Research Paper VII

MIGRATION AND RESILIENCE

Experiences from Nepal's 2015 Earthquake

Bandita Sijapati
with **Jeevan Baniya, Anish Bhandari, Ashim Bhattarai, Sambriddhi Kharel, Amrita Limbu, Dinesh Pathak, Nabin Rawal** and **Prakriti Thami**

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Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility
Social Science Baha
345 Ramchandra Marg, Battisputali, Kathmandu – 9, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-4472807, 4480091 • Fax: +977-1-4475215
info@ceslam.org • www.ceslam.org

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The teams conducting this assessment consisted of:

Sindhupalchowk	Mohammed Ayub, Jeevan Baniya and Manju Gurung
Kavrepalanchowk	Anish Bhandari and Nabin Rawal
Dhading	Ashim Bhattarai, Amrita Gurung, Himalaya Kharel, Dawa Tshering Sherpa and Prakriti Thami
Kathmandu	Swarna Kumar Jha, Ratna Kambang, Amrita Limbu, Dinesh Pathak and Akshay Tuladhar

Desh le bidesh khedyo (My country is chasing me abroad)
—Male earthquake survivor from Dhading,
interviewed 26 May 2015

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I. INTRODUCTION

A landlocked country with diverse geographic and climatic features, Nepal is known to be highly vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, particularly droughts, earthquakes, floods and landslides. The risk arising from natural disasters is further exacerbated by the poor socio-economic condition of the country's population. Over the past two decades, Nepal's record in reducing poverty has been noteworthy, with poverty headcount having fallen from 42 per cent in 1995/96 to 25 per cent in 2010/11. Yet, a significant number of households remain ever vulnerable to slipping back into poverty as over 70 per cent of Nepalis still live on less than USD 2.5 a day. To exacerbate matters, inequality across social groups and regions has persisted over the years. Thus, the Central Region[1] with an HDI of 0.510 (in 2011) has consistently ranked at the top while the Far-Western Region with an HDI of 0.435 has remained at the bottom. In terms of regional comparison, Nepal's 2011 HDI score of 0.458 is among the lowest in South Asia.

In such a context, outmigration (both internal and external), especially of the youth for employment opportunities, has been high. In the fiscal year 2013/14 alone, approximately half a million Nepalis, mainly young men and women, took up foreign employment. (This figure excludes migrants to India and migrant workers who went abroad without government-issued labour permits, both categories that are not captured in the government data.) The total official remittance received during the first nine months of FY 2013/14 was almost NPR 400 billion (USD 4 billion), or close to 30 per cent of the country's total GDP.

In the aftermath of the M 7.8 earthquake[2] that struck central Nepal on 25 April 2015, and its aftershocks, particularly a major one of M 7.3[3] on 12 May 2015, issues related to the links between migration and disaster-preparedness as well as coping strategies adopted by the affected population have come to the fore. To examine such linkages, the Centre for the Study of Labour and

1 Nepal has been divided into five administrative regions: Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-Western and Far-Western.

2 http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eventpage/us20002926#general_summary.

3 http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eventpage/us20002ejl#general_summary.

Mobility (CESLAM) at the Social Science Baha (SSB), with support from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Migration Initiative of the Open Society Foundations, New York, undertook a quick assessment in four of the 14 severely affected districts,[4] namely, Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Dhading and Kathmandu, to understand how households with migrants—both external and internal—have coped with the natural disaster and whether there is any evidence of greater resilience on the part of such households.

4 The government has classified 14 of the country's 75 districts as severely affected, namely, Gorkha, Dhading, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk, Kavrepalanchowk, Dolakha, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, Sindhuli, Makwanpur, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur.

II. APPROACH, METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SITES

The rapid assessment was undertaken over the period 23-29 May 2015, with separate research teams deployed to the four sites. Since the assessment was being conducted not long after the calamity, the situation demanded a certain degree of sensitivity on the part of the researchers. Further, given the dire needs of the affected population in the districts outside Kathmandu, it was agreed that the research would go hand in hand with relief work being conducted by other groups, with SSB making a contribution to the effort as well. But, this also meant that the teams were not able to follow a scientifically rigorous research methodology, and neither could they always adhere to standard ethical practices either. As a result, the selection of research participants, the nature of respondents, and the approach taken by the research team was dependent on the local situation and varied across the research sites.

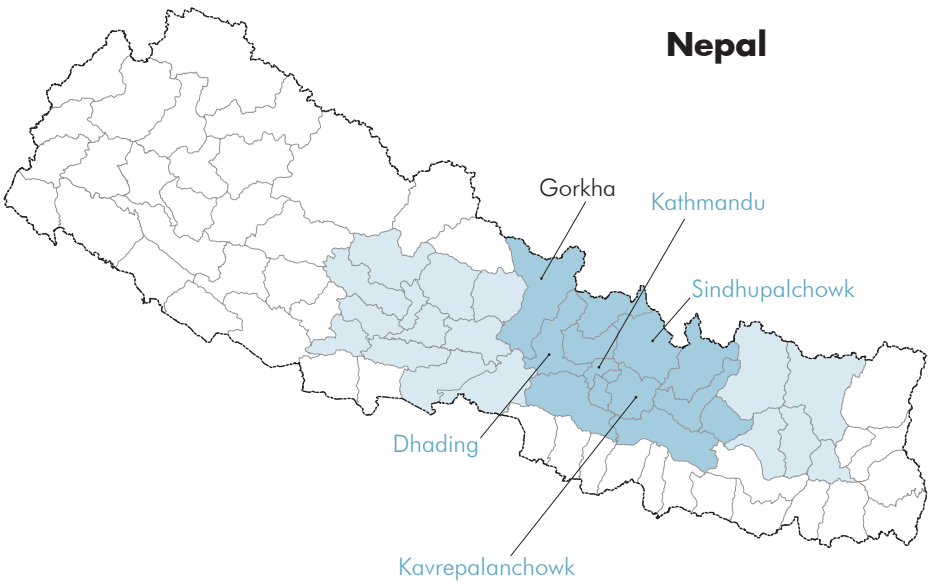
All four teams conducted a short survey to capture some key elements of the migration condition and how that might have affected households. The teams also interviewed people using a checklist that covered the general effect of the earthquake and immediate relief efforts as a means to understanding the impact of the earthquake at the household level, the coping strategies and mechanisms adopted by families, and the role of institutions and the state in rescue and relief.

The remainder of this section provides a summary of the processes through which the teams arrived at the various places, a brief description of the research sites, and the strategies adopted by each in seeking out respondents.

Sindhupalchowk

The researchers teamed up with a group of relief workers associated with Base Camp, Children and Youth First (CYF) and Hope International Nepal, and SSB made a contribution towards the cost of transporting the relief materials. The team headed east towards Kartike Bazaar of Pangtang VDC[5]

5 VDC stands for 'village development committee', the lowest administrative unit in Nepal.



The 31 districts affected by the 25 April earthquake with its epicentre in Gorkha with the 14 severely affected districts in a darker shade.

in Sindhupalchowk, which is linked by a dirt road to Araniko Highway that leads to the border with Tibet/China. Kartike Bazaar, also known as Kartike Deurali, lies in Ward No. 1 of Pangtang VDC and is located on the bank of the Bhotekoshi River, to the northeast of the district headquarters of Chautara.

After the first day, the researchers parted ways with the relief workers and carried out the assessment by staying on in Kartike Bazaar, which happens to be the roadhead where people from neighbouring areas would come to collect relief materials. Hence, the researchers were able to benefit from interactions with residents from Pangtang, Gumba and Golche VDCs. The team was also able to take advantage of observations along and around the Dolalghat-Balefi-Jalbire-Simle road. The approach of the researchers involved informal conversations with earthquake-affected people, security personnel, health workers, relief workers, community leaders and some civil servants besides participant observation in the field. The team spoke with anyone who was available for a conversation without consideration of their background such as location, gender, caste/ethnicity or links with migrants. A total of 41 individuals were interviewed, out of which 28 belonged to migrant households.

