

## **Migration, Remittance and Its Consequences at the Household Level in Agrarian Nepal**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Migration has historically been a feature of all societies. Over the decades, labor migration seeking employment has been a major revenue source for Nepali youth. This study aims to explore migration patterns, remittances flow, and consequences of foreign labor migration in agrarian Nepali households. The empirical analysis revealed that low individual income, a lack of employment prospects, poor economic conditions of the migrants, non-existence of social assistance, child education, social prestige, and a desire for property accumulation were the causes of migration in the study area. As a result, increased labor wages, family labor shortage for farming, less use of farmyard manure, a preference for farm machinery, decreased crop production, abandoned livestock rearing, and less use of local seed were the consequences of foreign labor migration in agricultural household practices. These findings will aid in developing policies related to labor migration and its consequences on agriculture.*

**KEYWORDS:** migration, foreign labor, remittance, causes, consequences

### **INTRODUCTION**

People's migration has been a crucial component of society throughout history. Human migration is referred to the movement of individuals from one region to another in quest of better living circumstances and opportunities, sometimes over long distances or in huge

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groups. This phenomenon has been identified as a socio-cultural, economic, demographic, and political occurrence that fluctuates with time and location. It frequently refers to the relocation of people seeking better life chances. In 2019, more than two-thirds (approximately 69%) of working-age migrants were concentrated in high-income countries (ILO, 2021). According to Kollmair et al. (2006), these circumstances frequently push young people to relocate to foreign markets as skilled or unskilled laborers. Labor migration is a significant aspect of both an individual's and a community's economic and cultural life. Young people often migrate from their hometowns to seek employment, education, and a better quality of life elsewhere.

Nepal has a long history of labor migration via military recruiting in foreign countries, which has resulted in both permanent and temporary settlements (Jennison, 2007). The pursuit of higher-paying jobs has always been a key factor driving such migration, in line with the neo-classical theory of migration, which posits that wage disparities are the primary motivation for migration (Jennison, 2007). In Nepal, the availability of off-farm employment is limited, which has resulted in many young people from rural areas demonstrating impressive adaptability and increasingly losing interest in agricultural work (Agasty and Patra, 2013). As a consequence, they are leaving their rural hometowns and moving towards urban areas. However, the question of whether employment is the only driving force behind this trend is up for debate. Labor migration in Nepal has become a natural and mandatory social phenomenon that prompts people to relocate to more sophisticated and advanced societies. Nepali people have relied significantly on labor migration for foreign employment as a crucial means of livelihood over the years (GIZ and ILO, 2015), whereas the consequences of such migration to agricultural activities in agrarian communities are mostly unknown.

Remittances and migration can alleviate poverty, boost economic growth, and promote well-being both directly and indirectly, but their consequences on inequality are considerably less clear (de Haas, 2007). Remittances refer to the transfer of money and other non-monetary items from migrant workers working outside their communities of origin to their households. Remittance constitutes a significant share of the financial inflows received by developing nations such as Nepal. Remittance refers to the income earned by households through foreign inflows, primarily from temporary or permanent migration to these economies. The World Bank (2005) notes that remittance helps enhance households' purchasing power, enabling them to access better healthcare, nutrition, education, and other essential amenities.

The volume of remittances sent by migrants has been growing annually. The World Bank (2016) stated that global remittances were US\$ 601 billion in 2015, with developing countries contributing US\$ 441 billion (73.4%). Tajikistan, Nepal, and Tonga receive a

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higher proportion of remittances as a percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP). Moreover, a report published by the World Bank (2022) stated that Nepal had a 22.7% share of remittance in its GDP composition of 2021 while agriculture accounts for 23.95%. Financial and social remittances have an economic and social impact on immigrant households (Ghosh, 2008). The household income, savings, and investments of migrant families are all increased by monetary remittances. They also make it easier for migrant families to buy homes, lands, household goods, etc., which improves their quality of life. The transmission of concepts, knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior patterns, identities, and cultures constitute social remittances (Levitt and Nyberg Sorensen, 2004). On the other hand, male counterparts experience an absence for several years due to migration. The gendered roles of those who are left behind at home may shift as a result of this short separation. Also, it can lead to several issues in migrant households, including family disarray, kid behavior changes, child education halts, drug and alcohol abuse, etc.

