Migrating out of Poverty
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How Migration into Urban Construction Work Impacts on Rural Households in Nepal

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Abstract

The research draws on interviews with rural-urban migrant construction workers in Kathmandu as well as with families of construction workers, other migrant labourers and non-migrants in two contrasting villages in the Karve district in Central Nepal and Saptari district in the Terai. Interviews at destination show that migrant construction labourers are poorly educated, not organised and vulnerable to exploitative working conditions at the hands of agents and employers. Despite tough working conditions and high expenses in the city, a majority of migrants remitted money to their families. Remittances were used for a variety of poverty reducing and social status enhancing purposes. Interviews at origin showed how social structure and factors related to class, gender and ethnicity influenced the necessity and ability to participate in migrant construction work. Households with construction migrants and households with other types of migrants (labourers) were better off than non-migrants, and subjective assessments by the migrants, their families and others in the village community suggest that migration had led to positive changes. Expenditure figures also show that there are significant differences between spending on education by migration status and type. In both villages, construction migrants spent more on education than other migrants and non-migrants. Women's control over remittance spending differed by ethnicity, with Tamang women belonging to indigenous hill communities having more control over household finances compared to Madhesi women in the Terai. The paper explores the reasons for these observed differences and offers lessons for policy in the area of migrant support.

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Executive Summary

This research is based on a reanalysis of the data for Nepal, which was collected under the Migrating out of Poverty RPC project 'Impact of Labour Migration to the Construction Sector on Poverty' conducted with the Nepal Institute of Development Studies (NIDS) in Kathmandu, the Refugee and Migratory Movements Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh, and the Institute of Human Development (IHD) in India. The research was conducted in two stages: (1) interviews with 150 rural-urban migrant construction workers in Kathmandu; and (2) a 'tracer' study in two contrasting villages in the Karve district in Central Nepal and the Saptari district in the Terai.

The interviews at destination were conducted with 150 workers spread equally across three types of firms: a large international construction company; a large national company involved in road building; and a smaller private construction company. The different types of firms were chosen to examine whether working conditions and remuneration varied and how these impacted on the welfare of workers, as well as on their ability to remit money home to their families. Some variations were seen in remuneration and levels of protection against risk but the conditions of unskilled workers were remarkably similar across all three firms. On the whole, unskilled migrant construction workers are poorly educated, not organised and vulnerable to exploitative working conditions at the hands of agents and employers. The implementation of labour laws is poor and workers are not aware of their rights.

Despite tough working conditions and high expenses in the city, a majority of migrants remitted money to their families. They reported that these remittances were being used for a variety of purposes including improved consumption, education, marriages, social/religious ceremonies, durable goods, and, for a few, land and house purchase. While not all of these uses were poverty *reducing,* they smoothed incomes and prevented downward slides into deeper poverty during the lean season. Some of these uses were also social status enhancing and regarded as extremely important by migrants and their families.

The interviews at source showed how social structure and factors related to class, gender and ethnicity influenced the necessity and ability to participate in migrant construction work. Migrants were drawn mainly from the poorer and socially excluded sections of society but there were differences within those broad categories, with Dalits being typically excluded from migration either due to discrimination against them during recruitment or because they did not have the required social networks. While women from the indigenous Tamang community of the hills had no restrictions placed on them in participating in migrant construction work, the women from the Hindu Madhesi community of the plains did not migrate.

The reported uses of remittances in the two villages were very similar and corresponded to the uses identified during the migrant interviews at destination. Households with construction migrants and households with other types of migrants (labourers) were better off than non-migrants in both locations, but it was not clear from income, expenditure, education and asset holding data whether there was any causal relationship between migration and these

differences. Subjective assessments by the migrants, their families and others in the village community appeared to suggest that migration had improved living standards. It was reported that Tamang women have more control over how remittances are spent in the household compared to Madhesi women but the data were too limited to see any specific outcomes of these differences. Somewhat counter intuitively, more girls were being privately schooled among the Madhesi of the Terai. A number of factors are likely to have resulted in this effect, such as government programmes, more disposable income releasing girls from care duties, and a change in attitude towards their education both as a result of migration and wider changes in attitudes to girls' education.

Migration was perceived to have a positive impact on health and sanitation in the villages of origin as migrants brought back different attitudes to personal hygiene and others in the village learnt from them.

Migration has clearly brought benefits as well as risks and costs to families in rural Nepal. Policy should aim to reduce the costs and risks and recognise how migrants view the process and why they continue to migrate into construction work.

1. Introduction

In the context of rapid urbanisation and increased competition within the construction industry there has been a structural shift towards the flexiblisation of labour and a rising demand for migrant workers, globally (Buckley 2014; Chang 2008; Torres *et al.* 2013; Wells and Jason 2010) and in South Asia (Pattenden 2012; Picherit 2012). Migrant workers are more attractive to employers because they are easily controlled and laid off when business is down and the market risk is transmitted to them (Guerin 2013). The lowest level jobs in construction are typically insecure and poorly paid, often involving migrants with restricted rights, or what has been referred to as 'precarious' employment (Bourdieu 1998). Nepal is no exception to this trend, where manual work in construction is often precarious by all of these criteria: wages are low, workers rarely have written contracts or access to social security, and there is a high risk of sickness, injury and death.

There are specific features of migrant work in construction in Nepal, and other parts of South Asia, that exacerbate the vulnerability of construction workers. First are the characteristics of the migrants themselves – predominantly from relatively poor and socially excluded communities – and second, recruitment is often through market intermediaries or agents. Both of these features produce strong asymmetries in information and power, which can exacerbate the conditions for exploitation. Indeed, the working and living conditions of workers in our sample were extremely exploitative and nearly all aspects of the migration process – travel, accommodation, work and remuneration – failed to meet minimum labour or welfare standards.

Yet, more and more people continue to migrate into this occupation from rural Nepal. Therefore, the aim of the research on which this paper is based was to understand the pros and cons of the process from the perspective of the migrants. The paper presents evidence from a small study of 150 migrant construction workers in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, and two source villages in the mountainous Kavrepalanchowk District and Saptari District in the plains. The analysis focuses on gender, class and ethnicity, in order to understand how the opportunities to engage in migration, the remuneration received, and impacts of migration and remittances are facilitated and constrained by these factors. The paper begins with a brief description of the construction industry in Nepal followed by a discussion of the methods employed in the research. These introductory sections are then followed by a detailed discussion of the findings from the interviews at destination, i.e. Kathmandu, starting with a profile of the workers, their working conditions and remuneration. The next section presents the findings from the rural part of the research, examining in detail the social and economic impacts, as perceived and relayed by households with migrants. We devote special attention to the roles of brokers and agents in the migration process, how they have been portrayed in the scholarship on migration and how migrants and their families view the process. Contrary to the singular portrayal of construction workers as victims of exploitation, the workers themselves see the process as risky and exploitative but also as a chance of exiting poverty and improving social status in the long term.

It is acknowledged at the outset that the study has limitations because it was conducted at one point in time, so any assessment of change has relied on recall alone. We do not have accurate information of the 'before' and 'after' situations of households. The paper presents the results of descriptive statistics and qualitative interviews but does not contain econometric analysis that could establish causality between migration and poverty reduction. However, we have subjective assessments of change over time and these show that there is a need to seriously reconsider the impacts of migration into construction work as it has the potential to reduce poverty, improve education and liberate the rural poor from unremunerated local work that has trapped them in poverty for generations. Not everyone is able to benefit from migration and the paper offers explanations for the observed differences.

2. The Migration Context In Nepal

Migration in Nepal is not a new phenomenon (Adhikari 2001; Gill 2003; Seddon *et al.* 2002; Sherpa 2010). Malaria control in the Terai in the 1960s created conducive conditions for resettlement of people from mountainous areas to the plains (KC 2004: 131). Prior to that, migration was mainly seasonal and took place in the winter months when work became scarce in the hills. Natural disasters and, more recently, conflict, have also led to population movements (KC 2003: 130). Migration has taken a new direction in the last three decades during which both rural-urban (i.e. internal) migration and international labour migration have increased significantly. However, studies have shown that international migration is often of a short term or circular nature and a large proportion of international migrants return home, with many relocating to urban areas or market centres in rural areas (Gurung 2013). These migrants

who have relocated to urban areas make investment in housing or other enterprises requiring construction, which further attracts migrant workers from rural areas.

Although international migration from Nepal has been increasing, it is still accessible mainly to the better off and better connected (Gurung 2008: 5-7; Seddon *et al.* 2002). Poor migrants from rural areas usually migrate within Nepal or to neighbouring India. People from the Far-Western and Mid-Western mountain regions, which are considered to be the poorest and most food insecure regions in the country, tend to migrate to India and Terai towns (WFP and NDRI 2008). Estimates of internal migration vary. The Nepal Living Standard Survey III (2011) puts the percentage of absentees who are believed to be in Nepal at 56.9 per cent, an estimated 3.06 million people (with the assumed population of 26 million) (CBS 2012b: 134). The Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS) of 2008 puts temporary internal migrants at 47.8 per cent of the total number of absentees,[1] or an estimated 1.81 million people (CBS 2008: 162).

According to the 2001 Census, roughly 13.2 per cent of the native born population was classified as internal migrants. Rural-to-rural (68.2 per cent) and rural-to-urban (25.5 per cent) were the major streams of internal migration. The same Census figures showed that 11 per cent of the internal migrants had moved for employment related reasons (Subedi 2009: 7). The rural areas of Mid- and Far-Western Nepal were major areas of net out-migration, with migrants moving to the Kathmandu valley and other urban areas, as well as to the lowlands of Terai (Lokshin *et al.* 2007: 7). A WFP report shows that internal migration in the districts of the study began in 1997 and increased steadily between 1999 and 2004 (WFP 2005: 9-12).

The construction industry in Nepal has boomed recently with the injection of capital from international returnees and wealthy migrants from rural areas (especially those who relocated in the wake of the insurgency). In the last decade, construction and real estate businesses have contributed roughly 15 per cent of the GDP, and this contribution is growing (Economic Review, MoF 2011/12). With stiff competition between firms and the need for labour that can be easily managed and laid off, migrant workers are in greater demand.

Agriculture is still the main source of employment in Nepal, employing roughly 9.3 million people (2008 Labour Force Survey). Next in importance are milling, handicrafts, construction, fetching water, and collecting firewood (CBS 2008). Among the currently employed people, 367,000 persons (15 years or above), or 3.1 per cent of the workforce, are employed in construction in Nepal. There are more men than women in this occupation (5.9 per cent male compared to just 0.7 per cent female).

[1] The NLFS considers those who have been away for six months or more or intend to be away for six months or more and will return to the same household in the future as absentee household members. These intentions are determined by asking households of origin. Absentees are regarded as migrants. Persons who are separated from the household and move somewhere else become residents of the destination and are not regarded as migrants by the NLFS (CBS 2008: 160).

