



SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF FOREIGN LABOUR MIGRATION IN AGRARIAN SOCIETIES OF NEPAL

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ABSTRACT:

Socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors play a crucial role in migration. The phenomenon of foreign labor migration has been shaped by a variety of factors including different dimensions of sustainable livelihood that push people to seek better opportunities. The main objective of this research was to assess the socioeconomic determinants of foreign labor migration in the agrarian community of the Sindhuli district of Nepal using a simple random sample technique. Accordingly, a quantitative interview protocol was employed along with the use of key informants' interviews to collect pertinent information in the year 2021. Findings revealed that determining factors responsible for foreign labor migration were primarily low individual income (with a score of 0.72), followed by a lack of employment opportunities (0.66); poor economic conditions (0.57); limited access to social protection (0.42), and child education (0.36). Additionally, other factors that contributed to the migration included social prestige, desire for property accumulation, peer pressure, the decline in agricultural production, lack of education, inability to pay loans, and food insecurity. The finding of this research thus suggests the need to consider these core facts while developing strategies to manage migration so as to impact positive implications in the agrarian context of Nepal.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Migrants, Socio-economic, Agrarian, Ethnicity, Unemployment



INTRODUCTION

Migration refers to the act of humans relocating from one place to another in search of improved living conditions (Toney and Bailey, 2014). This phenomenon is often viewed as a socio-economic and demographic occurrence influenced by both temporal and spatial factors. It is not only affected by the population size but also by its structure and socio-economic characteristics. Individuals leave their home country for a variety of reasons, such as violence and war, the need for economic advancement, family reunion, and environmental deterioration (Sharma, 2008). Migration is often analyzed as a response to push and pull factors (Adhikari, 2009). Unemployment, poverty, low wages, lack of physical facilities, and peer pressure play a vital role as push factors while employment opportunities, availability of physical infrastructure and better services, and greater liberty are the key pull factors.

Nepal has a history of migration for business purposes and employment through military recruitment in foreign lands (ILO, 2004). Some of them had led to permanent migration and others to a temporary settlement. Rural youths in Nepal in general have reduced access to off-farm employment opportunities as a result of which they are generally becoming less interested in agricultural work and leaving rural areas (Agasty and Patra, 2013). Over the years, labor migration for foreign employment has played a vital role in providing national income (GIZ and ILO, 2015). Similar to other developing countries, Nepali youth have been compelled to seek employment opportunities overseas due to mainly low employment and income rates, elevated levels of poverty, and unequal distribution of national income in the country. Furthermore, young migrants as unskilled or skilled laborers to the global market are driven by social pressure and political unrest (Kollmair et al.2006, as cited in Thapaliya and Devkota, 2018).

Although agriculture is the primary source of income in Nepal's agrarian communities, production is hardly enough to meet the demand for domestic consumption. Even though agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy, people also use other forms of livelihood to address the issue of food insecurity, such as raising livestock, gathering and trading medicinal herbs, being involved in occupational work, tourism, and, most notably, labor migration from rural to urban areas and abroad.

Murard (2019) mentioned that the effect of global migration on the nations where individuals were born has emerged as a pressing policy concern, given that over 3% of the world's population resides outside their country of origin. Indeed, remittance inflows have the potential to generate greater opportunities by fostering entrepreneurial initiatives and facilitating the creation of new jobs (Yang, 2008), which is well related to migration. Furthermore, in some cases, these transfers may produce positive spillover effects for non-migrant households. Migration and remittances have increased the employment prospects and earnings of the non-migrants' people (Dyer and Taylor, 2009).

