



## Causes and effects of rural-urban migration in Nepal: Case of Dev Community in Biratnagar

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*Journey for Sustainable Development and Peace*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v3i1.75565>

### Abstract

The study aims to analyze the reasons behind the migration from rural areas of the Saptari district to Biratnagar Metropolitan City, Koshi Province of Nepal, as well as to examine the changes in their socioeconomic status among the Dev community. It explores the influences of migration in occupation, income, lifestyle, land ownership, and other socioeconomic factors among the members of the Dev community in Biratnagar, using a qualitative approach. A total of thirty-three household respondents were purposively selected and interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire and checklist. The data gathered from primary sources in the field reveal significant changes in socioeconomic fields compared to the past. Traditionally, the Dev community engaged in agriculture and livestock; however, currently, very few members are involved in agriculture even in their native places. Instead, most have transitioned to the service sector, with only a small number participating in business activities. The primary motivations driving rural-urban migration include the search for employment opportunities and quality of livelihood.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, rural-urban migration, Dev community, job opportunity, Quality of livelihood

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To Cite this article:

Chaudhary, S. (2025). Causes and effects of rural-urban migration in Nepal: Case of Dev Community in Biratnagar. *Journey for Sustainable Development and Peace Journal*, 3(1), 6–21. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jsdpj.v3i1.75565>

## Introduction

This study examines the causes and effects of migration on various socio-economic factors within the Dev community in Biratnagar. This community originally migrated from different areas of the Saptari district of Nepal over the past 30 years. Biratnagar, a metropolitan city in Nepal and the capital of Koshi Province is the largest metropolitan city in the country, attracting people from various villages and districts. The vibrancy of Biratnagar can largely be attributed to this migration.

Dev is one of the minority communities belonging to the Madheshi/Mithila culture in Nepal which follows Hinduism. Dev is under the middle Hindu caste system. The origin of many Dev people is Bishariya, Sakarpura, etc in the Saptari district of Madhesh province. According to Chaudhary (2000), there is no written history of the Dev community from where they came into the Saptari district, however, some evidence supports that Dev is the inheritance of the Karnataka dynasty of Simraungarh. Since the Sakra Singh Dev came to Saptari abonding throne and settled here. Chhinmasta temple in Saptari is believed to have been built by the Simraungarh dynasty. Dev people are rich in Maithili culture and rituals. Traditionally, agriculture, livestock and writing are major occupations of the Dev community. According to the census of Nepal 2021, the population of Dev caste in Nepal is only 7418, though their literacy rate is 90.1% which is much higher than the national average (76.3 percent) in Nepal. Devs have been involved in jobs in either government or private sector. Very few are in business. Due to education, the trend of migration in Dev is found higher. Presently, they have made their presence in major cities of Nepal like Itanagar, Kathmandu, Janakpur, Nepalgunj, and Birgunj. After Saptari, Biratnagar is the main place where they reside. Generally, quality of education, search for jobs, and security are the main causes behind rural-urban migration.

The rural-urban migration is a common feature of Nepal due to various reasons. The causal factors outlined in the pull-push model are commonly known as migration. Recently, the concept of new economics and livelihood perspectives on migration and development has emerged as a significant development in migration studies, referred to as the "new economics of labor migration" (NELM). NELM addresses the various

realities surrounding the interactions between migration and development (Haas, 2010). According to Ban and Gangal (2024), the economy is the motive for rural-urban migration and economic changes can be seen in migrant households in between before and after rural-urban migration.

This study identifies the causes of migration and examines its effects by comparing the past and current socioeconomic status of the Dev community in Biratnagar. It provides valuable insights into the underlying reasons for migration and its trends, which can inform relevant policy implications. While this study focuses on a specific area and utilizes a selective sample, it does not aim for generalization. Instead, it offers a thorough analysis that highlights the unique experiences and challenges faced by the rural-urban migratory community.

## Methods

The study adopts a qualitative approach to thoroughly investigate the causes of migration, paying close attention to personal grievances and experiences. The qualitative approach is applicable in in-depth interviews (Sapkota, 2019). Biratnagar, located in the Morang district, was selected as the focal area because it has seen significant migration of the Dev community from different villages of the Saptari district. A purposive sampling method was used to select 33 households, which represent a subset of approximately 250 households from the Dev community residing in Biratnagar. The sampled households were drawn from wards 10, 12, and 13, where more than two-thirds of the Dev population is concentrated. The data collected for this study is primarily sources, supplemented by secondary data to provide a broader context. In-depth interviews utilizing semi-structured questionnaires and checklists were conducted to gather primary information.

