

Migration and Politics in Nepal

Symposium organized by the international research project
“Nepal on the Move: Conflict, Migration and Stability”

www.nepalonthemove.dk

Department of Development Studies, Kathmandu University

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PREAMBLE

The armed conflict (1996-2006) had dramatic impact on economic development as well as social and political structures in Nepal leading to, among others, changing migration patterns. While migration within Nepal and from Nepal to India have been practiced for decades, migrant destinations such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia have attracted an increasing number of young Nepali's in search of better livelihoods. The issue of mobile populations, both within the country and across national boundaries poses particular challenges to the ongoing state restructuring process.

Acknowledging that there is an intimate relationship between poverty, conflict and migration, this Symposium seeks to understand how these mobility processes challenge and stimulate the current nation-building project. It addresses the implications of mobility for the new constitution in spe and explores notions of citizenship and civil rights that have traditionally been linked to place of birth or registered place of residence. Bearing in mind that a large and increasing proportion of the population is residing outside Nepal, it is important for the policy-makers of Nepal to adequately address these issues.

The Symposium will be organized around four themes. Each theme will be informed by a presentation, followed by input from discussants and general discussion. All four themes should be discussed in relation to migration and to the framing of the New Nepal, including the constitution process. The themes are as follows:

- **Migration and Rights.** This topic includes issues such as human rights, citizenship, and gender rights with a special focus on migrants and migration. A central question that this

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discussion will address, is the issue of how a new constitution may (or may not) define citizenship and democratic rights for Nepalis who are formally Nepalese citizens (in the sense that they do not have any other citizenship) but who are 1) living permanently or semi-permanently in Nepal but in a different place than where they are registered, 2) are living permanently, semi-permanently or temporarily outside Nepal. With estimates of 10-20% of the population migrating out of Nepal at a given time, the issue of how this large group of the population in the 18-45 age-group (and recently also senior citizens, i.e. ex-servicemen in the UK army) are included or excluded in the political process in Nepal is important. The paper and discussion will seek to address these questions.

- **Migration and National Coherence.** This theme includes ethnic groups, caste and ethnic identity, the role of nationalism, and the framing of democracy. The political process and the various interests involved in the discussion of whether or not Nepal should be a federal state, and if so whether or not the federation should be carved according to perceived ethnic boundaries or across them are discussed in this presentation. The paper will outline the different scenarios that are currently discussed (no federation, ethnicity-based federation, ‘geographic’ federation, a combination thereof) and their implications in a situation where the Nepali population (including ethnic groups in particular) are in a fast transition in terms of moving from their traditional geographic locations (rural-urban as well as transnational migration).
- **Migration and Social Coherence.** This theme focuses on the impact of migration at family level, including relations between generations, rural-urban migration and issues of social inclusion. Migration has in recent decades changed the composition of households along age- as well as gender-lines. There is a relative absence of family members in the reproductive age group, and there is a relative absence of men compared to women. At the same time, rural villages have been depopulated due to migration. Simultaneously, staying family members have become increasingly dependent on reception of remittances from abroad. This paper discusses the impact of these demographic and socio-economic changes and outlines possible policy implications.

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- **Migration and International Relations.** Transnational migration unfolds in a context of specific agreements between states, such as between Nepal and India, Nepal and UK, but it also unfolds in spite of such agreements, e.g. in the case of illegal immigration to US and Europe. Recently, changes in the policies towards ‘Gurkha’ soldiers in the UK has changed economic flows and settlement patterns for Nepalis who have retired from the British army, impacting dramatically on the places of origin in Nepal. A call to renegotiate the tripartite agreement from 1947 was recently made by a committee under the Constituent Assembly. This and other issues related to migration, security and international relations is discussed in this paper on migration in relation to Nepal’s foreign policies, including issues of national autonomy and security.

Each theme will be informed by a presentation, followed by input from discussants and general discussion. Participation is by invitation and the total number of participants is limited to 30. A draft programme is available online [here](#).

Contact person for details: Dr. Sagar Sharma, Associate Professor, Department of Development Studies, Kathmandu University (sagar@ku.edu.np)

The Project “Nepal on the Move: Conflict, Migration and Stability” is a collaboration between Aarhus University (Denmark), Copenhagen University (Denmark), Kathmandu University (Nepal) and North-Eastern Hills University (India). The main objective of the project is to examine the relationship between migration and democracy-building in the context of post-conflict Nepal and to identify feasible recommendations to inform the policy process. The project is funded by Danida for four years (2011-2015).