According to research on remittances in Nepal, it was known that remittance significantly reduced poverty levels (Acharya & Leon-Gonzalez, 2012). However, the influx of remittances has caused the Nepalese currency to appreciate, resulting in a loss of competitiveness in the export sector and a rise in the trade imbalance, culminating in the Dutch disease effect (Sapkota, 2013). The movement of workers toward foreign employment has also had an impact on Nepal's labor market, with male-dominated industries such as agriculture and construction facing a labor supply deficit, which has resulted in wage increases (Sunam and McCarthy, 2016).

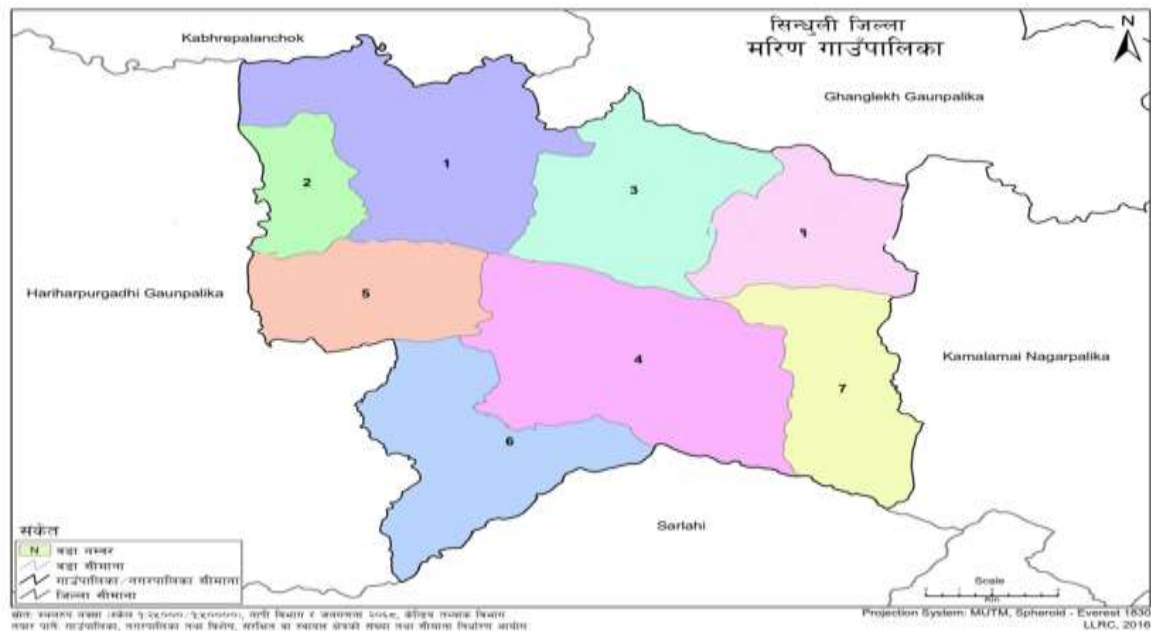
de Haas and Van Rooij (2010), reported that migrant remittances can improve the living standard of women with their children by eliminating financial constraints and enhancing access to credit facilities, healthcare, and education. However, according to the ADB (2014), migration has a negative impact on agricultural yields, and households receiving remittances in the agricultural sector are not experiencing an increase in output. Despite the fact that remittances have been shown to increase agricultural yields in other countries by increasing the capacity to purchase agricultural inputs and assets such as chemical fertilizers and hybrid seeds, they do not appear to be contributing to a similar increase in agricultural yields in Nepal (ADB, 2014).

