



Out-migration and Returnee Migrants' Integration in Farm Production: A Case Study from Andhikhola Rural Municipality

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Keywords

Returnee migrants,
out-migration,
livelihood,
remittance

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the volume of out-migration and returnee migrants' integration in farm production focusing on the case of Andhikhola Rural Municipality. Necessary data/information were collected from 364 randomly selected households with six group discussions and 12 key informants' interviews. Collected data were processed using SPSS programs and qualitative techniques. The study reveals that people from this area have migrated to different destinations for better jobs and opportunities. Altogether 234 persons migrated to various destinations abroad while 185 persons migrated to other parts of Nepal. The out-migration of the population is on the rise and increase in some years to come. Likewise, 109 persons returned home due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other reasons. Returnee migrants have started translating experiences and skills gained abroad with financial earnings into productive farm enterprises. This can change traditional agricultural practices and production. The government should encourage them by providing financial and technical support.

Introduction

The trend and practices of migration have been continuing in the context of Nepal for a long time. Both internal and international migration are continuous phenomena in Nepal. The mainstreaming of internal migration is especially from rural to rural, rural to urban, and Mountain and Hill to Tarai. The international migration includes both emigration and immigration. The trend

of out-migration has been rising (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security [MoLESS], 2022) and some returnee migrants started new businesses in Nepal by establishing activities based on industries and agriculture (MoLESS, 2020). Out-migrants send remittances and bring skills, knowledge, and experience with them, which they can use for production activities within the country. According to the 2021 census, 21,90,592 persons (7.5 percent of the total

population) were migrated abroad. Likewise, a total of 7,34,663 foreign-born population (2.5 percent of the total population) have immigrated to the country. Nepal Labour Force Survey 2017/18 reported that only 42.8% of returnee migrants were involved in jobs, 13.4% were unemployed and 43.8% were outside the labor force (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2019). Here, returnee migrant refers to migrant workers returning to their origin country from their destination (Wickramasekara, 2019). After the COVID-19 pandemic, the labor market has become more uncertain with increasing unemployment. However, different countries of the world including Nepal have been following good practices for the reintegration of returnee migrants (Adhikari et al., 2023).

The movement of people from one place to another irrespective of distance, and composition, whether across an international border or within a country is a common human phenomenon (Sharma et al., 2015). It has been considered an inherent part of human existence from the day of human civilization. It is not only confined to the study of the movement of individuals between places but it also places importance on its influence over the individuals (Hossain, 2001). Thus, migration is influenced by push and pull factors such as job opportunities, landlessness, extreme poverty, loss of income sources, access to informal sectors in cities, and reunion of family members (Mandal et al., 2018).

The primary reason for migration is considered to be the fulfillment of human aspirations and addresses the results of dissatisfaction. It has been a common trend to migrate towards areas where people can have better opportunities to interact with more educated, civilized, and developed societies. The migration process is

the product of different factors related to the place of origin, the destination, intervening obstacles, perceptions, and individual interactions towards the culture and people (Lee, 1966). These factors and perceptions of people vary according to the life cycle, socio-economic context, and personal judgment. The processes are further motivated by improved access to modern transportation, information, communication, and information technology. The values, ways, and patterns of livelihoods are being changed and migration remains integral to all these changes. The largest proportions of the migrated population come back to their society with a new set of skills, knowledge, experience, and learning (Subedi, 2020; Government of Nepal, 2020). Thus, it further facilitates flows and counterflows of goods, remittances, technology, ideas, and information from and to the origin and destination of migration (Lee, 1966).

Sustainable reintegration of returnee migrant workers is a growing concern in Nepal. It is a multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by a myriad of factors and having diverse impacts. The understanding of this process is crucial for policymakers, researchers, and societies at large, as it shapes the economic, social, and cultural landscape. In recent years, the situation has changed and returnee migrants are being engaged in different activities such as farm production, small enterprises, and the business sector. Reintegration is an important stage of the migration cycle.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, thousands of labor migrants returned to their home country, seeking new income-generation opportunities to compensate for household income (Adhikari et al., 2020). These people returned to their society with innovative skills, knowledge, and experiences (Paudel & Paudel, 2022),

and countries of origin greatly benefit from their remittances and the skills acquired (Subedi, 2020; Government of Nepal, 2020). The economic disruption created by the COVID-19, pandemic has significantly impacted the global supply chain, travel, trade, and economy. It is a big challenge for a country to create employment opportunities and reintegrate returnee migrant workers.

