly areas of eastern Nepal and India, especially after the 1950s, while the Terai Janajati seemed to arrive earlier than the hill people using different path. BTC (65, Male, Terai Janajati) said he was born in this place, but his grandfather came from

India long ago. Another respondent (BPL, 72, Male, Hill Janajati) said that when he migrated to this place in 1961, there were few Dhimal and Tajpuriya settlements in the area. Both Dhimal and Tajpuriya belong to the Terai Janajati group. This difference in trend and patterns of in-migration to the *terai* has also been reported in the studies of Gurung (2001) and Subedi (1991).

Two main factors played a role in the movement to the *terai* and the research area. On the one hand, as shown by the narratives, there was plenty of land. This abundance of land is also revealed by studies on other *terai* areas (Dahal 1983; Shrestha et al. 1993). On the other hand, out-migration was a means to escape the lack of arable land, oppression and exploitation of moneylenders in the hills (Hutt 1998). “The migration of ‘Nepalis’ from the eastern hills of Nepal into northeast India and beyond during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a poorly documented phenomenon, although it has had a formative effect on the culture and politics of the region” (Hutt 1998: 196).

Because of the lack of empirical studies about that time, Hutt (1998) analysed a number of novels, poems and stories based on social realism, using the truism that ‘literature is a mirror of the society’ as point of departure. He concludes that all the texts he described refer to the problems people had in the hills and how they tried to find a better living elsewhere. In fact, these two situations in the hills and in the

terai served as pull and push factors to drive people to the *terai*, though using different pathways. At that time, the economy in the *terai* was predominantly agrarian and having fertile land was not only a matter of food security, but also a status symbol.

The current outward move

The current scenario is entirely different. In-migration is rare, but out-migration is increasing. In the research area, more than half of the households (53.3%) have at least one migrant member, almost

one migrant per household. The average age of migrant members is 29.2 years with a maximum of 65 years; 58 per cent is married (42% unmarried). Likewise, almost 80 per cent of the migrants are between 20 and 40 years of age, which can be explained as follows. First, these are the economically active ages, from which the employers want to recruit their labour. Second, persons of school-going age see their slightly older peers migrating while they are at school, hence already anticipating the difficulties they will experience to find a job locally after finishing

school. Third, as reflected in the narratives of the migrants (see below), migrants are pressed by family obligations once they get married. It forces them to engage in rewarding economic activities, of which out-migration has proven to be a good option. Migrants of ages below 14 and above 55 years are not necessarily labour migrants; they can be students or persons accompanying in-country migrants. 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 1).

Destination	Caste/Ethnicity (%)					
	Hill Brahmin-Chhetri	Hill Janajati	Hill Dalit	Terai Janajati	Other Terai	Total
In country	228 (34.0)	39 (22.0)	4 (9.1)	10 (18.2)	2 (25.0)	283 (29.7)
Qatar	110 (16.4)	26 (14.7)	11 (25.0)	9 (16.4)	1 (12.5)	157 (16.5)
Malaysia	81 (12.1)	30 (16.9)	6 (13.6)	9 (16.4)	0 (0.0)	126 (13.2)
Saudi Arabia	79 (11.8)	37 (20.9)	4 (9.1)	4 (7.3)	0 (0.0)	124 (13.0)
India	41 (6.1)	9 (5.1)	7 (15.9)	14 (25.5)	3 (37.5)	74 (7.8)
Other Gulf states	30 (4.5)	15 (8.5)	5 (11.4)	5 (9.1)	1 (12.5)	56 (5.9)
Europe	8 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (0.8)
America	3 (0.4)	1 (0.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (0.4)
Others	12 (1.8)	9 (5.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (12.5)	22 (2.3)
Total	670 (70.2)	177 (18.6)	44 (4.6)	55 (5.8)	8 (0.8)	954 (100)

Table 1: Destination of migration according to caste/ethnic group. Source: Migration Assessment Survey 2008

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.

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 group 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, the economic viability of the hills and mountainous areas is limited; 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). Gurung argues that the 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.

Reasons for out-migration

The narratives of the earlier settlers show that they came to this place in search of an area suitable for rice cultivation. 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 (or 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 whom we asked for their views on the phenomenon of labour migration in the area.