The main objective of this research was to investigate the effects of foreign labor migration, particularly in agrarian Nepal, with a particular emphasis on migration patterns and the flow of remittances. In order to achieve this objective, the study principally seeks to analyze the effects of migration and remittances at the household level within the agrarian context of Nepal.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Study Area

The research was conducted in ward number 7 of the Marin Rural Municipality in Sindhuli district, located at  $27^{\circ}15'52''\text{N}$   $85^{\circ}43'59''\text{E}$ . This rural municipality spans a total area of 324.55 sq km, comprising plains, the Chure area, and the Mahabharat Range. The research area is bounded in the center by the Marin River, in the north by the Mahabharata Range, and in the south by the Chure Range. According to CBS (2021), the population of this rural municipality is 28,988, with 14,277 males and 14,711 females, residing in a total of 5,843 households. The rural community mainly consists of ethnic groups with a unique way of living in contrast to the urban areas of the district. Unfortunately, the Marin Rural Municipality is lagging in terms of human consciousness, and physical, economic, and infrastructure development. As a result, the majority of the residents seek foreign labor migration as a means to improve their living standards and overcome poverty.



**Figure 1: Map of the study area**

### Data Collection

To conduct the study, a quantitative interview protocol was designed, pretested, modified, and utilized. Marin Rural Municipality was purposively selected due to its agrarian nature and having a high percentage of foreign labor migration (65% of households contribute to foreign labor migration, which exceeds the national average of 56%, and 70% among

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Janjati). For this research quantitative interview protocols were developed, pretested, and deployed to obtain quantitative data. For this purpose, a total of 350 households were chosen, with 50 migrant households from each ward. Likewise, Key Informants Interview (KII), and Case Study were used to collect qualitative data. Three key informants were interviewed from each ward, including a returnee, a community leader, and an agricultural technician. A migrant household engaged in commercial agriculture, a migrant household that has ceased agricultural activities, a non-migrant household involved in commercial agriculture, and a non-migrant household that has abandoned agriculture were also chosen for the case study. These households provided valuable insights into the experiences and challenges of households engaged in the agricultural industry, both migrant and non-migrant. To gather qualitative data a checklist was devised, and utilized, while secondary data were acquired from published sources of information from governmental and non-governmental organizations. Finally, quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, and qualitative information was transcribed, categorized, interpreted, and used in the results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Basic Demography**

According to the findings of the household demographic survey, the average age of the respondents was 46.48 years, with a range of ages 22 to 77 years and a standard deviation of 13.54 years (Table 1). The majority (64%) of respondents or household heads were male, while about one-third were female. According to a study's findings, a woman's standing in the family is determined by her position. Desai and Banerji (2008) also concluded that male migration has strengthened the autonomy and decision-making power of women in nuclear families. Women having little control over their lives may be influenced by the preferences and decisions of other household members, which can result in a lack of control over their lives. Kaspar (2005) in a study revealed the fact that related to workload and decision-making authority for women in the household was determined by their standing in the household.

**Table 1: Distribution of household heads by various social characteristics**

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	224	64
	Female	126	36
<b>Caste/Ethnicity</b>	Brahmin	6	1.7
	Chhetri	14	4
	Dashanami	12	3.4
	Dalits	26	7.4
	Janajati	292	83.4
<b>Family Type</b>	Nuclear	169	48.3
	Joint	181	51.7
<b>Religion</b>	Hindu	190	54.3
	Buddhist	153	47.7
	Christian	5	1.4
	Others	2	0.6
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	193	55.1
	Non-formal	20	5.7
	Pre-primary	6	1.7
	Grades 1 to 8	66	18.9
	Grades 8 to 12	57	16.3
	Bachelor and above	8	2.3

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

Findings also revealed that Janajati made up 83.4% of the respondents, followed by Dalits 7.4%; 5.7% of Hindu high caste, and Dashanami 3.4%. A joint family comprises 51.7% of the respondents, while nuclear families comprise the remaining 48.3%. Concerning the interviewees' religion, 54.3% were identified as Hindu, while 47.7% of them were identified as Buddhist. Regarding the educational attainment of the respondents' results showed that more than half of the respondents (55.1%) were illiterate, about one-fifth, had completed basic level education; 16.3% had completed high school (Table 1).