Remittances are typically understood to be the portion of a migrant's earnings that is paid back to their country of origin. Migrants used to send money and other goods as remittances. Remittances can be sent in kind, but the phrase often usually refers to monetary transfers (Dhungana and Pandit, 2014). If we look at the recent scenario, the number of Nepali pursuing foreign employment is increasing rapidly (DoFE, 2017). It has been observed that in the last seven years, more than 300,000 young individuals per year have migrated overseas for foreign employment opportunities in the global labor market. The volume of remittances sent by migrants is increasing every year, and there is a significant increase in the volume of migrants also. The preliminary census report of 2021 states that there are 21,69,478 absentee individuals. Meanwhile, the remittance inflows in the country during the fiscal year 2021/22 amounted to Rs. 1007.31 billion, as reported by the Nepal Rastra Bank in 2022. The World Bank (2023) estimates that in 2022, Nepal's remittance inflows made up 22.7% of its GDP while agriculture contributed 23.95% of it. Remittance has helped a lot in addressing household poverty for example, the poverty headcount in Nepal has significantly decreased over the years, from 42% in 1995 to 31% in 2004, 25% in 2010, and further reduced to 16.6% in 2019 (Devkota, 2014; MoF, 2020).

This research has primarily focused on analyzing the socio-economic determinants of foreign labor migration in agrarian Nepal. The findings of the study will be helpful in reducing muscle drain and also facilitate the design of alternatives for sustainable livelihood. Accordingly, the main objective of this pertinent research was to assess the socioeconomic determinants of foreign labor migration in agrarian Nepal.

METHODS

A quantitative interview protocol was prepared, pretested, modified, and used for the study. Whereas, a checklist was developed and used to gather qualitative data. Similarly, secondary data were collected using published sources of information from governmental and non-governmental organizations. Marin Rural Municipality was purposively selected because the area is agrarian having a higher foreign labor migration percentage than the national average (i.e., 65% of households contribute to foreign labor migration and that exceeds 70% in indigenous people) whereas the national average of 56%. Quantitative interview protocol, Key Informants Interview (KII), and Case Study were used in collecting data. Out of the 3,165 households of migrants in the proposed research area, a sample size of 350 households has been determined for quantitative data using G*power software. By using simple random sample selection techniques, a sample of 350 households was selected to represent the population of migrant households, with 50 households selected from each ward. Similarly, this study interviewed three key informants from each ward, comprising one returnee migrant, one community leader, and one agricultural technician. Additionally, four households were selected for the case study, including a migrant household engaged in commercial agriculture, a migrant household that has ceased agricultural activities, a non-migrant household involved in commercial agriculture, and a non-migrant household that has abandoned agriculture. These households provided valuable insights into the experiences and challenges of households involved in agricultural activities, both migrant and non-migrant. All collected data were analyzed using SPSS whereas qualitative information was interpreted and used in the result.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the household demographics of the respondents, the mean age of the respondents was 46.48 years, with a range of ages from 22 to 77 years, having a standard deviation of 13.54 years. The majority (64 %) of the respondents or household heads were male and 36 % were female. Researchers have concluded that a woman's status in the household is determined by her

position. Women who have limited decision-making power may be subject to the preferences and decisions of other household members, which can result in a lack of control over their own lives. The position of a woman within the household affects her workload and decision-making power (Kaspar, 2005).

Results have also shown that the majority of respondents (83.4%) were Janajati, followed by Dalits (7.5%), Brahmin/Chhetri (5.7%), and Dashanami (3.4%). Among the respondents more than half (55.1%) were illiterate whereas 18.9 % obtained basic education, 16.3% of respondents had secondary level (Grade 8 to 12) education and 2.3% of the respondents had completed a bachelor's degree and above (see table 1). In the household survey, it is found that most of the respondents above 35 years are illiterate, and among the literate two third of the respondents have a basic level of educational attainment i.e., grade 1 to 8. Results revealed that more than four-fifths (80.6%) of the respondents were engaged in agriculture followed by wage labor (11.1%), service (4.3%), and business (3.4%).

