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**Left behind women and empowerment.
Consequences of male labour migration on the economic
and social position of left behind women in Nepal**

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Abstract

Women's empowerment is crucial for overall development. It has been recognized by international organizations as important factor as Millennium Development Goal (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014:20). The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how male labour migration influences social and economic position of left behind women in Nepal. United Nations (UNDP 2010) has acknowledged importance of labour migration in development process, however the phenomenon of migration does not include only those who decide to move. Women, children and elderly stay behind hoping for better future in accordance to migration as an option to survive. Secondary data was used for the purpose of this study. This research analyzes left behind women's empowerment through three dimensions: resources, agency and achievements, which were introduced in the analytical framework by Naila Kabeer (1999). This study shows that the impact of male labour migration on women left behind is a complex picture. Although, this thesis concludes that there is no indication of an empowerment process (within the meaning of Kabeer) being initiated as a result of male labour migration.

Key-words

Male labour migration, Remittances, Empowerment, Nepal, Women Left Behind

List of Abbreviations

DoFE - Department of Foreign Employment in Nepal

FEPB - The Foreign Employment Promotion Board

GDI - Gender Development Index

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GEM - Gender Empowerment Measure

IWMI - International Water Management Institution

MWSCW - The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare

NLSS-II - Nepal Living Standard Survey

QDA - Qualitative Data Analysis

UN – United Nations

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1. Introduction

Women's empowerment is not a new discourse in social sciences, researchers constantly study this phenomenon (Suja 2012). While the economic aspects of migration has been discussed, the social concerns about migration, those shouldered by the left behind, have also increased. This paper is to examine what is the impact of male labour migration on the situation of left behind women in Nepal. This study uses secondary data to explain the condition of left behind women and to analyze their situation in connection to male movement. It is important to see and understand the circumstances of those women who stay behind. There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of women's empowerment in development process (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014). This study provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge about the position of left behind women in Nepal and therefore it makes a contribution to research on this particular topic. Voices of left behind women present two types of life they have after male migration. Sardevi (interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2011:9) explains her situation: "*So far, I am satisfied with my personal life, even if my husband stays separate.*"

Suhana (interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2011:8) has experienced different effects of her husband's movement: "*I do not think that my position in the family and the society has improved due to his migration. I am treated the same as before.*"

The concept of empowerment introduced by Naila Kabeer (1999) will help in the analysis of collected secondary data. First - as background information - the situation in Nepal will be described, as well as the importance of remittances in this country.

1.1. Nepal

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, this means that it struggles with economic and social development. The country's GDP per capita in 2014 was US\$ 694 which gave Nepal 21st place among the poorest countries. Nepal has witnessed decades of violence and political instability. In 2006 after many years of violent conflict, the country was ready for transition and in 2008 it became a republic (Nepal Migration Year Book 2011:7). Primary sectors of the economy are agriculture, industry and services. Remittances contribute to 25 percent of country's GDP (Dahal 2014:9). The agricultural sector employs over 75 percent of the working population. Farming is subsistence-oriented and together with small farm sizes it is difficult for many households to meet their fundamental needs (Maharjan, Bauer and Knerr

2013:1). Poor farmers have small chances to find a job in urban industrial sector. In this situation, new strategy to survive has arisen. International labour migration has become a strategy to fulfill the basic requirements and enhance the income level of the households. The unemployment rates in Nepal are very high, over 45 percent in 2012. That is one reason why so many Nepalese males have decided to go abroad in a search for work (Dahal 2014:8).

Migration process has been greatly influenced by globalization. Migrant workers have earned US\$ 414 billion in 2013. The World Bank estimates that the flows of remittances “remain a key source of external resource flows for developing countries, far exceeding official development assistance and more stable than private debt and portfolio equity flows” (World Bank, 2014:2). Money that is transmitted back to developing countries play an important role in their economic performances. In the country of Nepal, the ratio of remittance inflows (as a percentage of GDP) in 1995 was 1,3 percent, however in 2012 reached 25 percent (World Bank, 2014). In 2012 Nepal was the third remittance-recipient country as a percentage of GDP (World Bank, 2013:5).

Economic effects of migration have been widely studied, however remittances are not only researched in monetary terms, but also as non-financial impact as so called social remittances (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010). Dahal (2014:6) argues that social remittances can “foster valuable ideas, norms and behavior of significance to the promotion of an industrious culture as an important factor in the economic growth of a country”. Examples of social remittances are: health check-ups, changes in living conditions, drinking safe water etc.