#### **Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents:**

Table (2) presents the major social and economic characteristics of the participants in the research area. Findings revealed that around four-fifth of the respondents worked in agriculture, while one-tenth of them were out migrants. Less than 5% of respondents were involved in service and other businesses (Table 2).



**Table 2: Distribution of household heads by various economic characteristics**

<b>Occupation</b>	Agriculture	282	80.6	
	Foreign Labor	36	10.3	
	Service	15	4.3	
	Business	12	3.4	
	Wage Labor	3	0.9	
	Other	2	0.6	
<b>Household Type</b>	Mud	36	10.3	
	Mud and wood	148	42.3	
	Cemented	166	47.4	
<b>Food Sufficiency</b>	Less than 3 months	13	3.7	
	3 - 6 months	46	13.1	
	6 - 9 months	63	18	
	9 - 12 months	139	39.7	
	Surplus	89	25.4	
<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>St. Deviations</b>
<b>Land holdings (in Hectare)</b>				
<b>Khet</b>	0	2.046	0.348	0.270
<b>Bari</b>	0	0.341	0.095	0.041
<b>Pakho</b>	0	0.341	0.095	0.041
<b>Animal holdings (in No.)</b>				
<b>Cow</b>	0	9	0.9	1.379
<b>Ox</b>	0	6	1.11	1.118
<b>Buffalo</b>	0	18	0.68	1.34
<b>Goats</b>	0	40	4.3	3.712
<b>Pigs</b>	0	45	0.7	2.9

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

Likewise, about one-tenth of the respondents of migrant families had mud houses, whereas about two-fifth of them had mud and wood houses. On the other hand, nearly half of the respondents had cemented homes. Findings also revealed that one-fourth of the migrants' families produce surplus food from their land whereas two-fifth of the families had produced enough food for 9-12 months and about one-fifths of families had food sufficient for less than six months. More than three-fourths (76.4%) of the migrant households were unable to grow enough food on their land using traditional farming methods (Table 2).

Orjuela-Grimm et al. (2022) reported that food insecurity is a typical issue for immigrants and refugees who are relocated to a new region and is a recognized cause of migration. Young people found it difficult to support their living standards and were forced to migrate

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in search of work and employment because of food insecurity, the growth in the cost of other daily consumable items, and poor social security. The currently available information also points to the reality that people are forced to migrate because of poverty, food insecurity, and a lack of job prospects (FAO, 2021).

Migrants' household has a small landholding size in the study area i.e.,  $0.34 \pm 0.270$  hectare on an average, contributing to food insecurity (Table 2). The findings of our study are similar to Karki et.al (2021) findings for Bagmati Province, Nepal viz. Nepal still suffers from food insecurity with a large proportion of food-insecure households being smallholder farmers who rely on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihood. It was also revealed from the study that the animal holding of the migrants' households is also nominal. Small farm owners face additional financial challenges, such as lower returns on their agricultural production, which may make it challenging for them to continue their way of life. A person's decision to relocate in quest of better economic opportunities may be influenced by a variety of factors.

**Access to Modern Facilities:**

Table (3) presents the findings on migrant household access to modern facilities and the use of appliances.

