

Persistent and implications of Changing Livelihood in Hill Setting of Nepal: A Qualitative Inquiry of Vyas-10 of Tanahun

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Abstract

Nepal has witnessed rapid change in political and socioeconomic dimensions in the last three decades. Migration and remittance are key factors for the changing livelihoods and it implies various forms of Hill settings in Nepal. The aim of the study is to identify the persistence and implications of livelihood changes in the Hill setting of Nepal from the emic perspective. As per the requirement of the study, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted Dumsi village of Vyas-10 of Tanahun district. The study identified that remittance is the key driver of the livelihood change in the Hill setting. The changing livelihood of the village people also changes the gender roles, the age structure of the working age population, change in the caste-based occupation and structural change of the caste-based system and the diversification of the income sources. Agriculture was seen as the main occupation three decades ago, it is a secondary source of livelihood in the villages due to migration and remittances.

Keywords: change, livelihood, migration, persistence, remittance, structure

Introduction

The concept of "livelihoods" has grown in significance in development theory and practice because it is thought to cover a wide range of issues and allow for consideration of a wide range of people's activities and assets in determining how they support themselves, as opposed to concentrating more narrowly on economic, income-generating, or formal activities. The creation of frameworks for sustainable livelihoods has been one method by which this idea has

been fostered. There are several diverse frameworks that have been created by many individuals and organizations, each with their own special focuses, advantages, and disadvantages. Strategies for generating a living change constantly. According to place and time, social groupings' patterns of subsistence practices differ. Different patterns of adaptation between ethnic groups might result from people sharing the same socio-cultural values. Similarly, due to changes in the social and physical environment, the adaption patterns of members of the same ethnic group may vary from one location to another.

Over the last three decades, Nepal has been experienced rapid changes, marked by a notable shift towards diverse income sources beyond traditional farming. Urban and international migration has surged since 1990s, with remittances now constituting a crucial income stream for many rural households (Sunam, 2020; Rai, 2017). These shifts have been partly fueled by mounting pressures in agriculture, including shrinking farm sizes, labor shortages, and the impacts of climate change (Ensor et al., 2019). Simultaneously, migration has opened up new avenues for earning cash, previously unavailable (Ojha et al., 2017). Nonetheless, despite a general decrease in reliance on agriculture in rural regions evidences suggests that farming, either for sustenance or limited commercial purposes, remains a vital of rural livelihoods (Chhetri et al., 2021; Sudgen et al., 2021).

A study highlighted a growing in commercializing agriculture in the global South. However, this focus overlooks the ongoing significance of subsistence farming in rural livelihoods (Khatri et al., 2023). It is emphasize the necessity of agriculture policies that explicitly acknowledge and support both subsistence and commercial farming. Nevertheless, policies aimed at enhancing subsistence farming may not benefit those with limited land access. Therefore, agriculture policy should also address the issue of land accessibility for landless individuals or those with small land holdings. There should be scheme like land pooling and collective/corporative farming as potential solutions in the any forms of land to use (Gupta et al. 2022). In this growing concerned about the subsistence farming along with commercial farming in the Hill settings are crucial for policy debate. However, the absence of youth population and technological constraints along with other socio-economic factors can contribute to the changing livelihoods.

Despite the crucial role of subsistence farming in meeting the daily needs of rural households and the increasing interest in semi-commercial agriculture, it seems that solely relying on farming is insufficient or unprofitable for securing the livelihoods of most rural households. Consequently, may rural families are compelled to seek off-farm employment opportunities, either within the country or abroad. Research indicates that both domestic wage labour and international migration entails various risk and uncertainties, while remittances alone often fail to provide stable or adequate income to support a family and overall well-being (Rigg, 2020).

Therefore, it remains important for rural households to continue farming, often alongside off-farm employment endeavors, to ensure sustainable livelihoods.