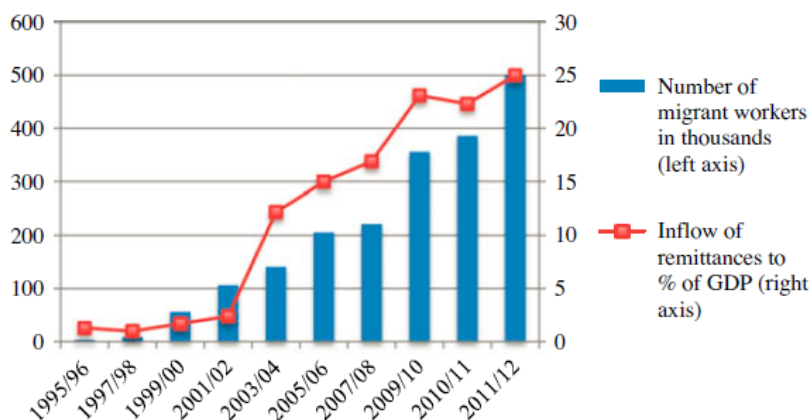
Migration is not a new phenomenon in Nepal, however until 1981, India was the only country of destination for Nepalese migrant workers (Nepal Migration Year Book 2011:16, Mahrajan, Bauer and Knerr 2012:5). This is closely connected to a political situation in Nepal. After adopting democratic system in 1990, Nepali government made it easier for people to obtain passports and travel overseas. Additional countries of destination are Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. The census from year 2010/2011 reveals that more than 1.92 million Nepalese had lived in foreign countries for more than six months (Nepal Migration Year Book 2011:16-17).

According to Department of Foreign Employment in Nepal (DoFE) 75 percent of Nepalese migrant workers were unskilled (cleaners, guards, construction workers etc.), 23 percent were semi-skilled (gardeners, waiters, electric and mechanic assistants etc.) and two percent skilled (those who have completed high school or higher: doctors, engineers, scientist etc.). Nepali migrant workers find jobs in industries, factories, construction companies, hospitality industry or agriculture.

1.2. Importance of remittances in Nepal

Migration is one of many factors that plays important role in the economic development of Nepal. Remittance inflows have reached \$US 5,2 billion or around 24,7 per cent of GDP in 2013 (Dahal 2014:3, see Figure 1.). The importance of money remittances is well recognized in Nepal (Mahrajan et al. 2012, Wagle 2012) as a strategy to meet basic needs, it is one way to develop country and change the position of left behind women. More than 55 percent of households in Nepal have received remittances in 2011, in comparison with 1996 where only 23 percent of households were included (Nepal Migration Year Book 2011:26). It is argued that remittances are playing very important role in both, household and national economy, however the effect of it is that Nepal may become a remittance-based economy (Nepal Migration Year Book 2011:11).

Figure 1. Number of migrant workers and ratio of remittance inflows to percentage of GDP, 1995/96-2011/12.



Source: Dahal 2014:9

1.3. Aim of the research

The aim of this study is to examine whether women experience empowerment after being left behind by their husbands who went abroad. Left behind women can use the situation and resources (remittances, land, and human resources) to enhance their position on the household and society level. Money remittances can have strong impact on women left behind in Nepal. The importance of remittances have been well recognized by scholars (Antman 2012, Cortes 2008, Thieme and Wyss 2005, Maharjan, Bauer and Knerr 2012, Wagle 2012) who claim that

money remittances can change the position of left behind women. Although access to resources does not transform to empowerment of women.

This paper seeks to understand whether male labour migration can be understood as a potential source of women's empowerment in Nepal. In order to expand the knowledge about given aim, following research question has been generated.

1.4. Research question

This paper asks the following question: What are the consequences of male labour migration on the social and economic situation of left behind women in Nepal? This study is to demonstrate changes in women's lives after being left behind by their migrant husbands. The expansion of resources, decision-making, mobility and freedom will be considered as factors that may contribute to women's empowerment. Labour market participation will be discussed as an achievement of women's empowerment. Furthermore, Sen (1999:191) argues that "working outside the home and earning an independent income tend to have a clear impact on enhancing the social standing of woman in the household and the society."

For some women male out-migration may bring new opportunities and more positive changes and for others the burden of keeping everything under control and managing everything is too big and heavy. Two very important aspects will be taken into consideration, these are economic and social changes in women's lives. Economic changes are correlated with independent income, the opportunity to engage in the labour market, the ability of how to manage money remittances that are being sent back home. Social changes include decision-making power, all the knowledge that is gained by women (about agriculture, market etc), new contacts they gain, more burden on their shoulders, mobility, restrictions.

The empowerment concept will be clarified by using Kabeer's (1999) explanation of women's empowerment.

1.5. Definitions and terminology

This study focuses on *left behind women* in Nepal. Throughout this paper, this term includes all the women that have been left behind by their husbands who went abroad in search for work. In this research the term of *empowerment* is used to explain changes in the lives of left behind women. Naila Kabeer (1999) gives a broad explanation of what empowerment means. She writes about empowerment in three dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. The

most important aspect here is the ability to make choice, in a situation when this ability was previously denied.

One model of living after male migration for women is to become the *de-facto head of the household*. They live independently, take care of all the responsibilities and manage the situation by themselves. Second model includes all the women who live with her parents in-law (in accordance to husband male labour migration).

1.6. Structure of the paper

Following the introductory chapter, the second chapter, *Literature review*, discusses the concept of left behind women (including countries such as Nepal, Morocco) and women's empowerment. Chapter three, *Methodology*, outlines the methods that are used for the purpose of this study. It also covers the part where limitations of this methods and research are discussed. Chapter four, *Theoretical framework*, explains the main concepts behind the Empowerment theory which is used in this study. Chapter five, *Analysis of Women's Empowerment in Nepal*, combines the collected secondary data and the theoretical framework used to explain the phenomenon of male out migration and women left behind. Empowerment is explained by using Naila Kabeer's (1999) three dimensions of empowerment: resources, agency and achievements. The thesis ends with conclusion in chapter six, *Conclusion*.

