Gender, Technology and Development
http://gtd.sagepub.com/

Do Rural Women Who Stay Behind Benefit from Male Out-migration? A Case Study in the Hills of Nepal

Amina Maharjan, Siegfried Bauer and Beatrice Knerr

Gender Technology and Development 2012 16: 95
DOI: 10.1177/097185241101600105

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://gtd.sagepub.com/content/16/1/95

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
Asian Institute of Technology
AIT Asian Institute of Technology
Gender and Development Studies

Article

Do Rural Women Who Stay Behind Benefit from Male Out-migration? A Case Study in the Hills of Nepal

Gender, Technology and Development
16(1) 95–123

DOI: 10.1177/097185241101600105
http://gtd.sagepub.com

Amina Maharjan, Siegfried Bauer, and Beatrice Knerr

Abstract

This article examines the impact of male out-migration on the workload and status of the women left behind in rural Nepal. The study uses primary data collected through household surveys from two districts in the mid-hills of Nepal to analyze aspects of women's roles and responsibilities that are expected to change in the absence of male household heads. Specifically, the study focuses on the change in women's workload, the expansion of their roles, their ownership and access to productive resources, and the part they play in household decision making. The results suggest that women have broadened and deepened their involvement in rural society as a result of male out-migration, which could lead to either the empowerment or disempowerment of women. The nature and extent of this impact was conditional on the migration pattern and the remittances received by the households. Larger

Amina Maharjan, PhD Researcher, Justus Liebig University, Project and Regional Planning, Senckenbergstrasse 3, 35390, Giessen, Germany.
E-mail: m_amina24@yahoo.com
Siegfried Bauer, Justus Liebig University, Project and Regional Planning, Senckenbergstrasse 3, 35390, Giessen, Germany.
E-mail: siegfried.bauer@agrar.uni-giessen.de
Beatrice Knerr, University of Kassel, Department of Agricultural Policy and Development Economics, Steinstrasse 19, 37213, Witzenhausen, Germany.
E-mail: knerr@uni-kassel.de

remittances generally helped to reduce the physical work burden and to increase decision-making roles, thus empowering the women left behind. But low remittances had the opposite impact, and saddled them with greater physical workload.

Keywords

International migration, gender roles, empowerment, disempowerment of rural women, migration impact, mid hills of Nepal

Introduction

International migration is not a recent phenomenon in Nepal, although it has increased in magnitude in the past decade, with the list of destinations also getting longer. An agrarian country dependent largely on subsistence agriculture with a growing population, Nepal has limited land for cultivation and other inputs, a condition which makes it exceptionally difficult for farming families to meet household food requirements. Farm households are increasingly using migration as an important household livelihood strategy based on remittances. Today, Nepal is ranked fifth globally in terms of the share of remittances in the national GDP (World Bank, 2011). It is estimated that about 15 percent of the total economically active male population (older than 15 years of age) in the country was involved in international migration in 2003–2004. The figures for females are much lower, at just above 2 percent (World Bank, 2006). Migration in Nepal is highly male-dominated.

While the gender dimension of migration has received the attention of scholars since the mid-1970s, research on international migration in Nepal has shown little interest in the complexity of the impact on those left behind. The impact of male migration on the women left behind has received slightly more attention than female migration. A rare study on female migration by Bhadra (2007) mentions that women migration leads to an increase in workload for the other women of the household, particularly the mother, mother-in-law, and the daughters. But there has been no study on the systematic impact of women migration on the changes in household roles and responsibilities.

The impact of migration on the women left behind is one of the microeconomic pathways for the growth and development of the household, society, and the nation. Thus, the gender consequences of international migration for households and communities are vital for any successful development policy in Nepal. This article looks at how male out-migration has transformed gender relations in the rural communities of Nepal. The article focuses on workload and its spin-offs into other domains, such as women's autonomy in household decision making and ownership of productive assets. It also attempts to find commonalities in different patterns of migration. Two districts, Baitadi and Syangja, are chosen as representatives of the two major migration patterns in the hilly region of the country. The former represents the Mid and Far-Western Development Region, where unskilled migration to India dominates. The latter represents almost all the hill districts in the Western, Central and Eastern Development Regions, where migration to the Gulf countries is predominant.

International Labor Migration in Nepal

Nepal is an agrarian country, with the agricultural sector contributing about 32 percent to the country's GDP (Move, 2009). But agriculture is subsistence in nature, and the increase in population coupled with the decrease in farm sizes has resulted in agriculture being unable to meet the basic requirements of even the farm households, forcing them to seek nonfarm sources of income. But there are not many nonfarm income options available locally due to the poor economic situation of the country accompanied by political instability. Hence, more and more farm families are participating in inter-region/international migration (Figure 1).

The number of men migrating is far greater than the number of women migrating. According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey, 2008, about 15 percent of the total male population and less than 2 percent of the total female population are recorded as absentees living outside the country. A person is declared an absentee when he/she is away from home for at least six months (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2009). The majority of absentees mention work as their purpose of migration. The actual figures are likely to be higher due to the difficulty in tracking

