



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Effects of male out-migration on household food security: Evidence from Far West Nepal

Jeeyon Janet Kim, Elizabeth Stites, Patrick Webb,
Mark A. Conostas, Daniel Maxwell

NOT FOR CITATION OR DISTRIBUTION



GERALD J. AND DOROTHY R.
Friedman School of
Nutrition Science and Policy



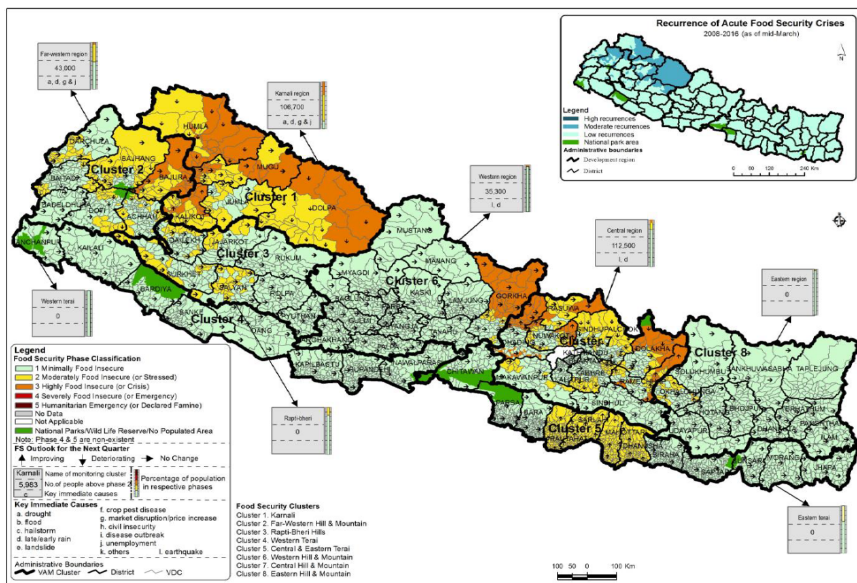
Labor migration in Nepal

- Labor migration – defined as movement of individuals within and across countries for employment – has a deep-rooted history in Nepal, dating back three centuries
- Recently, the number of migrants has reached unprecedented levels, jumping drastically from 9.7 million to 26.5 million between 1961 and 2011 (GoN 2014)
- Destination of *international* labor migrants vary by their level of skill, education, and season. Those who are highly skilled often migrate to developed countries, whereas low/semi-skilled migrants often migrate to Gulf countries and South East Asia, including India

... is highly male-dominated

- Compared to global figures where women make up about half of the world's migrant population, 90% of Nepalese migrants are men
 - N.B. The number of women migrating *within* Nepal are on the rise
- Many of these men migrate alone, leaving behind their families as they earn wages abroad
- In 2010, it was estimated that 30% of the total male population were absent and among the absentee population, males outnumbered females by a ratio of nearly three to one (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012a; Sharma et al. 2014)

... and occurring in a context of widespread household food insecurity



NeKSAP 2016

- Over half of the population chronically food insecure, with 20% facing moderate or chronic food insecurity (2014) (IPC National Partners in Nepal 2015)
- Nearly 40% of population not meeting daily requirements for calorie consumption (2010-11) (National Nutrition and Food Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015)

Yet, there is a limited understanding of the migration-food security nexus.

- In Nepal and globally, there is a dearth of empirical studies examining the linkages between migration and household food security
- While remittances are indeed critical to consider, majority of studies focus narrowly on the *monetary* aspects of migration and fail to account for the *non-monetary* effects on household food security
- In turn, the people who stay behind are “often invisible, and their role, experience, wellbeing and interconnectedness with the practice of migration are not well understood” (Gartaula, Visser, and Niehof 2012, 402)

Study site:

Maulali, Far West Nepal

Data collection:

February 2016 – March 2017



Iterative in-depth interviews

- Purposive sampling by household caste and migration status
 - Informed by ward and family structure
- Iterative design key

	Interview 1 Oct-Nov 2016	Interview 2 Feb-March 2017	Total by caste
High Caste	15	13	28
Low Caste	10	9	19
Total by Interview type	25	22	47

Iterative in-depth interviews

“When I first saw you, you were strangers. I was scared. What will I say with you? Now I feel comfortable. I know you now.”

(Interview #2 with higher caste woman whose estranged migrant husband lives in Bangalore)

- IDI #1:
 - Household migration history
 - Perceptions of male out-migration
 - Effects on household food security
- IDI #2:
 - Check-in about interview #1
 - Effects of male out-migration on women who stay behind
 - Intra-household decision-making dynamics
 - Women’s workload

Focus group discussions

- Complement in-depth interviews
- Purposive sampling by caste and gender

	Male	Female	Total by caste
High Caste	#1: 6 #2: 3 Total: 9	#1: 3 #2: 4 Total: 7	16
Low Caste	#1: 2 #2: 1 Total: 3	#1: 2 #2: 2 Total: 4	7
Total by gender	12	11	23

Focus group discussions

- FGD #1:
 - History of migration in Maulali
 - Perceptions of migration
 - Effects on household food security
- FGD #2:
 - Intra-household roles and responsibilities
 - Socio-cultural norms
 - Effects of migration on women who stay behind

