



Full length article

Migration as Livelihood Strategy: A Mixed Methods Study of Household Welfare in Bagmati Province, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the role of migration in improving household livelihoods and reduce poverty focusing on Bagmati province of Nepal. The research employs a mixed methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to analyze the impact of migration on household welfare, resilience, and economic outcomes. The study also focuses on household livelihoods, remittance allocation, and implications for livelihood diversification and rural sustainability. The key findings show that the livelihood level could be increased from migration and the lack of vocational skills training and availability of limited employment opportunities are the primary causes of the increasing trend of migration in Nepal. Policy recommendations focusing on sufficient vocational training opportunities to needy youths, awareness creation on migration regarding benefits, risks, and remittance utilization in productive investment to generate incomes at the community level.

Introduction

Households possess a set of assets as; human, physical, financial, natural, and social. Migration decisions are shaped by asset endowments and local opportunities. Migration generates flows of remittances, skills, and networks that alter household asset portfolios and thereby influence outcomes such as income, consumption smoothing, investment and resilience. Institutional and contextual factors (policy, labor market conditions, legal status) moderate these pathways. The study adopted a mixed-methods convergent design combining a cross-sectional household survey with qualitative interviews and focus groups. This is taken from a random selection of migrant's households residing within 3 districts representing mountain (Dolakha), Kathmandu valley and the Tarai (Chitwan).

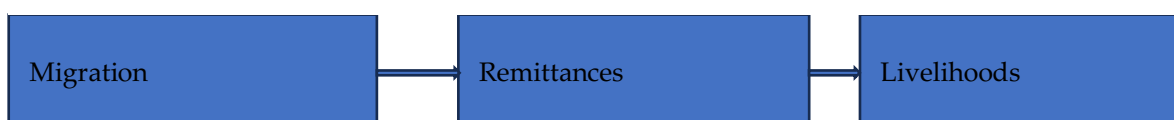
The study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to analyze the impact of migration on household welfare, resilience, and economic outcomes. lores the role of migration in improving household livelihoods and reducing poverty in Nepal with a focus on Bagmati province. The research study employs a mixed methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to analyze the impact of migration on household welfare, resilience, and economic outcomes. Quantitative analysis estimates associations and tests hypotheses; qualitative data explains mechanisms and contextualize findings. Bagmati Province, with purposive selection of three districts representing diverse areas

and migration intensities (high, medium, low), with the key informants including returnee migrants, recruitment agents, local leaders, and service providers, with a stratified multistage sampling model. Purposive sampling for 30 in-depth interviews (returnees, current migrants and left behind spouses reachable through research questionnaires and 6 focus group discussions (men, women, youth, community people). Household questionnaires covering demographics, assets, income and consumption, remittance receipts and use, migration history, skills, and training, and subjective wellbeing. Returnee migrant working conditions, skill acquisition, and intentions to return investment are also included.

Semi-structured interview guides for in-depth exploration of decision processes, remittance use, gender dynamics, and institutional interactions were made. Focus group guides to capture community perceptions and collective strategies. Pretested instruments in a pilot sample; train enumerators thoroughly, computed internal consistency for multi-item scales. Triangulation was made across data sources (survey, interviews, and administrative records) to strengthen validity. Obtained institutional ethics approval, and participant's permissions were taken in advance. Informed consent the respondent's language, confidentiality of data was ensured. Provided referral information for respondents reporting exploitation or distress. Stored data is securely taken and restricted except for the research team. Used regression for causal reference and CFA for construct validation. So that cross-sectional design constrains causal claims and findings from Bagmati Province may not generalize to all of Nepal.

Internal and international migration is contributing significantly to the diverse and evolving livelihoods of Nepali people. However, these diverse livelihood strategies pose challenges for nationally formulated and sector-specific poverty reduction policies. Therefore, Migration affects those who remain behind the social and economic inequalities.

Figure 1: *The conceptual model of migration impact in Bagmati Province*



As mentioned in figure 1, migration decisions are made by socio-economic push/pull factors. The motive for leaving the country is to earn money through employment for household benefits. When people join foreign employment, the financial resources are sent back home for their families. The family's life diversified into expenses, investment for the future, and the consumption pattern also be changed. Their kids start to join in improved education, and healthcare is also improved as per receiving the remittances, which impacts the whole families' livelihoods after the migration of a family member.