The studies reviewed so far are not focused on returnee migrants' reintegration at the micro level. In this context, this paper aims to analyze the out-migration and the integration of returnee migrants in production activities focusing on the case of Andhikhola Rural Municipality, Nepal. This helps researchers and policymakers understand the issue of out-migration and reintegration of returnee migrants at the micro level.

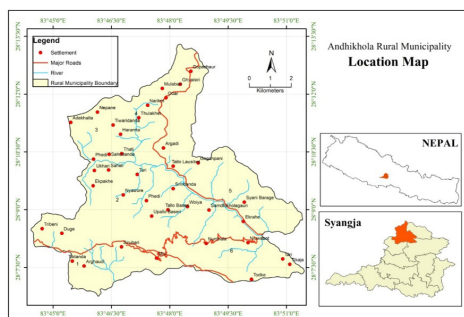
Methods and Materials

This article has adopted three approaches- a literature survey, consultations with local people, and a household survey to collect the necessary data/information to fulfill the research objective. Available literature related to the present study has been reviewed to set up the study background and methodology. A general understanding of out-migration and its causes has been obtained through consultations with local people. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques are applied for information/data analysis. For the household survey, a sample size of 364 households is determined from 3,992 households using the formula $[n = N / (1 + Ne^2)]$ suggested by Taro Yamane (cited in Israel 2003), where n = sample size, N = total number of households, e = error (0.05) at reliability level of 95 percent. Household-level data/information were collected by interviewing household heads. The field survey was carried out from 22 March

to 5 April 2024. Information regarding population out-migration and the integration of returnee migrants was collected from household surveys and consultations. Besides the household survey, altogether 6 group discussions and 12 key informant interviews were organized with field observation. In addition, a detailed discussion was made with a returnee migrant to develop a case study. All the quantitative data were processed and analyzed using SPSS and qualitative information was processed by summarizing views of groups/people and attempting to reach conclusions.

Study area

The study area Andhikhola Rural Municipality is located in the mid-hills of Nepal in the northern part of the Syangja district in the Gandaki Province between 28° 13' 47" and 28° 06' 45" North latitudes, and 83° 50' 38" and 83° 44' 37" East longitudes (Figure 1). The topography is characterized by diverse physical features: river valleys, ridges, and high hills with distinct variations in micro-climates. Altitude ranges from about 800 meters to 2500 meters from the mean sea level and covers an area of 69.69 square kilometers. As of population census 2021, this Rural Municipality has 13,094 populations (5,955 male and 7,139 female) with 3,992 total households. The average household size is 3.28 persons with a literacy rate of five years and above population 76.24 percent. The population growth rate is -2.27 percent. Agriculture is the main economic activity and livelihood base of the local people. However, people are involved in different off-farm activities as well.

Figure 1*Location of the study area*

Result and Discussions

Out-Migration of Population

As in other areas of Nepal, labor migration is a common feature and one of the main sources of income for the people of Andhikhola Rural Municipality. According to an 87-year-old elderly person, out-migration has a long history in this area which was started with the Treaty of Sugauli signed between East India Company and Nepal in 1816. Many Nepalese people were recruited and served in the East India Company. Later, the East India

Company encouraged Nepalese to migrate to India along with their families establishing Gorkhali settlements along the hill areas of northern India (Kansakar, 2003) and also migrated to work in other jobs in Darjeeling, Assam, Meghalaya, and other places in India. Later, with the opening up opportunities to work in different countries abroad, people from this area migrated abroad for foreign employment.

The total population of the surveyed household was 1962 (1,020 males and 942 females). Of the 364 households surveyed, 53.8 percent reported the out-migration of their family members. Irrespective of gender, both males and females migrated to different destinations, however, males outnumbered female out-migrants. Out of the total households surveyed, 51.6 percent reported the out-migration of male members while 18.7 percent of households reported the out-migration of female members (Table 1). A total of 234 people out-migrated to different destinations abroad.

Table 1*Total surveyed, out-migrated, and returnee population*

Description	Households	Population	% of the total surveyed population
Total	364	1962	100.0
Male	-	1020	52.0
Female	-	942	48.0
Total out-migrants	196	419	21.4
Male	188	293	37.2
Female	68	126	6.4
Out-migrants within country	70	185	9.4
Out-migrants abroad	196	234	11.9
Returnee population	105	109	5.6

Source: Field survey, 2024

Among destination countries, Qatar ranks first followed by India in terms of the total number of out-grants. The other destination countries include UAE, Saudi Arabia, Japan and others. Migration of the population abroad from this

area increased drastically during the decade-long Maoist movement of the 1990s. The poor economic conditions, lack of employment opportunities at home, high demand for youth labor, and higher wage rates in destinations

attracted Nepali youth to foreign employment. Changing climatic conditions also aggravated the situation of out-migration from this area due to the drying out of water sources, crop failure, and damage of lives and properties with increasing climate-induced disasters.

