

**Men's overseas migration and women's mobility and
decision-making in rural Nepalese families**

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the Australian National University

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Disclaimer

Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own original work carried out as a PhD researcher at the Australian National University between February 2011 and February 2015

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February 2015

*I dedicate this thesis to my parents - Buddhi Prasad and Eka Devi
Chapagain, who have been, and will continue to be, an inspiration
throughout my life*

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Acronyms and Glossary

CDC	Child Development Centre
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
DFAT	Department of Foreign Aid and Trade
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DoF	Department of Forest
DoFE	Department of Foreign Employment
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHI	Family Health International
FWLD	Forum for Women Law and Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMSP	Gramin Mahila Srijansil Pariwar (Society of Creative Rural Women)
GoN	Government of Nepal
HDI	Human Development Index
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
NDRI	Nepal Development Research Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NIDS	Nepal Institute for Development Studies
NLSS	Nepal Living Standard Survey

NRB	Nepal Rastra Bank (Central Bank of Nepal)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VDC	Village Development Committee
WB	The World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WMR	World Migration Report

Glossary of Nepalese Terms

(In alphabetical order)

Arabe: A nick-name given to Nepalese men who are working in the Middle East.

However, there is no clear distinction between the Gulf and Malaysia, and therefore, the migrants to Malaysia are also known as *Arabe* in the research area.

Arabeka Shrimati: Wives of migrant men who are working in *Arabia*.

Bhumi: Land

Bigreka aaimai: Characterless women.

Brahmin, Chhetri, and Thakuri: These are higher-caste groups, as per the Hindu caste system, also known as upper-caste people.

Dalit: As per the Hindu caste system, *Dalits* are considered to be untouchables and are not allowed to enter the homes of the ‘so-called’ upper-caste people; not permitted to use public spaces such as Hindu temples; are restricted from fetching water from water sources in public places that non-*Dalits* use; and prevented from joining public feasts and events together with non-*Dalits*.

Dashain is also known as *Durga Pooja* (the worshipping of the goddess *Durga*) in Hindu society. This festival is celebrated for 10 days, and worships the Hindu Goddess *Durga* who had supposedly killed the devil and protected the people. At the end of the tenth day, all family members go to one of the senior members of the paternal family,

for example, one of the grandparents, to take their blessings. They also exchange gifts and food on the occasion. This festival is considered to be one of the biggest festivals among Nepalese Hindus.

Eilani: Common property land forcibly occupied by the landless for shelter and cultivation.

Ghar: A house.

Gurkha: This is a term given to the soldiers who joined the British Army from Nepal. The term *Gurkha* is associated with a place called 'Gorkha', from where the then King Prithivi Narayan Shah started the expansion of Nepal, and moved the capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu after his victorious taking of the Kathmandu Valley.

Janajati: The *Janajati* people are also defined as Hill Tibeto-Burmese. Traditionally, these people used to live in the hills and mountains of Nepal. Through internal migration, there is now a population of *Janajati* in the hills, mountains, and plains of Nepal. They look Tibetan-Chinese and they usually have their own mother tongue and culture. As per the 2011 population census, there are 125 *Janajati* groups who speak 123 different languages in Nepal. The share of the *Janajati* population is 27 per cent of the total population of Nepal. They are divided, based on their origin, into the *Hill Janajati* and the *Terai Janajati*, and are identified by their surnames. This is also a preferred group in the Nepalese army, as well as in the British Army as *Gurkhas*.

Lahure: The word *Lahure* is used in association with the migration of Nepalese men to Lahore (in current-day Pakistan) into the army of the Sikh ruler in the early 19th century. This word continues to be applied to the people who migrated as *Gurkha* to the British army.

Madhesi: The people who live in the plains (also called the *Terai*) of Nepal are generally known as *Madhesi*. This definition does not include people who migrated to the plains from the hills and mountains of Nepal. The term *Madhesi* gives a common identity, and there are other specific identity groups within it, for example, *Dalits*, *Tharu*, and *Dhimal*.

Tamang: This is one of the *Janajati* ethnic groups which speak the *Tamang* language.

Terai: Nepal is broadly divided into three geographical regions: the mountains, the hills, and the *Terai*. The *Terai* is the plains area, which has a large share of Nepal's productive land.

Tharus: *Tharus* are considered to be the traditional inhabitants of the plains region of Nepal. They have their own language, called *Tharu*, and are scattered from the eastern plains to the western plains of Nepal. They are also known as the *Terai Janajati*, the ethnic group of the plains.

Tole: A cluster within a village.

Abstract

This research investigates the ability of women, after the temporary overseas migration of their husbands, to define their priorities and act upon them within household and community spaces in the multi-cultural environments of two distinct geographical locations of Nepal—in the hills of Sindhupalchok and in the plains of Sunsari. Based on surveys and in-depth interviews with the women, semi-structured discussions with their neighbours, and a series of observations, this study examines the convertibility of men's migration into the agency of women, in response to the research question - what are the changes in women's abilities to set priorities and act upon them when their husbands migrate and leave them behind? Specifically: a) How do women negotiate decision-making with their husbands when they are working abroad?; b) How do women manage their mobility and community participation in a society where they are constrained by stringent social norms and practices?; and c) How do women's social position and identity change over the period of the men's absence?

This research argues that the migration of husbands has not made women dependent and 'left-behind', but instead has created the scope to access decision-making processes, financial and non-financial resources, social networks, and information about services, which have collectively enriched women's ability, identity, and agency, despite having to perform some roles which contradict the prevailing social values and practices. The women have increasingly managed their resources and negotiated at different levels according to the length of their husband's migration. These capacities have come from the women's distinctive abilities, skills, exposure, and a combination of individual ability and the external environment. Therefore, the temporary separation of husbands and wives in the patriarchal Nepalese villages has been beneficial to the women, enhancing their negotiation and bargaining power, and

their ability to challenge the patriarchal institutions as capable agents in managing multiple roles.

The scope to make decisions has also been strengthened with the enhanced networks of the women, who have catalysed community participation to redefine gender relations. These social networks are the symbolic power which has offered women a legitimate base for their social position. Thus, while agency has built social capital, social capital has become the means to enhancing the agency of individuals, resulting in a virtuous cycle of change. As well, the combination of social capital and capable agency has contributed to challenging the micro-level social structures that have played critical roles in creating unequal relationships in society. Social capital, therefore, has created productive resources which have contributed to the achievement of both economic and non-economic benefits for the women.

In addition, this research argues that the women increased their voice in decision-making when they gained access to information, through networking and exposure. The linking capital of women connected them to political decision-making and financial resources, and enhanced their capacity to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions. Therefore, this research establishes exposure and information as two of the major elements in increasing the bargaining power of Nepalese women in trans-national families. Nevertheless, these women perform their roles despite several restrictions and challenges in both research districts, although there are differences between women in the hills and the plains, among higher-caste, *Janajati*, *Dalit*, and *Tharu women*, and between joint and nuclear families.

The women living in nuclear families have greater scope for making decisions, whereas women from extended families have more scope to spend time participating in community groups and activities. On the other hand, women who perform agriculture-related activities, and have some livestock at home, face challenges going outside their

village when required. This restricts their mobility to their own village. Women from *Janajati* and *Tharu* families enjoy relatively higher freedom than others, while women from higher-caste families are associated with a number of traditional taboos which limit their mobility and some of their activities to only their own caste group. About one-fifth of the women have experienced physical attacks, and about half of the research participants have been scolded by their husbands and/or in-laws. The incidence of such gender-based violence is relatively higher in the plains than in the hills. Similarly, more than one-quarter of the women in the plains, and about three-quarters in the hills, are restricted from making financial decisions. The above points are evidence that there is a thorny path to women's agency, and that women have to perform their roles tactfully to prevent them from falling prey to different constraints, and to bring them out of their traditional gender roles.

Although each migration theory has its own importance, and one may contribute to others, these theories do not have enough scope through which to fully understand why the migration of women is so low in some cultures, and how these cultural practices affect the position of women when their husbands migrate. Therefore, this research emphasises the need to have an integrated approach to the analysis of migration, including a socio-political and economic perspective, in order to understand the causes and effects of migration at the macro- and super-state, meso-society, and micro-individual levels. This research recognises that migration is not only a result of unemployment and income pressures, but also decision-making capacity, because of social interactions and roles, hierarchies, power relationships, the ability to exert autonomy, and various policies and practices, all of which have effects on migrants or on the women left-behind.

With these factors taken into consideration, this research recommends a number of areas that require further understanding. Among them, the question of women's

agency and decision-making scope after men return from their migration in patriarchal societies is one. Similarly, the experiences that migrant women bring to the communities and the pressures that they face in a patriarchal society help to understand the perspectives of returned migrant women. Finally, an analysis of the differences between women, their capacities and social networking, despite having similar external environments, would help to identify the stimuli for individual behaviours.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Introduction

Temporary migration by men who leave their wives and other family members behind for employment in the international job market is increasing in contemporary Nepal¹. In this context, this research investigates how the migration of men in a patriarchal society changes the decision-making scope of the women left-behind², their abilities to set priorities, and to act upon them. This research investigates how these women negotiate decision-making, how they manage their mobility and community participation, as well as how their social position is enhanced when the men migrate. This is important in a context where the male domain is defined as being the bread-winners who earn the household income and make decisions, whereas women are supposed to be responsible for the household chores. Traditionally, this gender division of roles keeps women in a secondary status position within the household, with little scope to participate in the community space. However, women have to manage all the household and social responsibilities, particularly in nuclear families, when their husbands migrate.

Small-scale international migration of men started in Nepal in the early 19th century; however, the access of ordinary people to travel documentation, and thus migration, was opened only after the restoration of democracy in 1990. This was further intensified with the 10 years of conflict which started in 1995 (Khatiwada, 2010a;

¹ For the purposes of this research, international migration refers to migration to other countries beyond India, as there has always been free and unregulated migration between India and Nepal. I also use the term migration to refer to out-migration or emigration.

² The term ‘women left-behind’ is used for the women who are left at home when their husbands are in overseas employment. At times, depending purely on the grammatical construction, the equivalent term of left-behind women will be used.

Poertner et al., 2011). There was a sharp rise of emigrants in the early 2000s with the growth of low-skilled employment opportunities in the Gulf countries and Malaysia (see Chapter 3). These developments have offered both opportunities and challenges at home for the women left-behind, which is still an under-researched area in Nepal. In addition, the existing research on migration is heavily focused either on migrants at the point of destination, or on remittances, development, and household-level changes (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Gartaula, Visser et al., 2012; Oishi, 2005). However, the overlooking of gender issues within the household is a major problem in those studies which tend to look at household-level change (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010), and there are only a few studies focusing on the changes for individual women who have been left-behind (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Kaspar, 2005; Maharjan et al., 2012a), which is the focus of this research.

Furthermore, people have different experiences depending on whether they come from the hills or the plains of Nepal, and their caste and ethnic origins, which largely reflect the Hindu social structure. In addressing some of these research gaps, this study concludes that the relationship between structure and agency is important in understanding the ability of women to make decisions and act upon them in Nepalese patriarchal society, but also that women have both formal and informal structural challenges within their homes and in community spaces.

This research argues that when men migrate, their absence offers women an opportunity to display agency with increased access to decision-making, financial and non-financial resources, social networks, and information about services. Women's capacity has gradually increased in making decisions and acting upon them, and in negotiating at different levels during the period of their husband's migration. The scope to make decisions is further strengthened with the increased networks of the women. Thus, this research finds that women's networks have contributed to connecting

individuals and enhancing their agency. This introductory section provides a brief context for the study, the significance of the research, a brief description of the research methodology, and an outline of the thesis.

Nepalese Migration

The decision to migrate in Nepal is a reflection of the patriarchal nature of decision-making. As a result, men have been the predominant migrants throughout history, and the concept of migration is associated with men's mobility in Nepal (Adhikari, 2009; Barbora et al., 2008; Piper, 2009). The migration data also confirms that 87 per cent of Nepalese migrants³ are men⁴ (GoN, 2012c). These migrants move temporarily and many take overseas employment, mostly as labourers, for more than six months, but usually between two to three years. However, there is a trend in Asia of repeated episodes of men's migration, who often make short-term visits to home, once every two to three years, before migrating again (FHI, 2012), probably until they are in their late middle-age, as a study in China illustrates (Jacka, 2012).

The number of Nepalese migrants has increased sharply over the last five years: a total of 294,000 people left for international employment in 2010, climbing to 703,000 in 2013 for various reasons, including declining agricultural production, increased unemployment, conflict, and other social causes (Khatiwada, 2010a; Maharjan et al., 2012a). Fifty-six per cent of households in Nepal receive remittances as one of their sources of income (GoN, 2012a), and 86 per cent of migrants are married (FHI, 2012)

³ These people are defined as an absentee population by the census. These people were living outside their home for at least six months at the time of census.

⁴ This is based on the population census of 2011 but there is data inconsistency between different sources. The Department of Foreign Employment records identify women's share at about two per cent of the total migrant population (Maharjan et al., 2012a). However, the Nepal Migration Year Book suggests that women's share is as high as 10 per cent (Ghimire et al., 2010), while the population census states it at 13 per cent of total migrants.

and leave their wives at home; this takes place in the context of a patriarchal Nepalese society where men are typically the main decision-makers within the household and in the community space (Kaspar, 2005). The gender division of roles is based on a traditional value system which has men as the decision-makers and women as the implementers of these decisions (Bennett, 2005; Bohra & Massey, 2009; Dhungana, 2014). While family and culture are the locus of gender and family hierarchies, they are also sources of social, economic, and psychological support when the man is away. This implies that an analysis of intra-household relationships is also required to understand the supportive and oppressive elements to women's agency and decision-making, and the changes in them, due to the migration of men.

Existing Knowledge

Much of the Nepalese migration research is focused on the destination of the migrant rather than the source (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012). In Nepal, as a source country, there is some literature on migration, remittances, and development (Acharya & Leon-Gonzalez, 2013; KC, 2005; Seddon et al., 2002). The findings from the Nepalese migration research can be grouped into the following categories: poverty reduction, physical asset accumulation, labour market participation, women's capacity development, and gender relations.

Poverty reduction is one of the dominant areas of the Nepalese migration literature (Acharya & Leon-Gonzalez, 2013; GoN, 2014a; KC, 2005; Kollmair et al., 2006; Lokshin et al., 2010; Sapkota, 2013; The World Bank, 2011a). This literature argues that the decline in the poverty rate (from 41 per cent in 1995 to 25 per cent in

2009) is an important outcome of migration and remittances⁵. However, Piper (2005), Seddon et al. (2002), Thieme & Wyss (2005), Vogel & Korinek (2012), and Young (2013) have found increased inequality due to migration within families, in society, and between urban and rural areas: the very poor remain at home and the remittances mainly reach the middle- and high-income families, resulting in boys getting more schooling benefits than girls, and urban areas being more advantaged than rural areas.

The accumulation of physical assets associated with Nepalese migration is another area that some researchers have investigated. Among them, Bal Kumar KC (2005), Maharjan (2010), NRB (2012), and Thieme & Wyss (2005) have argued that remittances have been invested in land, new houses, and motorcycles, among other assets. However, Maharjan et al. (2012a) added that decisions to spend remittances, however, are made by men; women only have the scope to make decisions to buy lower-value items.

Lokshin & Glinskaya (2009) conducted a study on the labour market participation of the women left-behind in Nepalese society. They concluded that women's participation in the labour market declined in Nepal after the migration of their husbands and they pointed to the increased workload within the home after the migration of their husbands as the key reason for this (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2009; Maharjan et al., 2012a; Sharma, 2012). Sapkota (2013) and Thagunna & Acharya (2013) also argued that remittances have contributed to the 'Dutch disease' effect of higher exchange rates, and the shrinking of both domestic production and the labour market.

⁵ As per the thirteenth plan of the Government of Nepal, the poverty rate has gone down further by 1.2 points to 23.8 per cent by 2013 (GoN, 2014d, p.12). However, the plan considers remittance as one of the contributing factors to reduce the poverty among many others.

The development of women's capacity in society is considered to be another impact of men's migration. As Bal Kumar KC (2005) found, there are higher human and gender development indices in the areas which have inter-district and international migration, based on a macro-data analysis. Similarly, Vogel & Korinek (2012) found increased spending of remittances on education, primarily for boys, but with the possibility of spending on girls' education as well in some cases. Gartaula, Visser, et al. (2012) also argued that migration has not contributed to changing the subjective well-being⁶ of women, particularly of those living with their in-laws.

Generally, women in all caste groups in Hindu society have a secondary status, as the power structure within the household is patriarchal (Cahn, 1999; Dhungana, 2014; Niaz, 2003; Tamang, 2011). Therefore, men control the resources and dominate social and cultural institutions and structures. Furthermore, men's domination over women in decision-making is also apparent, despite the physical distance caused by migration, and this keeps women in the shadow of men (Agarwal, 1997; Luitel, 2001; Morgan & Niraula, 1995; Shrestha & Conway, 2001). However, Poertner et al. (2011), despite expecting there to be changes in gender relations within the home and the community as a result of international migration, found no fundamental change from internal rural-to-urban migration in Nepal.

Kaspar (2005), based on her research in a western hills cluster of Nepal, found that men's migration has the potential to increase women's decision-making if there are favourable conditions, particularly if the women are in nuclear families and the husbands do not return home for an extended period. Therefore, not all women have the

⁶ Gartaula, Visser, et al. (2012) defines subjective well-being as the social and cultural perceptions of people on the quality of life of individuals. Basically, the subjective well-being of migrants' wives is related to self-satisfaction of the women as well as their relationships with husbands and in-laws (p. 404).

same possibility for making decisions. As well, they have challenges in continuing their decision-making after the men return home. However, she recommends a consideration of household type, the relevance of the decisions, and the duration of men's migration, in order to establish the effects of men's migration on gender relations at home.

Gartaula, Visser, et al. (2012) conducted their study in the eastern part of Nepal and found that there were high levels of objective well-being⁷ among the women left-behind.

Thieme & Wyss (2005) pointed out the possibility of increased inequality between remittance-receiving women and the poor women who do not have opportunities for earning money, which could have wider impacts on gender relations in society. However, they found there to be a potential for migration to improve "the financial situation as well as human and social capital" (Thieme & Wyss, p. 89) of the families at home. Lokshin & Glinskaya (2009) also found that there was an adverse impact on gender relations due to the increased workload for women when they were left-behind and dependent on remittances from their husbands.

Internationally, migration is considered to be an important livelihood strategy in many countries for reducing poverty (Adams & Page, 2005; Chimhowu et al., 2005). A significant amount of literature focuses on the macro-economic impacts or changes at the household level without considering the differences between men and women (Haas & van Rooij, 2010). There are some studies which focus on well-being, sexually-transmitted diseases, morality, and family relationships of the women (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; McEvoy et al., 2012; Sevoyan & Agadjanian, 2010). However, the impact of men's migration cannot be gender-neutral

⁷ Gartaula, Visser, et al. (2012) defined objective well-being as the availability of, and access to, food and water, land and housing, and healthcare and schooling for children.

(Haas & van Rooij, 2010), particularly considering the agency of individual women based on their caste and ethnic identity, which is a complex issue requiring further exploration.

In Mexico, Silver (2011) found symptoms of depression and feelings of loneliness among the women left-behind; however, Pauli (2008), looking at the same country, found positive outcomes, such as the building of a house, as a strategy for moving away from abusive mothers-in-law among the wives of migrant men. In Egypt, women's unpaid household workload increased with men's migration, resulting in reduced participation in paid work, and a subsequent reduction in women's status (Binzel & Assaad, 2011). The distance between husbands and wives also has the possibility of exacerbating problems which already exist within the family (Coe, 2011). In rural Morocco, de Haas & van Rooij (2010) found that men's migration has given women comfortable and secure lives, but does not change the position of women; however, there is the possibility of long-term positive change through the education of daughters.

Jacka (2005), referring to internal migration in China, found that higher income contributed to improved subjective well-being among the women left-behind. However, she said that this was not enough to change the quality of life of the women. Cortina (2014), based on her comparative study of Ecuador and Albania, found that migration had empowered women in the absence of traditional cultural figures with more physical and financial independence, and that there was also a breakdown of some of the entrenched social norms and practices, such as participation in illegal and criminal activities (Cortina, 2014; de la Garza, 2010). This literature points to the further scope for understanding the impact of migration on women left-behind, particularly in relation to decision-making within the household and in community spaces, as well as women's changed positions in their society, in the short- and longer-term.

Research Interest

Migration, remittances, and development are emerging research topics although there are many under-researched areas. As Dey (2014) argues, there is a significant focus within the migration research on the causes of migration, but little on the effects, particularly on the non-economic impacts. Many researchers have focused on the demographic aspects of migration and remittances, but have also pointed out a number of additional areas that require further investigation in the area of Nepalese migration research. The socially-embedded and complex aspects of migration and their meaning in the lives of rural people (Sharma, 2008); the link between migration and human capital (Acharya & Leon-Gonzalez, 2013); and the relationship between migration and household well-being (Lokshin et al., 2010) in Nepal, are some of these under-researched areas in the literature. Highlighting the research gaps, Ghimire & Upreti (2012) identified the need for conducting research on migration, as these identified factors bring different social, economic, demographic, and political benefits and problems. Similarly, Piotrowski et al. (2013) recommended conducting research linking social and cultural institutional structures and individual behaviour.

The women left-behind have different issues when their husbands migrate and they take on additional responsibilities at home, but are "... invisible, and their role, experience, wellbeing, and interconnectedness with the practice of migration are not well understood" (Gartaula, Niehof, et al., 2012, p. 2). Earlier research in Nepal characterised the domestic effects of labour migration on wives and children as a "blind spot" in migration research in Nepal (Hadi, 2001; Kaspar, 2005; Shrestha & Conway, 2001). These articles point out that there is a need to identify the different gender dimensions of migration, particularly in relation to the women left-behind, the power relationships and changing roles of men and women in the Nepalese social context

(Gartaula, 2007), and people's adaptation to emerging social and demographic circumstances (Childs et al., 2014).

In addition, researchers and organisations which work specifically on issues of gender, migration, and development, have identified a number of areas that need further investigation in Nepalese migration research. For example, the impact of out-migration on gender roles in the mountains (ICIMOD, 2009), gender and family relations, gender-based violence related to internal and international migration, and the well-being of children (Piper, 2009) are some of these issues. Nicola Piper, in her research for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), stated that there is a need to explore the social dimensions of the impact of migration in Asia (Piper, 2009). This has been further qualified by Jacka (2012) from her research on China. She argued that attention has been paid to the significance of migration for national development and on urban communities, while less work has been undertaken "... to understand the social consequences of migration for rural communities of origin, and the situation of those who remain in the countryside" (Jacka, 2012, p. 2). de Haas & van Rooij (2010, p. 44) stated that:

In comparison to the vast literature on remittance impacts, the non-economic impacts of migration have remained comparatively under-researched. This is unfortunate, because migration has important socio-cultural and political impacts through ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving-to sending-country communities (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010, p. 44).

Considering these under-researched areas, this study is interested in understanding the non-economic impacts of migration, particularly in relation to changes for the women left-behind, and their capacity to make decisions and to have control over these decisions, based on their geographical locations, and their caste and ethnic identities.

Research Methodology

As a development practitioner, I have worked on various issues involving women in Nepal, with a focus on their education, health, economic opportunities, and empowerment between 2000 and 2010; as well as in Sindhupalchok and Sunsari between 2008 and 2010. This is a society where women usually follow the decisions made by their husband or their father-in-law (Kaspar, 2005; Shrestha & Conway, 2001). As discussed above, men's migration leads to many women being responsible for managing household and community activities, and thus leaves women with an additional workload, including child-care, agriculture, livestock, community involvement, and various productive and reproductive roles. By early 2011, 27 per cent of households in Nepal were headed by women (an increase from 13 per cent in 2001), and a total of 56 per cent of households were receiving remittances (GoN, 2011c). With men's migration, the question that emerges is: does men's migration create a vacuum in the decision-making of female-headed households? Kaspar (2005) and Shrestha & Conway (2001) have argued that women are highly dependent on men and that their positions are closely associated either with their husband, father, son, or at least one of the closest men. The pertinent question for these researchers is how these gaps can be addressed.

Research Questions

This thesis consists of exploratory research examining the convertibility of migration; basically, of men's absences on the agency of those women who are left-behind, as well as the contribution of independence and networking of women to enhance their agency. In particular, this research explores the changes in women's abilities to set priorities and act upon them when their husbands migrate and leave them behind. This is critical in a society where women operate according to a number of

significant constraints – a powerful family structure, a gender-based division of roles, a discriminatory customary and legal system, and male-centred decision-making.

Therefore, this research analyses the changes in women's agency after the migration of their husbands at three levels.

At the first level, this research examines women's scope to enhance their own capacity when they are left-behind and to start performing various roles at home. In particular, it identifies the key inputs that contribute to bringing change to women's lives after the migration of the men. At the second level, this research investigates the influence of the inputs on household and community-level decision-making in a society where traditional gender-, caste-, and ethnicity-based structures act against women's freedom. These products are defined as the outputs caused by the first level of inputs. At the third level, this research discusses both the supportive and the oppressive social and legal institutions, and their effects on the agency of women. Based on these three levels of analysis, this study examines the following key question:

What are the changes in women's abilities to set priorities, and to act upon them, when their husbands migrate and leave them behind? Specifically:

- How do women negotiate decision-making with their husbands when they are working abroad?
- How do women manage their mobility and community participation in a society where they are constrained by stringent social norms and practices?
and
- How do women's social positions and identities change over the period of the men's absence?

Methodology

This research was conducted in two geographical regions, one each from the hills of Sindhupalchok and the plains of Sunsari, in order to understand the similarities and differences between them. Within each district, two clusters were selected. One cluster had a representation of mixed caste and ethnic groups, while the second had a population with a specific ethnic group. It was envisaged that this would assist with documenting, comparing and contrasting, and analysing the experiences of women from different caste and ethnic groups.

This research employed a mix of survey questions and qualitative interviews, dividing the research work into three phases. In the first phase, a survey was conducted with a total of 130 women who had been left-behind, 72 in the hills and 58 in the plains district. They were randomly selected from a total of 315 women left-behind who were living in the research clusters. Purposive random sampling was conducted to ensure the representation of women from the higher castes⁸, *Janajatis*⁹, *Tharus*¹⁰, and *Dalits*¹¹.

⁸ The research participants are divided into four ethnic groups subscribing the existing literature (see Bennett, 2005; Gurung 2012; Panta & Resurrección, 2014) which has grouped Nepalese people into these groups. This is also important to limit in these four groups for this research considering the small sample size.

⁹ *Janajati* are people who are also defined as Hill Tibeto-Burmese by Massey et al. (2010, p. 123). Traditionally, these people used to live in the hills and mountains of Nepal. Through internal migration, there are populations of *Janajati* in the hills, mountains, and the plains of Nepal.

¹⁰ *Tharus* are considered as the traditional inhabitants of the plains region of Nepal. They have their own language known as '*Tharu*', and they are scattered from the eastern plains to the western plains of Nepal (Gunaratne, 1998). They are also known as *Terai Janajati*, the ethnic group of the plains. This group of people are not found in significant concentrations in the hills and mountains of Nepal. Therefore, they are not represented in the hills research sample.

¹¹ Based on the Hindu caste system, *Dalits* are considered to be impure and are placed at the bottom of the caste system in the ritual order (Bennett, 2005). They are also known as *Sudra*. *Dalits* make up approximately 15 per cent of the total population of Nepal and are scattered across the country.

In the second phase, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with a total of 82 of the survey participants. These participants were selected based on their availability and interest in participating in the interview part of the research process.

In the third phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 men who had been left-behind; 46 women and men who had returned from migration; and 15 social and political leaders from the research districts. Similarly, semi-structured discussions were conducted with seven focus groups, and observation of a series of group meetings were conducted in both of the research districts.

Being a male researcher, it could be considered to be culturally insensitive to frequently meet with a woman who had been left-behind. Therefore, the researcher ensured cultural and religious sensitivity by not meeting the women alone. As a result, a total of four female research assistants, representing each cluster, were recruited and trained in ethics and the use of the research tools. The research assistants were selected with the help of local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which had already employed them for other research work.

The survey data were analysed using statistical software (SPSS 21), while data from the in-depth interviews, field diary, observation notes, meeting discussions, and semi-structured interviews were analysed using NVivo 10. An inductive approach was followed to analyse the qualitative data. The findings from these surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations have been analysed and presented in this thesis.

This research is based on a framework that Ling & Dale (2013) applied in their research to measure the agency of women in the context of sustainable development. Basically, the agency of the women left-behind is analysed in relation to various drivers of change. This research analyses various aspects that contribute to agency by categorising them as inputs, outputs, processes, and external factors. The external

factors are further grouped into supportive influences and barriers. In order to triangulate the information, this research examines not only the experiences of the women left-behind, but also the insights of the people around them, the social leaders, family members, and others.

Limitations

As this is an academic study conducted in two specific areas of Nepal with women who are living in their own unique social and cultural circumstances, the findings may not be generalisable to other regions of Nepal where there may be variations in socio-cultural practices. Likewise, this research focuses on the individual women who have been left-behind and is unable to provide a picture of those women who do not have any experience with migration. The lack of availability and the poor reliability of the secondary migration data from the Government of Nepal and other organisations remains one of the major limitations of this research: there is data inconsistency, lack of gender-disaggregated data, and the unavailability of information about migrants to India and irregular migrants. Similarly, the Government of Nepal keeps records of the migrants who depart the country for employment, but not of others, and there is no record of the workers who have returned home. As well, there is no data about circular migration. This also creates the possibility of a duplication of numbers at the national level. Being a male researcher, there was a challenge to bring the female perspective into the research, and this may be considered as a limitation of the study. In particular, the researcher had to limit discussions which could have been considered to be culturally-sensitive. For example, this research does not look at women's decision-making to have, or to reject, sexual relations with their partners or with others.

Organisation of the Thesis

This research investigates the complex nexus between men's migration, patriarchy, the caste-based structure, and the women left-behind and their changing roles and agency. Therefore, to analyse these complexities, this thesis is organised into nine different chapters which are divided into three groups. The theoretical framework and the existing research on migration set the overall context of the research. These are included from Chapters Two to Four. The results are presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven. Finally, a discussion of the results, the research findings, and the conclusion are covered in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Specifically, the first chapter introduces the study, and provides an introduction to the thesis and the motivations of the researcher. A brief summary of the research gaps and the methodology used to conduct the research are also included. The second chapter analyses theories relevant to migration, gender, agency, and social capital and defines the theoretical frameworks relevant to the women left-behind and the changes at home. The third chapter presents a picture of migration in Nepalese society in relation to global migration, the drivers and types of migration, policy frameworks, issues and challenges, and migration impacts at the source. Chapter Four explains the field research methods and tools that are employed in the conduct of this research to analyse the results. It also elaborates upon how the research participants were selected and why the particular tools used were appropriate for the research purpose. Furthermore, this section looks at the data analysis tools and processes.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the results from the field research. The results are organised into three different thematic areas. In the context of a patriarchal society, men's migration and intra-household gender relations is one thematic area. Similarly, women's participation in community spaces and membership of groups before and after men's migration is another area. Finally, women's position in society is

another theme through which the findings are presented. In addition, these chapters also document women's workloads, gender-based violence, restrictions and freedoms, family support, and the enabling and constraining factors for women's decision-making and agency.

Finally, Chapter Eight analyses the key research findings and presents these through the selected research framework. Importantly, the chapter presents the findings on how the agency of women has changed with the migration of men, including an analysis of the contributing factors, and concludes the thesis with the overall conclusion of the research and the scope for further research.

Chapter 2 – Migration and Agency: Theoretical Discussion

Introduction

Although the movement of people is a constant feature of societies, it is also a complex social phenomenon like many other social processes. The complexity arises because men and women have different experiences of migration, and this is further compounded by factors such as age, ethnicity, religion, language, and geography. Therefore, there is a need to have multiple lenses to understand different practices of migration, and in particular, to investigate the migration experiences of the women left-behind, because the impact of men's migration can be rewarding for some women's experiences and eroding for others.

Men's migration may provide women with various opportunities to step out of their gendered roles and scope to develop knowledge, exposure, and skills (Gartaula, Niehof, et al., 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999). As a result, these women have the possibility of maximising their agency and changing the existing structure that limits their potential. However, some women experience an overburden, various restrictions, and reduced participation in the labour market (Binzel & Assaad, 2011; Khan et al., 2010; Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2009; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Oishi, 2005). Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that enhance the agency of, and create barriers for, these women. To investigate these complexities, this chapter proposes a research framework to examine the agency of the women left-behind in a society where the social norms, values, and practices are patriarchal and hierarchical. First, it will explain a number of theoretical concepts; second, it will analyse the relationship between different theories and contemporary migration practices; and finally, it will offer a framework for this research before concluding the section.

Migration Theories

Generally, migration theories revolve around the economic motivations of people to migrate and on various push and pull factors. Among these, macro-economic, micro-economic, the new economics of migration, and classical macro-economic theories are some examples which cover the economic motivations for migration (Borjas, 1989; Faist, 2012; Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 1993). However, there is no single and coherent theory of migration which explains contemporary migration; rather, they are fragmented and segmented by disciplinary boundaries (Castles, 2010; Massey et al., 1993; Massey et al., 2010; Van Hear, 2010).

Push and Pull Factors Theory: Push and pull factors are a much discussed migration theory since Ravenstein first posed it in the 19th century (Ravenstein, 1885), although the development of these factors in migration theory is a post-Ravenstein development (Lee, 1966). Grigg, who also elaborated upon the work of Ravenstein, established the importance of push and pull factors in this area of research, which were expanded later into migration theory (Corbett, 2005; Grigg, 1977). However, many scholars have highlighted push and pull factors in migration as the bases for migration decisions at two levels. At the micro-level, they are analysed at the community and household levels (Dorigo & Tobler, 1983; Skeldon, 2006), while at the macro-level, the impacts on wider social phenomena are analysed (Massey et al., 1993; Piore, 1979; Wallerstein, 1974). Dorigo & Tobler (1983) proposed migration as an individual choice, and that women and men do not experience the same impacts from these push and pull factors.

Neoclassical Theory: Among different theories, neoclassical economic theories of migration are amongst the oldest theories. These theories were developed by scholars who claimed migration as part of the process of economic development (see Harris & Todaro, 1970; Lewis, 1954; Ranis & Fei, 1961; Todaro, 1976). Macro-economists

explain migration as a result of wage differences between countries. They argue that individuals make a decision to migrate by comparing wage differences between two countries, and that the elimination of the wage gap would stop the migration of people (Borjas, 1989; Faist, 2012). Going beyond macro-perspectives, neoclassical micro-economists (see Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969, 1976, 1985; Todaro & Maruszko, 1987) explain that individual actors decide to migrate based on a cost-benefit calculation, not simply according to wages and demand and supply (Massey et al., 1993). Therefore, migration, either regular or irregular, is believed to be an individual choice (Ryo, 2013). However, migration is negotiated considering factors such as the family, society, national demographics, and economics.

New Economics of Migration: The new economics of migration theorists add family members into the migration decision (Stark & Bloom, 1985). They explain that "... migration decisions are not made by the individual actors, but by large units of related people – typically families or households" (Massey et al., 1993, p. 436). These household decisions are important for diversifying family income as well as reducing family risk. Thus, they argue that the diversification of labour is an important strategy for developing countries where people do not have alternative insurance mechanisms to reduce the risks related to their income from agriculture, trade, capital markets, and employment. Therefore, this theoretical framework is also defined as the household-oriented livelihoods approach (de Haas, 2010). The framework offers voluntary reasons for migration and contractual relationships among family members to benefit each other (Stark & Bloom, 1985). These theories consider family members not as passive victims, but as active agents who shape their lives within existing institutions and structures.

These theories also define wage differences between countries, the cost/benefit analyses made by families, and family insurance as the key contributing factors to migration (Stark & Bloom, 1985). These factors all revolve around the income-based

benefits to individuals and families, and tend to ignore other migration factors, including the interests of the individual, affordability, kinship, gender, and tradition. This raises further questions about the implied consensual decision-making within the family, through a lack of understanding about the power dynamics within the household.

Dual Labour Market Theory: Dual labour market theorists outline migration as a consequence of permanent migration demand in developed countries and pays attention only to the destination (Arango, 2000). Piore (1979), the main proponent of this theory, claims that international migration is not caused by push factors at the source, but by pull factors in the receiving countries. When there is regular demand for labour from industrialising countries, labour starts to move to these receiving countries because of the low interest of the workers in native society to perform the low-paid but unstable, dangerous, demeaning, and dirty jobs (Arango, 2000; Piore, 1979). There are a number of fundamental characteristics that are believed to be responsible for the demand for migrant workers. For example, structural inflation related to income and prestige in society, motivational problems in the bottom ranks of the labour market, economic dualism between labour and capital¹², and the demographic characteristics of labour supply in conditions which are unpleasant for native workers, are all characteristics which create scope for the movement of migrant workers (Massey et al., 1993). Nonetheless, this theory ignores micro-level decision-making processes, and only outlines the macro-level economic forces responsible for human mobility.

World Systems Theory: The world systems theory of migration is similar to the dual labour market theory. However, this theory explores the idea that international

¹² Massey et al. (1993) find that capitalists use two different methods to create the supply of products: capital-intensive to meet regular and basic demands, and labour-intensive for seasonal, fluctuating demands. This creates segmentation between labourers, and an unstable labour market.

migration does not happen because of the demand for workers, but because of capitalist intervention in developing economies (Arango, 2000). Building on the work of Wallerstein (1974), this theoretical framework explains that the penetration of capitalism into the global economy is one of the key contributing factors to international migration. It is argued that the capitalist (core) economies influence the peripheral and non-capitalist economies, and subsequently, people's migration increases to the core nations (Massey et al., 1993). Therefore, world systems theory, rather than simply explaining the mobility of the worker, analyses the past and present links between nations and the influence of the rich over the poor countries (Arango, 2000). World systems theory provides very little scope for the agency of individuals claiming that they are driven by externalities (Bakewell, 2010). However, further analysis is required in relation to whether human mobility is caused by the influence of the core economies or because of other factors, such as an open environment and political changes, and if they are equally applicable to both women and men.

Network Theory: Going back to Thomas and Znaniecki, migration networks have been discussed as the key factors for internal and international migration (Arango, 2000). Massey et al. (1993) identified the differences between the conditions of international migration and the factors that perpetuate it. They found that the network of people and institutions supporting migration propagates the movement of people. Therefore, the individual network, that is, the interpersonal ties among non-migrants at the origin, and former migrants and migrants at the destination, causes the migration of people (Gallego & Mendola, 2011). These networks offer multiple benefits for potential migrants: they encourage people to move, convey information about the destination, border crossings, and employment opportunities, as well as reducing their costs and lowering the risks of movement, thus increasing the likelihood of migration, regardless of the push and pull factors (Arango, 2000; Chelapi-den Hamer, 2008; Dolfin & Genicot,

2010; Gallego & Mendola, 2011; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). However, Ullah (2013), based on his field research, argued that migration is an expensive, lengthy, and difficult journey, despite the fact that migrants have these networks. In addition, there are other migration theories, including the cumulative causation and the migration system frameworks. These theories also explore migration in general, but do not explain how such migrations differ for men and women. As well, there is only limited discussion about migration as an integral part of social change (Van Hear, 2010).

Critics of Migration Theories: Although migration theories have defined migration in different ways and are largely complementary to each other (Battistella, 2014; Massey et al., 1993), they have also generated a number of critics. Some of the critics of the economic and network theories have argued that push and pull factors cannot be equally generalised to all men and women. The mobility of people differs based on the gender of individuals and their ability to make migration decisions (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; de Haas, 2010; Oishi, 2005). They maintain that people have individual tastes and interests, and that they therefore respond to the push and pull factors differently. As de Haas (2010) argues, the migration theories do not consider the agency of individuals, but conceal “intra-household age, gender, and other inequalities” (de Haas, 2010, p. 64). Similarly, some researchers have argued that the existing interpersonal bonds of migrants, as prompts for migration, do not consider the gendered aspects of migration decisions, and that these ties do not necessarily reduce the cost of migration (Ullah, 2013; Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Oishi, 2005). The decision to migrate or not is made within a complex context of gendered practices and traditions (Donato, et al., 2006). In the context of Nepal, this research also argues that gender is important in explaining the nature of migration. Migration decisions are influenced by patriarchal norms and different cultural taboos; therefore, one or two factors cannot be generalised to all migrants. Intra-household gender relations are important factors for any migration

and non-migration decisions. Finally, if economic factors were the key to decision-making, then poor women would form the majority of Nepalese migrants.

Similarly, the critics of world system theory and dual labour market theory have argued that approximately 60 per cent of the movement of people is between developing countries or between developed countries, and not necessarily from periphery to core or from developing to developed countries (Oishi, 2005; UNDP, 2009a). Thus, they argue that the penetration of capital, in the form of pull factors or the traditional colonial bond between countries, as a major factor, is not justified. The majority of South Asian and South-East Asian migrants to the Middle-East could be one example of this.

Furthermore, in the context of the overwhelming majority of people moving within the borders of their own country, and internal migration being six times that of international migration (IOM, 2013; UNDP, 2009a), the argument made by world system and dual labour market theorists do not make up the complete picture. A UNDP report has found that people from very poor countries are less likely to migrate as they cannot afford the migration costs (de Haas, 2010; UNDP, 2009b). In addition, their movement is heavily constrained by various policies which create barriers to entry, both at home and in the destination countries (UNDP, 2009a). Hence, Bakewell (2010) argued that the rational choices of individuals and family consultations are more important than simply arguing for the domination of the rich countries over the poor.

Therefore, it seems that each migration theory has its own importance and one may contribute to others; however, they do not sufficiently take into account gender-based issues. Similarly, migration is a complex phenomenon and theory should account for many different types of migration, including regular, irregular, and conflict or nature-induced migration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). This requires an integrative approach to migration analysis at different levels: macro, meso-society, micro-state, and micro-individual (IOM, 2013; Martin, 2014; Oishi, 2005). This is because international

migration is heavily influenced by emigration policies (at the super- and state-level), women's autonomy, and the social structure (de Haas, 2010; Oishi, 2005; UNDP, 2009a). This is also confirmed by comparative research conducted in Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and India. The research found that women with greater autonomy at home are more likely to migrate than women from patriarchal male-dominated households (Oishi, 2005). If we examine the global migration pattern, the number of women migrants is almost equal to men (IOM, 2013; UN, 2013a); however, "the proportion of female migrants is the highest in Europe (51.9 per cent), followed by Latin America and Caribbean (51.6 per cent), Northern America (51.2 per cent), Oceania (50.2 per cent), Africa (45.9 per cent), and Asia (41.6 per cent)" (UN, 2013b, p. 2). Higher migration levels for women are found in those countries where they enjoy greater legal and cultural autonomy. Therefore, the state and meso- (society), and micro- (individual) level environments are equally important determinants of women's migration (Arango, 2000; de Haas, 2010; IOM, 2013; Martin, 2014; Oishi, 2005). However, the UN agrees that the number of female migrants has increased over time (UN, 2013b) and, importantly, the commodification of care in the globalisation of the workforce is one of the contributing factors to the feminisation of international migration (Benería et al., 2012). In addition, women's networks, access to education, and information about employment and resources are also mentioned as contributing factors (de Haas, 2011; Martin, 2014).

Nepal, where 87 per cent of migrants are men, is an example of a country where state-level, meso-level, and micro-level patriarchy influences migration decisions¹³.

¹³ In line with Hapke (2013), the concept of patriarchy is taken as the social system that varies in specific form over time and across space. The argument is that this privilege men structurally and ideologically, and it creates barriers for women to access productive resources and it is ingrained in the minds of many Nepalese people, manifesting in the forms of gender inequality, discrimination and

More than one hundred laws against women (FWLD, 2006, 2011) are evidence of patriarchal domination at the state-level. In addition, the structural exclusion of women from decision-making processes in relation to migration keeps men in the core and women in the periphery (Dhakal, 2008; Luitel, 2001). The hierarchical social structure which enhances male supremacy, gives men more power and roles in decision-making in the home and in society, and discriminates against women based on their gender (Dhungana, 2014; Malla, 2001; Timsina, 2002). The under-representation of women in Nepalese migration is evidence of this situation. In addition, these patriarchal structures and social institutions have implications for the women left-behind. This makes the migration decision-making process and the role of women an interesting aspect of Nepalese migration research.

Migration, Gender and Agency

Generally, migration is analysed at three different levels – pre-migration, during migration, and in the post-migration stage, and therefore, gender relations are related and can be investigated at every stage of migration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). This research, however, has a focus on the women left-behind and concentrates on gender relations at home, during the period of the men's migration. This is because gender is a vital social factor that shapes migration patterns, the allocation of social and financial remittances, and social relations at the source (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003), as well as women's agency and social capital.

violence against women. It roots in broader economic, political-legal, cultural and social processes and brings historical and multi-scalar perspectives.

Migration and Gender

Largely, migration theories have been dominated by economic factors revolving around male migrants and families, and generally assume gender neutrality in terms of drivers and effects (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Oishi, 2005; Piper, 2005; UN, 2006). However, migration has multiple drivers and affects men and women, and boys and girls, in different ways (Piper, 2006; Vogel & Korinek, 2012). In addition, gender is one of the key decisive factors in determining who moves and how these moves take place (Afsar, 2011; Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Chort, 2014; Hoang, 2011). If factors such as poverty and unemployment were the sole determinants, as claimed by many economists, the migration of women from poor countries such as India, Nepal, and Bangladesh would have been much higher than men (Oishi, 2005). In addition, although South Asia is known as a labour exporting sub-region, the women's share among migrants is very small (Barbora et al., 2008; Piper, 2005). This confirms that “gender relations and gender-specific behaviours at the individual, family, and societal levels have an influence on whether women will migrate internationally” (UN, 2006, p. 9). This also raises a number of further questions around why women from some countries do not migrate or are less mobile than some others, and why women from patriarchal societies migrate less than those from more liberal societies.

The perspective in international migration, considering both women and men, thus recognises that gender is an important aspect in decision-making because of social interactions and roles, hierarchies, power relationships, abilities to exert autonomy, and various policies and practices (Afsar, 2011; Hoang, 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999; UN, 2006). This confirms that migration is not only a result of unemployment and income, but is also due to the decision-making capacities of women and men in a household and within society. Gender relations are a key aspect which governs who migrates and who is left-behind (Gabaccia, 2013; Oishi,

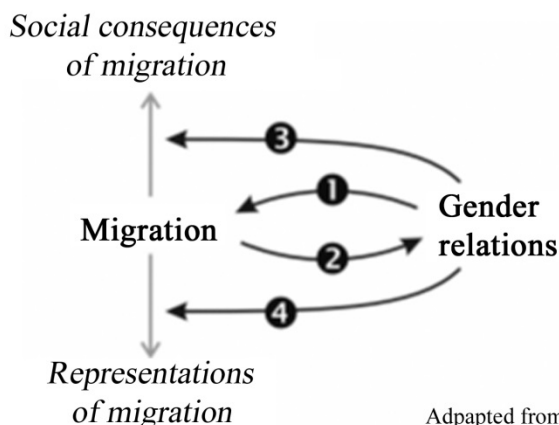
2005; Piper, 2006; UN, 2006). Therefore, migration is also a product of gendered decisions, as opposed to concerns over the assumed neutrality of family decision-making processes and opportunities for women to take part in such decisions (Gioli et al., 2014; Lutz, 2010).

Over time, migration theories have gradually become more gender-sensitive; however, relationships differ based on gender hierarchies, roles, and status, as well as the structural characteristics of the originating society (Benería et al., 2012; Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999; Piper, 2005). Similarly, the status and roles of women in particular socio-cultural environments influence the probability of migration in addition to labour market and employment conditions (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; UN, 2006). However, the research on migration and gender has been evolving despite inconsistencies (Gabaccia, 2013; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). For example, Carling (2005) stated that some researchers have focused only on women rather than on gender relationships, while some others are more sexist, and assume a male privilege in migration. Similarly, some researchers have treated women implicitly as dependent in many cases, both at the source and in the receiving countries, and simultaneously in policies which may affect their rights and entitlements (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005).

In the 1980s, Morokvasic (1983, 1984) made migrant women more visible by raising concerns about their plight, and characterising them as independent migrants (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005). However, the research did not treat gender as the central theoretical concern, instead viewing this as a women's issue, and therefore, they were criticised as being case studies with only limited scope (Carling, 2005; Lutz, 2010; Piper, 2005). Nonetheless, gender analysis in migration research continued to grow, and later, both the structural- (macro) and behavioural- (individual/micro) level gender lenses became part of the research agenda (Chant, 1992; Hoang, 2011; Pedraza,

1991). Together with these developments, Carling (2005) proposed a framework for understanding the gendered aspects of migration, as shown below (Figure 2.1):

Figure 2.1: Different Forms of Causal Analysis of the Gender Dimension of Migration



What we know now is that migration decisions are highly gendered (Hoang, 2011; Oishi, 2005; Pedraza, 1991; Piper, 2006; UN, 2006). Women rarely make decisions about their own, or their spouse's, migration if they live in a patriarchal society. Usually, men make autonomous decisions to migrate, but women consult with family members to make such decisions (Hoang, 2011; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). Therefore, the gendered dimension of migration decision-making is one of the areas of analysis.

Second, migration creates significant changes in the life of both migrant women and those women who are left-behind (Carling, 2005; Gartaula, Niehof, et al., 2012; Hadi, 2001; Pedraza, 1991). Some women have had their capacity enhanced because of their or their spouse's migration, but some others have been victims, including of sexual exploitation (Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Oishi, 2005). For example, women in Mexico and Bangladesh have more significant roles in decision-making in the absence of their husbands (Hadi, 2001; Pauli, 2008), whereas women who have been victims of gender-based violence, particularly of rape and physical abuse in some other areas, have less

significant roles in the making of decisions (Mahler & Pessar, 2006; McEvoy et al., 2012; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). Similarly, the effects of migration on gender relations may be different in the short-term compared to the long-term, and may not be the same for all individuals – some improve women’s positions while some erode them, both at home and at the final destination (Brochmann, 1990; Carling, 2005). The gendered impacts of migration will also be different for migrant and non-migrant women (Curran & Saguy, 2001; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011; Lurie et al., 2003). As Carling states, “women might, for instance, experience increased autonomy both as independent migrants and as *de facto* heads of household while their husbands are working abroad” (Carling, 2005, p. 6).