2. Literature review

Recent trends in migration have led to a proliferation of studies that give a space for left behind women. It is time to hear their voices, because as Shrestha and Conway (2001 in Mahrajan, Bauer and Knerr 2012:7) claim "migrants' wives exist in the shadow... in the shadow of their husbands, in the shadow of the mountains, and in the shadow of the academic discourse on migration."

2.1. The left behind women

The effects of male out migration on left behind women can be in a way divided into two models. The first model contains all the new opportunities and positive changes to women who stay behind. On the other hand we can distinguish the second model where described

cases include more burden and responsibilities on women's shoulders and in that situation more negative effects are to be found.

The literature on the left behind women is abundant and provides a variety of analysis. One factor that many of these studies have in common is highlighting the importance of money remittances in the life of women left behind (Antman 2012, Cortes 2008, Thieme and Wyss 2005, Maharjan, Bauer and Knerr 2012, Wagle 2012). The question of why Nepalese male workers have decided to migrate is not in the focus of this paper, however Ushadevi Presta, who was interviewed by Gartuala et al. (2011:14), answered: *"We are obliged to live in this situation because of our poverty. It is a necessity for them [husbands] to go out for work and it is our fate [of wives] to handle the household."*

The effect of male labour migration on left behind women differs from one area to another, according to Mahrajan, Bauer and Knerr (2012). Baitadi and Syangja are two districts that are very different from each other when it comes to economic performance. Syangja district is a well prosperous one and the outcome of male out-migration is mainly positive according to Mahrajan et al. (2012). They claim that women in Syangja district witness reduction of workload in crop farming and responsibilities (as they are able to hire labor from earned remittances) and experience the phenomenon of changing roles. Mahrajan et al. (2012:7) argue that right after somebody's husband leaves, the situation of women and the family gets difficult, however when remittances start to flow back to Nepal, her position is about to change in a positive way. On the other hand, Baitadi district is defined as "one of the most backward districts in Nepal from a gender perspective" and the effect of male migration is not that positive (ibid:12). In this district, the workload on women is very high, even when a husband is a migrant worker. However, the amount of money that is transferred to women living in Baitadi district is not that high. In that situation family cannot afford to hire labour force in order to replace the lost one (male migrant). Mahrajan et al. (2012) argue that all the responsibilities that male migrant has had, have to be divided between the rest of the family members. The research presented Mahrajan et al. (2012) provide with the information that women in Baitadi district have less leisure hours per day than males. In a situation where men migrate, the position of women gets even worse.

Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) examine whether male out-migration affects the labour market behavior of women in Nepal. Scholars (Lokshin and Glinskaya 2009) argue that two theoretical aspects are taken into consideration in this study. The first model, when the household income is increasing (due to remittances), the participation by women in labor

market is reduced. The second, when male migration could decrease or increase women's home productivity (all depending on the properties of home production function), although have an ambiguous impact on their labour market participation (ibid:23). They found that the migration of male household member is to reduce women's rates of labour market participation by 5,3 percentage points. Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) argue that there is more negative effects on the level of the labor market contribution of Nepalese women in the migrant households.

Todgha and Steinmann (in De Haas and Van Rooij 2010:16) claim that women in migrant households are dependent on the money that the husband transfers back home, while women in the non-migrant households as well depend on their husband's income, which is often too low to cover all of the needs of the household. The study conducted by de Haas and Van Rooij (2010:14-15) discusses that an increase in responsibilities of women is an effect of male migration. Mainly, internal male migration was connected to emphasize the burden on women's shoulders, and international movement was related to the advantages for women (decision-making power, better economic situation etc). De Haas and Van Rooij hypothesize that male migration changes gender roles in rural Morocco. International movement and remittances can lead to more comfortable life, security and higher standard of living, however in addition to that, migration brings additional responsibilities, increasing workloads and uncertainty. De Haas and Van Rooij (2010) conclude that migration may cause temporary revised conditions of life, although on the longer run women are loaded with the burden. De Haas and Van Rooij (2010) discuss that migration and remittances (as indirect factors), cultural and social transformation can lead to development of women's position.

As a result of male migration, women's participation in agriculture is increasing (even though they receive money remittances), according to world development organizations such as World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Food and Agriculture Organization (Gartuala, Visser and Niehof 2010). Authors argue whether this participation in agriculture leads to women's empowerment (Gartuala et al. 2010:2). Two models are presented, women who live with her in-laws and women that become a head of the household after husband's migration. Authors finding are contingent upon the domestic settlement in which women are one of the part. Women living with in-laws do not witness improvement of their situation, due to the fact that in-laws make decisions for them. Women continue to live under patriarchal control. On the other hand, women that become de-facto heads of the households witness more autonomy in decision-making and control their mobility (ibid:11).