**Table 3: Migrant's household access to the modern facilities**

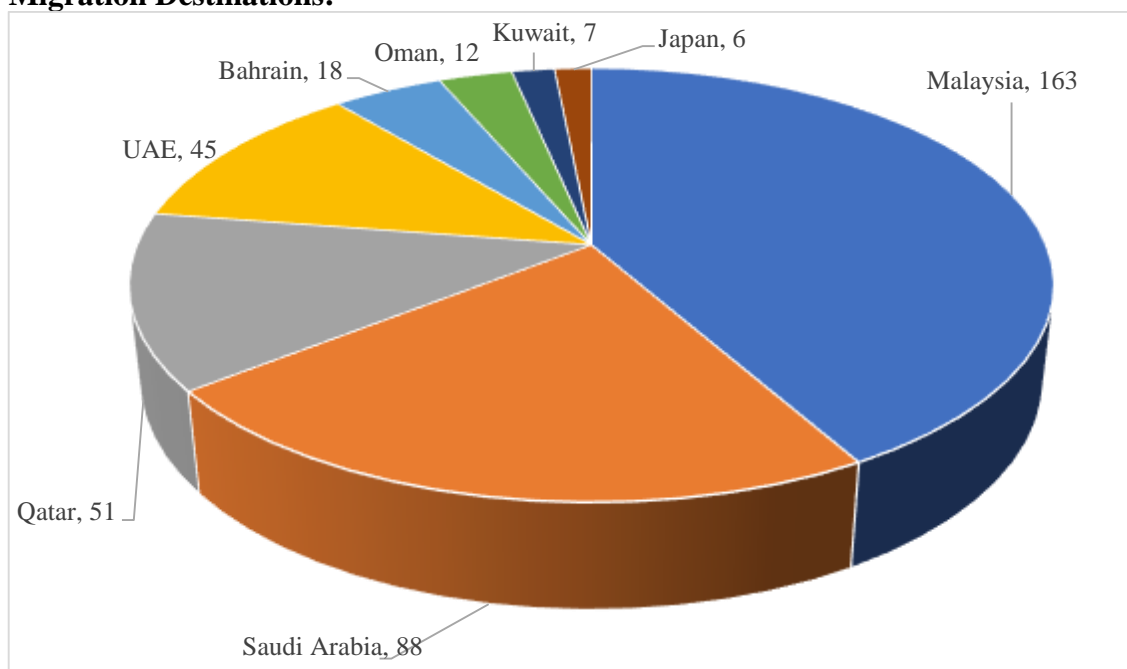
Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Electricity Facility</b>	Yes	257	73.4
	No	93	26.6
<b>Fuel used by Household</b>	Firewood	306	87.4
	LPG	154	44.6
	Biogas	16	4.6
	Electricity	3	0.9
<b>Type of Drinking Water</b>	Piped water	245	70
	Tube-well	59	16.9
	Well	44	12.6
	River/Stream	2	0.6
<b>Type of Toilet</b>	Flush or pour-flush	207	59.1
	Pit-latrine	139	39.7
	Composing toilet	1	0.3
	No facility (bush/field)	3	0.9

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)



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It was well revealed that about three-fourths of the respondents had access to electricity whereas nearly four-fifths of them used firewood, followed by LPG, biogas, and a very nominal percentage of households using electricity for cooking purposes. In a similar vein, the findings revealed that about three-fourths of the respondents reported access to the households utilizing piped drinking water facilities followed by 16.9% of respondents who use tube wells, whereas one-fifths of them depends on wells as their primary source of water (Table 3).

**Migration Destinations:**

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

**Figure 2: Migrants' destination**

Figure (2) describe the major destination countries of the migrants. Accordingly, Malaysia was the first country to receive a large number of Nepali migrant workers followed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. This result is in line with the research findings of Bossavie & Denisova (2018) the majority of international employees prefer to work in four countries: Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The great majority of Nepali migrant workers are hosted by the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as Malaysia (MoLESS, 2022). Nepal labor migration report further concluded that since 2013/14, these seven countries have regularly employed more than 80% of Nepali migrant workers, and they are also the nations with the biggest demand

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for Nepali labor (2022). Migrants frequently extend their stay in their destination due to a lack of career options and the possibility of high compensation. In this regard, data revealed that the average duration of migrant migration was  $3.795 \pm 2.472$  years, with a range of 1 year to 14 years.