De Haan (1999) and Skeldon (2002) emphasize the positive stance toward migration with arguments on the overall balance of evidence. They suggest that benefits are substantial and adverse effects can be mitigated through appropriate policy interventions. A livelihood-based approach to migration and poverty reduction focuses on how individuals and households use migration to enhance well-being and economic prosperity. This perspective is taken as a problem solving but it is a dynamic mechanism through which people foresee better lives.

According to Ellis (2003), the livelihood approach has categorized resources available as assets or capital, which are divided into five categories such as; human capital, physical capital, financial capital, natural capital, and social capital. Mostly, people migrate to diversify their income sources, reduce risk, and reach better opportunities through rural-to-urban or international mobility. In practice, traditional poverty reduction strategies are overlooked by migrants. A livelihood approach advocates for inclusive policies that focus on migrants' rights and contributions, including access to available services, legal protections, and support networks. When they get support from appropriate institutions, migration helps to reduce poverty, send earned remittances, and invest in their kids' education or entrepreneurship development.

Migration is understood as a separation between the location of a household and the livelihood activities of people with their connection. This kind of separation is a major part of livelihoods. Internal migration includes movement within national borders driven by economic needs, seasonal labor demands, civil emergencies, or conflict. International migration involves crossing national borders, often motivated by economic opportunities or suffering from conflict, or displacement. It is a major driver of global population demographic change and long-term shifts in population distribution all over the world (Billari, 2022).

The Nepalese context, migration has taken place as a common livelihood strategy. Census data from several districts indicate that one in every two households has at least one migrant worker. The United Nations estimates 232 countries have covered from migration within 3 decades in 1990–2020, as the latest update released in 2022 (United Nations, 2022). This data reveals how migration flows respond to economic changes over time.

Nepal's emigration follows three major destinations through open-border migration to India, contract labor migration to Malaysia, Gulf countries, and other middle-income destinations, and migration to high-income countries in the North, including Europe, Australia, Japan, and North America. So that the third stream has taken small, but it is expanding rapidly (Adhikari et al., 2023).

Despite the migration opportunity offers rarely without challenges. But sometimes, migrants may face cultural barriers and language difficulties during migration. They face unfamiliar customs and discrimination as well. Highly skilled migrants may also struggle with recognition of qualifications in foreign countries or a new labor market where many barriers may occur. They are legal documentation processes such as visas, work permits, or asylum procedures that make migration more complex and stressful. Migrants also suffer from emotional challenges, homesickness, loneliness, and difficulties until they build new social networks. In some cases, host communities may not respect or recognize their hard work.

The meaningful management of migration can significantly enhance livelihoods and help to reduce poverty. Increasing remittances can boost household income, improve access to kids' education, family healthcare, and support entrepreneurship. According to Wen and Wee (2025), family education plays a crucial role in children's growth but there are still many problems in current family education practices. But updating education concepts, enriching education methods, providing resources, support enhancing parents' abilities promote the healthy development of family education. Migration is also helping to decide economic risk within migrant locations. Migrants can get chances to acquire new skills and experiences that contribute to innovation and help promote entrepreneurship upon return. When they invest in housing, services, and enterprises that can stimulate local development. Lenhardt (2023) argues that migration can serve as an effective tool to escape from poverty when drives with the opportunity, but it may also be helpful to cope with the challenges, hardship, conflict, or climate

stress during migration. Effective policies must be implemented to protect migrants' rights and maximize their contributions to both origin and destination communities.

Research objectives

The study assesses how labor migration influences household livelihoods and poverty reduction in Bagmati Province, Nepal, and to identify the mechanisms through which migration affects economic and social outcomes through primary research question as; Does labor migration improve household welfare and livelihood resilience in Bagmati Province? And the secondary question is: How do remittances, skill acquisition, and social networks mediate the relationship between migration and livelihood outcomes? The objectives are to quantify the association between household migration status and key livelihood outcomes (consumption, assets, education spending, business ownership), to identify the pathways through which remittances, skills transfer, and social capital affect livelihoods.

Local Fields to Foreign Lands: Migration as a Driver of Livelihood

There is a positive interconnection between livelihoods and migration. Migration is often one of the strategies used by people to sustain or improve their livelihoods if they suffer from poverty, environmental stress, and limited local opportunities. Livelihoods encompass the means through which people secure the necessities of life, including access to assets, resilience to shocks, and the ability to improve their well-being over time.