The story of JBP (38, Male, Hill Janajati):

JBP 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 (32, Male, Brahmin):

The situation of TBP 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 and 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 could not pay the 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, 2 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, and 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 non-farm sources (mostly remittances) the farm production is

hardly enough to cater for the family”.

(DKP, 10 August 2008)

GBP (68, Male, Brahmin) 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 1000 rupees/month, it means 33 rupees per 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 1000 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 aspirations of the younger generation. The situation of increased unemployment among educated people results in increased labour out-migration. The descriptions are supported by the household survey data. 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. 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 2).

Reasons	Number of migrants (%)			
	As first reason	As second reason	As third reason	Total
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 fam. 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)

Table 2: Reasons for out-migration. 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. Hence, they may 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. “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. If those opportunities are also limited, people try to find their way outside their home area.

A significantly positive correlation (Pearson correlation coefficient=0.232, $p<0.001$) was found between landholding size and out-migration. This indicates that while formerly migration was inspired by motives of poverty and lack of land (previous hill to *terai* migration), in current times the motives to move from the *terai* are different and relate to the desire for upward mobility and improving the quality of life.

Return migrants: a source of inspiration

Out of 20 returnees, seven 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, took up 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 of migrant households are important motivating factors for the prospective migrants. The modern gadgets the returned migrants own, such as expensive mobile phones and big-screen coloured television sets, and the changed lifestyle of migrant households become a source of inspiration and aspiration. A calculation of the possession of five important modern gadgets (coloured television, mobile phone, CD/DVD player, and digital camera) shows a higher proportion of ownership by migrant households than non-migrants (Table 3).

	Households with Gadgets (%)		
Gadgets	Migrant	Non-migrant	Total
Colored television	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)

Table 3: Possession of modern gadgets by households.

Source: Household Survey 2009

Not only the possession per se but also the prices also count. However, we did not go into details about brands, makes and exact prices of those gadgets, a general observation is that migrant households possess those of expensive ones, which is also evident from our discussion with respondents. 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 remittances. Ordinary people are not able to buy such expensive mobiles. (SGS, 24, Male, Hill Janajati, FGD, 9 November 2009)

[...] Labour migration has modernized 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, Male, 21, Chhetri, FGD, 9 November 2009)

Hence, it can be concluded 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).

Conclusion

The paper dealt with three types of population flows. First, it discussed the history of Nepal as an arena of population movement in terms of the *longue durée*, as exemplified by the Gorkhas and the across-border flows to India made possible by the open border between Nepal and India. Second, it discussed the gradual opening up of the *terai*, leading to the hills-*terai* movement of whole families, especially after the eradication of malaria, which is the recent history. The third flow comprises the current outward flow of population in the form of individual migration for work, the contemporary situation. The paper focused especially on the second and the third population movements and highlighted the changing motives of the people involved, while the first one rendered the historical setting that

shows that in Nepal population movement has been of all times.

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 in-migration to the area still continues, but that at present out-migration is becoming more important and is motivated by the pursuit of a better quality of living. So, from being a migrant-receiving area, the *terai* is increasingly becoming a migrant-sending area. A study carried out in another district in the *terai* called Chitawan found a similar pattern of labour out-migration from the district to within as well as outside the country (Bohra and Massey 2009).

Unemployment, low income from agriculture, the growing aspirations of the modernized young adult population, 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. Migration is occurring not only because of poverty but also to upgrade livelihoods and have a better life. Out-migration is no longer a last resort for poor 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 a 'modern' lifestyle have become push factors.

The results of this study contradict the image of migration as just a coping strategy of the poor (Gill 2003) and as a shameful and painful experience (Golay 2006; Shrestha 1988). But they correspond with the empirical evidence that shows migration to be a strategy to improve living standards and strengthen the livelihood of relatively better-off households (cf. Niehof 2004). The poorest households are usually unable to participate in such processes (De Haas 2005). Moreover, it has to be noted that labour out-migration is not just an individual economic decision; it is also a cultural phenomenon (Rigg 2007) and the decision to migrate is made collectively at the level of households and families (Gartaula et al. 2012).

The paper shows that poverty and lack of arable and fertile land as the motives for family migration were replaced by the aspirations for upward mobility of individual migrants. It describes the shift of an area from being a receiving to becoming a sending area, and it pictures the emergence of lifestyle motives for migration. Hence, it is concluded that like movements of people, also their motives for moving are not static and cannot be taken for granted. 🧐

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