Kavrepalanchowk

The team to this district travelled to Simthali, Choubas and Saping VDCs in the Koshipari area where, as part of the support to the local community, SSB made a donation of NPR 50,000 (c. USD 500) to Shree Setidevi Secondary School located in Ward No 9 of Choubas VDC. These three adjoining VDCs lie in the north-eastern part Kavrepalanchowk and are considered among the most remote in the district. Nonetheless, a motorable track was opened from Dolalghat along the Araniko Highway to these VDCs four years ago and a bus service from Kathmandu has been operating on it for the last six months. However, it is likely that the service will come to an end during the monsoons. This area can also be accessed through an alternative route from Chere, which lies five kilometres further from Dolalghat on the Araniko Highway. A suspension bridge over the Sunkoshi River connects Chere with Saping VDC, from where there is a motorable track to the other VDCs.

Meetings in these VDCs were facilitated by a local who is well known for his social work in the area but who currently lives in Kathmandu. This individual travelled with the team during the fieldwork and hosted them for the duration of the fieldwork. While in most instances, the local contact helped the research team identify migrant households, in a few cases, the team members approached such households independently. Pre-selection of migrant households meant that the number of migrant households interviewed is higher in the case of Kavrepalanchowk compared to the other districts. As the team was able to inform potential research participants about the purpose of the assessment, they interviewed only those who provided their consent.

Dhading

The research team travelled to Wards 8 and 9 of Jeevanpur VDC in Dhading District as part of the relief distribution work being carried out by the Rotaract Club of Sainbu, Bhaisepati (Lalitpur). SSB contributed towards the transport of relief materials to Jeevanpur as well as in the provision of some essential medicines. Jeevanpur VDC is situated in the south-eastern corner of the district that lies west of Kathmandu and is about an hour and a half's drive away. It is accessible through a partially paved but narrow, motorable road that branches off the Prithvi Highway from Tile Ghar. While it is also accessible from another point on the highway further west at a place called Dharke, that

ride takes slightly longer. The VDC is not connected to the highway via any public transport services, but it takes only about around an hour to walk to the Prithvi Highway. And locals always have the option of calling up vehicles for commercial purposes or during medical emergencies.

The team was supported by a local schoolteacher, a prior acquaintance of some of the Rotaract Club members, and he also took on the role of local coordinator. This individual introduced the researchers to members of the community and also directed them to possible sources of information. All the interviews were conducted within a 1-kilometre radius of the house of the coordinator with additional interviews conducted with households situated along the road leading to the main highway. The team did not follow any specific criteria during the household selection process; interviewers spread out from the local coordinator's house to visit households one after the other, primarily along the main road leading towards the highway.

Kathmandu

In Kathmandu, the assessment was conducted in six different locations in and around the outskirts of the city: i) Tundikhel, ii) Narayanhiti Palace Museum premises, iii) Chuchchepati, iv) Kapan, v) Namgyal Chowk, Swoyambhu, and vi) Yellow Gumba, Swoyambhu. Three of the sites, Tundikhel, Chuchchepati and Yellow Gumba, were hosting large relief camps, housing hundreds of people affected by the earthquakes. There were about 5000 individuals in the camp in Chuchchepati alone, living in 754 shared tents. The other camps were smaller in comparison, with approximately 10-15 tents each. The team initially began by speaking to any and everyone. But, later, in order to capture more international migrant households in the assessment, the team adopted a purposive approach in Tundikhel. Nonetheless, interviews were conducted with respondents from both migrant and non-migrant households, i.e., respondents with and without migrants in their family. The interviews also included those who had migrated to Kathmandu and those displaced from the severely affected districts, particularly Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk, Nuwakot and Kavrepalanchowk. The team spoke to 54 individuals, of whom 19 belong to households with international migrants.

III. LABOUR MIGRATION FROM THE AFFECTED AREAS

As is the case throughout Nepal, labour migration features prominently in the social and economic life of the affected districts. According to the 2011 census, the total absentee population[6] in the severely affected districts was 300,435, which represents around 6 per cent of the total population of these 14 districts. Of these, 80 per cent were males and 20 per cent females. This gender distribution is slightly different from the average for Nepal where the proportion of females in the absentee population is lower at 12 per cent as opposed to 88 per cent males. In terms of labour permits,[7] in 2013/14, individuals from the severely affected districts received 87,558 labour permits, which equals 18 per cent of the total number issued.[8] Similarly, these districts received USD 1 billion as remittances that year, which is 17 per cent of the total remittance flow into the country.

In order to examine the differential impacts of the earthquake on migrant and non-migrant households, the study also conducted an analysis of the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2010/11. Since 12 of the 14 severely affected districts[9] make up the central hill and mountain region of Nepal,[10] the data from this region was used as a proxy to explore the socio-economic dynamics amongst migrant and non-migrant households. Evidently, this analytical domain includes

6 The census defines an 'absentee' as an 'individual absent from the household and gone abroad for more than six months before the census date'. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Population Monograph of Nepal, Vol II (Social Demography)*, Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014, p. 399.

7 The data on labour permits allows us to examine the dynamics of labour out-migration at the national level since labour permits are required by anyone who intends to migrate for work with the caveat that this data does not include labour migrants to India and labour migrants who have migrated via 'irregular' channels not authorised by the government.

8 This calculation is based on district-wise data provided in the Annual Progress Report 2070/71 of the Department of Foreign Employment. It should be noted that the sum total for the number of district-disaggregated labour permits issued add up to 482,427 in the Report (which is the total used for this calculation) while other sections of the same report list the figure to be 527,814.

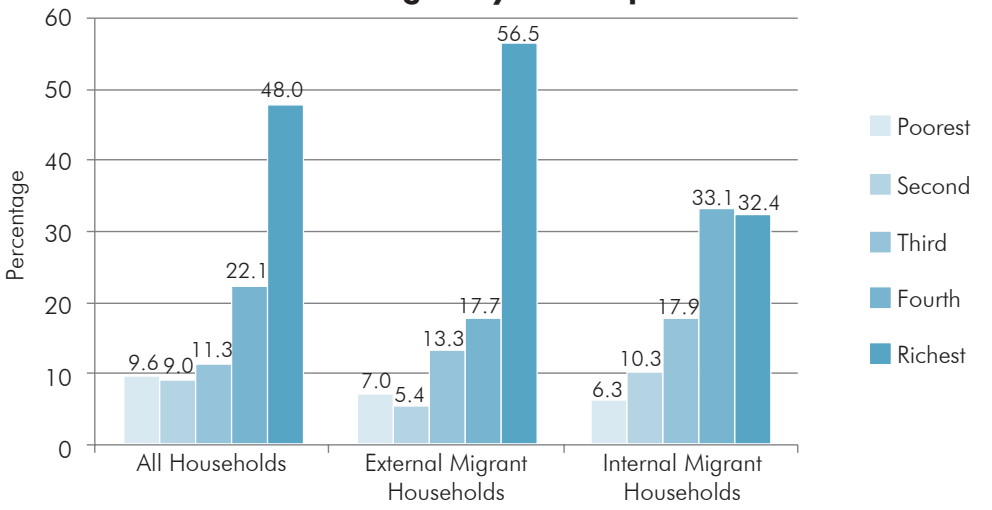
9 The two exceptions are Gorkha and Okhaldhunga in the western and eastern hills, respectively.

10 The country can also be divided into three ecological regions running east to west: mountain, hill and Tarai (plains).

the large metropolitan areas of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, which can sometimes provide a somewhat skewed picture.