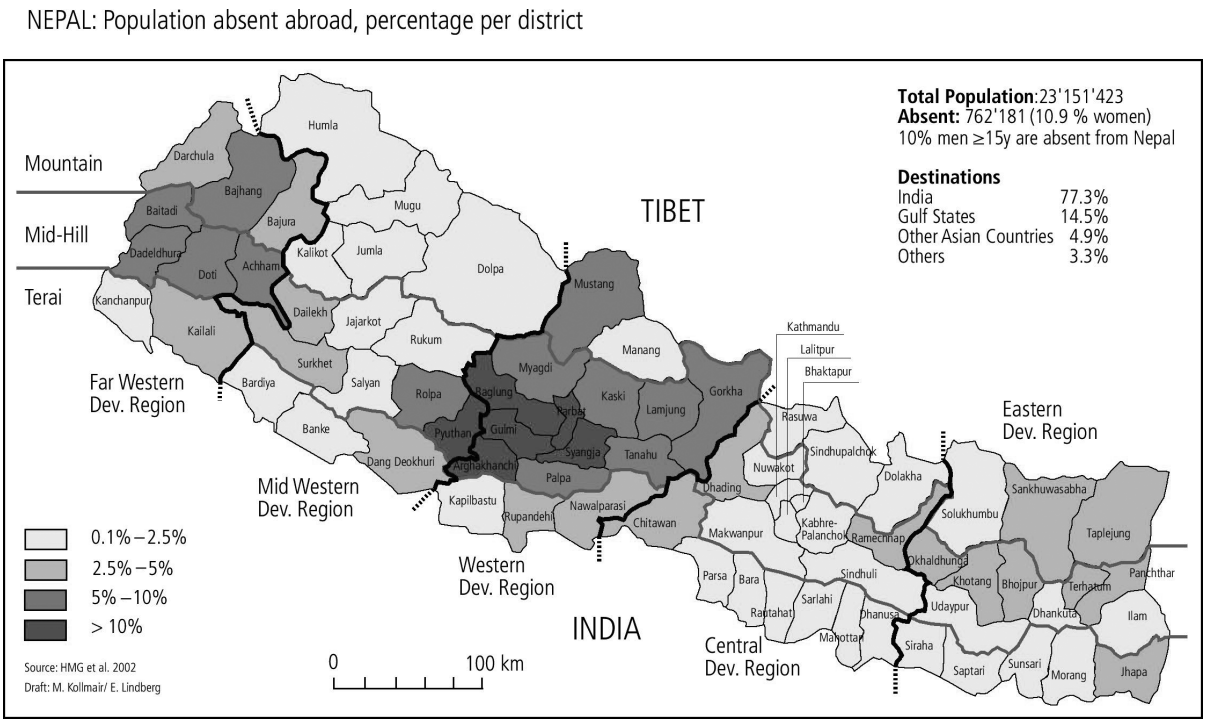

Figure 1. Map of Nepal Indicating Percentage of Population Absent (Abroad)

Source: Kollmair and Lindberg as cited in Thieme et al. (2005).

this outflow. Migration to India is difficult to quantify because of the open border and lack of documentation and migration to the Gulf countries often takes place through India, through illegal or informal means. There are gender differences in the sector of employment of male and female migrants at the destination. While male migrants work in diverse fields such as farming, industrial sector, or service sector in the countries of destination, the majority of women migrants seek employment in the "care economy" (Bhadra, 2007).

In absolute numbers, international labor migration in Nepal does not attract global attention. However, it ranks fifth globally and first in South Asia in terms of the contribution of remittances to the GDP. Remittances to the country reached USD 3.5 billion in 2009, contributing about 23 percent to the country's GDP (World Bank, 2011). This clearly demonstrates the importance of emigration and remittances for the households involved in migration, as well as for the nation. Today about 29 percent of the households in Nepal have at least one member living abroad (CBS, 2009).

In the early 1980s, labor migration was more or less restricted to India. However, from the late 1980s onwards, destinations diversified, with Nepalese migrants migrating in significant numbers eastwards to Southeast Asia and the Far East, and from the mid-1990s onwards, westwards to the Gulf countries (Seddon, 2005). This trend has gained momentum in the last decade with the opening up of the economy together with the poor economic performance of the country amidst armed conflict.

Today, there are three broad kinds of migration patterns in Nepal based on destination: high-skilled migration to developed countries (US, EU, Australia, and Japan), semi/low-skilled migration to the Gulf countries and Southeast Asia, and semi/low-skilled migration to India. The highly-skilled migrants to developed countries, in general, try for permanent settlement in the destination country, whereas semi/low-skilled migration is more temporary in nature. In rural Nepal, the most popular destinations are India, the Gulf countries, and Southeast Asian countries. In India, migrants work both in the formal sectors (security forces and factories) and in the informal sectors (in restaurants, as watchmen, in mines, etc.). Working in the formal sector in India requires a certain level of skill, whereas the informal sector does not require any particular skills.

Consequently, both income and job security are higher in the formal sector than in the informal sector.

Labor migration to India is cheap due to low travel and transaction costs, whereas migrating to other countries requires higher transaction costs. Also, working in India does not require either a visa or a work permit, making it easier for less educated and less privileged persons. The scenario is different for other countries. Most of the institutions and agencies involved in providing information on labor market opportunities in countries other than India are located in the capital Kathmandu, making them less accessible to households in remote regions.

In general, remittances from countries other than India and the formal sector in India are higher than those from informal sectors in India (Kollmair, Manandhar, Subedi, & Thieme, 2006; Maharjan, 2010). Moreover, in the case of migration to countries other than India, the migrants stay away from home for a year or more, whereas migration to the informal sector in India is mostly seasonal or circular in nature, with migrants returning home at least once in a year (Maharjan, 2010). Migrants working in the formal sector in India have semi-permanent or permanent jobs, and return to Nepal for their annual holidays. On the basis of these differences in the period of absence, skill requirements, cost and income, migration to the Gulf countries, the Southeast Asian countries, and the formal sector in India can be grouped together and migration to informal sector in India can form a separate group. This study covers both the patterns of migration and their impacts on the family left behind, particularly the women.