Videos presented by International Water Management Institution (IWMI) are another source of information in this study. Interviewed women have witnessed harsh time while their husbands are abroad. Even though they send remittances back home, all the expenses of the household cannot be covered by it. Life of those women have become more difficult and more burden has been put on their shoulders. Bimli, from Thadhi village says: *“We live a poor and miserable life. My husband is away, I am under pressure from all sides. Now all the responsibilities are on my shoulders”*. Another women, Sunita explains: *“If he (husband) lived with me, I would feel more secure and less worried about the fields and the house”*. Hearing the question: “How is your life while your husband is abroad?” Rita answers: *“Very difficult. If my husband was with me I would be under less pressure in taking care of children, house and external activities. I have small children and now it is me who takes care of everything”* (IWMI 2013). This source provides us with mostly negative effects of male out-migration where there is no space for women’s empowerment. Women from those interviews do not see themselves as empowered individuals after their husbands migrated in a search for work.

This section suggests that the situation of left behind women is difficult, however positive aspects of male migration are often discussed by scholars (Gartuala et al. 2010, Mahrajan et al. 2012). In order to avoid the situation where researchers are biased by the type of data they use, it has been decided to bring new perception of the situation of left behind. Xiang Biao’s (2005) article is used as the source of critique to left behind women.

Meng (1993, 1995 in Biao 2005:9) argues that migration of the husband makes woman’s labour participation in the household more visible, and therefore more appreciated. It is discussed by feminist researchers that left behind women take more action in agriculture because agriculture is marginal economic segment, they would rather witness increase in their decision –making and power (ibid:10). Being a left behind woman is not seen as a chance to gain empowerment in any aspect of her life. The majority of left behind wives worry about their marriage and relationship with the husband. Migrant workers can have affairs and can infect their wives with different diseases such as HIV or STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases). It is also argued that social attitude and behavior of left behind women are not influenced by the absence of their husbands (ibid:11). One can be left behind physically, economically, or socially. Biao (2005:23) discusses that economic and social abundance is connected to the whole communities and can bring negative effects of male migration.

This literature review has been used in order to gain knowledge about male labour migration and its impact on left behind women. Presented review encompass examples from the whole world. This study will focus on Nepalese left behind women, those cases will be used in the analytical part of this paper in order to answer given research question.

2.2. Gender equality in Nepal

The Hindu caste system classified people into four main groups: Brahmin (scholars and priests) at the top, Chhetri (warriors) just below, then the Vaishya (merchants and traders), and lastly, Sudra (peasants/laborers) (Asian Development Bank 2010:7). In that division both women and men are socially divided and often discriminated. The Constitution and Civil Code in Nepal include provisions that discriminate owing to gender, caste, ethnicity or religion. Several changes have been introduced, however discriminatory provisions are still included in the Constitution (ibid:10). Nepal has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1991. It includes exclusion of “discrimination in public life, civil status, education, employment, health care and other aspects of social and economic life” (ibid:10). Promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment is a main goal of The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MWCSW).

The United Nation’s Human Development Report reveals new facts about gender equality and women’s empowerment in Nepal. Two indexes are introduced: The Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GDI refers to inequality in terms of the similar dimensions as Human Development Index (HDI): adult literacy, years of schooling, standard of living, life expectancy at birth. The GDI demonstrates the empowerment of women and men in diverse political and economic areas. However it only refers to opportunities that are open to women, rather than their capabilities (resources, not agency according to Kabeer) in three aspects: political and economic participation and decision-making and power over economic resources (Nepal Human Development Report 2014:19). The value of GEM for Nepal in 2011 is 0,568 in comparison to year 2001 when it was 0,391. (ibid).

Education is an important aspect in the process of poverty alleviation and overall sustainable development. The gender gap persists in education attainment of women and men. Percentage of Nepalese women without any education declined from 60% in 2001 to 50% in 2006. Right now more women have access to education in Nepal, however they still witness disparities among castes, ethnic groups or regions. Taking that into consideration, since not all of left

behind women have opportunity to gain education, chances to improve their situation by taking part in labour market are quite low. There are several factors which limit access to education in Nepal: location, low level of infrastructure, inadequate number of well-trained teachers, socio cultural norms or language. Another potential issue is that women who remain in Nepal often live with in-laws. This type of living arrangement may bring a new pressure on left behind woman to obey orders from in-laws. Left behind woman is not free to move or often even to take part in decision-making. One important factor that is missing in this story is a role model for left behind women. It would be easier for them to speak out loud, if they could follow somebody else's steps. However in traditional society, as it is in Nepal, this may take decades to see changes in left behind's behavior.

2.3. Empowerment of women

Women's empowerment plays very important role in the process of development and poverty alleviation. The position of women is a major concern in developing world and it gains more attention from scholars. World Bank has recognized women's empowerment as necessary in development, the importance of empowerment have been acknowledged by international organizations and societies, as exemplified in the Millennium Development Goal number three, to promote gender equality and empower women (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014:20). The concept of women empowerment has emerged in the psychological literature in 1970s and spread among other disciplines, like social sciences. This term has been defined as everything that removes obstacles of participation of women in all kind of spheres in private and public lives. Different explanations and contexts of empowerment bring about many factors that are known as empowerment. Although the concept of empowerment is known for more than four decades is it impossible to find a clear definition of it.