In general, the socio-economic indicators of migrant households are similar to that of non-migrant households. However, further disaggregation of migrant households suggest that households with internal migrants are much worse off than the average household in the severely affected districts, while households with a family member currently abroad are slightly better off. Thus, while 48 per cent of households overall are in the richest quintile, the figures for external migrant and internal migrant households are 57 per cent and 32 per cent respectively. This suggests that, at least, in terms of consumption and perhaps by proxy income distribution, households with internal migrants are economically not as well off as those with external migrants or even as the general population (see Figure 1).

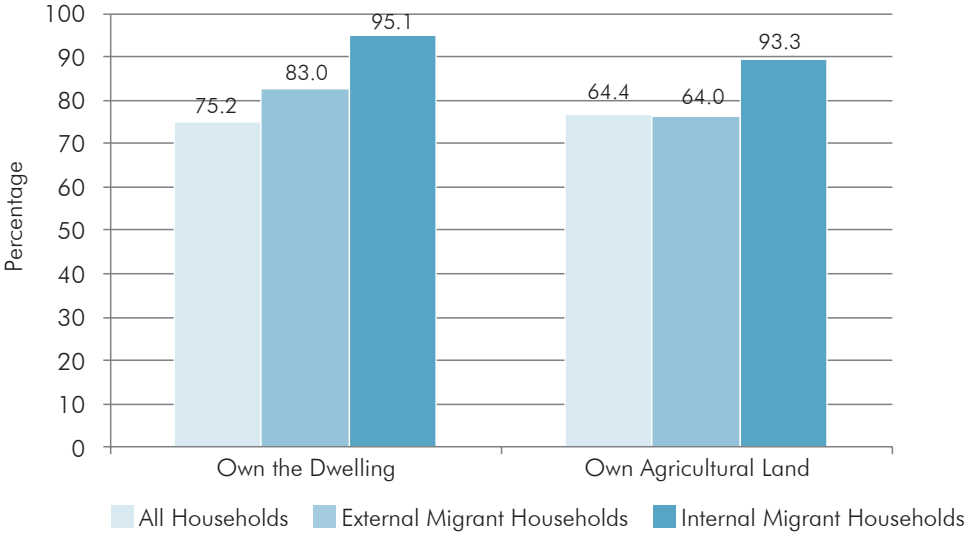
Figure 1: Distribution of households from the Central Hill and Mountain Region by Consumption Quintile



Source: Calculations based on Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2010/11

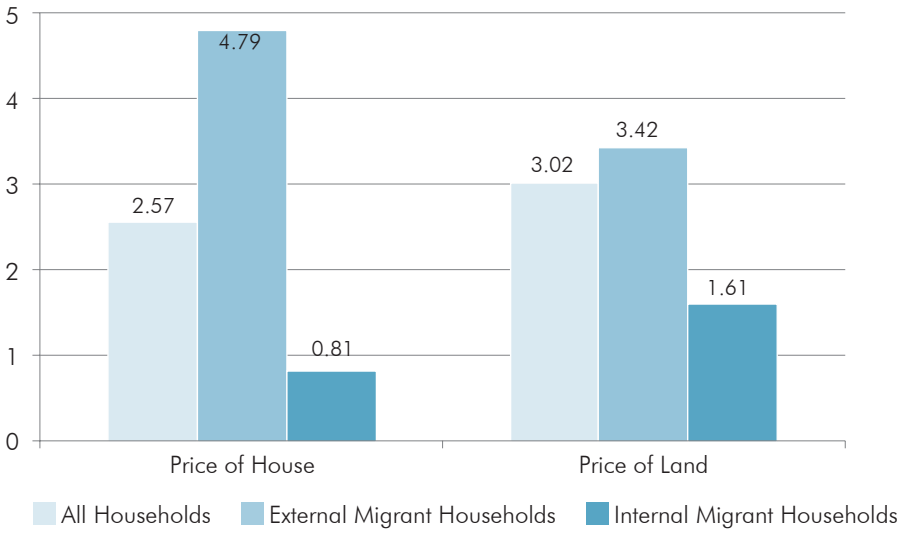
Results from the analysis of NLSS further suggest that households with internal migrants also fare worse off than the average household on other socio-economic indicators such as ownership of assets, while those with external migrants are better off compared to the average household. Although a higher percentage of households with internal migrants own houses and agricultural

Figure 2: Ownership Patterns of Land and House in the Central Hill and Mountain Region



Source: Calculations based on Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2010/11

Figure 3: Average Estimated Cost of Dwelling and Land in the Central Hill and Mountain Region (NPR, million)



Source: Calculations based on Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2010/11

land, the estimated price of their house and land is much less than those of the others two groups (see Figures 2 and 3).

Presumably, the much higher average value of the housing units belonging to external migrants is because this region also includes the Kathmandu Valley. Houses located in the Kathmandu Valley which tend to be much more valuable compared to houses located elsewhere,[11] would also be included in the calculations for 'households with external migrants'. On the other hand, given that the Kathmandu Valley itself is a major destination for internal migrants from all over the country, very few households from the Valley would have migrants living in other parts of Nepal to be counted among the category 'households with internal migrants' to increase the average value of the houses of that group.[12] Regardless, the data from the NLSS also indicates that the low value of the houses owned by internal migrants is to be expected since a significant majority of these are structures with mud-bonded foundation and walls (see Table 1).

To date, disaggregated information on the damage caused by the earthquake based on migration history is not available. However, as reflected in the analysis above, it can be speculated that internal migrant households are generally in a more precarious situation than the average population in the affected region and much worse off than households with external migrants. Their dwellings are likely to be structurally more vulnerable to damage and they are also more likely to belong to lower economic quintiles. This indicates that following the earthquake, migrant households are likely to be as vulnerable as the average households. This provides evidence contrary to the general belief that migrant households, or 'remittance-receiving households' as they are known in the literature, are better off than others and, hence, perhaps not in need of additional assistance to meet recovery and rehabilitation needs.

11 The average price of housing units in the Kathmandu Valley is about 10 times compared to housing units in the rural parts of the Central Region.

12 In the interest of comparison, in all of Nepal, the average price of housing units is NPR 1.02 million (c. USD 10,000) whereas for external migrant households it is NPR 1.19 and for internal migrants it is NPR 0.92 million. This indicates that the national difference in property value between internal and external migrant households at the national-level is not as large as the one found in the central hill and mountain region.

Table 1: Structural Condition of Houses in the Central Hill and Mountain Region

(in per cent)*

	All Households	External Migrant Households	Internal Migrant Households
Material of Outside Wall			
Cement-bonded bricks/stones	39.4	45.6	11.6
Mud-bonded bricks/stones	56.0	50.8	83.4
Wood	3.0	2.0	3.7
Bamboo/Leaves	1.3	1.7	1.2
Unbaked bricks	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other material	0.2	0.0	0.0
Foundation of Dwelling			
Pillar-bonded	22.0	28.9	5.4
Cement-bonded	17.4	17.8	4.8
Mud-bonded	54.3	46.7	83.0
Wooden Pillar	6.0	5.7	6.9
Other	0.3	0.8	0.0

Source: Calculations based on Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2010/11

* A higher percentage of houses in Kathmandu Valley are concrete structures (76 per cent) compared to the rural hills (20 per cent) but the distribution of such houses amongst the general population, external migrant households and internal migrant households is almost the same at 76 per cent, 85 per cent and 81 per cent respectively.