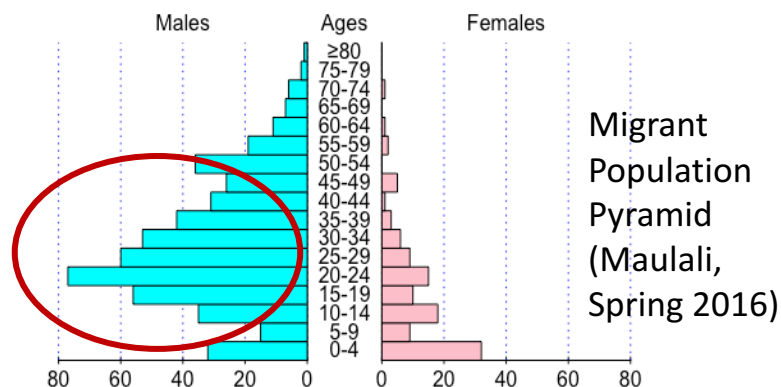
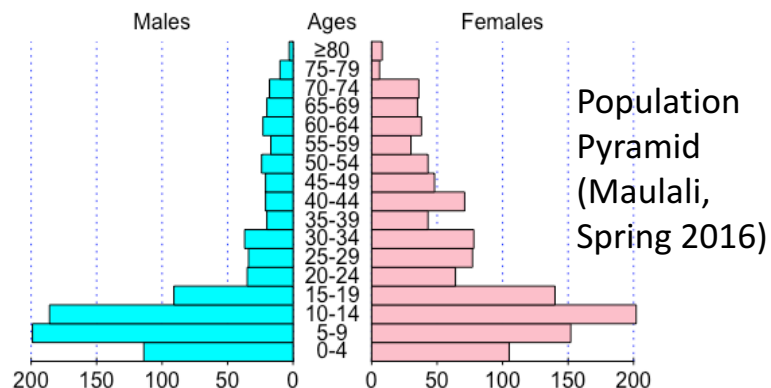


Data Analysis



- Iterative data analysis approach using memos and categorizing strategies (Maxwell 2005)
- Track emerging themes and insights *during, between, and after* field visits (Patton 2002)
- Debriefing sessions to ensure accuracy of translation

In Maulali, migration is not a choice, it is compulsory.



“We want to stay in our country. We don’t have enough to feed our children. We don’t go to India because we’re happy. We have to make money. Here, there is no employment. It is a compulsion. Otherwise we don’t want to go”

(Focus group discussion with lower caste men)

Migration as livelihood “strategy”

- Male out-migration is a central fact in Maulali with economic and cultural implications
- Transnational migration is commonplace, where men migrate alone and women and children stay behind to tend to the homestead
- Majority of men migrate to India (based on inter-generational chain migration routes) and work as low-skilled laborers (e.g. security guards, chefs, driver)
- Migrants’ frequency of return vary, from a few months to several years (and desertion, while rare, can occur)

Core cross-cultural household food insecurity domains

		Domain		
		Insufficient food quantity	Inadequate food quality	Uncertainty and worry
Subdomain	-	Reports of food running out	- Not eating balanced meal/not eating healthy and nutritious diet/not eating properly	- Worry about food in near term
	-	Perception that quantity of food consumed was not enough	- Limited within or between meal variety	- Long-term uncertainty
	-	Had to eat less or not at all	- Eating less preferred foods/less expensive, luxurious, or socially preferred foods	
	-	Had to disrupt typical meal patterns	- Unsafe or not fresh food	

Adapted from Coates et al. 2006

Migration is offering households reprieve from food insecurity...

"Having someone in India reduces my worry about having enough to eat. I hope that when he is in India, he will send money for us. I live in hope."

(High caste woman with migrant husband in Bangalore)

1. Improving **economic access** to market to meet *immediate* consumption needs via remittances and increased access to loans/credit;
2. Alleviating *short-term* **anxiety and worry** about having enough to eat;
3. Avoiding socially unacceptable ways of acquiring food

but it is temporary and precarious, and come at a high cost...

- Remittances are infrequent and unstable
 - And often insufficient to meet immediate needs preparation
 - Can be challenging for women to navigate remittance transfer systems
- Comes at a high cost
 - “Feminization of agriculture” with (perceived) reduction in agricultural productivity, increased reliance on market, consumption of less preferred foods, divestment of remittances to hire male labor
 - Increased workload for women who stay behind with consequences for child care and food preparation
 - Little/no improvement to limited variety within/between meals

Women, children, and the elderly bearing the brunt of male out-migration.

- Women face enormous psychological and physical burden
- Inter-generational cycle of low-skilled labor: growing up without their fathers, children are motivated to migrate themselves and fail to get the education required to break out of this cycle
- Elderly population highly dependent on remittances, without alternative income sources
 - When remittances do not come or are insufficient, elderly are forced to take out loans/savings or rely on good will of their neighbors/relatives
- Men report facing difficult, undignified, and unsafe conditions to make ends meet in India

Take-away points

- Male out-migration is a central component to household's efforts to realize food security in rural Nepal
- Migration facilitates *and* exacerbates households' experience of food insecurity and its effects are highly gendered
 - Monetary effects, via remittance income, may be limited and precarious
- Programs and policies must support both those who migrate (e.g. vocational training, information hubs) and those who stay behind (e.g. time-saving labor technology) to facilitate a more "successful" migration experience
- Must move beyond focusing solely on the *monetary* effects of migration and encompass a more holistic understanding of both the effects of migration and food security

Acknowledgements

- PAHAL study team
- Mr. Poshan Dahal
- Ms. Gomati Awasthi, *translator extraordinaire*
- Women and men of Maulali
- Mercy Corps-Nepal/USAID
- Friedman Fellowship in Nutrition and Citizenship

This presentation is made possible by the generous support of the American people through USAID. The contents are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Thank You

Questions and feedback are welcome

Please contact Jeeyon Janet Kim at
janet.kim@tufts.edu

Please do not cite or circulate the content of
this presentation, in parts or in its entirety,
without authors' consent