In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were expectation, as noted in some studies (Sunam et al., 2021b), that a significant reverses migration could prompt individuals to return to farming, potentially revitalizing agriculture production. However, as indicated by the findings of the study and others (Gupta et al, 2022), this anticipated trend did not materialized. In hindsight, this outcome is not surprising, given the array of structural challenges facing rural agriculture, including diminishing farm sizes, a shortage of farm labour, limited profitability, and the impacts of climate change. Additionally, in recent years, rural farmers have faced increasing losses of crops and livestock to wildlife, exacerbating these challenges. These obstacles jeopardize the traditional safety net function of subsistence farming and that off-farm employment will likely persist in the future. Therefore, it is crucial for government policies to explicitly address the needs of smallholders farmers. Recognizing and addressing these challenges are essential for safeguarding basic well-being and for sustaining rural hill settings areas as vibrant centers of agriculture and economic activity. As changing nature of livelihood of the rural and urban settings of Hill region is witness the last three decades.

It is stated that social change is a process of change in social structure, e.g. the size of the society, the composition or balance of its parts or the nature of its organization (Ginsberg, 1958). There are several explanations for the traditional lifestyle and means of livelihood, such as agriculture-based livelihoods, family structures, and income generation. The majority of the world's poorest people live in rural areas, relying heavily on small-scale farming for their livelihoods. They engage in various roles within agriculture, including farming, labor, transportation, marketing, processing, and providing non-agricultural services. Additionally, marginalized individuals in rural areas often handle the processing and distribution of agriculture goods. In remote part of Nepal, where agriculture remains predominant, farming serves as the primary economic activity. This shift is evident in changes to social institutions, rituals, housing, lifestyle expectations, economic condition, political awareness, women's empowerment, and health. As a result, there has been a noticeable transformation in the socio-cultural and economic practices of *Darai* community (Wagle, 2011).

It is also stated that the foreign labor migration contributed to positive aspects of the human life in Nepal in terms of their social differentiations. Women may migrate from situations where they are subject to traditional patriarchal authority to situations where they can exercise greater autonomy over their own lives. The role of women in Nepal has changed dramatically over the last three decades. Although traditional gender roles and cultural practices persist in some social and cultural land scapeof the country. Women play an important role in sustaining families and communities through economic activities such as agriculture, trade, remittance,

and household management. The present research tries to explore the changing livelihoods and its implications human life in the hill setting of the Nepal.

Data and Methods

This is based on the exploratory research design to analyze the key research issues. The data were collected using in-depth interview (IDI) method. Field work is conducted in the *Dumsi* village of Vyas municipality-10 of Tanahun district. It is located in eastern bank of *Mandi* river. Has easy access to road services. It is also the village's lowest point; there are some higher points, and *Dumsi* appears to be a valley of the municipality. The development infrastructures of the village do not fulfill the requirements of urban characteristics. Most of the economic activities are rural based. In the heart of *Dhumsi* village, there is a high school, temples, and a primary health care center. The western part of the village has enough irrigation land. In the community group, there are 60 households registered, and some people reside in the same family even though they are not relatives. Only 30 potential research participants were chosen for the in-depth interview. The researchers frequently visited the field for the selecting purposes and field work. In the initial phase, the researchers visited to village and mentioned the research purpose and its significance. At second phase of field work is related with the social mapping of the villages and selected the potential research participants. The final phase of the research was made IDIs and non-participant observations. The field work was began from the February-April, 2023. We got help from the Anju Rijal *Dhumsi-tallo toll* chairman. The village is home to a diverse population in terms of age, ethnicity, economic status, class, and caste, along with other factors. A total of 30 in-depth interviews were conducted during the fieldwork period. The general profile of potential research participants is as follows:

Table 1: General profile of the potential respondent of the study

Background Characteristics of Potential respondents	Number	Background Characteristics of Potential respondents	Number
Caste/Ethnicity		Gender	
Brahmin Chhetri	19	Male	11
Dalits	7	Female	19
Janajati	4	Education	
Age		Literate	8
20-29	10	Primary	10
30-39	5	Secondary	10
40-49	3	Secondary+	2
50+	12		