IV. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 166 households (HHs) were surveyed in the four district of Kathmandu (54 HHs), Sindhupalchowk (41 HHs), Dhading (50 HHs) and Kavrepalanchowk (21 HHs). The survey consisted of 115 migrant households (almost 70 per cent) (including both internal and external migrant) and 51 non-migrant households (see Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of Households Surveyed by District and Migration Status

	Migrant	Non-Migrant	Total	Percentage
Sindhupalchowk	28	13	41	24.7
Kavrepalanchowk	21	0	21	12.7
Dhading	17	33	50	30.1
Kathmandu	49	5	54	32.5
Total	**115**	**51**	**166**	**100.0**

Migrant HHs were almost equally distributed between internal (59 HHs) and external migrant households (56 HHs).[13] This pattern, however, is not consistent across all districts. The Sindhupalchowk and Kavrepalanchowk samples consist of more external migrants while the opposite is true for Dhading and Kathmandu. It should be noted that internal migrant households in Kathmandu consisted mainly of migrants from other districts who had moved to the capital, while such households in the other districts would have family members away from home, invariably in Kathmandu. Further, it is also worth noting that the survey has more internal female migrants in Kathmandu compared to their male counterparts. Table 3 below provides the distribution of internal and external migrants by district and gender.

13 There were a few households that had both internal and external migrants. In such cases, however, the data collected related to external migrants only.

Table 3: Household Distribution by Type of Migrant and Gender

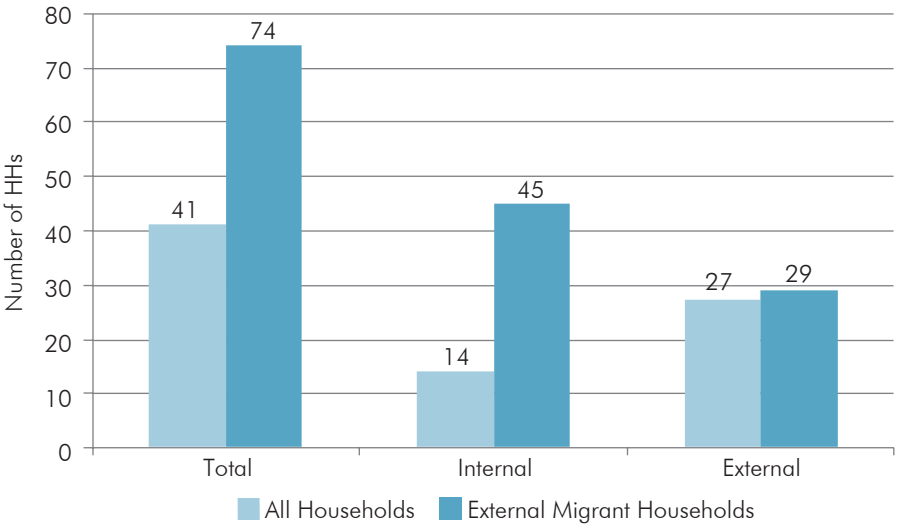
	Internal			External		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Sindhupalchowk	9	0	9	16	3	19
Kavrepalanchowk	10	0	10	10	1	11
Dhading	9	1	10	6	1	7
Kathmandu	12	18	30	12	7	19
Total	**40**	**19**	**59**	**44**	**12**	**56**

As reflected in the table, the Kathmandu sample is the only one which contains a substantial female migrant population.

V. MIGRATION AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Broader literature on migration and natural disasters seem to indicate that migration and remittances can foster disaster-preparedness through improved economic and social resilience.[14] However, findings from the assessment found a very weak link between migration and readiness for earthquakes or other natural disasters. The majority, approximately 64 per cent of the total migrant households, had not used remittances to be prepared for any kind of disaster (see Figure 4). Perhaps reflecting the higher levels of income available to them, 48 per cent of the households with external migrants (i.e., 27 HHs), however, did mention having used remittances in being better prepared for the earthquake, compared to only 24 per cent of those with internal migrants (i.e., 14 HHs), although preparedness was interpreted in different ways, as the subsequent discussion shows.

Figure 4: Use of Remittance in Earthquake Preparedness



14 S. Mohapatra, G. Joseph and D. Ratha, *Remittances and natural disasters: Ex-post response and contribution to ex-ante preparedness* (Policy Research Working Paper 4972), Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009; Practical Action and Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium, 'Remittances and Earthquake Risk in Nepal' (draft), Kathmandu, September 2014.

There were a few stray cases of migrant households having invested remittances in stronger houses in that they had built houses using cement. Yet, they appear to have been driven less by a concern to construct an earthquake-resistant structure and more with being able to afford a 'modern' house. For instance, in Dhading, a respondent said that he had used remittance income, supplemented by a loan, to simply plaster the outer walls of his house. It is unlikely that the cement plaster would have contributed to the structural strength of the house. And, not surprisingly, the plaster as well as the house had been severely damaged by the earthquake. There were also some households that had borrowed money, apart from using the remittances received, to build houses that had now been destroyed by the earthquake, further increasing the indebtedness of the families. While it is clear that most of these affected families were unaware of, chose not to, or just could not afford to spend the remittance in constructing stronger structures, the despair they felt is striking as expressed by two women from two different migrant families in Sindhupalchowk. Said one,

> We had bought a small parcel of land in this area just a couple of years back and built a small house with the money my husband earned working abroad. With the remittance, we had managed to pay back all the loans we had borrowed to build the house. In the same house, I had also started a small eatery to support my family. Now, we have with us neither our daughter [who fell victim to the earthquake] nor our house or any other sources of income. Since we have lost everything, including the property we had accumulated with the remittances, he [the husband] is very reluctant to go abroad for employment.

The second added,

> We had built a house with the money earned by my husband while working abroad for six or seven years. It had been just two months that we had moved into this newly built house. In the house, there was a new TV sent by my husband, furniture bought with the remittances he had sent, 30,000 rupees, clothes and food. We had two goats and a cow in our shed but we have lost them all…we really lost everything in the earthquake.

Among those who reported being better prepared due to the inflow of remittances (36 per cent of households, of whom 66 per cent were external migrants), this was in the form of having access to ready cash, higher food stocks, and, in a few cases, jewellery worn on the person. Family members mentioned that these fungible resources were vital to helping families recover in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. For example, in one of the households interviewed in Kathmandu, the husband had sent NPR 100,000 (c. USD 1000) from Qatar only a few months back. His wife had been using that money to take care of her children and meet the family's expenses. Likewise, a 36-year-old man who had returned from Saudi Arabia some months before the earthquake and was living in a makeshift tent in Kathmandu with his pregnant wife and parents-in-laws, was relying on the money he had brought back from abroad to manage his daily expenses.

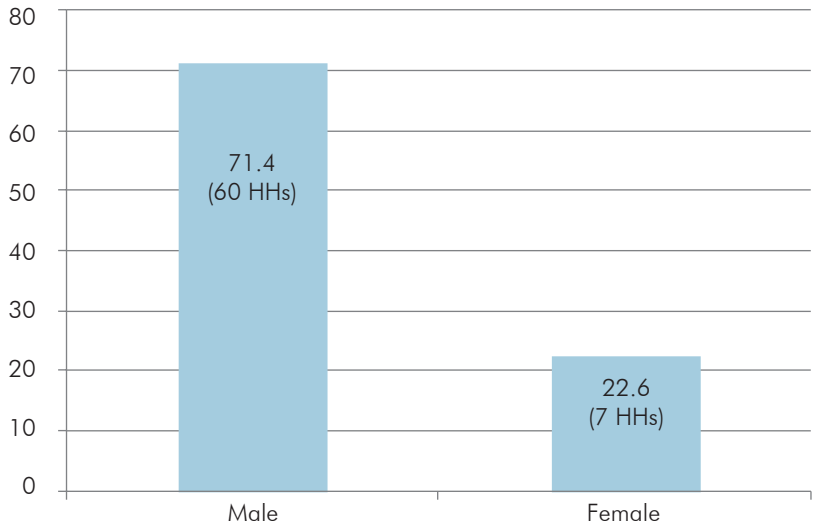
Likewise, in Sindhupalchowk, a local resident mentioned having bought gold ornaments with the remittance sent by her husband from Qatar. Since she had been wearing her jewellery at the time of the earthquake, it had remained safe. The family is now planning to sell that jewellery and start a small business to support themselves. In another instance, in Dhading, one migrant returnee who had saved during his stay abroad in order to be able to re-migrate a second time was able to use his savings to provide loans to members of his community who had lost their homes. Further, as was mentioned in Kavrepalanchowk, families with external migrant also have the added advantage of being perceived as more trustworthy when seeking loans to meet their immediate needs.