Table 1: Distribution of household heads by various social characteristics across the study area

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	224	64
	Female	126	36
Caste/Ethnicity	Brahmin/Chhetri	20	5.7
	Dashanami	12	3.4
	Dalits	26	7.5
	Janajati	292	83.4
Education	Illiterate	193	55.1
	Non-formal	20	5.7
	Pre-primary	6	1.7
	Grades 1 to 8	66	18.9
	Grades 8 to 12	57	16.3

	Bachelor and above	8	2.3
Occupation	Agriculture	282	80.6
	Wage Labor	39	11.1
	Service	15	4.3
	Business	12	3.4
	Other	2	0.6

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

Results showed that 51.7% of respondents belonged to the joint family and 48.3% of respondents from the nuclear family. It was found that 47.7% of respondents had cemented houses, 42.3% had mud and wood houses and 10.3% of respondents had mud houses. Findings revealed that about two-fifths of respondents had enough food for 9-12 months and about one-tenth had food sufficient for 3-6 months only. Similarly, one-fourth of the migrants' households produce sufficient food for them and the majority (74.6%) of the respondents were food insecure (Table 2). Orjuela-Grimm et al. (2022) reported that food insecurity is a recognized cause of migration and has been seen to be a common problem for immigrants and refugees who are relocated to a new location. Due to food insecurity and the rise of the costs of other daily consumption materials young people had a hard time maintaining their living and they were compelled to migrate for jobs and employment. Available information also suggests the fact that poverty, food insecurity, and a lack of employment opportunities force people to migrate (FAO, 2021). Respondents have a small landholding size in the study area i.e., 6.84 ± 5.30 ropani on average which also contributes to food insecurity (see Table 2). Small landowners also experience financial hardships, such as poorer returns on their agricultural output, which could make it difficult for them to maintain their way of life. Several elements might influence a person's decision to move in search of greater economic opportunity.

A study carried out in India's rural areas put forth the claim that the major factors motivating migrations are caste and ethnicity, the extent of land ownership, and access to irrigation facilities (Singh & Basu, 2020).

Table 2: Distribution of household heads by various social characteristics across the study area

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage	
Family Type	Nuclear	169	48.3	
	Joint	181	51.7	
Household Type	Mud	36	10.3	
	Mud and wood	148	42.3	
	Cemented	166	47.4	
Food Sufficiency	Less than 3 months	13	3.7	
	3 - 6 months	46	13.1	
	6 - 9 months	63	18	
	9 - 12 months	139	39.8	
	Surplus	89	25.4	
Attributes	Minimum	Maximum	Average	St. Deviations
Land holdings (in Ropani)				
Khet	0	40.2	6.84	5.30
Bari	0	6.7	1.87	0.80
Pakho	0	6.7	1.87	0.80

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

Results revealed that the dominance of male migrants in foreign labor migration i.e., 94.87 percent and 5.13 percent were female. A report published by the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security states that the number of female migrants was approximately 8.5 percent in 2018/19 (2020). Researchers have concluded that due to different socio-cultural

reasons encircled female foreign labor migration. Piper (2009) suggests that due to the assumption that women are more vulnerable to the risk of sexual assault in foreign countries, hence, the government restricts their emigration.

Young women continue to move to the Middle East for domestic labor, but they now do so through clandestine routes and without any security that the institutional system can offer. This puts individuals in danger for a variety of things, such as excessive hours, sexual assault, physical abuse, and economic exploitation (Mishra, 2022). Joshi Rajkarnikar (2017) also revealed that women who go to work abroad are stereotyped as being promiscuous sexually and bringing dishonor to the family.

Findings revealed that more than 94% were male migrants with an average family size of 5.6 ±2.094. Likewise, more than half of the migrants were sons of the household head (Table 3). Before migration for jobs about three-fifths of them had agriculture as the main occupation and about one-tenth of them were wage laborers. It can be assumed that the rural males preferred to out-migration rather than to stick to their traditional occupation (agriculture) due to its poor performance. According to a report by the Government of Nepal (2014), 82.9% of the population of Nepal lives in rural areas, with 60% of these people relying mostly on agriculture for their livelihood.

