



# Exploring the inter-linkages between Outmigration, Land degradation and Climate Risk Management

*Bishnu Raj Upreti*



Agriculture terraces in Chisapani village, Kaski, Nepal. Photo: Gitta Shrestha (2014).

## Introduction

This policy brief is based on the Science - Policy Workshop on 'Exploring the inter-linkages between outmigration, land degradation and climate risk management', which was organized in Kathmandu on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014. The aim was to initiate debate and contribute to the evidence-based policy making process. The Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), University of Lausanne (UNIL), University of Bern, University of Neuchatel, Switzerland and IUCN Nepal have been implementing a research project entitled Sustainable Land Management in the Context of Outmigration, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Mountain Regions of Nepal with the objective to provide evidence on the impact of outmigration on land management practices, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation for policy and decision makers.

The roundtable discussion highlighted the close inter-linkages between women and migration in Nepal. It also showed concerns of migrant women such as secured food, alternative livelihoods, and discrimination is some of the reasons for out-migration. The cumulative frustration of not being rewarded, not being counted is one major push factors for migration of women, regardless of the risks. However, vast majority of women do not have cash in hand, so they fall in the trap of migration agents, as obtaining formal loans without collateral is very difficult. Hence, the popular slogan of agent "fly now, pay later" is becoming a powerful instrument for agents to attract migrant workers.

It will be difficult to achieve Nepal's aim to graduate from least developed country to developing country by 2022, if the current challenges of outmigration, land degradation, food insecurity and agriculture stagnation are not addressed. Agriculture in Nepal is no longer attractive to the youths and therefore a majority of youths migrates to foreign countries. The big policy concern still prevalent is relying on slippery remittances and their efficient for the development of the country. In this context, more comprehensive migration strategy is needed for development. However it is only short to medium term and Nepal need to develop local employment opportunity within the country for long term sustainability.

## Policy Message

- ✓ Appropriate mechanisms for engaging policy makers (government, I/NGOs, development partners/donors, etc.), practitioners, researchers and local stakeholders to facilitate sharing and dissemination of research-based evidences are crucial for research being effective to address societal problems and issues and develop collective ownership. Evidences generated from research have to contribute to adaptation/revision of policies and enhance authenticity, credibility and effective implementation.
- ✓ It is urgent for the government to effectively implement the existing rules and regulations and bring new ones to address the anomalies on migration. Government must ensure that the departure and return of migrants is smooth, and free from exploitation. The government should devise proper strategies to address unlawful actions of the brokers and the middle men. Government attention is needed in the issue of land abandonment and its impact on food insecurity, as it is creating more dependence on food import and undermining food sovereignty.

- ✓ Addressing massive unemployment need creating more employment opportunities in rural areas. The massive outmigration of unskilled labor is a big concern at the long run and generating local employment and developing skills is precondition for policy makers. One of the options to generate local employment is to address the issue of land use and land management (land reform: enhancing agricultural productivity through technological and inputs intensity, land consolidation, agricultural mechanization, addressing landlessness).
- ✓ Migration is leading to lower soil fertility due to lower availability of manure and led to rise in the likelihood of food insecurity and vulnerability for those remaining households without remittance income.

## The findings

Findings from the two studies on the linkages between outmigration, land management and food security conducted by the University of Bern and University of Lausanne, Switzerland in collaboration of Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Nepal reveals interesting policy relevant findings as follows:

- ❖ Examining inter-linkages between outmigration, land degradation and climate risk management are intrinsically complex in nature and therefore require sound theoretical orientation, holistic analytical perspective, and interwoven research methodology.
- ❖ Pro-active engagement of the key stakeholders from the beginning of the research helps to develop ownership and enhance the chance of evidence-based policy making.
- ❖ Migration is a characteristic of demographic dynamics. As of 2014, every day about 1300 people



Science Policy Workshop on 'Outmigration, Land degradation and Climate Risk Management held on 3.11.2014 at Hotel Himalaya, Kathmandu, Nepal. Photo: Prathicchya Acharya (2014).

are officially leaving Nepal for foreign employment. Consequently, women, staying at homes have increased burdens of managing the land and other households' responsibilities.

- ❖ In Panchase area (Kaski, Parbat, Syangja districts) where the studies were conducted, some villages such as Tamagi, Kuiredanda are facing specific challenges once the entire family of many households move down to the cities and urban centres. Consequently, around 20-25 % of cultivable land has been abandoned in the Panchase region. In parallel, soil fertility is declining as there are fewer livestock for manure because only less number of human resources is available to manage livestock. As a result, the food production is decreased and impacted on the food security situation.
- ❖ However, the forest cover in the study area has increased by 12% since 1996 because of less stress on forests by human and animals.
- ❖ The studies noted a greater increase of invasive species such as *Banmara* and *Nilo gandha*, which are also moving up the hillsides due to warmer temperatures.
- ❖ However, migration has also contributed positively such as the increase of income to those households receiving remittances and more empowerment to women who must make more decisions.
- ❖ Migration impacts on food security, women's role, management of land and agriculture have several policy implications.
- ❖ There are definitely links between migration, climate change and disasters. Although the research demonstrated that there is little erosion or shallow landslides being created due to land abandonment, a disaster can be an additional push factor for households who were already considering migration. The research findings demonstrated that overall erosion and shallow landslides are declining with some exceptions on land that was recently abandoned. Climate change is creating uncertain conditions for agriculture and more intense rainfall that can be difficult for declining rural populations to manage, in addition to declining soil fertility, most likely resulting from less availability of manure.



Bishnu Raj Upreti  
Executive Director  
Nepal Centre for Contemporary  
Research  
Kathmandu, Nepal.

---

*“Migration impacts on food security, women’s role, management of land and agriculture, and therefore, has several policy implications.”*

---

  
UNIL | Université de Lausanne

  
UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN  
CDE  
CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT  
AND ENVIRONMENT

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Karen Sudmeier-Rieux and Ms. Stephanie Jaquet for their constructive inputs to the draft of this policy brief. Similarly, I express my sincere gratitude to NCCR colleagues Gitta Shrestha and Anal Tandukar for their active engagement throughout the process in making of this policy brief.