The absence of any direct linkage between disaster-preparedness and remittance transfers resulting from migration indicates that improving resilience against natural hazards is not only a function of access to economic resources (e.g., income to build safe buildings or retrofit existing ones) but depends on factors such as knowledge about seismic-resistant construction standards, access to disaster preparedness programmes, prior exposure to or experience of hazards, and decision-making capacity, among others. More importantly, the findings from this assessment suggests that rather than contributing towards preparedness, remittances help households cope better in the aftermath of disasters by having cash, extra food and even jewellery, which provide a much-needed safety net to affected households.

VI. IMMEDIATE IMPACT OF ABSENTEE HOUSEHOLD MEMBER

Although stories in the media appeared to uniformly depict affected families feeling the absence of their male members during and after the earthquake,[15] the proportion of those who felt handicapped by the absence of a family member during and immediately after the earthquake and those who indicated that it did not make a difference was roughly equal.[16] Among the former group, more of those households with male migrants reported that their absence had a negative impact on their families during and immediately after the earthquake (71 per cent of households with male migrants in comparison to only 23 per cent of the households with female migrants) (see Figure 5). This difference is possibly because of the 'hard labour' entailed during rescue, relief and evacuation processes, following any disaster.

Figure 5: Percentage of Households that Mentioned Feeling the Absence of a Migrant (male and female)



15 See, for instance, Om Astha Rai, 'Migrants inbound', *Nepali Times*, 15-21 May, 2015; and Jagannath Adhikari, 'The hurt of distance', *The Kathmandu Post*, 12 May 2015.

16 Of the migrant households, 58 per cent said that the absence of the family member had a negative impact on coping with the earthquake.

Among those who mentioned having experienced difficulties, they believed the absent migrant could have helped in the evacuation of family members, in rescuing livestock, in accessing relief materials, in providing emotional support, and during rehabilitation. A woman in Dhading noted that her husband was trapped in the rubble of a collapsed house for four hours. She stated,

> If my brother-in-law [a migrant] had been present at that time, it would not have taken so long to rescue my husband…Villagers were able to rescue my husband only after four hours.

Similarly, in Sindhupalchowk, a woman who was in the house at the time of the earthquake with her elderly mother-in-law who was injured in the aftermath said that unlike their neighbours who had men among them, her family was unable to recover anything that was buried under their collapsed homes. Adding further to their grief and pain, she said that while their neighbours had helped them shift to a temporary shelter, her injured mother-in-law has been finding it difficult in using the toilet since it is at quite a distance from the shelter. Given such circumstances, she felt that had her husband been around, they would have attempted to recover at least some of their belongings, built a temporary shelter for themselves soon afterwards (instead of having to live in the ones built by the neighbours the day after the first earthquake), and arranged for toilet facilities closer to the shelter to make it easier for her mother-in-law.

A 35-year-old woman who earns a living as a footpath vendor in Kathmandu felt that if her husband had been there, he would have helped their three children (3, 10 and 12) evacuate the building immediately. In his absence, all she could do was tell her children to crawl under the bed and watch them weep for the duration of the earthquake. She added further, 'He would also have managed the food and water, and looked for a [new] place to rent.' The latter being something she has been finding difficult to manage between looking after her small children and keeping up with her livelihood responsibilities.

In particular, women and the elderly reported having difficulties building shelters and acquiring relief materials. The case of a respondent in Dhading who mentioned not having the courage to go inside her damaged house until her son's family returned from Kathmandu, is emblematic of the dependence, both physical and emotional, that some families expressed.

Results from the rapid survey also indicates that while 73 per cent of the households with external migrants reported that the migrants' absence had a negative impact on the household's post-earthquake coping mechanisms, only 44 per cent of the households with internal migrants reported the same. This is to be expected because as discussed below, most of the internal migrants were able to return home more readily and attend to the immediate needs of the household. However, the absence of the household member presently abroad could have been offset had their families been able to contact them soon afterwards. This would have provided the affected families with the much-needed emotional support but also from the perspective of the migrant workers it would have helped them to learn that their family are safe and to make more informed decisions about returning home, sending support, etc. As recounted by a woman in Sindhupalchowk,

> I have been thinking that we would be a little relieved if I had managed to share with my husband abroad the situation and the damages that the earthquake had caused to my family. He would console us if we had managed to talk to him. But the phone and electricity has been completely cut off immediately after the first earthquake. It was only after a week that I managed to talk to my husband when I went to Chautara [the headquarters of Sindhupalchowk district that is four or five hours' walk away]. Both of us cried over the phone and we tried to console each other.

Similarly, another woman from Sindhupalchowk said,

> We faced this huge disaster and loss of our daughter but I could not inform my husband about it since my mobile phone was buried under the rubble and I was not able to travel far away to make calls either. I came to learn later that our relatives who lived in Kathmandu had informed my husband about our situation and he arrived home twenty days after the first earthquake… that was the first communication we had had after the earthquake.

Notwithstanding the plight of these families whose members were away from their homes, in all the three districts outside Kathmandu, there were others who confirmed that the absence of the migrant, whether male or female, did not have

much effect during the various post-disaster phases—evacuation, rescue, and seeking relief or rehabilitation. On the one hand, this refutes masculinity norms and the deeply embedded impressions about women's and men's capabilities and roles, also reinforced by the press, that women without their menfolk are hapless victims waiting for males to help out. On the other hand, it also indicates the importance of community support and the larger social networks, particularly those extending to Kathmandu, in the immediate aftermath. In all the districts it was reported that women and others requiring help actively sought assistance from neighbours during the entire process.

In Dhading, for instance, the villagers had formed a group of able-bodied individuals that would assist community members evacuate personal belongings from damaged or destroyed houses. Working together, as one respondent mentioned 'was much better' since it allowed houses/buildings to be cleared at a much faster pace than would have been possible with just one or two individuals doing it themselves. However, as was pointed out in Kavrepalanchowk and Dhading, such support was extended only after the concerned individuals first provided for their own or their families' needs.

Apart from the help from others in the community, there was also support provided by external agencies which helped make up for the absence of family members. The medical camps organised by teams from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka that had been facilitated by a local medical student in Kavrepalanchowk and the support received from the Nepal Army in Sindhupalchowk were mentioned specifically.

VII. ROLE OF REMITTANCES IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE EARTHQUAKE

Drawing from the experience of Haiti, it is often argued that in the context of disasters, remittances increase more rapidly than foreign aid and unlike much of foreign aid, they provide direct benefit to the needs of the affected families.[17] As such, leveraging remittances is considered an important mechanism for supporting recovery and rehabilitation after natural disasters. In Nepal, too, media reports indicate that the trend of remittance in-flow suddenly increased by 20 per cent over the second week following the earthquake of 25 April compared to the pre-earthquake inflow of remittances.[18] To facilitate the process, several money transfer agencies like Xpress Money, GCC Exchange, Money Gram, Western Union and UAE Exchange also waived fees (amounting to approximately 5 per cent of the total remitted amount) on remittances to Nepal for the month of May 2015.

However, findings from the assessment indicate that remittance transfers following the earthquake did not increase noticeably in the areas visited. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the methodology adopted for this rapid assessment, it is not clear if the information provided by money transfer agencies is accurate either. In all likelihood, in their calculations the money transfer agencies quoted in the media reports included remittances from migrants as well as the not-insubstantial funds transferred person-to-person by the larger Nepali diaspora and other well-wishers to support relief work in that period.[19]

Regardless, in the present study, only 24 per cent of the households reported having received remittances following the earthquake. The proportion of both external (25 per cent) and internal (22 per cent) migrants remitting money

17 Colette Mortreaux and Jon Barnett, 'Climate change, migration and adaptation in Funafuti, Tuvalu,' *Global Environmental Change*, Volume 19, Issue 1, February 2009.