Table 3: Migrants by various social characteristics across the study area

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	370	94.87
	Female	20	5.13
Family Size	Min.: 2 Max.: 16	Avg.: 5.69	Std.: 2.094
Relations with the household head	Son	202	51.79
	Spouse	158	40.51
	Brothers	17	4.36
	Daughter	9	2.31
	Daughter-in-law	3	0.77

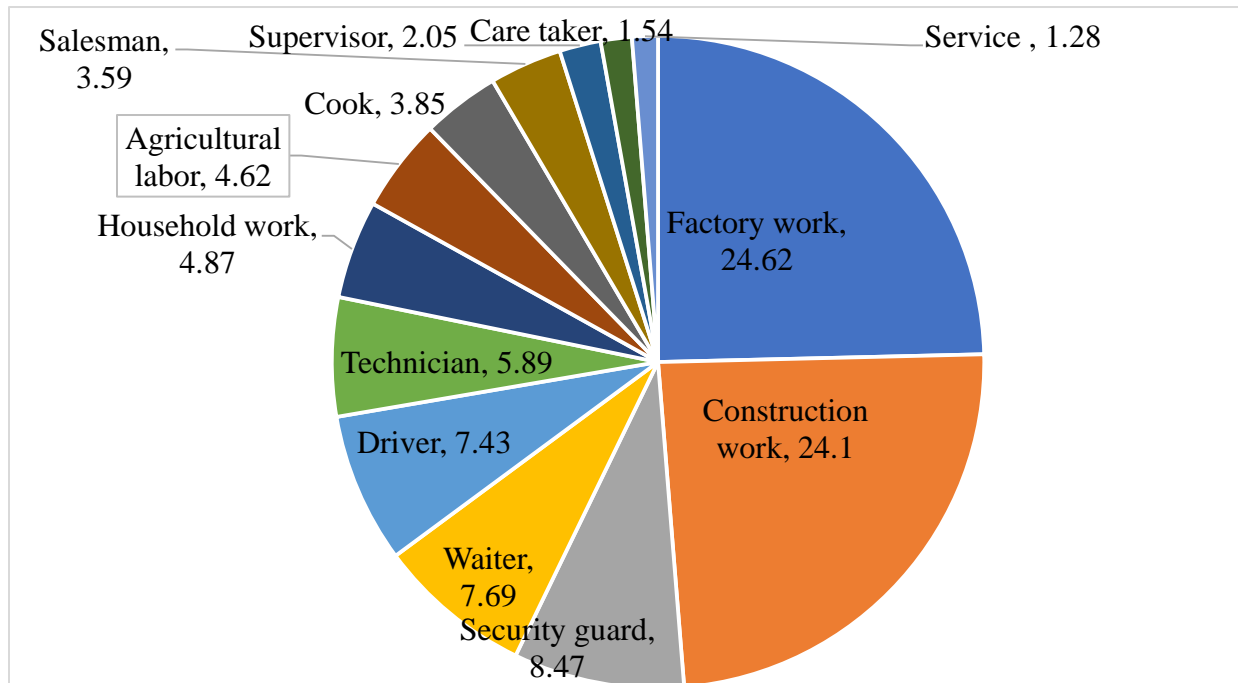
	Son-in-law	1	0.26
Occupation before migration	Agriculture	257	65.89
	Students	50	12.82
	Wage labor	47	12.06
	Business	14	3.59
	Service	9	2.31
	Drivers	8	2.05
	Foreign labor	5	1.28

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

The findings of the study showed that the destination of the majority of migrants was Malaysia (41.79%) followed by Saudi Arabia (22.56%), Qatar (13.08%), and the United Arab Emirates (11.55%) (see Figure 1). The six GCC countries and Malaysia remain the most popular destinations for Nepali labor migration, accounting for more than 85 percent of the workers leaving Nepal (MoLESS, 2020). Due to the lack of employment opportunities and the possibility of high pay migrants often extend their stay at their destination. In this regard, findings also revealed that the average duration of migration of migrants was 3.795 ± 2.472 years, and the duration ranged from 1 year to 14 years.

Furthermore, the study found that migrant workers' occupations at their destination included factory work (24.62%) and construction labor (24.1%) followed by security guard (8.47%), waiter (4.69%), driver (7.43%) (see figure 1). Nepal labor migration report (2022) stated that destination-wise disaggregation of the occupational profile of migrant workers shows variation in their job types. Most migrant workers in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait were found engaged as laborers, in the cleaning and laundry sectors, and Malaysia was primarily concentrated in the manufacturing sector (MoLESS, 2022).