Besides, observational remarks were noted to capture the on-ground realities of the community. Secondary data was rigorously reviewed. This case study was analyzed through thematic analysis to identify patterns and discern key themes. Microsoft Excel was utilized for data organization and analysis. The findings and data were cross-verified with existing literature to ensure accuracy and reliability as possible. This

comprehensive methodology enables a nuanced understanding of the migration experiences of the Dev community in Biratnagar.

### **Results/Analysis**

This section provides important insights into the socio-economic characteristics of households within the study area. The heads of households serve as the primary respondents, offering valuable information regarding both past and current socio-economic status. In an in-depth interview, key data points were collected, including respondents' age, sex, occupation, family structure, education level, income, gender ownership, and land ownership both before and after migration.

The survey encompassed a total of 33 households, ensuring a diverse representation of the Dev community in Biratnagar. This comprehensive approach to gathering information allows for a better understanding of the socio-economic dynamics at play and highlights the changes experienced by these households due to migration. The collected data serve as a foundation for analyzing the broader implications of migration on their socio-economic conditions.

### ***Profile of the participants***

The profile of the respondents includes age, gender, and education across different scenarios. Out of 33 respondents, 75.76 percent are male. Regarding age, two-thirds of the respondents are over 50 years old, with the age group of 41-50 years having the highest number of respondents (33.33%), followed by those over 60 years old (24.24%). In terms of education, one-third of the respondents (25%) have completed a bachelor's degree, while 11.63 percent have pursued a master's degree. Only 5.81% of respondents were found illiterate. The majority of the respondents possess a school-level education. Education is one of the contributing factors of migration.

Table 1: Profile of respondents, % (n=33)

<b>Age</b>	<b>%</b>
20-30	6.06
31-40	18.18
41-50	33.33
51-60	18.18
>60	24.24
Total	100.00
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	75.76
Female	24.24
Total	100.00
<b>Education</b>	
Illiterate	5.81
Basic	24.42
Secondary	33.14
Bachelor	25.00
Masters or above	11.63
Total	100.00

Source: Field Data, 2023

### **Socioeconomic Impacts**

Socioeconomic status describes individuals based on their education, income, occupation, and similar factors.

### **Social Impacts**

The social impact of migration in a community can be substantial, influencing various aspects of the community's dynamics and structure.

**Education:** Education plays a critical role in this context. Most first-generation migrants are educated and hold government jobs. All second-generation migrants have had the opportunity to pursue higher education in various private and government institutions, depending on their financial circumstances. Many parents have managed to send their children to

English medium schools, and abroad including India for higher education. Attending such schools is often seen as a way to demonstrate one's social status. Despite the establishment of numerous schools and the upgrading of many to plus-two levels, rural areas still see a lower presence of students in these institutions. Instead, many students are opting for English medium schools located in nearby market centers and cities. No good schools are in their native places.

**Family structure:** Family structure refers to a group of parents and their children living together as a unit. There are several types of family structures, including. A nuclear family is a family consisting of a married couple and their children, living together in the same household. Before migration, more than two-thirds (87.88%) of families were in joint families and the rest of the family was nuclear. After migration to Biratnagar, the structure of the family was changed. Around 80% of the total family is nuclear, and the rest is a joint family. It is clearly observed that after migration most of the family structure was changed to nuclear. It indicates the changing scenario in the intimacy towards family and kinship.

**Household Size:** Family size refers to the number of people in the family. The size of the family is a matter of great importance not only for the country as a whole but also for the welfare and health of the individual, the family, and the community. The heads of households were asked about their household size. According to the field visit, the minimum family size was found to be 4 members. The maximum family size was 12 members. A total of 87.88% of respondents belong to a small family size that consists of 4- 6 members. The family size 7-10 comprised 6.06%. The decreased size of family members indicates the changing scenario of traditional family and its association with agriculture as well.

**Sanitation and Health:** Sanitation refers to the measures and actions taken to promote and maintain public health, Sanitation is essential for preventing the spread of diseases. It is also important for protecting and maintaining a clean and healthy living space for individuals and communities. Health is considered an important socio-economic indicator. In our country, a large number of people believe in superstition practices and consult witch doctors, Shamans, and healers. At their native places, the

open-defection practice was common in the past, though, presently, all households have a modern type of toilet facility.