Male Migration and the Women Left Behind: Key Issues

There have been several studies on the impact of international migration on the receiving countries, and to a lesser extent also on the effects on the sending countries. The studies addressing the local effects of international migration have mostly focused on the causes, development, and consequences for the national economy. Little attention has been paid to the impact of migration and remittances on the economic and social behavior of household members left behind, particularly the women.

As Shrestha and Conway (2001) put it, "migrants' wives exist in the shadow… in the shadow of their husbands, in the shadow of the mountains, and in the shadow of the academic discourse on migration."

A review of the available literature on the impact on women left behind by male migration reveals that there is no global consensus on whether male out-migration is an opportunity or a threat to the status of women left behind. Van Rooij (2000) reveals that emigration decreases the workload of women as a result of increased purchasing capacity to hire labor. However, Sadiqi and Ennaji (2004) reported increased workload due to migration in Morocco. Sadiqi and Ennaji (2004) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) suggest that male migration helps in increasing women's autonomy and self-esteem by expanding their role and responsibilities in the household beyond the traditional ones.

Other researchers have highlighted the complex nature of the impact of male out-migration on the status of women (workload, roles, and responsibilities). The studies note that the extent and nature of impact depends on several conditions such as migration pattern, type of household, number and age of children, land, and livestock holding. Paris, Singh, and Luis (2005) note that in rice-producing villages in UP, India, the women had to take over the workload of the migrant male when remittances were not large enough, thereby increasing the overall physical workload. Desai and Banerji (2008), who conducted a study in India, say the effect is conditional on the family structure that the women left behind lives in. Their study highlights that the effect is substantial in case of women living in a nuclear family and limited in case of women residing in extended families. In nuclear families, male migration increases a woman's autonomy, decision-making responsibility, as well as labor demand. Louhichi (1997) also notes that the financial and moral authority of women is the highest when they live in a nuclear family and are also mothers.

Studies carried out in Nepal reveal contradictory findings. Paneru (2006), who carried out a study in the Kaski district of Nepal, reports that in general, right after the migration of the husband, the workload on his wife and other women in the family increases, but once the husband starts to send remittances back, it actually starts to decline. The remittances are first used to pay off any outstanding debts, and then are increasingly used for hiring labor. However, when the remittances are little, the workload continues to be high, especially when the household

has much land and livestock. The study by Kasper (2005) in the Kaski district of the Western Development Region also supports this view. However, Karki (1998), who researched households in the Syangja district of Nepal, reveals that male migration results in an increase in the workload and decision-making powers of the women left behind. The study reports that male out-migration increases the workload of children as well.

With regard to decision making, both Paneru (2006) and Kasper (2005) recount that male migration has positive influence on women's household decision making. Kasper reports that in more strategic decisions, such as about investments, the role of women is less than in operational decisions such as labor hiring or irrigation management.

This study researches the impact of two patterns of male out-migration on the workload of women left behind, and on the expansion of their roles and responsibilities. It asks the following questions:

- Is male out-migration associated with a higher work burden on women?
- Does male out-migration lead women to greater ownership and access to productive resources?
- Does male out-migration empower the women left behind, by increasing their autonomy (expanding their roles) and decision-making powers?
- Is the effect similar for the two patterns of migration (migration to the informal sector in India, and skilled migration to the Gulf countries, to Southeast Asian countries, and to the formal sector in India)?

Methodology, Study Area, and Data Base

Study Area

Nepal is divided into three agro-ecological zones from North to South—the mountain, hills, and Terai—and further into five developmental regions from East to West—Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-Western, and Far-Western. Compared to the Terai region, the hill and mountain

regions have a negative net migration rates, making them suitable for the study. However, the mountain region is far less populated than the hill region. Also, the hill region has a very high out-migration to international destinations, both India and overseas (particularly Gulf countries) than the mountain region. Another distinct feature of the hills of Nepal is the smallholding subsistence farming system, where the heterogeneity in the size of the holding is not as great as in the Terai region. Hence, the hill region was selected for study.

Although international migration is more or less prevalent in almost all the development regions of Nepal, there are clearly two hot spots in the Western and the Far-Western Development Regions of the country (see Figure 1). Therefore, two districts in the hills of Nepal—Baitadi (Far-Western region) and Syangja (Western region)—were selected for this study based on the migration intensity and predominant migration pattern. Syangja represents migration to diverse destinations, higher remittances, and longer periods of absence. Baitadi, on the other hand, represents low-paying migration to informal sectors in India. On average, the per household annual remittances are about USD[1] 2,172 in Syangja against USD 353 in Baitadi (Maharjan, 2010).

The two districts differ dramatically in overall development, poverty situation, basic infrastructure, educational institutions, and the gender situation. Table 1 presents a few indicators of development and respective rankings of the two districts under study. As seen in the table, Syangja is among the top 10 districts from the development point of view, while Baitadi is at the 62nd position (out of a total of 75 districts). Similarly, poverty is more widespread and access to road and means of communication is much lower in Baitadi than in Syangja. Most notably, Syangja is the district with the highest women's empowerment index in the country, whereas Baitadi stands at 60th position (CBS, 2007) in this regard. Therefore, a study of these two widely different districts, with different migration patterns, would help in presenting a clearer picture of the impact of major migration patterns on the rural Nepal as a whole. It will also contribute to the ongoing debate on whether migration is an opportunity for women's empowerment or a threat.