Youth represent the future where communities can benefit through equipping their kids with skills. To equip them with livelihood skills strengthening the asset base necessary for long-term societal resilience (James-Wilson, 2008). Migration is frequently adopted as a livelihood strategy when local opportunities are scarce and unstable. People move temporarily or permanently to find work, send remittances, or build a better future. However, migrants require vocational and technical skills to maximize earnings and adapt to new environments. Livelihood skills help youth minimize their challenges and contribute to the economic sustainability and resilience of their communities (Tukundane et al., 2015).

Empower to the needy youths can also be enhanced through active participation in community affairs, in particular youth adult partnerships. Such partnerships enable youth to work collaboratively with adults to address community needs (Akiva & Petrokubi, 2016). Through partnership, youth develop teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, communication skills, and technical skills which improve their livelihoods and strengthen their community needs (Mukembo & Edwards, 2020).

Migration can lead to improve livelihoods, but outcomes depend on context, type of migration, and opportunities available at the destination. People migrate in search of better employment, quality education, and health with safety. Rural people can supplement from seasonal or long-term migration that can raise household income, reduce vulnerability, and diversify livelihood sources (Johnson, 1997). However, migration is not a guaranteed path to prosperity. Risks include job insecurity, social isolation, and exploitation, particularly when migration is forced or unplanned. To minimize the risks, experts emphasize that migration should be a choice rather than a necessity. The development policies should aim to create viable livelihood options at household level (FAO, 2016). Better policies can help to create a positive environment to enhance migrants' livelihoods within society. As per my study of Bagmati province, the livelihoods, with level of migrant after migration is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Migrants' livelihood level after migration within the Bagmati Province

Livelihood Level	Number of participants	%
Medium	24	11.27%
Increased/better	151	70.23%
Satisfactory	29	13.61%
Usual	9	4.25%

Out of 220 participants, 213 respondents attempted this question, and the table above shows that 70.23% participants have better livelihoods after migration which is the highest score of the study results in this question. Similarly satisfactory livelihoods level 13.61%, medium level of livelihoods 11.27%, and as a usual 4.25% among the participants. The research study found the better livelihoods within the migrant families after migration. Migration and livelihoods are closely connected. Mobility often including as a key strategy for individuals and households seeking to sustain or improve their well-being. When people suffer from poverty, environmental pressures, or limited local opportunities, they frequently rely on migration to diversify income sources and reduce their own risk. Livelihood encompasses the resources and capabilities to secure the necessities of life. They try to access assets such as land, skills, and social networks, as well as the ability to reduce shocks and enhance their living conditions over time. So, the youth represent a vital component of community resilience, and equipping livelihood skills strengthens the long-term sustainability of society (James-Wilson, 2008).

Migration is commonly adopted as a deliberate livelihood strategy when local employment options are not available in the nearby community. Individuals may move temporarily or permanently to seek better work opportunities. They send remittances or build a more secure future. However, the benefits of migration depend on the people's skills level how much they possess. Therefore, the vocational and technical skills motivate youth to adapt to new environments, secure higher-paying jobs, and contribute to their communities. De Haan (1999) and Lipton (1980) argue that migration is not just an individual choice but a household-level risk diversification strategy. Families send members away to spread risks, secure remittances, and stabilize livelihoods when local opportunities are uncertain.

Historical Shifts in Migration Patterns in Nepal

Nepal is ethnically, religiously, and geographically diverse, with a population of approximately 29 million people (CBS, 2023). Agriculture remains the primary livelihood for the majority of Nepalis, providing employment, food, and shelter; however, public and private investment in the sector has been limited. The available data indicates that the agriculture sector is contributing more than 65% of household consumption, about 66% of employment, and roughly 35.12% of gross domestic product (CBS, 2023; Ministry of Finance, 2023).