18 *The Kathmandu Post*, 'Remittance in-flow post-earthquake', 7 May 2015.

19 To take one example closer home, also counted as remittance would have been the NPR 377,157 (c. USD 3770) contributed by the staff from the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) in Indonesia to provide relief to households in the sites of an SSB-CIFOR research project that was routed through the bank account of an SSB staff member.

seems more or less equal while in terms of gender, 28 per cent of the male migrants did do compared to only 13 per cent of female migrants (see Table 4).

Table 4: Characteristics of Migrants Sending Remittances Post-Earthquake[20]

	Male			Female		
	Internal	**External**	**Total**	**Internal**	**External**	**Total**
Yes	12	11	23	1	3	4
No	28	32	60	18	9	27
Total	**40**	**43**	**83**	**19**	**12**	**31**

Of those who received remittances in the aftermath of the earthquake, the impact of this inflow of cash was being able to purchase food and other daily necessities. For instance, a 45-year-old woman who owns a single-storey house in Chuchchepati, Kathmandu, spoke of her (unmarried) sister working in Bahrain. Her sister used to send money to her and their father every four to six months, the former for her (the respondent's) son's education. After the earthquake, the sister had sent them money twice in one month, NPR 7000 (c. USD 70) the first time and NPR 6000 in the second instance. With this additional money, the family was able to buy food items after moving to the temporary shelter and her husband was also able to travel home to Sindhupalchowk to visit his family.

However, the fact that the majority of the respondents did not receive additional funds from their family members requires closer scrutiny. Findings from the assessment point to several factors which help explain why remittances did not increase immediately after the earthquake: i) the burden of loans that the migrant families might have taken to finance the migration costs to begin with could have dissuaded migrants from sending money home; ii) the possibility of migrants selectively sending remittances to certain family members (e.g., to the wife and children living in urban areas rather than parents back in the village); iii) unavailability of funds amongst the migrant workers themselves, especially since they generally hold low-paid jobs and the salary level of migrant workers would have limited their ability to send additional amounts to their families; and iv) affected households' family members advising the migrants against it.

20 There was one case of missing data for an external male migrant.

Down but Not Out

Tenzing (name changed), a 52-year-old man from Tatopani, Sindhupalchowk, came to Kathmandu with his family of five after the earthquake damaged his house and agricultural land. He has set up a makeshift tent near his relative's house in Swoyambhu. Back home, he used to run a grocery, and the house he had been building by taking out a loan was nearing completion when the earthquake struck. It now has large cracks and no longer safe to live in.

Tenzing has a daughter working in Cyprus, and a son who drives a bus on the Kathmandu-Tatopani route, both of whom had been contributing financially to the family before the earthquake. He is relieved that his daughter was abroad during the earthquake and hence safe. At present, Tenzing has some savings of his own and some money sent by his daughter that he is relying on to meet his family's living expenses. His daughter had wanted to send money after the earthquake but he told her not to do so immediately. He also asked her not to return despite her desire to come and meet them. Now, with his house and shop lost, and his son out of a job after the bus service was disrupted due to the road blockage following the earthquake, his migrant daughter remains their only bread winner. She has also been providing them emotional support and telling them not to worry about money.

For instance, a female respondent in Dhading mentioned that her brother-in-law had expressed his desire to send her money by borrowing from friends. However, their family asked him not send any money since it would only add to the latter's existing debt burden.

The fact that most households affected by the earthquake have not received remittances following the event, however, does not mean that they do not have high expectations of their migrant members. In fact, most families have asked their migrant members not to return and instead continue to provide support during rehabilitation by remitting additional funds.

VIII. DECISION TO RETURN

Following any disaster, it is likely that migrants who are away from their homes would want to return. To facilitate this, the Government of Nepal had requested governments in destination countries to make provisions for advance payment of workers' salaries and paid leave for workers.[21] Similarly, acting through the Foreign Employment Promotion Board, the government decided to reimburse the round-trip air tickets to those external migrants who had lost family members in the earthquake.[22] However, as mentioned by an official at the Foreign Employment Promotion Board, the number of migrant workers who have utilised this opportunity has been limited. While the scheme is open only till the end of the month of Jeth according to the Nepali calendar (i.e., 15 June 2015), by 10 June 2015, only 15 or so individuals had applied for the facility.

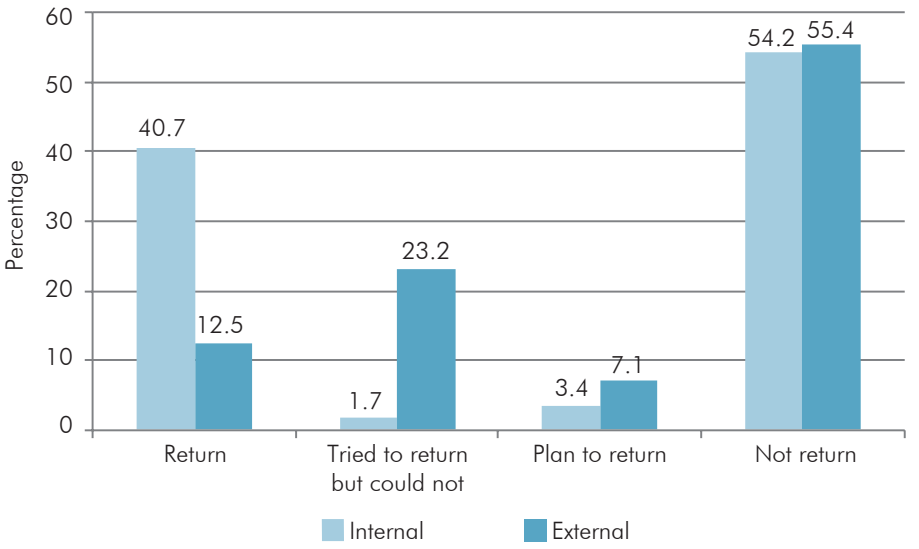
Results from this assessment indicates that the vast majority of migrants (55 per cent) did not return after the earthquake and among those who did, for obvious reasons, there were significantly more internal migrants in comparison to their external counterparts (41 per cent compared to 13 per cent) (see Figure 6).

In the case of some migrants who did manage to return to Nepal from abroad, the path was not easy as they often had to lie, provide some form of guarantee to their employers, and/or agree to have their salaries, ranging from two to six months, withheld since their unforeseen return amounted to a breach of the terms of their service contract. A 30-year-old who returned from Saudi Arabia on the 27th of April said,

> I was able to return since I cooked up a story that my uncle had died in the disaster and since he had no sons, I had to perform his last rites. My company held 1500 riyals to make sure that I returned. I got four months of leave. If I had informed my company that only my house had collapsed then they would not have let me go. They would have just told me to send money home to rebuild the house…When I first saw pictures of my destroyed house,

21 *The Kathmandu Post*, 'Embassies ask host countries to grant Nepali workers leave', 30 April 2015.
22 Press release from the Foreign Employment Promotion Board, 10 May 2015.

Figure 6: Return Status Post-Earthquake



> tears came to my eyes and I felt like crying...I do not care about the 1500 riyals and I will not return to Saudi [Arabia]. If I get a better opportunity elsewhere then I might consider going again, but not to Saudi [Arabia] since the work is hard and they don't pay well.

Similarly, in Kathmandu, a 35-year-old woman mentioned that her husband who had been working in Qatar had returned on a two-month emergency leave but only a month after the earthquake. Even then, in order to convince his employer that he would return to his job, he made arrangements for 2000 riyals to be deducted from his friend's salary if he failed to do so.

