



Woes of Remittances

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A serpentine queue at the international departure terminal with individuals carrying a backpack behind their back, one hand difficultly gripping a medium sized hand bag and the other hand holds a see through plastic folder containing passport, work permit and other documents. The arrival terminal, adjacent to the departure receives scores of returning migrant labors pushing their heavy plastic wrapped suitcases. The rather unlucky ones, at least three in a day, arrive dead in a coffin pushed by two trollies in a parallel. The narration above is not a fiction, but the most common citing at the only international airport of Nepal in Kathmandu.

The estimation of exact number of Nepalese migrant labors is a difficult number to establish. The official figures shows that a total of 2,723,587 labor permits were issued by the Department of Labor and Employment from 2008/09 through 2014/15, [1] and this number excludes migrant workers to Korea and India together with workers using other informal channels for foreign employment. The national census survey of 2011 also suggests that nearly 71 per cent of the total absent population (1,921,494) cited private and institutional jobs abroad as the reasons for leaving. [2] The migrant labors are more concentrated in Malaysia and the middle-east countries with 33.3 per cent of permit issued for employment in Malaysia, followed by Qatar (19 per cent), Saudi Arabia (18.9 per cent), United Arab Emirates (9.8 per cent), Kuwait (2.5 per cent), Bahrain (0.9 per cent) and Oman (0.6 per cent). [1]. The current trend of foreign labor migration from Nepal has been attributed to a major construct of the lack of employment within the country; increased globalization; effects of poverty; food insecurity; economic hardship; unequal distribution of income; lack of employment; and political unrest, war and insecurity. [3] On the other hand, the income received as remittances from these migrant labors in Nepal from abroad are more than 25 percent of Nepal's GDP [4]and, at \$5 billion in 2013, more than 50 percent of its imports. [5]

Life after reaching to the destination for work is not always easy for these migrant labors. They face several problems; routine harms include contract substitution and fundamental changes in the nature or conditions of work, non-payment of wages, unsafe work conditions, inadequate rest, inhumane housing conditions, and confiscation of identity documents. In more serious cases, migrant workers suffer verbal, physical and sexual abuse. [6] Working at the extreme temperature and significant change in routine and the eating habits also put serious risk to the worker's health. There are many occupational safety and health issues for laborers in all areas of work as several migrant labors have returned having lost parts of their body in the workplace. [7] A total of 4,320 deaths of migrant workers (4,235 men and 85 women) occurring in 24 destination countries were reported from 2008/09 to 2014/15. The major identified causes of death among labor migrants when working abroad were cardiac arrest (941 cases), natural death (847 cases) and other or unidentified causes (795 cases). A significant number of deaths by traffic accident (571 cases) and suicide (451 cases) were also recorded, while the proportion of deaths due to a workplace accident was low (at 8.5 per cent). The major cause of death among the female labor migrant was suicide (at 29 of the total 85 among female workers). Nearly 19 per cent of all deaths were classified as 'other or unidentified cause'. [1] It is a harsh truth that that the death of Nepalese migrant labors has outnumbered total US soldiers killed in Iraq since the beginning of Iraq war in 2003. Most of the death of workers is reported to be during their sleep,

following a hard day's work, often amid hostile working conditions, this mysterious death of Nepalese migrant workers has been termed as Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome and an international consortium is launching an investigation into these deaths. [8]

The available database although incomplete but gives an overview of the situation of workers and hardship they have faced and this is alarming. The coining of a medical terminology for death occurring in Nepalese migrant labors also establishes concerns over risks and adversities faced by the workers. The increasing number of death and serious health risks associated with working on hostile conditions of extreme temperature, poor dietary habits and minimal living conditions have developed as a non-compensating issues and safeguarding worker's interest has to be established. The economy generated by migrant labors is the backbone of national economy and the government should have to lay efforts in protecting health and rights of these workers.

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