Figure 1: Migrants' occupation at the destination



(Source: Field Study, 2021)

Table (4) shows the distribution of respondents by education level and destination countries. Accordingly, it was well revealed that the highest number of migrants with secondary level education migrated to Malaysia and bachelor level in Saudi Arabia. Results also revealed that Qatar has a relatively higher number of migrants with primary level compared to other countries where the percentage of illiterate migrants is highest in Malaysia. Similarly, the percentage of migrants with non-formal education is highest in Saudi Arabia and lowest in Qatar and UAE. Information also indicated that illiterate people did not migrate to Bahrain. Overall, the data provided an overview of the educational attainment of the migrants and their destination. In this regard, Malamassam (2016) found that education not only enhanced the youth's capacity to migrate but also affected the decision of the youth migrants to move to a large city. Therefore, education is an important factor to consider when examining the reasons why young people choose to migrate and where they choose to settle.

Table 4: Migrants' educational status and their destination across the study area

Destination	Education Level						Total
	Illiterate	Non-formal	Preprimary	Grade 1-8	Grade 9-12	Bachelor	
Malaysia	20 (51)	5 (71)	6 (67)	59 (48)	73 (35)	0	163 (42)
Saudi Arabia	10 (26)	1 (14)	1 (11)	26 (21)	48 (23)	2 (29)	88 (23)
Qatar	2 (5)	0	2 (22)	17 (14)	30 (15)	0y	51 (13)
UAE	5 (13)	0	0	11 (9)	28 (14)	1 (14)	45 (12)
Bahrain	0 (0)	0	0	5 (4)	13 (6)	0	18 (5)
Oman	1 (3)	0	0	2 (2)	8 (4)	1 (14)	12 (3)
Kuwait	1 (3)	1 (14)	0	2 (2)	2 (1)	1 (14)	7 (2)
Japan	0 (0)	0	0	0	4 (2)	2 (29)	6 (2)
Total	39 (100)	7 (100)	9 (100)	122 (100)	206 (100)	7 (100)	390 (100)

(Source: Field Study, 2021)

It was well revealed in this research that 37% of migrants had their social networks in the destination countries before migration. In terms of the social network at the destination before migration, the majority of the migrants had family members (51.36%) as their networks. The next common network included relatives (35.61%), followed by friends (33.56%) and neighbors (16.34%). Information also revealed that family members played a substantial role in the decision-making process of migration for a majority of the migrants due to the possibility of the support and security that family members provide in their destination. Additionally, friends were also relatively accounted for in the common network in the destination before migration, indicating that social connections could also be an important factor in migration decisions.

The findings of this research revealed that the most common motivation for migration was self (87.12%) followed by family members (45.4%), and friends (36.8%) (table 5). These results suggest that personal motivation is the significant driver for migration followed by family and social ties. Migrants are often motivated by personal factors such as employment opportunities,

the economic condition of the family, and quality of life as well as social factors such as family and community ties. Castaneda (2013) argued that when people have more information about job opportunities overseas and establish stronger ties with individuals who have already migrated to their destination countries, they tend to increasingly rely on community-based networks to assist them in reaching their destinations. Overall, this finding emphasizes how difficult it is to make decisions and how crucial it is to take into account both societal and personal elements while attempting to understand the migration pattern of migrants.

Table 5: Distribution of migrants by network in destination before migration and motivation for migration

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Network in Destination Before Migration (n=146)	Family Member	75	51.36
	Relatives	52	35.61
	Friends	49	33.56
	Neighbor	24	16.34
Motivation for Migration	Self	284	87.12
	Family members	148	45.4
	Friend	120	36.8
	Manpower Agency	39	11.96
	Neighbor	34	10.43

(Source: Field Study, 2021)