After the interview, the handwritten notes were also read again and again to transcribe the data. A summary sheet was prepared of the field notes. All the field notes and interview notes were transcribed in the word form. Within a six-step manual data analysis processes were applied. The extended notes are transcribed. The researcher carefully read and annotated at the second stage of analysis. In the third stage of analysis, codes are given for the different themes of changing livelihoods. In the fourth step of the analysis, themes are summarized and merged with relevant themes. In the fifth stage, the narrative analysis was done as per the requirements. Finally, based on the analytical themes, and narrative analysis, the paper is prepared

Findings

It is witnessed that there have been massive changes in the political and social life of people in the hill settings of Nepal in the past three decades. The changing livelihood of people contributed to various implications in the micro-level process. The study identified major issues in terms of gender roles, age structure, caste-based occupations and remittances and implications for community people. It is also indicated that the change processes are mostly taken place in the hill settings of Nepal. The finding section of the paper mostly focused on the persistent and implications of changing livelihoods.

Changing role of women

Gender is the key factor influencing the community's means of survival. Evidence suggests that individuals determine their livelihoods based on their gender. When there are more males in a family, they often engage in diverse employment opportunities and agricultural activities. Men typically undertake physically demanding tasks such as manual labor, while women primarily manage household affairs and tend to livestock. Livelihood necessities, including milk and meat, are sourced from animals. Historically, only men could venture outside the home for work, but contemporary times have seen both genders gaining equal access to job opportunities in the marketplace.

Women are expanding beyond domestic duties, actively participating in various income-generating activities. They collaborate within their communities to generate income, reshaping traditional perceptions of gender roles and occupational boundaries. The conventional division of labor in society is evolving with time. Majority of the women viewed that there has been changed the traditional concepts of livelihood and the roles of women in the village. The narratives indicates that numerous wives now support their husbands in business endeavors, while others seek employment opportunities abroad to contribute financially. A 45 years old Dalit women viewed as:

Currently, my spouse resides in Japan, and we have a daughter together. While my husband earns over a million rupees monthly in Japan, I engage in producing local alcohol at home for additional income. I sell the alcohol to cover household

expenses, aiming to maintain our remittance. There's been a shift from traditional norms, with women now active both within and outside the household.

From the original text, it's apparent that there has been a shift in the times, with women increasingly seeking employment and pursuing higher education opportunities overseas. Moreover, numerous young women, aged between twenty and thirty, are both studying and working abroad. Additionally, some young girls are employed locally within their neighborhoods. A 41 years old Brahmin women stated as:

The traditional viewpoint has been changed towards women' and girls on education attainment, social dimension and occupations significantly. Nowadays, women are equally empowered to pursue various endeavors. My daughter resides in a European country where she earns over one lakh per month, serving as the primary breadwinner for her family. Her dedication to supporting her family financially is commendable, and as a result, there's no pressure from her family to rush into marriage. She possesses the autonomy to chart her own course in life and make decisions independently.

From the women's perspective, it's evident that the roles of women within the community are undergoing transformation. Previously confined to household chores, tending to animals, and casing children, these traditional roles have evolved with the times. Women now have the freedom to leave their homes for various purposes, including pursuing education. They've advocated for equality, secured equal rights, and upheld their freedom of choice. Some young women are now diversifying their sources of income, moving away from traditional tasks like household duties. Instead, they seek employment abroad, balancing family responsibilities while relinquishing domestic and agricultural duties. This shift in women's roles within the community has led to a change in the primary source of livelihood.

The research titled "Examining Gender Analysis of Changing Livelihood Activities in the Rural Areas of Central Nepal" investigates into how gender influences shifting livelihood practices in rural Nepal (Khatiwada et al., 2018). The authors argue that traditional gender roles and labor divisions in rural societies are being influenced by economic and societal changes, which in turn affect women's engagement in various livelihood activities. The study suggests that women are increasingly participating in non-traditional activities, offering new avenues for income generation and empowerment, including wage employment, small-scale business ventures, and migration.