McWhirter (1991 in Hyde-Hills 1998:1-2) explains empowerment as "the process by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others, and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community." This concept of empowerment assume that it can be applicable around the globe, and the participants will apply it to struggles they have in different spheres of their lives.

Amartya Sen (1999) refers to development as freedom. It is a key concept that helps to understand that “freedom to” different actions, things or behaviors is extremely valuable. Freedom is seen as instrument and as the objective. Sen puts the emphasis on expanding human freedoms so that she can live a valuable life. Sen argues that “social and economic factors such as basic education, elementary health care, and secure employment are important not only on their own, but also for the role they can play in giving people the opportunity to approach the world with courage and freedom. These considerations require a broader informational base, focusing particularly on people’s capability to choose the lives they have reason to value” (Koggel 2013:4).

Suja (2012) puts the emphasis on women’s empowerment as it is the main issue when it comes to improvement and development of countries all over the world. It is argued that women can act individually or collectively. They are seen as knowledgeable and target oriented actors who take or promote actions to overcome gender inequalities. Women’s empowerment is seen as a strategy to reach gender equality and capacity building of women.

Presented approaches describe empowerment of women as ability to make decisions that influence their lives and their future. However it is difficult to find a common denominator in the form of exemplary types of decisions or the degree of influence that should be considered as empowerment.

There is no one clear definition of women’s empowerment. Presented authors agree that it is a process and that many different aspects can have strong impact on the outcome of this process. Although different interpretations of women’s empowerment have been demonstrated, in this paper Kabeer’s (1999) understanding of empowerment of women is main theoretical concept.

Presented literature review has enhanced the knowledge about left behind women worldwide and empowerment approaches. It has assured that this is very complex picture. The understanding of women’s empowerment presented by Kabeer (1999) is also very complex. It is therefore most suitable for this study, as it composes of three dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. This model of empowerment of women will be expanded in the analytical part later in this paper.

3. Methodology

This study is conducted as a research overview where secondary data is applied as the empirical foundation. Qualitative information is used in order to get a better understanding of the situation of Nepalese left behind women and their position in the society. Academic books, articles, newspaper articles as well as reports published by international organization, The World Bank and videos made by International Water Management Institute are going to be used for the purpose of this study. Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) of collected information is supported by empowerment theory. Various methods have been developed and introduced to measure the position of left behind women. Each has its advantages and drawbacks. I have not been able to travel to Nepal in order to collect the data, so that secondary qualitative data as semi-structured interviews, comments and surveys are substantial in this study to see the reality and to let the women speak out loud about their emotions, problems they face and on the other hand, successes they achieve. Secondary data is seen as a fundamental source of information in this study. Authors (Desai and Banerji 2008, Gartuala et al. 2011, Mahrajan et al. 2012, Lokshin and Glinskaya 2009) presented in the literature review have used different types of collecting data. Desai and Banerji (2008) provide us with survey and interviews with left behind women in India. It is important to add that different authors look for diverse things that is why they ask contrasting questions. Using information that has been already gathered by other scholars leads to gaining knowledge about the topic from different angels.

Gartuala, Visser and Niehof (2011) conducted a fieldwork carried out in Maharanijhoda Village Development Committee (VDC) of Jhapa district in eastern Nepal in 2008–2009. Presented data obtained from a survey among 277 households. Their study focuses on the “qualitative data from the subjective experience of wives of migrant workers who are either de-facto heads-of-households or who are staying with their parents-in-law.” (Gartuala, Visser and Niehof 2011:5).

Mahrajan, Bauer and Knerr (2012) have collected data from 509 migrant and nonmigrant households in two districts: Syangja and Baitadi in 2007. A structured questionnaire was developed for the household survey. In addition, small workshops, focused on group discussions and interviews were carried out. Authors used a mixed approach in analyzing the issue.

Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) used the data from the 2004 Round of the Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS-II). It is a nationally representative survey of households and

communities, the one that is used in their study was conducted between April 2003 and April 2004.

3.1.Limitations of chosen methods

In this research secondary data is remarkably valuable. One advantage of using already collected information is that it allows the researcher having more time to spend to analyze it and draw conclusions. Bryman (2008: 299) argues that analyzing the same data by another researcher may offer new interpretations. All this depends on what are those researchers looking for and what they want to discuss and explain in their study. Source criticism is an important aspect used in order to ensure the quality of gathered information

The main disadvantage of using secondary data is that the data is inherent in its nature. The data was collected to answer specific research questions, and some important information can be missing. It can be collected on the other geographical areas than it is needed for the purpose of this study. Data can be not significant anymore, since it could be collected decades ago.

Another potential problem of using secondary data is that researchers who collected the data do not always let the secondary researchers to use it for confidentially reasons. It is crucial to examine secondary data set carefully to confirm that it contains the necessary facts, that the data can be analyzed in appropriate manner according to research question.

Since I have not participated in the data collection, planning and execution, the knowledge about how exactly this process had been conducted by others is missing.