Contrary to those who had migrated abroad, internal migrants returned home immediately after the earthquake and helped in recovering belongings buried underneath the rubble of collapsed houses, built temporary shelters, and became involved in other rehabilitation activities. Some of them also brought corrugated iron sheets and tarpaulins to build temporary shelters. A 64-year-old woman in Kavrepalanchowk recounted,

> My elder son is in Qatar and the younger in Dubai. They both have said that they are going to come home soon following the disaster. My middle son works as a tipper [dump truck] driver and lives in Kathmandu. He came

> the day after the earthquake and helped us take things out from the rubble. He also helped us take care of the cattle and made this temporary shelter for us…He returned to Kathmandu only a few days back.

It should also be noted that a significant proportion of external migrants (23 per cent) did try to return but were unable to. This was mainly due to four reasons: i) not receiving permission from the employer; ii) not having the money to buy a ticket at the time; iii) being told by families not to return since the migrant's earnings had become even more important in the post-disaster situation; and iv) lack of information about the support provisions provided by the government regarding the free round-trip ticket for bereaved external migrants. For instance, a respondent in Dhading whose son was employed in Malaysia said, 'The employer told my son that since he had only been working there for a year, he could not return.' In another instance, the employer had given permission to a migrant worker from Dhading to return but refused to provide him with any financial assistance to cover the cost of airfare, which meant that he was unable to return home. Likewise, in Sindhupalchowk, a migrant worker who had lost his daughter in the earthquake was able to return home after 20 days of the first earthquake but he had to buy the ticket himself and the company did not extend any help at all.

In some cases, there was also concern about the risks from the continuing aftershocks and the migrants were advised against coming back. Having said that, those working under better conditions were able to return without problems and with their jobs remaining secure, such as in the case of one from Pangtang VDC in Sindhupalchowk who worked for Qatar Airways in Qatar and another from the same VDC working in a restaurant in the United States. These results indicate that 'return' is rarely a choice for migrant workers and their families; instead, the ability to return home, even during times of crisis, is driven by the asymmetric power relations that exist between the workers and their employers, and seldom are employers sympathetic to the needs of workers.

IX. FUTURE PLANS

For the moment the imperative to be closer to home for immediate reconstruction and rehabilitation needs seems to outweigh other considerations such as the need to earn a living. In fact, it is reported that in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, there has been a drastic reduction in passport applications and foreign employment permit applications.[23] Corresponding to these nation-wide trends, findings from the assessment also show that fewer than 25 per cent of the respondents indicated a desire to. For instance, in Dhading, one respondent noted that none of his family members were planning to migrate since 'this place and this house are everything that we have so we will not go anywhere'. Similarly, a family from Langtang in Rasuwa district north of Kathmandu living in a relief camp in Kathmandu had been planning to send their 18-year-old son to France before the earthquake struck. The father mentioned,

> He [his son] was in the process of going to France but how can he go now? It has become difficult to live, how can we send him abroad, the little money we had is lost buried in the house.

Findings from the assessment also indicate that while internal migrants living in Kathmandu have been assisting in the relocation (temporary or permanent) of their family members to the city for their safety, the longing to return 'home' is strong amongst those who have been displaced as in the case of whole communities from Langtang now living in Yellow Gumba. They are keen to return home and move on with their lives. Some of them still have property

23 For instance, 5268 labour permits were issued to residents of the 14 severely affected districts in the two months prior to the earthquake (Fagun and Chait 2071 according to the Nepali calendar, corresponding to mid-February to mid-April). However, in the month subsequent to the earthquake (Baisakh 2072, i.e., mid-April to mid-May), that number had decreased by 15 per cent to 4480. The decrease in permits issued to women from these districts was more significant—a 21 per cent decrease (from 546 to 431). Note that these numbers deal only with those who received 'institutional' permits (those seeking to go abroad through a recruitment agency) and does not include those who were seeking 'individual' permits (those seeking to go using their own contacts). At the time of writing, the Department of Foreign Employment had not compiled information on the latter yet.

(land, livestock, and remains of houses) that they were not happy to leave behind when they came to Kathmandu. Most of the displaced households were engaged in agriculture before the earthquake; for them the agricultural season will soon begin, and many have left their livestock unattended. For example, a 65-year-old man who lost his daughter, sister and both parents in the earthquake was eager to return to Langtang immediately. He plans to make a small lean-to *(tahara)*, plant potatoes, take care of the remaining livestock, and even re-open his hotel some time later. He had not been able to find the body of his daughter before leaving and that has added to his eagerness to return home at the earliest.

Despite the yearning to return to their home districts, some are also mindful of their safety and well-being, especially in consideration of the continued aftershocks, the fear of landslides, and the imminent hardships that await them due to the losses they have suffered. As a result, some respondents admitted that they might stay back in Kathmandu till the end of the monsoons. As a man from Sindhupalchowk mentioned,

> The monsoon is nearing. Our house is near a stream. Therefore, we will only return after November. We will stay there [Sindhupalchowk] in the winter and move out during the monsoons. I do not want to leave my village.

In the same vein, a 46-year-old man who came with his wife from Sindhupalchowk also intends to return and resume his family's only source of livelihood—shopkeeping. They have almost run out of the money they had brought with them to Kathmandu after the earthquake. However, due to the risk of landslides, they want to stay back in Kathmandu till the rainy season is over.

Findings from the assessment do not allow for a robust conclusion on future migration patterns. However, there are indications that with regard to internal migrants living in Kathmandu, it is unlikely that they will return to their districts of origin to live there permanently even though many hoped to go and help build houses (mostly temporary ones with corrugated iron roofs) or to meet their family and return. Internal migration to other places within the country is likely due to concerns about safety and loss of livelihoods but permanent relocation without government support is not very likely. This was seen to be the case particularly with the poor, women and the elderly who did

not have any alternative but to continue living in their current location despite the danger they feel. However, short-term internal migration to urban areas, especially in search of livelihood options, is more likely but this would probably be at the level of individuals as opposed to households or families, at least in the short- to medium-term.

As for migration abroad, in the medium- to long-run, it is likely that the earthquake could trigger higher external migration, particularly since entire livelihoods have been lost and part of the reconstruction costs will fall on household members. Those who are young and have lost their houses and have no income sources indicated that they want to migrate to support their family members. Even those migrant returnees who had returned from abroad, including those who had come back for good prior to the earthquake, appear to be reconsidering. Their houses have been destroyed and in many cases livelihoods have also been lost. In Dhading, one respondent whose house and crops had been destroyed by the earthquake and was completely disheartened said, 'Desh le bidesh khedyo' (My country is chasing me abroad).

X. PLIGHT OF INTERNAL MIGRANTS: EXPERIENCES FROM KATHMANDU

As mentioned above, the rapid assessment included visits to makeshift camps in Kathmandu. While findings from these sites have been incorporated in the rest of the report, the special circumstances of these 'displaced' population groups demands a separate treatment.

The people in the Kathmandu camps consisted of those who had been compelled to take shelter away from their houses for reasons of safety as well as those who came to Kathmandu after the earthquake. Most of those interviewed in the camps were from Sindhupalchowk, Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Kavrepalanchowk, with a few others from Dolakha, Makwanpur, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga and Dhading, districts that happen to coincide with the severely affected districts. It is possible that internal migrants already in Kathmandu from the other districts had gone home and those from these severely affected districts had decided to stay back. Among those who did is a 66-year-old female who generally lives with her brother in Nuwakot. She had come to Kathmandu after the earthquake to visit family members as well as for some personal work. In her village, she had lost her house and crops, and her agricultural land has been rendered uncultivable. Although she did not lose any family members, many in her village were not so fortunate. She said, 'Dead bodies had to be stacked like firewood and cremated.'