Changing Working Age Population

Improvement in education system and efforts to assert rights, both men and women in the community now enjoy a more varied source of livelihood. The country's primary income stems from energetic, young individuals capable of exerting considerable effort to enhance their families' and society's well-being. Many of the study setting's youth seek employment abroad, heavily relying on remittances as a primary income source, leading some family members to

abandon farming in favor of subsisting on remittances. Additionally, some elderly individuals who had previously migrated in search of better income opportunities now reside locally, contributing to household tasks. A 47 years old Brahmin women viewed as:

My husband, aged 55, has accumulated over 15 years of experience working overseas in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, India, and Malaysia. Currently residing here, he's embarked on a new venture by starting a farm and selling milk to the cooperative, aiming to secure a comfortable life, especially given his health concerns. We've come to realize that relying solely on foreign employment isn't sustainable, as it mandates retirement at a certain age, leading to unemployment. Hence, we're transitioning to sustainable work within our village. However, I'm concerned that the aspirations of the modern youth revolve around global travel, and unless we foster a supportive environment locally, future generations may be compelled to follow the same path.

When individuals are young, they have the opportunity to engage in various fields, including agriculture and livestock management. As they mature, there's a tendency for them to transition to operating businesses, preferring stability over risk-taking due to prevailing national conditions and obstacles to success. Consequently, both gender and age play significant roles in determining income and the range of livelihood sources. Similarly, the community exhibits diversity in income sources and expenditure areas, yet the chosen path often hinges on the individual's age. Notably, a significant portion of the community's income stems from foreign employment, as outlined in national statistics.

A male Brahmin, aged 67, expressed the belief that things improve with time, reminiscing about his youth when he possessed vigor and aspired to effect positive change in the world. He ventured to Malaysia and India in pursuit of employment to provide for his children. However, upon reaching forty, his health began to decline, prompting him to transition to livestock farming for sustenance. Presently, he finds himself earning a livelihood by selling milk to the cooperative, generating some income.

Age plays a pivotal role in determining the choice of livelihood source. Like Brahmin man, over thirty other individuals resided in foreign countries before returning to their communities and passing on their responsibilities to their children. As individuals reach middle age and encounter challenges, they often involve themselves in community activities such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, and animal husbandry. Consequently, the bulk of community members migrating abroad fall within the age bracket of twenty to thirty years.

The narrative from a Janajati potential respondent, the local restaurant's manager, was in Dubai on business. He was approaching forty when he took a flight from Dubai to Nepal and decided to launch his own business, which he is currently successfully running and earning a respectable living form. Young people, he said,

don't care about respect; instead, they simply care about getting paid to do what they want to do. However, I made the decision to live here with dignity in the community because I wanted to earn respect and did not want to spend my golden years in another underprivileged area.

Young individuals often depart shortly after finishing their education or training to seek employment opportunities abroad. This trend is influenced partly by the limited job opportunities and career advancement prospects within Nepal and the community. Additionally, certain industries, such as manufacturing, construction, and domestic work, have a high demand for young, physically capable workers. The decision to migrate is driven by the allure of better-paying jobs available in those destinations.

Changing Caste based occupations

Government policies have ensured that untouchable Dalit groups have equal access to diverse sources of income. With equal opportunities and rights, individuals from lower castes can now freely select their occupations like any other citizen. Consequently, discrimination against them is diminishing within the community. For example, lower caste members can openly sell milk in the market alongside Brahmins, providing them with a dependable source of income. A 25 years Dalit women viewed as:

In the past, individuals were segregated into different castes according to their professions, and we belonged to the lower castes and untouchables. Consequently, people refrained from touching us and avoided using our products. However, times have changed, and evolving policies have granted us equal status with others. Now, I sell milk at the milk collection center, which significantly contributes to meeting household needs and expenses.