A total of eight village development committees (VDCs) were selected from the two study districts, four from each district. For the selection of villages, the incidence of labor out-migration in 2001 was calculated

from the Population Census, 2001, raw data. On the basis of the results of this calculation, four VDCs were selected randomly from each district with high and moderate migration incidences. From each VDC, 10 percent of households (as per the 2001 census) were selected randomly for interview.

The caste and economic class of the households were two factors in selecting the households. From each VDC, efforts were made to have an equal number of migrant and nonmigrant households. A household was classified as a migrant household if, at the time of the survey, it had at least one member abroad for labor work. The duration of the man's absence had to be at least six months.

Data Base

The primary data from a total of 509 migrant and nonmigrant households in the two districts was collected from June to December 2007. Considering the difficult political situation of the country at the time, we collaborated with local nongovernment organizations and community-based organizations to collect the data. They included Suryodaya Club, a local NGO, and Community Development and Resource Conservation, a CBO in Syangja, and an NGO called Social Awareness and Development Association (SADA) in Baitadi. This collaboration was made with the help of the project, Sustainable Soil Management Programme (SSMP), Nepal, implemented by the international NGO, Helvetas Nepal.

A structured questionnaire was developed for the household survey, and attention was paid to keeping the questions simple and unambiguous to avoid confusion. The preliminary questionnaire was field tested before starting the actual survey work. On the basis of the field test feedback, some improvisations were made in the questionnaire, particularly with regard to open-ended questions. Wherever possible, these were converted into multiple choice questions. The survey questionnaire was initially developed in English, and later translated into Nepali language before the survey.

Small workshops, focused group discussions and key informant interviews were carried out for in-depth information on the villages and other aspects of the research. In addition, discussions were also held with

government officers like the District Agriculture Development Officer and the District Livestock Development Officer.

During the survey, the filled-in questionnaires were checked for errors, consistency, and completeness after surveying the households in the VDC. Inconsistent and incomplete questionnaires were either rejected or the households revisited for further information and clarification. After the survey had been completed, the information was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) datasheet using the SPSS Version 16.0 for Windows. After data entry, three questionnaires were discarded for inconsistency of information and a further 10 migrant households were selected and surveyed in Baitadi, to increase the number of migrant households covered. In the end, a total of 509 households were covered in the analysis. The survey covered a total of 280 households, including 108 nonmigrant and 172 migrant in Syangja, and 229 households in Baitadi, of which 128 were nonmigrant and 101 were migrant households.

Analytical Strategy

The impact of male out-migration on women left behind was measured in terms of the changes in the gender division of labor in farm and nonfarm activities, changes in ownership of productive resources and the share of women in household decision making. The study used a mixed approach in analyzing the problem. Quantitative techniques such as comparison of means and frequencies and descriptive statistical tools such as the Independent *t* test and the Chi-square tests were used to reveal the statistical differences between the migrant and nonmigrant households. Qualitative methods such as case study, cobweb diagrams, and time budgeting were used to further enhance the findings of the quantitative analysis.

Research Findings and Discussion

Results on the impact of male out-migration on the household members left behind, particularly women, are presented in the following section.

First, we have given the impact on workload by age and gender followed by the impact on the role of women in farming, access of women to various resources, and finally, on the role of women in decision making. The results differed significantly between the two districts under study, representing two patterns of migration.

Impact on Workload

The workload is analyzed in terms of per capita hours of work in various sectors: crop farming, livestock, the nonfarm sector, and household activities. The household was questioned about the number of days per year and the number of hours per day spent working in these sectors for various age groups and gender, which was then converted into per capita working hours.

Crop Farming

The results for workload in crop farming are given in Table 1. In Syangja, the workload in crop farming was lower for members of migrant households compared to nonmigrant households, across both age categories and gender. However, the difference was statistically significant only for the children and adults, both male and female. In Baitadi, the workload was higher for female members of migrant households than that of female members of nonmigrant households. The difference was statistically significant for young and old females only, and not for adult females.

Baitadi district is one of the most backward districts in Nepal from a gender perspective. The workload on women is very high in the district, particularly on the adult females (mostly married women or daughters-in-law). Even without male out-migration, the adult women have very little free time and they are not in a position to undertake additional workload created by the absence of male household members. Thus, the additional workload is distributed to other members of the households, mostly the young and old females. In the case of males, adult and old males from migrant households worked fewer hours and young males

Table 1. Average Per Capita Working Hours in Crop Farming

District	HH Migration Status	*N*	Children		Youth		Adult		Old	
			Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Syangja	Nonmigrant	108	58	93	142	240	689	865	458	180
	Migrant	172	15	18	91	219	295	606	189	148
	t test		2.35**	2.64**	1.34	0.322	4.55***	3.04***	1.22	0.202
Baitadi	Nonmigrant	128	58	79	214	405	1035	1174	635	280
	Migrant	101	39	57	258	710	827	1240	523	734
	t test		1.18	0.965	−0.75	−3.57***	2.45**	−0.939	0.581	−1.98*

Source: Household survey (2007).
Notes: ***, **, and * indicate significance at 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

slightly more hours than those in nonmigrant households, but the differences were significant only for adult males.

The results for the two districts were contradictory. While in Syangja, all members of migrant households worked fewer hours, in Baitadi, members of migrant households worked more than those from nonmigrant households, except adult males.

As indicated by the position in the gender equity ranking, there is greater gender discrimination in Baitadi district than in Syangja. In Baitadi, men are the household heads and are beyond any sort of command or request to participate in the household workload, including farming. Women have some control over the younger males (sons and grandsons), but not over their husbands or older males. Moreover, Baitadi has a long history of out-migration, and men do not like to do household chores or farming activities even when they do not migrate. This explains the lower participation of adult males in the farming work.