3. Research Objectives

The research sought to understand characteristics of the migrants entering construction work, the conditions in which they work, and the impacts of such migration on the migrants themselves and their families. The main questions addressed were:

- Who becomes a migrant construction worker and why?
- What is the role of gender, ethnicity and class in determining entry into this job market?
- How is recruitment done and what is the role of social networks and intermediaries?
- What are the characteristics of the living and working conditions of migrants and the modes of remuneration?
- What are the impacts on migrants' health?
- How does gender impact on workers' wages and the opportunities for acquiring new skills?
- What are the impacts of remittances on household income at origin?
- Under what conditions are households with migrants able to improve their living conditions at origin?
- How effective are labour laws in improving working conditions and remuneration?

4. Study Locations

The research was conducted in three locations: the capital city of Kathmandu, the destination for migrants in this study; a typical 'hill' village in the Central Indrawati region in Kavrepalanchowk District; and a Terai 'plains' village in the Eastern Inurawa region in Saptari District. The rationale for selecting these two types of villages was to understand how rural-urban migration impacts poverty in villages with different agro-economic conditions, social structure and connectivity to the outside world. Following other studies comparing the impacts of migration from villages with different characteristics (e.g. Ballard's classic 1983 study comparing Mirpur and Jullunder), we anticipated that the impacts generated by migration and remittances would be mediated by a number of structural factors. We paid special attention to the differentiation of these village societies by class, ethnicity and gender to understand who was able to migrate and who was excluded, how remittances were utilised and who benefitted from the additional income.

Figure 1: Map of Nepal Showing Main Regions and District Boundaries

5. Research Methods

The research followed a mixed methods approach employing a combination of a short questionnaire survey, observation, and semi-structured interviews. In Kathmandu, a total of 150 migrant construction workers were surveyed. It was anticipated that workers in large construction firms would experience different working conditions to those in smaller firms. Therefore interviews were held with workers from three different types of construction firms: large infrastructural projects led by international firms (type 1); road construction projects implemented by national firms (type 2); and small housing projects undertaken by private developers (type 3).

Fifty workers were chosen from each type of firm and only one firm in each category was chosen. While the first two types were large, employing 300-400 workers at a time, the third was much smaller and employed between 50 and 100 workers. All three were fairly typical of their kind. The sample was chosen from the current migrants who were in the city only temporarily. These were identified through snowballing and willingness to participate in the study. The reason for using snowballing was to identify workers without the employer, recruitment agents or unions controlling the selection process. The research team was aware of

the bias that this could introduce, but there was no other alternative in the absence of a sampling frame.

In order to gain insights into the impact of migration on the household poverty situation, interviews were also conducted in two source villages. Altogether 60 households were chosen in the two villages, of which 30 were non-migrant households, i.e. households that did not have a recent history of migration or migrants at the time of the study, and these were included as a control group. Of the households with migrants, 12 were the origin households of migrants interviewed in Kathmandu and their permission was sought to contact them. The rest were households with other kinds of migrants working in comparable low-paid occupations including construction. In order to select comparable households from both categories, households with small, marginal, or no landholdings were selected.[2] The selection of both migrant and non-migrant households for screening was done randomly from lists of households, their landholding and occupations, prepared in consultation with the local Village Level Development Committee (VDC).[3]

From the large lists generated with the help of VDCs, a random selection of households were asked about their landholding ten years previously and households belonging to the same landholding bracket, i.e. marginal or landless, were chosen. The reason for selecting only these categories was that construction workers are mainly drawn from poorer segments of society and we wanted to examine the impact of migration on poverty. Non-migrant households were also in the same wealth bracket in terms of landownership but did not have a history of migration or any migrants at the time of study. Care was taken to include households belonging to all the major ethnic/religious groups in the village in both the migrant and non-migrant categories. Even though the numbers of such households would be too small to generate statistically relevant findings, including them would provide insights into their specific circumstances.

The villages of Dolalghat in the Kavre district and Inurwa in the Saptari district, where the rural fieldwork was conducted, have a long history of seasonal migration among poorer households.[4] Economic factors including land shortages, the search for more remunerative jobs and a lack of employment opportunities locally, especially during the lean season, were cited as the primary reasons for migration. As Shekhar (name changed) from the Terai said:

[2] Our cut off point was less than 0.5 hectares. For the majority of the rural population access to land is extremely limited (IFAD country profile for Nepal). Nationally, 70 per cent of all households have holdings of less than 1 hectare, and these plots are too small and underproductive to meet subsistence needs. Productivity has remained low due to limited access to new technologies inputs and extension services. According to the Institute for Integrated Development Studies in Nepal, there is no universally accepted definition for marginal farmer but data in the National Agricultural Census of 2001/02 suggest that holdings less than 0.1 hectares should be regarded as marginal.

[3] The VDC is the lowest administrative part of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development.

[4] Interview with VDC secretary in both villages.

> My father's family was very big – 5 brothers and 2 sisters. He had only half a bigha of land, and it was hard for us to feed ourselves. Then two senior brothers went to India to work there. In fact my father helped them to go to India for work, and then it was my turn. I started working as a wageworker in landlord's farm in the village itself, and then moved to nearby city with the help of other people who had been going there from the village. Initially, I worked as manual worker in various urban centres in Terai, which are close to my home – like in Janakpur and Lahan.

More than half of the workers interviewed in Kathmandu said that one of the main aims of migration was to send remittances back home for the education of children and family members and some stated that they also invested in the education of extended family members. Improving the family asset base and housing were also important reasons for migration. These aspirations were voiced during the interviews in the two villages as well. Family members of migrants said that one of the main reasons for migrating was to educate their children and enable them to live like urban Nepalis. There was a clear influence of returning migrants on the aspirations of others in the village, who desired the city lifestyle that they described. Educating one's children was seen to be the prerogative of urban people and a pathway to a future away from manual work and poverty. The parallels with other case studies of migrant aspirations and education were evident (Bohme 2012).

Those who had decided to migrate were not under any illusion about the working conditions and recognised the risks to their health as well as to those family members who accompanied them. They had experienced first-hand what work in the tough building environment could do to workers. But these risks were regarded as worth taking in the quest for a better future. We do not argue that this was due to ignorance or a lack of information on risk but rather a calculated strategy considering the risks and costs of all the options available to them.

Focus group discussions with non-migrant households indicated that those who did not migrate were either those who did not have to find another source of income, such as rich landlords, or those who could not do so because of care responsibilities at home.

Migration for construction work is seasonal, a few months at a time so as to manage economic activities back at home. Most of the workers interviewed in Kathmandu were involved in small businesses when back at home, as Table 1 indicates.

Table 1: Other Activities of the Construction Workers in the Year 2013 (% workers)

Activities	International company	National company	Private company	All
Own farm	30.0	40.00	4.00	24.7
Agricultural labourer	2.0	0.00	6.00	2.7
Non-agricultural labourer	0.00	4.00	2.00	2.0
Self-employed (service, trade, small shops, mobile trader etc.)	60	56.0	88.0	68.0
No response	8.00	0.00	0.00	2.7
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.0

(Source: survey data, 2013).

6. Profile of the Construction Workers:

The data bore out the assumption that construction workers are mainly migrants – a quick scoping exercise in the three firms indicated that, on average, 80 per cent of the manual labourers in the lowest jobs were migrants and had come to the city from rural areas with the intention of staying temporarily. The rest had migrated permanently to the city within the last ten years. The sample was chosen from the current migrants who were in the city only temporarily.

While about a third of the workers in the type 1 (international company) and type 2 (national road company) firms had slightly larger land holdings and could farm for part of the year, the workers in type 3 firms were clearly poorer and mainly landless labourers in the villages that they came from. A small proportion of workers came from households with other kinds of businesses and occupations (Table 2).

Table 2: Occupation before Migration (% workers)

Work before this construction work	Type 1 International company (n=24)	Type 2 National company (n=26)	Type 3 Private company (n=23)	All (n= 73)
Cultivation/agriculture	37.5	39.4	12.9	29.9
Agricultural labour	14.2	18.2	25.8	16.1
Non-agricultural casual labour	14.2	15.2	19.3	12.9
Self-employed in non-agriculture	6.2	9.1	3.2	4.1
Regular worker in service sector	0.0	0.0	9.6	3.2
Regular worker in factory/manufacturing	4.2	3.0	3.2	3.5
Others	24.20	15.2	25.8	30.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.00	100.0

(Source: survey data, 2013).

The majority of migrants were young (75 per cent under the age of 45), single and male, with low levels of education and from poorer sections of rural society. While 55 per cent of the workers in the sample had migrated on their own, 28 per cent had brought their families with them and these were mainly workers in the large international firm (type 1). Their higher levels of remuneration probably helped them move their family to the city. The rest migrated in groups with friends, neighbours or relatives.

It was observed that migrants often came from larger families where there was more than one son. Migration is usually a household decision where labour is allocated by the head of the household and the eldest son would be sent away to earn for the family. As the father of a migrant in Kathmandu said:

> He is my eldest son, and I have two more sons who are studying in the school. As a eldest son, who studied up to 8th grade, I sent him for work so that he could be assist in the family by giving us money.

Only 21 out of the 150 interviewed (i.e. 14 per cent) were female. This corroborates the findings of an ILO study on women in construction work by Jha (2002), which found that roughly 15 per cent of the workforce was female. However, other research in some regions of the Far Western hills found that the majority of unskilled labourers in construction were

female.[5] Female workers clustered around certain parts of the construction process – an estimated 75 per cent of stone crushers in Jha's study were women. These differences can be explained by cultural norms related to women's participation in the workforce. While women working outside the home are culturally accepted among the hill communities such as the Tamang, the communities in the plains have gendered divisions of labour that are closer to those observed in North India where only men work outside the home. The research in the two origin villages probed this issue further to determine how gender, class and ethnicity bear on the likelihood of becoming a migrant construction worker.

In our sample, there were proportionately more women in the smallest type of firm (type 3) – 10 compared to 8 in type 1 and only 3 in type 2. There appeared to be two reasons for this: first, the types of jobs that women do such as sifting sand and carrying loads are mechanised in larger firms; and, second, women are less able to participate in road building because of the location of such projects, away from civic facilities. Women and girls are more able to take on work if they can work part-time and return home easily to cook and look after their children/siblings, so type 3 firms are more suited to them.