Malik (1993) has indicated that the duration of male labour migration can have impact on those who stay behind. However the aspect of length of male absence is not included in this study due to time and space constraints. Another important aspects which are not taken into consideration are age of women, their social class and education level and rural versus urban context.

Lastly, it is argued by Kaspar (2006:295) that division of decision-making power will change again after husband returns home. Due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of the situation when husband returns from employment abroad.

4. Theoretical framework: Empowerment of women

This section will present and discuss the theoretical framework and key concept selected for this study: the empowerment theory. The role of theoretical framework is to provide complementing approaches in order to explain the economic and social position of left behind women in Nepal. An approach of empowerment model is introduced by Naila Kabeer (1999). This model helps to examine whether the position of Nepalese women is changing for better and whether they experience transition in their economic and social position.

Women empowerment will be explained by Naila Kabeer's model of three dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Left behind women in Nepal can witness empowerment after their husbands go abroad for work. It does not have to mean only difficulties and burden on women's shoulders. They can actively take part in the decision-making processes, step into labour market and develop their social and economic standards of living.

As already mentioned, Naila Kabeer understands the term of empowerment as a three dimensional aspect: resources, agency and achievements. The first factor are resources, they can be human, social or material. This term should be understood not only as economic resources (e.g. land, equipment, working capital), but also as human and social resources which may increase the ability of women to make choice. Human resources are met on the individual level and varies from one person to another. These are for example knowledge, skills, creativity, imagination etc. Social resources includes relationships, connections and networks in different spheres of life which have the impact on improving people's position. "Empowerment entails a change in the terms on which resources are acquired as much as an increase in access to resources" (Kabeer 1999:20).

The second dimension refers to agency, "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (ibid:21). The notion of agency is closely linked to the idea of power in both senses positive (power to) and negative (power over). The measurement of agency includes both favorable and unfavorable agency: women's mobility in the public domain, male violence etc.

Resources and agency together constitute as achievements (outcomes). The idea of empowerment will be described more in details in the next part (which is analysis) where examples and discussion about left behind women in Nepal will be supported by this approach.

Money remittances are going to be described as one of many resources that can have influence on women's empowerment. Other types of resources that will be presented are for example: land entitlement and human resources. Although different types of resources will be mentioned, money remittances are the reflection of male labour migration. In this paper money that is sent back home is seen as the first and crucial resource in the process of women's empowerment. In the next part of the analysis, remittances and land entitlement will be explained more in depth.

5. Analysis of Empowerment in a Three-dimensional Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the analysis that can help to answer the research question that is the consequences of male labour migration on the economic and social position of left behind women in Nepal. The theoretical concept of women's empowerment originates in Kabeer's (1999) three dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Although different explanations of women's empowerment were introduced in literature review, Kabeer's analytical framework is used for the purpose of this study. Kabeer's argumentation (1999) fits best with the complexity of this topic and the process of empowerment of women.

5.1. Nepalese women and empowerment

Nepal is a traditional country and roles are divided among women and men. Men are seen as breadwinners, the head of the household. They take care of the fields and crops, often search for a job in other sectors. Women have to help with agriculture, take care of children and the household. Some women with higher level of education can get access to the labour market, find a job and in that way support their families. Although women work outside the house, their duties to take care of children and household do not vanish. Women have to be good planners in order to keep everything under control.

Secondary data presented by different scholars (Lokshin and Glinskaya 2009, Mahrajan et al. 2012, Kaspar 2006) help to understand the complexity of the situation of left behind women in Nepal. In this study labour market participation is reflecting left behind women's empowerment. Amartya Sen (1999) argues that finding work outside the household can play very important role in gaining freedom and empowerment.

In the next section, three dimensions of empowerment will be elaborated in accordance to Nepalese left behind women.

5.2. Three Dimensions of Empowerment

The notion of empowerment according to Kabeer (1999:19) “is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change.”

The choice is very important factor in the process of empowerment. Kabeer (1999:19) refers to the first- and second-order choices. The first-hand choices (also known as strategic life choices) can be explained as those “critical for people to live the lives they want” (ibid:19). Examples of strategic life choices are: choice of livelihood, whether to get married or to have children. However, empowerment comes together with the expansion of women’s ability to make strategic life choices. The capacity to make choice is unequal between males and females. However, the idea of ‘doxa’ is described by Bourdieu as “the aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken for granted that they have become naturalized” (Kabeer 1999:25). The idea of doxa helps to move our attention from the false consciousness, in a sense that women are often not able to imagine the possibility to choose differently than it was chosen for them. Women’s capacity to make those choices is crucial in this analysis of empowerment.

Illustration 1. Dimensions of Empowerment

resources
(conditions)

agency
(process)

achievements
(outcomes)

Source: Kabeer (1999:20)

5.2.1. Resources

Resources are also described as pre-conditions to empowerment. It is considered as economic, human and social resources. According to Kabeer (1999:20) access to resources is not an indicator nor it translates directly to empowerment. As already mentioned the husband is playing the role of decision-making authority. In migrant households a new pattern emerges itself. The women left behind may increase their access to new resources, which can lead to changes in their social and economic position. Amartya Sen (1999:201-202) argues that “one reason for the relatively low participation of women in day-to-day economic affairs in many countries is a relative lack of access to economic resources. The ownership of land and capital in the developing countries has tended to be very heavily biased in favor of the male members of the family.” In order to support that statement, several types of resources are described below.

