



Migration matters: Outmigration and the feminization of agriculture in South Asia, IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Context

Nearly one billion people are on the move - and the impact on rural economies is unprecedented.

According to the FAO, there are an estimated 214 million international and 740 million internal labour migrants worldwide. Asia is at the forefront of this transformation: Urbanization and industrial development are increasing the capacity for its cities to absorb the vast surplus labour of the countryside.

Why is this happening now? In part economic liberalization and rising costs of living in rural areas combined with climate stress and other ecological pressures, are making agricultural based livelihoods increasingly less viable. Added to this are the cultural changes wrought by globalization which is both increasing the demand for cash, and changing the aspirations of young people.

Despite the exponential increase in migration, agriculture often remains critical for household members who stay behind, and is often part of a dual livelihood strategy. Sporadic remittances, and increasingly fragile livelihoods at home, mean that farming remains important for supporting non-migrant family members, although there are often shifts in the responsibilities on the farm.

Recent research has documented the negative impacts on gender relations when men migrate. There is usually an increased workload for women and limited access to capital and resources. There are often positive outcomes too, such as increased empowerment for women. However, significant unanswered questions remain on the migration-agriculture nexus. These include the following:

1. Why migration matters? -When women or older people stay behind, as is common in the Ganges basin, they may have a considerable incentive to invest in the land. However, women may not be able to access remittance money. Migrant work may be sporadic and unpredictable, making income uncertain. This inequity also often plays out beyond the household where women may find accessing services necessary for agriculture dominated by men. Furthermore, unique cultural contexts, such as the desire to spend cash on consumables and the rising price of events such as weddings can divert remittances away from productive uses. On the other hand, in regions where the potential profits from agriculture are higher, reinvestment of remittances on the land may be more common.

So there is a need to explore how the management of communal water and land resources is affected by migration. Similarly, there is limited knowledge of how migration affects the use patterns of water and land resources necessary for agriculture, and the demand for natural resources.

Managing for migration: the policy response: Out-migration is treated in complex ways by government and other institutions. Some governments actively encourage migration, although policies and programmes have been focused on facilitating the migration process and not on maximizing the benefits for migrants and 'left behind' populations. Programmes by NGOs are often focused on strengthening livelihoods so people do not migrate. Agricultural initiatives, however, have been sometimes been slow



to accept the changed gender roles due to migration itself, with programmes for women still focused on the traditional 'female' domain of household water access, sanitation and kitchen gardens. While male outmigration clearly presents major challenges, how these changing gender roles in agriculture can be turned into opportunities to empower women's productive roles, remains a key question.

Purpose of the workshop

The core objectives are to:

- Bring together multiple stakeholders for a policy debate relating to the issue of 'Out Male Migration' and feminization of agriculture in South Asia.
- Learn from the range of experiences across the region and what some of the research findings have to share.
- Identify a series of practical solutions to improve women's engagement in the water and agriculture management
- Address constraints that have emerged from of the research experiences across the region.

Outputs of the workshop

- Identify policy messages, key knowledge gaps and pathways for policy influence
- Suggest further ways of collaborating
- Co-Production of research proposal

The presentations will range across countries including Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. These will open plenary sessions focused on dialogue to question and debate the unknown facts and draw up a participatory plan for the next steps forward.

Expected outcomes

The two day event will create a platform for policy dialogues that will include influencing and suggesting recommendations to the National governments across South Asia on issues related to outward migration and feminization of agriculture, issues and challenges. Decision makers and planners will actively participate to bring about a change in their national programmes / policies related to better agriculture and water management practices. The focus will be to help government departments better understand the issues and concerns highlighted within the regions and expect a collaborative effort to develop a plan for next year.

Key outcomes will be –

1. Provide knowledge to address the missing gaps on issues related to outward migration
2. Develop and strengthen South Asian partnerships

References

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