Table (6) presents the cause of foreign labor migration based on the agreement level, index value, and rank of each cause. The results showed that the major causes of foreign labor migration were low individual income (0.72), followed by lack of employment opportunities (0.66), poor economic condition (0.57), limited access to social protection (0.42), child education (0.36), social prestige (0.35) and desire for property accumulation (0.35) respectively. Similarly, other causes for migration were also revealed as peer pressure, a decline in agricultural

production, lack of education, inability to pay the loan, and food insecurity. Different research reports suggested that socio-cultural, economic, and political factors contributed to migration. For example, conducted by Kaur et al. (2011) reported that migration is primarily driven by uneven development, in addition to economic factors such as poverty, fragmented landholding systems, rain-fed agriculture, limited employment prospects, and low wages. In addition to economic factors, social and psychological factors such as having a large family size, limited access to basic civic amenities, and living in poor conditions can also contribute to migration. The United Nations published a report in 2013 stating that economic migrants are motivated to migrate internationally due to the promise of high pay, and better employment prospects, and they want to escape from the social and political circumstances of their home country. One of the most potent ways for low-income households to raise their level of living is through international labor migration (Clemens 2011). From all these perspectives findings of our study also tally some of these causes of foreign labor migration (table 6).

Table 6: Causes of Foreign Labor Migration

S.N.	Causes of Migration	Agreement Level					Index Value	Rank
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
1	Food insecurity	117	59	0	173	1	0.17	12
2	Decline in agriculture production	43	188	14	77	28	0.20	9
3	Poor economic conditions	124	187	1	20	8	0.57	3
4	Low individual income	156	192	0	2	0	0.72	1
5	Lack of employment opportunities	128	214	2	5	1	0.66	2
6	Lack of education	58	159	14	108	13	0.20	9
7	Desire for property accumulation	93	172	3	53	29	0.35	6
8	Loan payment	66	156	0	109	19	0.20	9
9	Child education	74	194	3	66	13	0.36	5

10	Family pressure	13	69	8	197	65	-0.33	14
11	Peer pressure	26	228	1	64	31	0.22	8
12	Social prestige	12	285	3	38	12	0.35	6
13	Limited access to social protection	14	302	7	16	11	0.42	4
14	Natural resources depletion	1	5	212	35	97	-0.32	13
15	Environmental degradation	1	6	141	95	107	-0.43	16
16	Climate change	3	4	147	91	105	-0.42	15

(Source: Field Study, 2021)

CONCLUSION

The overall conclusion from the findings is that the majority of the respondents are Janajati and engaged in agriculture, with a significant portion of the population being illiterate or having only basic education. Educational attainment is particularly low among those over 35 years old. Migrant families face significant food insecurity in the study area, with only a quarter of households producing sufficient food. Due to the small landholding size, three-fourths of the respondents are food insecure. While talking about the gender and family size of migrants the data indicate that male migrants dominate the foreign labor migration and they come from relatively joint families. Additionally, the majority of the migrants have a predominantly agricultural occupation. Social networks and motivational factors of migrants play a crucial role in the decision-making process of migration. It can be concluded that the major causes of foreign labor migration are economic i.e., low individual income, lack of employment opportunities, and poor economic conditions. Similarly, limited access to social protection, child education, desire for property accumulation, and social prestige were also identified as contributing factors. Other reasons for migration such as peer pressure, the decline in agricultural production, lack of education, loan payment, and food insecurity were also reported, but to a lesser extent compared to the economic reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the majority of the respondents are Janajati and engaged in agriculture, with a significant portion of the population being illiterate or having only basic education, it is important to consider education and ethnicity while formulating migration-related policies. It was also revealed that male migrants dominate the foreign labor migration and they come from relatively joint families with predominantly agricultural occupations. The research will reflect the situation about the need to consider policies and programs that support and promote the education and skills development of potential male migrants. Such initiatives could help increase the chances of migrants finding employment and improve their overall well-being in their destination countries. It can also be concluded that the major causes of foreign labor migration are economic i.e., low individual income, lack of employment opportunities, and poor economic conditions. Similarly, limited access to social protection, child education, desire for property accumulation, and social prestige were also identified as contributing factors. These important factors could be crucial to consider while formulating migration-related plans, policies, and strategies to promote quality migration aiming to earn more in a sustained way.

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