Like migration abroad, people from this area migrated to different parts during the 1950s with government-sponsored resettlement programs after the eradication of malaria in Tarai. People out-migrated from this area to the Chitawan and Nawalparasi areas first and then slowly to other parts of the country. The out-migration flow from this area increased with the intensification of development works in the Tarai districts. Out of the total surveyed population, 185 population from 70 households were out-migrated to different destinations within Nepal. The popular destinations were Pokhara, Chitwan, and Kathmandu.

The official record of Andhikhola Rural Municipality also shows a high out-migration rate. A total of 299 out-migration cases were registered with 1,080 out-migrants from this Rural Municipality in the last 6 years, after the new federal setup of the country from 2017 to 2023. At the same time, only 60 people were in-migrated with 18 registered cases. This indicates a high flow of out-migration as compared to in-migration. This trend of out-migration tends to continue for some years to come. Due to the huge out-migration of the youth population, this area has been facing shortages of the labor force. The impact of such out-migration is clearly evident in farmland management and crop production.

Out of the total surveyed households, 28.8 percent of the households reported returnee migrants. A total of 109 people returned to

their origin from their workplace abroad. Mostly, people were returned due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a tendency for returnee migrants to move to urban areas rather than live in their origin.

Remittance Inflow

The flow of financial remittances, which are cash or goods sent by migrants to their origin, and social remittances which are ideas, behaviors, identity, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending-country communities (Levitt, 1998; Lacroix et al., 2016; Tuccio & Wahba, 2020) have been increasing with the increase in out-migration. However, the quantity of the flow and impact of social remittances is more difficult and complex (Tuccio & Wahba, 2020). The transfer of remittances can generate positive effects on the economy through various channels such as investment, savings, consumption, income distribution, and poverty reduction. With the increasing volume of out-migration, remittances have emerged as one of the main sources of foreign exchange, an important avenue of support for family members remaining at home. It plays a vital role in maintaining the stability of the national economy as well. Nearly one-third of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Nepal is made up of remittances sent by migrant workers.

As noted, the inflow of remittances has been increasing with increasing out-migration. Of the total surveyed households, 53.8 percent (196 households) reported the out-migration of their family members. However, only 177 households (90.3 percent of the total out-migrant households) received remittances (Table 2). A total of 9.7 percent of them have not received remittances. They were either out-migrated recently and did not earn sufficient money to send back home or for other reasons, they have not sent remittances.

Table 2*Households receiving remittances*

Response	Households	Percent
Not received yet	19	9.7
Received	177	90.3
Total	196	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The local people receive remittances from both banking and non-banking sources. As reported, about 90 percent of the migrants send remittances from formal channels such as International Money Express (IME) and other money transfer companies and 5 percent of them send through friends and relatives. Some of the migrants also send their earned money through informal channels as well.

The amount of money sent by migrants varies by the country where they work and the types of work in which they are involved. According to a local key informant, on average, migrants send NRs 25000.00 to 30,000.00 per month. They send remittances in three to four months. Usually, they send remittances to their spouses or their parents.

Integration of Returnee Migrants in Farm Products

Measuring the inflow of social remittances and their impact is a difficult and complex task; however, the effect of both social and financial remittances translated into productive activities is common in the study area. One of the best examples of such integration of returnee migrants into farm production is the buffalo farming of Shera by an innovative youth aged 40, a returnee migrant from Dubai during COVID-19. In the context of the declining livestock population and production from the whole Andhikhola area, he has translated his skills and earned knowledge into productive activity. He had spent 15 years in buffalo farming in India

before going to Dubai. He explains about his buffalo farm as:

When I returned home from Dubai during the COVID-19 pandemic, I had no work at home. I worried about the future of my family. After some time, my wife and I considered a livestock farm as a source of household income and self-employment. Then we started this buffalo farming business by applying my experience and skills gained translating into reality by investing money in buffalo farming for milk production in 2020. However, we did not have enough land for buffalo farming. Then, we started this dairy farming by renting 1.8 hectares (36 Ropanies) of land from local farmers on lease and constructing sheds for buffalo with a sum of NRs 40,00,000. Now there are 24 buffaloes of Murrah breed (15 milking and 9 small) and two cows on my farm. I have been producing Napier grass in 0.6 hectares (12 Ropanies) of land to feed farm animals with green grass.