Third, gender affects the social consequences of migration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005; Curran & Saguy, 2001; Hadi, 2001). This has the potential to bring both positive and negative changes in gender relations, both at the source and at the destination – in decision-making, conjugal relationships, child care, social capital, and networking. In addition, there is the possibility of changes to existing social structures and practices as a result of migration (Pauli, 2008). The changes in gender relations also have the potential to affect the use of remittances in the migrant’s home society. In Nepal, for example, women living in nuclear families were found to take a greater role in decision-making than women in extended families during the absence of their husbands (Kaspar, 2005).

Fourth, gender influences the representation of men and women in scholarly works on migration, such as the generalisation of the migration experiences of women and men, the representation of women as being dependent on male migrants, and the representation of men as breadwinners, among others (see Carling, 2005; Oishi, 2005; Thapa, 2013). Therefore, gender relations do not influence migration alone, but also the thinking process of individuals about migration. Stereotypical views in the migration

literature about female and male migrants can be taken as examples of gender influence (Carling, 2005; Lutz, 2010). These have led to a smaller body of work on a number of specific aspects of gender, including migration decisions and the use of remittances (Benería et al., 2012; Piper, 2006).

Social Capital and Agency

Social capital¹⁴ is an important element in enhancing the agency of women left-behind. When individuals belong to a network, they achieve agency through a dynamic mix of bonding¹⁵, bridging¹⁶, and linking¹⁷ capitals, which collectively offer them power (Ling & Dale, 2013). Bonding capital gives individuals collective power,

¹⁴ Bourdieu highlights two components of social capital: the first is resources that are connected with group membership and a social network; the second is based on mutual cognition and recognition (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Siisiainen, 2000). Symbolic power, and then symbolic capital, is acquired through the cognition and recognition process. Further to these, symbolic capital is recognised as the legitimate base of social position, which exists in the eyes of the others. The symbolic capital, social network, and social position of the actors and voluntary associations are examples of the embodiment of social capital (Siisiainen, 2000). Coleman (1988) defined this by function and focused on social structure, social relationships, norms and values, information, and institutions. He considers social capital as a set of multiple entities as opposed to a single entity with two elements in common, that is social structure and certain actions by actors within the social structure. Social capital is defined as a productive resource that contributes to the achievement of certain ends, both economic and non-economic, which is not possible in its absence. Putnam incorporates more abstract features of social capital by including trust, norms, and networked relationships as part of the concept (Putnam, 1993a, 1993b). His idea of social capital envisions a mechanism that integrates the ‘values of society, and solidarity and togetherness’, and consensus as part of the mechanism.

¹⁵ Bonding capital refers to relations among family members, close friends and neighbours in closed networks often lacking diversity and characterised by dense, multifunctional ties and strong but localised trust (Ling & Dale 2013: p.3).

¹⁶ Bridging social capital connects people (or bonded groups) and may facilitate access to resources and opportunities that exist in one network to a member of another and is characterised by weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Ling & Dale, 2013).

¹⁷ Linking social capital connects the civic community to political decision-making and financial resources and relates to the capacity to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond community (See Ling & Dale, 2013; Woolcock, 2001).

whereas the vertical¹⁸ linking and bridging capitals give voice to the locus of power where decisions are made. Agency can be exercised either by individuals or by a group of people through networks as drivers of change. However, social capital and the acquisition of power are not just a sum of the parts, rather they offer a pattern of behaviour (Bakewell, 2010; Fukuyama, 2001), with Fukuyama arguing that social capital is represented by cooperation between individuals. Social capital, for the purposes of this research, and as a set of resources, is connected with group membership and networks that facilitate collective voices and actions, focusing on access to the decision-making power of women. Therefore, the formation of women's groups, membership in various groups and committees, and participation in different community activities and decision-making make up part of the formal social capital of the women left-behind. Similarly, informal types of social capital are made up of the frequency of contacts with the husband, other family members, and friends. Although formal social capital is visible, informal social capital is also important to the achievement of changing one's position in society.

However, as Newman & Dale (2005) stated, social capital can be used only if agency exists. Agency promotes action that allows individuals to enjoy their rights and access to resources (Bandura, 2000; Newman & Dale, 2005). Social capital, particularly bonding capital, sometimes becomes the social ties that constrain the ability to innovate (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Newman & Dale, 2005). Agency is, then, the ability of a person to affect events outside their immediate sphere of influence, either within the household or in community decision-making and access to resources, in addition to maintaining identity and status through the use of bonding, and then, bridging capital.

¹⁸ Vertical social capital pertains to connections with the people in power, whether they are in politically or financially influential positions (See Ling & Dale, 2013; Woolcock, 2001).

While agency can build social capital, such capital is also a means to strengthen agency at both the individual and community level (Dale & Newman, 2008; Harvey, 2002; Ling & Dale, 2013). In other words, “with social capital and agency, further agency and social capital can be created, resulting in a virtuous cycle for change” (Ling & Dale, 2013, p. 4). Therefore, the above can be summarised as follows: both agency and social capital complement each other and must be mobilised to enhance power. As Krishna (2001) argued, a combination of high levels of social capital and agency is required to transform a structure which creates unequal relationships.

Migration and Agency

In defining human agency, Bourdieu (1977) placed emphasis on the role of habitus¹⁹ to construct agency, while also considering human agency as being habitual, repetitive, and taken for granted (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kabeer, 1999). Bourdieu (1977) considered the agent as the product of a *modus operandi* and as a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. Engagement with Bourdieu helps the researcher to understand observable practices (*habitus*) and deeply-held beliefs (*doxa*) in particular social fields (Cameron & Ojha, 2007; Ojha et al., 2009) which reinforce internalised structures of cognition, behaviours, tastes, motivation, and dispositions. However, habitus does not undermine human agency as there is always an interplay between the objective structure and the subjective mental experience of agents, which ultimately produce and reproduce habitus (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996).

¹⁹ Habitus refers to the lifestyle, values, dispositions, and expectations of particular social groups that are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life. This is created through social processes and an interplay between subjective ‘free will’ and objective ‘social structure’ (also called field) over time, leading to patterns that are transferable and enduring from one context to another. The central concept of habitus is its embodiment. This implies that habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously without any deliberate pursuit of coherence and without any conscious concentration.

Giddens (1984) outlines agency as a continuous process by which action transforms both the structure and the individual. He explained that structures shape people's practices, but also that knowledgeable and enabled human agents constitute the structure (Giddens, 1976; Sewell, 1992). Therefore, Giddens conceptualises structure not as a series of constraints on human agency, but as a product of knowledgeable and enabled people who can further transform the structure. Furthermore, going one step further, Emirbayer & Mische (1998, p. 962) conceptualised agency,

...as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its 'iterational' or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a 'projective' capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a 'practical-evaluative' capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment) (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962).

These waves of literature go beyond social structure and habitus, and envision the idea of the free agent (Drydyk, 2008; Luke, 1973, in Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Lacroix, 2012) with an ability to make rational choices for individuals and society (Bakewell, 2010). Kabeer (1999, p. 438) added to these ideas, defining agency as "... the ability to define one's goals and act upon them." These definitions embody the capacity of the agent to perform their actions freely. Nevertheless, the term has maintained an "...elusive, albeit resonant, vagueness", and has been associated with "self-hood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom, and creativity" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, pp. 962-963). Thomas Lacroix (2014) elaborated upon agency as the product of complex social conditions that move beyond their contradictory social institutions, and which link practices with social structural elaboration processes. He argued that "agency emerges from the necessity to take action in a composite world and to build up an identity despite often contradictory roles" (Lacroix, 2014, p. 17). These depictions paint a picture of great complexities in the

understanding of agency. However, Harvey (2002) emphasised the role of agency in bringing transformation into the existing state of affairs (Harvey, 2002, p. 173), and also as “the capacity of persons to plan and initiate action” (Onyx & Bullen, 2000, p. 29) to obtain a desired effect. Therefore, as Onyx & Bullen (2000) argued, agency is far more than a component of social capital, and social capital becomes effective only if there is a high level of agency (Krishna, 2001; Newman & Dale, 2005).

Samman & Santos defined agency as a multidimensional concept, with the role of the agent being enacted in three different dimensions: a) in different spheres: civic and market; b) at different levels: micro, meso, and macro; and c) in different domains: social, religious, and cultural (Samman & Santos, 2009, pp. 6-9). Basically, the concept of human agency is grounded on the principle that change is possible through the efforts of people in different spheres and domains, and at different levels, and therefore, people have the capacity to transform the existing state of affairs (Dale, 2013; Newman & Dale, 2005; Onyx & Bullen, 2000). In other words, this contributes to the production of desired effects outside of one's immediate sphere of influence.

The current research, based on these arguments, stands on the idea that agency is the ability of women who have been left-behind to make decisions and to act on them. This goes beyond the concept of female gender roles, which have been characterised as being submissive and powerless and conditioned by associations of patriarchy, caste identity, and economic status (Martin Hilber et al., 2012; Rao, 2014). Although the structures produce roles to shape agents and their actions (Bourdieu, 1977; Charrad, 2010), it is also believed that agents have the potential to change these structures over time and to bring change to power relationships and the ‘dynamic interrelationships between actions, motivation, and social cultural system’ (Charrad, 2010; Molnar, 2014). Therefore, agency is interest-driven, and change is possible through the active role of the agent despite several challenges.

Migration, either as an independent migrant or for those left-behind in a joint family or as the *de facto* head of a household in a nuclear family, has a major influence on women's lives (Carling, 2005; Gartaula, Niehof, et al., 2012; Hadi, 2001; Pedraza, 1991; UN, 2006). Migration is also considered to enhance women's autonomy and power (Pauli, 2008; UN, 2006).

The migration of husbands could be rewarding to some women left-behind, because these women have the opportunity to step out of their gendered roles, and to gain the scope to develop new knowledge, exposure, and skills beyond traditionally-defined areas. This gives them the opportunity to benefit from their capabilities and agency, although this may differ based on the social and cultural contexts of the agents (Briones, 2009; Rashid, 2013) and their willingness to change (Ling & Dale, 2013). As a result, they can acquire more power and maximise their agency within the existing socio-cultural structure (Gartaula, Niehof, et al., 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999). However, understanding the relationship between the social structure and human agency is a major problem (Bakewell, 2010; Elder-Vass, 2010; Lacroix, 2012). This is because social scientists see society not simply from a purely structuralist or individualist perspective – there is ongoing debate about whether individual behaviours are guided by structural forces or by the free choices of individuals (Elder-Vass, 2010). However, the current research understands agency and structure as being interconnected and as multi-faceted phenomena rather than as dichotomous variables (Charrad, 2010; Lacroix, 2012).

Agency of the Women Left-Behind

This research investigates the agency of women left-behind as a result of their spouse's migration in contexts in which interactions between gender, social capital, and social institutions/structures play key roles in shaping their social position. This mix of

different elements creates the agency of the women as there is an ongoing interplay between agency and structure (Archer, 2000; Bakewell, 2010). Therefore, this research analyses a range of factors, including formal and informal norms and practices, culture, men's absence, remittances, and community organisations and decision-making spaces in the community, which influence the position and decision-making processes of women. Basically, the agency of women at the individual level includes a number of key elements, such as freedom of movement, participation in decision-making²⁰, control over family rituals and the selection of the spouse, access to and control over family resources including land and other assets, and psychological confidence and self-esteem (Jejeebhoy et al., 2010; Mukherjee & Kundu, 2012).

These discussions provide a close examination of the micro-social processes within community organisations and decision-making forums in the context of men's migration, either as the *de facto* head of household in nuclear families, or by women with less direct supervision by husbands while their husbands are working abroad giving the woman increased levels of autonomy (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Kaspar, 2005). Furthermore, this research investigates the confronting issues, challenges, and social practices, as well as the supportive formal and informal policies, institutions, and practices, in relation to the agency of women. In addition, this research accepts the fact that agency is related to power which comes individually or collectively from different sources, including money and assets, networks and connections of people, language, culture, religion, law, education, and skills, among others (Agarwal, 1997; Jejeebhoy et al., 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Lacroix, 2012).

²⁰ Mukherjee & Kundu (2012) have divided decision-making across socio-religious communities in West Bengal of India into four different groups: a) money management; b) food management; c) use of borrowed money; and d) family-related matters (rituals).

Economists argue that the radical distribution of wealth, particularly of money and assets, enhances the power of both women and men (see Duflo, 2012; Garikipati, 2012; McElroy, 2001; Mukherjee & Kundu, 2012). Migration offers women access to money either from remittances or from the sale of household products. Therefore, it could be argued that these assets may be sources of women's agency. The economics school, however, covers only one aspect of power while ignoring structural sources of power, such as the cultural, social, and legal structures that create divisions between men and women and the subsequent gender division of authority and roles (Connelly et al., 2000; Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Parmar, 2003). They believe that women would have greater authority and be in a position to enjoy their agency if they had material resources; however, this would not create a complete picture because there are other actors and variables around them that have an influence (Jakimow & Kilby, 2006; Mahmud et al., 2012; Mayoux, 2006).

Economic rights, therefore, as one of the factors in women's agency, should be supplemented with the implementation of legal provisions and structural modifications (Agarwal, 1995; Mukherjee & Kundu, 2012; Parmar, 2003). For example, research conducted in South Asia found that through access to financial resources and changes in a number of legal frameworks that allowed property rights for women, the women have increased influence in decision-making as well as more opportunities for social networking and greater bargaining power (Agarwal, 1995; Sharma, 2007). However, the provision of political rights, access to micro-credit, and equal education opportunities would not automatically enhance the agency of women (Mukherjee & Kundu, 2012; Parmar, 2003). The implementation of legal provisions, the creation of new institutions, better working conditions, and more importantly, the "societal commitment to work for appropriate functioning of social, political, and economic arrangements" would ensure the rights of workers and enhance their agency (Sen, 2013, p. 86).

Building on these ideas, agency is taken as the capacity of social actors to reflect on their position, develop plans and strategies, and take action to achieve their vision (Bakewell, 2010). The agent is defined as a social actor who is capable of enjoying some degree of control over social relations, assets, and structures in which the actor is enmeshed, and in turn, implies the ability to transform these social relations and structures (Bakewell, 2010; Sewell, 1992). However, there are some factors which prevent women from enjoying their power, such as the nature of their post-marital residence, sexual restrictions, few opportunities to make choices, and exclusion from decision-making (Agarwal, 1995; Allendorf, 2007; Baumann, 1997; Kabeer, 1999). Therefore, as Bourdieu (1986) argued, the agency of actors also facilitates collective voices and actions, resulting in greater access to decision-making power for women.

Ling & Dale (2013) defined agency as the most important factor in making social capital useful, and developed heuristic equations to address agency at the community and individual levels, as follows (Ling & Dale, 2013, pp. 6-7):

Community Scale

Agency = (Capacity + Reason to act (perceived need or threat)) + Social capital) –
Barriers at the community level

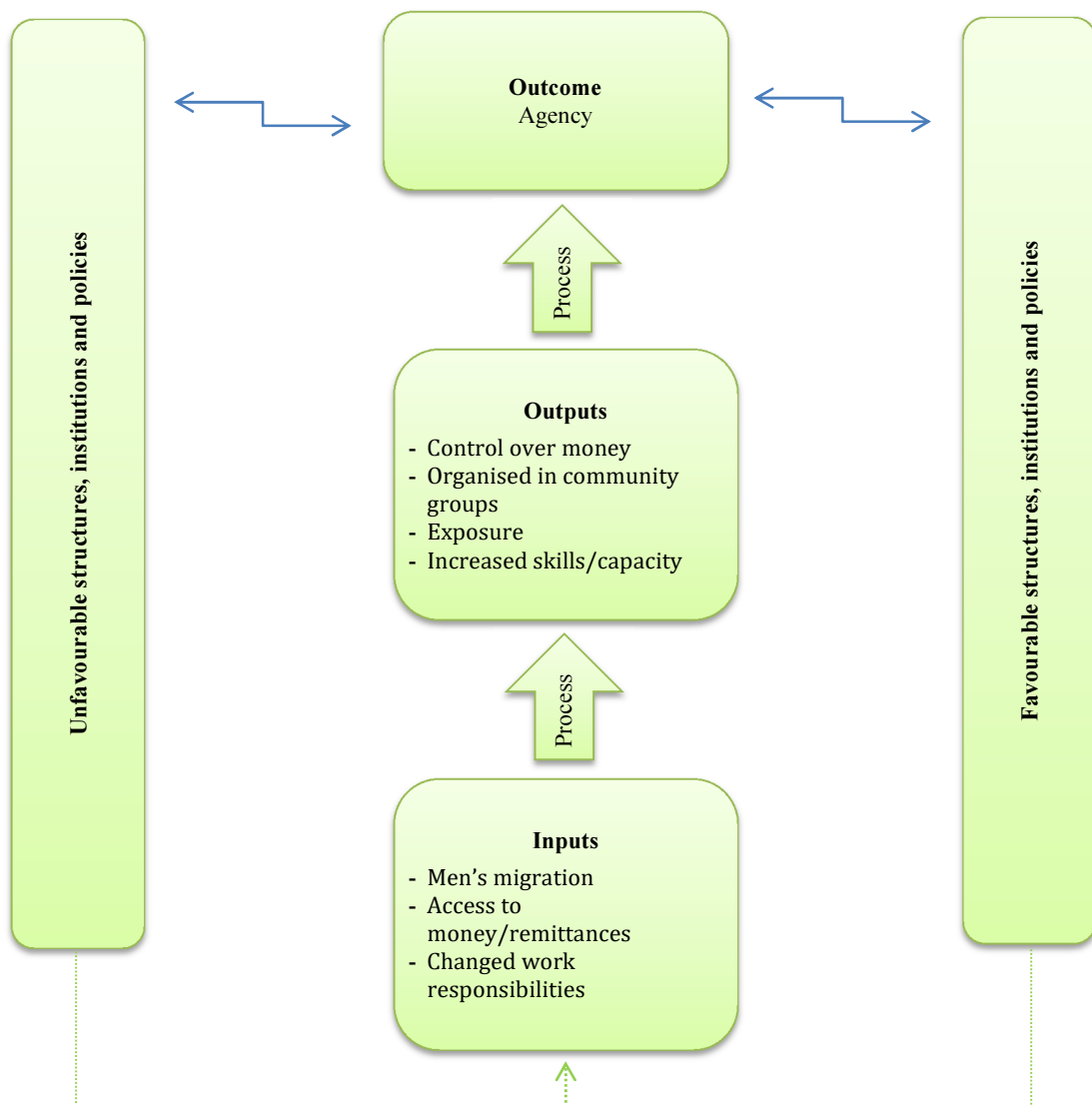
Individual scale

Agency = (Will/intent + Reason to act (worldview + cause) + access to resources/
networks) – Barriers at the individual level

Thus, agency, as an outcome, is achieved as a result of various inputs which are managed in a social environment by actors. At the community scale, this is achieved by groups of people and the results are collectively beneficial to a specific group of people. The people act together when there is a specific reason to do so. Therefore, social

capital lubricates these collective efforts. However, there is always resistance which does not allow these efforts to operate as smoothly as expected. Therefore, such barriers, in a sense, are deducted from the sum of the other three elements in defining agency. On the other hand, on an individual scale, Ling & Dale (2013) argued that capacity is limited to the willingness of individuals. As with the community scale, there are barriers at the individual scale, but the access of the individual to networks adds value to individual agency.

Figure 2.2: A Framework for Defining Agency of the Women Left-Behind



Building on the work of Ling & Dale (2013) to define the agency of the women left-behind, this research framework has been developed using the concept of inputs, outputs, processes, and external factors. The interaction of these factors determines the agency of women as an outcome. Migration and remittances have been defined as inputs which bring access and control over money, social networking, and increased skill and capacity as outputs in an external social, cultural, and political environment. Ultimately, agency has been defined as the outcome, as presented in Figure 2.2, although it is accepted that the agency of the individual influences the external factors as well as the results. These elements are further defined in the following paragraphs.

Policies and Institutions: External Factors

Agents live and perform in a society where a number of institutional, cultural, and social norms and practices prevail and guide them and their community. These are the environments (as shown in the vertical boxes as barriers and supportive elements – Figure 2.2) which create various norms to perform, or not to perform, various roles. There are formal institutions and policies which are imposed by the state to shape the individual's roles, responsibilities, and duties, including government policies, rules, and regulations. Similarly, there are informal cultural values, practices, and traditions which determine women's and men's positions and roles, as well as the distribution of resources within the household and in society (Bourdieu, 1993; Giddens, 1984; Klugman et al. 2014; Lacroix, 2012). In Nepalese society, for instance, there is a caste-based structure which defines the roles and position of individuals by birth based on Hindu rituals. The gender division of roles determines the role of men and women within the home as well as outside (Dhungana, 2014; Nanda et al., 2012; Tamang, 2011).

The formal and informal policies and the institutions are the environmental foundations upon which actors perform their roles. The agents usually appreciate these formal and informal policies, but do not have any control over them, and therefore, they make efforts to perform their actions within the existing environment, while the more knowledgeable and enabled agents act to modify it (also see Giddens, 1984; Ling & Dale, 2013).

The actors are effective when they have positive policies and institutional foundations surrounding them (Ling & Dale, 2013). Policies that ensure equal land and property rights between men and women, for example, help agents to enhance their agency. For example, the constitutional provision, Article 13(2) of the Interim Constitution of Nepal which states that “No discrimination shall be made against any citizen in the application of general laws on grounds of religion, colour, sex, caste, tribe, origin, language or ideological conviction or any of these” (GoN, 2007b), is an important supportive policy that offers women equal rights to men, regardless of their caste and ethnic identity.

On the other hand, there are many social, cultural, and legal practices that create barriers for the agents, including caste- and gender-based norms and practices, gender-based violence, and discrimination based on gender (Lewark et al., 2011; Thieme & Wyss, 2005; Upadhyay, 2002). As well, there are more than a hundred discriminatory laws against women in Nepal (FWLD, 2006, 2011). There is an interconnectedness of these discriminatory policies in South Asia which create barriers to the accessing of resources, freedom of expression and mobility, and make women less effective, not only in Nepal but in other South Asian countries (Gill & Stewart, 2011). Furthermore, policy-makers have not been fully successful in developing appropriate strategies to include women and poorer groups in different levels of decision-making and monitoring of policy implementation (Acharya, 2011; Lama & Buchy, 2002). Therefore, the formal

and informal policies and institutional factors have both positive and negative influences on the performance of agents. This is the reason why supportive policies and institutions are added, and barriers are deducted, from the sum of inputs and outputs, as proposed by Ling & Dale (2013).

These environmental factors, both supportive and restrictive, influence the female agents throughout the change cycle. Therefore, these factors surround the inputs, outputs, and outcomes, and have an effect on them (Figure 2.2). However, individual and collective agency can influence the environment if the actors have the intention to bring about positive change (Ling & Dale, 2013).

Inputs

As a result of the migration process, migration itself becomes an input for many women because this makes the woman a *de facto* head of household in nuclear families, and provides additional space to perform various roles that their husbands used to perform in extended families (ICIMOD, 2009). The migration of the husbands becomes one of the reasons to take action by the wives. With the migration of the husbands, the women left-behind, both in joint and nuclear families, gain access to money either from remittances, or from household production and local employment (Gartaula, 2009; Gartaula, Niehof, et al., 2012; Gulati, 1987). The responsibilities are changed because they need to perform the activities that their husbands used to perform at home. In addition, they have greater scope to participate in community activities, meetings, and other events where they have the opportunity to gain exposure and experience beyond their household chores.

These inputs collectively help women to understand their abilities and potential. They gradually find themselves responsible for managing money, interacting with people, and making decisions (De & Ratha, 2012; McEvoy et al., 2012). In addition,

when women have the freedom to move beyond their household chores, they gain opportunities to network with other women and to work together on their agendas (Bedford et al., 2009; Orozco & Ellis, 2014). However, outputs are only possible if the women have the willingness to take action and participate in decision-making at home and in the community forum. The willingness and initiative to take action becomes the process for achieving outputs (Carling, 2005).

Outputs

Despite the constraining policies and institutions, when there is a willingness, various initiatives and inputs may bring some change for the women left-behind (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Kaspar, 2005). These factors gradually help to bring women's hidden capacity²¹ out, as well as motivating them to change their position. When men are not at home, for example, women become responsible for additional roles. They participate in community meetings and discussions that directly, or indirectly, affect them and their families. These experiences give them exposure to different activities at home and in their community (Bedford et al., 2009; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; D. Massey et al., 2009; Sherpa, 2010).

Social capital, in the form of community groups and organisations or a common interest to act for change, offers confidence to women at the individual and community

²¹ Basically, to analyse capacity, this research follows the concept of capabilities that Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (1999; 2001) define at three levels. These are basic, internal, and combined capabilities "... with a sense of the worth and dignity of basic human powers" (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 237). These capabilities come from the innate equipment of individuals, such as skill development and exposure; sufficient conditions to perform a role; and a combination of individual ability and external environment. As Sen (1999) argued, the capabilities come with instrumental freedoms – political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. Therefore, this offers a wider framework through which to analyse instrumental freedoms, particularly social opportunities and financial freedoms that the women left-behind have enjoyed with the migration of their husbands.

levels (Ling & Dale, 2013). Furthermore, women have to make financial or other asset-related decisions either alone or in consultation with someone else. Again, such experiences offer exposure to the roles that women did not perform when their husbands were at home. This provides them with skills and opportunities in new areas, and ultimately helps them to boost their confidence (Antman, 2012b; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; ICIMOD, 2009).

Once the women experience such autonomy, earn money, hold assets such as land, or receive remittances, these resources offer them some measure of power to make decisions that contribute to improving their lives (Agarwal, 1997; Allendorf, 2007; Deere & Doss, 2006; Deere & León, 2003; Kabeer, 1999). These inputs generate a process of change among knowledgeable agents and bring gradual possibilities of contribution to modify existing policies, practices, and institutions. Finally, the above experiences become two-way processes – actors perform these actions and the actions contribute to enhancing the confidence and capacity of these actors (Harvey, 2002; Ling & Dale, 2013).

Through these experiences, women gradually increase the confidence to control their lives. Therefore, the process, which starts with the women after they gain some inputs, is very important in bringing change to social relations and among themselves (Benería et al., 2012; Gioli et al., 2014; Kabeer, 1999; Kaspar, 2005; Piper, 2005). More importantly, when these agents find spaces, reasons, or pressing concerns to perform, and the willingness to act either individually or collectively, they become additional inputs and allow the agent to gain positive outcomes (Harvey, 2002; Ling & Dale, 2013).

Outcomes

Finally, the enhanced ability of women to make decisions and have control over them, results in the greater scope of women to enhance their agency within the home, in decision-making, and in managing household and community activities (Harvey, 2002; Ling & Dale, 2013; McEvoy et al., 2012). This is very important in women's lives because, as Mary Holmes states, "... gender is a major boundary around which resources and prestige and power are divided, with the majority of women often struggling to keep control over their lives" (Holmes, 2009, p. 4). The women left-behind, as presented in Figure 2.2, when they have a willingness to bring about change, start participating in community forums which, in turn, offer them the opportunity to understand their abilities and to enhance their social capital which collectively brings results for the individual women in gaining control over their decisions. Similarly, formal and informal social networking gives collective power to women and also protects them from intra-household gender-based violence (Choi et al., 2012; Harvey, 2002).

Through such arguments, this research framework suggests that women enhance their agency by bringing out their voices, and by participating in community forums; such actions also contribute to changing the restrictive social structure through challenging discriminatory practices that are embedded within the culture. Therefore, as Anthony Giddens stated, knowledgeable and enabled agency is extended to challenging the structures that shape the lives of men, women, and children. In addition, such agency changes the identity of women from being dependent on the husband to being a leader. The women, for example, challenge what is thought of as being appropriate gender behaviour when they understand their identity and capacity within the household and in their community. Identities are marked by differences and formed through social roles, the everyday interaction of actors with others, and the language they use

(Woodward, 2004). Therefore, agency gradually assists in transforming the identities of actors (Hoang, 2011). As agency is closely related to women's position and identity in their community, their capacity, and their networking, they are central concepts in this research.

As Manuel Castells (2011, p. 6) stated, identity is "people's source of meaning and experience" and is constructed, and originates, from social institutions (Castells, 2011). Thus, building on Ashforth & Mael (1989), identity is gained through the perception of oneness with, or belonging to, a network within the household and in the community space. The perception of others gives them a symbolic position in society, and they also gain formal positions if they have any decision-making power either within the home or in community groups (Bourdieu, 1989; Jones, 2012). Therefore, this research examines both the ascribed and constructed identities and positions of women left-behind and their experiences. The position of women in the household and the community has been measured based on their decision-making scope, the family and community response to their decisions and actions, and the interest of the community and extended family members to interact with the women left-behind. In addition, invitations to join community groups and requests for different types of assistance from the women are symbolic of the position and identity of women in society.

However, these outcomes cannot be generalised to all women left-behind, because the women who are constrained by their environments and do not have the same reasons to act, would not enhance their agency to the same level as women in more favourable environments (Hoang, 2011; McEvoy et al., 2012).

Conclusion

Men's migration, women being left-behind, and decision-making in the home are complex life processes in a patriarchal society, which cannot be understood simply through a single theory. Migration can be influenced by micro-, macro-, and meso-factors either individually or collectively (Lacroix, 2012). Similarly, men and women have different experiences of migration, either as migrants or for those left-behind. In addition, as a number of scholars have identified, migration affects men and women differently (Bedford et al., 2009; Piper, 2006; Vogel & Korinek, 2012). Overall, it can be seen that patriarchal decision-making has implications for women if they do not migrate and therefore live at home.

When men migrate, women are left with additional roles within the home and in the community. Some of them find increased autonomy and gain different life experiences, but some others find additional challenges. However, there are variations in their experiences based on their locations and ethnic identities because they are surrounded by different socio-cultural and political institutions which set different rules for different individuals. Some of these institutions favour women's voices and participation in public spaces, but some others limit their mobility and agency. Therefore, the elements in the social environment need to be analysed separately, categorising them into supporting and preventing factors. Therefore, building on the proposition by Ling & Dale (2013), this research takes agency as the outcome of various inputs and processes which interact with various supporting and preventing factors. Therefore, the external elements are analysed either as barriers or as enablers throughout the change process. Some of these are barriers while others enhance the capacity of agents.

Similarly, this research considers the willingness of individuals, and their social capital, as part of a process which has a reciprocal relationship with agents.

Furthermore, the components of the inputs will be investigated in the context of men's migration and the women left-behind. Here, migration, remittances, changed work responsibilities, and community participation are considered as inputs. When these inputs are present, and if the women have a willingness to take action and participate in the community forum, this is taken as a process which makes women more powerful.

The outputs become a higher level of conditions through which to achieve a higher level of agency for women. The outputs include access to and control over money, community group participation, social networks, exposure, and increased skills and capacity. However, these outputs are surrounded both by a supporting and limiting socio-cultural environment. Therefore, with the help of enabling factors, women start defining their own goals and acting upon them with increased confidence. Thus, the women become increasingly successful in modifying their freedom from everyday supervision into social and symbolic capital which ultimately contributes to defining their position at home and in wider society.

Therefore, this research uses a mix of the concepts of migration, gender, and social capital which contributes to achieving higher levels of agency for the women left-behind, within the existing social structure and institutions. This mix of concepts has helped to develop the researcher's own research framework to define agency as the sum of inputs, outputs, and supportive factors. Agency is high when there are favourable policies and institutions, and is low when these are unfavourable.

Chapter 3 – Migration in Nepalese Society

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on migration from Nepal, particularly the impacts of men's migration on the women left-behind, with particular attention focused on the experiences of the women when their husbands leave them at home with multiple responsibilities. Nepalese men's migration is driven by various causes, including poverty, unemployment, and conflict, as well as natural disasters and environmental factors. Regardless of these different causal factors, the focus of this chapter is on the impacts of men's migration, particularly on poverty reduction, gender relations, capacity development, labour market participation, and physical asset accumulation, in a patriarchal society where men are the major decision-makers. The first section of this chapter presents the historical background to and the current trends in migration in Nepal, the causal factors and types, the distribution of migrants by geographical area, and the current policy framework. The second section is about the impacts of migration in Nepal, while the third outlines a number of contemporary issues, before concluding the chapter.

Nepalese in Global Migration

The international migration of Nepalese people makes up a very small proportion of global migration, where approximately 214 million people globally live outside their country of birth. This is about three per cent of the total global population, with three out of four migrants being from developing countries (IOM, 2010, 2013; Sutherland, 2013b). However, the percentage of the global migrant population has not increased significantly and has remained relatively stable in recent times (for example, increasing by 0.1 per cent between 2005 and 2010); however, migrants' remittances are

playing an increasingly important role in the global economy and actually outstrip official aid and, in some cases, foreign direct investment (IOM, 2010). In South Asia, remittances are greater than both foreign aid and foreign direct investment combined (Gammeltoft, 2002; Kilby, 2008). Nepal, which has over 20 per cent as a percentage of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) coming from remittances, is one of 10 countries²² in the world which has these large shares of remittances in their gross national income (IOM, 2010). Nepal receives around 30 per cent as a percentage of its GDP from remittances, but only 5.9 per cent from foreign aid and loans (GoN, 2014a).

Nepalese migration can be divided into two groups by destination – international and internal; and as seasonal, temporary, and permanent by duration. International migration may be divided further into two groups: migrants to third countries that require travel documents, and migrants to India where people travel and work without any documentation. Migration data to and from India are not recorded and so cannot be substantiated. The World Bank estimates that there are approximately 2.27 million temporary Nepalese migrants to third countries and it is estimated that there are between two and three million Nepalese in India²³ out of a population of 26 million (Ghimire et al., 2010). Fifty-six per cent of households in Nepal have at least one member absent²⁴ from the home (GoN, 2008, 2012a; WFP & NDRI, 2008).

²² The top 10 countries that receive more than one-fifth of their GDP from remittances include Tajikistan, Tonga, the Republic of Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Samoa, Lebanon, Guyana, *Nepal* and Honduras. Based on the amount of remittances, the top 10 receiving countries include India, China, Mexico, the Philippines, France, Bangladesh, Spain, Germany, Nigeria, and Belgium.

²³ The World Bank estimated that a total of 565 thousand Nepalese migrated to India in 2010 (<http://go.worldbank.org/JITC7NYTT0>). There are between one and three million Nepalese in India. Thieme (2006) and Ghimire et al. (2010) narrow this to two to three million as the agreed numbers, but it is not clear if these numbers include second generation migrants.

²⁴ The Nepal labour force survey defines ‘absent’ for a person if s/he is away from the household for more than 6 months out of the last 12 months, or had recently left and was expected to be away for more than 6 months, and will return to the same household in the future.

International Migration

Many Nepalese men and women have been leaving the country, mostly temporarily, for the last 200 years (Adhikari, 2009; Kansakar, 2003; Massey et al., 2010; Piotrowski, 2010; Seddon et al., 1998; Shrestha, 1985, 1988; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). In the early 19th century, when young Nepalese migrated to Lahore (current-day Pakistan) to work in the army of the Sikh ruler, all Nepalese migrants were nick-named *Lahure* (Bhattarai, 2005; Maharjan, 2010; Seddon et al., 2002). However, the recruitment of Nepalese youths into the British Army as *Gurkhas* in 1815 became the first-ever documented mass-migration²⁵ from Nepal (Rathaur, 2006; Seddon et al., 2002). At this time, migration was limited to the British Army, with the majority of *Gurkhas* coming from the *Janajati* population. However, the Government of Nepal restricted other forms of migration, except for the *Gurkhas*²⁶, until the late 1980s (Thieme & Wyss, 2005).

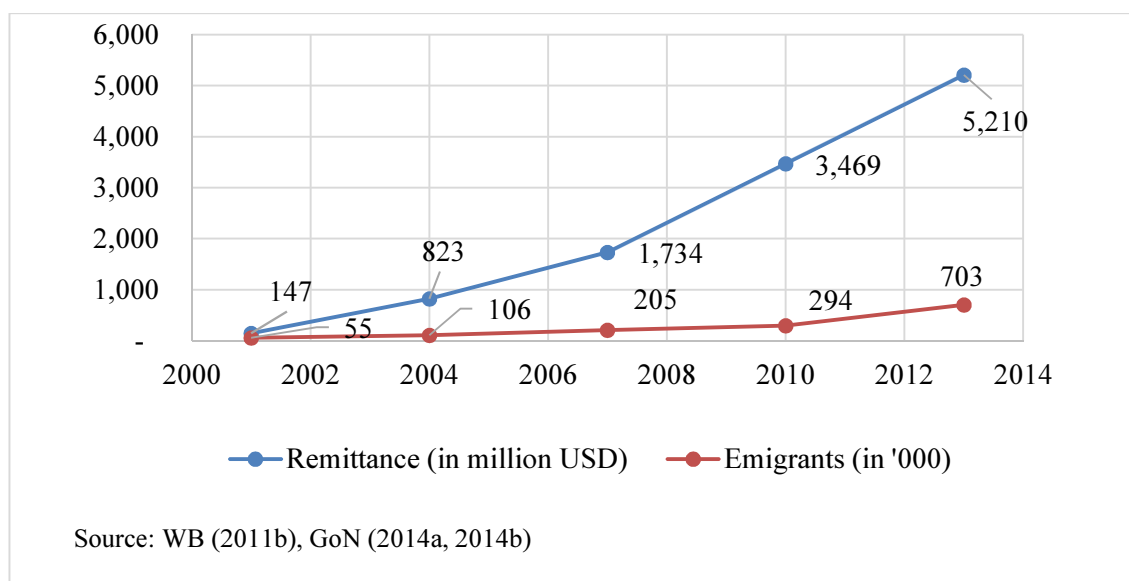
After the restoration of democracy in 1990, the migration of Nepalese people was opened to many more countries (Bohra & Massey, 2009), and the number of migrants increased with this policy change. This was further escalated after the start of a 10-year violent conflict starting in 1995, and the boom in labour to the oil-rich countries of the Middle East (Poertner et al., 2011; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). The growth in the number of migrants and the amount of remittances in Nepal is given in Chart 3.1. The Nepal Institute for Development Studies pointed out that there has been a significant growth in overseas labour migration, mainly to the Middle East and Malaysia, (NIDS,

²⁵ Nepal and India share an open border and there is a long history of non-recorded migration between these two countries. People migrate between these countries for education, work, and marriage, and there are practices of permanent migration from one to the other. Many ethnic groups in Nepal and India share the same language, culture, and religion, and migrations also take place for these reasons. There is no record of these migrations.

²⁶ During World War I, more than 200,000 *Gurkhas* served in the British Army and about 20,000 suffered casualties.

2008). This was as high as 703,000 migrants in 2013 alone, excluding those going to India (GoN, 2014b). The World Bank estimates that, outside of India, 96 per cent of the migrants departed for Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (The World Bank, 2010).

Chart 3.1: Number of Migrants and Amount of Remittances Received in Nepal

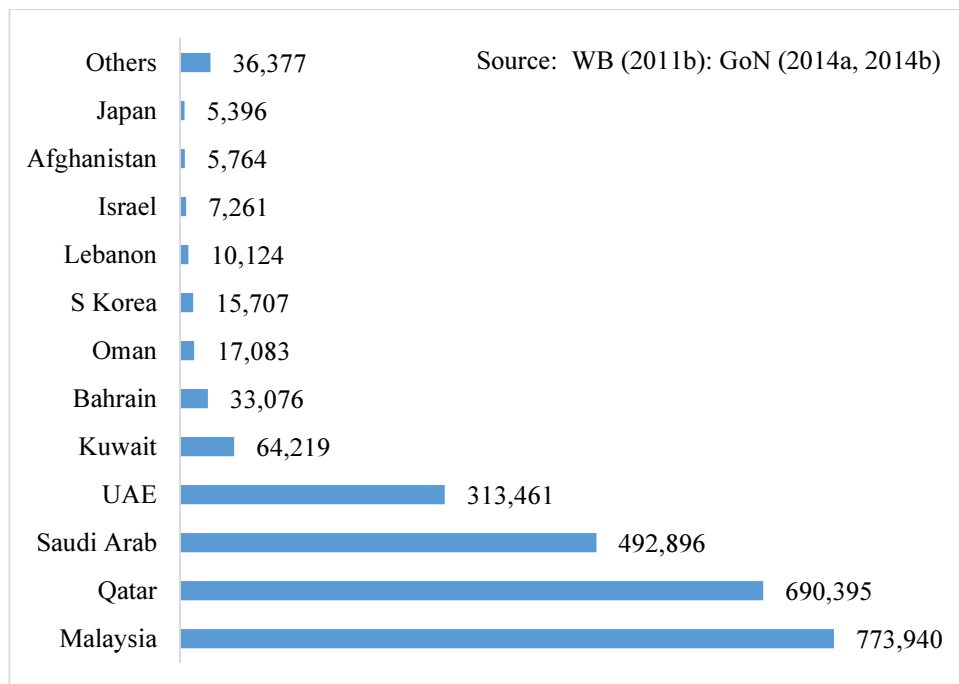


In 2011, out of a total Nepalese migrant population of 2.5 million, 774,000 (more than 31 per cent) were living in Malaysia, 690,000 in Qatar, 492,000 in Saudi Arabia, and 313,000 in the United Arab Emirates, as shown in Chart 3.2 (GoN, 2011a). In addition, a large number of Nepalese people have undertaken work-related migration to Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon, South Korea, Afghanistan, and Israel. Among these, approximately 45 per cent migrated between the ages of 15 and 24 years (GoN, 2012c, pp. 2-3).

Between 2001 and 2013, as shown in Chart 3.1, the number of Nepalese migrants increased thirteen-fold and remittances to Nepal increased 35 times, from US\$147,000 in 2001 to US\$5.2 million in 2013, accounting for around 30 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GoN, 2014a; Shishido, 2009; The World Bank, 2010, 2011b),

and directly benefiting over half of Nepal’s total households²⁷ (GoN, 2013). Among them, 85 per cent of migrants were from rural families compared to 15 per cent from the cities (GoN, 2012c). As a result, there has been a population decline in 27 hills and mountains districts²⁸ (out of 75 districts in Nepal) between 2001 and 2011, of which youth migration is one of the key reasons for the decreasing population (GoN, 2012c, p. 3).

Chart 3.2: Number of Nepalese Migrants in Different Destination Countries



The period of these temporary migrations varies between individuals and their destination countries. Usually, an initial contract is made for two to three years, but in many cases, the migrants extend their contracts at the destination, and as a result, the

²⁷ The remittance receiving households include international and internal migrants, as well as those migrating to India.

²⁸ In this research, the terms ‘hills’ and ‘mountains’ in Nepal are used interchangeably, both terms are used to describe the mountainous region of Nepal. The districts in the region have generally smaller populations than the plains districts; and the mobility of a small number of people from a district has a large impact. In addition, internal migration (which is discussed later) is responsible for the decreased population in the hills and mountains.

time of the family separation is extended. Bruslé (2009) found that, in a labour camp in Qatar in 2008, four years was the mean duration of stay. However, many migrants from the Indian state of Kerala were found to be working in the Gulf for more than a decade, without any expectation or possibility of permanent migration (Czaika & Varela, 2012). The duration of migration is determined according to the trajectory of the migrant workers as well as the characteristics of the source country. If the migrants are obtaining jobs according to their expectations, they are likely to extend the time spent in the job. Similarly, if they do not have adequate opportunities at home, this increases the length of their working time in the destination country (Czaika & Varela, 2012; Kırdar, 2013). Therefore, temporary overseas employment turns into long-term, but non-permanent migration.

Although international employment migration has been increasing, this is an expensive venture. Nepalese migrants spend large sums of money, from an average of US\$10.25 for migration to India and US\$1,370 to the Gulf, to around US\$9,000 to Japan and Korea (Jones & Basnett, 2013; The World Bank, 2011a; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). However, average earning from the Gulf States is about US\$2,120 per year, which indicates that a large share, up to two-thirds, of their income for the first year goes to recruitment agents²⁹ (Jones & Basnett, 2013). This cost of international employment migration differs based on the migrants' skills and the destination country. Usually, the migrants who have a greater potential to make higher income, pay relatively higher costs. Similarly, people who migrate to a developed country also pay higher fees and prices (Jones & Basnett, 2013). The migrants have a general preference for those countries which have the highest potential income. The first group of countries

²⁹ Because of the research focus on women whose husbands have migrated to the Gulf and Malaysia, earnings data are compared only for these groups.

that Nepalese migrants prefer include Australia, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Gulf States and Malaysia are generally second preference, while India is third. Other high-cost destinations include countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where migrants can make a solid income. Therefore, the costs depend largely on the choice of destination, the process of migration, and the skills of the migrant (Gurung, 2003; Jones & Basnett, 2013; Shrestha & Bhandari, 2007; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). However, it needs to be noted that a total of 90 per cent of Nepalese temporary migrants are unskilled (GoN, 2011a) and migrate to middle-income countries.

Seasonal Migration

Seasonal migrants move both within and outside of Nepal, usually for less than six months, returning home for major events and festivals; for example, for *Dashain*, the planting of agricultural produce, and the harvesting season. These people are usually poor and migrate to areas that are close to home, or to Indian cities at most (Gill, 2003; Kollmair et al., 2006; Maharjan et al., 2012a; Seddon et al., 1998), and the remittances are the major source of income for many of them in Nepal (GoN, 2012a). Most of these migrants move for a short period, usually for less than six months of the year. As Seddon et al. (1998, p. 4) argued, they "...tend to be tied up to the village in various forms of bondage, which constrain their ability to seek work elsewhere for anything other than a short period". Some of these migrants move with their entire family, but most leave their family members (mostly women, children, and the elderly) behind. However, detailed data on seasonal migrants are not available because of its short-term nature, the destination of the migrants, and the free movement between Nepal and India. It is estimated that between two and three million Nepalese work in different states of

India, including a large number of unskilled seasonal migrants (Ghimire et al., 2010; Kollmair et al., 2006; Thieme, 2006).

Permanent Migration

In addition to permanent internal migration, there is also permanent migration of people internationally. There are practices of cross-border marriages between Indian and Nepalese families which lead to permanent international migrations (KC, 2005; Khatiwada, 2010). Furthermore, there are chains of migration outside of Nepal. Thieme & Wyss (2005) provided an example of Nepalese *Gurkha* families migrating to Hong Kong, where many of them decided to migrate permanently after the government of Hong Kong, the special region of China, offered identity cards to these families (Thieme & Wyss, 2005). Migration of skilled workers is another example. In particular, doctors, nurses, and engineers from Nepal obtain work permits to work in developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Australia, and move permanently to these countries with their immediate family members (Adhikari & Grigulis, 2013; Adhikari & Melia, 2013; Adkoli, 2006; Mullan, 2005). Similarly, the movement of students results in gradual permanent moves for some (Valentin, 2014).

There is a high level of permanent internal migration in Nepal, and this is another reason for the declining population in some districts (GoN, 2012c; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). Internally, huge numbers of people have been migrating from the hills and mountains to the productive plains areas (called the Terai) and cities (GoN, 2011e; KC, 2003). However, migration to the Terai and urban areas is not as old as international migration. Internal migration gradually increased with the control of malaria in the Terai after the 1950s (Bohra & Massey, 2009; KC, 2003). As a result, there have been changes in population distribution between the mountains and the plains. Until 1971, for instance, more than 62 per cent of Nepalese people used to live in the mountains and

hills. The share of population in these regions decreased to 53 per cent by 1991 and 49.7 per cent by 2011. As a result, the share of the population in the Terai has increased from 38 per cent in 1971 to 50.3 per cent of the country in 2011 due to permanent internal migration (GoN, 2011e). Similarly, there has been migration from rural areas to urban areas, resulting in the growth of the urban population, which has increased from 14 per cent to 17 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (GoN, 2012c; Sharma, 2014).

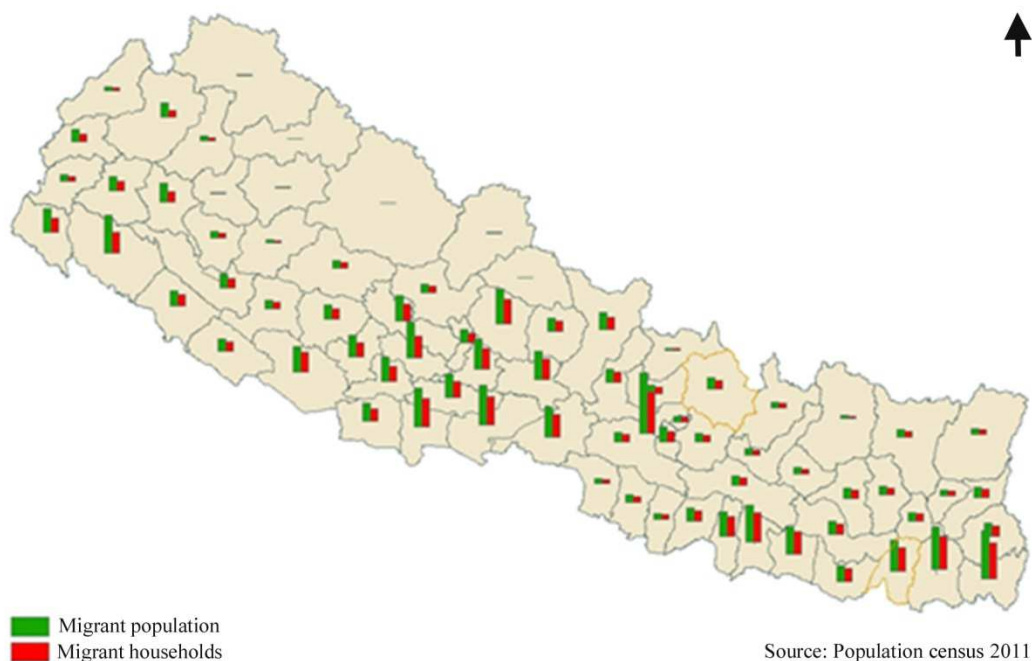
Distribution of Temporary International Migrants

The share of the temporary migrant population varies by different regions and areas of Nepal, as presented in Map 3.1. There are some regions which have high numbers, and some with only limited numbers of migrants. The population census (GoN, 2011f) revealed that 57 per cent of the share of migrants is from the hills and mountains and 43 per cent from the plains (GoN, 2011f). However, some of the plains districts, such as Chitwan, Dang, Dhanusha, Jhapa, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Mahottari, Morang, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Siraha, and Sunsari, have between 31,000 and 60,000 migrants per district. Kathmandu, the capital and a hill district of Nepal, has the highest numbers compared to the other districts (GoN, 2012c).