Migration has been an integral feature of human history, and it is a persistent element of social and economic transformation. People move within and between countries in search of better opportunities to make their lives easier. Due to this reason, the global population redistribution has been observed as part of long-term demographic change (Billari, 2022). The volume and patterns of migration have increased in recent decades due to geographic disparities, technological change, and shifting economic dynamics (Carling & Talleraas, 2016). In the Nepali context, formal labor migration has deep historical roots. (Kunwar, 2017) traces that organized labor migration started from the period of Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–1816). Migration rate increased

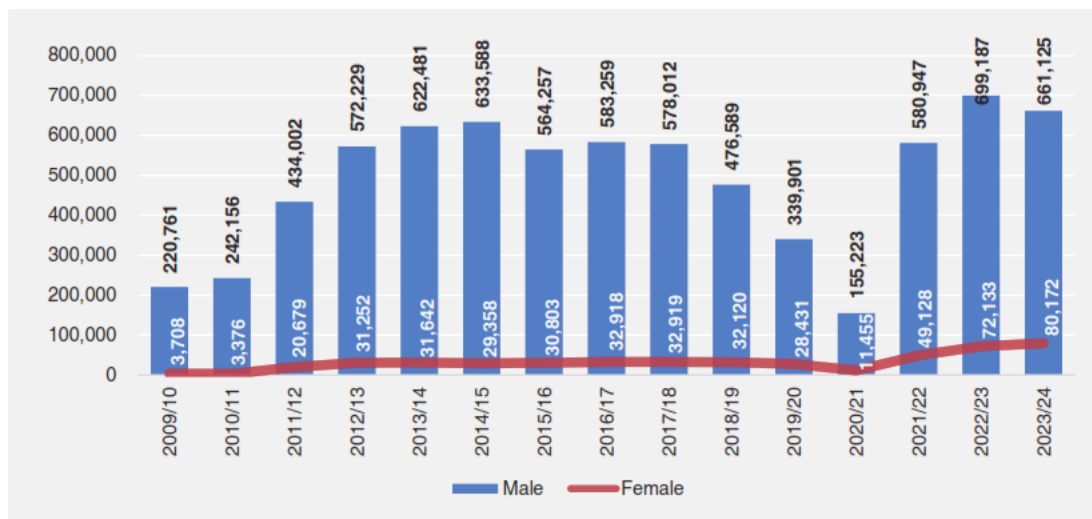
dramatically during a decade-long armed conflict that make significant displacement in mass level from rural to urban and urban to international migration (Khatiwada, 2023).

Labor migration is taking place of central feature of Nepali life. The CBS (2023) census reports that one fourth households have at least one member living abroad. In 2024, a total of 1.674 million Nepalis travelled abroad for work, out of them 66,835 left only for permanent residence. Immigration records indicate that approximately 1.2 million were men and 467,257 were women (National Statistics Office, 2025). By realizing this, the Foreign Employment Act of 1985 brought labor migration into a formal legal framework. It is facilitating the increasing number of recruitment agencies with strong monitoring and supervision.

Common drivers of migration in Nepal mirror global patterns: poverty, scarce employment, declining agricultural productivity, conflict, and natural disasters such as earthquakes (Shrestha, 2008). Youth migration for foreign employment has risen markedly: between 2009/10 and 2023/24, the Department of Foreign Employment issued approximately 7.8 million labor approvals for new and returning migrants (National Statistics Office, 2025). Labor permit issuance increased from 220,761 in 2009/10 to 661,125 in 2023/24, indicating a dramatic upward trend in formal migration for employment over the past decade and a half.

The data indicate the number of Nepali youths migrating for foreign employment is increasing over time. During the period of 15 years (2009/10 – 2023/24), around 7.8 million new and old labor approvals were issued to Nepali migrants for foreign employment purposes (National Statistics Office, 2025). The issuance of labor permits from the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), 2009/10-2023/24) is shown in the figure below.

Figure 2: The issuance of labour permit from Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), 2009/10-2023/24



Source. National Statistics Office (2025).

As per the graph above shows that in 2009/10, 220,761 permits were issued. It was grown into 661, 125 in 2023/24. The data indicate that labor permits are increasing dramatically during these years.

Does Migration Reduce Poverty and Contribute to Livelihoods?

Migration both, internal and international, has reshaped Nepal’s socio-economic landscape. Due to the increasing number of Nepalis working abroad and sending remit earnings influencing household welfare, local economies,