Table 2 shows that 75.76% of respondents used tube wells and 24.24% used manmade wells for drinking water at their native places before migration. However, in Biratnagar, 84.85% of respondents are using tube wells and 15.15% of respondents use tap water as the source of drinking water. It shows that the pattern of the source of water has changed. Before migration, none of the households used tap water but after migration, a significant percentage of respondents are using tap water which is free from Arsenic material and some other heavy chemicals that are harmful to human health.

Table 2: Sources of drinking water, %

Sources of Water	Before migration(HN)	%	After migration (HN)	%
Pond	0	0.00	0	0.00
River	0	0.00	0	0.00
Tube well	25	75.76	28	84.85
Well	8	24.24	0	0.00
Tapped Water	0	0	5	15.15
Total	33	100	33	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

Note. HN implies Household Numbers.

Table 3 shows that 54.55% of respondents followed allopathic treatment followed by homeopathy (3.03%), 15.15 % by Ayurveda, and 27.27% depended on a witch-doctor. After migration, all respondents followed modern allopathic treatment methods. None of the respondents followed only Homeopathy, or Ayurveda. According to interviews with respondents, sometimes they followed alternative modes of treatment along with modern allopathic treatment. Respondents used to go to medical centers for even minor treatment, though it was not possible in their native places.

Table 3: Types of treatment by Dev community, %

Type of Treatment	Before migration(HN)	%	After migration(HN)	%
Allopathic	18	54.55	33	100
Homeopathy	1	3.03	0	0
Ayurveda	5	15.15	0	0
Witch-doctor	9	27.27	0	0
Total	33	100.00	33	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

### Economic Impacts of Migration

Migration can have various economic impacts on communities. It can be assessed through occupation, landholding patterns, gender, and income.

**Occupational status:** The occupation of people refers to the type of work that individuals engage in to earn their livelihood. Occupations can vary, from manual labor and skilled trades to professional roles such as teachers, doctors, pilots, and engineers. The occupation of individuals is often influenced by factors such as their education, skills, interests, and the availability of job opportunities in the present places.

Table 4: Occupation status, %

Occupation	Before migration (HN)	%	After migration (HN)	%
Farming	3	9.09	0	0.0
Service	23	69.7	23	69.7
Business	7	21.21	10	30.3
Others	0	0.00	0	0
Total	33	100.00	33	100

Source: Field Data, 2023



Table 4 shows that most of the respondents (69.70%) were engaged in the service sector before migration such as teaching, or government jobs. It also includes a tenant farming system. Similarly, 21.21% of respondents were involved in the business sector and only 9% were engaged in full-fledged farming. After migration, the pattern of occupation changed drastically. Despite farming as an occupation, the primary occupation is a job. Percent of respondents having a business has increased from 7% to 30.3%.

In an interview with Rajesh Chaudhary, he expressed his view as follows; "In the village, we were engaged in traditional agriculture (manual) for decades with our parents. When our family migrated to Biratnagar, I studied at college. Currently, I am running my own business which is the main source of income for my family, it could not happen in the village. Now, I am satisfied with my occupation and earnings. I am planning to expand my business".

**Income:** Income refers to the earnings that an individual or household receives from various sources such as wages, salaries, business, investments, and other sources. It is an important measure of an individual or household's financial health and is used to determine their ability to meet their expenses, save for the future, and invest in various assets.

Table 5: Income Pattern, %

Annual Income (NRs)	Before migration(HN)	%	After migration(HN)	%
<2,50,000	26	78.79	2	6.06
2,50,000 - 5,00,000	7	21.21	22	66.67
>5,00,000 - 8,00,000	0	0.00	6	18.18
>8,00,000	0	0.00	3	9.09
Total	33	100.00	33	100.00

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 5 shows that 78.79% of people earned less than 2,50,000 annually in their place of origin. Only 21.21% used to earn between 2,50,000 and 5,00,000. This shows that their level of income was average in their place of origin. After migration, their level of income was increased. Only 6.06% of people are earning less than 2,50,000, whereas,

66.67% of respondents are earning between 2,50,000 to 5,00,000 NRs. Likewise, 18.18% of respondents are earning more than 5,00,000 and 9.09% of people are earning more than 8,00,000 NRs. In sum, most of the respondent succeeded in increasing their income in Biratnagar which helped to uplift their livelihood.