**Table 4: Distribution of migrants by various social characteristics**

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Network in Destination Before Migration (n=146)</b>	Family Member	75	51.36
	Relatives	52	35.61
	Friends	49	33.56
	Neighbor	24	16.34
<b>Motivation for Migration (n=350)</b>	Self	284	87.12
	Family members	148	45.4
	Friend	120	36.8
	Manpower Agency	39	11.96
	Neighbor	34	10.43
<b>Migrants receive training (Before migration)</b>		52	14.9
<b>Migrated member return</b>		27	100
<b>Occupation of Returnee</b>	Agriculture	22	81.48
	Wage labor	3	11.11
	Business	1	3.7
	Government Job	1	3.7

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

Findings from this study revealed that about half of the migrants have a family member at their destination followed by relatives of about one-third (Table 4). Migration experts have typically defined migrant networks as interpersonal linkages that connect families, friends, and neighbors in their places of origin and destination (Poros, 2011). Migrants' social network in the destination countries before their migration plays a crucial role to choose their destination. A study conducted by Adhikary, & Teijlingen (2019) reported that family and friends, as well as financial support, encourage Nepali men to travel to work in the Middle East and Malaysia. In addition to these factors, government regulations, migrant networks, and social pressures to migrate all have an impact on migration decisions (Kunwar, 2021).

### Causes of Foreign Migration

Table (5) summarizes the causes of foreign labor migration from the study area, based on the agreement level, index value, and rank of each cause. According to the research findings, the leading cause of foreign labor migration was low individual income (0.72),

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followed by a lack of employment opportunities (0.66), poor economic conditions of the migrants (0.57), and limited access to social protection (0.42) (Table 5). Peer pressure, a loss in agricultural production, a lack of education, an inability to repay a loan, and food shortages have also been revealed as additional reasons for overseas labor migration. Various research findings revealed that socio-cultural, economic, and political issues contributed to migration. Shrestha (2017) reported the fact that high wages owing to exchange rate shocks in the destinations promote migration outflow from Nepal. This result is in line with unemployment, poverty, a lack of education, political instability, debt, family pressure, family conflict, a lack of social protection, low agricultural production, and other circumstances that compel individuals to migrate to foreign for employment (K. C., 2021).

**Table 5: Causes of Foreign Labor Migration**

S.N .	Causes of Migration	Agreement Level					Index Value	Rank
		Str. Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Str. Disagree		
1	Low individual income	156	192	0	2	0	0.72	1
2	Lack of employment opportunities	128	214	2	5	1	0.66	2
3	Poor household economic conditions	124	187	1	20	8	0.57	3
4	Limited access to social protection	14	302	7	16	11	0.42	4
5	For child education	74	194	3	66	13	0.36	5
6	Social standing (prestige)	12	285	3	38	12	0.35	6
7	A desire for property accumulation	93	172	3	53	29	0.35	6
8	Peer pressure	26	228	1	64	31	0.22	8

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9	A decline in agriculture production	<b>43</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>9</b>
10	Lack of education	<b>58</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>9</b>
11	For loan payment	<b>66</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>9</b>
12	Food insecurity	<b>117</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>12</b>
13	Natural resources depletion	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>-0.32</b>	<b>13</b>
14	Family pressure	<b>13</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>-0.33</b>	<b>14</b>
15	Climate change	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>-0.42</b>	<b>15</b>
16	Environmental degradation	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>-0.43</b>	<b>16</b>

(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

### **Consequences of Foreign Migration:**

The consequences of migration may vary based on the destinations chosen by migrants, as both the characteristics of migration and the level of remittances sent differ across different locations. According to the findings of this study, increase wages of labor (0.53) was the major agricultural consequence of foreign labor migration, followed by a shortage of family labor (0.48) in agricultural activities; less use of farmyard manure (0.46), and an inclination toward farm machinery (0.43). Likewise, decreased crop production, abandoned livestock rearing, and less use of local seed were other consequences of foreign labor migration regarding household agricultural practices. Démurger (2015) in his research revealed that the major disadvantages are an increase in job load, an impact on children's educational activities, a disruption in family life, and a shortage of home labor. Similarly, Huy & Nonneman (2016) concluded that the migration of male members of the family reduces the supply of male labor on farms, increases the wage of labor, increasing female participation, while remittances can be utilized to alleviate food shortages. Foreign labor migration resulted in a decrease in crop production, a decreased use of farmyard manure, a labor shortage, and an increased wage of labor (Maharjan et al. 2013).