Figure 2*Buffalo Farm for milk at Shera*

At the time of the survey, he has reported 100 liters of milk production daily. He sells 40 liters of milk to individuals at a rate of 130 per liter with home service and 60 liters

to milk collectors at a rate of 108 per liter. He earns a total of NRs 7680 per day from selling milk. Besides, he sells farmyard manure to local farmers. Last year he earned a sum of NRs 1,26,000 by selling 28 tractors of farmyard manure with a rate of 4500 per tractor. He maintains all family costs including school fees for two children (one son and one daughter studying in the school) and saves some worth of money from his farm production.

He has employed two persons, one male and one female for farmwork. They do all the work related to feeding, washing farm animals, and maintaining a healthy environment on the farm. He has to pay his employees NRs 40,000 monthly salary (NRs 25,000 and 15,000 for males and females respectively) with food and accommodation. He and his spouse spent all their time in farmwork.

He sells all the products at a better price, but the demand for milk products is still not fulfilled in the local market. Thus, he has been thinking of increasing farm size to fulfill the local demand for milk production. He plans to add 10 more milking buffaloes within two or three years. Till now, he has found no such difficulties in his buffalo farming. One of the problems he has been suffering is farmland in rental land. This makes him think seriously about increasing farm size and the future. To date, he has been managing the expenses of farms on his own and with no support from the local government. He has become critical of the government policy to support farmers.

Another agriculture farming was started by an innovative returnee migrant at Rangethanti in ward number two near the Pokhara Jugle

road. Another person, aged 40, is a returnee migrant from Dubai. He had spent 4 years in Dubai, and 6 years in India before Dubai. He returned home on January 15, 2022. Then, he started a discussion with his friends about the farm and then started the farm. Regarding the form he stated as:

After returning home he discussed with his partners to establish a mixed agriculture farming considering the local market. Then, they started 'Andhikhola Model Krishi and Livestock Farm' in a joint venture with four partners in 2022. The farm is operated on rental land which they rented from locals with a rent of NRs 30,000 per year with an increment rate of 10 percent after two years. The lease agreement of land is 15 years. They developed a permanent structure for Pig, Turkey, Chicken, and Fish farming with an access road. They have invested about NRs 9,000,000 which they earned from foreign employment.

There were 80 pigs, 100 chickens, and 40 ducks including a few turkeys during the time of the survey. The fish ponds are developed but fish farming is yet to be started. They employed four persons for farmwork and one driver. Altogether, they have to pay a sum of NRs 60,000 per month in employees' salaries. They also maintain provident funds for employees. Workers do all the farmwork related except marketing of farm products. The farm is in the initial stage with minimum production. All the products are consumed in local markets.

Figure 3*Mixed livestock farming at Rangethanti*

He claimed that there is a high demand for such farm products with huge market potential in Syangja and Pokhara. They have been initiating government assistance for the further development of farms. They have a plan for goat farming shortly. They started for fodder for goats. Currently, the farm is operated on 4.5 hectares of land.

The tendency of productive use of remittance is evident. The trend of out-migration and remittance received is increasing in the Andhikhola Rural Municipality area. Despite several positive impacts, the increasing out-migration has significant negative impacts as well. As noted above, land abandonment has been increasing in this area due to shortages of labor force. In addition, tendencies to leave parents unattended, and an increase in divorce cases are reported as common. These case studies indicate that the returnee migrants are interested in joining the productive work in their villages. However, the government has not supported to promotion of such types of returnee migrants in the study area.

Conclusions

The study reveals that out-migration is a common feature of living in this area, a large proportion of the youth population has

migrated to different destinations within Nepal and abroad in search of better jobs, education, and other reasons. This is the combined effect of both pull and push factors related to origin and destination. The trend of out-migration is on the rise and there is no sign of a decline, and will continue for some more years to come. The impact of out-migration is clearly been observed in farmland management and crop production.

Reintegration is an important stage of the migration cycle as many people return from their workplaces to their homes for various reasons. Some returnee migrants have started translating their skills, knowledge, and experience into production activities by investing in farm products. Encouraging returnee migrants to reintegrate into farm products is essential for developing an agro-based rural economy like ours. Thus, the local government should encourage them by providing financial support for income-generating activities, self-employment, and entrepreneurship development. Smallholder farms can be the best option for livelihood and a secure food system. The returnee migrants can change traditional agricultural practices and work on innovation in agriculture and livelihood sectors.

Acknowledgments

This article is an outcome of the National Priority Research Project under the scheme of EFRG funded by the Research Coordination and Development Council, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

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