Another distinct feature was the higher disparity in workload among the men and women household members in migrant households than in nonmigrant households. This suggested a widening gender gap in the labor use in crop farming between the males and females as a result of male out-migration. In patriarchal societies when households can afford leisure, men tend to enjoy it more than a woman which is reflected in the results stated earlier. As expected, the difference between the results of the two districts was very high.

Table 2 shows an average day in the life of an adult male and an adult female in farm households in Baitadi, without nonfarm activities. It is evident that women work more hours than men. However, the male members also carry a significant workload, which when they migrate is distributed among the remaining household members, thereby increasing the workload across age categories and gender. In Baitadi, the remittances are too low to replace the lost labor effect of migration by hired labor, and subsistence farming is indispensable for maintaining household food security situation. In such a situation, households are forced to work additional hours. Woman already have less leisure hours per day and with male out-migration, the situation gets worse. The impact of the increased work burden on women's health as well as on family life needs further analysis, which is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 2. An Average Day, for Adult Male and Female, in the Farm Households in Baitadi

	Female	Male
1. Morning wake up	4–4:30 a.m.	6 a.m.
2. House sanitation and cleaning	2 hours	30 minutes
3. Other morning activities		
• Cattle feeding/cattle shed cleaning/milking	30 minutes	10 minutes
• Grass cutting and firewood collection	1 hour	0
• Grain milling, grinding, etc.	30 minutes	10 minutes
• Baby care and feeding	30 minutes	30 minutes
• Working in field	1 hour	2 hours
• Cooking and feeding	1 hour	30 minutes
• Utensil cleaning	20 minutes	0
• Others		
4. Day work		
• Official work	0	0
• Agricultural work	3 hours	3 hours
• Cattle grazing	1 hour	1 hour
• Grass/firewood/bedding material collection	1 hour	1 hour
• Baby care	1 hour	1 hour
5. Evening work		
• House sanitation and cleaning	20 minutes	0
• Cattle feeding/cattle shed cleaning/milking	30 minutes	30 minutes
• Cooking and feeding	1 hour	30 minutes
• Utensil cleaning and sanitation	1 hour	
6. Care of older family members	40 minutes	20 minutes
Total working hours	16 hours 30 minutes	11 hours 10 minutes
Sleeping time	10 p.m.	9.30 p.m.
Leisure	1–1.5 hours	4 hours 20 minutes
Total sleeping hours	6–6.5 hours	8:30 hours

Source: Focus group discussion, household survey (2007).

Livestock Keeping

As in crop farming, the workload in livestock keeping was lower in migrant households of Syangja than in nonmigrant households, across age categories and gender. The differences were significant for children, for adult males, and for young males. Conversely, in Baitadi, the workload was higher for women in migrant households compared to nonmigrant households, but the difference was significant only for young females. In the case of males, adult and old males from migrant households worked fewer hours, and young males slightly more hours than those in nonmigrant households, but the differences were significant only for adult males. The details of the per capita hours of work in livestock keeping are given in Table 3. The results are similar to those for crop farming. The results again show a greater disparity of workload between male and female members of migrant households than nonmigrant households. Together, the results of the study indicate the feminization of agriculture.

In general, livestock rearing was largely carried out by younger members of the household. The young females were mostly involved in fetching grass for livestock, while children fed the animals and adult males were involved only when the animals fell sick or had to be sold. Of all the work, fetching grass for livestock is most time-consuming, and the time spent on this activity increases proportionately with the increase in livestock. In Baitadi, the study showed that households tended to invest additional income from migration in livestock which explained the increased workload on household members, particularly the young women.

Box 1 presents details about the number and conditions of households without livestock in Syangja and Baitadi.

The number of households without livestock is higher among migrant households than nonmigrant households in both districts. The number of such households is higher in Syangja than in Baitadi. In Baitadi, livestock is an important source of cash income for farm families with limited other alternatives. Also, livestock is a form of asset holding in the absence of formal credit institutions and nonformal institutions such as saving groups and cooperatives. Another important feature is the high disparity in the workload between children from migrant and nonmigrant households, particularly in Syangja. On average, a male

Table 3. Average per Capita Work in Livestock Keeping (in Hours)

District	HH Migration Status	*N*	Children		Youth		Adult		Old	
			Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Syangja	Nonmigrant	108	220	244	109	209	436	644	450	255
	Migrant	172	73	77	51	181	235	550	343	228
	t test		2.85***	2.52**	2.10**	0.621	3.59***	1.46	0.646	0.150
Baitadi	Nonmigrant	128	98	100	71	321	374	808	180	240
	Migrant	101	57	61	82	458	200	870	170	395
	t test		2.42**	2.06**	−0.466	−2.16**	4.89***	−1.41	0.131	−1.03

Source: Household Survey (2007).
Notes: *** and ** indicate significance at 1% and 5% levels, respectively.

Box 1. Household without Livestock in the Study Districts

Syangja: Compared to 13 nonmigrant households without large animals, 27 migrant households had no large animals, and compared to 6 nonmigrant households without any livestock, 16 migrant households had no livestock at all.
Baitadi: Compared to 3 migrant households without livestock, only 1 nonmigrant household had no livestock.
In all the households without livestock, both migrant and nonmigrant, the household's income from nonfarm sectors (remittance, jobs, own business, skilled labor work) was high enough to forego the livestock income. Also, most of these households have lower household labor force with the children still studying.