It was evident that manual construction work in Nepal, as in the rest of South Asia, is one of the most accessible occupations for poor rural-urban migrants. More than 80 per cent of the workers in the sample were from the poorest and most socially excluded groups – the Janajati (49 per cent), Madhesi Dalits (30 per cent) and Dalit castes.[6] According to the 2004 Nepal Living

[5] WIEGO page on women in construction work: http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/construction-workers

[6] 'Janajati' are regarded as early settlers in Nepal and outside Hinduism and its caste hierarchy. In the past, they, were also referred as 'mutwali' (alcohol-drinkers) and tribal, and were generally put under the lower caste – lower than Brahmins and Chettri castes (but above the Dalits). The government of Nepal adopted the Adivasi/Janajati Act, 2002 (Adivasi/Janajati Utthan Rastriya Pratisthan 2058 Nepali Year). The act defined adivasis (earlier settlers)/janajatis as those ethnic groups or communities who have the following characteristics: have their own ethnic languages other than Nepali; have their own distinct traditional customs other than those of high castes; espouse distinct culture other than the Hindu culture of dominant groups; have distinct social structure that does not fall under hierarchical Varna or caste system; have written or oral history that traces their line of descent back to the occupants of their territories before the annexation into present Nepal; are included in the list of adivasis/janajatis published by His Majesty's Government of Nepal. Under this act, 59 ethnic groups or communities have been identified as adivasis/janajatis. 'Madhesi' (also Madyadesi or Mahesi) or 'plains people' are the indigenous population of the Terai plain bordering India. Madhesi is a broad category with diverse social and language groups. In 1991 they accounted for 40 per cent of the entire population of Nepal. Several languages are spoken by the Madhesi depending on their geographical location, including Hindi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Santhal and Northern Bengali. A large proportion of Madhesi people belong to Hindu religion and some are considered 'indigeneous' (Janajati), and some belonged to Muslim faith. There is wide disparity (on the basis of caste and gender) in terms of land and access to political power. While they own most of the economic resources in the Terai, political power has been taken over by hill migrants (Gaige 2009) leading to Madhesi grievances over

Standards Survey, the poverty rate among the Hill Dalits was 48 per cent, 46 per cent among the Tarai Dalits, and 43 per cent among the Hill Janajati (Bennet 2005: 17). The breakdown by firm type indicates that the Janajati were concentrated in the type 2 road building firm whereas the others had a higher proportion of Madhesi Dalits. These differences had probably emerged due to recruitment patterns or social networks (chain migration)[7] – case studies of migrant communities in various parts of the world have shown how certain communities become concentrated in certain locations and jobs.

Table 3: Profile of Migrant Construction Workers by Caste, Ethnicity and Nationality

Social Group		Type1		Type2		Type3		Total	
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
	Brahmin	5	10.0	3	6.0	3	6.0	11	7.3
	Chhetri	5	10.0	2	4.0	7	14.0	14	9.3
	Dalit	1	2.0	1	2.0	3	6.0	5	3.3
	Janajati	18	36.0	40	80.0	16	32.0	74	49.3
	Madhesi	20	40.0	4	8.0	21	42.0	45	30.0
	Indian	1	2.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.7

According to the 2010/11 Nepal Living Standards Survey, 25.2 per cent of the Nepali population was under the consumption poverty line. But, there is a great discrepanccy in population under this poverty line across ethnic groups and caste groups. On the whole, the Tarai Brahmins and Chhetris are the wealthiest, as they have the lowest incidence of poverty. The poverty incidence among the Hill Dalits, Tarai Dalits, Hill Janajati and the Muslims is significantly higher than the national average. Almost half of Hill Dalits (48 per cent) are below the poverty line. Furthermore it appears that the relative position of Janajatis has worsened: in 1995/96 Dalits (both Hill and Tarai) were the poorest but by 2003/04 the Hill Janajatis occupied this spot (Bennet 2005). There are also class dynamics within all ethnic and caste groups. Some Janajati groups like Newars and Thakalis are very advanced, while many others are disadvantaged. Similarly, some members of higher castes like Brahmins and Chettris are also poorer, but usually these groups are well off. The research in the villages explored these social groups' levels of access to migration, and why some are able/compelled to migrate whereas others are not.

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political representation. Despite productive land and industries, development problems like poverty, malnutrition, gender and caste based discrimination, especially against the Dalits, are profound in Terai (Gaige 2009).

[7] Chain migration refers to the social process whereby migrants from a particular origin location and community follow others from that community to a particular destination, creating a pocket of such migrants in the receiving area. Examples are Bangladeshis from Sylhet in the UK or taxi drivers from Punjab in New York city.

All of the migrants surveyed had very low levels of education – a third were completely illiterate, a fourth had completed only primary school and the rest had completed middle or high school. The mean land ownership was less than half a hectare or 6.7 *ropani* (1 ha = 20 *ropani* or 1.45 *bigha*)[8], and there was not much variation across workers in different types of firms.[9] This is consistent with land access data for rural Nepal – the rural poor have large families, very small landholdings or none at all.[10] Land ownership was historically concentrated in a feudal system under the monarchy and this pattern continues today. For the majority of the rural population access to land is extremely limited. Nationally, 70 per cent of all households have holdings of less than one hectare, and these plots are too small and underproductive to meet subsistence needs. Productivity has remained low due to limited access to new technologies inputs and extension services. A survey of landholding among Dalits in Nepal conducted by Save the Children Fund-US shows that 23 per cent are landless whereas 48.7 per cent are functionally landless with less than 5 *ropanis* of land (Bishwakarma 2004).

It was not surprising, therefore, that 65 per cent of the workers were employed at the lowest level, i.e. manual or 'unskilled' work, while others were either 'semi-skilled' or 'skilled' workers, including masons (12 per cent), carpenters (8 per cent), painters (5 per cent), plumbers (5 per cent), scaffolders and electricians. The proportion of manual and skilled workers varied by the type of firm, with the large international firm employing more skilled workers.

7. Recruitment

As short term migration for construction work is now quite well established in the areas that the migrants in the sample came from, a significant proportion of workers in all three firms migrated on their own or with the help of friends and family who had previous experience of migration or had contacts at destination with potential employers. The majority, however, in type 1 and 2 firms migrated with the help of recruiting agents (*dalals*) or labour contractors, locally known as *naikes* or *thekedars*. The dalals or naikes usually offer workers an advance that is to be repaid through work. The arrangement is preferred by employers to ensure that workers are tied to them and it bears a strong resemblance to the system seen in the Indian construction industry (Guerin 2013; Picherit 2012). Nearly 60 per cent of the workers in the type 2 firm (road construction) and 46 per cent in the type 1 firm were recruited by an agent. The higher proportion in the road construction firm was to be expected as the location of such projects tends to be poorly connected and more difficult for workers to reach on their own.

[8] These are local measures of land; ropani is used in the hills and bigha in the plains

[9] The land in the Terai is more fertile and even though the landholding area is similar, Terai migrants can better engage in farming compared to hill migrants (refer Table 2).

[10] 'Nepal' International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) country profile: http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/nepal

The recruitment agent is paid by the firm to procure a certain number of workers within a given period of time. He[11] may be a higher-level contractor who then sub-contracts to a lower level intermediary who may in turn link up with a village level recruiting agent. The village level agent is the one who negotiates directly with prospective migrant and their family. An advance is offered, which is to be repaid through work.

Bonding workers to the job in this way is punishable by law but employers outsource the recruitment so as to evade the law (Guerin 2013). Outsourcing also facilitates the laying off of workers when business is down as this would be virtually impossible to do under existing labour laws. Even those who migrated with the help of friends and family were often in receipt of advances (from these friends and family) that were to be repaid. But the terms of repayment would be slightly more relaxed and based on social expectations of reciprocity rather than a contract. This type of arrangement was seen mainly in the type 3 firm.

Table 4: Access to Employment (% response by workers)

Access to employment	International company	National company	Private company
Through labour contractor/middlemen	46.0	58.00	32.00
Acquaintances/relatives	34.0	30.00	44.00
Directly approached by employer	6.0	6.00	6.00
Approached by manager	18.0	6.00	18.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

(Source: survey data, 2013).

Skilled workers were almost always recruited directly by employers or company managers based on previous experience or recommendations. In such cases advances were not paid.

The advance paid by the agent is an important source of money for the households that migrants come from. In fact, 80 per cent of the workers in the type 1 firm said that they would not accept the job without an advance; 94 per cent said the same in the type 2 firm and 74 per cent in the type 3 firm. The proportion was highest among the type 2 firm workers because they usually migrated on their own leaving their families behind and required the advance to ensure that the family is financially secure. The advances were used by the family left behind for a variety of purposes, including day-to-day consumption and to fund health emergencies such as surgery or expensive treatments. Even though type 3 workers often migrated with the help of friends and family, two thirds received an advance as well which they used for consumption and other uses.

Agents can reduce the risks of penalties faced by migrants in negotiating formalities and regulation. Although Nepal is a free country that does not restrict the internal movement of its

[11] We did not come across female agents.

people, the reality is that there are several barriers including the cost of migration and discrimination against some communities – poorer groups of Madhesi, for example, are looked down upon by the Pahadi hill people. The agent is therefore a facilitator. But agents are also notorious for exploiting illiterate workers who are in a highly personalised yet highly unequal power relationship with them. One common way in which exploitation is perpetuated is cheating in the calculation of wages, which illiterate and poorly educated migrants are especially vulnerable to. Migrants depend on the agent to maintain their attendance record and this is where the agent can falsify the records or enter details incorrectly. But interviews with migrants indicate that they are ambivalent towards agents; while they can see the exploitation they also acknowledge that such migration would not be possible without them. Shekhar described his experience of recruitment as follows:

> The company that employs me is a big one, even though I do not know the real contractor. I was contacted by a person who works for the contractor, and I agreed to work in his company. He was in Lahan where I used to work. I came to know that he knew the small contractor who employed me there. They talked each other and I was allowed to change the company after my work was over in that house-building work. Then I came to Kathmandu with the agent along with ten other people. The agent paid the travel cost, and to start with he had a small room where he let us sleep and cook rice in the kerosene stove. He gave me Rs 10,000 as advance payment. Since he knew my previous employer, he was confident about me. I gave Rs 8,000 to my father to look after the whole family including my family as I had married then – 2 years ago. Now I also have a daughter.

But he also lamented that the agent did not do much to provide safe working conditions for the workers or provide adequate compensation when workers were injured.

8. Contracts, Wages and Working Conditions

Formal contracts for manual workers were the exception rather than the rule in all three firms and 96 per cent of the workers interviewed stated that there was no written contract. These were likely to be unskilled workers whereas skilled workers would be issued with formal contracts both due to their higher levels of awareness and education but also because they were better able to play the market on account of their skills and employers were keen to employ them on good terms.

Wages were calculated on a daily wage basis but workers were paid monthly in the international type 1 firm and weekly in type 2 and 3. As expected, the wages were highest in the international type 1 firm, with skilled workers such as masons and electricians receiving Rs 600 a day and manual workers earning between Rs 250 and 300 per day. However, surprisingly, the average monthly income was highest in the type 3 firm with Rs 9924, compared to Rs 9362 in the type 1 firm and Rs 7012 in the type 2 road building firm. This anomaly could be explained by the fact that the majority (88 per cent) of workers in the type 3 firm said that they worked

over time and were paid well to do so. This arrangement worked for both the firm and the workers. For the firm, it brought economic benefits as the same amount of work could be done by fewer workers. For the workers, overtime payments meant that they could maximise their earning and remitting within the period that they were in employment. But the arrangement ended up with working conditions that could be seen as exploitative because of the long and hard working days. There were trade-offs in terms of working conditions and the level of protection against risk, as we discuss later in this section.