The distribution of migrants differs based on their caste, gender, and wealth status, with some groups of people migrating more than others and having different patterns of migration (Childs et al., 2014; Skeldon, 2006; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). For example, as stated earlier, the very poor populations are less migratory because international migration is an expensive venture for them (Childs et al., 2014; Ghimire et al., 2010; Gurung, 2012; Seddon et al., 2002; Stahl, 1982). The existing data from the Nepal Department of Foreign Employment do not offer migration information by caste

and economic class; however, the Nepal Living Standard Survey of 2011 estimated³⁰ the distribution of the migrant population by their economic status, and indicated that there are 26 per cent of poor, 64 per cent of middle income, and 10 per cent of higher income people among those who are undertaking international employment (GoN, 2011d), indicating that a large number of migrants are from the middle-income group, followed by the poor (Gurung, 2012; Lokshin et al., 2010; Seddon et al., 2002).

Map 3.1: Distribution of Absentee Population by Districts



Drivers of Migration

According to the Government of Nepal, some of the key reasons for migration are family and marriage, education and training, jobs, lifestyle, and others (GoN, 2008, 2011d). In addition, the research has identified multiple push factors, such as a lack of

³⁰ Based on the Living Standard Measure Survey method, this estimation is based on the population by the origin of migration in the external quartile, from a stratified sample survey of 5,988 households, representing all 75 districts of Nepal. The study was conducted over one year by the Central Bureau of Statistics of the Government of Nepal (GoN, 2011d).

employment opportunities, insufficient income to meet consumption expenditure (Datta, 2005; Sapkota, 2013), the decline in agricultural production and farm size, an inability to expand the agricultural sector (a large employment provider), inadequate alternative economic opportunities (Bhandari, 2004; Gurung, 2000; Piotrowski et al., 2013), and conflict, poverty, unemployment, and the unequal distribution of income (KC, 2003; Khatiwada, 2010; Piotrowski et al., 2013; Seddon et al., 2002; Sharma, 2008; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). Sharma noted some of the following key phrases, '*jagir paiyena*' (did not get employment), '*ghar chalaune/ghar herne*' (maintenance of household expenses), '*kehi awastha sudharna*' (to improve financial status), and '*ghar kehi ramro hola bhanera*' (betterment at home), as push factors for migration (Sharma, 2008, p. 314). Similarly, as Sharma (2008) concluded, migration is the only option for many young people, particularly when they start wandering around their village without work.

Other researchers have identified environmental factors as key push factors in Nepal; for example, variations in the frequency and duration of rainfall as well as prolonged drought are identified as major reasons for migration in Nepal, and the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region more generally (Banerjee et al., 2011; Massey et al., 2010; Shrestha & Bhandari, 2007). This is also a global issue and environmental degradation has been one of the major factors for forced migrations from many countries (Gentle et al., 2014; Warner, 2010).

Furthermore, there are several pull factors which affect the migration of people. These pull factors are associated with the place of destination and include employment opportunities, aspirations for better wages and living standards, and education opportunities at the destination (Datta, 2005; Ghimire et al., 2010; Gill, 2003; Massey et al., 1993; Tisdell & Regmi, 2000). Similarly, having networks of relatives in the host country is an important pull factor (Bohra & Massey, 2009; Piotrowski, 2010; Thieme & Wyss, 2005).

Despite these push and pull factors, the share of women among Nepalese migrants is very small, being only 13 per cent, which points to other factors such as caste, and the role of patriarchy in gender relations (Lokshin et al., 2010; Sharma, 2008). Within a household, for example, women generally perform roles that are considered to be subordinate to those of men (Adhikari & Podhisita, 2010), as mothers, care-givers, cook, and cleaners. They also carry out various chores, but do not generally participate in household decision-making. Their role is almost completely absent in most families if the transaction involves money (Acharya et al., 2010; Nanda et al., 2012; Thapa, 2013). These factors, although they are less visible, continuously push women into the margins, while men make decisions on various issues, including the migration of family members.

While women perform all the household chores and supply approximately 66 per cent of the labour force in Nepalese agriculture (GoN, 2011d), their work is not paid, and is thus not counted in the household economy or the national economy (Jack & Ommeren, 2007; Joshi, 2000). When women do not have disposable income, their decision-making ability and bargaining position within the household are limited (Agarwal, 1997; Thapa, 2013), and their status within the household and society is adversely impacted, further marginalising them from a wider range of opportunities (Sharma, 2007). Therefore, the push and pull factors cannot have the same effects on men and women, although they are associated with the household, production and employment, and the socio-political and natural environment.

Women in patriarchal societies are not very mobile, and so these pull and push factors also affect women differently from men (de Haas, 2011; Oishi, 2005; Piotrowski et al., 2013). The mobility of individuals is strongly affected by formal and informal policies, norms, age, gender, skills, networks, and economic and social inequality; these factors may favour some and discourage others (de Haas, 2011). In Nepal, for example,

the government has banned women's migration to the Gulf countries on many occasions³¹, prohibiting them from working as maids (Amnesty International, 2005; GoN, 2012b; Piotrowski et al., 2013; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). On the other hand, the Nepalese labour market provides women with only limited labour opportunities (mainly in agriculture), which is often reinforced by the husbands' objection to their wives working outside the home (Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2009; Piotrowski et al., 2013; Thieme & Wyss, 2005; Williams, 2009). These factors limit both their internal and external mobility and employment opportunities. Similarly, the policies of the destination country, travel expenses, and the nature of the work also have significant impacts on migration decisions at home (Hugo, 2012; Sijapati & Limbu, 2012).

Therefore, the different roles of women and men in decision-making are important aspects of migration (Benería et al., 2012; Carling, 2005; Hoang, 2011). Usually, the process of decision-making occurs in two phases - the decision to migrate, followed by the decision of where to migrate (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). However, these are influenced by existing gender relationships between men and women (Carling, 2005; Curran & Saguy, 2001). Factors such as access to resources, the position of men and women in household decision-making, traditional practices, and the agency of individuals play critical roles in migration decisions. Gendered social norms, institutions, and formal and informal values and policies affect these decisions (Hoang, 2011; Piper, 2009). In particular, the gendered labour roles in the home also influence

³¹ The Government of Nepal imposed an official ban on women's migration between 1997 and 2008. This ban was partially lifted in 2003. However, this was made unofficial by stating that the government had a number of criteria to safeguard Nepalese women from working as maids or domestic workers in the Middle East. In 2010, all restrictions were lifted by the government and women had the same mobility as men. However, from 2012, the government imposed bans against women who are under 30 years of age from migrating to the Gulf as maids and domestic workers, following reports that the women were subjected to harassment and sexual abuse (Hamada, 2011; Amnesty International, 2005; Sijapati & Limbu, 2012).

the expected roles of women in the migration decision, thus granting men the social authority to decide to migrate (Hoang, 2011). In many cases, Nepalese cultural norms and practices dictate that men are more likely than women to take employment outside the home (Williams, 2009).

In South Asia, some scholars have identified that men themselves decide to migrate while the women have to get authorisation or usually serve as supporters of their husbands' decisions (Barbora et al., 2008; Gulati, 1987; ICIMOD, 2009). In the case of married women and young girls, they need to obtain permission from their husbands and/or fathers, before they decide to migrate (Hoang, 2011; Thieme & Wyss, 2005), but this does not equally apply to men. Therefore, the drivers of migration cannot be generalised to men and women, and there is a need to analyse the factors that explain these differences because the migration decisions are informed and influenced by formal and informal rules, values and practices, and are part of the male domain in Nepalese families (Acharya et al., 2010; Lewark et al. 2011; Williams, 2009).

Migration Impacts at the Source

The migration of a family member to partake in international employment can bring both opportunities as well as challenges to the people left at home (Aghajanian et al., 2013; Dahal, 2014; De & Ratha, 2012; Jones & Basnett, 2013; Orozco & Ellis, 2014; Seddon et al., 2002). This may help to reduce poverty, change gender relations, and increase income and assets (De & Ratha, 2012; Hugo, 2012; Jones & Basnett, 2013; Sapkota, 2013). However, this can also be one of the causes of family breakdown, increased workloads at home, gender-based violence, and other socio-economic problems (Choi et al., 2012; Niaz, 2003; Rai, 2011; Shrestha & Conway, 2001).

Therefore, the impact of migration at home differs based on individual circumstances³². Sutherland (2013a) argued that migration is not a problem to be solved, but rather a solution to problems such as poverty, gender-based discrimination, and others. In Nepal, although there are risks and challenges (see Migration Issues), the literature has identified the contribution of migration to reducing problems, such as poverty and livelihoods, gender relations, physical assets, human development, and labour market participation.

Poverty Reduction

Migration and remittances are considered to be one of the major contributing factors to reducing global poverty, and there is a growing recognition that remittances can contribute to poverty reduction in the originating country³³ (Adams & Page, 2005; Hugo, 2012). Based on a study from 71 developing countries, Adams & Page (2005) concluded that international migration and remittances have contributed to reducing the depth and severity of poverty in the developing world:

...on average, a 10 per cent increase in the share of international migrants in a country's population will lead to a 2.1 per cent decline in the share of people living on less than \$1.00 per person per day. ...a similar 10 per cent increase in per capita official international remittances will lead to a 3.5 per cent decline in the share of people living in poverty (Adams & Page, 2005, p. 1645).

Given these impacts on poverty levels, there are efforts to include migration as part of the poverty reduction agenda. The World Migration Report (2013) proposes

³² The concept of inter-sectionality helps to understand the intersections between forms of oppression, domination and discrimination which position people at different levels. This research also echoes the discrimination based on caste, class and gender with the help of gender theory.

³³ In this case, Nepal

migration to become part of the post-2015 global development agenda, continuing the focus on poverty eradication in the poorest countries of the world as a priority theme (IOM, 2013).

As mentioned in Chapter One, the poverty rate in Nepal reduced by 16 percentage points between 1995 and 2009 (Acharya & Leon-Gonzalez, 2013; GoN, 2013; Sapkota, 2013; The World Bank, 2011a), despite the fact that the country was facing intense internal conflict during the period, with an associated drop in tourism and its major export industries such as garments and carpets (GoN, 2014b; Kollmair et al., 2006; Lokshin et al., 2010; Maharjan et al., 2012b). So, the remittances have been vital for reducing poverty and inequality³⁴ in Nepal (Sapkota, 2013; The World Bank, 2011a). These arguments demonstrate the importance of migration and remittances for reducing poverty levels.

Together with poverty reduction, others have argued that migration and remittances have contributed to improving the livelihood choices of people. Thieme & Wyss (2005) found that migration had increased women's access to financial means, social networks and skills, thereby expanding the livelihood choices of people. Therefore, recent migration practices have been accepted as poverty reduction and livelihood strategies (Dey, 2014; Sutherland, 2013b).

Gender Relations

Both positive and negative changes in gender relations within the household and the local community are important effects of migration in the home community (Binzel & Assaad, 2011; de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Debnath & Selim, 2009; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Hadi, 2001; Jacka, 2012; Maharjan et al., 2012a; Poertner et al., 2011; Sevoyan & Agadjanian, 2010; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). With the migration of husbands,

³⁴ As per the World Bank, the Gini coefficient index has decreased from 35.23 in 1995 to 32.82 in 2010.

some women have enjoyed more freedom and have attained increased access to decision-making, while others have faced increased restrictions and gender-based violence.

Based on studies in Nepal, it has been established that migration increases gender inequalities between migrant and non-migrant families, and within families (Poertner et al., 2011; Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). Poertner et al. (2011) found that family migration is one of the factors that increases or maintains the gap between men and women as migrant women are uprooted from their social networks, but with the unequal practices remaining. Thieme & Wyss (2005) outlined the increased vulnerability and widened income inequalities between the remittance-receiving women and poor women who did not have any opportunities for earning money. In addition, Seddon et al. (2002) found increased levels of social and spatial inequality at the household, village, and regional levels due to remittances.

Research conducted in Bangladesh found that women, who were left-behind, were vulnerable to harassment and abuse because of the absence of their male family members (Piper, 2009). The absence of the husband, in turn, further marginalised the left-behind women from the benefits that they could obtain. McEvoy et al. (2012) argued that men's migration makes women vulnerable to prejudicial community gossip which often results in high levels of unhappiness. Suspicions of infidelity and the policing of women's activities in the home are other examples that limit women's mobility and reinforces gender roles at home (McEvoy et al., 2012).

Regardless of these disadvantages, there are opportunities for women when the men migrate. There is the potential to create positive gender relations in the home, depending on factors such as type of family, duration of migration/marriage, means of communication, and traditional cultural practices, among others (Aghajanian et al., 2013; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Jacka, 2012; Kaspar, 2005; Maharjan et al., 2012a;

Poertner et al., 2011). Migration often challenges existing power relations in the home as the “family is a place where spatial and temporal boundaries are negotiated” (Poertner et al., 2011, p. 33). Therefore, the power relationships in the family can change through the absence of a male member, but greatly varies based on the social and cultural contexts (Afsar, 2011; Rashid, 2013).

In South Asian countries, men’s migration has provided various prospects for the women left-behind. In South India, as a result of the husbands’ migration, women have gained increased access to funds as well as greater mobility outside the home (Gulati, 1987; Rashid, 2013). This, in turn, has empowered women to make decisions at home and in the community. The left-behind women in nuclear families have gained more control over household affairs in comparison with women in extended families, as the absence of husbands has given women the opportunity to lead the household as the *de facto* head³⁵ (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; ICIMOD, 2009). In Sri Lanka, the transfer of decision-making to women contributed to an increase in the social position of women together with mutual trust and a sense of responsibility (Piper, 2009). In Bangladesh, similarly, women found increased freedom and autonomy in managing their households when they received remittances (Hadi, 2001). In Nepal, women in nuclear families had greater roles in household decision-making, mostly on operational issues, than women in non-migrant households (Maharjan et al., 2012a). Kaspar (2005) identified changed gender relations in the home when the men migrated and the women took over money management and community responsibilities, although she agreed that “the position of women in Nepal is determined by patriarchy, virilocality, and patrilinearity” (Kaspar,

³⁵ The women become the *de facto* head of the household when they live in a nuclear family. If they live in a joint family, one of the male members (for instance, the father-in-law) is the head of the household. In Nepal, as per population census 2011, the percentage of female-headed households have increased by 11% points from about 15% in 2001 to 26% in 2011 (GoN, 2012c, p.3).

2005, p. 285). Similarly, Kaspar (2005) argued that the women have increased scope to make decisions at home when their husbands migrate and the women take over the responsibilities. However, she also explored different factors which have an influence on decision-making, including the age of the women, the duration of the migration, and the type of family. She found that newly-married women living in the parents-in-law's home in Nepalese villages had weaker decision-making positions within the home when their husbands migrated abroad. Kaspar (2005), in her study, further made the point that there is a possibility of negotiating competencies and decision-making in the home when the husband returns from abroad.

Women's Capacity Development

The development of the human resources of the migrants themselves, as well as that of the women and children at home, is another impact of migration. The migration is depicted "... as a fundamental capabilities-enhancing freedom itself" (de Haas, 2009, p. 1). Thus, migration can play a part in enhancing the capacity of people and enabling them to enjoy their freedom, although well-being is a subjective measure and cannot be measured by poverty indicators (Bakewell, 2009; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Rashid, 2013). Some research has found that new jobs, skills, and income offer better education opportunities for their children at home, while the women gain 'money management and decision-making opportunities' when their husbands migrate abroad (Gulati, 1987; Pruitt, 2008; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). As KC (2003) found, there was higher human development index (HDI) and gender development index (GDI) in those areas which had higher inter-district and international migration. In Bangladesh, there was a significant positive relationship between male migration and the decision-making capacity of women, as well as the education of the girls left-behind (Hadi, 2001).

Women's increased capacity to manage money and other resources at home is another positive effect of migration (De & Ratha, 2012; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Jacka, 2012; McEvoy et al., 2012; Pruitt, 2008). In Nepal, women gain a higher capacity to access health and education services when they receive remittances (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012) and make operational decisions when their husbands are away from home (Kaspar, 2005; Maharjan et al., 2012a). Based on family type, women in nuclear families have greater decision-making scope than women in extended families (Kaspar, 2005). In rural Mexico, women who were left-behind changed their inner and outer appearance as "creative expressions of accomplished female agency" (Pauli, 2008, p. 181), while in Pakistan, male migration was an opportunity for women "to discover hidden strengths, skills, and confidence" which, in turn, contributed to human capital development (ICIMOD, 2009, p. 2).

Similarly, working outside the home and earning an income increases exposure and learning for women. Women who work outside the home learn social and other skills needed to navigate their own environment, and these translate into increased bargaining power within the home (Doss, 2011). Men's migration creates the scope for the mobility of women in the absence of direct supervision and gives them increased autonomy (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Kaspar, 2005). Migration, therefore, also provides women with the opportunity to network with other women and, as a result, gender inequality may be challenged through these networks (Curran & Saguy, 2001).

Thus, women's increased capacity in a number of dimensions is one of the major achievements of men's migration, despite the increased workloads and other socio-cultural challenges for women. However, in Nepal, there are challenges when the men return because of the patriarchal nature of decision-making (Kaspar, 2005). Similarly, women in some countries have faced health problems, including HIV and AIDS,

because of the extra-marital relations of their husbands and of the women when their husbands were away (Agunias et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2008; WHO, 2010).

Participation of Left-Behind Women in the Labour Market

The research has also identified lower levels of labour force participation of women who have been left-behind. In Nepal, for example, a total of 13 per cent of women had participated in the workforce from migrants' families, whereas 21 per cent participated from households which had no migrants. In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, wives had to perform additional household work in most migrant workers' families (Piper, 2009) and could not work outside their homes. This phenomenon of domestic drudgery for the women (and children) leads to an increased dependency on remittances (ICIMOD, 2009), and reduces participation in the labour market. An increased domestic workload is the key reason for the lower level of labour force participation (Binzel & Assaad, 2011; Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2009; Massey et al., 2009; Mu & van de Walle, 2011), and increased uncertainty among women because of migration in rural Morocco (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010).

Physical Asset Accumulation

The use of migrants' remittances has also been a means of accumulating physical assets at home in many source areas. In Nepal, remittances have been invested to buy land, new houses, motorcycles, education for the children, and for further migration (Adhikari, 2001; GoN, 2014b; Lokshin et al., 2010; Thieme & Wyss, 2005; Williams, 2009). They have also used the money to pay loans and to acquire family properties (GoN, 2011c) as well as to move away from the rural areas to fertile plains and urban centres (Adhikari & Hopley, 2011; ICIMOD, 2009). The migrants maintain good relationships by sending remittances and gifts to extended family members to ensure that they inherit family properties at a later date (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Thieme &

Wyss, 2005). It is worth noting that the women who are left-behind in Nepalese villages own only lower-value assets, such as livestock, but not high-value assets such as land and houses (Maharjan et al., 2012a). Therefore, remittances have been used to improve physical assets, such as improving the condition of housing and buying land³⁶ (Adhikari & Hobley, 2011; Piper, 2009).

These findings suggest that migration and remittances have a positive impact on some aspects of women's lives, such as poverty reduction, children's health and education, and physical asset accumulation (Adhikari & Hobley, 2011; Lokshin et al., 2010). However, the overall effects of men's migration on women left at home have somewhat mixed results, as some women find increased freedom in the absence of men, while others face increased limitations and restrictions, and become vulnerable to different forms of exploitation (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Thieme & Wyss, 2005).

Migration Issues

International migration is not only expensive, but is also a challenging and risky decision (Bohra & Massey, 2009; del Rey Poveda, 2007). There are various external factors which shape the lives of migrants and family members, such as the policies of the origin and destination countries, the selection of recruitment agents, the route of migration, the availability of jobs, and access to health and social services (de Haas, 2011; Fafchamps & Shilpi, 2013; Mahmud, 2013; Shrestha, 1987; Tisdell & Regmi, 2000). These issues are related to different stages of the migration cycle: the pre-, during, and post-migration stages. This section looks at those migration issues that are

³⁶ Government of Nepal has also made some affirmative policy decisions to encourage women to own land, including 30% exemption on land registration tax if the land is owned by women (GoN, 2011d). However, women's ownership over land is still as low as 8.1% (<http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/statistics/en/>, downloaded on 28 July 2015)

directly linked with policies, institutional arrangements, cultural beliefs and practices, and social norms and behaviours at different stages of the migration cycle.

Policy

There are a number of policy issues at different stages of Nepalese migration, including discriminatory policies between men and women. As stated earlier, the existing laws discriminate between men and women, and they have an impact on the mobility, as well as the quality, of the lives of women in different places (FWLD, 2006, 2011). The Foreign Employment Act 2007 and Regulations 2008 are more focused on controlling recruitment agents than assisting migrant workers at different stages of migration, and they do not have adequate provision to assist migrants during and after the actual migration (Hamada, 2011). As well, there are policy contradictions between the Foreign Employment Act 2007 and the Foreign Employment Policy of 2012, with the Act protecting recruitment agencies while, at the same time, the policy being pro-migrant (GoN, 2014b). The Act has sections relating to licences, welfare funds, the monitoring of recruitment agencies, offences and punishment, and the classification and approval of workers (GoN, 2007a). However, the Act does not have specific provisions for enhancing the skills of workers, ensuring the quality of the migrants' training, handling of complaints, and for the provision of support at the destination (GoN, 2014b; Hamada, 2011). Similarly, the pre-migration policy is insufficient for the needs of potential migrants and their families, with unenforceable guidelines (Ghimire & Upreti, 2012; Regmi, 2011). Policies to ensure the health and safety of migrants are poor, and are not mandatory, therefore the health and safety needs of the migrant workers in different destination countries are not addressed (Joshi et al., 2011). Similarly, there is no access to affordable credit for people who cannot offer collateral, despite migration being an expensive venture (Adhikari & Hobley, 2011; Bhattarai, 2005).

Similarly, there are policies that discriminate between men and women, as well as *ad hoc* policy practices. The Nepalese government's decision to prohibit women's migration as domestic workers to the Gulf States is an example of poor *ad hoc* regulation. These restrictions have created scope for unsafe migration, including the trafficking of women from Nepal (Amnesty International, 2011b; Bhadra, 2013; Datta, 2005; Gurung, 2009). Thieme & Wyss (2005) argue that the ban against women has violated the constitutional rights of women to migration, employment, and mobility, and is one of the reasons why many women have to migrate undocumented³⁷. Saudi Arabia alone had about 20,000 to 25,000 Nepalese women who were not recorded in the Nepalese government's information system (Gurung, 2009). This could be similar in many other countries in which Nepalese women are working.

Irregular migration is another area that poses a risk to potential migrants. These forms of migration are usually expensive and risky (Bloch & Chimienti, 2011; Jandl, 2007; Sørensen, 2012). Men, women, and children who migrate without enough information, skills, and documents can fall into the trafficking trap (Sørensen, 2012; Tushar et al., 2012). These migrants may be imprisoned or face enforced repatriation if caught (Koser, 2010). They also face the increased likelihood of being exploited by their employers and the brokers (Busza et al., 2004; Koser, 2010). Since these women and children are at high risk of being trafficked, women's migration is both challenging and risky in Nepal, and other developing countries, because of various vulnerabilities associated with their migration (Craig, 2011; Dannecker, 2005; Datta, 2005; Heath, 2012; Oishi, 2005; Truong, 2012). However, the Government of Nepal has not

³⁷ The undocumented migrants are considered as those whose work permits have not been approved by the Government of Nepal as labour migrants, and are not recorded with the Department of Foreign Employment of Nepal. Most of these migrants obtain their visas to enter the destination countries through a second country and do not use a Nepalese airport when departing (GoN, 2014b).

simplified and liberalised the regular channels, which would assist women to take legal routes and would thus reduce the trafficking of people, particularly of women and children (UNDP, 2009a). Similarly, the Government of Nepal has also circulated a set of guidelines setting a maximum limit of service charges if a private service provider works as a recruitment agent, but these have not been implemented (Ghimire & Upreti, 2012)³⁸.

Some researchers (Mookerjee & Roberts, 2010; Singer, 2010; Sutherland, 2013b; Yang, 2011) have argued that governments can greatly assist in reducing the transaction costs associated with movements and remittances, and should also enable people to find options within the country if they are not interested in leaving their family members for a long period of time. Therefore, enabling mobility as an integral part of national development strategies would largely contribute to a decrease in poverty, and discrimination between rich and poor and other groups of people (Deshingkar, 2006; Kapur, 2003; Lokshin et al., 2010; Nanda et al., 2012; Sutherland, 2013b). However, Pant argued that Nepal does not have an effective plan to maximise the benefits of migration and remittances for the wider development of the country and for the productive use of remittances (Pant, 2011). In an effort to use remittances as development finance, the Government of Nepal issued diaspora bonds worth US\$76 million in 2009/10 (Julca, 2013; Sapkota, 2013), but less than one per cent were sold³⁹ in either of the first two years of operation (Chapagain, 2014; NRB, 2011; Sapkota,

³⁸ The document is intended to guide the actions of those actors that are involved in foreign employment. However, the document is not a legal document and cannot be challenged in the courts.

³⁹ Sapkota (2013) found that the interest rates offered for the bond were lower than the interest that they could get if they saved their money at fixed deposit in a bank or financial institution. In addition, the migrant workers did not have complete information about the bonds and the potential returns that they could make from them.

2013). This experience suggests that Nepal needs to establish more workable policies and programmes to make productive use of remittances (Pant, 2011; Probst, 2012).

Institutional

The Department of Foreign Employment is the government agency that approves the international migration of workers from Nepal. The department makes approval decisions based on information provided by the private recruitment agencies (Sijapati & Limbu, 2012). These private agencies have had poor publicity as a result of charges of documentation forgery (Manandhar, 2012; Ojha, 2013; Regmi, 2011). While the department is supposed to monitor the quality of these private recruitment agencies, it has only a limited capacity to do so. As a result, unauthorised agents have been operating throughout the country and many people have been migrating through unauthorised channels and by transiting through India (Jones & Basnett, 2013; Seddon et al., 2002). These recruitment intermediaries or brokers do not provide sufficient information about their services and often create delays in departure. They waste the time and money of prospective migrants, either in Kathmandu or in transit. Although the potential migrants pay large amounts of money to prepare their travel documents, pay broker fees, and travel to the destination, they are constantly at risk of being exploited by these recruitment companies, which are not regulated effectively by the government institutions (Bohra & Massey, 2009; Lokshin et al., 2010; Thieme, 2006; Thieme & Wyss, 2005).

In addition, the government has created a Foreign Employment Promotion Board which is supposed to find appropriate job markets around the world. The board is supposed to manage a welfare fund⁴⁰ that has been created by the migrants, and has

⁴⁰ Every migrant, who takes employment overseas from Nepal, contributes a specified amount to the welfare fund, before his/her migration.

been commissioned according to the Foreign Employment Act (GoN, 2007a). However, a study conducted with migrant workers has found dissatisfaction with the services of the Board (Amnesty International, 2011a). A review commissioned by the Government of Nepal has also made several recommendations, including regulating fraud, corruption control, and improving the safety and security of workers, to improve the performance of the board (Jones & Basnett, 2013). Likewise, Nepalese missions are expected to secure the protection of, and provide assistance to, Nepalese workers who are overseas. However, institutional assistance for potential migrants and workers at the point of destination are inadequate and not migrant-friendly (Sijapati & Limbu, 2012).

Cultural and Social

Nepalese society is divided according to the caste and ethnic hierarchies of individuals and families, and this has negative implications for the traditionally-excluded castes and ethnic groups (Aasland & Haug, 2011; Lama & Buchy, 2002). Women, for instance, have limited opportunities to network with other men, and women from *Dalit* families are at the margin and have very limited mobility and networking scope. Therefore, their social networks and economic capital are usually weak, particularly among marginalised groups (Hatlebakk et al., 2010; Panta & Resurrección, 2014; Patel, 2013).

Generally, the absence of one or both parents has implications for the education and well-being of the children (Cortés, 2008; Cortina, 2014; Milligan & Bohara, 2007; Poertner et al., 2011), and the negative impacts are particularly severe for young children (Antman, 2012a). Likewise, a son's migration has impacts on the welfare of elderly parents who are supposed to be cared for by their sons (Adhikari & Hogley, 2011; Antman, 2012b; KC, 2005; Poertner et al., 2011). Thus, men's migration has the potential to create a range of social issues at the source.

Migration involving the leaving behind of family members has a number of negative psychological and social aspects (Arias, 2013; Cortés, 2008; Piper, 2009). There is the challenge of family breakdown because of the extended period of migration of the husband or wife, and this problem is intensified if the migrant or the family fails to pay debts or loses their hard-earned money (Arias, 2013; Deshingkar & Start, 2003; Mosse et al., 2002). In addition, the migrant and the family members are at risk of a range of health hazards, including sexually-transmitted diseases (Agunias et al., 2012; KC, 2005). Thus, social and cultural practices also pose challenges for the women, children, and the elderly who are left-behind (Arias, 2013; Piper, 2009). A summary of issues associated with international employment migration from Nepal at different stages of the migration cycle is given in Annex 1.

Conclusion

Although Nepalese people have a long history of international migration, this has always been a male-dominated phenomenon, with men currently making up 87 per cent of total migrants. Most of these men have migrated temporarily as unskilled or semi-skilled workers to different countries, leaving their wives and children behind. This literature review has found that migration decisions are strongly influenced by patriarchal practices, and cultural values and beliefs which restrict women's mobility and undermine their capacity. In addition, government policies are discriminatory against women and have restricted their mobility. A comparative study conducted by a group of NGOs and lawyers in 2006 and 2011 found that there are more than one hundred discriminatory legal provisions which adversely affect the mobility and quality of life of women at home (FWLD, 2006, 2011). Similarly, the government has discriminated between men's and women's migration through different guidelines, although the Foreign Employment Act 2007 clearly states that there will not be any

discrimination between men and women. Thus, the literature demonstrates that the state has been reproducing discriminatory practices.

Furthermore, the lives of women, particularly of those left-behind, have been affected by a range of policies and practices. Existing policies do not have enough capacity to support the migrants and their families. Government organisations, which are supposed to help migrants, are not well-equipped and do not have the capacity to assist people at home and at the point of destination. The private intermediary organisations which are involved in the recruitment of people from Nepal are not properly regulated, and are often highly exploitative and corrupt (Manandhar, 2012; Ojha, 2013). As well, Nepalese cultural and social values are patriarchal and promote gender-based discriminatory practices. Therefore, women are excluded from migration opportunities as well as these practices adversely affecting the women who are left-behind at home. This situation poses several challenges to both the migrants and the family members left-behind.

Despite these challenges, men's migration has brought a number of positive impacts at home. The poverty rate has been reduced, there is evidence of the development of women's capacities, and migrants' families have increased their physical assets. The children have also benefited from increased schooling opportunities because of remittances. However, researchers argue that women have only gained access to lower-value assets, such as livestock, but not to high-value assets, such as land and houses (Maharjan et al., 2012a).

Within these variations and complexities, migration has become an emerging research topic in Nepal. Researchers have already conducted a number of studies in the field, particularly on remittances and development. However, there are some under-researched areas, such as the impact of migration on gender roles, the social dimensions of migration, and the social consequences of migration for rural communities in the

originating country, particularly on women from different castes and ethnic groups.

Similarly, changing gender relations and power dynamics within the household and the wider community are other areas that need further investigation in the area of Nepalese migration research.

Chapter 4 – Getting into the Field: Methodology

Introduction

This research is designed to explore the experiences of women left-behind after their husbands have migrated, particularly around gender relations and decision-making within the household and the wider community, through a methodology which enables an analysis of the impacts in relation to the social, geographical, and cultural background of the migrant-sending communities. This chapter outlines the research area and the selection of the research participants, the methods and tools used, the data analysis processes and tools, and the scope, limitations, and ethical considerations involved in this research.

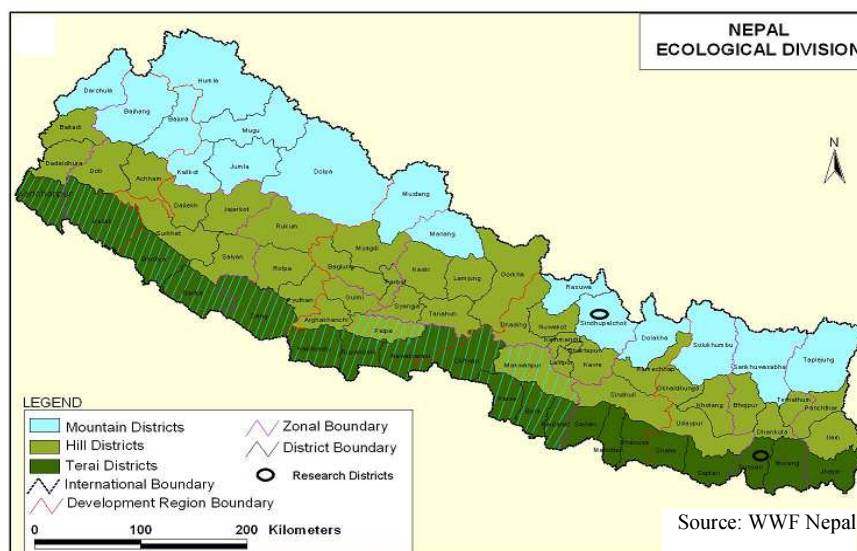
Research Area

This research is conducted in two geographical locations of Nepal, one each from the mountains and the plains; and also representing rural and semi-urban areas, respectively. The circles (○) in Map 4.1 indicate the exact research locations. In the mountains, Sindhupalchok is in the central-north, while Sunsari is in the plains in the south-eastern part of Nepal. These districts were selected according to three major criteria: a) the researcher's former involvement in the area; b) the mobility of men and women; and c) geographical coverage.

Former Involvement: As a development practitioner, I worked in both of the target districts in Nepal between 2008 and 2010 in order to promote safer human migration and to enhance the capacity of local NGOs to work effectively with local people. As a result of my earlier work, I have the basic geo-cultural information about these areas, as well as a range of connections with community-based groups, local NGOs, and government agencies. Furthermore, my earlier work has provided me with

an opportunity to understand the social practices and migration trends in these districts. Thus, the earlier experiences have helped me to re-connect with people and build on my existing knowledge base, particularly in relation to cultural practices and behaviours.

Map 4.1: Research Districts



Mobility of men and women: This research has representation from two districts – Sunsari and Sindhupalchok. As can be seen in Table 4.1, both districts have more than 20 per cent of households with at least one person absent for more than six months of each year. The plains district of Sunsari has more than 50,000 migrants, with 86 per cent of them being men (see Table 4.1). This district has one of the largest shares of migrant populations in Nepal (GoN, 2012c). The hills of Sindhupalchok have about 20,000 absent people with 34 per cent of them being women⁴¹ (GoN, 2012c). In addition, Sindhupalchok has a long history of women’s mobility (Crawford & Kaufman,

⁴¹ These women are absent from their home for more than six months. Historically, women from Sindhupalchok were trafficked to Indian cities (Seddon et al., 2002), but their movement has changed over time and many of them have migrated to the middle income countries in the recent years. The recorded migration of women from the district was 1,355 in 2001, whereas this was 6,677 in 2011 (GoN, 2012c).

2008). Further details of male and female migrants for each research district are provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: People Absent for More Than Six Months (CBS, 2012: 37-38)

District	Household		Total population	Absent population		
	Total	Absent		Total	Male	Female
Sunsari	162,279	37,984	763,487	50,281	43,381	6,894
Absent %		23%		7%	86%	14%
Sindhupalchok	66,635	13,778	287,798	19712	13035	6677
Absent %		21%		7%	66%	34%
Nepal	5,423,297	1,378,678	26,494,504	1,921,494	1,684,029	237,400
Absent %		25%		7%	88%	12%

Geographical Coverage: A total of two geographical regions have been selected for the purposes of the research, including a district from the plains and one from the mountains, in order to obtain a comparative picture of women between the two geographical locations. This also allows for ethnic, language, caste, and cultural diversities to be included in the analysis. These districts have some differences based on culture, marital practices, ethnic distribution, and migration patterns (GoN, 2005a, 2005b). A brief description of the research districts is given in the following paragraphs.

Research Districts

Sindhupalchok: Sindhupalchok is the target hills district, bordering on China, and without road connections to other rural areas. The district has a large proportion of Tamang, a *Janajati* group, which make up 40 per cent of the district's population (Dahal, 2001; GoN, 2012c). As well, the district has a population of 38 per cent Buddhist, 59 per cent Hindu, two per cent Christian, and one per cent other religions (GoN, 2012c, p. 189). Nationally, the share of Buddhists is as little as 9 per cent of the total population. The district includes one mountain with a height of 23,238 feet, and a

national conservation area known as Langtang which covers about one-quarter of the district (GoN, 2005a).

This district is recognised as one of the least developed⁴² rural areas of Nepal, although it is only about 100 kilometres north-east of Kathmandu (Riley et al., 2003). Although agriculture is the major source of income, the district has high hills and very little productive land (Pradhan, 2012). A total of 85 per cent of families in the district are involved in subsistence agriculture, while 37 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line⁴³ (GoN, 2005a). To help this situation, the Government of Nepal has been operating a small poultry and pig farming programme in the district since 2013 (GoN, 2012a). The district has also been declared a tourism area as it has beautiful mountains and wide rivers (GoN, 2012a). However, employment opportunities are very limited as the district has a total of only three industrial firms which provide employment to only 95 people (GoN, 2011b), whereas the district has a population of about 300,000. The nearest market to the district is Kathmandu, and therefore, seasonal migrants go to Kathmandu for work (Pradhan, 2012). The exact unemployment data for the district could not be ascertained during the research. However, nationally, 30 per cent of the Nepalese labour force is underutilised, being either unemployed or working less than 40 hours per week and looking for more work (GoN, 2008; GoN/ILO, 2010). Nevertheless, it can be predicted that the district has a higher unemployment rate than

⁴² Based on a study, the district was placed in the 60th least developed position out of the 75 districts of Nepal, according to the poverty and deprivation index, and the 50th least developed based on the socio-economic and infrastructure development index (Riley et al., 2003).

⁴³ The Nepal Living Standard Survey uses a measure of 2,200 calorie consumption by a person per day and access to essential non-food items as the index to measure poverty in Nepal. Based on current market prices, a person needs an income of at least Rs14,430 (US\$160) a year to manage food equivalent to 2,200 calories per day and other essential non-food items. As per the report, an individual earning less than Rs14,430 per year is below the poverty line (GoN, 2011c, NLSS main findings).

the national average because of the absence of industry and other employment opportunities. Furthermore, the district has a long history of human trafficking. Historically, women and girls from the hills of Sindhupalchok have been trafficked to Indian sex shops (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; Datta, 2005; Joshi, 2001).

The district has one hydropower plant which primarily supplies electricity to Kathmandu. Therefore, most of the people in the district use firewood to cook their food (Amacher et al., 1993; Devkota & Race, 2010). The census of 2011 found that more than 92 per cent of households used firewood as the most common type of fuel for their cooking (GoN, 2014c). Finally, the district's literacy rate is 68 per cent for men and 52 per cent for women (GoN, 2014c).

Sunsari: Sunsari is one of the plains districts which borders India and has road connections to most of the other rural areas of the country. Most of these roads are muddy and almost non-functional during the rainy season⁴⁴ (GoN, 2005b). The district has a mixture of communities from the mountains and the plains. The population of the district is made up primarily of an ethnic group known as *Tharu*⁴⁵ (*Terai Janajati*) which has a population in only a few of the plains districts of Nepal. In terms of religion, the district is 73 per cent Hindu, 12 per cent Muslim, seven per cent *Kirant*⁴⁶, four per cent Buddhist, and one per cent Christian, while three per cent is made up of other religions (GoN, 2012c).

The district has a population of 763,000 people (GoN, 2012c). The Government of Nepal states that the area has nine registered industrial firms which provide

⁴⁴ The rainy season starts with the monsoon in May and remains until October every year.

⁴⁵ The share of Tharu in the district population is 14 per cent, followed by Muslims who make up 11 per cent. The district has about 98 different groups of people, including *Brahmin*, *Chhetri*, *Magar*, *Tamang*, *Newar*, *Dalits*, *Yadav*, *Rai*, *Gurung*, *Limbu*, and others (GoN, 2012c).

⁴⁶ *Kirant* is a religion practiced by some ethnic groups such as *Limbu*, *Rai*, *Sunuwar*, and *Yakkha*. *Mundhum* is the religion scripture that guides the practices.

employment⁴⁷ to only 632 people⁴⁸ (GoN, 2011b). In addition, the district provides some employment in the informal sector, including in agriculture, hotels and restaurants, transport, and on construction sites. However, these jobs are casual in nature and some are available only in a specific season. Hotels and restaurants employ approximately 30,000 people, while agriculture provides employment for an additional 79,000 people (GoN, 2005b); however, both of these sectors are seasonal⁴⁹.

Based on development indicators, Sunsari is in the top 10 developed districts out of 75 in Nepal, and is ranked as the eighth-highest district based on the socioeconomic and infrastructure development index. However, the district falls in the intermediate group (in 27th position) in the women's empowerment index (Riley et al., 2003). This shows that the position of women in the district is relatively weaker than in the other development indexes. Finally, 71 per cent of families use firewood and cow-dung to cook their food, while 16 per cent use kerosene (GoN, 2005b).

Research Clusters

Within each district, two clusters each were selected to conduct the research in order to have a representation of people from different caste and ethnic groups; this meant that overall, there were a total of four clusters. Within each district, one cluster had a mix of different caste and ethnic groups, while the second had one ethnic group as

⁴⁷ Nepal's living standard survey defines 'employed' on the basis of whether a person has had at least one hour of paid employment during the previous seven days of the survey, or has a job attachment if the person is on leave (GoN, 2011c, NLSS main findings).

⁴⁸ Based on the 2001 census, the Central Bureau of Statistics estimates that a total of 217,000 people were employed in the district during the census year. The employment came from seasonal work such as agriculture, fisheries, mining, construction, hotels and restaurants, transport, and construction work; while some (in fields like education, security, NGO workers) had employment throughout the year (GoN, 2005b).

⁴⁹ Usually, agricultural employment is available during the planting of rice in June and July; and harvesting in October and November, for a maximum period of four months in a year.

a majority. In the plains of Sunsari, for example, *Janta Basti* cluster has a mixed community, whereas most of the residents of *Tengra Toli* are *Tharus*.

Janta Basti is a suburb of Itahari municipality where people started living from 1992. The research cluster of *Janta Basti* had 230 families, who were landless because they had been living on the property of a private company. The landless people forcefully occupied the land and have been living there since 1992 as illegal settlers. The cluster has a mixed population who have migrated primarily from the hills, but also some other parts of the country, including the higher caste, *Janajati*, and *Dalits*. During the period of the research, the cluster had a total of 74 women left-behind, with at least one male migrant per family in either the Gulf States or Malaysia. There were no migrants from the cluster working in developed countries (see Table 4.2).

Tengra Toli has a total of 146 families, 118 of which are *Tharu* families. These families have been living in the plains of Nepal even before the control of malaria in 1950 (Bohra & Massey, 2009; KC, 2003). The *Tengra Toli* cluster has two small clusters within it – one with families who had constructed their houses on their own land, and a second group of families who had been living on government land since the early 1990s. The research cluster had 62 families with at least one male in the Middle East or Malaysia (see Table 4.2). Most of the women in the cluster work as seasonal casual labourers either in agriculture or construction, whereas the men work in agriculture, transport, and construction. Except for a few, these families do not own any agricultural land. This area is known as the poor cluster of the district.

Similarly, two research clusters were taken from the Sindhupalchok district: *Marmin* in the north and *Thulo Pakhar* in the south. *Marmin* has 357 families, including 26 *Dalit* families, and 135 families with at least one male migrant working internationally (see Table 4.2). This cluster is known as one of the remote areas of Sindhupalchok, where the majority of the population is *Janajati* (Tamang). It takes

people at least two hours to walk to the nearest road-head from the cluster. As the cluster is in the high hills, the land is not irrigated and produces only a few crops, such as corn, potatoes, and millet. On the other hand, *Thulo Pakhar* is linked to a road that passes through the village. The cluster has a total of 129 families, with 44 families having at least one male migrant (see Table 4.2). The cluster has a mix of higher-caste families with only a couple of *Tamang* and *Dalit* families. This cluster has some fertile agricultural land where the families produce cash crops, including fresh vegetables they transport to the nearby market, or to Kathmandu.

These clusters were selected in close consultation with local community-based NGOs, Abhiyan Nepal in Sunsari, and the Society of Creative Rural Women (also called GMSP) in Sindhupalchok. Basically, the clusters were taken from the areas where the NGOs had been working and had connections with the local people. More importantly, the sites were selected from the NGOs' working areas where they had experienced large numbers of migrants and the diversity of their caste and ethnic groupings. These areas had about 50 per cent of households with at least one migrant working outside their area or a returned migrant now living at home (see Table 4.2).

Sampling

In order to identify the survey participants (the women left-behind), stratified random sampling⁵⁰ was conducted in each research cluster. As Miller & Brewer (2003) stated, stratified sampling involves a two-stage process; that is, the grouping of the entire research population into different strata (small homogenous groups within a large group) in each cluster, based on their caste and ethnic identity, and then sampling separately within each of these groups. Building on Miller & Brewer's (2003) approach,

⁵⁰ The details of the strata and sample selection process are given in the Sampling of Survey Participants section.

the following four steps were employed to sample the research participants from different strata (Chart 4.3)⁵¹:

Chart 4.1: Sample Selection Process



First, rapid information was collected in each cluster to identify those households that have at least one migrant or returned person at home.

Second, these households were divided into four strata: a) women left-behind⁵²; b) men left-behind; c) women returned; and d) men returned. The women left-behind were the primary research participants; therefore, they were further stratified in the third step.

Third, as the primary research participants, the women left-behind were further divided into three groups in the hills, and four groups in the plains, based on caste and ethnic identity – higher caste, Hill *Janajati*, and *Dalits* in both districts, plus *Tharu* in the plains.

Finally, at least 41 per cent of random households were picked from each of the above. Further detail of the sampling process is provided in the Sampling of Survey Participants section.

⁵¹ The field research was conducted between March and August 2012.

⁵² For this research purpose, all married men and women who had their emigrant spouses have been taken as 'left behind'. If any family had unmarried men or women as emigrants, they have not been taken as the subject of this study, because of the focus of the research is the agency of the married women 'left behind'.

Information on Households with Migrants

As the first step, information about households with at least one migrant or returned person was collected using a rapid information collection procedure based on the work of Chambers (1983, 1994). The information was collected in all four research clusters through a group of five to seven key informants, basically the community leaders, who were identified together with local NGOs. The leaders listed the households in the research cluster and identified the families with at least one migrant out of the country, except for those in India.

Table 4.2: Distribution of Potential Research Participant Households in Research Clusters

District	Area	Number of households with at least one migrant or returned migrant									Total households
		Left-behind			Returned			Total			
		Women	Men	Sub-total	Women	Men	Sub-total	Women	Men	Total	
Sunsari	Janta Basti	74	2	76	11	25	36	85	27	112	230
	Tengra Toli	62	-	62	5	8	13	67	8	75	146
	Sub-total	136	2	138	16	33	49	132	35	187	376
Sindhupalchok	Thulo Pakhar	44	19	63	10	7	17	54	26	80	129
	Marmin	135	23	158	11	11	22	146	34	180	357
	Sub-total	179	42	221	21	18	39	200	60	260	486
Total		315	44	359	37	51	88	332	95	447	862

With this listing, information about those families (with the names of the family heads) which had at least one migrant abroad, and the households with a returned migrant, was prepared for each cluster, including details about caste and ethnic group affinity⁵³. As presented in Table 4.2, a total of 447 households, that is, 187 households

⁵³ The caste and ethnic groups were identified as higher caste, Hill *Janajati*, and *Dalits* for the hills, and higher caste, Hill *Janajati*, *Tharu*, and *Dalits* for the plains (see Table 4.3). As the second step, the households were divided into two groups: left-behind families and returned migrants families. These families had either women or men left-behind or returned. These groups also had sub-groups of men and women; thus, a total of four groups were identified in each cluster, that is: a) women left-behind; b) men left-behind; c) returned women; and d) returned men, as presented in Table 4.2.

(*Janta Basti* 112; and *Tengra Toli* 75) in Sunsari, and 260 households (*Marmin* 180; and *Thulo Pakhar* 80) in Sindhupalchok, had at least one migrant or one returned migrant at home. However, the number of the left-behind men, returned women, and returned men was far smaller than the women who had been left-behind.

Sampling of Survey Participants– Women Left-Behind

As the primary research participants, building on the work of Castles & Miller (2003), stratified random sampling was undertaken only for the women left-behind, from the four caste-based strata, higher caste, *Tharu (Terai Janajati)*, *Hill Janajati*, and *Dalits*, in each research cluster.