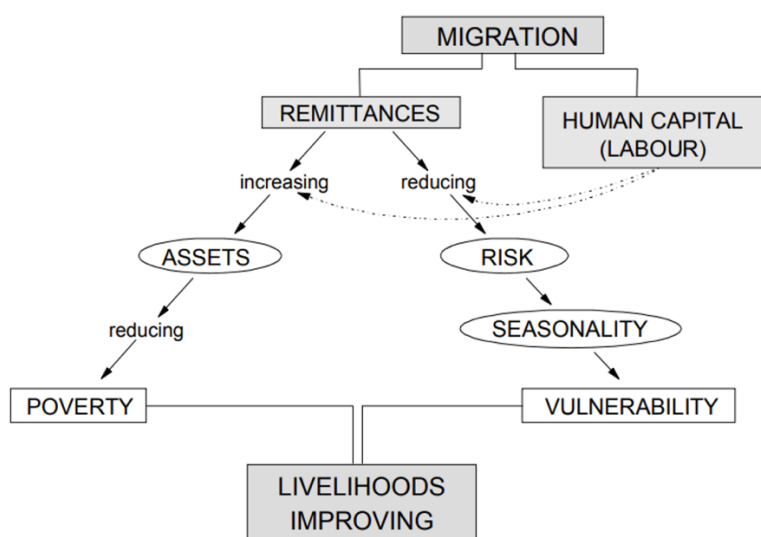
and national development. But few studies have examined the causal pathways linking migration to household livelihoods through their research.

Available evidence and theoretical work indicate that migration is contributing to reducing poverty and improving livelihood. But it should not be taken as a universal solution. Remittances commonly contribute only to basic consumption, education and health care. Also, it is used for debt repayment, and small investments in agriculture or enterprise development. At the macro level, remittance inflows help to a substantial share of Nepal’s foreign exchange and national income. That’s why foreign employment is becoming a principal driver of international migration. It is also taken as the driver of entrepreneurship development tool. In this connection, Fei and Tee (2024) highlighted that entrepreneurial education not only directly affects SME’s sustainable development but also indirectly affects their sustainable development by improving their innovation capabilities. The key role of entrepreneurial education is fostering firm’s innovating capabilities and provides SME’s growth and development.

Migration is helping to overcome poverty and enhance livelihoods through multiple channels. First, remittances raise household income and smooth consumption and reduce vulnerability to local shocks. Second, migration diversifies income portfolios and lowers dependence on agricultural earnings. Third, migrants often acquire new skills, knowledge, and social networks that can be transferred to origin communities, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation upon return. Fourth, increased household spending and investment can stimulate local markets and services, producing broader economic multipliers.

The positive effects depend on the condition of the migration. The benefits of migration depend on migrants’ skills, the stability and legality of employment at the destination, household composition, and how remittances are used. Migrants may face risky work, social isolation, legal barriers, or exploitation that can reduce potential gains. Thus, migration is best understood as a strategic choice for many Nepali households rather than a guaranteed route out of poverty. In this context, positive links between migration and improving livelihoods are shown in the figure below (Adopted from Taylor, 1999, Nyberg-Sorensen et al., 2002).

Figure 3: The positive links between migration and improving livelihoods



The figure indicates that migration provides opportunity to gain remittances and acquire new skills that ultimately improve the human livelihoods of the country of origin. So, the migration is an important part of the livelihood of the poor all over the world including Nepal. Migration contributes to achieving better livelihoods and outcomes. It also makes achievement to the expansion of enterprise for poor people to overcome poverty. Nepal has been experiencing a complex of migration-driven development. Because the country is compelled to be highly dependent on remittance inflows that support household welfare and national accounts. Major destinations for Nepali migrants include the Gulf states, Malaysia, South Korea, and India, where the labor demand and establishes migration networks. In many rural areas especially, in the middle hills and western regions seasonal, and long-term migration can be seen due to limited agricultural opportunities, land scarcity, and a lack of off-farm employment.

A livelihood perspective of migration focuses on assets, activities, and outcomes. From this viewpoint, migration has a positive contribution when it expands households' asset (financial, human, social), enhances resilience to shocks, and enables investments that contribute to improving long-term well-being. To maximize these benefits, policy measures should be formulated to strengthen skills and predeparture training. Furthermore, strong provisions are utmost to protect migrant rights, promote productive use of remittances through financial inclusion, and investment incentives. Creating viable local livelihood options makes migration a choice rather than a necessity.

Discussion

The research study indicates that migration functions are considered as a multifaceted livelihood strategy rather than a simple income transfer as briefed in table 1. Migration measures provide an opportunity to collect remittances, improve short-term consumption and reduce immediate poverty. But the structural constraints limit the translation of remittances into sustained productive transformation. The research and study make rich to formulate policies and plans for maximum utilization of remittances by the migrant families and the nation as well.