Table 5: Skilled and Unskilled Wages (in Rupees) By Type of Firm for an 8-Hour Working Day

	Type1	Type 2	Type 3
Unskilled	250-300	230-280	200-250
Skilled	600-650	550-600	500-550

Without exception, the women in the sample were employed as manual workers and their wage rates ranged from Rs 250 (for cement mixing and other lower end jobs) to Rs 300 for harder work such as carrying loads. Nationally, only about 6 per cent of women in the construction industry are skilled or highly skilled (Table 6), the rest relegated to unskilled or semi-skilled work.

Table 6: Category of the Construction Workers by Skill

Category	Male	Female
Unskilled	23.5	58.8
Semi skilled	23.5	35.3
Skilled	41.2	2.9
Highly Skilled	11.8	2.9

Source: GEFONT, Search for Alternatives, 2003

Interestingly, there was not much discrimination in the wages of male and female unskilled workers in the sample. However, the GEFONT and CUPPEC (2006) study of the construction sector documents gender based discrimination with women drawing lower wages for the same volume and type of work. It is not clear why this was the case in our sample as the team was not able to probe the issue further. A possible explanation is that the women were the wives of skilled workers who had more bargaining power in the industry

Workers in all three firms were expected to work without a break, i.e. no weekly day off and no public holidays. In a few cases workers were given a day off but on a discretionary basis and without pay. In all three firms, pay was deducted for unauthorised absence and damage to tools and equipment, highlighting the precarious nature of employment even in the international firm. In the type 2 and 3 firms, if a worker falls sick he loses out on pay and has no insurance against such losses. Even in the type 1 firm, with the best (or least worst) working conditions, only 16 per cent of the workers said that they were given sick leave. In the type 2

road building project, a quarter of the workers said that they had their pay deducted if their work was deemed to be substandard. Exactly what was considered substandard was never made clear, giving the contractors and employers an unfair advantage over their captive workforce.

In the type 1 firm, workers were either provided accommodation by the company or rented a room on their own if they had their family with them. In the case of the road workers in the type 2 firm, accommodation was provided on site. Workers in type 3 firms were also provided accommodation on site but a few chose to rent on their own for family reasons.

Table 7 Types of Accommodation (% Worker's Response)

Types/location	International	National	Private	ALL
In structure under construction or inside workshop/factory	2.08	4.0	4.0	3.4
Room/shed provided by the employer at work site	29.17	64.0	48.0	47.1
Room/shed provided by the employer away from the work site	0.00	4.0	4.0	2.7
Privately rented room	54.17	14.0	32.0	33.4
Privately rented house	0.00	12.0	0.00	4.0
Own house	12.50	0.0	12.0	8.2
Others	2.08	2.0	0.0	1.4
Total	100.00	100.0	100.0	100.0

(Source: survey data, 2013).

Furthermore, the workers in the international firm were able to borrow smaller interest free loans during their period of employment to meet regular or emergency expenses and these were repaid through wage deductions. This arrangement, while binding the worker to the employer even further, was perceived by the workers as offering some protection against shocks. Those in the smallest type 3 firm were not able to borrow in this way, leaving them exposed to other higher interest borrowing on the open market.

9. Expenditure At Destination

A large majority (95 per cent) of workers across the firm types had to purchase food on the open market. Although the take-home pay for type 3 workers was higher, their expenses at destination were also higher on account of higher expenditure on food, communication, water, transport and clothing. On average, a migrant worker spent Rs 6,128 monthly for various necessities including food. This varied by type of company: type 1 spent roughly Rs 5,900, on average; type 2 the least at Rs 5,300 (probably because there were no shops nearby); and type 3 the most at Rs 7,100 per month.

Table 8: Average Expenses on Food and other Consumables per Month (Rs)

Items	International	National	Private	All
Food	3286	3100	3412	3266
Water	91	68	352	170
Tea/refreshments	314	302	270	295
Tobacco, pan, alcohol, bidi,	169	127	108	135
Cooking fuel (all types)	306	305	502	371
House rent	250	200	609	353
Electricity	82	68	111	87
Transport	88	21	107	72
Clothing and footwear	348	298	495	381
Medical care	164	103	84	117
Education	103	89	213	135
Telephone/mobile	157	128	467	251
Cleaning and personal care	250	224	205	226
Social expenses and	150	136	143	143
Others	178	155	55	126
Total	5937	5324	7134	6128

(Source: survey data, 2013).

The ownership of consumer durables was highest among the type 1 workers but others also had assets. More than 90 per cent of the workers across the three firms owned a mobile phone, whilst 33.3 per cent had TVs (mostly in the type 1 firm). There were more radios, bicycles and two-wheelers among type 1 workers.

Table 9: Durable Assets (%)

Assets	International	National	Private	All
Radio/transistor	24	20	10	18
Television	52	24	24	33.3
Cell phone	90	92	98	93.3
Bicycle	20	14	16	16.7
Two wheeler	8	4	6	6
Others (water filter elegant water jar, *almari*)	2.3	0	2.4	1.4

(Source: survey data, 2013).

10. Remittance sending

About 78 per cent of the workers were able to send remittances home in 2012. The proportion of workers sending remittances was more or less the same across the different companies. The average amount of remittances sent was Rs 31,123 (Rs 43,520 in Type 1, Rs 32,360 in Type 2 and Rs 33,490 in Type 3). The reason for higher remittances in case of international workers

could be their higher wage rates and savings as well as longer period of employment that year (international companies employ workers for longer periods with fewer gaps between work projects). There was no support for workers in terms of food and shelter from the company .

Table 10: Remittances

	International	National	Private	All
Workers able to remit (%)	75.0	79.2	79.6	77.9
Amount remitted last year (Rs)	43,520	32,360	33,490	31,123

(Source: survey data, 2013)

According to the migrants, remittances have been used by their families to improve housing, purchase consumer durables, education and medical treatment. The financing of marriages and religious ceremonies as well as the repayment of debt were also identified as important uses. These identified uses were different across the firms: type 1 workers reported more consumer durables, land purchase, healthcare and support for family members to establish enterprises compared to workers from type 2 and 3 firms.

Table 11: Reported Uses of remittances by type of firm (% workers)

Impact	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	All
Purchased or mortgaged-in land	6.8	12.2	14	11
Purchased other farm or non-farm productive assets (including land)	13.4	2.4	6	7.4
Improvement in housing	52.3	53.6	62	56
Purchased consumer durables	59.1	31.7	44	55.1
Repayment of debt and credit from money lenders and informal sources	22.7	14.6	26	21.1
Reduced debt and credit from moneylenders and informal sources	22.7	4.9	18	15.2
Higher levels of consumption especially during lean seasons	30.2	19.5	12	20.6
Higher expenditure on children's education and health	34.1	29.3	38	33.8
Education of children and family members	52.3	58.5	50	53.6
Built own house in the village or other places	0	7.3	8	5.1
Helped family members to establish small enterprises like shops	9.1	4.9	6	6.7
Helped in the medical treatment of family members	56.8	53.7	48	52.8
Financed the marriage ceremony of family members	13.4	21.9	18	17.9
Organised a religious ceremony	29.6	21.9	32	27.8
Helped the extended family members in their emergency situation	25	4.9	38	22.6
Others	6.8	2.4	6	5.1

Whether or not the uses identified by receiving households correspond with those identified by the migrants is seen in the tracer survey results presented later in the paper.

When split by skill/unskilled labour some differences are immediately apparent. Skilled workers were much better paid and they spent their remittances on improving their houses, buying or renting in land, education and healthcare. The proportion of unskilled workers identifying these end uses was lower. However, more unskilled workers identified the purchase of consumer durables, the repayment of debts and improved consumption during the lean season as a use of remittances.

Table 12: Uses of Remittances (% workers) by Skill of the Workers (multiple choice question so total can exceed 100%).

Impact	Unskilled	Skilled
Purchased or mortgaged-in land	9.7	23.3
Purchased other farm or non-farm productive assets (including land)	5.4	13.4
Improvement in housing	52.3	73.6
Purchased consumer durables	59.1	39.7
Repayment of debt and credit from money lenders and informal sources	22.7	15.6
Reduced debt and credit from money lenders and informal sources	22.7	4.9
Higher levels of consumption especially during lean seasons	23.2	15.5
Higher expenditure on children's education and health	29.1	49.3
Education of children and family members	47.3	63.5
Built own house in the village or other places	0.0	13.3
Helped family members to establish small enterprises like shops	4.1	12.9
Helped in the medical treatment of family members	45.8	64.7
Financed the marriage ceremony of family members	13.4	26.9
Organised a religious ceremony	23.6	37.9
Helped the extended family members in their emergency situation	19.0	31.9
Others (specify)	6.8	2.4

(Source: survey data, 2013)

11. Health Risks

Despite these economic gains through migration, there were a number of risks that migrants had to contend with. Health and accident risks in the all three firms were extremely high and workers reported not being issued with protective gear. The employers on the other hand said workers do not wear the masks even if they are issued because they find them uncomfortable. It was impossible to verify either position because of the short time available to the team and the sensitivity of the issue. In the interviews with workers, several health problems and risks were identified with exposure to smoke and building dust mentioned most frequently, leading to problems such as asthma, persistent coughs and lung damage. Accidents and injuries were also commonplace. Shekhar expressed his fear of being injured:

Work place involves some risks. Until now, I have not been hurt from accident. But, two of my friends were seriously hurt when concrete machine they were operating blew all of a sudden. The contractor took them to hospital, but the health problem has persisted. I sometime fear that I could be the next victim. There is no contract and I do not know whether there is any insurance or not.

Table 13: Health Problems Identified by Migrant Workers

Problem	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	All
Dust particles and pollution	48	78	62	62.7
Accidents	30	40	36	35.3
Eye strain	20	14	12	15.3

These findings are corroborated by secondary sources. Doctors at Dhaulagiri Zonal Hospital treat construction workers for eye and skin problems as well as respiratory ailments including pneumonia, bronchitis and fibrosis due to the inhalation of particle dust. According to Dr Poudel, Medical Superintendent at DZH, these health problems become chronic because workers do not seek medical help either because they cannot afford it, cannot access it on account of being migrants, or are not aware of the dangers of their condition.[12]

Only 4 per cent of the workers in the type 1 international company, 12 per cent in type 2 road company and 16 per cent in the type 3 private company knew that work sites have to be inspected by government for the safety of the workers. Only 26 per cent of them knew that the inspections were conducted by an official from the Labour Office, and a few workers thought that it was an NGO responsible for the inspections. Only two of the workers from the type 3 firm remembered that they were interviewed by inspectors.

While workers in type 1 and type 3 firms did not always have health insurance, the research team was pleasantly surprised to find that nearly all workers in the road building type 2 firm had health insurance arranged for them by the company. The reason appears to be that the type 2 firm is a government run firm and it had to national directives to provide workers with health insurance. How effective these policies were in case of injury or sickness was not clear. Tellingly, workers did not know the amount of premiums paid for them or what benefits they were entitled to.