Table 4.3: Sample Research Participants (Women Left-Behind) by Ethnic Group⁵⁴

District	Number of total women left-behind					Number of sampled research participants				
	Higher caste	Hill Janajati	Tharu	Dalit	Total	Higher caste	Hill Janajati	Tharu	Dalit	Total
Sunsari	26	54	42	14	136	11	23	18	6	58 (43%)
Sindhupalchok	35	122	-	22	179	14	49	-	9	72 (40%)
Total	61	176	42	36	315	25	72	18	15	130
Sample %						41%	41%	43%	42%	41%

As shown in Photo 4.1, a lottery method was used to select a sample of the women left-behind from each group. The names of the women from each caste and ethnic group were randomly chosen from a basket, ensuring at least 41 per cent from each stratum. Through this process, a total of 130 left-behind women were selected as the primary research participants from a pool of 315, as shown in Table 4.3. Similarly, out of 130 left-behind women, 58 (45 per cent) were from Sunsari and the remaining 72 (55 per cent) from Sindhupalchok. A detail of the district-wise distribution of the participants is presented in Table 4.3.

⁵⁴ The sample of individual districts by caste and ethnic group is too small to measure the confidence interval. Therefore, the analysis is complemented by case studies and qualitative data.

Photo 4.1: Random Selection of Research Participants



Although the stratified random sampling was conducted to identify the research participants, the equal distribution of the research participants by their caste could not be achieved. This was mainly because of the distribution of the households. For instance, Tamang's population is about two-thirds of the total households in the research area of Sindhupalchok, and the share of left-behind women participants from the group is 68 per cent of the total respondents. Similarly, *Tharu*, one of the *Janajati* groups living in the plains⁵⁵, represents 31 per cent of left-behind women in Sunsari (see Table 4.4). This is also because one of the sites (*Tengra Toli*) was purposively selected from the *Tharu* cluster.

⁵⁵ In Sunsari, the district has a local ethnic group, known as *Tharu*, which does not have a population in the mountains.

Table 4.4: Left-Behind Women Survey Participants by Ethnic Group and District

District		Women Left-behind				
		Higher caste	Hill Janajati	Tharu	Dalit ⁵⁶	Total
Sunsari	Count	11	23	18	6	58
	% within	19%	40%	31%	10%	
Sindhupalchok	Count	14	49	-	9	72
	% within	19%	68%	-	13%	
Total	Count	25	72	18	15	130
	% within	19%	55%	14%	12%	

Similarly, strata were defined based on family type of the left-behind women research participants. As shown in Table 4.5, 48 per cent of the left-behind women research participants were from nuclear families, and 52 per cent from joint families⁵⁷. By district, 69 per cent (40 out of 58) of the left-behind women research participants from Sunsari and 32 per cent (23 out of 72) from Sindhupalchok were living in nuclear families. The majority (68 per cent) of women in Sindhupalchok still live in joint families.

⁵⁶ The number of *Dalit* left-behind women is very small in both districts. Therefore, the given percentage of the sampled *Dalit* population does not represent all *Dalits* in the area.

⁵⁷ A joint family is usually comprised of a couple, their children, and their parents. The unmarried sister(s) of male members also live/s together with the family until they get married. In addition, in some joint families, couples and children of more than one brother live together with their parents.

Table 4.5: Left-Behind Women Survey Participants by Family and Ethnic Group

Type of family			Caste group ⁵⁸				Total
			Higher caste	Hill Janajati	Tharu	Dalits	
Nuclear	Sunsari	Count	7	16	12	5	40
		%	18%	40%	30%	13%	
	Sindhupalchok	Count	2	17	0	4	23
		%	9%	74%	0%	17%	
	Sub-total	Count	9	33	12	9	63
		%	14%	52%	19%	14%	48%
Joint	Sunsari	Count	4	7	6	1	18
		%	22%	39%	33%	6%	
	Sindhupalchok	Count	12	32	0	5	49
		%	24%	65%	0%	10%	
	Sub-total	Count	16	39	6	6	67
		%	24%	58%	9%	9%	52%
Total	Sunsari	Count	11	23	18	6	58
		%	19%	40%	31%	10%	45%
	Sindhupalchok	Count	14	49	0	9	72
		%	19%	68%	0%	13%	55%
	Total	Count	25	72	18	15	130
		%	19%	55%	14%	12%	

Research Participants– Qualitative

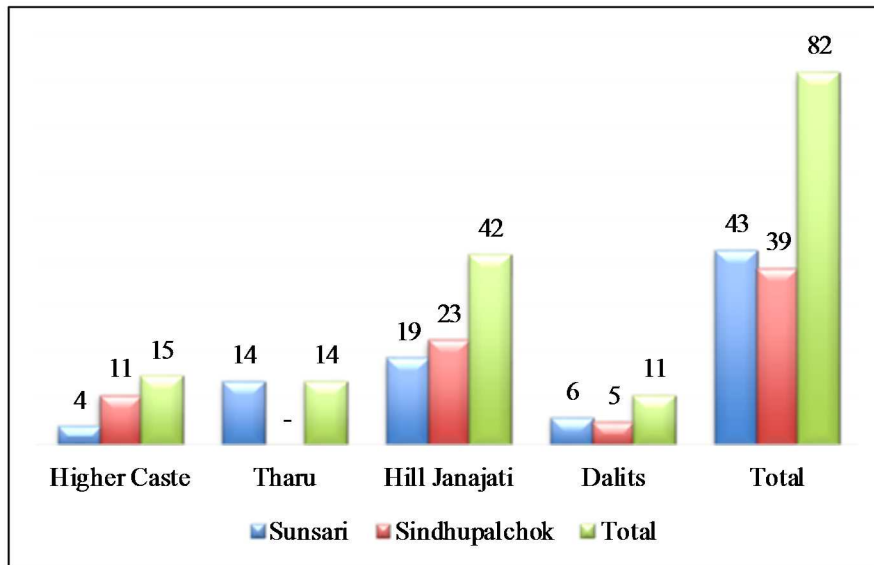
The sampling of the returned men and women, and the left-behind men, however, was not conducted because they were relatively small in number, and many of them were not continuously living in the research clusters. In addition, these groups were expected to share their observations about the women left-behind, as observers of the everyday practices in the research clusters. Therefore, given their small number, it was planned to meet all of those who were available and conduct semi-structured interviews. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with some of the selected women who participated in the survey.

⁵⁸ Given the small sample size, the confidence interval by caste group may be analysed only on an overall basis, and may not be reliable by location.

In-Depth Interviews– Left-Behind Women: The research participants for the in-depth interviews were confirmed only after the identification of interest of the research participants to participate in further discussion during the questionnaire survey. Therefore, the number of research participants during the in-depth discussions was less than the number of structured interviews. The in-depth discussion is considered to be a qualitative interview with purposively-selected people who participate in a longer discussion. As shown in Chart 4.4, the in-depth discussions were conducted with a total of 82 women left-behind who had their husbands outside the country for at least six months. A total of 43 of them were from the plains of Sunsari and the remaining 39 were from the hills.

Although the research participants for the in-depth discussions were the same women who participated in the structured questionnaire survey, the focus was to investigate case-specific stories, and to ensure a naturally occurring conversation through a semi-structured discussion (Bernard, 2006; Davies, 1999). Particular attention was paid to include information from the respondents in terms of the perception of significant, moderate, no, or negative changes in their lives. These research participants had the opportunity to tell their stories during this phase of the study. A number of the research participants also reflected on their everyday work, which is called ‘24-hour recall’ by Beaton et al. (1979). By caste group, there was a far higher share of *Janajati* women involved in the in-depth discussions, followed by higher-caste women. Chart 4.4 presents a visual summary of different caste groups of the research participants who participated in the in-depth discussion process in Sunsari and Sindhupalchok districts.

Chart 4.2: In-Depth Discussion Participants (Women Left-Behind)



The in-depth discussions were conducted on more than one occasion with the same research participants in order to collect the experiences of individuals in the family and community; society and religious organisations; and groups and networks; including the participants' perceptions and feelings.

Semi-Structured Interviews– Other Participants: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with men left-behind, returned women, returned men, and a number of key informants, in order to understand their perceptions about the women left-behind and their roles in the household and in community decision-making. A total of 28 returned women, 18 returned men, 17 men left-behind, and 15 key informants participated in this process. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to collect the participants' perceptions about the women left-behind, particularly about their community participation, social position, and decision-making.

Returned Women: A total of 28 returned women participated in the semi-structured interviews, as seen in Table 4.6. Out of these, 15 were from Sunsari and 13 from Sindhupalchok. By caste group, 25 per cent were *Dalits* and 57 per cent were *Hill*

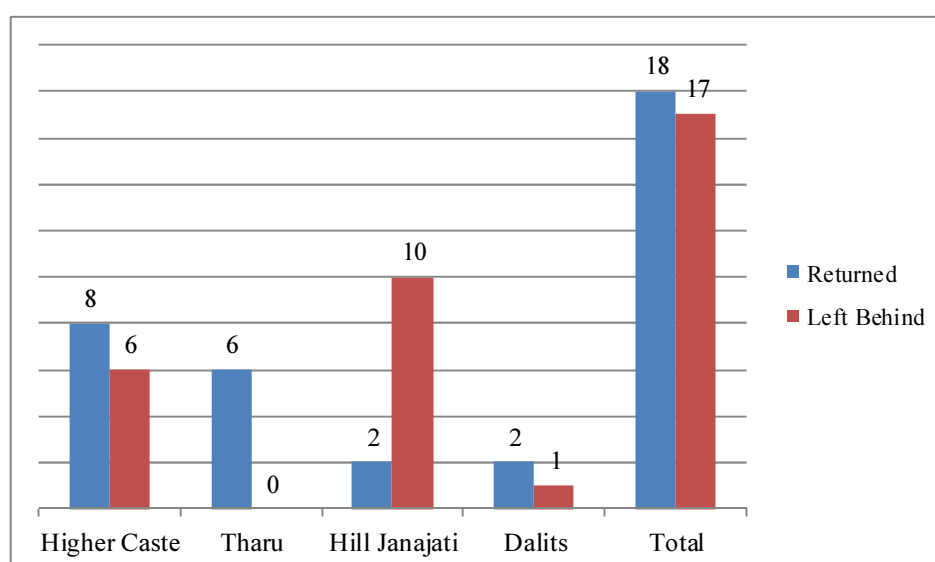
Janajati. However, representation of *Tharu (Terai Janajati)* was possible only from Sunsari district, because they do not have a population in the hills.

Table 4.6: Semi-Structured Interview Research Participants: Returned Women

District		Returned women				Total
		Higher caste	Hill Janajati	Tharu	Dalits	
Sunsari	Count	3	7	1	4	15
	% within	20%	47%	7%	27%	
Sindhupalchok	Count	1	9	-	3	13
	% within	8%	69%	-	23%	
Total	Count	4	16	1	7	28
	% within	14%	57%	4%	25%	

Returned and Left-Behind Men: In addition, as presented in Chart 4.5, a total of 35 men (18 returned and 17 left-behind) were interviewed to gather their perspectives about the women left-behind and those who had returned. Out of these, 18 were from Sunsari and 17 from Sindhupalchok districts. The interviews with these men were undertaken in order to understand male perspectives on women’s issues.

Chart 4.3: Semi-Structured Interview Research Participants– Men



Key Informants: As part of the research process, a total of 15 people (eight men and seven women) from different agencies participated in individual semi-structured

interviews (n=15). As Bernard (2006) stated, the interviews allowed for a specific focus on individuals who did not have a direct impact on, or from, migration, but had observed the social dynamics by representing social groups, political parties, NGOs, and government organisations. The interviews with some of these key informants were conducted on more than one occasion. A total of eight NGO workers, two political leaders, two government officials, and three social workers participated in these interviews. The government representatives included two senior officials from the Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the Department of Foreign Employment. The social workers were two female activists and a journalist. Similarly, the NGO workers included NGO representatives working for safer migration and against human trafficking in Nepal and in the research areas.

Participant Observation: Together with the in-depth interviews, participant observation was conducted as part of the research as another data-gathering strategy. However, observations of a number of specific processes and events were given priority beyond merely extended and continuous observations of daily lives involving cultural meaning and social structures (Bernard, 2006; Davies, 1999). Specific attention in the process was given to the roles of women in community-level decisions and processes. Therefore, a series of community and group meetings were observed in addition to participation in cultural events, festivals, and weddings.

During the research process, there were a number of challenges faced in the conduct of household-level observations. Being a male, the researcher had to be cautious in making frequent visits to women living at home without their husbands. Meeting women individually, interviewing them frequently, and visiting their homes could affect the well-being of the women in their community. Therefore, the observations were limited only to those houses which had at least one man at home and

were made in his presence. During these events, the role of the researcher was as observer-as-participant (Davies, 1999) who kept notes of the observations.

Focus Group Discussions: During the research period, a total of seven focus group discussions (n=7) were conducted, representing different types of groups. A total of three women's groups, one men's group, one mixed group, and two national-level networks participated in these discussions. A total of 14 men and 22 women were involved in these focus group meetings. A semi-structured checklist (Annex 3) was used during the discussions. The focus group participants were selected based on the availability and interest of group members to understand the perspectives of different groups of people on a specific topic (Bernard, 2006), ranging from gender-, caste-, and ethnicity-based practices in their communities, to social structures and functions in the community. The size of each group ranged from three to seven participants per meeting. Table 4.7 provides details about the focus group participants by the different research areas.

Table 4.7: Focus Group Discussion Participants

Group	Sunsari		Sindhupalchok		Other		Total		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Total
1. Janta Basti	5	1					5	1	6
2. Bouka Jhoda	6		-				6	-	6
3. Marmin	-		-	7			-	7	7
4. Danda Pakhar	-		-	5			-	5	5
5. National network			-		3		3	-	3
6. National network						4	-	4	4
7. Tengra Toli	-	5					-	5	5
Total	11	6	-	12	3	4	14	22	36

Group Records Review: In addition to interviews, observations, and discussions, reviews of the meeting minutes of local community groups were conducted to find out the representation of women in group decision-making processes, as well as to investigate if these decisions were gender-sensitive. Therefore, the meeting minutes of 10 groups, 5 each from Sunsari and Sindhupalchok, were reviewed during the process.

The community groups that allowed their meeting minutes to be reviewed included a land rights group, a *Tole* Development Group, and a women's group in Sunsari; and a women's group, a community forest users' group, and a survivors' group in Sindhupalchok. Some of these groups had only women as members, while the *Tole* development, community forest, and land rights groups had mixed membership of both women and men.

Total Research Participants

With the random selection of 130 women who had been left-behind, and the availability of other group members, a total of 208 people served as the research participants, as shown in Table 4.8. Out of this total, 130 were women left-behind while 28 women had returned home after migration. Similarly, a total of 17 men left-behind and 18 men who had returned from migration also participated in the research⁵⁹. In addition to these groups, a total of 15 representatives from government agencies, NGOs, and political parties also participated in semi-structured interviews during the research and shared their observations. These people were interviewed based on their interest and availability during the research period, with a purpose to triangulate the information from a range of different sources.

⁵⁹ The left behind research participants had their spouses in overseas migration at least for last six months when they were interviewed; and all of the returned women and men had served more than six months as migrant workers. However, the representatives from government, NGO and political parties were observing the changes around them, because of migration and other interventions.

Table 4.8: Total Research Participants

Research participants	Sunsari			Sindhupalchok			Other area			Total		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Primary												
Left-behind	58	-	58	72		72	-	-	-	130		130
Others												
Left-behind					17	17					17	17
Returned	15	18	33	13	-	13	-	-	-	28	18	46
Key informant	3	3	6	1	1	2	3	4	7	7	8	15
Sub-total	18	21	39	14	18	32	3	4	7	35	43	78
Total	76	21	97	86	18	104	3	4	7	165	43	208

Research Tools

This research follows a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods, which intertwines structured and open approaches (Bergman, 2008) in order to triangulate and complement the accumulated information (Greene et al., 1989). Despite the mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods having been criticised as being a continuation of the positivist approach to research (Giddings, 2006), the methods also offer a legitimate alternative response to the limitations of the sole use of one method (Doyle et al., 2009). In addition, their combination offers an opportunity to obtain the best understanding of the present reality, as well as allowing options for future innovative solutions to be developed (Bergman, 2008).

Mixed methods are also defined as the third methodological movement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yimin, 2009). As Yimin (2009) argued, it is believed that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can enrich an understanding of the complex social processes and practices that researchers seek to investigate. Although this requires a variety of data collection and analysis methods, mixed-methods research, as Kalaian (2008, p. 727) stated, "... provides a more comprehensive and enhanced image of the research problem". Mixed methods research is considered as the research craft that is employed to identify appropriate research methods and their application

(Bernard, 2006). As well, mixed methods facilitate the triangulation⁶⁰ of information which can improve the understanding of particular phenomena (Östlund et al., 2011).

Therefore, this research goes beyond the dichotomy between positivism and non-positivism, offering a pragmatic approach to understanding the changes in the lives of the women left-behind in rural Nepal. The results of the quantitative survey provide an overview of family size, the period of emigration, the age of the research participants, migration expenses, and group membership (before and after). However, the qualitative interviews and observations serve to collect information about major life-changes: decision-making and negotiation strategies, women's roles, gender relationships, participation in community events and meetings, and the social status of women, among other issues. As the research focuses on changes in social processes and practices, this implies the use of a range of research tools, in order to maximise the value of such a variety of information.

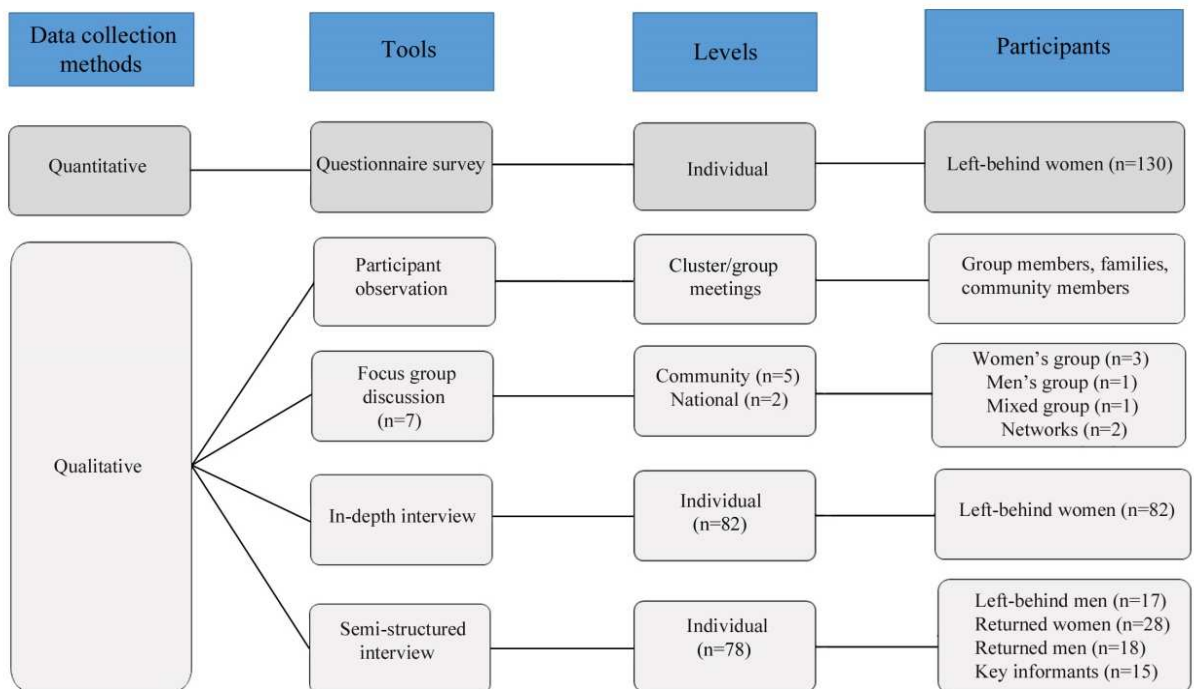
The purpose of using different tools is to investigate the information in as much depth as possible, as well as to triangulate data from different sources (Kalaian, 2008). The use of multiple tools is an opportunity to understand the complexities of the everyday world (Giddens, 1976). With this in mind, this research was conducted in two phases – questionnaire surveys in the first phase, and in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus group discussions in the second phase, by engaging in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time and in their naturally-occurring settings (Davies, 1999; Miller & Brewer, 2003). Chart 4.1 presents an overview of the different research methods, tools, and research participants.

⁶⁰ The use of a single method has some limitations, including the risk of research bias and incomplete information. Therefore, more than one research approach is used, using triangulation as a methodological metaphor, when investigating a research question. This enhances confidence in the findings (Östlund et al., 2011).

Questionnaire Survey: First Phase

Surveys are characterised as the systematic collection of data in a prescribed format. They are highly structured and designed to collect information as agreed in advance by the researchers. In most cases, the questionnaire is pre-tested and pre-determined (Walsh, 1996) and more formalised and systematised using a scale (De Vaus, 2002). Nonetheless, there is an agreement that surveys collect systematic and structured sets of data. A structured survey usually gathers information that can be quantified, providing quantitative or numerical descriptions and trends so that the researcher can analyse these trends and generalise the findings based on the sample (Creswell, 2014).

Chart 4.4: Summary of Research Methods and Participants



As surveys generate quantitative data, this method is also known as a positivistic research method. However, surveys do have a number of limitations. For example, they are not designed to explore individual views and feelings, and cannot generalise such

findings. This tends to undermine the stories of individuals, and groups of people from different strata of society.

In order to establish some trends, a total of 130 left-behind women participated in the survey which was conducted in the early stages of the data collection phase of the research in both districts. The survey questionnaire is shown in Annex 2. The survey also identified different types of experiences of the respondents, for instance, if the migrants and their families had been highly successful, moderately successful, or not successful.

Qualitative Research: Second Phase

In the second phase, a qualitative approach was taken using face-to-face in-depth interviews, group meetings and discussions, and observations to understand the perspectives of the research participants in relation to the agency of the women left-behind. The purpose of this research was to obtain inductive information from the research participants and to generate a greater depth of understanding based on their knowledge (Berg, 2001; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Qualitative researchers believe that the social world is constantly changing and that it can be understood through the perspectives of social actors (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). This research approach also has a number of limitations as the research is generally more time-consuming, and includes the possibility of subjective bias (Berg, 2001; Miller & Brewer, 2003). Therefore, a triangulated set of methods is utilised, using in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and reviews of group records, to avoid personal bias. The guidelines for the qualitative discussions are provided in Annex 3.

Data Analysis

The analytical focus of this research is on the contribution of men's migration to changes in the agency of women in a society where gender-, caste-, and ethnicity-based social structures shape the life of the individual. The researcher understands that the changes for women do not take place simply as a result of financial resources because assets may not translate directly into the agency of individuals (Samman & Santos, 2009). Therefore, this research investigates the contribution of men's migration to women's social and economic freedom and opportunities. The data analysis is carefully planned to keep these complexities in mind.

Two different software programmes have been used to analyse the quantitative and the qualitative data. The inputs from the survey were directly stored in SPSS (SPSS 21) and descriptive tables were produced based on the data. I have presented my statistics at the commonly used 95 per cent confidence level; that is, there is only a five per cent chance that the results are due to random effects rather than what is being measured. Given the small sample size, I have also calculated the confidence interval, which is the range of values within which the data are good estimates (95 per cent confidence level) of the parameters being measured (Kothari, 2004; Lavrakas, 2008). In some cases this is as high as plus or minus 10 per cent; in these cases, I have only accepted differences in two values greater than the combined measures (20 per cent) to validate the reliability of the data. This is pointed out in the relevant tables in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

The qualitative data from the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and semi-structured interviews have been through a long process of analysis. The transcripts of all the qualitative interviews, discussions, and observations were translated into English on an ongoing basis throughout the research period. All interviews were conducted in the Nepali language, and therefore, immediate translations

revealed the essence of each discussion. The data were stored on a personal computer using a different code for each research participant to ensure their privacy.

At the second level, codes were developed to analyse the data, and each set of interview findings were organised into different codes. NVivo version 10, the software designed to analyse qualitative data, was used to code and re-code the qualitative data and to generate coding reports. During the data coding process, the data were coded and recoded on many occasions and, as a result, many new codes emerged throughout the process. Therefore, the process followed an inductive approach as the principle technique, as per a grounded theory approach (Bowen, 2008). However, conscious efforts have been made to shape the self-emerging codes within the wider framework of women's agency.

Research Ethics

This research was conducted with the ethics approval of the Australian National University (protocol 2011/648) under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007. Based on the approved research proposal, the study began with an open mind, and therefore, I did not have any pre-conceived ideas and approach. The research participants had the opportunity to decline or to withdraw their participation from the research at any point in time. Therefore, all the research participants were interviewed only after their explicit and informed consent had been given. The confidentiality of the research participants has been given due respect during and after the research. The research notes and survey questions have been stored in a locked cupboard and are able to be accessed only by the primary researcher. In addition, the information provided by the research participants has been used only for the research purpose, without disclosing the individual identity of the research participants – pseudonyms were used while coding the data and writing this thesis.

The researcher maintained cultural and political sensitivity and took a number of precautionary measures to protect the research participants. For example, it can be considered culturally-insensitive for a male researcher to meet female research participants on a frequent basis. Therefore, female research assistants were recruited and trained, and they accompanied the male researcher during all the individual interviews and observations⁶¹. Furthermore, I did not, at any stage, make any comments on political and religious issues which could be considered contentious.

In addition, I followed some strategies to minimise risk during the research. For example, I collected security information in advance before going to the field areas, and obtained updates about the security situation from the Risk Management Office and from local NGOs. I trekked together with a local research assistant and did not travel in the early morning or the late evening. Similarly, I spent the night in villages which were recommended as being safe by local NGOs and the research assistant.

Scope and Limitations

The impact of migration at the origin is an emerging area of research interest in Nepal where there are large numbers of people who migrate and leave their family members behind. This is increasingly relevant in recent years because the number of such migrants has increased thirteen-fold and the amount of remittances by 35 times between 2001 and 2014 (GoN, 2014a; Shishido, 2009; The World Bank, 2010, 2011b). Therefore, going beyond the economic impacts at the source, this research has focused

⁶¹ All of the interviews were conducted by the researcher, accompanied by local female research assistants. A total of four experienced female research assistants, representing each cluster, were recruited and oriented on questioning techniques, research ethics (including confidentiality of information) and the use of the research tools. At the end of each day, a reflection with each research assistant was conducted to feedback research assistant on their performance as well as to update the field notes.

on women's decision-making, networks, and social position as the key areas of study, as a step to fill a major gap in the migration research, particularly at the origin, with a focus on the women left-behind and the convertibility of men's migration into women's capacity, agency, and social capital.

Limitations of the Research: Although there is a significant research scope, this study does not address all the existing gaps as it limits the subject of the research to only those women who are living in the community who are left-behind. Furthermore, this research concentrates only on the agency of the individual women left-behind, particularly in the context in which they are left with additional responsibilities in the home, and have more opportunity to participate in social activities and to manage financial resources. Thus, this research does not cover the complete social dynamics of women in the source areas. In addition, this research does not cover the seasonal migrants⁶² and those women who do not have any migration experience, either as a migrant or as being left-behind.

In addition, this research was conducted in two clusters in each of two geographical locations of Nepal, and the findings from this research are presented to understand only the experiences of the research participants, although the impacts of migration on women in sending societies have been of global concern. As well, the limited geographical coverage and the relatively small sample size of the research does not allow for the realisation of a complete macro-picture, primarily emphasising micro-level change. For example, the small sample size of *Dalits*, and some other disaggregated groups, does not provide a realistic confidence interval to represent the

⁶² Seasonal migrants return home for major events and festivals; and migrate both within Nepal and to India, usually for less than six months, for some specific seasonal work. As the research has focused on the gendered impact of migration with an extended period of time, the seasonal migrants are not the subject of this research.

wider population. Furthermore, being a male, the researcher faced a number of challenges in bringing out the female perspective, and this may be considered as a limitation of being a male researcher on a topic such as this.

Conclusion

As a study on migrant-sending communities, this research investigates the changing agency of women through the use of mixed research methods. When identifying the women left-behind, four clusters of women were identified as the subject of this research. The four groups are defined according to their caste and ethnic identity, as higher caste, *Janajati*, *Tharu*, and *Dalits*. Similarly, when choosing the geographic locations, two topographical areas which have distinctive social structures and migration practices, were selected. One of these is in the mountains and the other in the plains. The mountain district, Sindhupalchok, has a majority of joint families with 21 per cent of households with at least one migrant, including a share of women from 34 per cent of them. In this area, the women's share of migration is far higher than the national average of 13 per cent, and is also higher than in Sunsari, the other area under investigation. However, the plains district, Sunsari, has a large number of nuclear families, with an 85 per cent share of males among the total migrants (see Table 4.1). In addition, the district has a mixed population, including hills-origin people and *Tharus*. Therefore, they bring a distinctive and comparative picture to this research. Another important component of this study is the differences within the populations based on caste and ethnic groups. Therefore, while selecting the research participants, a stratified sampling method was used to ensure the participation of diverse groups of people, basically representing the higher caste, *Dalit* (called lower caste), and *Janajati* groups, in the research process.

After the selection of the research participants, this study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a structured questionnaire survey was conducted with 130 women left-behind. These participants were selected through a random sampling process, ensuring a spread of different caste and ethnic groups from the research areas. Out of the 130 women, a total of 82 participated in the second round of in-depth discussion meetings and interviews. In addition, in the second phase, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted representing different groups of people. For example, a total of 15 representatives from NGOs, government agencies, and political parties, 28 returned women, 17 left-behind men, and 18 returned men participated in the semi-structured interviews (see Chart 4.1). Similarly, a total of seven focus group discussions and a series of participant observations were undertaken in the research areas. The research was conducted with the consent of the research participants, and their identities have, and will, remain undisclosed in order to maintain their privacy.

In order to analyse the data, two different software programmes were used. The survey data were analysed using SPSS 21, and the qualitative interviews with NVivo 10. The quantitative data provided descriptive statistics based on multiple-choice questions. The coding of the qualitative data followed an inductive analysis process with extra codes emerging from the data during the analysis process. The qualitative data provide the perspectives of a range of different individuals on the changing status of the women, recognition, and networking as a result of migration. The results from these analyses have been presented in the findings and analysis sections of this thesis.

Chapter 5 – Men’s Migration, Women’s Workload, and Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on the women left-behind research participants’ gender relationships within their households. These results are derived from the two selected geographical locations of Nepal, Sunsari in the plains and Sindhupalchok in the hills, and with people from four different caste and ethnic groups. As well, they have been derived based on the methodology outlined in Chapter 4. The findings point to an increased workload for the women left-behind, who are also trapped by patriarchal practices, which pose several challenges in terms of asking for, and receiving help, particularly from male family members. This makes them overloaded in many cases, and dependent on other family members and relatives to get help for different activities. In addition, women have to be careful to avoid working or travelling alone. They also face different types of restrictions either from their husbands, even when they are out of the country, or their in-laws, and any non-compliance with these restrictions may result in physical, verbal, and/or psychological abuse. This chapter reports on the findings in relation to the status of women’s roles and workloads, and gender-based violence when their husbands migrate for foreign employment.

Women's Roles

When men migrate, there are changes in the managerial and productive roles of women within the household and beyond. In the research sites, the reproductive and domestic roles are considered as the primary responsibilities of the women, both in joint

and extended families⁶³. In line with Koolwal & Walle (2013), the women in the research areas are responsible for the care of family members and also for undertaking unpaid farm work which does not generate any income, as such⁶⁴. So, the women's contribution to the household is not considered to be economically important, as there is no account of the savings that the household could make by the women performing these roles⁶⁵.

After the husbands' migration, the management of money, either from remittances or from locally-generated work, was found to be one of the major areas of management for the women. More than two-thirds of women in nuclear families, and one-quarter in joint families, reported that they had increased their money management roles after their husband's migration⁶⁶. The women in joint families had relatively fewer money management roles because the father-in-law, or one of the male members of the family, previously took on these roles. The women who performed these roles had to plan their expenditure carefully into different categories, principally loan re-payments, health and education, land and business, house construction and maintenance, and food and consumption.

⁶³ Out of the total women left-behind, 52 per cent were living in joint families and 48 per cent in nuclear families.

⁶⁴ Women are expected to work in the agricultural fields in Nepalese society. This work results in the production of subsistence food, and generally, does not make any cash income for the women.

⁶⁵ Women's participation in formal sector employment is less than 8 per cent in Nepal (Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2009); alternatively, they are employed in seasonal agricultural work if any is available, and some girls from poor families work as carers for children and animals.

⁶⁶ The confidence interval for money management roles was ± 10.99 for Sunsari and ± 9.86 for Sindhupalchok. The difference between the districts is greater than the combined confidence interval, which confirms that there are variations in money management practices between the districts.

Table 5.1: Women's Roles: Based on the Use of Remittances

Caste group		House construction/maintenance	Education of children	Health	Invest in land business	Loan payment	Food consumption	Total
Sindhupalchok (n = 72)								
Higher caste	Count	3	3	-	2	11	2	14
	% within	21%	21%	-	14%	79%	14%	
Hill Janajati	Count	7	11	-	3	42	17	49
	% within	14%	22%	-	6%	86%	35%	
Dalit	Count	4	6	-	-	8	6	9
	% within	44%	67%	-	-	89%	67%	
Sub-total	Count	14	20	-	5	61	25	72
	% within	19%*	28%*	-	7%*	85%	35%	
Sunsari (n=58)								
Higher caste	Count	9	9	3	11	11	5	11
	% within	82%	82%	27%	100%	100%	45%	
Hill Janajati	Count	13	13	3	15	20	10	23
	% within	57%	57%	13%	65%	87%	43%	
Tharu	Count	8	10	4	13	17	9	18
	% within	44%	56%	22%	72%	94%	50%	
Dalits	Count	1	4	1	-	6	1	6
	% within	17%	67%	17%	-	100%	17%	
Sub-total	Count	31	36	11	39	54	25	58
	% within	53%*	62%*	19%	67%*	93%	43%	
Both district's total	Count	45	56	11	44	115	50	130
	% within	35%	43%	8%	34%	88%	38%	

* The differences are higher than the combined confidence intervals. This confirms there are differences in the two populations.

After the husband's migration, loan re-payments were the major financial⁶⁷ responsibilities that the women had, and this came largely from remittances. One-third of the women were also able to invest in land or business, which was made up of two-thirds from Sunsari, but only seven per cent from Sindhupalchok⁶⁸ (see Table 5.1)⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ Eighty per cent of migrants took loans, of which 20 per cent had spent between US\$340 and US\$660; 24 per cent between US\$661 and US\$989; 39 per cent between US\$990 and US\$1,319; and 12 per cent more than US\$1,320.

⁶⁸ The confidence interval for land and business is ± 5.89 for Sindhupalchok and ± 12.1 for Sunsari. The difference between the districts is higher than the combined confidence interval, confirming the variations.

The businesses women invested in included small enterprises such as groceries, the production and sale of alcoholic drinks, animal farming, sewing/knitting, and other small production activities, which could generate income to assist them and their children.

Women also had to manage their time for their children's schooling, construction and maintenance around the home, health, and other household activities. However, the women in Sindhupalchok did not report health as one of their activities on which they had to spend money, whereas eight per cent of the women in Sunsari mentioned this. One reason why health in Sindhupalchok was not a major activity for expenditure was because the first point of contact in the hills was the local traditional healer or the free government health posts, whereas women in Sunsari contacted private health practitioners if they had any health problems⁷⁰.

Some of the women left-behind had started money-lending operations with the remittances they received. For example, a higher-caste woman from Sunsari started such a business. By the middle of 2012, she had lent about US\$24,000 to different women in the district⁷¹. She said that with the interest that she had earned from the lending, she was managing her household expenses, including the education of a child, food, water, electricity, and other daily consumption expenses. This was the most significant money management role that any of the women left-behind had performed

⁶⁹ Investment in land and business is high in Sunsari because the value of land is high in the plains. In addition, many research participants in Sunsari were living on public land; therefore, there was a trend to purchase land or a house to secure a place to live. Access to the market in the plains was the key reason to invest in business.

⁷⁰ The availability of private health clinics and chemist shops is high in the plains district of Sunsari, whereas they exist only in a few places of Sindhupalchok, mainly in the district headquarters and some town centres, but not in all the rural villages.

⁷¹ US\$1 = Nepalese Rupees 91.28, as of 21 June 2012.

among the research participants. Her husband had been working in the Middle East since 2003.

Although Pokharel et al. (2011) have suggested that women have limited capacity to manage money and income-generating activities, in comparison to men, this research does not confirm their findings. The female research participants in both districts demonstrated their money management roles and abilities, and have performed those roles that were traditionally undertaken by men. They have invested and used the money for a wide range of purposes. As demonstrated in Table 5.1, this research finds that more than one-third of women have constructed or maintained their houses, invested remittances in land or business, or used some share of the remittances for household consumption⁷².

By district, women in the plains of Sunsari took on these roles more than the women in the hills. The research participants mentioned two key reasons for this. First, the women in the plains either had small plots of land or were landless, and so they had to purchase many of their daily necessities, which their husbands had no control over⁷³. However, most of the research participants in Sindhupalchok had some agricultural land which they used to produce food, particularly corn, wheat, potatoes, and vegetables. Second, two-thirds of the women in the hills were living in joint families in which the father-in-law or another male member was at home to exert some level of control. However, more than three-quarters of the women were living in nuclear families in the plains and therefore had more freedom from everyday supervision.

⁷² The differences between the districts were confirmed through a confidence interval test.

⁷³ Nep004/43, Nep023/29, Nep037/34 and Nep046/39

However, the women in both districts stated that the areas of expenditure were agreed with their husbands in advance, particularly for major financial decisions⁷⁴. This helped them to continue their harmonious relationship with their husbands. More importantly, a number of research participants confirmed that the men's migration had given the women opportunities to be involved in activities such as the construction of a house, education of children, loan management, and investment in land and business, which were traditionally performed by men in Nepalese society. The following is an example of this:

Maya Rai (name changed), a Hill *Janajati* woman, is 39 years old. She is a housewife, and her husband Suva Bahadur used to work as a street vendor before his migration. However, she took over all the household roles in 2005 when Suva migrated to Malaysia. In 2007, Maya planned to operate a grocery shop which Suva did not agree to initially. It took her almost a year to negotiate. In 2009, she proposed to buy a house with the money that he remitted. Suva, this time, asked her to consult his parents in making the decision. In 2011, she bought a small plot of land beside their house, which Suva agreed to without giving it a second thought, although they had to take a loan from a money-lender.

In addition, the women had to undertake other activities, such as fodder and forage collection, shopping, and participation in community groups and activities, which also increased their workload.

Women's Workload

Among the left-behind women, their workload had generally increased with the migration of their husbands. The intensity of the workload was high among the women

⁷⁴ Nep001/42, Nep011/32, Nep026/27, Nep029/22, Nep036/30, Nep057/31, Nep073/45, Nep155/50, and Nep165/51

in nuclear families in which women often became the *de facto* head of the household. This was because they were responsible for multiple activities that needed to be performed within the household, the community, the marketplace, and in different organisations. As can be seen in Table 5.2, the workload increased not only for one single reason, but for a combination of the multiple roles that the women performed in the absence of their husbands. However, the reasons for the increased workload varied between districts and family type.

Table 5.2: Reasons for Increased Workload among Women Left-behind

Caste group	Group work	Education of children	House construction/maintenance	Agriculture	Fodder/forage	Shopping	Other	Total	
Sindhupalchok (n=72)									
Higher caste	Count	6	4	4	10	14	1	3	14
	% within	43%	29%	29%	71%	100%	7%	21%	
Hill Janajati	Count	41	9	6	36	45	1	17	49
	% within	84%	18%	12%	73%	92%	2%	35%	
Dalits	Count	8	5	5	3	7	2	5	9
	% within	89%	56%	56%	33%	78%	22%	56%	
Sub-total	Count	55	18	15	49	66	4	25	72
	% within	76%	25%*	21%*	68%*	92%*	6%	35%	
Sunsari (n=58)									
Higher caste	Count	6	7	6	4	4	1	7	11
	% within	55%	64%	55%	36%	36%	9%	64%	
Hill Janajati	Count	16	12	12	3	1	1	8	23
	% within	70%	52%	52%	13%	4%	4%	35%	
Tharu	Count	13	9	7	4	4	5	7	18
	% within	72%	50%	39%	22%	22%	28%	39%	
Dalits	Count	4	3	2	1	2	0	4	6
	% within	67%	50%	33%	17%	33%	0%	67%	
Sub-total	Count	39	31	27	12	11	7	26	58
	% within	67%	53%*	47%*	21%*	19%*	12%	45%	
Both district's total	Count	94	49	42	61	77	11	51	130
	% within	72%	38%	32%	47%	59%	9%	39%	

* The differences are higher than the combined confidence intervals. This confirms there are differences in the two populations.

In Sindhupalchok, for example, a total of 92 per cent of the research participants reported fodder and forage collection as the main reason for the increased workload⁷⁵. The research participants in Sindhupalchok had at least one animal – a cow, goat, sheep, or bullock – at their home, and therefore, fodder and forage collection was one of the key reasons. Similarly, three-quarters of the research participants were involved in the activities of community groups, while more than two-thirds had taken additional agricultural roles in the district after their husband's migration. However, there were no major variations in the women's workloads as a result of group participation⁷⁶.

In Sunsari, the maintenance/construction of the house and the schooling of children were some of the reasons for the additional workload of the women left-behind. About half of the women left-behind were either constructing or repairing their homes⁷⁷, and more than half had their children at school. Outside their homes, two-thirds of the women had participated in group activities, while about half were involved in other activities, such as meeting government officials, municipalities, and health facilities⁷⁸.

Before migration, the men used to assist with the fodder and forage, and would take on the responsibility for community groups and agriculture in Sindhupalchok district⁷⁹. Similarly, men's roles were in community groups, the schooling of children,

⁷⁵ The confidence interval for fodder and forage collection is ± 6.27 for Sindhupalchok and ± 8.36 for Sunsari. This confirms that there were differences in the workload between the districts because of these roles.

⁷⁶ The confidence interval for group work is ± 9.86 for Sindhupalchok and ± 12.1 for Sunsari.

⁷⁷ The confidence interval is ± 9.41 for Sindhupalchok and ± 10.84 for Sunsari on construction and maintenance of the house; and ± 10 for Sindhupalchok and ± 12.84 for Sunsari on schooling of the children. Both of these confirm the differences between the two districts, because the differences in percentages are higher than the combination of the confidence intervals.

⁷⁸ There was no significant difference between the districts.

⁷⁹ Nep108/28, Nep096/30, Nep102/55, Nep108/28, Nep123/30, Nep127/26, and Nep130/49

construction and maintenance of the home, and attending government and municipality meetings in Sunsari. Therefore, the women had to take on these roles after their husband's migration.

Measuring the workload of women in Nepalese villages is highly subjective, as it is often invisible and much of it is seasonal and casual, without specific hours of work. The research participants said that every day, they would, for example, sweep the house, make tea and breakfast (*Dal bhat*⁸⁰), cook and serve lunch (*Khaja*) and dinner (*Dal bhat*) for all family members, clean the dishes and utensils after each meal, wash the clothes for all family members, take care of the children, fetch water, collect grass and firewood, and feed the cattle, among other duties. Traditionally, many of these roles have been considered as women's roles. Therefore, men have been reluctant to perform these so-called 'women's roles'. One higher-caste man, for example, said that he would not do his dishes because he considered this to be part of the woman's role. Another higher-caste man, who was serving as the chairperson of a community forest group, said that he would recommend women to take jobs only if the employment would not affect their household chores. He emphasized that women should perform the jobs that have been traditionally determined by society. As Holmes (2009) stated, men had expectations that women should be primarily responsible for household chores, which were considered to be their assigned gender roles in everyday life. Therefore, to understand the work patterns of the women left-behind, 24-hour re-calls of women's work were conducted with a total of 18 interested research participants.

⁸⁰ There is a practice of eating *Dal bhat* (rice, lentils, vegetable/meat curry, and yoghurt/ milk or butter – the variety changes based on the affordability of the family) in the morning and at night in Nepalese families. They start with *Dal bhat* and have snacks (called *Khaja*) at midday, usually between 12pm and 2pm.

The following (Box 5.1) is an example of a *Janajati* woman's work in Sunsari on Sunday, 6 May 2012. Since 2007, her husband had been working in Malaysia and she was living with her son, who was 7 years old. She also kept two piglets and two goats.

Box 5.1: An Example of a 24-hour Recall of Women's Work

4am – 7am: Got up and collected fodder for the pigs and goats from the forest (son was locked inside the house until she returned home)
7am – 8am: Managed firewood, washed clothes
8am – 10am: Cooked food; fed the child, cleaned him, and dropped him off at school; cleaned dishes/utensils/ house
10am – 12noon: Prepared food for pig and goat and fed them, cleaned animal sheds, and fetched grass for goats
12noon – 3pm: Carried home-made alcohol to market/shops, and sold it; collected money; and bought some rice, lentils, and vegetables
3pm – 5pm: Prepared food, brought the child back from school, fed and cleaned him; fed pigs and goats
5pm – 10:30pm: Prepared ingredients for making alcohol for next day, ground lentils, cooked dinner, fed child, cleaned utensils, and started making alcohol, packed alcohol into bottles/ jars and made ready for next day
10:30pm – 4am: Bed (Nep060/33)

The above case represents a typical workload for women. A total of 95 per cent of women left-behind said that there was an increase in their workload after the emigration of their husbands, although they had variations in the intensity of the work. These women, in the various research clusters, said that they did not have weekends or holidays because the animals and children had to be fed every day and they needed to be cleaned regularly. More than 80 per cent of the research participant families had at least one cow⁸¹.

⁸¹ Nepalese families keep cows for milk and goats for meat. In addition, some *Janajati* and *Dalit* families keep pigs for meat. Chickens and ducks are raised for meat and eggs by most families, except for some *Brahmins* who serve as priests.

Therefore, women in nuclear families had to work between 14 and 17 hours per day⁸², whereas women in extended families worked between 12 and 14 hours. These women usually did not have a break except when they stopped for meals. In many cases, it was observed that women with small children were feeding their children at the same time as they themselves were eating.

A small number (about five per cent) of women said that they did not find any change in their workload. Living together with in-laws or with maternal family members, and the sharing of responsibilities with them, were stated as the key reasons for this. Similarly, some women did not have a history of sharing work with their husbands and, as a result, did not have any change in their routine after the husband's migration⁸³. A *Janajati* woman, for example, said, "I do not have any feeling of additional workload in my husband's absence because he never helps me."

Thus, the women, who used to get help from their husbands, either partially or fully, in their daily activities, such as taking care of children, feeding animals (cows, goats, and pigs) and cleaning their sheds, have experienced an increased workload as a result of the migration of their husbands. The women, who did not have such support, or who had their husbands working outside their home, did not report any additional workload as a result of the migration of their husbands⁸⁴.

⁸² When husbands were at home, some of the research participants (for example, Nep089/30, Nep079/44 and Nep070/30) said that they used to work between 12 and 14 hours, depending on the help of their husbands. However, Nep071/39 said that she was working fewer hours than before because the family was economically better off with the migration of the husband, and she did not have to work as she used to in the past.

⁸³ Nep047/28, Nep021/25, Nep037/34 and Nep042/47

⁸⁴ Nep077/42, Nep021/25 and Nep047/28

Workload Management

With the increased workloads, this research finds that the women left-behind increased their knowledge of household management in the absence of their husbands. The exposure and learning increased the happiness of the women, despite the increased workload. A 32 year old higher-caste woman discussed how her role changed after the emigration of her husband. She used to perform the tasks within the household, while her husband was responsible for all other roles. She said,

I was living with my parents before my marriage, and they used to take on all of my responsibilities. However, after nine days of our marriage, my husband left me with all the responsibilities at the age of 22, and migrated to Bahrain in 2003. This was something like a big mountain in front of me. Initially, I had many sleepless nights. However, within two years of husband's migration, I developed confidence not only to manage the household chores and shopping, but also to deal with suppliers, contractors, and government officials, as well as to manage networks. I had never thought that I would construct a house in the absence of my husband. I made a lot of effort to build this house, although my husband was reluctant (Nep057/32).

In another case, a 31 year old *Dalit* woman shared her experiences as follows:

I had to visit the municipality and the district administration offices after my husband left me at home. I was scared initially, and I did not have any information about the municipality's roles. After my visit, I found that they would provide with financial help for *Dalit* children if there was a birth registration. I got my son's birth registration done, and I started getting a monthly stipend to supplement nutritional food. This has helped me to manage my household budget (Nep064/31).

These experiences suggest that the increased workload was also a means of enhancing the women's learning, skills, and opportunities. With such a diverse

workload, these women have explored different forms of workload management options at home. Some of them have acquired help from their relatives, such as their parents, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters, among others. Table 5.3 explains the assistance that women received in the absence of their husbands⁸⁵:

Table 5.3: Sources of Help for Women in the Absence of Their Husbands

Caste Group		Women's family member		Husband's family member		Others		Total (n=130)	
		Sindhu-palchok	Sunsari	Sindhu-palchok	Sunsari	Sindhu-palchok	Sunsari	Sindhu-palchok	Sunsari
Higher caste	Count	2	10	1	-	5	3	14	11
	% within	14%	91%	7%	-	36%	27%		
Hill Janajati	Count	36	18	2	1	35	7	49	23
	% within	73%	78%	4%	4%	71%*	30%*		
Tharu	Count	-	14	-	-		1		18
	% within	-	78%	-	-		6%		
Dalits	Count	8	4	1	-	4	1	9	6
	% within	89%	67%	11%	-	44%	17%		
District total	Count	46	46	4	1	44	12	72	58
	% within	64%	79%	6%	2%	61%*	21%*		
Both district's total	Count	92		5		56		130	
	% within	71%		4%		43%			

* The differences are higher than the combined confidence intervals. This confirms there are differences in the two populations.