**Pattern of Landholding:** A holding pattern refers to the way land ownership is distributed within a particular area. It includes information about the size of their land. The pattern of landholding influences the economic and social status of the community. Table 6 shows that none of the people of the Dev community were landless in their place of origin. A total of 12.12% of respondents had less than 1 *kattha* land. Around 55% of respondents occupied 1 to 5 *kattha* of land. Similarly, 15.15% of people owned 6 to 10 *kattha* of land. Likewise, 18.18% of respondents owned more than 10 *kattha*.

Table 6: Landholding size, %

Land Size	Before migration (HN)	%	After migration (HN)	%
<1 Kattha	4	12.12	8	24.24
1-5 Kattha	18	54.55	12	36.36
6-10 kattha	5	15.15	7	21.21
> 10 kattha	6	18.18	6	18.18
Landless	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	33	100	33	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Note. 1 Kattha = 338.63 square meters

Table 6 shows that the size of the land was reduced in their native place after migration to Biratnagar. This happened because there was difficulty looking after their land and purchasing property in Biratnagar. A total of 24.24% owned less than 1 *kattha*, 36.36% owned 1 to 5 *kattha*. Similarly, 21.21% of respondents owned 6 to 10 *kattha* land. Likewise, 18.18% of respondents said that have more than 10 *kattha* land. The size in landholding has not so far changed, though, most of the respondents managed land in Biratnagar and its suburbs is costly.

**Women's ownership of property:** In Nepal, women's ownership of property is significantly limited, which contributes to gender inequality in

the society. Historically, cultural and social factors have deprived women of their right to own property. However, recognizing the importance of gender equality, Nepal has enacted various laws and policies aimed at promoting women's property rights. Ensuring that women have access to and the ability to own property is crucial for advancing their status and achieving broader equality in the country.

Before migration, most of the owners of the property were male respondents. Around 60% of the property was owned by males. Only 39.39% of the property was owned by females. This indicates the domination of male in the society in their native place. After migration, most of the ownership of property has been shifted to females. The data reveals that 21.21% of the property is owned by males and 78.79% of the property is owned by female members mainly wives.

**Status of Housing pattern:** Housing refers to the physical structures and accommodations that people use to live in. Housing provides individuals and families with a place for lodging, food, and performing other activities necessary for daily life. The type of housing a person chooses often depends on their lifestyle, financial situation, and personal preferences. It is also an indication of economic upliftment. Before migration, concrete houses were minimal (15.15%). However, after migration, all households managed the concrete house, which is linked with rising income and betterment of the socioeconomic situation.

## Discussion

The data shows some glimpses of changes in socioeconomic sectors among respondents. The level of income was average in their place of origin. After migration, their level of income was increased. A total of 66.67% of respondents earn 2,50,000-5,00,000 NRs in the present places, whereas, only 21.21% earned the same amount at their native place. An income above 50,000.00 was not possible in their native village. Another change can be seen in the ownership of the property; it has been shifted to females as a total of 78.79% of the property is owned by female members mainly wives, while it was 39.39% in the past. Similarly, only 15.15% of respondents had concrete houses in their native place. After migration, all

respondents have concrete houses. The data suggested that their economic condition is better after migration.

In terms of education, around one-fourth of the total population was studying basic education and 33.14% were in secondary school level education. The female literacy rate has significantly increased. Before migration, more than two-thirds (87.88%) of families lived in joint families. After migration, the structure of the family looked to change as around 80% of the total family are adopted nuclear families. These evidences show that there are some changes among migrated households in the social sector.

Although migration offers certain economic relief and indicates cultural diversification but also creates problems that have an impact on the social, economic, and environmental setting of rural people. Over the period of time, migration has taken many forms, including voluntary and involuntary movement, and has been driven by a variety of factors such as economic opportunities, political instability, and environmental changes. Today, migration continues to be a significant global phenomenon, with millions of people moving to new countries each year.

Internal migration in Nepal has a long history, with people moving from rural areas to urban centers in search of better economic opportunities and improved living standards. The movement of people within Nepal has been shaped by various factors, including economic, political, social, and environmental changes. Migration and development have been linked with the concept of new economics and livelihood perspectives as the third wave in migration studies (Faist, 2004). Also the 'new economics of labor migration (NELM)' has been the cause of migration as a concept. This study also supports this line. According to Chaudhary (2020), low production and low employment opportunities are major causes in Nepal for a favorable environment of internal migration.