12. Upward mobility

Although opportunities for formal training were highly limited, a majority of workers in all three firms said that they were able to acquire skills on the job, which would improve their earning capacity in the long term. The skills that could be acquired in this way are shown in the table

[12] Source: Republica. Published on 2013-03-20, 04:06:16 p.1

below. Women never progressed beyond being manual workers due to strongly entrenched cultural stereotypes of what they are capable of and should be doing.

Table 14: Skills that Were Acquired on the Job by Type of Firm

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	All
Carpentry	18	2	2	7.3
Steel bending	0	0	0	0
Concrete work	10	0	14	8
Electric welding	2	0	0	0.7
Scaffolding	0	0	6	2
Electrician	2	0	2	1.3
Crane operation	0	4	0	1.3
Signalman	0	0	0	0
Painting	18	0	0	6
Plumbing	8	0	0	2.7
Masonry	14	14	14	14

(Source: survey data, 2013)

13. Policies for the Welfare of Construction workers in Nepal

The main law governing the welfare of workers in construction is Labour Act 1991 (amended in 1998). Some of the provisions of the Act that relate to construction workers are included in Clause 46:

- The management (owner) is responsible for providing all the equipment to be used at construction site.
- The management is responsible for accommodation, food supplies and potable water that include temporary construction sites with more than 50 labourers at work.
- The management is responsible for ensuring appropriate accidental insurance for workers at site. They are also responsible for ensuring the safety of the workers on site. Personal protective equipment (helmets, boots, gloves etc.) is to be made available to the workers.

Similarly, some of the provisions of Clause 84 are relevant to construction workers:

- The outsourced workers and staff are to be paid in accordance with the written contacts or else within seven days from the date of engagement to the works (in case of verbal contacts).
- In case of default in payments by the employer, the worker can lodge a complaint with the District Labour Office (DLO) or with the Office of the Chief District officer (CDO).
- For the complaint lodged, the DLO or the CDO will summon the culprit within 15 days and can force him to deposit the due payments.

There are other provisions in the Act that could be made applicable to the construction industry. For instance, the Labour Regulation prohibits employment of child labour and night-shift duties for women, it allows foreign nationals to work for two years (renewable) and mandates compulsory record keeping and a set of wage and welfare arrangements. The welfare arrangements include compensation for accidents and 'incapacity to work', social benefits available through the Provident Fund, medical facilities, insurance and public holidays.

The Construction Enterprises Act (CEA) 1998 and its corresponding Construction Enterprise Regulation 1999 is the most recent legal framework that governs the construction industry of Nepal. The purpose of the Act has been stated 'to ensure quality of public works through strengthening and development of construction enterprises'. Under this Act there are two related institutions that look after construction enterprises and construction workers' welfare: Construction Enterprise Development Council (CEDC) and Executive Committee (EC). The former is responsible for the regulation of construction companies and the latter for the welfare of the workers. As per clause 17 of the Act, the Construction Enterprise Development Fund (CEDF) has been created to facilitate, support and provide services to the construction firms towards improvement of work efficiency and quality of public works. The Regulation (1999) has made it mandatory for all construction firms to contribute 0.1 per cent of the contract amount to the fund. In addition to contractors, HMG as well as other national and international organisations are expected to contribute to the fund.

Despite these legal provisions, the condition of construction workers is far from satisfactory. A study conducted in 2006 by GEFONT (General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions) and CUPPEC (Central Union of Painters, Plumbers, Electro and Construction Workers, Nepal), a trade union, reveals that even the most basic labour rights are not honoured. For example, only 4.8 per cent of workers had a written contract. Only 4.9 per cent were paid the minimum wage, 11.5 per cent had a weekly day off, 11.5 per cent had public holidays, 14.3 per cent were given leave for funerals, 6.5 per cent were given leave to visit home, 15.4 per cent were given sick leave and 13 per cent had maternity leave (GEFONT and CUPPEC 2006).

Nepal has active Trade Unions but these are mired in factionalism. The three major trade unions for construction workers are: Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC), GEFONT and DECONT (Democratic Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions). There are also associations such as the Nepal Building Construction Workers Association (NBCWA), Nepal Woodworkers Association (NWWA) and Nepal Electrical Workers Association (NEWA). There was very little awareness about the existence of these unions and associations among the workers in the sample. Only 32 per cent of the sample in the international company, 8 per cent in the national company and 46 per cent in the private company knew that there was a union. Membership rates were poor: 21 per cent in type 1, 10 per cent in type 2, and 24 per cent in type 3. When asked why they were not members of the union, a majority said they were not interested, but on further probing some said that they did not want to jeopardise their job by becoming a union member.

Only a negligible proportion of workers knew about various Acts and Provisions related to construction workers. For example, in total, 13 per cent workers were aware of the Labour Act, 2.7 per cent of the Minimum Wage Rate, 2.7 per cent of the Provident Fund, 2 per cent of the Group Insurance for Construction Workers, 3.4 per cent of Factory and Factory Workers Act, 4 per cent of the Bonus Act, and 7.4 per cent of the Disability Compensation. The response across the different types of companies was similar. In case of a grievance, a large proportion of workers (almost half in total) preferred to approach the contractor, followed by the employer (30 per cent of workers).

14. Impacts of Migration on Households at Origin

A 'tracer' study was conducted in the two villages of Dolalghat, a typical 'hill' village in Kavre district, and Inurwa, a typical 'plains' (Terai) village in Saptari district. Dolalghat is a five-hour drive from Kathmandu. It is a predominantly agrarian society dependent on high risk and low productivity farming. There is a long history of migration to Kathmandu. The plains village of Inurwa is also agricultural and is an overnight bus journey to Kathmandu. Migration patterns from the plains are more diversified to nearby cities including some cities in India.

The two villages have marked differences in terms of their social structure and land distribution. Inurwa village (VDC) is located just six kilometres from the district headquarters and connected by an all-weather road. Access to district facilities is good. According to the 2011 Census, the village has 647 households with a population of 3918 (1942 male and 1976 female). The overall literacy rate was 47.21 per cent (63.9 per cent male and 29.8 per cent female) in 2001 (District Profile prepared by DDC based on 2001 census report). The average land holding in the village was 0.6 ha (12 ropani), of which more than 95 per cent was *khet* (lowland – paddy land), which was intensively cultivated. But there was also high disparity in land ownership, with only a few households owning small plots of land. The village is a predominantly a Hindu village (90 per cent of the households) with the majority belonging to the broad category of Madhesi, who are the indigenous population of the Terai region and include specific castes like Teli, Kurmi, Thakur, and Koiri. The remaining households were mainly Muslim. Only two households were the Madhesi (Terai) Janajati, Kushbadiya and Pathatkatta. All these Madhesi groups are at the lower end of the wealth distribution.

The hill village (Dolalghat VDC) is located at some distance from the headquarters, but a high way linking Kathmandu and the China border passes through it, giving people access to the local market near the river. The village has a variable terrain and land quality, with mostly sloping and *Pakho* (dry) land. Cultivation was therefore difficult and mainly for subsistence. There was some paddy cultivation in the foothills. The village is dominated by non-Hindu Janajati and, within them, the Tamang, who have a long history of migration. While there are no Brahmins there are many Chhetris/Thakuris, who control much of the land. The overall literacy rate is 43 per cent (56 per cent male and 30 per cent female). Thus the literacy rate for women is relatively high in this village compared to the Terai village, even though the overall literacy rate is higher in the Terai village.

The households selected for the study belonged to a similar economic class (in terms of land holding) ten years prior to the research, so that the effects of migration on wealth status could be observed. There were differences in the type of land owned and access to facilities, but these could not be controlled for effectively. They were predominantly from households at the poorer end of the distribution with about 0.5 ha (10 ropani) land, on average.

Table 15: **Land Ownership in Ropani (1 ha = 20 ropani) around 2003**

	Land area owned	Land area leased in	Total Area Operated
Construction migrant	10.6	0.0	10.6
Other wage worker migrants	10.3	0.0	10.3
Non-migrant	9.3	4.2	13.5
Village differences			
Dolalghat all households	*11.5*	*1.6*	*12.8*
Inruwa all households	*12.8*	*1.8*	*14.4*
All	10.1	1.7	12.2

(Source: survey data, 2013)

There was little buying and selling of land according to the interviews. Remittances had stimulated the land market a bit but only three households with migrants (two construction migrants and one other) had purchased land within the previous year. The father of a skilled migrant from the Terai village who had recently bought land with remittances notes how this was made possible:

> Rajiv (name changed) gives his savings to me and I use that money for educating his brothers, his six-year-old son, and in meeting all the clothing and other needs. We produce rice which is sufficient for about nine months of the year, and we also generate a small income from vegetables and milk. We can sell these products in the market in district headquarters. Last year, Rajiv might have sent us in total Rs 50,000, and I used a part of it in buying a half Kattha of khet (farm) land in the village.[13] I had some money saved from his remittance in the past three years.

Non-migrant households were more likely to own animals compared to migrant households because of the availability of the necessary labour. Non-migrants had 3.6 heads of draught animals (cows or buffaloes), whereas migrants had only 1.9 heads of animals and construction migrant had 1.6 heads of these animals. Migrant households tended to keep more small

[13] 1 hectare = 1.45 *Bigha*, 1 *Bigha* = 20 *Kattha*

animals such as goats. Comparing the two villages, it is seen that the Terai village had more drought animals, cows and buffaloes due to the ease of grazing them on a flat terrain. These animals were often kept for small-scale commercial milk production. The hill village, on the other hand, had more goats and chickens, raised mainly for home consumption.

A short questionnaire survey and interviews were held with 60 households of whom 12 were migrant construction workers, 18 were migrants into other manual work, and the remaining 30 were non-migrants. Other types of migrants were included to determine the broader impacts of migration for manual work on families left behind. Non-Migrant households were included as a control group. As many of the migrants themselves were away, the respondents were often the spouses, children or parents of the migrants.

15. Socially Differentiated Migration Opportunity

Migration is known to be a selective process and a number of studies in other parts of South Asia show that migrant construction work is strongly correlated with being relatively poor, poorly educated, and belonging to socially excluded communities (Guerin 2013; Pattenden 2012; Picherit 2012). In both study villages, it was the poorer communities who were heavily represented in this stream. These were typically castes, tribes and religious minorities who were already part of the labouring class in the traditional village society but who had diversified as new opportunities emerged beyond the village.