Remittances as resources

One of the main motivation for migration is to obtain better job opportunities, higher income and thus economic advances. The money remittances that left behind women in Nepal receive are also at some level managed by them. This is correlated with the situation they got into after their husbands’ migration (independently living or with in-laws). This control over resources could be seen as a potential precondition for women’s empowerment. Money remittances are seen in this study as resources and “resources are at once removed from choice, a measure of potential rather than actualized choice” (Kabeer 1999:28). Apart from money remittances, social and human resources will be included in this analysis to get a better picture of the potential choice and women’s empowerment. Nonetheless, financial resources in a form of money remittances can have strong impact on changing women’s situation.

The level of money remittances is high, the average amount of remittances per recipient household reached NRs80,436 (about US \$806) in 2011 (Dahal 2014:9).

Gartuala, Visser and Niehof (2011:11) describe four different cases of left behind women in their paper. They divided interviews into five parts: Migration: Decision and Involvement, Remittances: Use and Strategies, Experience, Relation with In-Laws and Communication and Bonding. All these parts are needed in order to get a full picture of the situation of left behind

women. The interesting part is that whether left behind women have access to money resources depends on their way of living: independently or with in-laws. Women living independently become de-facto the head of the household and have the power to manage money remittances. Those women have the ability to use and manage money remittances in a way they think it is the best. Some of them will not be able to save money for the future due to present expenses. These are for example: debts, education of children, household expenses. Although education is very costly, it is seen by the left behind women as an investment for the future (ibid:10). Authors argue that “the additional income from remittances has helped enhancing objective wellbeing of the people in the research area and those remittances provide a safety-net for the women left behind” (Gartuala, Visser and Niehof 2011:7).

It is argued that women who become de-facto the head of the household witness more freedom when it comes to the use of remittances. On the other hand, women living with in-laws do not have the opportunity to be involved in the decision on where to put money remittances. As Suhana (interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2011:8) points out:

“My father-in-law collects the money from his sons and makes use of it, usually by investing it in residential plots for a profit. He does not inform me about the amount sent by my husband”

Land entitlement as resources

Mahrajan, Bauer and Knerr (2012:23) discuss access to resources as it is measured based on the ownership of land, house, animals or money. Their results indicate that women in migrant households witness greater ownership of resources, however the difference between non-migrant households is not significant (ibid). Women in migrant households own more livestock and have access to money resources.

Gartuala, Visser and Niehof (2010:3) discuss the empowerment of women by using following indicators: land entitlement, women’s participation level in social groups, control over their mobility, and their voice in decision-making. Land entitlement seems to be an important resource in the process of women’s empowerment. In Nepal 20 percent of the households have their land registered under women’s name. In some cases a migrant worker can transfer his title deed to his wife when he decides to migrate, however this is not an obligation. When the couple decide to buy a plot while husband is abroad, it will be probably registered in the

wife's name. The evidence shows that the percentage of women's title deeds in returned migrant households is higher than in non-migrant households (Gartuala et al. 2010:9).

Kabeer argues that access to resources reflect the rules, norms and practices of various social relationships that are present in different institutional domains and allows numerous actors to use their authority over others in the distribution of these resources (Kabeer 1999:20). Empowerment is not only about the increase in access to resources, although changes in terms of which resources are acquired are also important.

Human and social resources

Despite money remittances, land entitlements and individual assets (house, savings, and livestock), human and social resources strongly influence left behind women. Human resources, such as good health, education, self-esteem, self-confidence, the ability to imagine a better future etc. are equally important in the process of women's empowerment. Social belonging, leadership relations, a sense of identity are examples of social resources which play an important role in this process as well. Individual assets can be measured, however social and human resources are not the ones that can be estimated so easily. Each and every left behind woman in Nepal witnesses difficulties, it is up to this woman to decide what she wants do to in her present situation. Some women are more confident, have stronger views and opinions and are not afraid to use present circumstances in order to change their social and economic position. Some women are capable to use given resources and start the process of changes.

Amartya Sen (1999) puts attention to capabilities in the process of empowerment and development. He notes that "the expansion of the people's capabilities to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value" (Sen 1999:18). Capabilities can be enhanced by public policy, however public policy can be influenced by the use of participatory capabilities by the public (ibid). Substantive freedom to choose a life one has reason to value is the capability that helps a person to achieve her objective (which in this paper is empowerment). Capability is seen as a kind of freedom. Freedom to achieve various lifestyles (Sen 1999:75). Fahlen (2012) argues that different types of resources can be used by a capable person to act and achieve their goal.

“To possess means and resources gives a person some control over the characteristics of the good, yet it does not tell us what a person is able to do with it.” (Fahlen 2012:16). Capabilities will be also explained in the next part in the notion of agency and the concept of doxa.