As presented in Table 5.3, women used multiple support options to manage their workload. For example, almost three-quarters of the women acquired some help from their maternal roots; four per cent requested assistance from their husbands' family members; and nearly half hired people from outside or bartered their labour with their neighbours. It was said that the women were reluctant to invite members from their husbands' families because of privacy reasons, as the husband's family members could

⁸⁵ In Sindhupalchok, six higher-caste women; and in Sunsari, three *Tharu* women, and one *Dalit* woman did not get any help from others. This was mainly because these families were poor and had limited scope to seek help from others.

get information about remittances if they were invited to help, and could claim a share of their son's/brother's income.

However, the hiring of people from outside was conducted only for those jobs which were performed outside their home, in addition to those which required a specific skilled worker; for example, a carpenter or a mason. Similarly, the hiring of external workers was relatively high (61 per cent) in Sindhupalchok⁸⁶, but much lower (21 per cent) in Sunsari⁸⁷. One of the reasons for the relatively high (79 per cent) support from women's family members in the plains of Sunsari was the availability of transport in the district, whereas road transport was difficult in the hills of Sindhupalchok, where women have to walk for hours if their maternal home is outside the village. This is one of the main reasons why women in Sindhupalchok hired more workers than those in Sunsari.

The findings suggest that many women left-behind in nuclear families have taken on the additional burden, rather than getting support from the husband's parents or family members⁸⁸. Support from the husband's family is as little as three per cent in nuclear families compared to 81 per cent in joint families. The other strategies used to manage the workload include hiring casual workers, changing household activities

⁸⁶ The confidence intervals for other sources of support are ± 11.27 for Sindhupalchok and ± 10.48 for Sunsari. The percentage of women with these sources of support differs greatly between the districts, and the difference is higher than the combination of these confidence intervals. However, support from family members, although they differ in percentages between the districts, do not exceed the total of the confidence intervals, which are ± 11.09 for Sindhupalchok and ± 10.48 for Sunsari.

⁸⁷ Skilled workers, such as carpenters and masons, were invited by relatives as much as possible in Sunsari. However, the agricultural workers who work in the open fields were invited from the neighbourhood in both of the districts, as appropriate.

⁸⁸ As per the existing legal provisions, parents and brothers are entitled to obtain a share of the income and property that a man earns. Therefore, information about income and property was not disclosed to the husband's family members to avoid the sharing of his income. Inviting the husband's relatives to work could leak such information about income and assets (KI004 and KI005).

(some of the participants sold their pigs/cows/goats), bartering of jobs with neighbours, and asking the children to help them. Around one-quarter of the women in Sunsari stopped doing particular activities (such as working as casual labour for others, or keeping cattle at home, and/or using firewood to cook food) after their husbands migrated.

Two NGO workers said that some of the women who had been receiving remittances adopted alternative options, such as using bottled gas instead of collecting firewood from the forest, as a way to reduce their workload. The women interviewed in Sindhupalchok were engaged in agriculture and had been using firewood as the main source of energy to cook their food, while about three-quarters of the research participants in Sunsari had been using firewood for cooking, so the use of bottled gas to substitute for firewood was still low.

Workload and Confidence

The women left-behind gained an increased sense of confidence to take part in different activities within the family and the community after they started undertaking the new roles in the absence of their husbands. This was because they were pushed to perform the new roles which were not as difficult as they were perceived to be, although some of the tasks were challenging. Over half of the interviewed women (55 per cent) indicated increased confidence⁸⁹; however, there was no significant difference between the districts, with only slightly more women showing increased confidence in the plains. The women in the plains had to face taking on multiple roles, as two-thirds of them were in nuclear families, whereas the women in the hills did not have similar opportunities because of the presence of other family members in the home. However,

⁸⁹ The confidence interval is ± 8.56 .

the women in the hills had opportunities to participate more often in group activities (see Chapter 6).

Table 5.4: Changes in Women's Capacity after Husband's Migration

Caste group		Increased confidence		Public speaking		Total research participants (n=130)	
		Sindhupalchok	Sunsari	Sindhupalchok	Sunsari	Sindhupalchok	Sunsari
Higher caste	Count	9	3	9	3	14	11
	% within	64%*	27%*	64%*	27%*		
Hill Janajati	Count	24	11	38	7	49	23
	% within	49%	48%	78%*	30%*		
Tharu	Count		16		16		18
	% within		89%		89%		
Dalits	Count	4	4	7	4	9	6
	% within	44%	67%	78%	67%		
Total	Count	37	34	54	30	72	58
	% within	51%	59%	75%*	52%*		

* The differences are higher than the combined confidence intervals. This confirms there are differences in the two populations.

As presented in Table 5.4, about two-thirds of higher-caste women in the hills, about half of the *Janajati* women in the hills and the plains, and most of the *Tharu* (89 per cent) women stated that increased confidence was an outcome of the men's migration. Around two-thirds of the research participants stated that they had improved their ability to speak in front of a group of people. These changes had taken place due to their additional responsibilities, basically, their roles in group meetings and activities. However, it would seem that only about one-quarter of higher-caste women in Sunsari found that their confidence and public speaking capacities had changed⁹⁰. This was possibly because some of these women were either living in extended families, were newly-married girls, or did not have group membership.

⁹⁰ Because of the small sample size, the difference between Sindhupalchok and Sunsari in relation to the changes in higher-caste women's public speaking capacity is not higher than the total of the confidence intervals, that is, ± 25.14 and ± 26.24 , respectively.

While taking on additional responsibilities, these women would not have been able to develop their confidence if they had not received help from their family and group members. As shown in Table 5.5, women referred to more than one factor which contributed to their increased confidence. Some of these were family help, exposure to different places, and learning from groups and organisations.

Table 5.5: Sources of Increased Confidence of Women Left-Behind

District of respondents			Family help	Learning from group	Exposure	Total
District	Sunsari	Count	46 (79%)	38 (66%)*	34 (59%)	58
	Sindhupalchok	Count	46 (64%)	64 (89%)*	37 (51%)	72
Total		Count	92 (71%)	102 (78%)	71 (55%)	130

* The differences are higher than the combined confidence intervals. This confirms there are differences in the two populations.

As shown in Table 5.5, more than three-quarters of the women in Sunsari, and about two-thirds in Sindhupalchok⁹¹, stated that their family was the reason for their increased confidence, in that they could make decisions and share their views with a group of people. The family bond would usually come either from the husband or from the parents of the women left-behind. Similarly, two-thirds of the women in Sunsari, and most of those (89 per cent) in Sindhupalchok, reported community groups as the source of their learning⁹². As shown in Table 6.5 (see Chapter 6), the higher number of women as group members in the mountain district of Sindhupalchok was one of the reasons for this. Exposure of the women to group training and visits had given increased confidence to a little over half of the research participants in sharing their views. This confidence was reflected through their ability to share their views in public places, meetings, and social events. Around two-thirds of the research participants confirmed that they were more vocal than previously, and did not feel hesitant in airing their views

⁹¹ Although there is a difference in the percentages between the districts, they are indicative only. The confidence intervals do not confirm this as a significant variation and may be due to chance.

⁹² Confidence intervals confirm the variations between the districts.

when required (see case Nep004/43, Chapter 7). Despite this increased confidence through a greater variety of actions, the women still had some challenges and restrictions because of the socio-cultural structure and institutions.

Gender-Based Violence

During this study, the female research participants cited many cases of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the research clusters. About one-fifth had experienced physical attack, and about half of the research participants were scolded by their husbands or in-laws, among others. As the World Health Organisation has outlined, the nature of gender-based violence has been categorised into four groups - physical, sexual, psychological, and deprivational⁹³ (Krug et al., 2002). Each type carries the possibility of psychological harm for the women (Krug et al., 2002, WHO, 1996), as well as reproducing exclusion, loss of respectability, condemnation, and reinforcing of the exploitative structure (Jakobsen, 2014).

Physical Violence

The women left-behind shared different stories of physical violence against them, either from their husbands or their in-laws. One-quarter of the research participants in Sunsari, and 13 per cent in Sindhupalchok, had faced physical attacks⁹⁴ in their lifetime⁹⁵. These attacks included slapping, punching, burning, scratching, pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, biting, shaking, poking, and hair-pulling, among

⁹³ This includes both of the social and economic aspects.

⁹⁴ Given the low count of research participants, the differences are indicatives only as the confidence intervals for Sunsari is ± 10.99 and ± 7.77 for Sindhupalchok.

⁹⁵ Research conducted in Nepal found that more than 51 per cent of women had experienced some forms of gender-based violence in their lifetime, whereas 25 per cent had faced physical violence. The sexual violence was reported as high as 46 per cent (Lamichhane et al., 2011, Puri et al., 2012). As the information about gender-based violence is reported based on the experiences of women during their lifetime, the physical attack incidences between the women left-behind and other women are similar.

others. These attacks were primarily perpetrated by their husbands when they were at home, or by their mother-in-law in some cases.

These findings are also supported by further research conducted in Nepal (Rai, 2011). Rai argued that migrant workers often tortured their wives after their neighbours or relatives gave them false information. In addition, this research revealed some cases where husbands, after being fed wrong information by relatives about their wives, had tried to bring home a second wife (Rai, 2011). The study also found that most of the women were looked upon suspiciously and tortured verbally and physically by family members and others in society for talking and walking with a male. Therefore, women make every effort to avoid particular situations in order to protect themselves from different forms of gender-based violence.

Generally, as presented in Table 5.6, the physical attacks were higher among *Dalit* women, followed by other caste groups⁹⁶. During the current research, many cases of physical attack were recorded. The following cases are some examples of physical violence among the women left-behind (pseudonyms used).

Radhika, a 34 year old *Dalit* woman from Sindhupalchok was badly beaten by her husband at home after he returned from migration. When a group of women went to save her, Ram attempted to attack them and asked why they were poking their nose into his family issues. She left her home and had been living with her parents for the last six months with her two children.

Sita, a 29 year old *Dalit* woman from Sindhupalchok was badly beaten by her husband and fell into an oven in which she was cooking her food. This burnt her leg and her cheek. She carries a number of large burn scars on her left leg and cheek. Her husband flew to Saudi Arabia a month after this incident.

⁹⁶ Although there is a small sample size and the confidence interval for physical attacks on *Dalit* women is ± 25.25 , the difference between *Dalits* and other caste groups can still be confirmed given the higher violence rate.

In Sunsari, when a 32 years old *Tharu* woman Sabita's husband returns home every two years or so from Qatar, there is a routine of physical abuse. She said that he slaps her every day because he does not want Sabita to talk to anyone and participate in groups and meetings. Sabita has completed her school education and used to serve as a treasurer for a community group, but she has dropped her community involvement because of her husband's pressure. She said that her husband has asked some of her neighbours to spy on her activities and report to him.

In Sunsari, a 47 year old higher-caste woman Tara's husband 'Kamal' has attacked her many times when he used to return from Qatar. These days, he neither calls her nor remits money. Tara has been living with her four children and runs a small grocery shop. Her first daughter has stopped her schooling and started working.

Thakan, a 37 year old *Tharu* man, does not want his wife to participate in groups and meetings. However, Shanti is an active member in some groups in Sunsari. This has been the reason for many physical attacks on Shanti. Shanti said that he mostly pulls her hair and punches her. Thakan considers her *netini*⁹⁷ who does not get any benefit from joining the groups. Shanti said that she had some peace during the research period, because her husband was in Qatar and she was continuing her community group participation.

There are several other cases of physical attack on women left-behind by their husbands either before or after migration⁹⁸. The reasons for these physical attacks include: doubts about extra-marital relationships, not offering food to husbands as ordered, not handing over money to the husband, joining groups/committees, and

⁹⁷ The word '*neta*' is used for leaders. Although there is no specific word for women leaders, many men use the word '*netini*' to humiliate women leaders.

⁹⁸ In Sunsari, at a neighbouring cluster to the research site, a fatal incident took place during the research period. *Kanchhi*, a 45 year old *Janajati* woman, had a great life when her husband *Kanchha* was working abroad. However, when he arrived home in May 2012, he heard various negative rumours about *Kanchhi* and attacked her physically. Because of a fatal attack, *Kanchhi* died and *Kanchha* has started serving a life-sentence in prison (KI013).

talking to/smiling at a man. One of the research participants mentioned, in one of the focus group discussions that women had been sustaining such violence because of their inability to bring these cases out. Another participant echoed the same sentiment and added that women had provided scope to continue the violence because they considered the problem as a household issue.

Psychological and Deprivational Violence

Naved (2003, p. 7) defines psychological violence “as any act or omission that damages the self-esteem, identity or development of the individual”. Psychologically violent actions include, but are not limited to, deception, humiliation, verbal abuse, mobility restrictions, and forced isolation from the family and community, threatening to harm the individual, intimidation through words or gestures, controlling behaviours, and the destruction of possessions. The current research has found that many of the participant women have been victims of one or another form of psychological violence in the home (see Table 5.6).

As presented in Table 5.6, about half of the women in the plains of Sunsari faced mobility restrictions; however, the percentage differences could not be substantiated by confidence intervals. Verbal abuse was also found to be high (68 per cent) in Sindhupalchok⁹⁹. A focus group discussion participant said that the women in nuclear families were considered to be under-supervised by their husbands, and therefore, there were efforts to control them from afar.

⁹⁹ Differences were confirmed based on the confidence intervals.

Table 5.6: Types of Gender-Based Violence

Caste group by districts (N=130)		Total women	Mobility restrictions		Group restriction		Scolding by husband		Physical abuse	
			Count	% within	Count	% within	Count	% within	Count	% within
Higher caste	Sunsari	11	10	91%*	6	55%	3	27%*	1	9%
	Sindhupalchok	14	7	50%*	4	29%	13	93%*	2	14%
Dalits	Sunsari	6	5	83%*	5	83%	6	100%	5	83%
	Sindhupalchok	9	2	22%*	-	-	7	78%	3	33%
Hill Janajati	Sunsari	23	8	35%	6	26%	5	22%*	5	22%
	Sindhupalchok	49	11	22%	2	4%	29	59%*	4	8%
Tharu	Sunsari	18	5	28%	3	17%	6	33%	3	17%
Total	Sunsari	58	28	48%	20	34%	20	34%*	14	24%
	Sindhupalchok	72	20	28%	6	8%	49	68%*	9	13%
Both total		130	48	37%	26	20%	69	53%	23	18%

* The differences are higher than the combined confidence interval. This confirms there are differences in the two populations.

As mentioned above, when the men migrate, the women have to take on additional responsibilities, and therefore, they meet many different people during the course of their work. However, as some research participants said, Nepalese society does not accept women's external involvement or women meeting men individually in the absence of their husbands. Similarly, if a woman leaves her house alone and works outside, she could face many challenges. In this way, women's mobility is considered unsafe, and the women vulnerable to sexual exploitation, but on the other hand, women who are sexually exploited are considered to be impure. As can be seen, a range of different types of restrictions were reported by the research participants.

Some other examples of restrictions included going out alone to do shopping, dealing with men, presenting in groups and community meetings, and making decisions about employment, among others. These restrictions were imposed by husbands or in-laws as part of the general norms of society. As seen in Table 5.7, a little over one-third of women from nuclear and extended families reported that they did not have the freedom to travel to undertake some of the activities that men were traditionally

supposed to do. These restrictions are defined as protection by parents-in-law or male members of the family.

Table 5.7: Women's Mobility Restrictions in Research Areas

By caste group			By age group		By family type		
Higher caste	Sindhupalchok N=14	7 (50%)	Below 20 N=89	38	Family	Nuclear N= 63	22
	Sunsari N= 11	10 (91%)*		43%			35%
Dalits	Sindhupalchok N= 9	2 (22%)*	Above 41 N=41	10	Children	Joint N=67	26
	Sunsari N= 6	5 (83%)*					39%
Tharu	Sunsari N= 18	5 (28%)	Total	24%	No N= 9	Yes N=121	5
Hill Janajati	Sindhupalchok N= 49	11 (22%)					56%
	Sunsari N= 23	5 (28%)	Total	48	Total	Total	36%
Total N=130	Sindhupalchok N=72	20 (28%)					48
	Sunsari N=58	28 (48%)*	37%	37%			

* The differences are higher than the combined confidence interval. This confirms there are differences in the two populations.

Based on caste-groups, the restrictions are highest among the high-caste groups and *Dalits*. Nearly all Sunsari higher-caste and *Dalit* women were discouraged from going out of their homes to undertake activities alone, while only one-quarter of *Janajati* were restricted in this way. The concept of maintaining purity was one of the reasons for mobility restrictions of the higher-caste women, while for *Dalits* in Sunsari, it was because of the reported gossip and jealousy of neighbours¹⁰⁰.

Similarly, the age of the women was another factor that facilitated or restricted their mobility¹⁰¹. As the age and number of children increases, the mobility restrictions would be fewer among the women. A 45 year old female research participant said that women of this age would not be suspected of having extra-marital affairs and stated, “*Hami jasta budhi lai kasle herchha ra, budha le sankha garnu?*” (Our husbands are not suspicious of us - who are going to look at old women like us?).

¹⁰⁰ The total number of female *Dalit* research participants was small among the overall number of research participants. Therefore, these figures are indicative only.

¹⁰¹ These percentages are indicative only because of the small sample size.

The women who confronted their husbands about the mobility restrictions, on the one hand, were deprived of decision-making and different benefits and services, and on the other hand, many faced psychological torture. A *Janajati* woman said that she would have not been ‘there’ if she did not have her children with her. She said, “Either I would have died or gone to somewhere, where my husband would never be able to contact me”. Similarly, a higher-caste woman made the metaphorical expression that she would like to go into the Koshi River¹⁰² when her husband frequently humiliated her. The first case above was blamed because she gave birth to a son who was suspected as not being conceived by her husband¹⁰³, while the second case was forced to be tested for HIV after her husband returned from foreign employment¹⁰⁴.

By caste and ethnic group, deprivation was higher among higher-caste and *Dalit* women, who faced mobility and group restrictions. *Janajati* and *Tharu* women were found to be in a relatively better position. Traditionally, the *Janajati* (including the *Tharu*) women have enjoyed relatively more freedom than the other groups of women in Nepal (Tamang, 2011; Furuta & Salway, 2006).

Overall, around half of the women in Sunsari, and one-quarter of the women in the hills, reported some form of mobility restriction against them¹⁰⁵. In one of the focus group discussions, a male research participant said that women in nuclear families had less supervision and had the chance of being easily spoiled. However, the participants in the hills had more flexibility than those in the plains. The historical acceptance of women who had returned from being trafficked, for example in the villages in Sindhupalchok (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008), was identified as an indicator of the

¹⁰² Koshi is a big river in the area and usually people die easily if they do not have excellent swimming skills. Thinking about the river is a metaphorical expression for suicide.

¹⁰³ During the interview, the female research participant said that the boy was conceived by him.

¹⁰⁴ HIV tests in Nepal are voluntary and one cannot be forced to do so.

¹⁰⁵ Because of the small sample size, the percentages are indicative only.

acceptance of mobility in the district. Similarly, the limited mobility of women outside of their cluster was reported as another reason by some research participants. When women are in their cluster, their activities can be easily policed by family members, relatives, and neighbours. Therefore, they are always under someone's surveillance, and have only limited scope to interact with outsiders.

In addition to these restrictions, there were a number of other social factors which restricted women's mobility. Three of the social leaders stated rumours about the extra-marital relations of the women left-behind as one of the main factors. In a men's only focus group discussion, one man¹⁰⁶ said that women who had been left-behind had been violating the existing cultural practices in the area, because they had freedom in the absence of their husbands. Similarly, two male social leaders said that the women were taking advantage of their freedom by having multiple sex partners in the absence of their husbands. These statements represent men's perceptions about the women left-behind.

Similarly, the male-dominated media played a major role in forming negative opinions about these women. The social leaders and opinion-makers, for example, would follow the newspaper reports and give similar examples. One higher-caste political leader in Sunsari said that the women left-behind had spoiled their society because they had extra-marital affairs, citing recent reports from a local newspaper. Thus, these generalisations of a few cases to all women who had been left-behind served to keep all these women under surveillance and victims of restrictions in their everyday lives, despite extra-marital relationships being exaggerated by the patriarchal media. Therefore, women tended to censor their own behaviour by limiting their interactions with individuals.

¹⁰⁶ A total of six men between 25 and 35 were in the group discussion.

Other Forms of Violence

In addition to physical and psychological violence, women in Nepal shared other forms of gender-based violence. During this study, one female focus group participant said that she was placed under regular pressure to have children until she gave birth to a son. It is considered to be very important to have a son to continue the family heredity in a patriarchal society. Therefore, women had the pressure of giving birth to a boy to continue their family line; this applied equally to women living with their husbands (Koolwal, 2007).

Similarly, this research found a number of polygamous men, despite having their wives at home. Three research participants, for example, Maiya and Kumari, *Janajati* women and Tara, a higher-caste woman found their husbands to be illegally married to other women and remitting money to the new wives¹⁰⁷. Other forms of violence included fake phone calls or invitations to have food or drinks, touching women in market places and on public transport, and teasing and harassing. Therefore, women made every effort to ensure that they were accompanied by a family member when they went out of the house.

However, most importantly, some women research participants said that they would expect their husbands' moral support on a regular basis. A total of 19 per cent of left-behind women said that they would be happy to do whatever they had to do 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, if their husbands would share a few words of encouragement and appreciation. They said that the husband's kind words would be strong contributing factors to their happiness. Therefore, family help was found to be an important element in preventing gender-based violence at home and in the community.

¹⁰⁷ In the case of women's migration, research has found that around 14 per cent of migrant women find their husbands living with other women on their return (Bhadra, 2007).

Preventative Actions

The women left-behind had multiple challenges in preventing gender-based violence. They faced accusations of adultery if they did not comply with the traditional cultural values and practices, either intentionally or by mistake¹⁰⁸. Therefore, women left-behind were conscious of avoiding such accusations through a number of preventative measures. These actions are called ‘self-censored actions’ in this section. As presented in Box 5.2, examples of such actions include: avoiding gatherings, not wearing shorts and bright clothes, not chatting with men, seeking help only from relatives, being indifferent in conversations with men, and staying indoors¹⁰⁹.

Box 5.2: Examples of Safe Practices

- not wearing brightly coloured new clothes;
- not going out alone (without a member of the family) to the market place or meetings;
- not going to restaurants and eating out;
- focus on ‘must attend’ events only;
- going out in the early morning, in the evening, and at night; and
- not talking to, or smiling at, a man.

Decision-making with the husband was identified as another preventative strategy. In household decision-making, about one-quarter of the female research participants requested approval from their husband’s parents to start any activities; and most of them consulted their husbands in making any decisions or to inform them as soon as possible if they had to make any decisions without prior information. About one-quarter of the research participants said that they would keep receipts for all their expenses. A *Tharu* woman, for example, said that she had kept all receipts because they

¹⁰⁸ Nep010/46, Nep023/29, Nep042/47, Nep047/27, Nep068/38 and Nep056/60

¹⁰⁹ KI013, KI004, Nep070/30, Nep047/27, Nep035/32 and Nep037/34

were important evidence of her expenses. During the research, one development worker, highlighted the importance of preventative action and said that,

Women are very often accused of behaving improperly when the man is absent. Such accusations, or the danger of such accusations, are powerful mediums of social control- it causes women immense stress as they have to always deal with the possibility of this happening, and thus tend to heavily self-censor their behaviour. They have to go to great lengths to be overly-correct and even then, they might still not escape such accusations which are often made out of jealousy because the woman receives money, the remittances (KI009).

Therefore, to prevent such accusations, the women took various precautions. For instance, one female research participant in Sunsari stopped her regular morning-walk because she would see men walking in the street. However, there were a number of actions that people in the community took to prevent women from false accusations and rumours, as purity and honour is one of the reasons for gender-based violence in South Asian societies (Rudnick, 2009; Furuta & Salway, 2006). According to one participant, if people start talking negatively about a woman and give her husband and family members negative information, a woman cannot live with the husband when he returns home. Therefore, these women continuously try to avoid such accusations. On the contrary, if they decide to stay at home without connecting with their neighbours, they are considered to be disrespectful, two research participants said. Therefore, striking a balance between preventative actions and managing social connections was identified as one of the challenges for the women left-behind in the research areas.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked into the impact of men's migration on the women's workload and gender relations at home, and has found that the women left-behind are

generally overburdened after their husbands migrate. The workload increases for multiple reasons, including the construction and maintenance of houses, agricultural work, fodder and forage collection, money management, community activities, and shopping, among others. The workload among the women who are living in nuclear families increases more than those in joint families, as the latter receive help from their extended family members. However, the women in nuclear families enjoy more freedom than the women in joint families if they manage their workload carefully, as they do not face everyday supervision. At the same time, the women living in nuclear families have challenges in hiring male workers to assist them because this could be interpreted against them. Rumours against their personal character that are spread to their husbands could jeopardise their family life. Therefore, the first priority of the women in nuclear families is to take help only from their parents and siblings.

About two-thirds of women in Sindhupalchok, and more than three-quarters in Sunsari, said that parental help was their first priority in acquiring assistance. In addition, they become very selective about the external workers when they decide to recruit them for casual work. For example, they hire someone from the neighbourhood if work is performed publicly, such as in the agricultural fields. However, the activities in the home are primarily assisted by relatives. This research has found that workload management practices help women to enhance their skills and confidence to perform a wider variety of activities. In addition, participation in community groups and subsequent exposure are mentioned as additional sources of increased learning to enhance confidence when they have family assistance.

Despite the above factors, women in both nuclear and extended families have faced different forms of gender-based violence – one-fifth of the female research participants, for example, have experienced physical abuse during their lifetime; more than one-third were restricted from joining groups and community organisations; and

more than half were scolded by their husbands. The mobility restrictions were also affected by the age of the women – younger women had more restrictions than older women, and higher-caste women had more restrictions than *Janajati* and *Tharu* women for a number of cultural reasons. In addition, women experienced other forms of violence, including pressure to give birth to a son, or to have many children, by their husbands. As a result, the women left-behind make efforts to be overly-correct in their actions to comply with traditional values and practices. However, they face challenges in striking a balance between preventative actions and managing social connections and networking.

Chapter 6 – Women’s Decision-Making and Community

Participation

Introduction

This chapter discusses the experiences of the women left-behind, particularly in regards to their roles in decision-making and participation in community groups and activities. The focus is on women’s roles in making financial, family, and migration-related decisions, and the effects of the length of men’s migration on the women’s scope to make various types of decisions at home. In addition, the findings are presented in relation to the freedom that the women have enjoyed after the men’s migration, and their subsequent involvement in community groups. This chapter has also documented the benefits of these roles to the women, either individually or as a group, based on their caste and ethnic identity, and the geographical location of the research participants.

The findings suggest that, in general, the men tried to make household decisions remotely; however, these efforts to reproduce patriarchy and reinforce gender inequality early on created tension between husbands and wives. However, the physical distance between the husbands and wives and the duration of the migration created spaces for the women to enhance their freedom, exposure, and decision-making abilities.

This chapter is divided into two sections; the first section looks at women’s decision-making after the men’s migration, while the second elaborates upon women’s community participation and benefits, before concluding the chapter.

Decision-Making

Decision-making is a critical dimension of power within the household in Nepalese society as it reflects the authority and image of each individual. Therefore, as discussed in Chapter 2, this research has investigated the decision-making role of the

women left-behind in relation to money management (including household debt), food management, and family rituals, building on the work of Mukherjee & Kundu (2012), in addition to migration decisions and the relationship between these decisions and the duration of the migration.

Financial Decisions

A large number of women left-behind had access to money after their husbands left them behind, and many of them had decision-making roles (Table 6.1). For example, around three-quarters of the women left-behind in the plains of Sunsari, and around one-quarter in the hills of Sindhupalchok, had money management roles. The differences in the context of the hills and the plains contributed to the variations between the districts. The women in Sunsari had small plots of land or were landless. Therefore, they had to buy their own daily necessities, which their husbands could not control from afar. Similarly, more than three-quarters of the research participants in the district were living in nuclear families, which also gave them relative freedom in decision-making. However, many of the families in the hills of Sindhupalchok had land holdings which were used to grow food items from their own farm as subsistence farmers. However, they also had difficulties in getting to a market place because of geographical difficulties, as many of them had to walk for several hours to reach a nearby town.

Financial decisions could easily bring about disputes between husbands and wives in these families. Therefore, the women had to take some preventative measures, regardless of the amount of money they spent at home. For example, nearly half of these women had updated their husbands about the expenses, including small expenses which were less than 1,000 rupees (US\$11). However, major spending, for example, the purchase of assets, jewellery, and expensive items if any, were made in consultation

with their husbands even if they were not in communication for long periods of time.

One *Tharu* woman from Sunsari said,

Our life has changed after my husband's migration. We have some money for our regular expenses and emergencies; children have got schooling opportunities; and I have joined groups and participated in group meetings and other events. I have visited many new places; met officials and politicians; and widened my knowledge about group and government services with the group membership. These all have increased my ability to take many decisions at home, but I always make my all efforts to make my husband understand the rationale of any major financial decisions before they are made (Nep017/29).

The women in the hills did not incur regular expenses, and did not have opportunities to make regular phone calls to their husbands, as most were living in a joint family where the in-laws would make the major financial decisions. Therefore, the level of consultation for decision-making was relatively lower in the hills than in the plains.

By caste and ethnic group, more than three-quarters of the women among the Hill *Janajati*¹¹⁰ and *Tharu* had more significant money management roles than the women from the higher-castes and the *Dalit* women, particularly in the hills. Traditionally, the former group of women have enjoyed more flexibility than others (Furuta & Salway, 2006; Tamang, 2011), and this was reflected in the financial decision-making processes in the research areas. However, in the plains of Sunsari, the women from all caste groups had to purchase their own daily necessities and to make relatively insignificant financial decisions. This was reflected in the fact that about

¹¹⁰ Differences between districts in financial decision-making were confirmed at 95% confidence intervals for higher-caste and Hill *Janajati* women. However, because of the small sample size of *Dalit*, this is taken as indicative only.

three-quarters of higher-caste, and nearly two-thirds of *Dalit* women, had only minor money management roles in the plains. In addition, with the migration of men, women had more opportunity to take part in other decisions, including family- and food-related decisions.

Table 6.1: Women’s Decision-Making after Men’s Migration

Caste group		Money management (≈ US\$11)		Food management		Family rituals		Total research participants	
		Sunsari	Sindhu-palchok	Sunsari	Sindhu-palchok	Sunsari	Sindhu-palchok	Sunsari	Sindhu-palchok
Higher caste	Count	8	3	9	9	9	6	11	14
	% within	73%*	21%*	82%	64%	82%	43%		
Hill Janajati	Count	17	12	18	37	15	30	23	49
	% within	74%*	24%*	78%	76%	65%	61%		
Tharu	Count	15		16		14		18	
	% within	83%		89%		78%			
Dalits	Count	4	2	4	6	1	7	6	9
	% within	67%	22%	67%	67%	17%*	78%*		
Total	Count	44	17	47	52	39	43	58	72
	% within	76%*	24%*	81%	72%	67%	60%		

* The difference between the district populations is higher than the combination of confidence intervals at 95% confidence level.

Family- and Food-Related Decisions

In Hindu society, men make the majority of the decisions within the home and outside (Agarwal, 1995, 1997; Luitel, 2001; Morgan & Niraula, 1995; Shrestha & Conway, 2001); however, this research has found a number of differences in households from which the men had migrated. Here, most of the women left-behind were not in the shadow of their husbands in terms of family-related and food-management decisions. Nearly two-thirds of the women left-behind played a part in family-related decisions in the research areas (see Table 6.1), such as in family rituals, including children's marriages (*bibah*), naming (*nwaran*), feeding (*pasni*), special birthdays (*pachasi*), holy-thread (*bratabandha*), and similar cultural practices.

As well, there were no major differences between the districts in these types of decisions, as about two-thirds of the women in both districts had been part of such decision-making. Among the different caste groups, the participation of higher-caste women in family-related decisions in the plains was higher (82 per cent) than in the hills. The joint family was mentioned as the limiting factor in the hills. However, this was consistent among *Janajati*, but varied among the *Dalit* women¹¹¹.

Overall, there were differences between Sunsari and Sindhupalchok in relation to money-management decisions, and women in the plains had more important roles than those in the hills. One of the reasons for this was that the women in the hills live in extended families where the father-in-law usually makes the decisions. However, there were no major differences in decision-making between the districts in relation to food-management and family rituals. There were two reasons for this, as Osella & Osella (2000) argued – first, men pay attention to those decisions that have direct monetary involvement, whereas these activities did not have immediate financial consequences. Second, these events occur on only a few occasions in the life of an individual. In addition, the women also have significant roles in implementing decisions related to kinship. To organise a marriage, for example, the matching of a boy and a girl was the broader family members' role. Once a boy and a girl had been identified, the mother had the key role of negotiating with the daughter while the father negotiated with the boy. Therefore, perhaps, it may be in the strategic interests of men to invite women into these decision-making processes, an NGO leader said.

¹¹¹ Because of the small sample size of *Dalit* and higher-caste women, these differences are indicative only. This figure has a large confidence interval (+-25%) for the two figures, as the sample size of the *Dalit* women was very small in the research sites, but despite this, the figure is higher than for the plains at a 95% confidence level.

Similar to family-related decisions, more than three-quarters of the women had significant decision-making scope in relation to food-management in both districts. As they did not have a diverse choice of foods, three research participants said that the women could continue preparing *Dal-Bhat* for their families as usual, except in some, where the husbands or in-laws had specific requirements or tastes.

Migration Decisions

In approximately two-thirds of the research participants, the women said that their husbands made the migration decisions without consulting them (see Table 6.2). By caste and ethnic group, more than three-quarters of *Tharu* and higher-caste, and about two-thirds of Hill *Janajati* men, made these decisions without consulting their wives. In many cases, these women were not even aware of their husbands' migration plans, particularly, where they were going and how much money they spent in order to migrate, until they had left home. One higher-caste woman said that she was told that her husband would go to Saudi Arabia just before he departed. However, a few months after her husband left, she received a message that he had become stranded in the United Arab Emirates on his way to Iraq. She received this information only after he was in need of additional money. In addition, some other women¹¹² also said that they did not have a complete picture of their husbands' plans before they migrated.

¹¹² Nep026/27, Nep037/34, Nep040/25, Nep042/47, Nep165/81 and Nep180/30

Table 6.2: Decisions about the Migration of Men

Research participants N=130		Family decision	Man's decision	Other	Total	
Caste group	Higher caste	Count	6	18	1	25
		% within	24%*	72%*	4%	
	Hill Janajati	Count	25	46	1	72
		% within	35%*	64%*	1%	
	Tharu	Count	4	14	-	18
		% within	22%*	78%*	-	
	Dalits	Count	6	9	-	15
		% within	40%	60%	-	
Total		Count	41	87	2	130
		% within	32%*	67%*	2%	
District	Sunsari	Count	19	37	2	58
		% within	33%*	64%*	3%	
	Sindhupalchok	Count	24	48	-	72
		% within	33%*	67%*	-	
Total		Count	41	87	2	130
		% within	32%*	67%*	2%	

* Differences between the family and the men's decision are higher than the combination of confidence intervals at 95% confidence level.

When giving reasons for this, three of social leaders and one focus group participants said that the men were the decision-makers in Nepalese families and were supposed to earn a living for the rest of the household members. Therefore, the man would be under pressure to find a good job and earn enough to cover the family expenses. One of the participants said that this was one of the reasons that many men would make much effort, but not share all of the information with their wives, because failure could be defined as *namarda* (unmanly¹¹³). Therefore, women would often get the information only after the men had arranged their work and made travel arrangements. In addition, a small number of women in Sunsari did not have any information about their husbands, or who had made the decision, and where they were working.

¹¹³ *Marda* is the opposite of *namarda*. When a person is a *marda*, he makes money, owns his family and property, and takes care of them. However, a *namarda* is one who does not have a regular source of income, is unsuccessful in his efforts, and cannot make enough to support his family.

Length of Migration and Decision-Making

Decision-making and household dynamics changed according to the length of the men's migration. While men made an effort to make remote decisions for those at home in the immediate period after migration, the women left-behind gradually took increased responsibilities, and the decision-making progressively moved to the women's domain. As shown in Table 6.3, a very small number of women had decision-making responsibilities for land and business within the first year of their husbands' migration, and this had changed to about one-third of women after three years. The scope to make decisions changed with the length of migration because the migrant men became disconnected from the local context, and the women had gained more local information in order to make these decisions, two research participants emphasized. More than half of the female research participants said that they were more confident in taking on these responsibilities after they had started making decisions at home, although the decisions were consultative.

As Table 5.1 (Chapter 5) demonstrates, the remittances were used for multiple purposes, but remote decision-making could be very complex over the period of absence. Therefore, the men had gradually negotiated with their wives about the expenses, while at the same time, the wives kept them abreast of their expenditures¹¹⁴. Furthermore, the decision-making by the women also varied according to the nature of the expenses; for example, loan repayments had to be made as agreed in advance, and some recurrent expenditure (children's school fees¹¹⁵, utilities) had to be accounted for, as these expenses varied little over time. However, investments in land and business,

¹¹⁴ Nep001/42, Nep011/32, Nep026/27, Nep029/22, Nep036/30, Nep057/31, Nep073/45, Nep155/50 and Nep165/51

¹¹⁵ A change of children's school had increased education expenses for some families in the plains district of Sunsari.

and construction or repairs of the house were the areas in which women had more decision-making scope over time, as presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Women's Decision-Making: Remittance Use in Relation to Years of Husband's Overseas Employment

Number of year in foreign employment N= 130		Construction/ maintenance of house	Schooling of children	Health	Land and business	Loan payment	Others
Up to 3 years	Count	9	10	4	4	16	16
	%	7%*	8%*	3%	3%*	12%	12%
Over 3 years	Count	36	46	7	40	34	34
	%	28%*	35%*	5%	31%*	26%	26%

* Difference between populations for the two periods is higher than the combination of confidence intervals at 95% confidence level.

These findings (Table 6.3) also provide a picture of the changing priorities of expenses over the period. The families which had experienced more than three years¹¹⁶ of migration, for example, prioritised the spending of remittances on land and business, and the construction and repair of their homes. Although they had to spend the remittances in multiple areas, more than one-quarter of the women, who had spouses in foreign employment for more than three years, had spent remittances on construction and maintenance of homes, while more than one-third had spent them on education and business or land. The families of the migrants who had taken a loan for their migration spent a share of the remittances on paying off the loan in the first couple of months or years. However, the loan repayments often continued over a longer period because they

¹¹⁶ Usually, foreign employment takes place for two to three years and workers have to return back home after the completion of their contract. However, circular migration takes place in most cases, and therefore, men start exploring further foreign employment. If a man returns home after his first contract, or is on holidays after a year or two years of work, and he is mostly happy with the activities that his wife has performed at home, he would let his wife make decisions more independently once he returns back to his work (Nep004/43, Nep050/42 and Nep057/31).

were taking additional loans to purchase assets¹¹⁷. This research has found that only a small percentage of women had made decisions to invest money in land and business in the first three years, but this rose to about one-third of the women after three years. This further explains the increased scope and opportunities for the women to spend money on high-value assets with the increased period of money management.

Community Participation and Benefits

This research has found the existence of different types of community groups and organisations, ranging from voluntary organisations to service agencies and informal groups, in both of the research districts¹¹⁸. A detailed overview of these community organisations is given in Annex 4. This section presents the findings in relation to the freedom of the women left-behind to participate in such group activities, their membership in these groups, and the benefits of these groups for the women, both personally and collectively as a group.

Freedom

With the migration of the men, the women left-behind gained freedom from the everyday supervision of their husbands. However, there were efforts to control their mobility, sometimes from afar. For example, about half of the women in Sunsari, and more than a quarter in Sindhupalchok, said that their husbands or family members¹¹⁹ (Table 5.6) were reluctant to allow the women to go outside to perform various

¹¹⁷ Nep005/24, Nep011/32, Nep012/30, Nep013/37, Nep036/30, Nep050/42 and Nep052/32

¹¹⁸ In the research areas of Sunsari and Sindhupalchok, there was a wide range of community groups and organisations. For the purposes of this research, they are divided into five categories, according to the nature of their work. There are advocacy groups, savings and credit cooperatives, resource management committees, cultural and religious forums, and NGOs and development agencies.

¹¹⁹ The difference between the districts is indicative, and the variation is less than the combination of the confidence interval at a 95% confidence level.

activities. However, their mobility could not be curtailed for some activities, such as shopping, visiting the children's school, meeting government officials, taking children to health facilities, and joining cultural programmes such as weddings and festivals. These activities could not be avoided and women were primarily responsible for them when they were living in a nuclear family¹²⁰. For these reasons, more than three-quarters of the research participants said that they had increased opportunities to participate in these events after the migration of their husbands.

In addition, freedom was represented by women's membership of community groups. As presented in Table 6.4, more than three-quarters of the women left-behind had been members of at least one community group. However, there were differences in group membership of the women between the higher-caste women in Sunsari and Sindhupalchok. The higher-caste women in the plains had a lower level of group membership because two of them had dropped out of the groups which had mostly *Tharu* women, and this number had a significant impact on the small sample. Overall, women in the hills of Sindhupalchok had higher levels of group membership than those in Sunsari. According to two focus group discussion participants, one of the key reasons for this was the higher levels of gender flexibility among the Hill *Janajati* women.

¹²⁰ KI012, KI013, Nep004/43, Nep023/29, Nep036/30, FGD03SI, FGD06KA and FGD05KA

Table 6.4: Group Membership of the Women Left-Behind

Districts		Higher caste		Hill Janajati		Tharu		Dalit		Total N=130	
		Member	Total	Member	Total	Member	Total	Member	Total	Member	Total
Sunsari	Count	2	11	14	23	16	18	6	6	38	58
	% within	18%*		61%		88%		100%		66%*	
Sindhupalchok	Count	14	14	45	49	-	-	9	9	68	72
	% within	100%*		92%		-		100%		94%*	
Total	Count	16	25	59	72	16	18	15	15	106	130
	% within	64%		82%		89%		100%		82%	

* The difference between the district populations is higher than the combination of the confidence intervals at a 95% confidence level.

However, the continuity of these freedoms after the husbands' return was found to be challenging, as more than one-third of the research participants shared their doubts about whether they could continue these changed roles after the return of their husbands.

Group Membership

This research has found a positive trend in women's participation in community groups and organisations after their husbands migrated, leaving them behind. In the research districts, for instance, around 42 per cent of women left-behind were members of at least one type of community group before their husband's migration. This had almost doubled (on average) after their husbands' migration.

By district, as shown in Table 6.5, only a small percentage of the women in the plains of Sunsari were a member of such groups, which rose to two-thirds after the migration of their husbands. Similarly, in the hills of Sindhupalchok, women's group membership increased from about two-thirds to almost 94 per cent of the participants¹²¹.

¹²¹ The group membership of women was high in the hills before the migration of men for two reasons. One, the district had community groups, like the community forest user group, which had mandatory membership of both men and women from the user households, and second, the *Janajati* women in the hills had more flexibility, traditionally (FGD03SI and FGD04SI).

In addition, some women were members of more than one group. About one-quarter of the women in Sunsari, and half in Sindhupalchok, were members of more than one group after the migration of their husbands. This was five per cent and 21 per cent respectively before emigration in Sunsari and Sindhupalchok. The women who benefited from the membership of one group had then become members of more groups. In addition, those women who had demonstrated leadership were also invited to join other groups.

Table 6.5: Women’s Membership in Groups (before and after male migration)

Group membership		Sunsari		Sindhupalchok		Total	
		Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
None	Count	51	20	25	4	76	24
	% within	88%*	34%*	35%*	6%*	58%*	18%*
One or more group	Count	7	38	47	68	54	106
	% within	12%*	66%*	65%*	94%*	42%*	82%*
Total	Count	58	58	72	72	130	130

* The difference between the two populations before and after the migration of the husband is higher than the combination of the confidence intervals at a 95% confidence level.

This research has found that the higher-caste and *Dalit*¹²² women in the plains had more restrictions on their mobility than in the hills (see Table 5.6), because traditionally, the women from the higher-caste groups had more restrictions in order to maintain their purity (Rudnick, 2009), while *Janajati* women had some flexibility (Furuta & Salway, 2006; Tamang, 2011). The reason for the difference in the membership levels of the women between the two districts was for two reasons: First, more than two-thirds of the research participants were from the *Janajati* group, whereas this was slightly above one-third in the plains. Second, the women from joint families had more scope and spare time to participate in group activities than in nuclear families.

¹²² Because of the small sample size of the Dalit women, these percentages are indicative only.

Two-thirds of the research participants in the hills were from joint families, whereas this was 17 per cent in the plains.

Table 6.6: Group Membership of Women Left-Behind by Caste and Ethnicity (before and after male migration)

Caste group		Number of women in groups before husband's migration		Total	Number of women in groups after husband's migration		Total
		None	Group member		None	Group member	
Higher caste	Count	11	14	25	9	16	25
	% within	44%	56%		36%	64%	
Hill Janajati	Count	42	30	72	13	59	72
	% within	58%*	42%*		18%*	82%*	
Tharu	Count	15	3	18	2	16	18
	% within	83%*	17%*		11%*	89%*	
Dalit	Count	8	7	15	-	15	15
	% within	53%*	47%*		-	100%*	
Total	Count	76	54	130	24	106	130
	% within	58%*	42%*		19%*	82%*	

* The difference between the two populations before and after migration of husband is higher than the combination of the confidence intervals at a 95% confidence level.

Based on their caste and ethnic identity, as shown in Table 6.6, membership of all groups of women had gone up. However, measurable changes were recorded among the Hill *Janajati*, *Tharu*, and *Dalit* women. Among the Hill *Janajati* women, this almost doubled from 42 per cent, while *Tharu* women's participation rose more than five-fold. Among the *Dalit* women, all of the research participants became members of at least one group in both districts, after their husbands migrated. These figures indicate that the involvement of the women left-behind in community groups increased in general, but it increased more among *Janajati*, *Tharu*, and *Dalits*, while it decreased among higher-caste women.

The reasons for increased group membership of the women left-behind were mentioned as increased interest, freedom, and affordability, as well as invitations by the groups. A 31-year old higher-caste woman, from the hills of Sindhupalchok, said that she was not a member of any groups when her husband was at home, but she became motivated to participate when she understood the importance of these groups for

enhancing her learning and exposure, and the possibility of mutual support. In addition, she also had money to spare for group fees and levies after she had started managing the family money.

However, about one-quarter of the women left-behind did not have any group membership, either because of the social stigma (Thieme & Wyss, 2005) associated with them, the group's policies, or family restrictions. The women who were not members of the community groups reported a reluctance of the groups to accept them as members because of social stigma. A 25 year old higher-caste woman from Sunsari, for instance, who had been a victim of domestic violence, was neither allowed to live together with her in-laws after her husband's death, nor did she have any other support options. As well, the local groups did not accept her membership because of negative rumours spread against her¹²³. Similarly, three research participant women had concerns about the stringent policies¹²⁴ of some of the community groups. Family restrictions were mentioned as another reason.

Group Leadership

This study has found many women taking leadership positions in various community groups and organisations. These leadership positions are defined based on the three main office bearers' positions: Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer. A review of the group records of 13 of these organisations, in which both men and women were members, revealed that about one-quarter of the key positions were held by women. However, out of the total amount of women in leadership positions, about two-

¹²³ One research participant said that she was blamed as a characterless woman, and suspected of having extra-marital affairs after her husband's death. However, she was working for a beauty-parlour and women's hair shop (KI004).

¹²⁴ A non-negotiable repayment date, a penalty for not attending group meetings, and members having to take a loan from the group fund were named as some of these.

thirds were from higher-caste families, while the other third were from *Janajati* groups. The *Dalit* women did not serve as chairperson, secretary, or treasurer of any of these groups.

As well, a review of the group records of 14 'women's groups' found that they also had mostly higher-caste women in leadership positions. About three-quarters of the decision-making positions involved higher-caste women as the leaders. Three social leaders said that the greater representation of higher-caste women as key office bearers is a reflection of the caste-based hierarchy in such community groups. Higher-caste women usually took lead roles because of their Nepali language abilities, and the social hierarchical structure which raises them above the others.

Among the women who had taken leadership roles, some were serving more than one group. The following case presents an example of changes in the leadership status of a woman before and after her husband's migration:

A 43 year old *Maithali*¹²⁵ speaking woman migrated to Sunsari after her marriage. She did not have basic Nepali-speaking ability when she migrated to Sunsari about 20 years ago. She learnt the Nepali language after her marriage, and had developed language fluency. Her husband migrated to the Gulf in 2003. When her husband was at home, she was a member of a mother's group. She also used to work as a casual labourer together with her husband on construction sites. After he migrated, she gradually stopped working as a construction labourer and started a small grocery at home. She also joined community groups and meetings in addition to the mother's group. This gave her exposure to different groups as well as an opportunity to share her views in public forums. She gradually became a member of more groups. In June 2012, she was a member of nine different groups.

¹²⁵ *Maithali* is a regional language spoken in the south-eastern and south-central regions of Nepal.

This research has found that the women left-behind had opportunities to enhance their leadership skills once they started participating in community groups and organisations. In addition, they gained exposure and learning from these groups and their activities. However, in the *Tengra Toli* cluster of Sunsari, two higher-caste women gradually withdrew their group membership. These women decided to leave their groups because the *Tharu* women had challenged the traditional practices between *Tharu* and higher-caste women. Out of 11 upper-caste families who were living close to the *Tharu* village, only one woman was serving as a member of a group in which *Tharu* women were in a large majority. Two of them had recently left these groups, while eight others did not have any group membership at all. The women shared two key reasons for leaving the groups – first, the *Tharu* women had started discussing and contesting a number of agenda items in the group meeting; for example, caste-based discrimination. This offended them as they did not have any interest in participating in this issue. Second, the higher-caste men did not want their wives to continue in groups which posed challenges to their identity. However, this may point to the changing power relationships in the villages, among different castes of women.