Findings

Migration is playing a vital role in the poor communities of the Bagmati province of Nepal. It changes not only a person's residence, but it is a profound social and economic transformation. In this connection. There may be different household roles, social networks, and long-term life risks. The byproducts of migration are difficult in cultural adaptation of children, hybrid identities of feeling and complex emotional dynamics. In my research question, one of the participants, Madan, said "*The country should adopt world class system and provide education, skills, orientation, network formulation strategies linking with entrepreneurial skills to the migrant's family*". Similarly, in another question, he said "*Our living standard has been increased in comparison to our previous life of after migration*". As per my study, figure 1 shows that the livelihoods of migrants have been improved after migration. On the other hand, the new networks and additional opportunities created by migration can expand social capital. And it also empowers some household members particularly women by increasing access to income and autonomy to run their own family and societal responsibilities.

Conclusions

Ellis (2000) and Scoones (1998) both highlight that livelihood diversification plays a central role in reducing poverty and household resilience. Viewed through a livelihood's lens, migration is the deliberate strategy of

livelihood options. Sijapati and Limbu (2017) in a study found that Nepalese migration reshapes gender relations by shifting household roles, providing additional responsibilities to women in decision-making, and empowering rural women. In this connection, in a question, Primit, one of my research participants, said *“I’m doing well, purchased a piece of land in my local village, quality education is provided in a boarding school to my kids, and my purchasing capacity has been increased after migration”*. The linkages between origin and destination places enable remittance flows, skill transfer, and investment that are helping to reduce poverty and open new options and pathways. However, the positive effects of migration are conditional on being sustainable. The preconditions are legal status, working conditions in the destination place, the productive use of remittances, and the presence of supportive local institutions. However, migration is treated as one part of a rural development strategy. A policy that links migration with local development opportunities can amplify benefits and reduce persistent inequalities within society.

Policy Implications

The policy implications recommend positive impacts of migration using remittances in productive use and investment in entrepreneurship. It also suggests strengthening market linkages, implement gender-sensitive support participants, enhancing social protection, facilitating reintegration, and fostering inclusive policy frameworks with implementation actions. These directions aim to shift migration from a short-term coping strategy to a sustainable development of a country like Nepal.

Recommendations

1. Enhance vocational skills training

Expand vocational skills, foreign language, and financial management skills aligned with destination labor markets to improve migrants’ employability and reduce exploitation. Include different training modules on entrepreneurship and returnee reintegration plan for the proper management of migrants after return.

2. Strengthening provision to protect rights and labor governance

Improve laws and regulations to govern oversight the recruitment agencies and bilateral labor agreements to reduce irregular migration and worker abuse. Initiate consular services and legal assistance for migrants abroad if the service is not available.

3. Initiate a new plan and programs for the productive use of remittances

Motivate migrants to savings, credit, and investment instruments that channelize remittances into small enterprises, agriculture, and local infrastructure. Make indicates mechanism for investment that pools remittances for utilization.

4. Availability of support systems to migrant families and social protection at local level

Make a strong mechanism for providing social services to households, childcare facilities, and schooling facilities to migrant’s children with psychosocial assistance and caregivers. Improve digital connectivity and reduce remittance transfer costs to maintain family ties and financial stability.

5. Build local capacity to encourage migration return

Provide incentives to returnees for entrepreneurship work locally, such as start-up grants, recognition of foreign qualifications, and business incubation services. Reflect model work in the document and disseminate through policy and program.

6. Mainstream migration into development planning

Align migration into national and local development plans, agricultural, education. Revise labor policies with the mechanism to expand livelihood choices and reduce forced migration.

7. Make gender balance migration plan through different approaches

Different interventions that address and to make gender balance in migration, support women left behind and ensure equitable access to all youths.

8. Make strong evaluation and monitoring plan for migration

Conduct research activities on migration periodically with longitudinal and micro-level research on migration, remittances, and household well-being to inform targeted policies. Prepare a report on remittance use, skill transfer, and social outcomes in migrant-sending communities. A strong mechanism helps to implement livelihoods strategy through migration.

Policy recognizes mobility as a potential engine of poverty reduction. The government should create skills development opportunities for all needy youths locally. Structural to mechanism support to focus protective institution and provide opportunities for productive investment. Reliable policies expand choice for migration and convert to make viable options rather than a necessity in resulting sustained improvements to their well-being within the society.

AI Declaration

I hereby declare that I utilized the grammar editing tool Grammarly for coherence and accuracy of the article. I also utilized the MyBib tool for accurate citations of references.

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