Source: Household survey (2007).

child from a nonmigrant household worked for 220 hours, while a male child in a migrant household worked only for 73 hours. The same figures for girls were 244 hours and 77 hours, respectively. An important reason why households in Syangja did not have livestock was to reduce the workload of children. Involvement of children in livestock care is common. When households can afford to forego or reduce livestock income, they prefer to do so to provide children with more time for studies. This is a positive step toward the reduction of child labor, but whether the reduced working hours in livestock result in better school performance needs further analysis.

Nonfarm Activities

Per capita work in nonfarm activities was higher among nonmigrant households compared to migrant households across age categories and gender, except for the young males in both districts. However, the difference was significant only in case of adult males and females in Syangja and old males in Baitadi. In Syangja young males from migrant households worked 332 hours and those from nonmigrant households 114 hours, a difference which is significant at 5 percent level. In the case of Baitadi, however, the difference was not statistically significant. The details are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Average per Capita Work in Nonfarm Activities (in Hours)

District	HH Migration Status	*N*	Children		Youth		Adult		Old	
			Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Syangja	Nonmigrant	108	4	4	114	109	1,079	563	135	0
	Migrant	172	0	15	332	37	625	194	223	0
	t test		1.66	–0.52	–2.60**	1.44	3.01***	3.51***	–0.38	
Baitadi	Nonmigrant	128	3	4	237	20	1,218	45	265	0
	Migrant	101	0	0	386	32	1,071	30	0	0
	t test		1.00	1.00	–1.40	–0.40	1.17	0.49	2.14**	

Source: Household survey (2007).
Notes: *** and ** indicate significance at 1% and 5% levels, respectively.

Household Activities

Household activities include work such as cleaning, cooking, fetching water and fuel wood, and caring for children and the elderly that are carried out on a normal day. Work in special circumstances (such as festivals and ceremonies, or during sickness) was not considered. The detailed results are given in Table 5.

In Syangja, members of migrant households worked less than members of nonmigrant households, and females worked more than males in both categories. The difference in workload between the migrant and nonmigrant households was significant for adult males at the 1 percent level, for children at the 5 percent level, and for adult females at the 10 percent level. Again the disparity in workload between males and females was greater among migrant households than nonmigrant households.

In Baitadi, the household workload was heavier in migrant households than in nonmigrant households, except when for adult males and children. However, the difference in per capita working hours was significant only in the case of young females, old females and adult males (at 1 percent level) and female children (at 5 percent level). In general, the female members spent longer hours doing household work as compared to male members. The disparity on the per capita work is very high among the adult males and females in the migrant households.

Participation of Women in Nontraditional Roles in Farming

In farming, traditionally there is a distinction between the work carried out by men and women. Ploughing, bund making, irrigation, fertilization, pesticide application, and threshing are traditionally carried out by males and activities such as planting, hoeing, and thinning are carried out by females. In order to analyze the expanding role of women in agriculture, particularly crop farming, households were asked "whether women carried out these activities." Of the 509 households, 231 nonmigrant households and 259 migrant households responded to the question, and the results are presented in Table 6. Participation of women in all activities was above 80 percent in Syangja, except for in pesticide application and ploughing. However, the difference between migrant and

Table 5. Average per Capita Work in Household Activities (in Hours)

District	HH Migration Status	*N*	Children		Youth		Adult		Old	
			Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Syangja	Nonmigrant	108	183	365	132	355	426	1,284	342	456
	Migrant	172	62	192	76	340	223	1,133	138	505
	t test		2.23**	2.06**	1.37	0.21	3.02***	1.68*	1.26	–0.17
Baitadi	Nonmigrant	128	206	283	183	382	639	961	537	337
	Migrant	101	158	163	217	596	448	1,023	619	821
	t test		1.12	2.22**	–0.76	–2.92***	3.41***	–1.04	–0.64	–2.9***

Source: Household survey (2007).
Notes: ***, **, and * indicate significance at 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

Table 6. Participation of Women in the Nontraditional Roles in Farming in Percent (Multiple Answers)

			Activities					
District	HH Migration Status	*N*	Ploughing	Bund Making	Irrigation	Fertilizer Application	Pesticide Application	Threshing
Syangja	Nonmigrant	108	0.0	100.0	99.0	93.2	74.8	87.4
	Migrant	172	0.0	98.1	98.8	96.3	68.9	91.9
Baitadi	Nonmigrant	128	0.8	97.7	67.2	30.5	0.0	71.9
	Migrant	101	1.0	100.0	79.6	22.4	4.1	79.6

Source: Household survey (2007).

nonmigrant households was small, and statistically insignificant. In Baitadi, too, participation of women in nontraditional roles was above 80 percent. Women's participation is lowest in ploughing, followed by pesticide application and fertilization. Here again, the differences between migrant and nonmigrant households are statistically not significant. The involvement of women in certain activities like pesticide application and fertilizer application is much lower in Baitadi than in Syangja. However, this is the result of lower use of inputs on farms in Baitadi than in Syangja rather than due to gender differences. Lower participation of women in ploughing could be attributed to the taboo attached to it. According to the Hindu religion, ploughing land by women will cause misfortune and natural calamities, which is why women are forbidden to plough the land.

Overall, the results indicated that a high percentage of women participated in all the nontraditional activities of farming except ploughing, indicating changes in traditional gender division of labor in farming. However, migration situation of the household did not play any significant role in this change. Maharjan (2010) reports that the family labor lost as a result of male out-migration is replaced more by hired female labor than by male labor. When the overall male population in the village is reduced (due to out-migration), females are left to undertake the farming activities. This may explain the higher participation of women in all farming activities irrespective of household migration situation. The results again indicate the feminization of the agricultural sector. Similar result is also reported by Gartaula, Niehof, and Visser (2010).