Exposure and Collective Action

There has also been increased exposure and learning of the women left-behind; for example, a 45 year old *Tharu* woman from Sunsari was proud to be a member of a land rights group. She said that the group had been successful in constructing a meeting house (called *Bhumi Ghar*¹²⁶), despite the local authorities creating several obstacles. She said, “I did not have the capacity to speak in front of five people before joining the

¹²⁶ *Bhumi* stands for land and *Ghar* for house. The *Bhumi Ghar* was constructed by the community group members who had been fighting for their rights over the land on which they had been living for more than 15 years.

group. However, I have been a leader these days¹²⁷”. She had the opportunity to visit government offices and to understand their services during the process of the construction of the *Bhumi Ghar*. Similarly, a 43 year old *Tharu* woman, who was a member of nine different groups, is another example. She acknowledged that 10 years of continuous involvement in collective action, exposure from these actions, and learning, were the key contributing factors in her achievements. Increased financial skills from money management roles, the encouragement of local NGOs to participate in community activities, and invitations from political parties to participate in their events, were other elements that contributed to her increased participation.

A 37 year old *Janajati* woman expressed how overwhelmed she was by the support that she received from the groups that she belonged to. She said, “I do not see any disadvantages of groups, rather I have benefited by my regular involvement in the group. If we were not united, we would have been homeless”. Here, she was referring to the group's collective efforts to keep them safe by protecting them from the local municipality, which had made forceful efforts to remove them from where they had been living since the early 1990s. Out of the total research participants in Sunsari, around one-third were poor and had been living on public land (called *Eilani*). The local municipality asked them to move out from the area on many occasions, but they did not have any other place to live. Therefore, they united as a land rights group, which was a major strength. Two social leaders said that the land rights group had both men and women as members, and were working for the tenancy rights of the landless people.

The women who were in groups, and who continued their participation in group activities, pointed out the multiple benefits of group membership. As shown in Table 6.7, out of the total women who were members of at least one group, more than three-

¹²⁷ Nep001/45, a research participant woman

quarters gained knowledge from the information and exposure in the groups. The groups were a source of information for the members about the services around them. In addition, the members learnt about their political, cultural, and economic rights from the group meetings and discussions. More importantly, about two-thirds of them said that they had gained the confidence to speak in front of people.

These groups provided women with opportunities to participate in meetings with different stakeholders and to visit different venues to achieve group objectives. These meetings and visits had given exposure to more than half of the women left-behind. Beyond these issues, the group savings fund had acted as a source of credit. More than three-quarters of the group members had taken advantage of the savings fund. In addition, some of the group members had developed new skills, and had also had opportunities to take a break from the household chores when they participated in group activities. An overview of the various benefits of group membership is provided in Table 6.7¹²⁸.

Table 6.7: Advantages of Group Representation to the Women Left-Behind

Districts N=130		Learning	Speaking	Exposure	Access to money	Forced saving	Collective work	New skills	Out of chore	Other
Sunsari	Count	38	30	34	37	37	34	9	38	14
	% within	66%*	52%*	59%	64%*	64%*	59%	16%	66%*	24%*
Sindhupalchok	Count	64	54	37	63	65	37	7	64	2
	% within	89%*	75%*	51%	88%*	90%*	51%	10%	89%*	3%*
Total	Count	102	84	71	100	102	71	16	102	16
	% within	78%	65%	55%	77%	78%	55%	12%	78%	12%

* The difference between populations in the two districts is higher than the combination of the confidence intervals at a 95% confidence level.

Group membership had given these women an identity as a group member, as well as opportunities for bringing women's voices into the decision-making process at

¹²⁸ These percentages are calculated based on the total research participants (n=130). The total number of women as group members was only 106, that is, 38 in Sunsari and 68 in Sindhupalchok.

the local level. Highlighting the importance of group participation, a 32 year old *Janajati* woman made an analogy of *gamala ka phool* (flowers in a vessel) to the women who did not have any group membership, suggesting that “they may look beautiful in the eyes of others, but they are heavily dependent on their masters”. Similarly, a 28 year old Hill *Janajati* woman said that women who lived within the boundaries of the home would not understand the world beyond this border. Therefore, she recommended that women should participate in community activities, and go beyond their comfort zones to understand the world around them.

A 31 year old *Tharu* woman referred to the women who did not have group membership as *kuwa ko bhyaguta* (frogs in a well). The frogs in a well consider the well as the entire world until they come out and see the larger world, which is beyond their imagination. A 33 year old *Janajati* woman from the plains of Sunsari said, “We have opportunities to meet our fellow friends, and learn new ideas and skills from group members”. She stated that women would not make any money if they were involved exclusively in household chores, despite their hard work. However, only monetary income is counted as a major contribution to the family. Therefore, she encouraged women to come out from behind their boundaries and compete in the public space carefully and strategically to gain both name and fame. A 49 year old higher-caste woman said that women used to be confined to household activities, but their roles had changed with the increasingly open environment, the husband’s migration, and involvement in community groups. She added that the women should be able to take advantage of these opportunities to enhance their exposure and confidence. This evidence indicates the importance of women’s exposure to different places, services, and organisations, as well as the benefits of their collective actions for themselves and their family members.

Other Benefits

In addition to exposure and learning, this research has found multiple advantages for the women when they participate in community groups. As presented in Table 6.7, the women left-behind shared more than a single benefit in having group membership. For example, more than three-quarters of the female research participants said that they were saving money in the group fund. A similar percentage of them had accessed credit from these groups. Similarly, more than half of the women found the group as a place to connect and network with different people, and to gain exposure to different places. Due to the group participation, slightly more than half of the women said that they had a place to share their problems. Beyond these advantages, group participation had provided welcome breaks for a large number of women (79 per cent) from their household chores.

In Sindhupalchok, the women had only limited opportunities to get out of the home and to go to the market place because they lived in remote villages and had little transport in the hills, apart from walking. However, the community groups provided opportunities to most (89 per cent) of the women to interact with their fellow members and to learn from their peers. In addition, banking was not available in the remote hills and the group savings provided most of the research participants (90 per cent) with a space to save some of their money which the women could use when they had a need. These groups also served as contacts for various service-providing agencies and NGOs in the area. Therefore, those women who were group members had the opportunity to participate in the meetings of these organisations, as well as their training and other skill development events.

In the plains of Sunsari, women had relatively easy access to banking facilities, roads, and transport, and they also had opportunities to go to the market place to buy regular supplies for themselves and their family members. Therefore, the female

research participants had more alternatives than the women in the hills. These are the main reasons why the percentage of women who saw group membership as an opportunity to save funds, and to have access to credit and learning, were relatively fewer in the plains than in the hills. However, access to the group savings fund was particularly beneficial for the women who had limited literacy and numeracy, as well as to the *Dalit* and *Tharu* women who had no previous exposure to financial institution procedures. In addition, these groups offered opportunities to undertake collective work for more than half of the research participant women in the plains. In Sunsari, these collective activities were also conducted as a result of some of the threats that the research participant's families faced, as stated earlier.

While highlighting the group benefits, a 33 year old higher-caste woman, from the plains of Sunsari, told her story of when her daughter had a snake bite – if she had not been a member of a group, she said that “probably, I would not have saved my daughter”. The group not only provided financial assistance for her, but some of the group members escorted her to hospital in the absence of her husband. A 39 year old *Tharu* woman said that the group had been instrumental in preventing domestic violence for their group members. This was because the group had created a sense of collective pressure against the perpetrators.

Some women left-behind were not just participating in community groups as members, but had also been working to organise many other women. For example, one 29 year old Hill *Janajati* woman motivated some of the women from her area to form an *Ama Samuha* (mothers' group). She spent about a year motivating women to form a 25-strong group. The group was formed in late 2009 and operates as a self-help group. However, she said that the group had received interest from more women from the neighbourhood after the group conducted a number of activities. The group provided a platform for mutual support and to assist members in need if they had emergencies or

celebrations, including festivals, or any other events such as weddings. In addition, the group organised a sanitation campaign to keep their area clean through the provision of a rubbish bin for each member household.

The women, as successful group members, had increased their reach to many other collective actions. A 29 year old Hill *Janajati* woman said that she visited many offices and institutions to advocate for women's issues collectively with other women from her neighbourhood. This helped her to understand the services of government agencies, as well as the programmes which had not been implemented. More than half of the research participants gained such exposure after they joined various advocacy campaigns. She added that she gained increased confidence and courage with the success that they had achieved with some of their advocacy work. Similarly, a 43 year old *Tharu* woman said that she had developed negotiation skills through various groups. She was invited to a range of meetings and activities that were organised in her village. Furthermore, she felt respected in her community. She said that she would not have been part of any community groups if her husband was at home. She said, "I learnt to read and write after I joined the group, and I am very happy because I can write my name¹²⁹". Similarly, a 43 year old *Tharu* woman started representing a political party after she developed confidence through her women's group. The women found these skills to be very important in a society where discrimination and stratification have been deeply entrenched based on individuals' gender and caste (Thoms, 2008). As Woodward (2004) argued, organisational affiliation is symbolic to the construction of identity, which is formed through interactions between people (see Chapter 7).

¹²⁹ Nep017/43

Family Help and Happiness

Generally, as Suikkanen (2011, p. 149) stated, “an agent is happy when she judges that her life fulfils her ideal life-plan” according to popular whole life satisfaction theory. This encompasses both the momentary phenomenological states of the agent as well as long-term well-being. Multiple elements play a part in the happiness of an individual. Among the female research participants, group membership and decision-making scope provided immediate happiness for them. One female research participant said:

With my husband’s migration and employment, we have made some significant achievements. We did not have anything and we started from zero. We neither had jobs nor a place to live. Now, we have our own house; the children are in private schools; and I am running a vegetable shop. I am very happy that we have made all this with my husband’s migration and his moral support. I am a member of a savings and credit group, and the group has been helpful in many incidents when I have needed help (Nep071/39).

A number of research participants said that moral support and family help were important elements in maintaining their happiness and family relationships, particularly between husbands and wives. As Hammel & Yarbrough (1973) stated, family relations could be durable and happy when there was frequent contact and continued support between the husband and the wife. One research participant said that regular contact with their husband and other family members was very important in making the left-behind women happy. This would also assist in disseminating an implicit message about the positive relationship with family members, to those people who policed the women’s roles, activities, and actions. Therefore, in addition to decision-making and community participation, regular communication with the husband was noted as one of the means to achieving happiness.

Therefore, where there was found to be continuing encouragement from the husband, and further family support, these were considered to be the keys to women's happiness at home. In addition, their happiness increased through improved social respect, the schooling of children, the availability of different foods and clothes, construction or maintenance of the home, access to television and mobile phones, among others. Some of these factors offered short-term, while others offered long-term, happiness and well-being. The following paragraphs provide the reflections of some of the women left-behind:

Our life changed after my husband's migration. I have got some money for regular expenditures and emergencies; the children have schooling opportunities, and I have joined groups and participate in meetings and other events (42 year old *Tharu* woman, Sunsari).

I used to be known as '*tan*' (dominating) before my husband's migration, but the same people have started addressing me as '*tapain*'¹³⁰ (respected). This is simply because my husband is in foreign employment (37 year old *Dalit* woman, Sindhupalchok).

With my husband's foreign employment, we now have significant achievements. We did not have anything and we started from 'zero'. We neither had jobs nor a house to live in. Now, we have our own house and the children are in private schools (32 year old higher-caste woman, Sunsari).

Truly speaking, we are in this place from the road. We did not have any social status. With the foreign employment of my husband, I cannot compare our social status - before and after. I feel respected and consulted in our village these days (40 year old higher-caste woman, Sunsari).

¹³⁰ In the Nepalese language, people use different forms of 'you' – *tan*, *timi*, *tapain*, and *hajur*. The word '*tan*' is dominating, '*timi*' is used for friends and children, '*tapain*' is used with respect for friends and seniors, and '*hajur*' is used with high respect.

Happiness was achieved after the women who had been left-behind started gaining respect as individuals in their community. Similarly, they felt that their views were not ignored as they were in the past. Additionally, they had been achieving happiness through increased exposure, leadership capacity, and their ability to express their views.

A 32 year old higher-caste woman from the plains of Sunsari is an example. She had invested the remittance from her husband in land, a house, and other businesses, and generated money to cover her household expenses from local investment. She appreciated her husband who supported her morally and financially. After taking on all the responsibilities, she has established herself not only as a household manager but also as an entrepreneur in her village. She invested her money in those areas which could give her regular interests; she bought a house and was sending her children to private schools. She managed all the recurrent expenses with the money that she would generate locally, without spending the remittances from her husband.

When women were left-behind as the *de facto* head of household (mostly in nuclear families), they were also left with a heavy load of intra-household and community responsibilities. The women in joint families had gained some freedom from the everyday supervision of their husbands. Although these responsibilities increased their workload in some cases, the women could still be happy when their husbands were positive and encouraging, and the women had opportunities to develop their different skills, a number of research participants said. These could be the means to increasing their long-term happiness.

The increased social responsibilities of the women also helped to develop their leadership qualities. For example, a little over half of the female research participants

said that they had developed the confidence to take on new roles, while two-thirds had increased their ability to speak in front of people (Table 5.4). The leadership roles increased their voice in household decisions by communicating their opinions to the husband, and in discussing different issues with family members. This included persuading family members to consider their plans.

Over two-thirds of the women said that their happiness had increased with better income and through their enhanced roles within the household and in society. Thus, this research does not confirm the findings of Borraz et al. (2010), who claimed migration as the reason for the unhappiness of those left-behind. When there were positive ties between the husband and the wife, as well as a reasonable income, there was evidence of positive incremental effects on the women, as shown in Box 6.1.

Box 6.1: Incremental Effects of a Good Relationship between Husbands and Wives

- Women have increased respect within the family and in society;
- The household economic condition has improved, resulting in the increased social status of the family;
- Children have increased access to education and nutritious food;
- Women are in leadership positions and have improved management capacity; and
- Women and children have access to better healthcare facilities, including private health service providers.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the impacts of men's migration on women's decision-making and participation in community groups and organisations. The experiences of the women left-behind were affected by many factors at home, including their geographical location, social values, norms and practices, types of family, and the behaviour of the husband before migration, among others. The women said that they

had increased levels of financial, family ritual, and food-management roles. A large number of women stated that they had access to money after their husbands left them behind through their increased decision-making roles, especially those with an extended length of the men's migration. While men made efforts to make remote decisions, the women left-behind gradually took on increased responsibilities, including decisions about land, housing, and high-value items such as jewellery¹³¹.

Women's roles in those decisions which did not have any direct involvement with money were higher than on financial decisions. About two-thirds of the women were part of family ritual-related decisions, and about three-quarters participated in food-management decisions in both districts. However, only about one-third of women were consulted by their husbands about their migration-related decisions. Many of the research participants received information about their husband's migration only after the decision had been made, and a few women did not have complete information about their husband's activities.

In addition to decision-making, men's migration had also contributed to bringing freedom from everyday supervision for the women left-behind. However, about half of the women in the plains, and one-quarter in the hills, said that there was a reluctance to allow such freedom by the husband and his in-laws, who had discouraged women to go out and meet other people. These challenges were high among the higher-caste group, and relatively low among the *Janajati* group of women in both districts. Despite these restrictions, freedom was reflected by women's membership of community groups; that is, more than three-quarters of the women had been a member of a community group, and this was higher in the hills than in the plains. There was a two-fold increase in

¹³¹ The decisions were documented only on the buying of these assets, as selling was hardly encountered during the research.

women's membership of community groups after their husband's migration. In addition, group membership and subsequent learning had provided women with opportunities to develop their leadership potential; as a result, there were a number of women taking leadership roles in these groups, including key office bearers' positions. These had resulted in women's collective action for the benefits of women and their wider community, including protection of their homes from being removed from the clusters where they had been living for almost two decades. In addition, the female research participants mentioned some other benefits of group participation, including access to credit, the collection of savings, exposure to different places and services, and the learning and development of new skills.

Highlighting the importance of such groups, the research participants stated that their work against gender-based violence had helped the women to enhance their confidence to speak out, and to learn new knowledge and skills. Some of the groups had worked as pressure groups to protect their members from domestic violence. As Kilby (2006) stated, these groups have worked as self-help organisations with rural women to enhance their confidence and their voice.

Group membership and decision-making had provided increased happiness for the research participants. This was further boosted and maintained through moral support and family help, particularly between husbands and wives. Therefore, the continuing good relationship between a woman and her husband, who was living abroad, was always a priority for the women left-behind. Therefore, the women tried to be overly-correct in their behaviours by complying with traditional values and norms. Finally, this research argues that freedom from everyday supervision, and exposure to performing various activities in the household and the community had provided access to information and networks, which gave them an enhanced ability to negotiate greater decision-making roles in the household over the period of migration.

Chapter 7 – Men’s Migration and The Social Position of Women

Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings about the changes in women’s social position after the migration of the men. The results are based on the structured interviews and the follow-up in-depth discussions with the women. In addition, they are supplemented by document reviews (the records of community groups), and observations of group activities in the research areas. This chapter is divided mainly into two parts. The first section covers the changes in the social position of the women after being involved in decision-making and participation in the community space, and discusses the determinants of their social position. The second part of this chapter analyses the factors that have contributed to women’s participation in community groups, in addition to a critical examination of the barriers which had created obstacles for them. Socio-cultural, personal, and behavioural factors are taken into consideration when identifying these contributing factors and obstacles. This research argues that the women left-behind have opportunities to improve their social position with the migration of the men, if they strategically manage the challenges and the factors that contribute to enhancing their position in the community.

Social Position and Determinants

As discussed in Chapter 2, the effects of migration on gender relations may be different in the short-term and the long-term, and they may not be the same to all individuals – some improve women’s positions while others erode them (Brochmann, 1990; Carling, 2005). Social position, which also influences the status of people, is the

place of an individual in a given culture and society. This is a subjective class¹³² created within the social hierarchy by a number of objective resources and actions (Lindemann, 2007). Generally, formal and informal networking and the leadership roles of individuals give them a higher social profile, status, and prestige within their reference group, together with improved self-esteem¹³³ and social recognition (Frable et al., 1997; Oh et al., 2014). This social recognition provides women with power in their community, and therefore, the women left-behind generally identified this as one of the important elements in making their lives happier, although there were multiple determinants of social position (Hadi, 2001; McEvoy et al., 2012). Therefore, the improvement of social position would create possibilities for greater mobility, higher self-confidence, and lower dependency on husbands, the traditional patrons.

Generally, the research participants stated that social position may be acquired in two different ways: first, people gain an elevated social position through inherited (known as ascribed) positions; and second, through developing their competencies (known as achieved). Achieved positions were difficult to acquire unless women had at least reasonable levels of self-esteem, and could show examples of remarkable performance; for example, leadership, educational achievement, or a significant improvement in economic status¹³⁴. These results are similar to the major indicators that Hadi (2001) used in relation to the position of women in Bangladesh:

¹³² Social classes are usually defined based on the economic well-being of individuals and are stratified within a social stratification system as: lower, working, middle, and upper class. Social position is ascribed by social class, but also achieved by money, power, culture, taste, identity, access, and inclusion.

¹³³ FGD06KA, KI001, KI004, KI006 and KI013. Self-esteem refers to a subjective evaluation of an individual and represents a feeling of self-respect. Higher self-esteem usually leads to positive results, whereas lower self-esteem can be counter-productive to individuals.

¹³⁴ Nep165/51, KI001, KI004 and FGD06KA

... (a) decision-making capacity which measures women's status in the family; (b) education for girls which relates to gender equity; and (c) the practice of dowry, a negative scenario from the secular perspective, indicating the prevalence of patriarchy and gender inequality (Hadi, 2001, p. 55).

The dowry could be contested as an indicator of women's position in Nepalese society, but as Ryan (2013) argued, women's position is determined within occupational and kinship structures, as well as through women's abilities and expectations of their roles in the community (McEvoy et al., 2012). The next section looks at these issues in more detail.

Ascribed Caste- and Ethnicity-Based Position

Caste- and ethnicity-based position is acquired at the time of birth by women and men. As mentioned in Chapter 4, both of the research areas have a majority, if combined, of two cultural groups – Hindus and Buddhists. About 59 per cent of the population in Sindhupalchok, and 73 per cent in Sunsari¹³⁵ are Hindus; and 38 per cent and four per cent are Buddhists, respectively (GoN, 2012c). The Hindus follow the caste-based structure and there have been interchanges of many structural practices between Hindus and Buddhists over time (Niaz, 2003). Therefore, in Sindhupalchok, in particular, there were many interconnected Hindu- and Buddhist-based cultural factors which determined the social position of women, whereas Hinduism was the major determinant in Sunsari¹³⁶.

¹³⁵ As per the population census of 2011, Nepal has around 80 per cent Hindus and 10 per cent Buddhists, and small amounts of other religious groups, including Christians, Muslims, *Prakriti*, *Kirant*, and others.

¹³⁶ The higher positions in society come through birth into a higher-caste family, whereas Dalits are still considered to be lower-caste people with a relatively lower social status. Traditionally, the Janajati and Tharu have a middle-level social position, while Dalits are at the bottom. Similarly, men have a

Out of the total research participants, about one-fifth were from a higher-caste, more than half were *Janajati*, and less than one-fifth were *Tharu* and *Dalit*. The higher-caste research participants were Hindu, whereas there was a mix of Hindus and Buddhists amongst the Hill *Janajati* group. The *Tharus* were divided between Hindus and *Prakriti*¹³⁷; while the *Dalit*¹³⁸ were a mix of Hindu and Christian. Although they were Christians, the *Dalit* research participants were considered to be lower-caste in Hindu society¹³⁹. Therefore, the women left-behind, based on their caste and ethnic identity, had ascribed social positions as either higher-caste, medium, or lower.

Family History

The social position of women is also acquired through family history. If a family member, either the husband or wife, for example, has had previous arrests or convictions, they would have a weaker social position in their community. These lesser positions are defined based on involvement in various activities, such as excessive drinking, gambling, fighting, addiction to drugs, and association with an act of crime, a number of research participants said. As a 40 year old Hill *Janajati* woman stated, if the husband was involved in one of these activities, the family members, particularly the wife, would suffer adverse effects. One 41 year old *Dalit* research participant said that her husband used to drink and act in a confrontational way with his neighbours for no particular reason before his migration, and she had problems joining community groups

higher position within the household and in society; and women do not have equal social standing as the men from the same caste group.

¹³⁷ A literal translation of *Prakriti* is 'nature'. A Majority of the *Tharu* research participants stated that they worship *Prakriti* as their god, and had identified themselves as people belonging to the *Prakriti* religion.

¹³⁸ The caste of the individual can be identified by their surnames/family names.

¹³⁹ *Dalits* said that they did not have any issues inside the Church, but they had an 'untouchable' identity in the community, where more than 80 per cent Hindus had been living.

in her neighbourhood because the group members were reluctant to accept her as a member. Similarly, the husband of a 48 year old higher-caste woman in Sunsari used to drink and attack her on a regular basis, while the husband of a 37 year old higher-caste woman was a drug addict. Both said that other women did not want them to join their women's groups, because the group members were scared of their husbands. However, both of them had an interest in being part of the women's groups and to benefit from the group activities. One woman was planning to move away from the village so that she would not have to carry the same burden to a new place.

Fifteen per cent¹⁴⁰ of female research participants in Sunsari stated that their husbands' behaviours were responsible for not gaining acceptance in their community and acquiring social respect, which could give women a social position in the long run. In addition, these women had a greater chance of facing gender-based violence, because they have less social capital than the other women. A total of 18 per cent of female research participants, including those who did not have any group membership, had been victims of at least one type of violence when their husbands were away. They had been victims of sexual harassment and/or eve-teasing, which is being followed, touched, stalked, or called bad names. These types of violence were usually targeted at women who did not have adequate family and social support¹⁴¹. Therefore, it was difficult to achieve a higher social position for those families who had a member with a bad reputation¹⁴², and their neighbours were reluctant to accept these women as their friends¹⁴³.

¹⁴⁰ With a possibility of variation of ± 9.19

¹⁴¹ There were some exceptions. Two women who had higher social status had been victims of these types of violence.

¹⁴² Nep041/41, Nep042/48 and Nep068/37 said that they had problems in society because of their husbands' behaviour.

¹⁴³ KI001, KI002, KI003, KI004, KI006, KI012, KI013, KI015, FGD05KA and FGD06KA

Similarly, if there was an explicit dispute between the husband and wife, the women from these families would often receive lower levels of social respect, and any form of assault, including physical, verbal, and psychological, from the husband before migration, or on his return, had negative implications for the social status of the wife, a number of research participants confirmed¹⁴⁴. A 48 year old higher-caste female research participant from the hills of Sindhupalchok said that women would not get respect in society if they were not respected within their own family. Therefore, family history and relationships within the family were found to be important markers of a woman's position in her community.

Destination Country

The destination country of the migrant was another determinant of women's social position at home. Some of the research participants said that the family members at home with a migrant relative in a developed country were placed in a relatively higher position in society than those families with a migrant relative in a middle-income or a low-income country¹⁴⁵. A 31 year old higher-caste woman said that the wives who have a husband working in a developed country, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Japan, or Australia, would gain high levels of respect in comparison to those women with a husband in other countries. The wives who had a migrant husband in Malaysia or the Gulf States were called '*Arabeka Shrimati*' (wives of the persons working in Arabia – the Gulf). The wives of British Gurkhas were known as '*Lahureka Shrimati*' (wives of *Lahure*)¹⁴⁶. Generally, *Lahureka Shrimati* had higher

¹⁴⁴ FGD06KA, KI006, and KI013

¹⁴⁵ FGD05KA, FGD06KA, KI002, KI006, KI003, and KI015

¹⁴⁶ FDG02SU, FGD05KA, FGD06, and KI013

social status in the community than of *Arabeka Shrimati*¹⁴⁷. Thus, the destination of the husband determines the social position of the women, although this was not the only determinant. One-third of the sampled women had their husband in Malaysia, a little over half in the Gulf, and around 10 per cent in high-risk, but low-income countries (such as Afghanistan and Iraq)¹⁴⁸.

Women's Performance and Age

Women themselves had possibilities for achieving upward social mobility. They could achieve the position either through demonstrated actions or by enhancing their knowledge and skills. During the in-depth interviews, the female research participants¹⁴⁹ emphasized that women would sometimes spoil their status in two ways: first, they would betray the trust of their husbands and violate the social norms; and second, they would not participate in community work which could promote gender equality and benefit a wider group of people. Some of the research participants said that women would accept their husband's or in-law's actions, such as intrusion in their decisions, under the assumption that it would reduce the risk of damaging their relationship with their husbands and in-laws. However, this acceptance or lack of action could also make them victims of discrimination at home and in their communities, and thus, actually depreciate their social standing.

In addition, the social position of women changes with the age of the women. Generally, older women have a higher position in society than younger ones; married

¹⁴⁷ Nep058/24, Nep041/41, and Nep032/30

¹⁴⁸ Generally, the few women who migrated to the developed countries moved mainly for education and had a higher level of education and skills when they returned back home (NEP022/49, KI013, KI009 and FGD06KA).

¹⁴⁹ Nep047/27, Nep055/31 and Nep062/41

than unmarried; and women with children than without¹⁵⁰. Similarly, the length of marriage was defined as another factor that would enhance the social position of women. A 40 year old Hill *Janaajati* woman said that the women with longer marriages would have higher social status than newly-married girls, and this was one of the reasons that women would make every effort to maintain their relationship with their husband. This could be one of the key reasons that the divorce rate is below 0.5 per cent¹⁵¹ in Nepal, but this is also a social strategy to keep a woman with a man even if he is abusive.

Community Actions

The social position of the women left-behind was reflected through different forms of actions that peers and community members undertook with them. These included an interest in meeting the left-behind women, requesting them to join community groups, paying them a visit, and asking them for a loan¹⁵², among others. As presented in Table 7.1, there were multiple actions that women had encountered. For example, more than half of the women from the plains of Sunsari were approached either to give them a courtesy visit or to invite them to community groups, whereas about a quarter of the women in the hills of Sindhupalchok did so. Similarly, over three-quarters of the women in Sunsari, and less than half in Sindhupalchok, were visited to request loans from them, simply because they were known to be receiving remittances. Financial transactions and women's decision-making roles were high in Sunsari, as stated in Chapter 6, and contributed to the higher percentage of visits. These research

¹⁵⁰ KI004, FGD06KA, Nep004/43, Nep022/48, Nep023/27 and Nep036/30

¹⁵¹ In Peru, the divorce rate was high among returning male migrants. Curran & Saguy (2001) stated that this was because the women left-behind would refuse to compromise their newly acquired egalitarian status that they had achieved after the migration.

¹⁵² Nep036/30, Nep004/40, Nep022/48, FGD06KA, KI001, KI004 and KI008

participants stated that they did not have these experiences before the migration of their husbands. They identified these visits and invitations as indicators of their increased status in society.

A focus group of men were of the opinion that the availability of money, which the women would receive as remittances, was one of the reasons why they were in higher demand. In addition, financial transactions were high in number in the plains because of access to the market, and therefore, higher numbers of women were contacted. The groups also invited women to join who could afford their monthly levies¹⁵³.

Table 7.1: Types of Changes in Behaviour of Society to the Women Left-Behind

Districts		Interested to meet	Requested to join community groups	Ask for money as loan	Total
Sunsari	Count	30	34	45	58
	% within	52%*	59%*	78%*	
Sindhupalchok	Count	19	16	32	72
	% within	26%*	22%*	44%*	
Total	Count	49	50	77	130
	% within	38%	38%	59%	

* The percentage difference between populations is higher than the combination of confidence intervals between the districts at a 95% confidence level.

By caste and ethnic group, more than three-quarters of *Tharu*, and about half of *Dalit* women, were requested to join such groups, whereas about one-quarter of higher-caste and Hill *Janajati* women were invited. Most *Tharu* women did not have any group membership before the migration of their husbands¹⁵⁴. In addition, there were a number of new groups, such as micro-credit groups, in the *Tharu* areas. As well, women started

¹⁵³ KI004, KI005 and Nep004/43

¹⁵⁴ KI004, Nep004/43 and Nep035/32

participating in groups, such as the land rights group, which had previously been dominated by men as the majority of group members¹⁵⁵.

A female social leader pointed out that the interest in meeting someone was an indicator of some level of status in Nepalese society. Usually, individuals pay visits to the leaders or seniors (in position and age) or the economically-rich. This was particularly important for *Dalit* and *Janajati* women who had been traditionally marginalised in their society based on their caste. The female research participants explained these behaviours as indicators of their recognition¹⁵⁶.

Confidence

As Pleskac & Busemeyer (2010) stated, the development of confidence is a long-term cognitive process of an individual, and these changes cannot be seen immediately. Therefore, with the increased period of men's migration and women's changed roles, the women could have a range of opportunities through which to gain confidence to take actions that men used to previously take. The women left-behind cited a number of changes in their actions over the period of the men's absence. For those women who were shy and accustomed to covering their face with shawls, the indicators of confidence were speaking in front of a group of people and sharing their views, participating in group discussions, presenting on behalf of a group, and speaking out against different forms of discrimination¹⁵⁷. The increased confidence of the women had helped them to enhance their social position.

One woman stated that some of these roles were challenging and painful initially, but they had offered the women scope to increase their exposure, and

¹⁵⁵ Nep001/42, Nep004/43, Nep010/46 and Nep023/27

¹⁵⁶ KI013, Nep125/50 and KI006

¹⁵⁷ Nep001/45, Nep004/43, Nep042/47, Nep092/42, Nep165/51, KI013 and KI004

subsequently, to develop increased confidence. A 45 year old *Tharu* woman (Radha, hereafter) from the plains district of Sunsari is one example.

Radha said that she was scared to speak with a group of people. She never had to face a group because her husband used to participate in community activities. However, when her husband went to foreign employment in early 2008, she had to participate in the land rights group meetings. Initially, she had difficulties in standing up and telling her name in front of the group. Gradually, she started speaking with the group members, and then with visitors, over a period of four years. Illiterate Radha also joined the adult literacy class, which was run by her group and started reading a few simple sentences and writing her name. She said that she did not now have any hesitation to speak in front of a group of people because of this (Nep001/45).

In addition to Radha, the data suggest that around half of the respondents in Sunsari and Sindhupalchok said that they had increased confidence in speaking to people and making decisions through their involvement in community groups and other activities¹⁵⁸. For example, a 43 year old *Janajati* woman in Sunsari did not have a national identity certificate or any other legal identity as a Nepalese citizen. When she needed to open a bank account to receive remittances, she was refused in the absence of a legal identity. Therefore, she had to collect supporting evidence from a number of government departments. This process, although difficult initially, helped her to learn the importance of citizenship, banking, and a marriage certificate. She said, “If my husband were at home, I would have been living as an illegal person at home¹⁵⁹”. When she received her citizenship, she opened a bank account, started receiving money at the bank, and increased her confidence in using the banking services. This is one example

¹⁵⁸ There was no substantiated difference between the districts as the confidence intervals were higher than $\pm 10\%$ confidence interval for both districts.

¹⁵⁹ Nep048/43

of women's exposure to services and subsequent elevated self-esteem after they had started taking on responsibilities.

One female NGO worker said that the additional roles that women had to perform in the absence of their husbands, had given them exposure and learning, and the gradual confidence to complete many roles that their husbands did not let them perform before their migration. The women had opportunities to learn to negotiate with suppliers, social leaders, and community members, through these increased roles and responsibilities¹⁶⁰.

The changed roles also contributed to changing the working approach of the women themselves. A 43 year old *Tharu* woman said that she learnt to manage her anger after she participated in community groups and meetings. She said that she had been the group leader because of her anger management skills, and within a couple of years of her husband's migration, she was one of the key people in her community who was invited to most of the community events in her area. With these events, her social prestige increased. She said, "nobody can dominate and exploit me these days, because I have gained experiences; been a leader of our society; and not been involved in anti-social activities"¹⁶¹. A 37 year old *Tharu* woman shared a success story which benefited some of the *Dalit* children because of their efforts:

Traditionally, *Dalit* had been deprived of information, services, and benefits, including health and education. However, when they were an organised community group, they received information about the services that the government provided for *Dalits*, but they had not received. This provoked action when a women's group visited a local primary school collectively and asked about the school budget that was supposed to benefit *Dalit* children. However, school management declined to give them the information. The group reported

¹⁶⁰ KI008, KI013, FGD06KA, FGD03SI and FGD07SU

¹⁶¹ She (Nep004/43) defined 'extra-marital sexual relationship' as anti-social activity.

the case to the government education office and made a series of visits to the school to get the information. As a result, the school had to disclose the information to local parents and guardians. With this, two members of the school management committee were found to be involved in the embezzlement of the school fund, and the *Dalit* children started getting the school bonus (Nep013/37).

These types of collective actions had helped the women to gain the confidence that they could access the services which were supposed to benefit them, but were hidden within the system. In addition, this case received much media attention, with journalists interviewing a number of local people, including female group members. The incident was reported as a successful community action to make service providers accountable, and the women were credited for their actions. These actions and subsequent successes had given the women increased status and social position¹⁶².

In addition, increased confidence had helped the women to develop alternative plans to manage their family. For instance, a 28 year old Hill *Janajati* woman observed a number of instances of inconsistent behaviour by her husband who had been working in Qatar since 2008. He frequently scolded and threatened that he would leave her with nothing. Therefore, she started working for a Child Development Centre (CDC), where she worked for 12 hours every week. In addition, she upgraded her house which she rented out to make extra income. She had the confidence that the income from her CDC work and the house rent would be enough to help her two children if her husband did not remit them any money. She said that she would not have thought about an alternative plan if her husband was at home. This was because he was very possessive and would not have allowed her to explore any outside options. There were a number of

¹⁶² FGD07SU, Nep004/43, Nep023/29, Nep036/30 and KI001

other women who had made alternative plans, either registering property as their own assets, or investing money in productive activities¹⁶³.

As Kamas & Preston (2012) argued, the confidence of these women made them competitive as well as more cooperative. Finding different livelihood options, taking leadership roles, competing with other members of the community, and taking risks to negotiate with service providers, are examples which demonstrate the women's enhanced abilities¹⁶⁴. The women, who did not have much opportunity to step away from their household chores, experienced greater exposure to social roles with the migration of their husbands, and had increased space to perform different roles within a patriarchal society¹⁶⁵. As Hay (2005) explained, the women as agents were motivated to act upon the world in their own particular ways, either within or against the social structures and traditions, which could be oppressive to them.

Besides meetings, discussions, and other forms of collective action, the women used songs as a means to motivate their peers to take action against the discriminatory practices that they had been traditionally facing. Many songs were used as a means to enhance the position of women. Among them, the following song was commonly sung in both research districts, and was sung by a research participant during one of the interviews (Nep036/30).

*Aafnei pourakh khanchhan, aafnei sip ma banchan,
dukha kasta sahera shristi yinle thamchhan,
asal mahan byakti haru yineile janmauchhan,
tara pani andhero ma jeeban bitauchhan,
ama didi banini ho kati baschhau dasi vai, sukha ko sandhei pyasi banera*

¹⁶³ KI001, Nep005/25, Nep021/24, Nep023/29 and FGD01SU

¹⁶⁴ FGD06KA, FGD05KA, FGD07SU and FGD03SI

¹⁶⁵ Nep004/43 and KI013

(You earn from their hard work, survive on their skill; take care of the nature; give birth to the big people; but, they live a dark life. Mothers and sisters – how long are you going to serve like a slave and wait for the good days to come).

This song inspired the women to come forward against different forms of discrimination, inviting them to become more independent. The song summonses mothers and sisters to wake up and come forward against slavery, and encourages them to stand up for their rights confidently. These types of songs were said to be a powerful means to organise women, and to increase their confidence to stand up against gender- and culture-based discrimination in their community and family¹⁶⁶. They said that the songs had been a medium for expressing women's agency at the local level and to collectively enhance the social position of the women.

Others

This research has found a number of factors that contribute to enhancing women's position and multiplying the benefits that accrue to them, including family support and encouragement¹⁶⁷. However, social position was also attached to a number of physical changes. The women who had their own house in the research clusters said that they had higher social status than the women who were in rented housing. Similarly, land ownership was another indicator. The following are examples of this:

A 32 year old higher-caste woman from Sunsari was one example. She had enhanced her social position after she started managing the money at home. She started lending money to other women as a money-lender and generated income to cover her household expenses, including food and drinks, and school fees for

¹⁶⁶ KI013, KI006 and KI002

¹⁶⁷ Refer to Chapter 6 for more details about family help and happiness.

her two children. She bought a two-storey house and had been sending her children to a private English-medium school. She had a television at home and owned a mobile phone. She found that she had more respect than before, and was consulted more often by her neighbours and the community leaders.

A 40 year old higher-caste woman from Sunsari said that they did not have any social status when her husband was in Nepal. After he (husband) started working in Iraq (and moved to Saudi Arabia later), her neighbours had seen changes in their clothes, food, and the children's education. In addition, they had bought a piece of land and constructed a house. These had given them an increased social status in her society. She did not have any comparison of status between 'before' and 'after' her husband's migration. She said, "We are here from the road¹⁶⁸ and we feel respected and consulted in the community actions these days".

A 51 year old Hill *Janajati* woman said that they had a difficult life when they had small children. However, the times had changed with the migration of her husband to Saudi Arabia in 2006. She did not have a shortage of money as it was before, and she could spare some money to pay group fees. She said that the change in economic status had changed the social status of the whole family and they had increased respect in society. One of her sons joined his father in 2010.

A 46 year old higher-caste woman from the hills said, "My neighbours did not give a single penny when I was sick. However, they would not say 'no' these days¹⁶⁹."

A 25 year old higher-caste woman, who married a *Tharu* man, had a similar experience.

¹⁶⁸ When people do not have a permanent place to live; do not own a house; and do not have a regular source of income, they often live in public places, including road sides, river banks, or forest land. A 40 year old higher-caste woman (Nep071/40) faced a similar situation before her husband's migration. However, she started constructing a house after purchasing a piece of land in one of the research areas of Sunsari. Her husband had been working in Saudi Arabia for the last 14 years, after his work in Iraq for a year.

¹⁶⁹ Nep073/46

Her social position had diminished because she married a *Tharu* man, which was against the social norms. She said:

I did not get a loan from the money-lenders when I was sick because I was poor. Therefore, my mother went to individual houses and collected donations like a beggar for my treatment. This has changed with my husband's migration. Now, everyone in our village is ready to lend me money if needed. They also come to my place and ask for some money if they are in need. They do not share their concerns about my marriage with a *Tharu* anymore (Nep007/25).

Similarly, a 28 year old *Dalit* woman in Sunsari felt respected in her community because her husband was in Qatar – “I am the wife of an *Arabe*¹⁷⁰”. She said that she did not have any other reason to gain a space in society rather than her husband's migration and some remittances. With these changes, there were multiple benefits for the women left-behind, with over one-third being regularly consulted by their fellow community members.

This evidence confirms the findings of Maharjan et al. (2012a), who stated that the woman's position was measured by the amount of remittances that she received at home and the wealth that they had accumulated. Therefore, the spending of remittances on construction or maintenance of the house, and purchasing land, had led to an elevated social position for the women left-behind. This also brought them additional benefits, such as participation in community groups and events, and access to credit.

The changed social position was also reflected in family relations. For example, a 37 year old *Tharu* woman said that she was respected in her community because of her changed economic condition and her involvement in community groups. In addition,

¹⁷⁰ Nep033/28

some of her neighbours wanted her daughter to marry their son¹⁷¹ because her husband was working in the Gulf and they were gradually becoming economically better off. A request to develop family relations is one of the indicators of increased status of a family in society.

Similarly, access to information, new skills, networking with community members, and leadership of women gave them respect and an elevated social position in their society. A 33 year old higher-caste woman said that the money, assets, and networking were related to the position of an individual in society; therefore, she had considered her husband's migration as a mission to accomplish a higher social status for herself and her family. In another case, a 42 year old *Tharu* woman said that she used to be called a *magne budhi*¹⁷² before her husband's migration. However, she was respected as kin after her economic status had changed, and she became an active member of a land rights group. Addressing someone as kin is an indicator of respect for a person in Nepalese society.

These cases explain how men's migration and the subsequent changes, community participation, and other factors contribute to enhancing the social position of the women left-behind. The income has allowed them to afford to purchase assets or to invest in business, which has enhanced their position in the community. The women also found freedom to join community groups and learn new skills. Nonetheless,

¹⁷¹ There is a practice of arranged marriage in Nepalese society where the parents of a boy (groom) are responsible for finding an appropriate girl (bride) for their son. Once they identify a potential bride, the family of the boy negotiates with the family of the groom. As part of this process, they make efforts to find a girl from a family with a sound economic status and social respect. The marriage takes place only after the families, and the boy and the girl, agree to it.

¹⁷² In Nepalese society, people are usually called by their kinship, not by their name. When people do not have anything at home, and they go from house-to-house and ask for food, the person is called '*magne*' (beggar), while '*budhi*' refers to an old woman. Collectively, the phrase, *magne budhi* is both dominating and humiliating to someone.

income alone was not enough; the women achieved more when they had support from their family members, particularly from their husbands. These benefits accumulated along with the increased confidence and agency.

Boosters and Barriers of Social Position

As discussed earlier, the accumulation of assets, and women's membership of, and participation in, community groups contributed to achieving an elevated social position. However, the membership of the women left-behind in community groups, and their participation in various social events, is only possible through various boosters; for example, a favourable socio-political environment, group decisions, language ability, and the family background of the women. If these factors were negative, they could create challenges for participation in community activities, and barriers to the upward social mobility of the women in their community. Therefore, the female agents, as Hay (2005) stated, had to keep themselves motivated to work within the boundary of social constraints and practices. This required them to overcome social obstacles, and to take advantage of participation boosters to achieve their social position. Participation, for the purposes of this research, has been defined at two levels – first, the membership of women in community groups; and second, women's contribution to discussions and playing a part in the agenda of meetings (Agarwal, 2001). The second refers to women's demonstrated performance, which is one of the contributing factors to improvements in women's social position.

Boosting Elements

There are multiple elements and events that boost women's position in society. This research has found that external intervention, gender-sensitive decisions, language ability, and a supportive family to be factors which contribute to women's participation

in community groups and organisations, and in enhancing their capacity, which are important in raising women's status, voice, and agency.

External Interventions and the Socio-Political Environment: When women face multiple challenges in participating in community groups and activities, interventions by external organisations were said to be important elements in promoting women's participation in community activities. The community groups formed with the help of NGOs, for example, usually also received help from NGO staffers to organise meetings, keep records, and motivate the women to participate regularly in group meetings. The land rights groups¹⁷³ and the *Dalit* rights¹⁷⁴ groups in Sunsari were supported by a local NGO known as Abhiyan Nepal, and a survivors' group¹⁷⁵ in Sindhupalchok by a female-led NGO known as GMSP¹⁷⁶. Assistance from the NGOs was regular and needs-based for such groups in both districts. The NGO representatives participated in the group meetings and assisted them to plan their actions and manage their accounts.

Some other groups had help from a distance, or no intervention at all, after a plan had been agreed with the support agency. The Community Forest User Groups (CFUG¹⁷⁷) and the *Tole* Development Committees¹⁷⁸ are such examples. These groups

¹⁷³ These groups are formed by people who were landless or living on public land. The purpose of these groups was to gain rights of tenure for the land that they had been occupying, or to find an alternative place where they could safely live. Because of these collective efforts, they had been living in the area, despite the efforts of the local municipality to displace them from the area.

¹⁷⁴ The *Dalit*-rights groups have formed *Dalits* groups which work collectively against caste-based discrimination. These groups have a national-level network which works as a policy advocacy group to develop affirmative policy and work with the Government of Nepal to form new and updated policies. At the community level, they work collectively to enhance their legitimate rights.

¹⁷⁵ Survivors' groups are formed by women who have been victims of trafficking or violence. These groups work to protect the potential targets and their group members from re-victimisation, and to promote the rights of the victims.

¹⁷⁶ GMSP stands for Gramin Mahila Srijanasil Pariwar (Society of Creative Rural Women).

¹⁷⁷ In Nepal, CFUGs are responsible for managing forest (common property) resources, collectively by the forest users. The users of the forests are organised as a group and they develop a forest

had a number of educated men and women (school teachers in most cases) as secretaries and treasurers who were capable of organising meetings and keeping records¹⁷⁹. These people were supposed to ensure equal participation and benefits for all group members. However, the office bearers of these groups were mostly men, and therefore, the decisions were dominated by them. A forest user group, for instance, had to allocate a total of 35 per cent of their resources to activities that would benefit women, *Dalits*, children, and marginalised groups, as per government policy (Department of Forests, 2009). However, some of the female research participants said that the resources did not actually produce any direct benefits for the women. The following case presents one such example:

In the hills of Sindhupalchok, local communities, in their user group (CFUG105), allocated 35,000 rupees (US\$390) to benefit the women. The money was supposed to be spent by the women's group. However, with the allocation of the funding, the executive committee of the CFUG decided that the amount had to be spent to build a community forestry building that was under construction. The interpretation of the executive committee was that the building would provide a meeting venue for the women (FGD04SI).

This is a classic example of male domination over the decisions of a community forest user group in the absence of external intervention. The budget allocation to the women was made according to the guidelines, but neither did it have any direct benefit for the women, nor did any of the women have a voice in the decision-making. As

management plan which is approved by the local Forest Office of the Government of Nepal. These groups have a mandatory provision to include both males and females from each user family as group members with equal voting rights.

¹⁷⁸ The *Tole* Development Committees are responsible for the management and development of their clusters, and are funded by the local municipality to perform their activities.

¹⁷⁹ FGD04SI, FGD07SU and KI06

Pokharel (2008) and Thoms (2008) argued, the benefits of pro-poor programmes in community forestry have not reached the poor and marginalised groups as expected, mainly because the executive committees of these groups are not inclusive, and they tend to “manipulate the things in favour of *aafno manchhe*¹⁸⁰” (Pokharel, 2008, p. 12). Pokharel further explained that about two-thirds of the members of the executive committees of such groups belong to advantaged caste groups, while the male to female ratio is 95:05. Although the policies of the community forest user groups encouraged women to participate, the women had to make continual efforts to gain a share of the benefits; they also added that external interventions could promote equitable benefit-sharing.

In addition, as an external intervention, political changes in Nepal were mentioned as one of the leading factors which encouraged *Dalit*, *Tharu*, and *Janajati* men and women to participate in the sharing of the benefits of development¹⁸¹. They added that the changes had created an environment for women's participation in community activities, as well as for the creation of community groups by different caste and ethnic groups. Therefore, there were multiple factors that contributed to enhancing women's decision-making, participation in community groups and social position. In addition to the absence of the close supervision of their husbands, which was a trigger of their mobility, factors such as changes in the socio-political environment and affirmative group policies were also motivating elements. Similarly, women's family backgrounds, language abilities, and levels of education to understand group meeting minutes, were the dynamics that gave women the confidence to take membership in these groups.

¹⁸⁰ People who are family relations, basically relatives.

¹⁸¹ KI002, KI005, KI006 and KI011

Gender-Sensitive Decisions: As discussed in Chapter 2, gender affects the social consequences of migration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005; Curran & Saguy, 2001; Hadi, 2001). Therefore, gender-sensitive decision-making by community groups and organisations was one of the factors which motivated women to participate in community groups and their activities. Gender-sensitivity in decision-making affects the socialisation of males and females, and reduces barriers.

As an example of this, a Community Forest User Group (CFUG106) changed their policy to include at least 33 per cent women on the executive committee, and also made a provision to allocate 35 per cent of their funding to activities decided by the female members. These policies offered some space for women to participate in the group. These spaces were participation boosters for the resources management groups such as forestry groups.