The majority of villagers seek financial assistance from a range of sources including cooperatives, banks, and private lenders, along with the mother group. These loans serve various purposes such as purchasing agricultural inputs, financing education, supporting women's employment initiatives, and fostering commercial ventures. Municipalities also conduct training programs aimed at fostering self-sufficiency among residents, thereby enabling them to explore diverse income-generating avenues. Furthermore, these entities provide loans at favorable interest rates and facilitate market transactions, thereby contributing to the diversification of employment opportunities and livelihood strategies. Since 2007, Nepal has implemented reservation policies to enhance the representation of women, Dalits, and marginalized groups in governmental institutions. These reservations enable Dalit individuals, both men and women, to access government-provided training and explore a range of livelihood opportunities. Policies regarding travel and employment abroad, as well as the role of women within the community, are all shaped by governmental regulations.

As stated in the research article titled "Dalit's Livelihoods in Nepal: Income Sources and Determinants" was to investigate the means of sustenance within the Dalit community (Atreya et al., 2022). The study delves into the socioeconomic conditions of Dalits in Nepal and assesses the impact of political unrest and economic globalization on their livelihoods. Through an analysis of various income sources such as agriculture, wage labor, small enterprises, and remittances, the authors explore the factors influencing Dalits' income levels. The research highlights the diverse sources of income and changes in the lifestyle of Nepal's marginalized caste population. A 31 years Dalit women stated as:

In Nepal, the constitution mandates equality for all individuals, and discrimination based on caste is outlawed. As a result, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have the opportunity to transition to different occupations, leading to changes within the community. Previously confined to industries dictated by the caste system, lower caste members now have diversified sources of income and lifestyles, with many running their own businesses and restaurants.

In the hill settings, there are numerous individuals belonging to lower castes, including Dalits. Together, these lower caste members account for approximately fifty-three percent of the population. It's evident that people's sources of income vary due to caste biases. However, Nepal's constitution strictly prohibits the caste system, allowing individuals the freedom to choose their occupations. Discrimination is punishable under the law. Interestingly, individuals from upper castes, such as Brahmins, also engage in occupations traditionally associated with lower castes, such as managing butcher shops, poultry farms, businesses abroad, and supplying milk from cattle and buffalo to cooperatives. Additionally, people from upper castes purchase milk from these cooperatives for their daily needs.

Changing livelihood by Remittances

The community's livelihoods have undergone significant transformation due to remittances. Nepali migrant workers send money back home from countries like India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, making Nepal one of the leading recipients of remittances globally. These remittances constitute significant proportion of the primary household income in the community. They have played a crucial role in reducing poverty and improving the financial well-being of local households. Remittances have empowered families to invest in housing, healthcare, education, and other worthwhile ventures, serving as a safety net during challenging economic periods. Moreover, by creating new economic opportunities and reshaping traditional occupational patterns, remittances sent within the community have contributed to changing livelihoods in Nepal. For example, many rural households have used remittance funds to establish non-farm enterprises like small shops or restaurants, thereby generating employment opportunities in the service sector.

I have two children, both of whom are employed overseas. They departed from the family's agricultural business to pursue opportunities abroad, while we manage a

small restaurant locally. Previously, agriculture and animal husbandry were our primary sources of income, but that dynamic has shifted, and now remittances constitute our main source of revenue. Our sons are providing guidance as we transition from agriculture to operating the restaurant (A 60 years Chhetri women).

Various factors are driving community members to pursue occupations beyond farming and livestock raising. One significant factor is the declining profitability and productivity of agriculture and livestock activities. Additionally, the expanding service sector provides better wages and opportunities for skill enhancement, making it increasingly appealing to young individuals. Furthermore, the option of working abroad has become popular due to its potential for higher earnings. Remittances have played a crucial role in enabling the community to transition away from its traditional reliance on agriculture and livestock-based economies.

Remittances have bolstered households' capacity to invest in housing, healthcare, education, and other beneficial ventures, leading to an overall improvement in their financial condition. By investing in non-farm enterprises such as small shops, eateries, and hotels, households have diversified their income sources, thereby reshaping traditional employment patterns and creating fresh economic opportunities. Thanks to remittances, individuals can access education and explore new job opportunities in the service sector. Remittances also serve as a lifeline for those facing financial hardship and poverty, enabling them to invest in healthcare, which in turn enhances health outcomes. Additionally, remittances help cover basic needs and sustain their way of life.