Access of Women to Productive Resources

Access to resources is measured based on the ownership of assets such as land, house, animals, and money. A total of 505 households (233 nonmigrant and 272 migrant households) responded to this question. The results are presented in Table 7. The results indicate that in general, women in migrant households enjoy greater ownership of assets than women in nonmigrant households, although the difference is not statistically significant. Compared to other resources, women own more livestock. Paneru (2006) found a similar trend in house and land ownership

Table 7. Ownership of Productive Resources by Women (in Percentage)

District	HH Migration Status	Farming Land	Non-farming Land	House	Large Animals	Small Animals	Money	*N*
Syangja	Nonmigrant	55	55	51	61	66	38	105
	Migrant	58	55	53	68	68	43	171
Baitadi	Nonmigrant	2	1	2	81	61	16	128
	Migrant	1	1	2	87	55	24	101

Source: Household survey (2007).

in the Kaski district. Of the 100 households covered in the study, only 16 percent and 24 percent of women had ownership of house and land, respectively. The results indicate that migration of male members does not lead to significant changes in the ownership of resources by the women members of the household.

Role of Women in Decision Making

Perceptions about the role of women in household decision making are measured for various aspects including cropping activities, education of children, food expenses and savings, agricultural expenditure and nonagricultural investment. Households were asked "*Do women in the household have any role in various household decisions?"* and *"What is the share of men and women in various household decisions?*" The responses ranged from no role at all (0 percent) to full control (100 percent) in household decisions. The results were tabulated and cobweb diagrams were created to present the findings.

Figures 2 and 3 clearly indicate that women in migrant households have a much greater role in household decision making than women in nonmigrant households in both districts. For both migrant and nonmigrant households, the share of women in decision making was much higher in Syangja than in Baitadi.

In the case of Syangja, the differences in the percentage share of women in decision making was highly significant for all activities except nonfarm investment, which was significant at the 5 percent level. In Baitadi, the difference in the percentage share of women in decision making among migrant and nonmigrant households was significant at

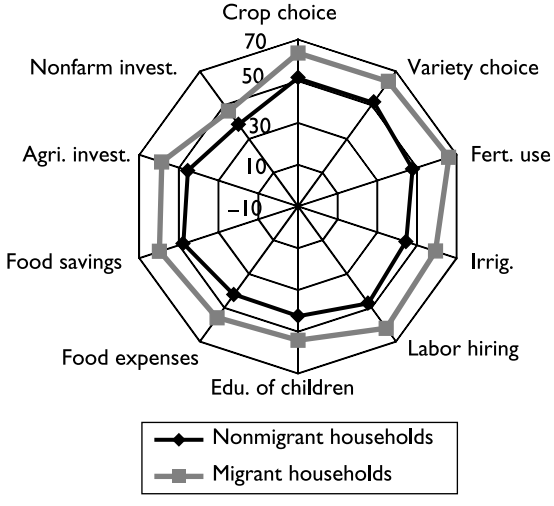

Figure 2. Cobweb Diagram Showing the Role of Women in Decision Making in Syangja (in Percentage)

Source: Developed by the authors.

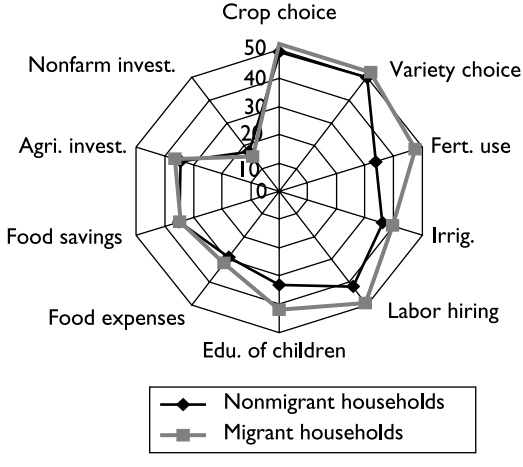

Figure 3. Cobweb Diagram Showing the Role of Women in Decision Making in Baitadi (in Percentage)

Source: Household survey (2007).

the 1 percent level for labor-hiring decisions in farming and child education, at the 5 percent level for fertilizer use decisions, and at the 10 percent level for selection of crops to be planted.

The results indicate that women have a greater role in operational decisions such as those about crop and variety selection, and a lesser one in strategic decisions such as about nonfarm investments. The limited role of women in nonfarm investment can be attributed to traditional gender discrimination, where women are raised to follow decisions, not to make them. Box 2 presents a case study of the dilemma faced by women in migrant households who are now de facto household heads.

Box 2. The Dilemma of a New Household Head, Syangja

> Being a household head is not an easy job, particularly when you are not educated. Women were never brought up to take the responsibility of the household head. Now with my husband migrating, I have to take all the decisions but I just don't know what decision to take. My husband sends about 10,000 Indian rupees every month. We have managed to change the thatched roof of our home with GI sheets, build separate cattle shed, and add this small room. It is dangerous to horde cash and I do not know about bank savings. I would like to make use of this money, but in a small village like ours where can we invest? Also the demand and expectations from relatives and friends are high. Most of the money is spent on hiring labor for farm work, on feasts and ceremonies, and on the treatment of my mother-in-law who is old and ill. I worry at times about the future and share it with my husband, but what can he do staying so far away? So he consoles me not to worry, and says: "Whatever happens, happens. There is no point worrying about things that are not in your control."

Source: Household survey (2007).