A closer look at the social structure of the two villages sheds light on who migrates for construction work and why. The hill village is typical of its kind, with wealth concentrated in the hands of the Hindu Chhetris and Brahmins. Below them are the Janajati or diverse groups of indigenous people of Tibeto-Burmese descent, who are subsistence farmers with very small plots of sloping and rainfed land. This broad category includes the Tamang, who have a history of occupational diversification and off-farm work, traditionally combining peasant farming with off-farm 'coolie' work such as rickshaw pulling, water carrying and hewing of wood (Landon 1928, cited in March 1998: 221). They have remained excluded from progressing beyond this status through progressive marginalisation in the village economy by 'a complex system of tenurial rights and rents on land, myriad other taxations in kind, a discriminatory legal code based on caste and especially, elaborate corvee labour obligations' (March 1998: 221). The Tamang have remained at the lower end of the social and economic hierarchy and continue to have very small land holdings and low levels of education, but, as we argue later in the paper, migration is bringing about changes in their social and economic status. The Tamang are now heavily represented in construction migration flows from the village and were well represented in the sample in Kathmandu. Undoubtedly, selection through recruitment agents has played a role in generating this profile of migration. There are others in the village who are accorded an even lower status than the Tamang and these are the Dalits, who have been excluded from such migration opportunities due to stereotypes and perceptions among recruiters and employers of their inability to undertake heavy manual work. They are usually landless and depend on wage labour opportunities within the village and surrounding markets.

The social structure of Tamang and other Tibeto-Burmese Janajatis is much less hierarchical than Hindu society, not only between different sub-groups but also between the sexes. Women belong to these groups have greater social and economic status vis-a-vis men compared to Hindu women (Bennet 2005). One manifestation of this is that the migration of women is not looked down upon in the same way that it is in the Hindu communities of the plains. In fact, women migrate independently of men in gangs that take on certain types of work such as concrete roofing. There are recruiters who recruit women-only gangs for such work, moving from one construction project to another in the larger cities of Kathmandu and Pokhra. The payment is based on the job rather than on hours worked and this can work in favour of the migrants, if they have a say in fixing the price and the agent does not take too large a cut of the profits. These gangs of women are often in the city for extended periods of time, living in informal settlements while they are away from home. Women also migrate for other kinds of work, including carpet weaving, as well as to work as guards in security companies, a job that would typically be associated with men in Hindu and Muslim communities.

Class divisions were sharper in the Terai village, where land was concentrated across a few households and where there were wide disparities along a number of social and economic indicators including education. The majority of the population was classified as Madhesi, which is a catchall term for those who live in the plains. There is a marked hierarchy in Madhesi society, with the Madhesi Dalits being the poorest of the poor, almost always landless and living on *ailani* land (government land with no property rights). The majority of poor Madhesi had long depended on local agricultural labour on the farms of feudal lords and migration has provided a source of income away from stifling patron-client relationships.

There are cultural restrictions on the participation of Madhesi women in migration and indeed none of the migrants (both construction and wage) were women. Leaving the home to undertake manual work was not culturally acceptable for the Madhesis and did not conform to stereotypes of femininity and decency. Furthermore, men also took decisions related to the spending of remittances in the receiving household. This would usually be the father of the migrant male, but other men such as brothers-in-law would also take on these functions. Only in the rare cases where families were nuclear rather than joint was the flow of remittances directly to the woman. Despite these structural inequalities in the ability of women to participate in migration or influence the way migration earnings are spent, a shift was observed in the village towards the education of girls, which we discuss further under education.

16. Annual Household Income and Expenditure Pattern

On average, the incomes of construction migrant households were highest, followed by other migrant households, with the non-migrant households having the lowest incomes. In 2012, construction migrant households earned Rs. 102,797 ($1142), other migrant households earned

Rs. 93,618 ($1040), and non-migrant households earned Rs. 84,162 ($953).[14] Remittances contributed about 43 per cent of income of the migrant households. Non-migrant households derived a greater proportion of their income from wage labour in and around the village. The annual household expenditure was statistically significantly higher among migrants as compared to non-migrants (Rs 94,000 for construction migrants, Rs 88,000 for the other migrants, and Rs 83,000 for non-migrants).

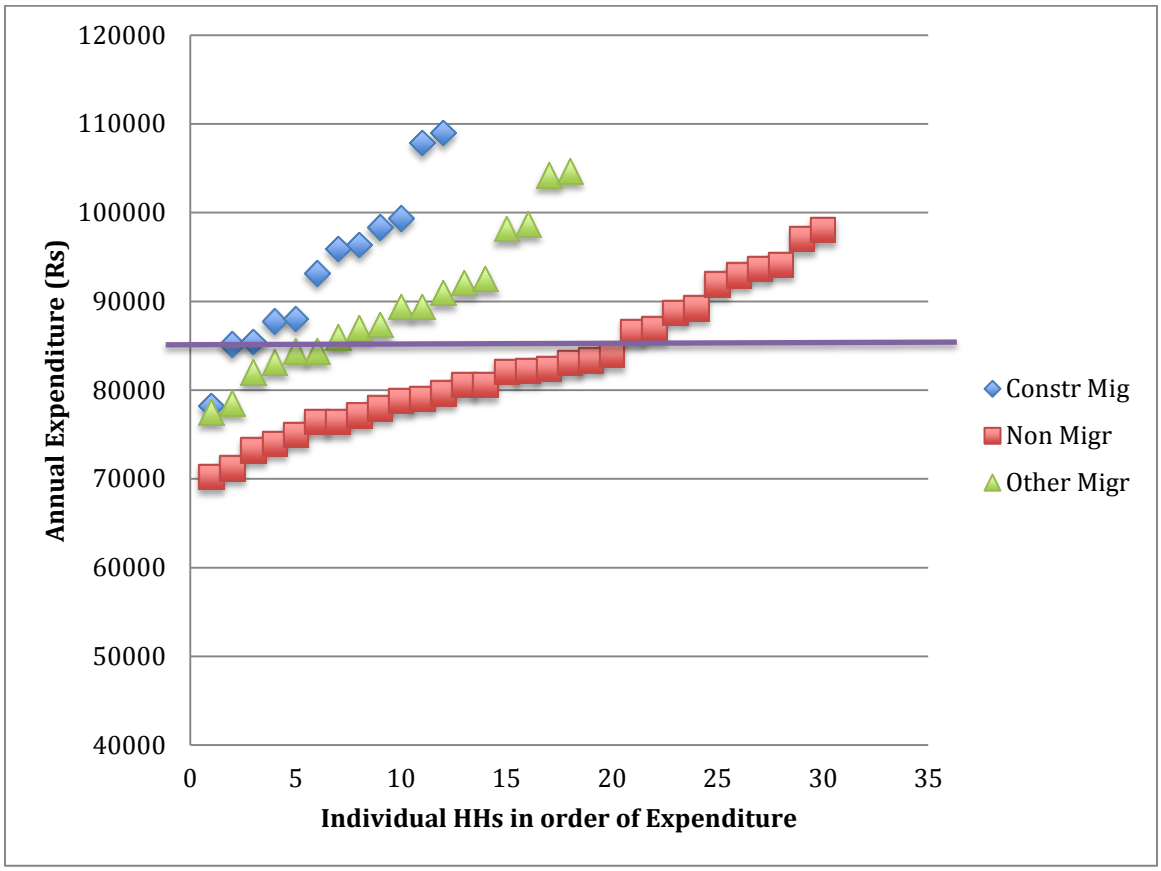
Table 16: Annual Household Income and Expenditure Patterns in 2012

Income sources	Construction migrants		Other Migrants		Non-migrants	
	Amount (Rs)	%	Amount (Rs)	%	Amount (Rs)	%
Wages	24520	23.9	29240	31.2	40230	47.8
Remittances	43000	41.8	41000	43.8	0	0.0
Non-agricultural income	5714	5.6	7886	8.4	8,369	9.9
Value of agri production	29563	28.8	15492	16.5	35563	42.3
Total Income	102797	100	93618	100.0	84162	100.0
Expenses for consumer goods	53926	57.5	51725	58.5	48245	58.23
Fuel and others	5624	6.0	5394	6.1	4548	5.49
Non-food	34173	36.5	32347	35.4	30064	36.28
Total expenses/year	93723	100	89466	100.0	82857	100.00
Saving	9,074		4,152		1305	

(Source: Survey data, 2013

[14] The exchange rate was roughly 90 Nepali rupees to a US dollar in mid 2013.

Figure 2: Distribution of HH Expenditure by Migration Status and Type in Both Villages Against the Consumption Poverty Line (Rs 87000)



Plotting the distribution of the three different types of households (x axis plots households in order of expenditure) shows that most of the construction migrant households are above the poverty line. In the case of other migrant households, more are above the poverty line than below. Non-migrant households on the other hand are mainly below the poverty line. The reader is reminded that both migrant and non-migrant households were chosen from roughly comparable landholding brackets ten years before the study, using records held at the VDC. The consumption expenditure poverty line is roughly Rs 87,000 per household per year based on based on the NLSS III survey.[15]

17. Variation in Income and Expenditure Between the Villages

The average household income in the hill village (Table 17) was Rs 105,379 for households with migrant construction workers, Rs 92,878 for households with other migrants, and Rs 85,572 for households with no migrants. The average expenditure for these three categories was Rs

[15] CBS (2012) Poverty in Nepal. Kathmandu. (p. 16).

97,958, Rs 92,049, and Rs 85,056 respectively. Taking the government's data on consumption expenditure and poverty line in 2010/11 (based on NLSS III survey), the poverty line was Rs 89,000 per household per annum. Thus households with migrant construction workers were above the poverty line, households with other migrants were around the poverty line, and non-migrants were below it. However, the differences between construction migrants and other migrants for total expenditure were not statistically significant.

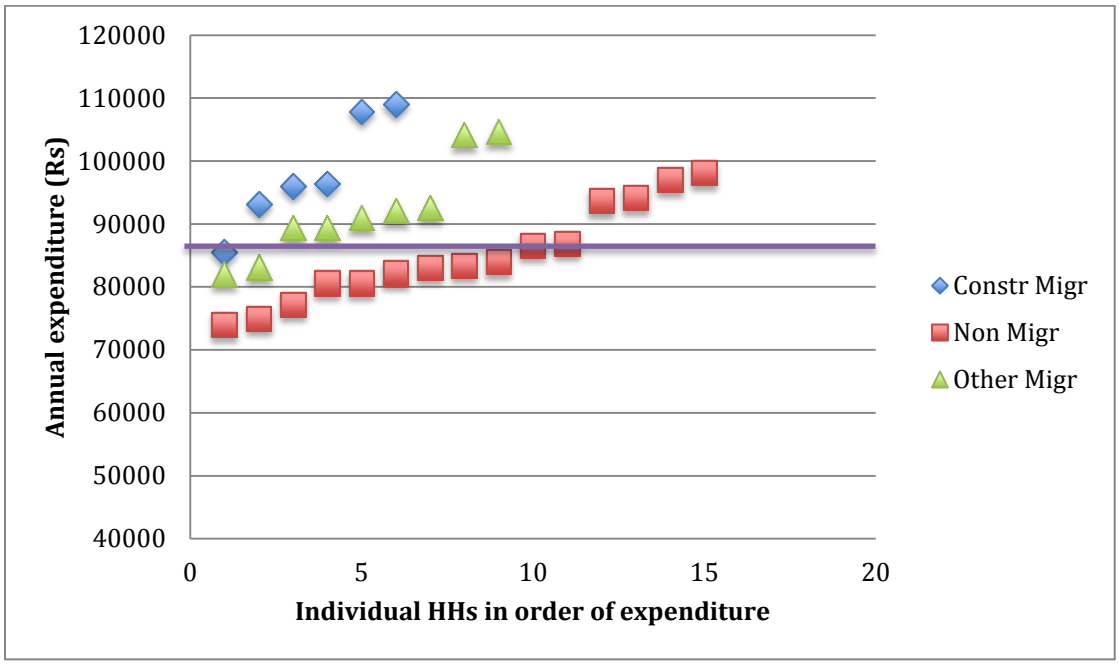
Table 17: Annual Household Income and Expenditure Patterns in 2012 for the hill village (n= sample size)