Gurung (2022) in his unpublished dissertation stated that Migration played a crucial role in uplifting the livelihoods of migrants. According to him, migrants suffer from different types of problems at the beginning but they were able to conquer problems that occurred during migration and were able to improve their livelihood situation. The study shows how the lives of migrated people changed their lifestyles. Migration can also be

understood through networking theory, which contributes to migration. Some respondents migrated due to their relative and friend circles.

According to Bikram Prasad Deo, who was a native resident of Bishariya, Saptari, the main cause of migration is the lack of quality education in the surrounding area. He said, "I migrated to Biratnagar in 1998. I completed my higher education in the Chemistry Department at Biratnagar College. Consequently, I worked in a number of schools as a science teacher in Biratnagar. Currently, I am working in one of the reputed schools of Biratnagar. Besides, I have run a small business as well. I have my own house in Biratnagar. My economic situation is far better than when I was in my village."

In the early 1950s, the Nepalese government implemented a number of policies aimed at promoting economic development in Biratnagar. Biratnagar is the first industrial place in Nepal. After the 1990s globalization, an increase in internal migration, driven by a number of factors. However, between 1996 and 2006, internal migration especially rural-urban migration took place on a large scale, and the Dev community of Saptari could not be exceptional. A study by Chaudhary (2000) found that due to the lack of basic amenities in Bisharia of Saptari district, mostly people from the Dev community migrated to different wards of then Rajbiraj municipality to uplift their socio-economic condition. The socio-economic condition of the Dev community in Bishariya was average during his study.

Today, internal migration in Nepal continues to be driven by a range of factors, including economic opportunities, social mobility, and environmental pressures. The country is also facing new challenges, such as the impact of climate change on agriculture and the rise of urban slums, which are creating new patterns of migration and displacement. The proportion of the population of places of origin and destination is changed due to internal migration. The change in population at both places has affected every sector of the economy, social life, physical amenities, and the environment. Migration is responsible for changing the pattern of population composition, and employment situation.

According to Kedar prasad chaudhary, "I was suffering from economic problems in my native village. After migrated to Biratnagar, he

was able to improve his economic condition gradually. My children have got higher education in the technical sector. I felt that their social status has been improved. Similarly, during a face-to-face interview with Santosh Deo who worked in a private enterprise in Biratnagar stated that the main reason behind the migration for his family was in search of a job that could feed his children which was not possible in the Saptari district. According to him, "Biratnagar is a large city located in the eastern part of Nepal, known for its numerous factories. I found a job here and settled down, and now my family relies on my income. I have managed to earn enough to support them. Additionally, Biratnagar is a city with a diverse culture, making it easy to settle here and find various opportunities".

### **Conclusion and Implications**

During the research period, it was found that most participants had migrated from the rural areas of Saptari District to Biratnagar in search of better education, healthcare facilities, and improved economic opportunities for their families. The primary motivation behind the rural-urban migration among the Dev community was socioeconomic development. Many individuals migrate from rural to urban areas in search of employment and educational opportunities (KC, 2020). Several respondents noted that they left their native places because their relatives and neighbors had already moved in pursuit of these same opportunities, which were lacking in their native areas. Additionally, the level of security in their villages was also one factor. This migration has led to various social and economic changes, including a shift from nuclear to joint family structures, an increased role for women, and a change in occupation from farming to jobs or business ventures. Notably, none of the respondents expressed an interest in returning to their native places permanently. The research clearly indicates that the socioeconomic benefits of rural-urban migration are significant. The main implications of both international and internal migrations focus on economic well-being, although issues of inequality could be a topic for future research (WB, 2021).

However, haphazard such type of migration may create problems in the future, if economic inequality is not addressed. To vibrant villages, rural settlements should transfer into smart villages. Internal migration can

be balanced if essential facilities such as education, employment, healthcare, roads, and electricity are available in rural areas. Natural disasters, like floods, have also forced residents of the Saptari district to migrate to urban areas. It is important to implement additional rural development plans, policies, and programs targeting these regions to reduce internal migration. At the same time, the sustainability of urbanization policies should also be adopted to address rural-to-urban migration effectively. Future research in this area should focus on data availability and the development of databases in Nepal. Given the significant contribution of remittances to the country's economy, conducting more case studies and meta-analyses would enhance our understanding of their impact in Nepal.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declares the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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