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The results indicate that male out-migration has a significant impact on the lives of the women left behind. However, the nature and extent of the impact depends on the pattern of out-migration. In this study, Syangja district represents overseas migration and migration to the formal sector

in India, and Baitadi represents migration to informal sector in India. The impact of these two patterns of migration on those left behind differs.

The impact of male out-migration on the family members, especially on women's workload, depends on the ability to hire labor from remittances earned. In Syangja where remittances are high, household members in migrant households work less than in nonmigrant households. But in Baitadi, household members in migrant households work more than in nonmigrant households.

Another important finding is the higher disparity in workloads between male and female household members in migrant households compared to nonmigrant households in both the districts. This implies a widening gender gap in workload as a result of migration. The findings also show that the traditional gender division of labor in agriculture is thinning and the feminization of agriculture, already prevalent in Nepal, is on the rise. However, no significant difference is seen between migrant and nonmigrant households in this aspect.

The results also show that there is no significant difference in the ownership of assets by women from migrant and nonmigrant households in the two districts. In general, women have more access to lower value assets such as livestock than to high value assets such as land and houses.

Another finding relates to the role of women in household decision making. In both districts, women in migrant households have a greater role in household decision making than women in nonmigrant households. However, in all households, women's decision-making role is greater in operational matters than in strategic affairs.

Overall, in Syangja, compared to nonmigrant households, women from migrant households shoulder lower physical burden but more managerial and decision-making responsibilities. This situation could be interpreted as women being more empowered. However, whether they are indeed more empowered would depend on their capacity to perform the new roles. In the case of Baitadi, women in migrant households bear a higher physical workload as well as decision-making role, and thus a higher overall workload than women in nonmigrant households. Although an increased role in decision making indicates empowerment, it might actually lead to more burden and disempowerment in the context

of women who lack the capability to undertake these new responsibilities, which are thrust upon them along with a greater physical workload.

The findings of the study have an important implication not only for the women themselves but also for the household and the nation. The study clearly shows the important shift in the position held by women in the household and communities. Therefore, any policies that ignore this new reality are bound to fail. There is, therefore, an urgent need to consider the changes in the gender situation in the context of male out-migration in the economic development policies and strategies of Nepal.

Note

1. 1 USD = 70 Nepalese Rupee (July 2011).

References

Bhadra, C. (2007, September). *International labor migration of Nepalese women: The impact of their remittances on poverty reduction* (Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade Working Paper Series, No. 44).

Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). (2007). District profiles. Planning, Coordination and Standardization Section of the Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal.

———. (2009). *Report on the Nepal Labour Force Survey 2008*. NPC Secretariat, Government of Nepal.

Desai, S., & Banerji, M. (2008). Negotiated Identities: Male migration and left-behind wives in India. *Journal of Population Research*, *25*(3), 337–355.

Gartaula, H.N., Niehof, A., & Visser, L. (2010). Feminization of agriculture as an effect of male out-migration: Unexpected outcomes from Jhapa district, Eastern Nepal. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, *5*(2), 565–572.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1992). Overcoming patriarchal constraints: The reconstruction of gender relations among Mexican immigrant women and men. *Gender and Society*, *6*(3), 393–415.

Karki, B.K. (1998). Male outmigration from rural areas: Effects on women and children—A case study of Chandikalika VDC, Syangja. Unpublished MA thesis, Tribhuwan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Kollmair, M., Manandhar, S., Subedi, B., & Thieme, S. (2006). New figures for old stories: Migration and remittances in Nepal. *Migration Letters*, *3*(2), 151–160.

Louhichi, Khaled. (1997). The impact of the emigration of the husband on the status of the wife: The case of Egypt. In Cosio-Zavala (Ed.), *Women and families: Evolution of the status of women as factor and consequences of changes in family dynamics* (pp. 323–339). Maria Eugenia, Paris: CICRED.

Maharjan, A. (2010). Labour out-migration and its impact on farm families in the mid hills of Nepal. In W. Doppler & S. Bauer (Eds) *Farming and rural systems economics* (Vol. 113). Weikersheim, Germany: Margraf Publishers GmbH.

Paris, T., Singh, A., & Luis, J. (2005, June 18–24). Impact of male out-migration on rice household economy and gender roles: A case in eastern Uttar Pradesh, India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *XL*(25), 2005, New Delhi, India.

Sadiqi, F., & Ennaji, M. (2004). The impact of male migration from Morocco to Europe on women: A gender approach. *Finisterra*, *XXXIX* (77), 59–76.

Seddon, D. (2005). Nepal's dependence on exporting labour. Country Profile, Migration Information. Retrieved on March 8, 2008, from http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=277

Shrestha, N., & Conway, D. (2001). The shadow life of a migrant's wife. In S. von der Heide & T. Hoffmann (Eds), *Aspects of migration and mobility in Nepal* (pp. 153–178). Kathmandu, Nepal: Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

Thieme, S., Bhattarai, R., Gurung, G., Kollmair, M., Manandhar, S., & Mueller-Boeker, U. (2005). Addressing the needs of Nepalese migrant workers in Nepal and in Delhi, India. *Mountain Research and Development*, 25(2), 109–114.

Van Rooij, A. (2000). *Women of Taghzoute: The effects of migration on women left behind in Morocco* (IMAROM Working Paper Series No. 12). Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

World Bank (2006). *Nepal resilience amidst conflict: An assessment of poverty in Nepal, 1995–96 and 2003–04*. Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit, South Asia Region, The World Bank.

———. (2011). *Migration and remittances factbook 2011* (2nd ed.). The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Washington: The World Bank.