Income sources	Construction migrants (n=6)		Other Migrants (n=9)		Non-migrants (n=15)	
	Amount (Rs)	%	Amount (Rs)	%	Amount (Rs)	%
Wages	25120	23.84	30246	32.35	39420	46.07
Remittances	43500	41.28	40362	41.71	0	0.00
Non-agricultural income	8600	8.16	8378	7.87	9462	11.06
Value of agri production	28159	26.72	13892	18.07	36690	42.88
Total Income	**105379**	**100**	**92878**	**100.00**	**85572**	**100.00**
Expenses for consumer goods	56523	59.98	52914	57.56	49230	57.88
Fuel and others	6219	6.01	5738	6.20	4762	5.60
Non-food	35216	34.01	33397	36.23	31064	36.52
Total expenses/year	97958	100	92049	100.00	85056	100.00
Saving	7421		829		516	

(Source: Survey data, 2013, and analysis by the researchers)

The distribution of households against the poverty line shows that all but one migrant construction worker household were above it. Most households with other migrants were also above the poverty line but more households with no migrants were below the poverty line than above it.

Figure 3: Distribution of HH by Migrant Status and Expenditure in the Hill Village Against the Consumption Poverty Line (Rs 89000)



In the case of the Terai village (Table 18), total household income for households with construction workers was Rs 100215, Rs 94337 for households with other migrants, and Rs 82752 for households with no migrants. Total expenditure was Rs 89496, Rs 86885 and Rs 80658 for the three categories respectively. Taking the government's data on consumption expenditure and poverty line in 2010/11 (based on NLSS III survey), a consumption expenditure of Rs 16,856 per capita per year, or Rs 84280 per household per year, was considered as the poverty line for the eastern Terai. Although this appears to suggest that households with migrant construction workers in the Terai are well over the poverty line and households with other kinds of migrants are just above the poverty line, the differences between them were not statistically significant. Households with no migrants are well below the poverty line.

Thus comparing the two villages, it appears that households with migrants, construction workers or other kinds of labourers, are better off than non-migrant households. Non-migrants in both the Terai and Hills were poorer than migrants, in terms of land ownership, agricultural income and absence of remittances. Their main income comes from agricultural and non-agricultural labouring within the village and nearby towns/markets.

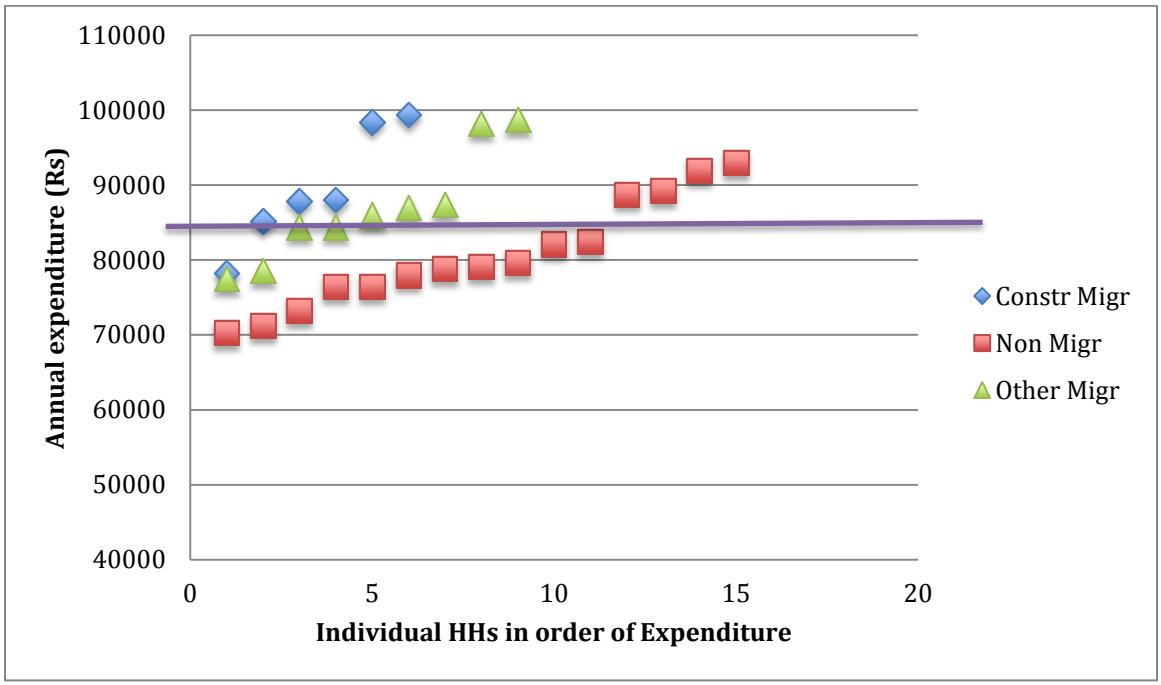
Table 18: Annual Household Income and Expenditure Patterns in 2012 for the Terai Village

Income sources	Construction migrants (n=6)		Other Migrants (n=9)		Non-migrants (n=15)	
	Amount (Rs)	%	Amount (Rs)	%	Amount (Rs)	%
Wages	23920	23.96	28234	30.05	41040	49.53
Remittances	42500	42.32	41617	45.89	0	0.00
Non-agricultural income	2828	3.04	7394	8.93	7276	8.74
Value of agri production	30967	30.88	17092	14.93	34436	41.72
Total Income	**100215**	**100.00**	**94337**	**100.00**	**82752**	100.00
Expenses for consumer goods	51337	55.01	50536	59.44	47260	58.58
Fuel and others	5029	5.99	5052	6.00	4334	5.38
Non-food	33130	38.99	31297	34.57	29064	36.04
Total expenses/year	89496	100	86885	100	80658	100
Saving	10719		7452		2094	

(Source: Survey data, 2013)

This distribution of households against the poverty line in the Terai village also shows that construction migrant households are better off than the other two types.

Figure 4: Distribution of HH by Migrant Status and Expenditure in the Terai Village Against the Poverty Line (Rs 85000)



While migrant households are clearly better off than non-migrant households, we cannot assume causality between migration and poverty reduction. We must be cautious of endogeneity affecting the results because migration is a selective process and migrants are not representatives of the general population that they are drawn from. Migrant households may possess characteristics that give them an advantage over non-migrant households. There are econometric methods to address this issue but these are beyond the scope of this enquiry. What we can rely on here are people's subjective accounts of how migration has impacted on their wellbeing. While most agree that they have benefitted economically, they also highlight the health risks of migration. But despite these costs and risks they feel that migration is worth pursuing to improve their chances of exiting poverty and low social status in the long term. It has also been shown in analyses based on successive rounds of the Nepal Living Standards survey that households with migrants have experienced a reduction in poverty. The official poverty rate in Nepal is about 25 per cent now, down from about 42 per cent in 1995. This is revealed in the following Table.

Table 19: Remittance Flow in Nepal in 1995/96, 2003/04 (Nepal Living Standard Survey, NLSS I and II), 2008 (Labour Force Survey), and 2010/11 (NLSS III)

Description	1995/96	2003/04	2008	2010/11
Per cent households receiving remittances	23.4	31.9	30.0	55.8
Average amount of remittance per recipient household (nominal Rs)	15,160	34,698	65,755	80,425
Share of remittances (per cent):				
From Nepal	44.7	23.5	16.8	19.7
From India	32.9	23.2	13.4	
From other countries	22.4	53.3	69.8	80.3
Share of remittance on the income of recipient households	26.6	35.4	-	30.9
Per capita remittance amount for all Nepal (nominal Rs)	625	2,100	4,042	9,245
Total remittances received in Nepal (nominal) in billion rupees	12.9	46.3	185*	259
Poverty rate	**42**	**32**	**-**	**25.16**

Sources: CBS 2008:165, CBS 2012c: 80 *Estimated with the assumption that population in 2008 was 27 million.

18. Uses of Remittances

While the hill and Terai migrants sent, on average, similar amount of remittances, the average household income in the hill village was higher on account of the less skewed land distribution and larger plot size. However, the expenditure incurred by the hill village migrant households was also higher (Tables 17 and 18) because of higher prices for food and other daily necessities. As a result, their saving rate was slightly lower compared to the Terai village.

In both the villages, remittances are mainly invested in land, house improvement, durables (cooking stoves and bicycles) and consumption. In both villages, construction migrant households had higher incomes due to remittances, and invested more in, or consumed more of, food and non-food commodities.

Interviews with the households of migrants suggest that Tamang women in the hill village have more autonomy in deciding how household incomes as well as remittances are spent. This is in keeping with their overall more equal position in the Tibeto-Burmese indigenous communities. A father of a Tamang construction worker describes how his daughter-in-law is able to manage her money independently of him:

> Before going to work in Kathmandu six months ago he (the son) gave Rs 2,000 to me, and Rs 3,000 to his wife. My son gives money to us only occasionally just to buy some necessities, and he gives the rest of the money to his wife. I do not know how his wife spends money. But, I have used this to buy clothes for myself and my wife (his mother). His family (wife and two daughters) stays with us but they also maintain their own accounts.

The wife of another Tamang construction worker describes a similar pattern in her household:

> I have liberty as to spending the money that I get from him (the migrant husband). But, we talk about the expenses when we talk through phone. There is no friction in the family that I use the money. My in-laws do not make fuss on this. They get small amount of money from time to time and we look after them as well. So, they do not complain much about it.

Women's greater control on remittances in the hills may have resulted in more spending on household consumption, especially food. However, this was also partly due to the fact that food is more expensive in the hills. The research team observed that girls were better looked after in the households that they visited in the hills, but more in-depth research would be required to objectively state whether this holds true for the entire community.

In the Terai village, where women were more subjugated both within and outside the home, it was not surprising to find that they had little say in how remittances were spent. Remittances from men were received by a male member of the household, usually the father or brother of the migrant. The wife of the skilled construction worker Rajiv (whose father had bought land with remittances) said:

> I do not know much about my husband's work and income. I was married here eight years ago, which was arranged by my parents. I gave birth to two sons. I work in the household and have not gone to Kathmandu. My husband gives a small amount of money when he comes home, but all his money is given to his father. I do not know how much is given and how that is being used. It is my in-law who makes decisions and I think he makes good use of money. My in-law looks after our sons also. I do all the household work and have gone to market only rarely.