Likewise, in Yellow Gumba in Swoyambhu, there were individuals and families from Langtang who had been displaced by the landslide that followed the earthquake and took over a hundred lives. Many in the camps mentioned having lost one or more family members. The villagers had not even had any time to retrieve their household items so they had also lost cash, gold jewellery, and food grains along with their houses that had been completely destroyed and buried. In the first few days, the villagers reported having lived in nearby caves in groups, eating whatever food they were able to retrieve from their houses. However, once the Nepal Army came in with supplies, some of them were airlifted either directly to Kathmandu or to the district headquarters of Dhunche from where they were put in a bus to Kathmandu once the road was

cleared. A 41-year-old woman who was flown to Kathmandu with her husband four days after the earthquake said,

> We lost everything, our happy days are over, from now onwards, it is only sadness and hardship for us.

The woman had lost both her parents-in-laws when her house was buried under the landslide, and together with them, her livestock. Her family used to rely on a shop that they had in their house for their livelihood and they had even been able to afford to educate two of her children in Kathmandu. The avalanche destroyed their source of livelihood as well when the house was swept away by the landslide.

Respondents in Yellow Gumba recounted that after arriving in Kathmandu, they accompanied their relatives who had been living in Kathmandu to Yellow Gumba in Swoyambhu. Relatives of the small group of villagers who were the first to arrive in Kathmandu after the earthquake were able to talk to the monks in the monastery and get their permission to stay there temporarily. In the following days, more followed and by the end of May, there were about 480 people from 125 households in the 'Langtang Relief Camp' set up in the premises of the monastery.

One striking feature about the tented camps set up in the aftermath of the earthquake in Kathmandu was that the study team found very few locals (i.e., those with a house in Kathmandu) living there. This could be because the displaced locals were likely to have found shelter with friends and family elsewhere in the city. The majority of the residents in the temporary camps were internal migrants who had been living in rented premises in Kathmandu or who had been displaced following the devastation that occurred in their home districts. The rented houses of the earlier migrants were now damaged (mostly partially) and several had also lost their ancestral homes in the home districts that were severely affected by the earthquake.

Many lives were lost in Kathmandu besides considerable damage caused to buildings and other property.[24] Among those buildings that had collapsed in the

24 According to government statistics as of 18 June 2015, 1223 people were killed in Kathmandu due to the earthquake, compared to 3440 in Sindhupalchowk, 733 in Dhading and 318 in Kavrepalanchowk. Similarly, 36,973 private houses were completely damaged in Kathmandu

Kathmandu Valley, most were old mud houses but some of the concrete ones, too, had suffered significant damage, rendering them uninhabitable. Regardless of the damage to the structures, most of the respondents in Kathmandu had been able to go to their respective buildings and at least recover some essential belongings, including utensils. A 47-year-old woman who has been living in Kathmandu for the past 20 years said that her rented house has developed cracks in the walls and there are tall buildings on both sides of the house. Because of the uncertain condition of the building as well as the possible danger posed by others in the vicinity, her family has refrained from returning to the house. Instead, the entire family has been eating and sleeping outdoors, though they go home to prepare their meals. This seemed a very common trend among those living in the makeshift camps in Kathmandu.

A common concern among people in the tents is finding a place to rent after their previous accommodation developed cracks. Most reported not being able to find other houses without cracks and they have had no alternative but to continue living in the camps. In some cases, such as the camp in Narayanhiti Palace Museum, the occupants have been asked to leave, and among those living in places like the Yellow Gumba and Chuchchepati, there is the looming fear that they too would be asked to leave the area or get evicted.

The plight of the people living in Kathmandu's camps is further compounded by their low levels of education and skills levels. Most of them are low-skilled workers who earn a living as housemaids or work in the construction sector, small hotels, catering, sweet shops, carpentry, carpet factory, security, and other such enterprises. There are also those who hawk food or other items on footpaths. Even a month after the earthquake, their earning had not reached previous levels. Those in the transportation sector were not earning enough to pay for vehicle rental and repair due to a decrease in the number of passengers, while those who run their own small business or even footpath shops were not getting enough custom to earn a decent income. Many of the respondents who worked as housemaids have lost their jobs, at least temporarily. They have not been in touch with their employers to find out if they can return to work later since many of their employers are living elsewhere. Although the demand for construction

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while the figures stand at 63,885 in Sindhupalchowk, 43,741 in Dhading, and 49,933 in Kavrepalanchowk. Source: Nepal Disaster Risk Reduction Portal, www.drrportal.gov.np.

workers in Kathmandu has definitely increased after the earthquake, workers have been hesitant to go back to work since that would involve working in damaged buildings that are at risk of collapsing.

Until then, these individuals are being forced to manage with the relief support provided in the makeshift camps of Kathmandu. A 37-year-old (divorcee) female respondent in Tundikhel in the centre of the city who worked as a manual labourer for a living before the earthquake said that she is now completely dependent on the aid (mainly meals) provided in the camp. She also added that her younger son is happy in Tundikhel as he has been provided with privileges that she could never afford. Meals are provided twice a day and relief materials are distributed occasionally by individuals and private organisations, one of which included toiletries for children, slippers, and towels. Children are engaged in different activities and provided with stationery, including colouring pens. Although she has a son working in Saudi Arabia, he has never sent her any money and she does not expect any. She added that she plans to live in Tundikhel as long as she continues to receive assistance.

XI. CONCLUSION

First and foremost, findings from this rapid assessment indicate that issues relating to migration are not only important in the context of natural disasters but, going forward, they are also likely to have considerable impact on the recovery and rehabilitation process. The assessment also indicates that there is no one particular way in which migration is likely to influence the post-disaster period—the demographics of migrant households, place of origin, severity of impact of the disaster, migrants' destination, amount and frequency of remittances, the characteristics of remittance recipients, availability of kinship networks, and cost of migration, are among the likely determinants.

The low levels of disaster preparedness amongst migrant households (as well as non-migrant households) are an indication that simply having an inflow of cash is not sufficient. There is greater need for other information that focuses on awareness-raising, information dissemination about seismic-resistant standards, access to disaster-preparedness programmes, and financial literacy on better management of remittances to fulfil the immediate recovery needs as well as sustainable rehabilitation.

Despite the efforts on the part of the government to support the return of migrant workers whose families were affected by the earthquake, many were unable to for reasons such as not being aware of government arrangements to facilitate their return or because they were unable to take time off from their employers. Better management of labour migration and information dissemination channels continues to be an urgent need.

Findings from this review, including an analysis of the nation-wide living standards survey, indicate that at least in the severely affected districts, the condition of migrant households is as precarious, if not more, than the average household. This is particularly so for internal migrant households whose family members are working in other parts of the country as well as for families who have migrated to urban areas where they risk urban exclusion that is likely to set in as government and other actors formulate their recovery and rehabilitation assistance.

The situation of those displaced due to the earthquake, which includes those from the severely affected districts as well as those living in rented accommodation

in Kathmandu and other urban centres is of concern. Fear of being evicted from their transitional shelters, finding suitable rental accommodation, and resuming their livelihoods, has become crucial for these households.

In some instances, individuals and households in the severely affected districts have begun to consider migration as the only option for recovering from the ravages of the earthquake. It is possible that such desperation could lead many potential migrants to adopt 'illegal' channels or pay exorbitant fees to recruitment agents and agencies, thus increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. While the potential to leverage migration and remittances has become highly significant in the post-disaster context, the need to protect migrant workers in general has become more important, especially in light of the fact that families/households are urging their migrant members not to return since their earnings will become more important in the recovery phase.

The Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility is a research centre within Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, set up with the primary objective of contributing to broader theories and understandings on labour and mobility. It conducts interdisciplinary, policy-relevant research on critical issues affecting working people; serves as a forum to foster academic, policy and public debates; and provides new insights on the impact of labour and migration.

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