Similarly, regarding the socio-economic consequences of migration, the research findings (table 6) revealed that migrants' household members have increased access to health

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facilities (0.67), followed by increased access to children's education (0.66), and increased access to electronic gadgets (0.61). In this regard, Ahunov et al. (2015) in their research also reported that labor migration has a major impact on the livelihoods of left-behind households, particularly on key social characteristics like health and education spending. The positive consequences of foreign labor migration include increased income through remittances, reduced child labor, increased access to children's education, particularly for girls, improved sanitation and health care, engaging left-behind members in constructive activities, and strengthening spouse bargaining power (Démurger, 2015).

**Table 6: Consequences of Foreign Labor Migration**

S.N	Consequences	Agreement Level					Index Value	Rank
		Str. Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Str. Disagree		
<b>Agricultural Consequences:</b>								
1	Increase wage labor	92	228	0	18	12	0.53	1
2	Shortage of family labor	54	266	0	19	11	0.48	2
3	Less use of FYM	48	270	0	20	12	0.46	3
4	The inclination toward farm machinery	47	257	0	41	5	0.43	4
5	Decreased crop production	29	258	0	39	24	0.33	5
6	Abandoned livestock rearing	15	277	11	19	28	0.33	5
7	Less use of local seed	48	159	0	136	7	0.15	7
8	Increase in fallow land	7	29	0	126	188	-0.66	8
9	Change cropping pattern	1	31	0	116	202	-0.7	9

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10	Low adoption of the local breed of livestock	1	15	8	94	232	-0.77	10
11	Abandoned agriculture	6	12	1	94	237	-0.78	11
12	The inclination toward commercial production	6	10	0	93	241	-0.79	12
<b>Socio-economic Consequences:</b>								
1	Increase access to health facilities	134	209	0	7	0	0.67	1
2	Increase access to education	112	237	0	1	0	0.66	2
3	Increase access to electronic gadgets (Fan, T.V., Mobile, Internet)	123	207	0	16	4	0.61	3
4	Constructed a new house	55	118	0	66	111	-0.09	4
5	Purchase land	52	43	0	90	165	-0.39	5
6	Purchase valuable assets (Gold, Diamond, Silver, etc.)	38	63	0	88	161	-0.39	5
7	Start of off-farm business	13	28	0	110	199	-0.65	7
8	Decline community participation	3	13	10	86	238	-0.78	8

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9	Decline organizationa l association	1	15	7	85	242	-0.79	9
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(Source: Field Survey, 2021)

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings indicate that migrant families in the study area confront considerable food insecurity, with only a quarter of households generating enough food. Three-quarters of respondents are food insecure due to their small landholding size. The decision-making process of migration is significantly influenced by the social networks and motivational factors of migrants. It can be concluded that the key drivers of international labor migration were economic factors such as inadequate individual income, limited employment opportunities, and adverse economic conditions. Additionally, Limited access to social security, child education, a desire for property accumulation, social prestige, peer pressure, a decline in agricultural production, a lack of education, and debt payback was also observed in the study, but to a lesser extent than economic drivers.

The vast majority of Nepali foreign labor migrants are unskilled; hence they earn poor salaries in comparison to skilled labor migrants from other countries. Appropriate technical and vocational training could help to raise the salaries that migrants can earn, increasing remittance inflows and helping to poverty reduction. Foreign labor migration solely contributes to agricultural labor shortages having both positive and negative consequences. Positive consequences include increased household income via remittance that contributes to children's education, access to health facilities, and ensure food security at the household level, while negative consequences include reduced agricultural activities, production, and then exit from the agricultural sector. These factors must be considered while developing policies and plans for migration and their implications in Nepal's agrarian context.

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