Only in the rare cases where the family was nuclear, would the women control remittances. Yet, somewhat unexpectedly, there was greater investment of remittances in the education of girls in the Terai village, a fact that we discuss in more detail below.

18.1 Education

Educating one's children was identified as one of the major reasons for migration in interviews in Kathmandu and the schooling pattern in migrant-sending households suggested that these aspirations were being realised to some extent. There were clear differences in the type of schooling by migration status and in both villages a majority of households with migrant construction workers or other kinds of migrant workers sent their children mainly to private schools (Table 20). Interviews show that migrants prefer to send their children to 'private' boarding schools as they believe the education is superior. While most children are enrolled in free government schools in Nepal, this does not guarantee an education because of the variable quality of government schools. A private education is perceived to be a route to a better job

and investing in private schools was identified as an important use of migrant earnings. Parental aspirations about education appeared to be changing due to migration and exposure to city values and lifestyles. Although an increasing number of non-migrant households also sent their children to private schools the number was relatively smaller. The Terai village households in general were found to send their children to private schools more often than government schools. One reason for this is that the Terai village is close to the district headquarters where a number of private schools are situated.

Curiously, there seems to have been an increase in the schooling of girls in the Terai village even though gender disparities here were greater than in the Hill village. A number of factors appear to have contributed to this change, including government programmes, exposure to urban values and lifestyles, as well as extra household income with the inflow of remittances. The additional funds may have released girls from their care duties and/or made it possible for parents to send both female and male offspring to school. It is not clear whether the effect is only for enrolment or that it represents a real commitment to educating daughters. Furthermore, it is not possible to say whether there is a direct link between migration and the increased education of girls, as there are government programmes that specifically target female enrolment in schools, but interviews suggested that there has been a change in attitudes towards the education of girls as a result of migration. However, as both migrants and non-migrants have school-age girls enrolled in school, it is difficult to see the impact of migration and remittance without a detailed study on what actually encouraged them to enrol.

Table 20: Schooling of the Children (% children)

Migrant types	Terai village			Hill village		
	Government	Private	Others	Government	Private	Others
Construction migrant	15	75	0	35	75	0
Other wage-migrant	25	68	4	31	68	4
Non-migrant	35	63	2	43	55	2
Total	32	66	2	32	66	2

(Source: survey data, 2013).

In both villages, construction migrants spent more on education as compared to other migrants and non-migrants. A statistical test to determine the significance of these differences by comparing the differences in means between the three migrant types for table 21 and 22 show that all are significantly different at the 99 per cent confidence level. For the Terai village the uniform mean between construction migrants and wage migrants is only statistically different at 95% confidence level and the same applies for the total expenditure between these two groups in the hill village. But these are still significant differences.

However, the average expenditure on education was lower in the Terai on account of lower school fees there (Table 21 and 22). This is mainly the result of locational advantage of the Terai where all prices are slightly lower than in the hills.

Table 21: Expenditure in Educating Children (Rs last year) in the Terai

	Tuition fee	Uniform	Books/ stationery	Others including transport	Total
Construction migrant	5103	1173	2193	300	8769
Other wage-migrant	4023	1008	1260	100	6391
Non-migrant	583	450	249	450	1732
All	2519	762	941	315	4537

Source: Survey data, 2013

Table 22: Expenditure in Educating Children (Rs last year) in the Hills

	Tuition fee	Uniform	Books/stationery	Other including transport	Total
Construction migrant	6153	1953	2375	270	10751
Other wage-migrant	4215	1600	1470	86	7371
Non-migrant	609	642	249	482	1982
All	2800	1192	1041	321	5353

Source: Household Survey, 2013 (analysis by researchers)

18.2 Assets

More house building, purchase and renovation activity was evident in the Terai village. Of the twelve houses built by migrants in the two study villages in the last five years, nine were built in the Terai village (six by construction migrants and three by other wage migrants) and three in the hill village (all by construction migrants). Remittances, savings and loans were used to build the houses. In case of the six houses constructed by non-migrants in the last five years, four were in the Terai and two in the hills. Of the ten houses that were purchased in the last five years by the surveyed households, six were purchased by migrants (of these four were in the Terai and two in the hills). Again a combination of remittances, sale of asset and loans were used to purchase assets.

In terms of ownership of consumer durables, construction migrants and other migrants in the Terai village owned more durables such as TVs, radios and computers, probably because of better connectivity and electricity connections. Use of gas for cooking is more common in Terai, as there is regular supply of gas, and remittances and transportation facilities helped in buying

gas stoves. Tables, chairs and clocks were also common purchases, particularly among the construction migrant households.

18.3 Debt

It is interesting to note that proportionately more migrants had debt as compared to non-migrants. However, contrary to narratives of migrants being trapped in debt, the interviews suggest that most of these were taken to invest in assets or social functions and take advantage of remittances. In fact, households with migrants were more able to borrow because they were regarded as more creditworthy on account of their external source of income. Due to the remote location and fewer lenders, the hill migrants faced higher interest rates (36-50 per cent compared to 30-45 per cent in the plains) and had slightly higher debts than the Terai migrants. For example, the average outstanding loan of a construction migrant was Rs 133,000 in the hills and Rs 95,000 in Terai; for other migrants these figures were Rs 25,000 and Rs 15,000 respectively. For non-migrants, the average outstanding loan amounted to Rs 13,000 in the hills village and Rs 9,000 in Terai.

Households with migrants, and especially migrant construction workers in Terai, are clearly better off than their hill counterparts, whilst both are better off than non-migrants. But we cannot attribute these differences to migration alone as migrant selectivity and the observable and unobservable differences in migrant and non-migrant households may have had an effect. The differences in the overall level of development, access to facilities and government services may have also played a role in leveraging the positive impact of migration and remittances.

While much has been said about the deleterious impact of male migration on family life and women's work burden and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, the interviews suggested that seasonal rural-urban migration for construction work did not cause serious problems, particularly because migrants visited their homes frequently. In Tamang society, where women are already less subjugated because of their social structure, women left behind are highly influential in deciding how remittances are spent and how the household is represented in community matters.

19. Subjective Perceptions of Change in Socio-Economic Status

During the interviews at origin and destination, migrants and their families were asked to compare the situation before and after migration. In one set of questions, migrants were asked to compare their situation in the city with the village on a number of indicators. While most reported an improvement in the availability of work and income, they reported negatively on living conditions and security. While over 86 per cent of the unskilled workers in the study reported an improvement in earnings, a slightly lower percentage of 79 per cent skilled workers said their earnings had improved. A significant proportion also reported that they felt their freedom from social constraints had improved in the city. Migrants were aware of these trade-

offs and accepted poorer living conditions in the city in order to earn more and improve their living standards back at home.

Table 23: Comparison of Origin and Destination Conditions by Skill of Worker

Housing	**Better here**	**Same**	**Worse here**	**Difficult to say**
Skilled	12.8	16.7	**66.2**	5.8
Unskilled	22.1	24.3	**52.3**	0.0
Other living condition				
Skilled	26.4	16.7	**49.1**	5.3
Unskilled	33.3	17.2	**48.5**	1.3
Working condition				
Skilled	**97.2**	2.8	0	0
Unskilled	**95.3**	4.7	0	0
Employment availability				
Skilled	**99.0**	0	0	1.0
Unskilled	**98.0**	0	0	2.0
Remuneration/Earning				
Skilled	**79.1**	2.1	5.9	14.7
Unskilled	**86.6**	3.1	3.0	7.5
Feeling of security				
Skilled	15.9	30.1	22.6	32.3
Unskilled	21.2	43.4	19.0	21.2
Freedom - Social Constraints				
Skilled	32.0	21.0	5.0	42.0
Unskilled	36.1	37.2	3.7	25.8
Over all				
Skilled	**97.2**	1.1	0	1.7
Unskilled	**91.6**	4.2	2.0	2.2

(Source: survey data, 2013)

While migrants reported on the negative health impacts of poor working conditions at destination, village elders attributed a positive change in the health and sanitation situation of the village of origin. They said that the village has become cleaner and diseases such as cholera are almost gone, as migrants have adopted good habits for personal hygiene within their households. Although they recognise that government programmes, education and better nutrition have helped, the change in attitude towards hygiene and sanitation is attributed to migration. Non-migrants have emulated this behaviour resulting in wider impacts.

20. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study of migrant construction workers in three different types of firms in Kathmandu shows variations in recruitment, remuneration and access to welfare programmes. However, 'unskilled' workers at the lowest tiers of the workforce across all three firms were recruited and employed in similar conditions – written contracts were virtually non-existent, there was a high risk of injury and ill health and workers were not accessing welfare programmes or protective

legislation. Employers were not being prosecuted for breaking labour laws and the levels of awareness among workers about their rights and entitlements were extremely low. There appeared to be political indifference and social apathy towards the appalling working conditions and this is probably due to the fact that most unskilled workers are poor, poorly connected and poorly educated, which means that they cannot easily demand better working conditions. They also often belong to socially excluded castes and indigenous communities who are discriminated against and the caste/class dynamics with the employers, although arguably less marked than in rural areas, are nevertheless fraught with power inequalities.

Despite these hardships, most migrants and their families felt that such work offered them a better chance of changing their social and economic position at origin, through a better education for their children, improved consumption, investment in land, housing and durable assets.

Interviews in two source villages show that migration for construction work is an accessible occupation for poorer sections of society both in the hills and the Terai plains. The two dominant groups represented in the sample in Kathmandu were the Janajati and poor Madhesis who were traditionally subsistence farmers and agricultural labourers working for feudal landlords. Differences in social structure and the position of women in Tamang and Madhesi society have shaped different levels of participation in migratory work by women in the two villages. While Tamang women are known to be active involved in migrant construction work, Madhesi women are never seen in this occupation.

Income and expenditure figures as well as land and asset purchase show that there is a clear correlation between greater material wealth and migration. While this alone is not proof of causality, subjective assessments by the migrants and their families suggest that migration has brought about a change for the better, both in terms of what they can afford and also in other ways including improved hygiene and sanitation.

The costs and risks of migration must not be ignored or glossed over and there are clear lessons for policy including:

- The need for better implementation of existing labour laws.
- Creating awareness among workers about their rights.
- Helping migrants to access social services and protective legislation.
- Better regulating the recruitment industry so that the balance of power is tilted more in favour of migrants.

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About the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium

Migrating out of Poverty is a research programme consortium (RPC) funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions - and is located in five regions across Asia and Africa. The main goal of ***Migrating out of Poverty*** is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and well-being of impoverished migrants, their communities and countries, through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement. The RPC will also conduct analysis in order to understand the migration policy process in developing regions and will supplement the world renowned migration databases at the University of Sussex with data on internal migration.

The ***Migrating out of Poverty*** consortium is coordinated by the University of Sussex, and led by CEO Professor L. Alan Winters with Dr Priya Deshingkar as the Research Director. Core partners are: the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh; the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana; the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa; and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya.

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