Through community group membership, an NGO worker said that the women could expect a number of direct and indirect benefits. She emphasised that gender-neutral decisions in Nepalese patriarchal society would traditionally benefit men more than women. Therefore, they would expect these allocated decisions to have direct benefits for the women. For example, group savings and access to credit were motivational actions for women in most of these groups. However, with these short-term benefits, the women also expected long-term impacts. A 35 year old *Tharu* woman from the plains of Sunsari said that the women should use community groups as a ladder to gain higher levels of participation. She said that women's participation at different levels of decision-making, for example, in municipalities, political parties, and policy-level forums, would help them to make gender-sensitive decisions at a higher level with greater subsequent impacts for women. She added that they could influence decisions to allocate more resources for women, as well as reducing gender-based discrimination, if they participated in the meetings of these forums. Therefore, as a

long-term vision, the meaningful participation of women in decision-making forums would increase their participation in community activities and contribute to gender-sensitive decision-making¹⁸².

Language: Language ability is a tool of domination (Koirala, 2013). Therefore, the opportunity to use one's own mother tongue in group meetings and discussions made the participation of ethnic women far more meaningful. In homogenous groups which had either only *Tharu* or *Tamang* women as members, all of the women had opportunities to speak in their own mother tongue during group meetings. The opportunity to speak in their mother tongue was observed as a booster for participation in these group meetings.

In one group meeting, a woman (who speaks *Awadi* as her mother tongue) was speaking in Nepali, but not completely fluently – she spoke slowly and some of her sentences were incomplete. When another woman, who had Nepali as her mother tongue, laughed at her, she was unhappy and started speaking in the *Awadi* language. When she was using her own language, she was fluent and could speak for far longer than she could speak when using Nepali. Similarly, in another group meeting, all the women were speaking in the *Tamang* language, and all the members shared their contributions during the discussion. As Portes & Sensenbrenner (1993) stated, this research confirms the increased confidence among women in groups from the same language background. Therefore, the use of the mother tongue in group meetings was observed as a participation booster to women from different language backgrounds.

Education and Family Background: In addition to encouragement from family members, the women gained the confidence to participate in community groups when

¹⁸² KI013, KI006, FGD06KA, KI001, FGD03SI and FGD04SI

they had improved their literacy or numeracy skills or completed school education¹⁸³. Similarly, women who had social or political roles made greater contributions to group meetings and discussions¹⁸⁴. In the research areas, four women¹⁸⁵, for example, had some political background and were chairing their groups. Similarly, women who were involved in political party activities were more vocal in bringing their views into the group meetings. These capacities gave them space to lead their groups. The following case provides an example:

A 43 year old *Tharu* woman was active in community groups and activities. She was invited to join a political party and asked to lead the women's committee in her area. She gradually gained other roles in the party. In June 2012, she was a member of nine different groups. She was serving as chairperson for three groups, treasurer for two groups, secretary for one group, joint secretary for another group, and executive member for two groups.

Likewise, three women¹⁸⁶ who were high school graduates were acting as secretaries or treasurers for their groups. The level of education was one of the factors in boosting women's participation in community actions and groups. If women had some education¹⁸⁷, they usually worked as the secretary or treasurer of their groups. These positions provided opportunities to influence group decisions.

In addition, women who did not face barriers from the family to take membership of community groups, and to participate in their activities, made active and

¹⁸³ FGD02SU, FGD03SI, FGD04SI, KI004 and KI006

¹⁸⁴ KI006, KI013, FGD06KA, FGD03SI and FGD04SI

¹⁸⁵ Nep004/43, Nep010/46, Nep036/30 and Nep022/48

¹⁸⁶ Nep011/32, Nep027/25 and Nep063/28

¹⁸⁷ Educated is a relative term in research. If most group members are illiterate, women with some reading and writing skills are considered educated. However, if a group has members with some reading and writing skills, high school graduates are considered educated.

regular contributions to the groups. A 42 year old *Janajati* woman from the hills of Sindhupalchok said that she was lucky to get her husband's encouragement to join a community group, although she had wasted a lot of money. Similar to this, more than three-quarters of the female research participants said that their family members played either neutral roles, or received help from their husbands or family members¹⁸⁸. A neutral role, neither 'yes' nor 'no' to community group membership, had given the women discretionary power which had also worked as a booster to participation.

Obstructing Elements

As Choi & Park (2014) stated, there are glass ceilings which prevent women from moving upwards in the social hierarchy in specific contexts. In their research, they found a number of barriers, such as the women's sex role, sex stereotypes, and masculine organisational culture, as some of the key barriers to women's career advancement. There are similarities in Nepalese society as there are a number of cultural, behavioural, political, and personal factors which create barriers for women in community participation and the development of their capacities¹⁸⁹ (Dhungana, 2014; Panta & Resurrección, 2014).

Socio-Cultural Factors and Rumours: As Bennett (2005) and Dhungana (2014) stated, the patriarchal structure of Hindu society has positioned women into the lower strata of the social order, and this structure does not accept women's freedom and mobility. If a woman is found walking with, or talking to, a man, this behaviour may be considered as suspicious¹⁹⁰. Some of these socio-cultural factors, particularly pregnancy

¹⁸⁸ As presented in Table 5.6, a total of 80 per cent of the research participants did not face restrictions in joining the group, although about half of their husbands had neutral positions on the issue.

¹⁸⁹ This statement was also confirmed by some of the research participants, including FGD06KA, KI001, KI003, KI008, KI009, KI012, KI013, Nep004/43, Nep035/32 and Nep042/47.

¹⁹⁰ KI004, KI013, KI001, KI003, KI008 and KI012

outside marriage and character-related accusations, have been reasons for suicide among women in Nepal (Pradhan et al., 2011). There are further challenges to women living without their husbands in the community. One 31 year old higher-caste woman, who was married to a *Janajati* man, said that *Arabeka Shrimati* (the wives of migrants) were considered as *Bigreka Aaimai* (characterless women), generalising the experiences of a few women who were blamed for spoiling the male members of society¹⁹¹. The media had also played a role in portraying negative images of women left-behind. The following statements provide examples of such media reporting:

Extramarital affairs are on the rise in Nepal, where the liberalization of a traditionally conservative and patriarchal society is changing the institution of marriage. Economic factors, such as an increase in foreign employment because of high unemployment at home, also add to infidelity¹⁹² (Global Press, Dec 2012).

... the migration trend has resulted in increased divorced rates, broken families with a higher number of children resorting to drugs, due to lack of proper parental guidance¹⁹³ (The Himalayan Times, 15 March 2013).

He is now left in the lurch after his spouse eloped with her lover when she was doing business ..., not later than one month of his return from foreign job in the gulf country, Qatar¹⁹⁴ (Republica, 5 August 2012).

Male emigrants suffered by their wives¹⁹⁵ (Nagarik, 3 March 2013).

¹⁹¹ The patriarchal social norms usually consider women responsible for having sex with someone. Therefore, women left-behind were interpreted as welcoming men to have sex with them and spoiling the male members.

¹⁹² <http://www.globalpressinstitute.org/asia/nepal/extramarital-affairs-increase-nepal%E2%80%99s-societyliberalizes> (downloaded on 23 April 2013).

¹⁹³ <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/perspectives/fullnews.php?headline=Costly+deal> (downloaded on 23 April 2013).

¹⁹⁴ http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/printable_news.php?news_id=39201 (downloaded on 15 March 2013).

In Sunsari, a popular national daily newspaper, *Nagarik*, published an article on 3 March 2013 citing an example of a woman who eloped with a man when her husband was returning from Malaysia. This article was generalised to the entire Sunsari district, sharing the cases of eight women who had eloped when their husbands were in overseas employment. The media reporting created a negative public opinion against the women left-behind throughout the district¹⁹⁶. In an interview with a political leader in the district, he again generalised the media report and showed his suspicion of the 40,000 women left-behind. This generalisation from a few cases to the whole caused barriers for the women left-behind to participate in community activities and to improve their social position.

In addition, family history has also been found to be a barrier to enhancing women's social position. The women whose husbands had displayed some negative habits¹⁹⁷ before their migration had faced difficulties in gaining respect in their community. In addition, when women did not find adequate support from their husbands, or when men did not give adequate attention to their wives left-behind, these habits affected other activities and the social position. A list (given in the Box 7.1) of incremental effects is drawn from the series of research observations. When women did not have adequate family support, they were vulnerable to different forms of exploitation, as the following case demonstrates:

A 31 year old *Janajati* woman ('Rita' hereafter), for example, ordered a supply of bricks from a supplier for a few months when she was constructing her house. At

¹⁹⁵ http://www.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=39201 (downloaded on 3 March 2013).

¹⁹⁶ KI002, KI006, and Nep035/32

¹⁹⁷ The negative behaviours include drinking, fighting, gambling, taking drugs, and engaging in the trafficking of people.

one point, her budget ran out and the construction stopped. One day, she received a call from a man offering her a supply of bricks on loan if she would be happy to accept. She did not recognise the person, but she started getting calls for a few days. At one point, she got the message that the man was trying to take advantage of her and had to stop taking his calls.

The findings of this research show that 14 per cent of women¹⁹⁸ from the plains of Sunsari reported cases of fake calls and eve-teasing while seeking help from outsiders. These collectively act as barriers to the women in enhancing their community participation as well as their social position.

Box 7.1: Incremental Effects of Difficult Relationships between Husbands and Wives

- Children were left without proper care
- Cases of increased expenses at home (changes in the pattern of expenses)
- Some teenage children engaged with bad company and developed habits such as drinking, smoking, and drug addiction
- Extra-marital affairs of both husbands and wives
- Cases of family breakdown
- Negative interpretations of women's actions at home by neighbours and family members
- Family getting into debt (also if foreign employment is unsuccessful¹⁹⁹)

Jealousy: As Harris & Darby (2010) stated, jealousy represents great personal misery which brings far-reaching social consequences. Jealousy against the women left-behind was also stated as a barrier to enhancing women's participation in community activities and to their position in society. This was one of the reasons that women had to

¹⁹⁸ The confidence interval is ± 8.93 .

¹⁹⁹ In the research area, overseas employment would be defined as unsuccessful if the person could not fulfil one of the following conditions: the migrant did not get the salary that was promised; got sick in the destination and could not work or died; had false documents and was trapped (sometimes imprisoned) in the destination; and returned home for reasons such as inadequate skills or bad health.

be cautious in order to prevent them from falling prey to false accusations and reporting of these to their husbands. Such reporting could be made either by neighbours or other family members if they were jealous about the women and their type of work.

Such reporting against women has played a critical role in negatively affecting the relationship between wives and husbands who were living abroad. A 48 year old higher-caste woman married to a *Dalit* man, for example, said “I was accused of having an extramarital affair and I was kicked out of the house with my three children when my husband returned home.” She added that her husband doubted her character and abused her physically after he returned home in 2011 because of a rumour that was spread around her neighbourhood because of jealousy. During the research, one female NGO worker said that the women left-behind were very often accused of behaving improperly when their husbands were absent. These accusations were made out of jealousy because the women received money from remittances, which would provide a range of opportunities for the recipients.

Age Group: Generally, young women had social mobility challenges more than older women or women with children. In particular, young women were considered vulnerable to having extra-marital sex when their husbands were not at home²⁰⁰. In the research areas, all of the young women without children were left either with their in-laws or their parents. One 26 year old higher-caste woman had been living with her in-laws after one month of marriage. She said that she did not have any knowledge of her husband’s income, did not make any decisions at home, and was not allowed to represent any community groups and committees. Similarly, a 23 year old higher-caste woman, who was married to a *Janajati* man, was living with her in-laws. Her father-in-

²⁰⁰ Research conducted by Pradhan et al. (2011) found that 43 per cent to 60 per cent of suicide deaths to women of reproductive age in Nepal were aged 15-24. These women, when they were accused of having an extra-marital relationship, or had an emotionally-difficult situation, committed suicide.

law would decide about her work and other involvements. She said that she had been faceless because she was left with someone who would make decisions for her. A 23 year old *Tharu* woman had moved from her in-laws' home to live with her own parents because she found it extremely difficult to live in isolation with people who would watch her every activity.

Language, caste, and ethnicity: Women's active and meaningful participation in groups and committees, in general, differed based on their caste and ethnicity, in addition to their language and education level. The following are some examples of this:

In a group meeting in the hills of Sindhupalchok, there were two upper-caste, four *Janajati* women, and one *Dalit* woman. During one hour of group meetings, two upper-caste women spoke most of the time and the meeting was chaired by one of them.

Similarly, in a *Tole* Development Group meeting, which had both male and female members, in the plains district of Sunsari, the higher-caste males usually dominated the group discussion and decisions. On some occasions, they prevented women from sharing their views.

Based on caste, higher-caste people take the lead, and men from the higher-castes controlled the group discussions. Similarly, language²⁰¹ inability was another challenge to those people who did not have Nepali as their mother tongue. If group members used their mother tongue, or if they had command over the Nepali language, they could contribute more to meeting discussions.

In Sunsari, speaking Nepalese was difficult for many *Tharu* women, and therefore, they participated less when meetings were organised in Nepali. In

²⁰¹ *Tharu* (also known as *Terai Janajati*) people speak the *Tharu* language in Sunsari, while Hill *Janajati* people, known as the *Tamang*, speak the *Tamang* language in Sindhupalchok as their mother tongue.

Sindhupalchok, the use of the Nepali language was a barrier for many *Tamang* women. In a group meeting organised in the Nepali language, in which six *Tamang* and three higher-caste women participated, the *Tamang* women were silent most of the time because they did not have fluency in the Nepali language.

Dalits could speak Nepali fluently, and therefore, had a slightly better experience. However, the meeting venues for the *Dalits* were a significant barrier. A meeting, for instance, of a women's group was organised in a house in which *Dalits* were not allowed to enter. This prevented two *Dalit* women from making contributions to the meeting agenda. Therefore, the access of *Dalits* to meeting venues was another barrier to their meaningful participation.

Others: In addition, the women had a number of other barriers which created obstacles to their participation in the community space. As Choi & Park (2014) stated, these barriers included the women's reproductive role. This was mentioned repeatedly by many of the research participants during the research as one of the fences²⁰². One 33 year old Hill *Janajati* woman presented her case as an example. She said that she would like to participate in community groups and activities. However, she was bound by her reproductive roles every day and it was difficult for her to spare a few minutes: "my life has been like a Nepali proverb, *ban gayo banei sanga, ghar aayo ghare sanga*" (you have work everywhere if you are either at home or in the forest).

Inadequate money was not stated as a major barrier, with only 14 per cent of the female research participants not having enough money to make the monthly levy contribution to the groups, seven per cent not having a good experience with the group norms and practices, and two per cent who could not obtain group membership because

²⁰² Nep030/34, Nep034/45, Nep039/32, Nep046/39, Nep048/42, Nep060/33, Nep062/41, Nep125/50, Nep165/51, Nep191/22 and FGD006KA

they were not permanent residents, or were recent arrivals^{203 204}. There were also broader reservations and concerns about the function of some of the groups. Some women²⁰⁵ did not wish to join the savings and credit (micro-credit) groups because of their stringent and inflexible policies²⁰⁶. A 33 year old higher-caste woman from the plains district of Sunsari cited an example of her friend who had to pay her instalments²⁰⁷ to the group at the same time as she was in mourning²⁰⁸.

In addition, the traditional hierarchy was another barrier for some higher-caste women as they were reluctant to work with *Dalit* and *Tharu* women. Similarly, divorce was also a barrier because it is not widely accepted, and women are usually discouraged from living separately from their husband. These factors create barriers to women's mobility, group participation, and involvement in community activities, which have

²⁰³ Groups expected their members to be permanent residents of the area, so that the people could participate in group meetings on a regular basis. As well, permanent residents would be less likely to leave the area after taking a group loan.

²⁰⁴ Women who migrated to a new area had difficulty in joining community groups because the groups and committees were reluctant to include new members. In addition, they would often accept them on the condition that new members would pay a huge joining fee.

²⁰⁵ Nep040/25, Nep053/32, Nep057/31, Nep068/36, Nep073/45, Nep048/42, Nep060/32, Nep062/41 and Nep065/40

²⁰⁶ Some savings and credit groups had a policy that the member must take a forced-loan from the group. This was because the group could not pay the agreed interest to members if the money was not invested. Therefore, those members who did not borrow money from the group savings fund were asked to take a loan to increase the group fund (Nep040/25, Nep053/32, Nep050/42 and Nep062/41).

²⁰⁷ When someone borrowed money from a micro-credit group, they had to agree to a series of repayment dates and instalment amounts in advance. If someone could not pay the agreed instalments for any reason, the person could be penalised by the group. The person either had to pay a fine or would be restricted from getting group benefits for a period.

²⁰⁸ As per the Hindu culture, mourning takes place continuously for 13 days after death when someone dies. All the sons, daughters-in-law, and daughters live somewhere which is considered pure, and do not eat salt and foods such as meat, cereals, and lentils. They do not wear stitched clothes and do not touch any people and animals during these 13 days.

been identified as the means to enhancing women's position in society. Therefore, the barriers to these situations are strategies to limit the agency of women.

Conclusion

This findings in this chapter reveal that men's migration and the freedom of women from everyday supervision in patriarchal Nepalese society, where women are mostly confined to household chores, has played an important role in increasing women's participation in community groups and their activities, and subsequently, in enhancing their social position. The changed social position of women is reflected in the behaviour of their neighbours in meeting with them, asking their advice, borrowing money from them, and requesting them to join community groups. These changes brought increased and multiple benefits to the women, creating an incremental of positive change. These factors increased well-being among the women and their collective strength to stand up for their rights. More importantly, these factors collectively enhanced women's motivation to challenge the traditional social structure through greater mobility, higher self-esteem, and lower dependency on their male counterparts.

In a patriarchal society, coming out from the home and participating in the community space is a challenge for many women. A caste- and gender-based social structure, the jealousy of the women left-behind, their age, inadequate access to meeting venues, mobility restrictions, and language inability were some of the factors that created obstacles to the enhancement of women's social position. However, there were several factors that contributed to improving their position and the subsequent development of their capacity. The changing socio-political environment, gender-sensitive decisions by existing groups, family help, the use of one's mother tongue in group discussions, the education of women, and the family background of the women

were identified as participation boosters to improve women's social position. Through these boosters, the women left-behind had increased opportunities to come out from their chores and participate in the community space, increase their participation in community decision-making processes, and use their agency for the benefit of women both individually and collectively.

Chapter 8 – Agency of Women Left-Behind: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter analyses and summaries why women take on new roles and challenges, as well as the processes for how this contributes to their agency when men migrate from Nepalese villages. The findings are discussed under three main sections: a) the motivation of the women; b) the social-cultural and family-related obstacles; and c) the actions that the women have taken. It responds to the research questions – what are the changes in women’s abilities to set priorities and act upon them when their husbands migrate and leave them behind? Specifically: a) How do women negotiate decision-making with their husbands when they are working abroad?; b) How do women manage their mobility and community participation in a society where they are constrained by stringent social norms and practices?; and c) How do women’s social position and identity change over the period of the men’s absence? This chapter, which also discusses significance of this research and outlines areas for future research, is based on the research findings presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, and in relation to the existing literature and research (Chapters Two and Three).

This research argues that men’s migration has been a means to increasing the confidence of women to manage resources, participate in community activities, and make decisions at home. The women have catalysed the community participation process to redefine gender relations and thereby to enhance their social position. Thus, while agency builds social capital, social capital has become the means to enhancing the agency of individuals. The combination of social capital and capable agency contribute to changing the micro-level structures that have created unequal social relationships.

Motivation to Act

In a context where women are deprived of resources and excluded from decision-making (Bennett, 2005; Dhungana, 2014; Puri et al., 2012; Tamang, 2011), they look for options that will help them to deal with these discriminatory practices (Brunson, 2011; Dhungana, 2014). Therefore, men's overseas migration brings the prospect for women to make changes. This research has found that, after their husbands migrate, women gain a window of opportunity to take on responsibilities which have traditionally been situated in the men's domain. The women gain opportunities to participate in community activities, and take on leadership roles in the household and in society, which enhance their social profile, self-esteem, status, and prestige with their reference groups (see Chapter 7). This social recognition has given the women symbolic power, in Bourdieu's terms, in their community and has contributed to bringing happiness into their lives. The change in social position, as Hadi (2001) argued, brought the possibility of greater mobility, higher self-confidence, and lower dependency on their traditional patrons (the husbands). In addition, as Poertner et al. (2011) argued, migration contributed to a renegotiation of the spatial and temporal boundaries within families, and changed the family power relationship.

In summary, this research has found multiple factors which have motivated women to perform the activities in the home and the community which were previously undertaken by their husbands prior to their migration. Decision-making opportunities, social capital, and social position were identified as some the key intertwining motivators. The women have not been forsaken or literally 'left-behind', but instead, have converted men's absences into women's agency leading to improved access to decision-making, greater financial and non-financial resources, enhanced social networks, and better access to information about services. These collectively functioned

as motivational factors among women 'left behind' to change their family and social positions.

Decision-Making Opportunities

This research has found that women had increased opportunities to participate in financial, food-management, and family-related decisions within the home after their husband had migrated (see Chapter 6). The decision-making is a critical power dynamic which gives higher status to a person who makes the decisions in Nepalese society. Among these, decisions related to financial transactions were taken as the most important ones. In the research areas, with the migration of the husbands, about three-quarters of the women had operational money management roles in the plains, but this was less apparent in the hills. The women had more scope to make both operational and assets-related decisions with the increased duration of the men's migration. In both of the research districts, the majority of the women had key roles in family rituals and in food-management decisions. These confirm, as opposed to Pokharel et al. (2011), that women have demonstrated capacities to manage multiple responsibilities, including money and other resources when they have the scope to do so.

Opportunities to manage money had provided scope among the women to spend some of their money on their own development, including on community group membership. These factors had all been a means to increasing their exposure to different activities and to enhancing their confidence to undertake them in the absence of their husbands. Therefore, the women, despite having challenges in performing some of the activities initially, had taken on many roles, as they had seen the clear link between them and the development of their own capacity. As de Haas (2009, p. 1) argued, men's migration has been "a fundamental capabilities-enhancing freedom" for many research participants in both research districts.

Longer-term migration by men created an increased capacity among women to negotiate decisions with their husbands and other family members. The female research participants' stake in major household decision-making, such as with the buying and selling of land and assets had increased with the greater length of their husbands' overseas employment. The women did not have such roles prior to the migration of their husbands. This confirms a positive relationship between men's migration and the decision-making capacity of women in Nepal, as Hadi (2001) also found in Bangladesh. More importantly, men's migration offered women the opportunity to discover their hidden strengths and skills, thus contributing to human development capital (ICIMOD, 2009). These women were happy because they enjoyed greater freedom and were able to improve their decision-making capabilities; however, there was a dilemma of choice among these women – living with their husband and receiving the benefits of marriage versus greater freedom and decision-making at home without their husband.

Financial independence, negotiation, and decision-making are some of the key areas that measure the agency of an individual (Mahmud et al., 2012; Mukherjee & Kundu, 2012). Three-quarters of the women in this study mentioned the combination of these factors as a major positive shift in their lives; however, there were differences in some decision-making areas between the hills and the plains.

The women from Sunsari had only limited access to land, and many of them were living on government or public land, so they had to buy their daily necessities. The women in Sindhupalchok engaged in subsistence agriculture where they would produce food items such as corn, wheat, potatoes, and vegetables, among others, as well as keeping chickens, cows, goats, or sheep for meat and milk products, and this had reduced their financial management roles in the hills. Furthermore, the women had to walk for hours to get to a market place in the hills. As a result, shopping was undertaken only on an occasional basis.

Second, more than two-thirds of the female research participants in the hills were living in extended families in which they had in-laws and other male members at home. However, this was as little as 17 per cent in the plains. When there were men at home, they had taken charge of the shopping. This was undertaken primarily by the father-in-law as the gender relations were patriarchal and men were dominant in making financial decisions, while women were supposed to limit them within household activities when the men were at home (Acharya et al., 2010; Dhungana, 2014; Joshi, 2008; Upadhyay, 1996). Therefore, women in nuclear families had greater opportunity to make financial decisions than women in joint families. However, the women in nuclear families had to be overly-correct in their activities, because these activities could be reported against them to their husbands abroad by their neighbours, family members, and others, either because of jealousy or for other reasons.

The extended families had a number of advantages – women in these families had some sharing of their workload, including child care, which allowed them to spare some time for other purposes. Similarly, the *Janajati* and *Tharu* women were better placed in decision-making, because traditionally, they had relative freedom which had given them the scope to make independent choices, in both districts. However, the higher-caste women had to maintain some of the traditional taboos, which had limited their decision-making, mobility and participation in activities with people from other caste groups, a point which has also been identified by Banerjee-Dube (2014) and Gupta (2005).

Women's greater participation in non-monetary decisions also had patriarchal connections. The women had a higher capacity to negotiate with their husbands in transnational families if the decisions were confined to kinship and cultural activities (Sinatti, 2013). Therefore, women's higher levels of participation in food-management and family rituals were apparent because these activities did not have direct

involvement with money, or at most, required only small amounts. However, if the issues were related to money, in line with Jensen (2012), and Osella & Osella (2000), masculinity came to the fore, unless women had an independent and regular source of income.

This had also been one of the reasons for women's participation in migration being far lower than men's in the research areas. This was because women were expected to be subordinate to, and dependent on, men in different decision areas (Lutz, 2010) when the men were at home and women did not have their own income. In addition, the migration of women was also influenced by patriarchal policies which acted against the migration of women (Amnesty International, 2011b; Bhadra, 2013; Datta, 2005; Gurung, 2009).

However, women were not in the shadow of the men at all times. When the men were out, this gave opportunities for about two-thirds of the female research participants to take an active part in decision-making with their husbands, with an increasing role being associated with the extended period of migration – the longer the duration, the more scope to make decisions at home (see Chapter 6). Therefore, this study corroborates with the findings of a range of scholars in this area of research (Barbora et al., 2008; Kaspar, 2005; Lokshin & Glinskaya, 2009; Thieme & Wyss, 2005), who argued that women have greater freedom when their husbands are abroad, or if they are not living together at home in a patriarchal society. The husband's migration contributes to increasing women's freedom and exposure, which has collectively functioned as one of the inputs in enhancing women's decision-making abilities. These inputs had motivated deprived women to come forward and increase their earnings through self-help processes, which had ultimately assisted the women to negotiate with their husbands, family, and community members.

The women who had their own incomes, had a greater voice in financial decision-making, and the income would have enabling effects over the period of migration (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009; Luke & Munshi, 2011; Pauli, 2008). Some scholars (Agarwal, 1995, 1997; Antman, 2014) have argued that women have increased bargaining power when they have their own income or access to assets. This research adds to the findings of these scholars, and argues that women have increased negotiation power in household decision-making when they have access to the information, through networking and exposure, which is required to make such decisions. Exposure and information have been the major elements in increasing the bargaining power of Nepalese women in transnational families (see Chapter 6).

Similarly, this study has found that women from migrant households were happy because of the changes they had achieved in their lives, the decision-making space they attained after their husband's migration, and the exposure they had to knowledge, experience, and learning. Therefore, there is no clear-cut sense of unhappiness among the women left-behind, unlike Jones (2013) found in his research. Therefore, the social and cultural context was important in determining the happiness of the women in the absence of their husbands.

The evidence suggests that freedom and choices at home for women were gradually strengthened with the extended period of the men's migration, and this contributed to women's agency in household decision-making and enhanced their social capital. There are, however, challenges in retaining this independence and freedom after the men return from their migration. Research on those families which have men who have returned from migration at home, can bring further understanding to this issue.

Overall, this research has found that the women had demonstrated capacities to make decisions to manage financial resources, family rituals, and food which had been undermined by the patriarchal values of society. There were some variations between

the women from the different caste and ethnic groups. However, despite various challenges, the successful negotiation of different types of decisions with their husbands, and their implementation by the women, demonstrated that the women had enhanced their capacities and managed multiple responsibilities when the men were physically away in both districts. This had been an opportunity to rid themselves of everyday supervision, to gain exposure to undertake various activities at home and in the community, to access various forms of information and services which were required to make decisions, and to enhance their ability to negotiate more significant decisions.

Community Group Participation and Social Capital

The findings reveal that participation in community groups, their activities, and the decision-making process were additional motivations for the women left-behind. As a number of scholars (Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Kaspar, 2005) have argued, men's migration has offered increased autonomy and has created the scope of mobility among women in the absence of the direct supervision of their husbands. The distribution of wealth, as McElroy (2001) stated, particularly women's access to money, has been identified as one of the reasons for the increased involvement of women in community groups. The groups' monthly levies were usually set at between 50 and 100 Nepalese rupees (less than a dollar), which the majority of women could allocate themselves when their husbands were not at home. With the money management roles, therefore, the women could set some money aside for the levy to continue their participation in community group meetings. The group's meetings were important to the group members because the group decisions would have implications for them and their savings fund. In addition, the effective management of money had the potential to bring

these women out of economic poverty, as Adams & Page (2005), Hugo (2012), and IOM (2013) have stated.

This was the reason for the rise in group membership which had increased from 12 per cent to 66 per cent of the women left-behind in the plains of Sunsari, and from 65 per cent to 94 per cent in the hills of Sindhupalchok after migration of men. Group membership and participation in group activities were important to the women when the husbands were not at home. For example, as discussed in Chapter 6, the groups were instrumental in preventing the women in Sunsari from being homeless, because the groups collectively negotiated with the municipality to remain in the area, although they were illegal settlers. In addition, they collectively advocated for tenancy rights or alternative housing options for the landless people before letting them be removed from the area.

Through group membership, the women had developed leadership roles in their community, including taking office bearers' positions in community groups which also had male members, becoming members of sister wings of political parties, and making collective efforts to obtain public services. These experiences send two messages: first, women had often participated in more than one group after the men's absence; and second, they had developed leadership qualities through group participation, and the associated meetings and activities.

Through membership in a group, women's participation had gradually moved beyond the 'women only' groups. Thus, about 40 per cent of women were members of more than one group after the migration of their husbands. Some of them, for instance, participated in community forest user groups, land rights groups, savings and credit cooperatives, and health/school management committees, which had their own resources and had both male and female members. These women demonstrated their ability to lead in some of the key positions and to set the agenda of these groups. About

one-quarter of the key office bearers of 13 mixed groups (which also had male members) were women. In addition, some women left-behind were members of the local-level committees of various political parties. Women's participation in the decision-making processes of different groups had given them an increased voice to access common property resources (Barnes-Mauthe et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2011) in a society where men had traditionally been the decision-makers.

Through group membership, slightly more than half of the research participants gained exposure to various service-providing agencies, including development organisations, financial institutions, local municipalities, and government offices. These were men's domains in the research areas before their migration. Due to such exposure, the women had opportunities to understand more about the services provided by these organisations, and many of them accessed these services. This confirms the work of Krishna (2001); that the combination of social capital and agency had contributed to changing a social structure which creates unequal relations.

Similarly, the group savings fund was important for many women group members, particularly in the case of emergencies. The case of one woman who had received funding from her group when her son was bitten by a snake is an example of the life-saving support of the group. Therefore, mutual help from group members was noted as a motivation for the social networking of the women. Mutual help is a concept of "giving back and getting something back" (Bellamy et al., 2012, p. 223).

Women's groups were also a way of protecting women from domestic violence in some cases, with group members supporting the women who were potential victims and survivors of different forms of gender-based violence from their husbands or in-laws. They also mediated cases of gender-based violence for some of their group members, even if the men did not like external intervention in what they saw as private matters.

Such help from other women was important for many activities which women would have otherwise undertaken alone. The women appreciated the help in various areas, such as child-care, health services, the schooling of children, agricultural activities, the protection of family land and other assets, and other family-related issues. In both districts, many of the women who were living in nuclear families did not take any direct help from their husbands' family members, while the women in joint families received support from their husband's family members in child care, the schooling of children, and with agriculture-related activities. Therefore, the women from nuclear families had to get support through their formal and informal networks, their brothers and sisters (natal connections), and from fellow group members.

This research has found that the absence of men from the home had provided women in both districts with the scope to go beyond the gendered boundary of men's and women's work. The women had participated in community activities through local groups and increased their voices in community decision-making processes, going beyond traditional remittance-based community development (KC, 2005; Lokshin et al., 2010; Seddon et al., 2002). Along with these factors, this study has found that men's migration had been one of the enabling elements in changing local-level gender-based relationships which served to limit women's agency through different forms of prohibitions. However, this research is limited to the micro-level benefits and, as de Haas (2012) and Kapur (2003) explained this, in the same way as other migration research, does not explain the impacts on macro-level structures.

Access to money, as McElroy (2001) and Doss (2011) argued, offered women increased power to negotiate with their family members and community leaders, as well as the scope to become involved in decision-making in the community in both districts. However, there were challenges to the women sustaining these changes after their husbands returned home. Therefore, as Pande & Ford (2012) argued, policy provisions

to ensure women's representation at different levels of decision-making would contribute to sustaining such changes. In addition, there is a need to strengthen women's existing networks.

As Bourdieu (1986) argued, networking and group membership have the potential to develop a durable network of institutionalised relationships for women in their community. This implies that these women have the ability to gain collective or individual benefit because of their group associations. Similarly, these women have been living in a patriarchal society where opposing interests, social conflict, and different types of domination and deprivation (Bourdieu, 1986; Siisiainen, 2000) have pushed these agents into their subjective roles within an objective structure, with the potential for achieving both economic and non-economic benefits (Coleman, 1988) through their social networks. Therefore, there is the possibility that women will be able to move out of the traditional patriarchal trap if their social networks are strengthened. Furthermore, these networks become a form of symbolic capital, which is the legitimate base of social position in the eyes of others (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Siisiainen, 2000).

Thus, this research confirms the findings of Barbora et al. (2008), Kaspar (2005), and Thieme & Wyss (2005), who concluded that women had been able to come out of the shadows of their husbands when the men were physically away from home in a male-dominated society. However, the findings also contradict other earlier research (Luitel, 2001; Morgan & Niraula, 1995), which claimed that women in Nepal were dependent on their husbands when they were left-behind. Despite the motivations and windows of opportunity, there were observable²⁰⁹ differences between the hills and the plains.

²⁰⁹ Within the limitations of the sample size

The differences between the hills and the plains, and among the women from different caste and ethnic groups, were due to a number of specific reasons that were stated earlier. In addition, the reasons behind increased group membership were increased affordability, freedom from everyday supervision, women's interests in being part of a social network, and the increased number of community groups in the neighbourhood. The hills district had a long history of trafficking of women and girls, particularly from the *Janajati* group, and there was an acceptance of the returned women both in the family and in wider society (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; S. Joshi, 2001). Therefore, women's group membership was not a major issue. However, some women could not join these groups due to a number of limitations, for example, various restrictions, group policies, and social taboos, such as the concept of purity.

In the *Janta Basti* cluster in Sunsari, where *Janajati*, *Dalits*, and higher-caste families were living, women had more restrictions on their mobility, in general. The higher-caste culture is considered as the 'role model', and a tendency was observed to follow the higher-caste model in the community where different ethnic groups lived in the same cluster. However, there were differences in practices between the *Janta Basti* and the *Tengra Toli* clusters. The *Tengra Toli* cluster had primarily *Tharu* (*Terai Janajati*) families, and the women had relatively higher mobility and group membership than the women in *Janta Basti*. In addition, there was also negative media reporting against '*Arabeka Shrimati*' (the wives of migrant workers to Arab or the Gulf), and this was mentioned as another reason for the restriction of mobility among mostly higher-caste women in the district (see Chapter 6).

Cultural and patriarchal practices are hidden in social behaviour and had posed challenges to women's mobility. These were particularly challenging for the younger and higher-caste women, and particularly to those who were living in nuclear families and whose husbands were away from home for long periods of time. In addition, some

of these practices condone gender-based violence as a social norm, but not as an offence, and make the life of women even more difficult.

Similarly, family history differentiated some women from the others – the women faced challenges in joining community groups and actions if their husbands had displayed particular behaviours in the past. For example, a lower social status was partly defined according to their, or their husband's, involvement in activities such as excessive drinking, gambling, fighting, addiction to drugs, and association with an act of crime. The women in the plains also suffered from sensationalist media reporting which could be read or listened to online by their husbands overseas and reacted to negatively.

In addition, biased government policy was a common reason which had limited the internal and international mobility and growth of women. Restrictions of women's mobility, differences in property rights between men and women, and different provisions related to marriage and citizenship were some of these examples. These policies had marginalised women from various legal entitlements. The women, despite their locations, and caste and ethnic identities, had multiple challenges which were posed either by socio-cultural practices or by patriarchal policy frameworks. Therefore, they had to be careful to avoid actions which could be interpreted against them. As well, they had to take advantage of supportive practices and provisions, and work collectively against those which were detrimental to them.

Social Capital

Despite these challenges, a significant rise in the group membership of the women left-behind in the research areas, indicated their motivation to participate in the community space, particularly in the groups which play important decision-making roles at the local level and which manage common property resources, such as forests,

water, and land. These are known as their bonding and bridging social capitals which collectively offer power (agency) to individuals (Ling & Dale, 2013). The bonding capital had given individuals collective power, whereas the vertical and bridging capitals gave voice to the locus of power where the decisions were made. Furthermore, the women who worked outside their home learnt social and other skills, which were required to navigate their own environment, as well as to increase bargaining power within the home and the community (Doss, 2011).

When the men migrated, this made many women, who were living in nuclear families, the *de facto* heads of their households, and responsible for many roles which their husbands used to perform at home before they departed. These voluntary roles provided women with connections to their fellow group members through formal and informal social networks. Thus, in the research areas, group membership signified the social and symbolic capital of the women left-behind (Thieme & Wyss, 2005). Similarly, these groups were part of the mutual recognition of women's agency through group meetings, training, and practical actions, and they also offered them symbolic capital, which is the legitimate base of social position in the eyes of others (see Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986; Siisiainen, 2000). The social network, the social position of the actors, and their voluntary associations, embodied the symbolic capital of the left-behind women.

The social networking of the women had not just been a means for many of them to escape from gender-based violence, but also to acquire help from friends and family in emergencies and to influence social and institutional decisions at the local level. As Fukuyama (2001) argued, social capital was a means to enhancing cooperation between individuals to promote instantiated cooperation, but not just as a 'sum of the parts', but through a pattern of behaviour (Bakewell, 2010; Fukuyama, 2001).

Therefore, social capital has been the means to enhance the symbolic power and confidence of the women as well as to achieve status at home and in the community.

In addition, the female research participants found their community group participation beneficial for enhancing their confidence to network with a group of people, to save their money, to access credit in the case of emergencies, and for other needs. This research also confirms the work of Coleman (1988); that social capital, thus, has been a productive resource for achieving certain ends, both economic and non-economic, which would not have been possible in its absence. As well, as Ling & Dale (2013) stated, linking capital connected women to political decision-making and financial resources, and enhanced women's capacity to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions. These have all been identified as key motivating factors for women's membership of different community groups and for networking with their members.

There were multiple factors that contributed to enhancing women's social capital. In addition to the absence of the close supervision of their husbands, which was a trigger of their mobility, factors such as changes in the socio-political environment and affirmative group policies were also motivating elements. Similarly, women's family backgrounds, language abilities, and levels of education to understand group meeting minutes, were the dynamics that gave women the confidence to take membership in these groups. On top of these factors, this research adds the framework that Ling & Dale (2013) proposed for understanding agency at the individual scale in community development. This perspective reveals that agency becomes more effective if the agent obtains additional support, either from external actors or from policy frameworks, which are collectively defined as inputs in this research. In addition, this confirms the ideas of Ling & Dale (2013) that restrictive socio-cultural factors, such as jealousy, gender stereotypes, increased workloads, and caste- and ethnicity-based

discrimination are some of the factors which constantly hinder women's participation in the community space, and which are also identified as barriers at the individual scale.

In addition, this research confirms that bonding, bridging, and linking capital, and communication with their peers, are important elements in enhancing the bargaining power of women at home and to make an increased access to the locus of power in the community, as Dale & Newman (2008), Ling & Dale (2013) and Newman & Dale (2005) have identified. The women have increased negotiation power in household decision-making when they have access to information, through networking and exposure, which is required to make decisions. Therefore, this research corroborates with Doss (2011) and confirms that women's skill to navigate the environment was an important skill for negotiating decisions within the home. In the absence of these skills, access to land or money could not be a means for women's increased bargaining capacity, as women's negotiations are weaker if they cannot make informed choices.

The women, who had decision-making scope, had maintained communication with their in-laws, husbands and community members. In addition, this research confirms Giddens' (1984) view that the regular communication of women with other group members had given them an identity as a valuable member of their community. Factors such as regular communication between husbands and wives, and respect for women by family members, also provided a symbolic identity which could contribute to achieving a legitimate social position for the women, as Bourdieu (1986) argued. Communication had an important role in preventing family breakdown, child abuse, gender-based violence, and mental health problems. In addition, regular communication between husbands and wives had been a means of sharing information and negotiating

decisions at home²¹⁰. This was also an opportunity for women to maintain their social capital as well as influence their husband's decisions, through the information they had about their local context.

Social Position

Social position in Nepalese society is either ascribed or achieved. Ascribed positions come to individuals either through caste or family background, but achieved position is determined through other factors, including education, skills and expertise, leadership ability, financial status of the family, social capital, the destination country of the migrant, family support, and individual behaviours.

The findings suggest that the social status of the women had improved because of their participation in community-level decision-making, the development of their social network, and changes in access to financial/physical property after the migration of their husbands (see Chapter 7). This research corroborated with that of Piper (2005) and found that the transfer of decision-making to women contributed to an increase in the social position of women, together with mutual trust and a sense of responsibility, as has been reported in some other South Asian countries (Hadi, 2001; Kaspar, 2005; Piper, 2009). As well, the networking and subsequent communication have brought social respect to the women, resulting in their increased social position.

This research does not confirm the increased gender inequalities within families with the extended period of men's migration as they were identified by earlier studies in Nepal (Poertner et al., 2011; Thieme & Wyss, 2005), as the difference between the

²¹⁰ In both research districts, women used to have contacts with their husbands, mostly using phones. This was easy in Sunsari as most of the women 'left behind' had access to mobile phones. However, the phone service was not available in one of the research sites of Sindhupalchok and women had to go to nearest market place to make/receive phone calls. Despite these, a total of 82% of research participant women had contacted their husbands as required, and some others had ad-hoc contacts.

research participants and other women in Nepal was not significant. Similarly, this research does not corroborate the findings of McEvoy et al. (2012) who claimed that the women at home had been vulnerable to prejudicial gossip which resulted in high levels of unhappiness, but instead argued that the majority of the women had increased their happiness despite the several challenges they faced.

Generally, remittances have been used to expand physical property through the purchase of land and the construction of housing, in addition to the schooling of children. Those families who did not previously have any land, often bought a small piece of land, while those who had land, constructed a small house (also see Adhikari, 2001; Adhikari & Hobley, 2011; GoN, 2014b; ICIMOD, 2009; Lokshin et al., 2010; Thieme & Wyss, 2005; Williams, 2009). Land and housing are symbols of status in Nepalese society (Allendorf, 2007; CSRC, 2013).

In addition, 'money power' was reflected throughout the neighbourhood when their neighbours visited the women left-behind to make loan requests or to ask them to join community groups. The women who did not have any voice in the past became the decision-makers in the villages when they gained access to money. Furthermore, they were an important source of information to their husbands to make money-lending decisions if the husbands were still making such decisions remotely, or if both the husband and wife were making joint decisions (see Chapter 7). These types of processes had kept women at the centre of decision-making, and therefore, in a position where they could gain and maintain respect. Therefore, the changed social position demonstrated the potential to change gender relations, together with reducing the poverty of women, and increasing income and assets (De & Ratha, 2012; Hugo, 2012; Jones & Basnett, 2013; Sapkota, 2013), through their increased access to decision-making.

Women had set boundaries on undertaking certain activities to avoid future difficulties. However, when the women became group members, rather than being known solely as the wife or daughter in-law of a man, they gained their own identity as a valuable member of the community who also contributed to maintaining direct communication with their network of members and building trust²¹¹ with them. These forms of communication were reflections of the increased social position of the women, because women's groups had given them an identity as a social worker with a sense of responsibility (Piper, 2009), as a result of the increased number of contacts between the women left-behind and their fellow community members. However, again there were differences between the hills and the plains.

In the plains district of Sunsari, for example, women generally received more courtesy calls or invitations to join community groups than the women in the hills (Chapter 7). The expansion of roads and market places, which demanded an increased level of financial activities, was one of the reasons for these differences. Similarly, most of the women in the plains were decision-makers, whereas the women in the hills had in-laws to make the decisions. However, communication with fellow group members was more prevalent in the hills because they had more opportunities to meet both formally and informally in the public space. For example, the families in the hills lived in a cluster where women would fetch water from a shared water tap, as they did not have a well-developed water supply system. These types of places gave the women opportunities to share and plan. In the same way as meeting at the water taps, they

²¹¹ Putnam (1993) believes that trust is an important element in social capital. Similarly, Portes & Sensenbrenner (1993) suggest that trust is made up of bounded solidarity, reciprocity of actions, socialisation, and the enforcement of actions as the basis of relationships. In addition, adherence to cultural values and practices has been found as one of the key determinants of trust in Nepalese society.

would also meet while collecting fodder and doing other collective work, where the women had various informal discussions.

Communication was one of the motivating factors for women, because this was the main area in which women were traditionally discouraged from playing a role (Dhakal, 2008). When the husbands were away, the women had to communicate with other people, mainly suppliers, shopkeepers, construction workers, and government officials. These spaces offered women an understanding of different places and services, as well as helping them to develop their communication skills and the confidence to deal with men, and ultimately the social status. These changes had been achieved because of the scope that men's migration had created (see Chapter 7). Accordingly, these changes had posed challenges to the existing power dynamics and relationships, as the women were taking many of the roles that were traditionally defined as being part of the men's domain. Change in family and social dynamics is one area which needs to be further investigated as part of the future research agenda.

In addition, the ways in which communication used to take place with the women left-behind had changed with women's increased roles. The women who were previously faced with a lack of respect and named using a word such as '*tan*' (dominated 'you') in the community, were subsequently being addressed with due respect, using a word such as '*tapain*' (respected 'you'). These changes in language itself have been perceived as a 'state of relationship of symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 1989), particularly by the *Dalit* women, who had a traditionally lower status based on their caste.

As communication is one of the key elements of social respect in most families and societies, this also has moral implications (Giddens, 1984). As Hammel & Yarbrough (1973) explained, continued and respectful communication which the women left-behind had received after they started making decisions, were important in raising the status of women in society. Similarly, showing an interest in meeting them,

courtesy calls, and invitations to join community groups were reflections of 'symbolic power' and changing social position. Therefore, adding to the previous research (De & Ratha, 2012; 2013; Kaspar, 2005; Maharjan et al., 2012a; Mahey, 2003; Piper, 2009; Upadhyaya, 1996; Zaman, 1999), this study confirms that the women left-behind gained increased social status because of changed communication within the family and with their fellow community members. These forms of communication were not simply the mode for understanding each other and offering mutual respect, but they also helped to reduce loneliness, anxiety, and depression for the women left-behind (Piper, 2009).

In Nepalese society, changes in the social position of women had contributed to increasing multiple benefits for them, creating incremental positive changes including increased respect in the family and society, and improving self-esteem and access to better health and education services for women and children. Collectively, these improvements have also increased the assurance of women to stand up for their rights. More importantly, they have also enhanced women's agency to challenge the traditional social structure which undermines women's abilities and their position within the household and in community decision-making processes. These findings have confirmed that agency had emerged from the necessity to take action and to build their identity, despite a number of contradictory roles. In addition, the women had been successful in acquiring and managing multiple identities in society. However, there was resistance which did not allow women's efforts to move forward as smoothly as expected or desired. Therefore, this research confirms the findings of Dhungana (2014) that women face thorny paths, which have been created by patriarchal policies, culture, and practices; and Lindemann (2007), that social hierarchy is influenced by gender, caste, ethnicity, education, income, and age.

In summary, women gained an enhanced social identity because of their improved communication, mutual help, social capital, and a decrease in gender-based

violence. Despite concerns about the unequal roles of women in community groups, based on their caste and ethnic identity, the groups were a place where the women could bond and bring their voices together to form and reform their symbolic and social positions. Identity is important, but contested, in contemporary political life as it is formed through interaction between people who are shaped by different structures (Woodward, 2004), and some identities are more structural than local, being formed according to caste, culture, and gender-based relations. These structural barriers cannot be removed at the local level or by a small group of people, and they prevent people from organising in a true sense (Woodward, 2004). Therefore, with the increased networking of women, radical social transformation may not be expected for some time, but some positive trends were to be seen, as stated above.

In challenging these social structures, as a number of scholars (Agarwal, 1997; Allendorf, 2007; Deere & Doss, 2006; Deere & León, 2003; Kabeer, 1999) have argued, there should be efforts to enhance women's control over assets, particularly land and housing in the South Asian context. Therefore, this would require improvements to women's income through the promotion of employment and enterprise, as well as the formulation of policies that give women access to ancestral property without gender-based biases. In addition, the position of women is negotiated when there is gender-based violence in the home and in public spaces. This deep-rooted violence cannot be eliminated simply by forming women's groups; rather this requires the collective efforts of both men and women. This research has noted that women's efforts to participate in mixed groups (of men and women), and to collaborate with men, has the potential to give them collective agency to fight against gender-based violence, and to enhance their social position and identity through the formation of human capital. However, the social structures do not allow women to work as 'free agents' and, as a

result, they need to operate with a number of restrictions and challenges (Drydyk, 2008; Kabeer, 1999).

Challenges and Restrictions

Despite the motivation of women to bring about change, women in Nepal face a range of restrictions and challenges (Bennett, 2005; Dhungana, 2014). Society is patriarchal and cultural practices favour men far more than women. Similarly, many government policies discriminate between men and women (FWLD, 2011; Nanda et al., 2012). This research has found that about two-thirds of female research participants were discouraged from developing non-kin ties, or to venture far from home in both research districts. Between the two research areas, the level of restrictions was relatively higher in the plains than in the hills.