The research article titled "Impact of Remittances on Rural Bangladeshi Households: Insights from a Study on Migrant Families" (Mohammad et al., 2021) investigates the influence of remittances on the lives of rural Bangladeshi households. Both international and domestic remittances play a pivotal role in supporting Bangladesh's national economy and serve as a significant income source for numerous villages and households. The study delves into the impact of remittances on household conditions, shedding light on their contribution to household income augmentation and consumption enhancement. A 23 years young Dalit man perceived as:

I previously worked in Dubai for employment and am currently on vacation, with my return flight scheduled for next month. Prior to working abroad, I engaged in wage-based work within the community, which was insufficient to meet all my needs despite requiring considerable effort and offering low pay. Encouraged by friends who were earning more abroad and had settled in their lives, I decided to seek employment overseas. To finance this venture, I borrowed money from relatives and community members. With the earnings from my overseas employment, I was able to marry using my own funds and adequately provide for

my daughter without accumulating any debt. Although my wife is currently not employed, she plans to establish a cattle business to reduce our reliance on remittances in the future.

Remittances play a pivotal role in reshaping the income sources of the individual described above. Initially employed as a wage worker, he opted to pursue work abroad due to the limited earnings in his locality. With one child to support, he fulfills all her basic needs with the assistance of remittances, enabling her to access education. Additionally, they plan to establish a new income source, made feasible by remittances. By channeling remittances into productive sectors, there's potential to reduce reliance on foreign nations. Furthermore, remittances facilitate the creation of new businesses, leading to significant transformations in the community's way of life. (Kafle, 2016).

Conclusion

As findings of the study, it can be concluded that the living standard of the people of the hill setting of Nepal is uplifted to some extent by remittance and other sources of livelihood. Such income has helped the villagers to fulfill their different needs. The changing livelihoods contributed to changes in gender roles, age demography, caste-based interaction and remittance as village economy. It can be said that agriculture and livestock are only for to utilize the time and they do not think it as a main work. Actually, agriculture and livestock are the main income of the people but which is lower than other income such as remittance so people think agriculture is the secondary source of occupation.

Actually, agriculture and livestock are the fix and regular income source of income. From the very establishment of milk collection center, the number of milks selling people has been increasing every year. Dalit people also get the opportunity to earn the money from the selling the milk because in the past people did not buy the goods and service from the lower cast people and the milk collection center build the market to sell the milk and help to change the living standard and livelihood diversification of the people. Milk cooperative also provide the loan to the people who have the share in it. Make the villagers easy to take the loan.

Recently, most of the people are attract to the foreign employment. People think about the short and fast income source which let to increase the remittance and become the main source of income. Almost every household have a member in the foreign country either for the study or employment, but main theme if the foreign study is also to earn money and settle there. Most of People use large number of the income for the household purpose and in education. Poverty is the main cause of choosing the diverse livelihood. Single income cannot full fill the needs of the people and the income working from Nepal is not sufficient to save the money for the future so in the present context people are choosing the foreign employment and the people depend in agriculture is become less than before. Low education status is also seemed to be

another reason for foreign unemployment. Many women are seemed to get married after they complete their secondary level or even without completion. After marriage the education gets halted and they are busy in household activities. But the positive aspect is some females are also involved in job and the foreign employment and local job is the secured job for the female. The study also concluded that most of the foreign labor migrant is from the low economic background. Economically high and middle class young people apply for the study abroad in Australia, Europe, America etc. along with for the employment and the behind the education main purpose is to earn money as well. Some of people those not having financial sufficiency for the foreign employment process and some take a loan from the people with the high interest rate and clearing debt becomes their prior responsibility because of which they cannot save the money as per income. This becomes the initial barrier for their savings for fulfilling their dreams for prosperity. Along with this the dependency of the family depends upon foreign income and the salary is invested in household activities and children education and no financial stock is left for business purpose or any sustainable livelihood activities. Thus, the overall scenario of livelihood diversification and income source of the people going to be positive.

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