Some examples of these restrictions include not allowing women to go out alone for shopping, meeting with a man, making a decision to buy or sell products, representing groups in community meetings, making a decision about employment, and selecting a school for children, among others. The women were discouraged from joining community groups or going out from the home without an escort. The female research participants in the plains said that they received calls from their husband to stay at home and enjoy the remittances that they would receive. As McEvoy et al. (2012) argued, the men's absence made the women vulnerable to prejudicial community gossip. The restrictions on mobility by the husbands, therefore, were efforts to reinforce gender roles and to police women's activities at home (McEvoy et al., 2012).

In addition, women usually found an increased workload at home with the migration of the men. As argued by Binzel & Assaad (2011), Khan et al. (2010), Lokshin & Glinskaya (2009), Mahler & Pessar (2006), and Piper (2009), this was one of

the reasons for women's limited participation in the labour market²¹². Similarly, gender roles for women were heavily dominated by domestic chores, while young men were expected to work in jobs, or to perform activities, that would create an independent identity. This implies that the status of men and women in the household and in wider society has been constructed based on relative deprivation (Curran & Saguy, 2001). Likewise, cultural boundaries, which were known as a means for controlling women's freedom, had posed challenges for women. This was also reflected in women's migration decisions. Therefore, the push and pull factors theory of migration was found to be incomplete because it did not give adequate consideration to gender aspects and the decision-making abilities of men and women, as argued by scholars such as Boyd & Grieco (2003), de Haas (2010), Hoang (2011), and Oishi (2005).

Gender-based violence is still prevalent in Nepalese society (Dhakal, 2008; Lamichhane et al., 2011), and the experiences of the women left-behind are no exception. However, there were some differences between the women in the hills and the plains. The women in the plains experienced a greater incidence of physical violence than those in the hills²¹³. In addition, 18 per cent of the women had been a victim of at least one type of sexual violence or harassment in the market place, on public transport, or in their community. These incidents were higher in the plains than in the hills. Similarly, young women had more mobility restrictions than the older women or women with children. These all had posed challenges for women to come forward and take roles outside their homes. Despite these restrictions, the women left-

²¹² A study by Lokshin & Glinskaya (2009) in Nepal found that women's labour market participation from migrants' households was 13 per cent, while it was 21 per cent from other households.

²¹³ The physical violence included beating, slapping, hair-pulling, kicking, and burning, among others. Other forms of violence included sexual, psychological, emotional (threats, verbal abuse, and neglect) and deprivational (economic and social) abuses. Polygamy, marital rape, dowry, trafficking, accusations of witchcraft, and early marriage are other examples of violence.

behind had demonstrated some collective or individual agency, going beyond their traditional boundaries.

Women's Agency

This research has investigated the agency of the women left-behind as a result of their spouse's migration, in a context where interactions between gender, social capital, and social institutions/structures play key roles in shaping their social position. The findings of this research stand on the idea that agency is the ability of women to make decisions and to act on them, going beyond the concept of female gender roles, which have been characterised as being submissive and powerless, and conditioned by associations of patriarchy, caste identity, and economic status.

Agency

Basically, the agency of women at the individual level includes a number of key elements, such as freedom of movement, participation in decision-making, control over family rituals and selection of spouse, access to and control over family resources including land and other assets, and psychological confidence or 'self-esteem' (Jejeebhoy et al., 2010; Mukherjee & Kundu, 2012). In addition, this research accepts the fact that agency is related to power, which comes individually or collectively from different sources, including information, money and assets, networks and connections of people, language, culture, religion, law, and education and skills, among others (Agarwal, 1997; Jejeebhoy et al., 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Lacroix, 2012). The female research participants took advantage of these opportunities through the tactical management of time, participation in community groups, involvement in decision-making, and through leadership roles, after the migration of their husbands.

Although, agency and social capital are associated and have a reciprocal relationship, a higher level of agency as an outcome is achieved as a result of various

inputs which are managed in a social environment by actors. In the context of women's agency in Nepalese rural families when their husbands were abroad, corroborating with Dale (2013) and Newman & Dale (2005), this research argues that the motivation to act is important to enhance women's agency in a context where men's migration offers women the opportunity to discover their hidden strengths. This research agrees with de Haas (2009), that the freedom of mobility created by the migration of the husband is complemented by changed work responsibilities, and a greater scope to manage money and to participate in activities beyond household activities, which result in women's increased capability.

As Newman & Dale (2005) argued, social capital is effective in expanding the agency of women through promoting actions that allow individuals to enjoy their rights and access to resources. As mentioned previously, while agency builds social capital, social capital becomes a means to enhancing the agency of individuals as well (Dale & Newman, 2008; Harvey, 2002; Ling & Dale, 2013), and the combination of enhanced social capital and capable agency was required to make the transformation of unequal social structures and relationships (Krishna, 2001). Therefore, as Bourdieu (1993, 1996) argued, agency is the interplay between objective structure and subjective mental experience, which ultimately contributes to changing local practices. The changes were shaped through the agency of active and capable women, or knowledgeable and enabled human agents (Giddens, 1976; Sewell, 1992), at different levels, including in the household and the community, and in the social, religious, and cultural domains (Samman & Santos, 2009).

Women's Tactful Actions

Women, as the agent, in the research areas demonstrated a number of tactful actions to avoid different forms of challenges, restrictions, accusations, and to continue

their participation in the household and community decision-making spaces. These actions included obtaining informal consent from an in-law or husband before taking group membership, negotiating with them in advance about their possible involvement, avoiding the type of clothes that could attract the attention of other people, avoiding early morning or evening meetings, and walking in a group of women or with one of their children. These were some of the strategies used by women to ‘stay safe’ within the existing social structure.

These strategies helped women to keep their family united on the one hand, as well as helping them to gain support from their family members for the activities they had planned or started, on the other. In addition, these actions could prevent women from accusations which could be made against them for taking actions without the notice of their family members. At the same time, they offered a window for women to continue their participation in the community decision-making space, and to enhance their abilities to undertake a range of roles which they would not have performed when their husbands were at home. Gender-based violence in South Asian society is strongly related to the concept of the ‘purity’ of women (Banerjee-Dube, 2014; Gupta, 2005); therefore, women’s preventative action and women’s networks and self-help organisations were important to protect them from some forms of violence, regardless of their income and employment status.

Women also had to undertake a number of activities which could not be restricted, such as shopping, visiting the children’s schools, meeting with government officials, taking children to healthcare facilities, and joining cultural programmes such as weddings and festivals with family and friends. The husbands had to allow the women to perform these roles because of their social meanings. Although, they had to take many precautions to prevent them from false accusations, these activities also provided opportunities for the women to understand the various services that were on

offer, to collect information about them, and to develop formal and informal networks with people, which were important aids to making decisions. These all provided the potential for creating positive gender roles as other studies (Aghajanian et al., 2013; Gartaula, Visser, et al., 2012; Jacka, 2012; Kaspar, 2005; Maharjan et al., 2012a; and Poertner et al., 2011) have identified.

Women have been increasingly confronted with new conceptions of gender identity, which stress greater autonomy and freedom to undertake desired actions (Curran & Saguy, 2001). Therefore, women's participation in community groups and other activities have increased over time despite different forms of restrictions, and discriminatory legal frameworks, in line with the work of Bhadra (2007), Kaspar (2005), Khatiwada (2010), Oda (2007), Piper (2009), and Poertner et al. (2011), who conducted their research in other South Asian countries. Similarly, the women had also made their efforts to manage gossip against them through direct communication with their husbands, family members, and group members (also see Debnath & Selim, 2009).

There were also variations between nuclear and joint families, with women in nuclear families having increased autonomy as the *de facto* head of household more than in extended families. This created scope for women to come out of their traditional domestic domain into the community space, which is similar to the findings of a study in Morocco (de Haas, 2010). However, women in nuclear families had more gossip to contend with, and a higher workload, than women in extended families. The women in joint families could therefore spare more time for involvement in community groups and meetings, but nevertheless, being part of community groups and the associated activities also contributed to reducing discrimination and enhancing their opportunities and capacities.

As Lokshin & Glinskaya (2009) argued, patriarchal norms and values were the reason that the women left-behind had lower labour market participation, and this may

have restricted women's participation in community groups where they would volunteer their time and effort. However, this study indicates that this effect may not be highly significant. The groups were a source of a range of benefits, such as access to credit, and decision-making and networking opportunities, which could give them symbolic power and respect in their community (Thieme & Wyss, 2005). As Gartaula et al. (2012) stated, the women had participated in group activities as a capacity-building opportunity.

Men's migration stimulated the majority of the left-behind women to create change in their lives. Therefore, the outputs, such as access to resources, community participation, social networks, and improved social position became the immediate motivation to perform additional roles. In doing so, they had taken advantage of supportive policies and institutions, and had strategically managed a number of social and cultural barriers. Women's agency was demonstrated while undertaking these roles, while at the same time, their agency further contributed to changing the existing structures and cultural practices. Thus, this demonstrates that there was an intertwined relationship between social capital and agency (Dale & Newman, 2008; Harvey, 2002; Ling & Dale, 2013).

This study substantiates the research conducted by Kaspar (2005) and Maharjan et al. (2012a), finding that there is a changed gender relationship with the increased status of women in the family and in wider society through women's networks and other activities which began after the migration of their husbands in Nepal. It also supports the conclusions of Ghimire et al. (2010), that migration has been a powerful means to increasing the confidence of women to come out against gender-based violence, and that when the women had their own incomes, they were in a better position than those women who had to depend on their husband or other family members for money.

The tactful management of restrictions and challenges, and increased mobility and migration have been part of the process of women's capacity development in Nepal. However, the women would benefit further through sustained freedom if the discriminatory legal frameworks were changed. Similarly, equipping women and their family members with an understanding of legal tools would help them to find a practical way to enhance their development. As de Haas (2009) argued, women's mobility should not be looked at as a problem to be solved, but as a process of their capacity development and transformation from a position of relative deprivation. However, the provision of political rights, access to micro-credit, and equal educational opportunities would not automatically enhance the agency of women (Mukherjee & Kundu, 2012; Parmar, 2003). The implementation of legal provisions, the creation of new institutions, better working conditions, and more importantly, a "societal commitment to work for appropriate functioning of social, political and economic arrangements" would ensure the rights of the workers and their agency (Sen, 2013). Hence, as de Haas (2009) argued, the issue of women's mobility should be addressed in the same way as health and education through increasing the people's welfare, and improving social and public services. These all conclude that there are some other areas that future research could contribute to understand the complexities of gender and migration.

Future Research Areas

Although there are multiple migration theories, most of them focus on push and pull factors, drivers of migration, and migrants at the destination. Each migration theory has its own importance and one may contribute to others. However, these theories do not have enough scope to understand why the migration of women is so low in some cultures, and how these cultural practices affect the position of the women when their husbands are not at home. Therefore, migration theories need to have a more integrated

approach to analysis, including an exploration of socio-political and economic issues, to understand the causes and effects of migration. This research also recognises that gender is an important aspect of decision-making because of social interactions and roles, hierarchies, power relationships, abilities to exert autonomy, and various policies and practices.

The research results have been analysed at three levels to explain the agency of women. At the first level, this research has examined women's scope to enhance their capacity when the men migrated and the women started to undertake various roles at home. These have been identified and explained as the inputs that contribute to women's capacity. At the second level, this research has investigated the influence of these inputs on the formation or membership of community groups, access to and control over money and other resources, exposure to different services and opportunities, and increased knowledge and skills of women to perform multiple roles in the absence of their husbands in a society where traditional gender-, caste-, and ethnicity-based structures play key roles. These changes are identified as the immediate outputs caused by the first level of inputs.

Finally, this research has examined women's expanded agency in relation to both progressive and regressive legal, social, and cultural structures, and the contribution of outputs to boosting the agency of the women. This research has analysed the agency of the women, based on their location, caste, and ethnic identity, and has worked through the idea of an interplay between structure and agency, and the capacity of social actors to reflect on their position, develop plans and strategies, take action to achieve their vision, and facilitate collective voices and actions, resulting in greater access to decision-making power for women.

In summary, the women had both formal and informal structural challenges within the home and in the community space. However, when the men migrated,

women gained the scope and the roles which ultimately contributed to enhancing their social capital. Social capital has been the means to enhancing the agency of women to negotiate decision-making at different levels. This scope to make decisions was further strengthened with the increased network of the women, the extended period of migration of their husbands, and women's access to the information needed to make decisions. Thus, women's participation in decision-making at home and in community groups has been a stepping stone to women's access to public spaces and resources in a society where men had traditionally been the decision-makers. While social capital built the agency of women, the higher level of individual and community-level agency was also important in strengthening social capital, resulting in a virtuous cycle of change. Therefore, a combination of high levels of social capital and agency were important in bringing changes to the formal and informal structures which created unequal relationships. However, women's position and their decision-making capacity after the men's return from migration require further investigation. This examination would provide a clearer picture of whether men's migration could be an option in the creation of structural changes to Nepalese patriarchal society.

There is a low level of acceptance of women's mobility in Nepalese society. However, there are some women who have chosen overseas migration and some have returned home. An investigation of experiences that migrant women bring to the communities and the pressures that they face in a patriarchal society would help to understand the perspectives of returned migrant women. As well, there are some women who have taken multiple leadership roles in society and others who have not even become members of community groups, although they live in the same clusters and the same social environment. An analysis of the differences between women, their capacities and social networking, despite having similar external environments, would help to identify the stimuli for individual behaviours.

In addition, when women had money management roles, their spending priorities tended to be on the accumulation of assets, one of the traditionally-accepted indicators of social status. However, women could be more independent and have increased bargaining capacity. Therefore, the identification of options to enhance women's bargaining power in different social, cultural, and family environments is another potential stream of research.

In conclusion, this research argues that women in Nepalese society were not in the shadow of their husbands when their husbands migrated, but instead, had developed their capacity and performed various roles despite the various challenges. The women had increased access to and control over resources, independence and learning, social networking, and an enhanced voice in decision-making in the home and in the community space. However, the women faced much resistance in maintaining these benefits because of patriarchal policies and practices. Basically, they had two major challenges – strengthening and maintaining their social capital, and making collective efforts against the socio-cultural practices and policies, for the formation and implementation of affirmative policies in order to change inequitable social structures and practices. Therefore, further research, as mentioned above, would help to understand more about the possible structural changes that may occur through the migration of men and women.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes that the relationship between women's motivation to take on new roles and to expand and improve their decision-making scope, social networks, and social position is important in understanding the agency of women in patriarchal Nepalese society. Women have been living in a social structure which has a number of elements which are confronting to women's agency and which create

problems at different stages of their lives. However, men's migration is one of the windows which opens opportunities for women to participate in decision-making at home and in community-level planning and action. Women from nuclear families had more scope to achieve this. At the same time, women in extended families also increased their opportunities, including participation in the community space. Such experiences functioned as motivating factors for women to use their agency. This research has found three key intertwined elements that motivated the female research participants the most – decision-making opportunities, community group participation and social capital, and social position.

The migration of men increased women's access to money, and functioned as one of the key inputs in creating women's decision-making space. In this process, women with their own incomes were better placed than those who depended on their husband's remittances only. Having their own income had given women a bargaining capacity and opportunities for decision-making with enabling effects. These processes had motivated relatively deprived women to come forward to strengthen their earning capacity, as well as to enhance their negotiation skills with their husbands, families, and other community members.

The absence of men from the home and from money management roles had also offered women the scope to participate in community groups, which provided them with opportunities to network with other women and to raise their voices in the community decision-making process. These roles have moved beyond the discussions taking place in the existing migration development research, and had actually enhanced women's capabilities. Collectively, the above experiences have created the potential for the development of a durable network of institutionalised relationships between women. However, they need to be backed up by the implementation of formal policies.

This study has established a link between men's migration and women's decision-making in the family and the community. With the decision-making roles at home, the women were invited to participate in community groups. This process had two-way impacts – the women built their social networks through their agency, and the group activities contributed to enhancing their capacity. These activities offered the women the opportunity to influence events outside their immediate space, either within the household or in community decision-making. Furthermore, the bonding and bridging capitals have been important in providing access to resources as well as maintaining identity and status. While agency built the social capital, the individual- and community-level networks contributed to enhancing the women's agency.

Furthermore, women's participation in community groups and organisations helped them to access alternative resources, and also functioned as a valuable means to fulfilling their needs. Beyond these benefits, the groups collectively challenged the patriarchal structure at the micro-level and protected women from gender-based violence. Although these actions had only limited impact in bringing wider change, they were considered valuable by the female research participants in enhancing their quality of life. Thus, all of these processes contributed to the agency of 'deprived' women as an outcome of men's migration.

However, the women faced a number of cultural and policy-related challenges. The mobility of women was constrained by government policy on the one hand, and informal cultural and social practices, and socio-cultural values, on the other. These issues had created barriers against women's mobility, decision-making, and involvement in community and social spaces. Therefore, within these complex formal and informal structures, this study has found that women have to manage their mobility, and they have to participate in more community activities than before. These steps had been the means to improving gender relations at home, which was further strengthened with the

length of the migration – as the period increased, the women gained greater freedom. However, women had to be continuously wary of their social environment to prevent them from falling prey to jealousy and different forms of false accusations.

As Pierre Bourdieu has given emphasis to the interplay between objective structure and the subjective mental experience of agents to change local practices (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996), the women agents had catalysed migration and the networking process to enact social change, particularly in redefining gender relations and enhancing their status at home and in the community. These arguments are also corroborated with the work of Boyd & Grieco (2003), Carling (2005), Curran & Saguy (2001), and Massey et al. (1993), who bring the contribution of social capital to changes in gender relations. The key insight of this work is that women's networks have a cumulative effect over space and time, and serve to connect individual and household decisions to the social structure (Curran & Saguy, 2001), while social networks reciprocate this agency. However, as some scholars (Drydyk, 2008; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kabeer, 1999) have outlined, these agents have not been able to perform as 'free agents' with the ability to make rational choices for themselves, as they still need to negotiate between the structure and their own agency.

The women left-behind found their enhanced freedom rewarding because they now had options to come out of their gendered roles, and they also had the scope to develop new knowledge, exposure, and skills beyond the traditionally-defined areas, as Gartaula et al. (2012) and Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford (1999) have argued. In addition, men's migration provided opportunities to acquire various life experiences for the women (Carling, 2005). These had all collectively contributed to maximising benefits for these women through the rational use of their agency within the existing socio-cultural space.

Together with these, this research identifies some future research areas to understand the complexities of gender and migration. Among them, women's agency and scope to make decisions after the men's return; experiences of returned-migrant women in Nepalese society, and difference between migrant and non-migrant women in society; and bargaining power of women in different social, cultural and family environments are some of them. With these additional research, this is expected to understand more about the possible structural changes that may or may not occur through the migration of men and women.

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Annex 1: List of Issues at Different Stages of Migration

Issues	Stages that issue occurs		
	Pre	During	Post
Policy-related issues			
Discrimination between men and women	X	X	X
Insufficient policy to make effective use of remittances		X	X
Inadequate regulation of the cost of emigration, high interest loan/funding	X		
Unsatisfactory policy to protect the health and safety of migrants		X	X
Institution-related issues			
Duplication of information/incomplete information of migrant/returned migrants by government agencies	X		X
Inadequate skill development support	X		X
No clear (false) contract and work responsibilities	X	X	
Expensive to transfer remittances		X	
No/inadequate orientation about the destination/work	X	X	
Cultural issues			
Caste-based discrimination	X		X
Gender-based violence	X	X	X
Inadequate reintegration of women (purity/honour)			X
Discrimination based on migration destination	X	X	X

Social issues	Pre	During	Post
Limited opportunities for women to network with friends and family		X	X
Polygamy/polyandry/family breakdown		X	X
Health and education of children/women		X	X
Lack of family help for women		X	X
Lack of care of senior people		X	X

X = prevalence of issue

Annex 2: Research Questionnaire and Interview Checklists²¹⁴

Consent form for individual interview

I understand the information about the research project ‘Men’s migration and the women left-behind in Nepalese villages’. I agree to share with you the information and I want/ do not want (circle one) my real name to be published in your work. I understand that the information that I give you may be published in a thesis, journal, and other academic papers, either in English or Nepali language.

I understand that even if the researcher (Binod) does not use my real name, people might recognise me by the information that I provide. So, I make a decision to disclose or not to disclose sensitive information or saying anything defamatory.

I understand that I can stop this interview at any time, without any reason. Furthermore, I will let you know in advance if I want something ‘off the record’ or that should not be recorded or published.

I give my consent to record this interview using a note book / a digital tape recorder (circle one).

Name:

Address:

Contact phone number:

Date:

²¹⁴ Research questionnaire, checklists and consent forms are translated from Nepalese version of them to English.

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

Ethics manager

The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee

The Australian National University

Telephone: 0061 2 6125 3427

Email: Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au

Oral consent form for individual interview – only for illiterate participants

I (Binod) will read the consent form and ask if I can record the consent using a digital tape recorder?

- If yes, proceed ahead.
- If no, ask participant for an alternative and proceed ahead, as agreed.

The recording will proceed with the following questions:

1. Can you tell me your full name and current address, please?
2. Can you tell me your phone/contact number, if any?

The researcher, Binod Chapagain has read the information sheet, and I understand about the research project ‘Men’s migration and the women left-behind in Nepalese villages’. I agree to share with you the information, and I want/ do not want (agree one by asking question) my real name to be published in your work. I understand that the information that I give you may be published in a thesis, journal, and/or other academic papers, either in English or Nepali language.

I understand that even if the researcher (Binod) does not use my real name, people might recognise me through the information that I provide. I will make a decision to disclose or not to disclose sensitive information or to share anything defamatory.

I understand that I can stop this interview at any time, without giving any reason.

Furthermore, I will let you know in advance if I want something ‘off the record’ or that should not be recorded or published.

I give my consent to record my interview using a note book/a digital tape recorder (circle one).

Date:

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

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Part A: Schedule for Interview²¹⁵

Date:

Interviewer:

Place:

Research participant's information

1. Full Name:
2. Caste/Ethnic group:
3. Address:
4. Age/DoB:
5. Information about family members
 - a. Total members:
 - b. Number of children (below 18 years), if any
 - c. Type of family – Joint/Nuclear (Circle one)
6. Member in overseas employment
 - a. Name of the person:
 - b. Relationship with respondent:
 - c. Destination country
 - i. Period: From Year..... Month..... to Year..... Month.....
 - d. If the member has worked in more than one country
 - i. Previous country/countries
 - ii. Period: From Year..... to Year.....
 - iii. Total period

²¹⁵ The interview questions were translated into the Nepali language and formatted as appropriate for the research purpose.

7. What is your family economic status? Perceived economic status of family (tick one)
- a. Poor
 - b. Medium
 - c. Rich
 - d. Reason for selecting

Before Overseas Employment

8. What activities did.....(name) do before his migration? (*Can be ticked more than one*)
- a. Household chores
 - b. Agriculture
 - c. Share-cropping
 - d. Casual labour/part-time job
 - e. Employed/full-time job
 - f. Shop
 - g. Social work/politics
 - h. Unemployed
 - i. Others
9. What was the reason for the overseas migration of.....(name)? (*Can tick more than one*)
- a. Unemployment
 - b. Conflict/civil war
 - c. Regular strikes/closure of workplace
 - d. Interested in earning more
 - e. Saving
 - f. Family relations/family dispute

- g. Disputes with relatives/neighbours
- h. Don't know
- i. Others

10. How was the decision of overseas migration made? Who made the decision to migrate? (tick one)

- a. Migrant's own decision
- b. Family decision– in consultation with family members
- c. No information
- d. Others

11. What was the total spending on the overseas migration (last one)? (tick one)

- a. No idea
- b. Less than 30 thousand rupees
- c. 31 to 60 thousand rupees
- d. 61 to 90 thousand rupees
- e. 91 to 120 thousand rupees
- f. More than 121 thousand rupees

12. How did you manage the spending for the overseas migration (last one)? (tick one)

- a. No idea
- b. Use of savings
- c. Sold household items/property/assets/jewellery
- d. Loan from money-lender (go to i)
- e. Loan from relatives (go to i)
 - i. If d or e ticked, what was the rate per year?

13. How was the information about overseas employment received? (tick one)

- a. No idea

- b. Friends
- c. Radio/TV
- d. Relatives/neighbours/brokers
- e. Others

14. Who organised the overseas migration? (tick one)

- a. No idea
- b. Relatives who were working in the destination
- c. Recruitment agents
- d. Local broker
- e. Others

15. Where was the departing airport? (tick one)

- a. Kathmandu
- b. Others

16. Was there any training before overseas employment? (tick one)

- a. No (go to 17)
- b. Yes
 - i. If YES, how long was the trainingdays.....months

17. What were your main roles before.....(name)'s migration? (Can tick more than one)

- a. Household chores
- b. Agriculture
- c. Share-cropping
- d. Casual labour/part-time job
- e. Employed/full-time job
- f. Shop
- g. Social work/politics

h. Others

After Migration

18. What type of work does.....(name) do overseas? (tick one)

- a. No idea
- b. Skilled
- c. Semi-skilled
- d. Unskilled

19. Who is the key responsible person who now performs the activities that
(name) used to perform at home after his migration? (can tick more than one)

- a. Wife
- b. Others (go to 23)

20. Do you receive any help to undertake these activities?

- a. No (go to 23)
- b. Yes

21. Who helps you to perform the household activities that.....(name) used to do?
(Can tick more than one)

- a. In-laws/husband's family members
- b. Women's brothers/sisters
- c. Hired workers
- d. Others

22. Who helps you to perform the community activities that.....(name) used to do?
(Can be ticked more than one)

- a. In-laws/husband's family members
- b. Women's brothers/sisters
- c. Hired workers
- d. Others

23. What are the major changes that you have faced because of the migration of.....(name)? (Can tick more than one)

- a. Increased household work (go to 24)
- b. Others (go to 24)
- c. Increased confidence to make decisions (go to 25)
- d. Improved public speaking (go to 26)
- e. Increased community participation (go to 27)
- f. Dropped some of the work that I used to do before (go to 27)
- g. No change (go to 27)

24. What are the major reasons for your increased workload? (Can tick more than one)

- a. Group work
- b. School of children
- c. Construction and maintenance of house
- d. Agriculture
- e. Fodder and forage collection
- f. Shopping
- g. Others

25. What has most contributed to enhancing your confidence to make decisions?

(Can tick more than one)

- a. Help from family members
- b. Learning from group
- c. Exposure to different services and places
- d. Others

26. What has most contributed to enhancing your public speaking capacity? (Can be ticked more than one)

- a. Help from family members
- b. Learning from group
- c. Exposure to different services and places
- d. Others

27. Have you or your family received remittances after the migration of.....(name)?

- a. No (go to 28)
- b. Yes
 - i. If YES, on what has the money been spent? (Can tick more than one)
 - 1. Construction or maintenance of house
 - 2. Investment in land/business
 - 3. Loan payment
 - 4. Education of children
 - 5. Health-related expenses
 - 6. Purchased a motorcycle/vehicle
 - 7. Changed clothing
 - 8. Changed food practices
 - 9. Wedding of children
 - 10. Others

28. Have you found any changes in the behaviour of your community members at home because of the migration of.....(name)?

- a. No (go to 29)
- b. Yes
 - i. If YES, What are they? (Can tick more than one)
 - 1. Increased courtesy calls (increased one-to-one meetings)

2. Requests for loans
3. Requests to join community groups
4. Fake calls/teasing
5. Others

29. Have you received any help from the female group members when.....(name) is not at home?

- a. No (go to 30)
- b. Yes
 - i. If YES, what are the areas of help (Can tick more than one)
 1. Household activities
 2. Schooling of children
 3. Emergencies
 4. Financial needs
 5. Work related to government offices/organisations
 6. Others

30. What do you see as the advantages to you (woman) because of.....(name)'s migration? (Can tick more than one)

- a. Management of money
- b. Food management decisions
- c. Family ritual decisions
- d. Children's education decisions
- e. Participation in community groups/activities
- f. Going outside home/travel outside home
- g. Understanding services provided by the government and other service providers
- h. Others

31. What are the disadvantages to you (woman) because of.....(name)'s migration?

(Can tick more than one)

- a. Asked to limit mobility
- b. Asked not to join the community groups
- c. Scolded frequently by husbands or in-laws
- d. Face sexual harassment
- e. Physical attacks by husband or in-laws
- f. Restricted from making financial decisions

32. Did you have membership of any community groups and organisations before the migration of.....(name)?

- a. No (go to 33)
- b. Yes
 - i. If yes, how many? (tick one)
 - 1. One group only
 - 2. More than one group

33. Do you have membership of any community groups or organisations after the migration of.....(name)?

- a. No (go to 37)
- b. Yes
 - i. If YES, how many? (tick one)
 - 1. One group only
 - 2. More than one group

34. What are the advantages of group membership to you? (Can tick more than one)

- a. Participation in community meetings
- b. Increased confidence to speak in front of groups of people
- c. Acquired new knowledge

- d. Developed new skills
- e. Made new friends
- f. Experiences of collective work
- g. Visited new places (exposure)
- h. Saving of money
- i. Borrowed money in emergencies (access to money)
- j. Received protection from gender-based violence
- k. Had opportunity to take a break from household activities
- l. Others

35. What are the disadvantages of group membership to you? (Can tick more than one)

- a. Increased workload
- b. Loss of money
- c. Increased family disputes
- d. Others

36. Do you hold office bearer's positions of any of groups you are a member of?

- a. No (go to 37)
- b. Yes
 - i. If YES, which positions? (Can be ticked more than one)
 - 1. Chair of.....groups
 - 2. Secretary of.....groups
 - 3. Treasurer of.....groups
 - 4. Executive member of.....groups

37. Who makes the following decisions in the absence of.....(name)?

- a. Spending of money which is less than 1,000 rupees (tick one)
 - i. Husband

- ii. Wife
 - iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- b. Spending of money which is more than 1,000 rupees (tick one)
- i. Husband
 - ii. Wife
 - iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- c. Purchasing of assets (land/house) and valuable items like jewellery (tick one)
- i. Husband
 - ii. Wife
 - iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- d. Schooling of Children
- i. Husband
 - ii. Wife
 - iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- e. Health-seeking decisions for you and your children
- i. Husband
 - ii. Wife

- iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- f. Loan payments
 - i. Husband
 - ii. Wife
 - iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- g. Family rituals like marriage, naming ceremonies, *bratabandha*, *pasni* etc. (tick one)
 - i. Husband
 - ii. Wife
 - iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- h. Selling of assets (land/house) and valuable items like jewellery (tick one)
 - i. Husband
 - ii. Wife
 - iii. Wife in consultation with husband or in-laws
 - iv. In-laws
 - v. Others
- i. When did you start making the following decisions? (tick one box per row, only)

Areas	No	Within first year	13 months to 3 years	3 to 5 years	5 years and above
Construction and repair of house					
Schooling of children					
Health-seeking for you and your children					
Purchasing of land/house/business					
Loan payments					
Others					

38. Have you ever experienced interference by your husband or in-laws in the decisions that you have made during the last year?

- a. No (End of interview)
- b. Yes
 - i. If YES, how many times?
 - 1. Once
 - 2. More than once

39. End of interview –

- a. Ask if the research participant has any questions for the researcher.
- b. Ask if the research participant is interested in meeting with the researcher to have a further discussion.

Thank the research participant.

Annex 3: Interview Checklists

Checklist for In-Depth Interviews with Women Left-Behind²¹⁶

Consent form for individual interview

I understand the information about the research project ‘Men’s migration and the women left-behind in Nepalese villages’. I agree to share with you the information and I want/do not want (circle one) my real name to be published in your work. I understand that the information that I give may be published in a thesis, journal, and/or other academic papers either in English or Nepali language.

I understand that even if the researcher (Binod) does not use my real name, people might recognise me by the information that I give. So, I make my decision to disclose or not to disclose sensitive information or saying anything defamatory.

I understand that I can stop this interview at any time, without giving any reason. Furthermore, I will let you know in advance if I want something ‘off the record’ or should not be recorded or published.

I give my consent to record this interview using a note book/a digital tape recorder (circle one).

Name:

Address:

Contact phone number:

Date:

²¹⁶ These interviews were conducted with the people who had already participated in a survey. Therefore, these are built on the former discussions. This is a guide only, the research participants had opportunities to share their stories.

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

Ethics manager

The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee

The Australian National University

Telephone: 0061 2 6125 3427

Email: Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au

Oral consent form for individual interview– only for illiterate participants

I (Binod) will read the consent form and ask if I can record the consent using digital a tape recorder?

- If yes, proceed ahead.
- If no, ask participant for an alternative and proceed ahead, as agreed

The recording will proceed with the following questions:

3. Can you tell me your full name and current address, please?
4. Can you tell me your phone/contact number if any?

The researcher, Binod Chapagain read the information sheet and I understood about the research project ‘Men’s migration and the women left-behind in Nepalese villages’. I agree to share with you the information and I want/do not want (agree one by asking question) my real name to be published in your work. I understand that the information that I give may be published in a thesis, journal, and/or other academic papers either in English or Nepali language.

I understand that even if the researcher (Binod) does not use my real name, people might recognise me through the information that I mention. I make my decision to disclose or not to disclose sensitive information or share anything defamatory.

I understand that I can stop this interview at any time, without giving any reason.

Furthermore, I will let you know in advance if I want something ‘off the record’ or that should not be recorded or published.

I give my consent to record my interview using a note book/a digital tape recorder (circle one).

Date:

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

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Discussion Checklist

Name.....

1. Life histories of the individual
 - a. Origin - where was she born
 - b. Where has she moved/migrated until now, if any
 - c. How did the movement take place, if any
2. Family history
 - a. Where is the origin of the husband's family
 - b. If the family migrated from other areas:
 - i. Who moved to the current location – husband/in-laws/others
 - ii. When did the family move to the current location?
3. Current emigrant from the family
 - a. What is the highest educational qualification of the person?

- b. History of overseas employment
 - i. When?
 - ii. Why?
- c. Communication with the migrant
 - i. How
 - ii. Frequency
 - iii. Barriers/challenges
 - iv. Importance
- 4. Frequency of migrant's visit to home
- 5. Gender relations within family
 - a. What are the changes within the household decision-making as a result of the member's absence?
 - b. What decisions did you make yourself?
 - i. Why did you decide this by yourself?
 - c. What decisions did you consult on with others?
 - i. If consulted, with whom?
 - ii. Why?
 - d. What are the changes in your role within the household in the absence of the male member?
 - i. What you used to do when the male member was in the house?
 - ii. What are the new roles you take on in his absence?
 - iii. Workload – what are your feelings about your workload in the absence of the male member?
- 6. Gender relations/social capital in the community
 - a. Membership

- i. Were you a member of any group or committee/network before the migration of the male member?
 - ii. If yes
 1. In which groups?
 2. In which positions?
 3. How much time did you spend in group meetings/activities every month (calculate with them)
 - iii. Are you a member of any group/committees/network now?
 - iv. If yes
 1. In which groups (name of groups)
 2. In which positions
 3. How much time do you spend in group meetings and activities every month (calculate with them)
 4. What major activities have you performed with the group members in the last six months?
 5. How do these group meetings/activities affect your workload? (compare before and after migration)
 6. How does membership in groups influence/benefit you?
 - a. Financially
 - b. Socially
 - c. Politically
 - d. In your social status/recognition
- b. Influence in decisions
- i. How do the groups take views shared by you?
 - ii. Are there any changes in group decisions over the period?
 1. If yes, what are the key changes?

2. Do they listen to the left-behind women?
 3. Do they listen to you?
- iii. Is there any evidence of group decisions taken which respect your views?
- c. Community relationship/leadership
- i. Have there been any changes in your relationship with other community members after you started taking a key role in your family (after the male member left your home)?
 1. If yes, what are the key changes that you have observed?
 2. What are the key contributing factors to the changed relationships?
 3. Has there been any change in gender- and caste-based roles? If yes, how?
 - ii. Do you get information about the groups and committee decisions?
 1. If yes, how do you get them?
 2. How have they changed before and after the emigration of the male member?
 3. Have they made you responsible to communicate group/committee information to other members? If yes, what information?
 - iii. Perceptions about community roles and identity
 1. How do you see the perception of others (mainly men and upper-caste people) about your role because you have been managing your household/community roles in the male member's absence?

2. How do you see your social prestige/social status while performing multiple roles?
3. How do you perceive yourself in relation to your roles and capacity in the male member's absence?
 - a. Are there any changes in your confidence?
 - b. If yes, can you explain?
- d. Likely future changes
 - i. What are the likely changes in your household decision-making once the male member of your house is back?
 - ii. What are the likely changes in your community roles once the male member is back at home?
7. Overall changes in gender relations, caste- and ethnicity-based practices and their sustainability

*Checklist for Participant Observation of Group Meetings*²¹⁷

1. Number of males and females in meeting
2. Agenda setting – who sets the agenda? How agenda is decided?
3. Discussion – who leads? Who speaks less? How are the voices of women from *Dalits* and ethnic groups included?
4. Decisions – how are decisions made? Majority, consensus?
5. Sharing of responsibility – who is made responsible to lead group actions?
6. Meeting minutes – who takes the minutes?
7. Communication of decisions – who is responsible for sharing? How are they shared?
8. What types of women are influential? Educated? Outspoken? Husband in developed countries? Husband in main labour market destinations? Husband in India?
9. Other meeting logistics – who takes different roles in logistics? What type of role for women and what for men? What for women from *Dalits* and *Janajati* groups?

²¹⁷ This is a guideline to take notes for the researcher and the notes can be taken about all other observed actions/ behaviours/ gestures as appropriate.

Checklist for Focus Group Discussions

Consent form for focus group discussion participants

I have understood the information about the research project ‘Men’s migration and the women left-behind in Nepalese society’. I agree to share with you the information and I want/do not want (circle one) my real name to be published in your work. I understand that the information that I give you may be published in a thesis, journal, and/or other academic papers, either in English or Nepali language.

I make my decision to disclose or not to disclose sensitive information or share anything defamatory during this discussion.

I understand that I can stop this interview at any time, without giving any reason. I also understand that the researcher may not be able to disaggregate focus group information by individual respondents after the discussion. Therefore, I authorise the researcher (Binod) to use the information (unless I have mentioned something as being off the record) that I shared during the group discussion.

Furthermore, I will let you know in advance if I want something to be ‘off the record’ or that should not be recorded or published.

I give my consent to record this group discussion using a note book and a digital tape recorder.

Name:

Address:

Contact phone number:

Date:

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

Ethics manager

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Discussion Checklist

1. Migration pattern from the areas –
 - a. Who are the migrants – men, women?
 - b. Which are the major migration destinations?
 - c. Why do they migrate?
2. What are the key reasons for migration?
3. Effects of male migration on women – how does this affect women’s
 - a. Workload?
 - b. Family roles?
 - c. Community roles?
 - d. Group committee membership and participation?
4. Influence in women’s status in household and society because of migration of male from households?
 - a. Contributing factors to the changes?
5. The role of women from *Dalit* and *Janajati* groups in groups and committees – what are the key changes with male migration?

6. Are there any effects of *Dalit* and *Janajati* women's participation in community groups in caste- and ethnicity-based structures?
 - a. If yes, what are they?
7. How does male migration influence the networking, exposure, and confidence of women in her household and community responsibilities?
8. How does migration to different countries affect the relationship of women in society? For example, how does the relationship differ if the male has migrated to India or the Middle East or developed countries?
9. How will the role of women change with the return of the male member?
 - a. Within the household
 - b. In community groups/organisations
10. Are there any negative effects of migration? What are they?

Checklist for Semi-Structured interview

(Guidelines for interviews with key informants, returned migrants and left-behind men)

Consent form for individual interview

I understand the information about the research project ‘Men’s migration and the women left-behind in Nepalese society’. I agree to share with you the information and I want/do not want (circle one) my real name to be published in your work. I understand that the information that I give may be published in a thesis, journal, and/or other academic paper, either in English or Nepali language.

I understand that even if the researcher (Binod) does not use my real name, people might recognise me through the information that I give. So, I make my decision to disclose or not to disclose sensitive information or to say anything defamatory.

I understand that I can stop this interview at any time, without giving any reason.

Furthermore, I will let you know in advance if I want something ‘off the record’ or that should not be recorded or published.

I give my consent to record this interview using a note book/a digital tape recorder (circle one).

Name:

Address:

Contact phone number:

Date:

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

Ethics manager

The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee

The Australian National University

Telephone: 0061 2 6125 3427

Email: Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au

Oral consent form for individual interview– only for illiterate participants

I (Binod) will read the consent form and ask if I can record the consent using a digital tape recorder?

- If yes, proceed ahead
- If no, ask participant for an alternative and proceed ahead, as agreed

The recording will proceed with the following questions:

5. Can you tell me your full name and current address, please?
6. Can you tell me your phone/contact number if any?

The researcher, Binod Chapagain read the information sheet and I understood about the research project ‘Men’s migration and the women left-behind in Nepalese society’. I agree to share with you the information and I want/do not want (agree one by asking question) my real name to be published in your work. I understand that the information that I give may be published in a thesis, journal, and/or other academic paper, either in English or Nepali language.

I understand that even if the researcher (Binod) does not use my real name, people might recognise me through the information that I mention. I make my decision to disclose or not to disclose sensitive information or share anything defamatory.

I understand that I can stop this interview at any time, without giving any reason.

Furthermore, I will let you know in advance if I want something ‘off the record’ or that should not be recorded or published.

I give my consent to record my interview using a note book/a digital tape recorder (circle one).

Date:

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Ethics manager

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Interview Checklist

1. Migration situation in general in the area– total migrants and share of males and females
2. Key reasons for migration– push factors and pull factors?
3. Effects of migration on women– how does this affect women's
 - a. Workload?
 - b. Family roles?
 - c. Community roles?
 - d. Group committee membership and participation?
4. Influence in women's status in household and society because of migration of male from households?
 - a. Contributing factors to the changes?
5. The role of women from *Dalit* and *Janajati* groups in the community– what are the key changes in gender roles and caste- and ethnicity-based practices?

6. Status of women in society with the migration of male members?
7. How does migration to different countries affect the relationship of women in society? For example, how does the relationship differ if the male has migrated to India or the Middle East or developed countries?
8. How will the role of women change with the return of the male member?
 - a. Within the household
 - b. In community groups/organisations
 - c. Are there any negative effects of migration? What are they?

Checklist for Document Review

1. Representation of different caste and ethnic females in the executive committee of the group/committee – in the past and present
2. Decisions that are directly related to the benefits of women
3. Decisions that are directly related to *Dalit* and *Janajati* people
4. Implementation of decisions (benefiting women, *Dalit* and *Janajati*)
5. Analysis of changes over the period

Annex 4 – Types of Community Organisations in the Research Areas

In the research areas of Sunsari and Sindhupalchok, there was a wide range of community groups and organisations. These ranged from voluntary organisations to service agencies and informal groups. These organisations also included religious groups, school and health institution management committees, natural resources groups, social-service groups, NGOs, and various clubs. For the purposes of this research, I have divided them into five categories, according to the nature of their work. There are advocacy groups, savings and credit cooperatives, resource management committees, cultural and religious forums, and NGOs and development agencies. A brief overview of each type of organisation is presented in the following section.

Advocacy Groups

Advocacy groups include community organisations which campaign for specific issues on behalf of their members. Landless settlers, for example, formed land-rights groups in Sunsari, and women had formed women's rights groups to fight against gender-based violence in Sindhupalchok. Similarly, *Dalit* women formed a group known as the '*Dalit* rights forum' in Sunsari, while women who had been victims of trafficking or gender-based violence, had formed a survivors' group in Sindhupalchok. The women's membership depended largely on their own issues and interests. Group members would advocate on issues on behalf of their group members as a whole. The members of these groups would meet regularly, usually at least once a month, to develop their agenda-based plan of actions, and to work collectively to achieve their mission.

Some of these groups conducted micro-finance activities in addition to advocacy on a range of issues. Women's groups were examples of advocacy cum micro-finance

groups in both districts. These groups were formed either by women from a mix of castes and ethnic groups, or sometimes by women from homogeneous backgrounds²¹⁸. The size of the groups differed according to the issue. The land-rights group in Sunsari, for example, had community-level groups and a district-level network. Similarly, the women's groups in Sindhupalchok had village-level networks which were formed by representatives from each cluster. The women's groups had between 10 and 30 members; the land-rights groups between 40 and 100; the *Dalit* rights forum between 7 and 10; and the survivors' groups between 5 and 10. As well, the networks of these groups had between 11 and 21 members, made up of office bearers representing different groups.

Savings and Credit Groups

There were three types of savings and credit groups based on the size of their operation. Women's groups performed micro-credit activities through collecting savings from their members and providing loans to the group members on a small scale. Usually, these groups had savings ranging between 2,000 and 40,000 rupees (US\$22 - US\$445). Savings and Credit cooperatives were larger than the women's groups in terms of membership as well as their size of operation and geographical coverage. Each had more than 100 members in both districts. The membership of the cooperatives differed based on the interest and affordability of members, and it was open to both men and women, unless the cooperative was formed exclusively for women. Some women were not members of any of these groups, while some were members of more than one group/cooperative. The financial affordability of an individual was the major determinant for membership in a cooperative. In addition, there were micro-finance

²¹⁸ Mixed groups have members from different caste and ethnic groups of women, including higher-caste, *Janajati*, and *Dalit*. However, homogenous groups have members from one ethnic community (*Janajati*, *Tharu*, or *Dalit*, for example) who share a common language.

institutions in Sunsari. The micro-finance institutions were funded through external loans, grants, and/or by investors. They also collect savings from individuals and provide loans to individuals and legal entities for different purposes. The savings and credit cooperative members elected their volunteer board of directors from among the members, whereas the micro-finance institutions were run by an appointed board of directors and a salaried staff²¹⁹.

Resources Management Groups

Resources management groups were formed based on the natural resources around the community. In Sindhupalchok, for example, the research participants' households were members of community forest user groups²²⁰. Similarly, there were drinking water and irrigation channel management groups in Sunsari. The membership of these resources management groups was mandatory for all resource users. Thus, both males and females from user households were members of these groups. The household unit was considered as the base of membership²²¹. In addition, there were school and health facility management committees. The members of these committees were

²¹⁹ In Nepal, the savings and credit cooperatives, and micro-finance institutions, are differentiated based on their *modus operandi*. These cooperatives are membership-based and collect savings from their members and provide loans to the same people. However, the micro-finance institutions supply loans beyond their members and are profit-oriented (Gingrich, C. D., 2004). Community-based savings and credit cooperatives in Nepal: a sustainable means for microfinance delivery? *Journal of Microfinance/ESR Review*, 6(1), 21-40). In addition, the executive committee of such a cooperative is elected from their members, while micro-finance institutions are managed by a board of directors and have salaried staff.

²²⁰ In Nepal, there are more than 14,000 community forest user groups which manage forest resources at the local level. The number of groups per district varies based on the forest resources managed by the community groups, ranging from 10 groups to 500 groups per district. In Sindhupalchok district, there are 428 community forest user groups, while there are 12 in Sunsari (<http://dof.gov.np/downloads.html>, downloaded on 22 April 2013).

²²¹ The number of *Tole* Development Committees, water and irrigation management committees, and women's groups, was not available because they have not been registered with any specific government institution. They work as civil society groups which are managed at the local level.

selected either by local government or by the head (called in-charge) of the institution. The number of group members varied by group, based on available resources and the catchment areas. The community forest user groups, for instance, had membership ranging from 15 to 1,500 households.

Cultural and Religious Groups

Cultural and religious groups were formed in both districts to promote the traditional culture and practices. They basically had two types – the first would promote the traditional cultures of different caste and *Janajati* groups of Nepal, while the second was formed by religious groups to protect and promote religious values and practices. Some examples of the *Janajati* groups included *Kirant Rai Yayokha and Yakthum Chumlung* in the research areas of Sunsari, and *Tamang Ghedung* in Sindhupalchok. Nepal has 127 ethnic groups of people who speak 123 different languages²²². Thus, these ethnic groups had organisations to protect their language and culture. The religious groups were named based on their locations, for instance, Hansposa Hindu Samaj and *Thulo Pakhar* Christian Sangati. These types of groups had both males and females as members, based on their interests and religious or ethnic identity. Religiously, the ethnic groups were divided into Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian, among others, and they joined their own religious groups as appropriate.

NGOs and Other Development Groups

There was a strong presence of youth clubs and NGOs in both research districts. The youth clubs focused on activities such as sports, music, and cultural performance. The NGOs were usually formed by educated people who could afford to devote their time to social causes. The NGOs were very diverse in their work. Some were involved

²²² National population and housing census 2011: National report. Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

in community development, while others would advocate for the rights of minorities and marginalised groups of people. Some NGOs were also involved in the formation of savings and credit groups and helping the people involved to develop group management skills. In addition, there were a number of NGOs which emerged from community-based organisations. GMSP – a female-led NGO, is an example of this type of NGO. There were 97 NGOs and youth clubs that were members of the NGO federation in Sunsari, and 47 in the Sindhupalchok district²²³.

The other types of groups included development groups and committees. The *Tole* Development Committees, for example, were formed in each cluster of the Itahari municipality in Sunsari, and every household was a mandatory member of the committee. Similarly, agriculture and livestock development groups were formed in the research areas. However, membership in these latter groups was voluntary and either men or women from a household could decide to join them by paying regular fees to the group.

In addition, both districts had sister wings of political parties in the research clusters. The sister wings included the Women's Association, the Farmers' Federation, and the Labourer's Union, among others.

Membership Provisions

Membership provisions differed between the groups and committees. Some of them had the household unit as the member while some had individuals. The groups, such as the resources management group and the *Tole* Development Committee, had the household as a member, so both the husband and the wife could represent the house. The advocacy groups and the women's group had either male or female individuals as

²²³ http://www.ngofederation.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=32&Itemid=50#, (downloaded on 23 April 2013)

members. The land-rights groups had both males and females as members. The women's groups and advocacy (*Dalit* and Survivors) groups had women only on their executive committees. The land-rights group in Sunsari had 57 per cent (12 out of 21) women, including the chairperson on the executive committee. The savings and credit cooperatives had mixed members, both men and women could be members of the cooperative. Generally, the executive committees of these groups were elected or selected on a consensus basis by the members.