5.2.2. Agency

Agency, or the process of empowerment, is defined as “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” (Kabeer 1999:21). It is about action, the meaning, motivations and purpose behind the activity of individual. The concept of power is closely correlated to agency, in both positive and negative senses. In positive understanding of the “power to”, it indicates on individual’s ability to determine their own life-choices and to purpose their own objectives and targets. On the other hand, we witness the negative effect of agency in a sense of “power over”. This refers to the ability of an actor to over-ride the agency of others, for example, through the implementation of violence, threat or coercion.

The term of agency if also mentioned by Sen (1999). Agency is seen as “the role of the individual as a member of public and as a participant in economic, social and political actions (varying from taking part in the market to being involved, directly or indirectly, in individual or joint activities in political and other spheres)” (Sen 1999:19).

In migrant households, when the husband is not present for longer time, his responsibilities are assigned to the rest of the family, mostly women. Together with those responsibilities comes the ability to be involved in the decision-making process. Women witness an increase in the management over things they did not use to have under their control.

Agency will be analyzed using three markers of empowerment: women and decision-making, women’s mobility and freedom of movement and an increase of responsibilities.

Responsibilities

There are several works that are carried by men, however after their migration, somebody has to take care of them. In some cases it will be a woman, and in other a hired male labor. According to Mahrajan, Bauer and Knerr (2012:20) over 80 percent of women in Syangja and Baitadi districts were involved in those activities, however the difference between migrant and non-migrant households was not at higher level. All these new responsibilities and

activities are seen differently by left behind women. Ushadevi (interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2011:12) explains:

“Running a household alone feels like a huge burden. The additional tasks are such as finding male labours especially during ploughing time, finding other labours for transplanting, and so on. Being involved in these activities takes a lot of time. I do not complain about my situation, as I am managing well in the end. Apart from the additional tasks, I have no complaints about my living alone because this is something I am taking as a challenge and he is doing something for the family. So, why would I fuss?”

The reality of being a left behind woman encompasses new responsibilities and duties. One respondent to Gartuala et al (2010:6) discusses it: *“When he (husband) was here he used to spray pesticides. I did not know how to do it but nowadays I have to spray pesticides.”*

Another left behind woman, questioned by Gartuala et al (2010:6) argues: *“As I am from the city area I had never done livestock care but now I can milk the cow. I am learning everything, I have no choice”*

Using secondary data can give more time for researcher to interpret gathered information, however the social and personal behavior of left behind women is missing in this picture. By saying “I am learning; I have no choice” does this woman see it as an advantage or disadvantage? Is it good that she is learning, or does she look at it as an unnecessary amount of new responsibilities? It is difficult to come to right conclusions while reading such interviews with left behind women.

Sen (1990:114 in Fahlen 2012:16) notes that “[I]ndividual claims are to be assessed not by the resources or primary goods the persons respectively hold, but by the freedoms they actually enjoy to choose between different ways of living that they can have reason to value. It is this actual freedom that is represented by the person’s “capability” to achieve various alternative combinations of functionings, or doings and beings.”

Women and Decision-making

Mahrajan, Bauer and Knerr (2012:24) have measured the role of women in household decision making by implementing various aspects, such as “cropping activities, education of children, food expenses and savings, agricultural expenditure and nonagricultural investment.” Findings indicate that women in migrant households witness increased role in the decision making than women in non-migrant households in Nepal. Their role includes

decisions about irrigation, use of fertilizers, labor hiring, food expenses, education of children, food savings, agricultural investments and non-agricultural investments (Mahrajan et al. 2012: 25). Almost 50 percent of interviewed women have the power to make decisions about non-agricultural investments. This is very important as the role of women is becoming stronger as they finally have the ability to make different kind of choices for themselves or for their families. This can be illustrated by following transcripts presented by Gartuala et al. (2010:8):

“To make a decision on which crops to grow, I do not ask for piece of advice from anyone. I make a strategy which crops would grow better and from which crops I can get green vegetables, I decide accordingly. My husband never asks which crops I am growing and the income I get [she sometimes sells mustard seeds]”.

Some women will be satisfied with their lives, even though it contains more responsibilities and burden on their shoulders. Consciously or not, the changes in their positions are being made, they may witness empowerment.

However, this ability to make choice is in some cases correlated to the concept of doxa. For some women culture and tradition is important and they in a way do not seek for any changes. Male migration in this situation is followed by negative attitudes and less positive impacts on women’s lives. As interviewed by Mahrajan et al. (2012:26) the dilemmas of left behind woman are following: *“Women were never brought up to take the responsibility of the household head. Now with my husband migrating, I have to take all the decisions but I just do not know what decision to take.”*

Amartya Sen (1999) argues that it is possible for women to have the opportunity and not take it up. “Choosing” itself can bring a high value of functioning. To choose “x” when no alternative is presented have to be distinguished from choosing “x” while substantial alternatives exist. (ibid:76). Another important argument made by Sen (1999:199) is that “there is plenty of evidence that when women get the opportunities that are typically the preserve of men, they are no less successful in making use of these facilities that men have claimed to be their own over the centuries.”

As it is introduced, women’s attitudes toward decision-making differs, it is an individual and personal way of incorporating with new responsibilities, burden and decisions. Although women have already possessed some authority in decision-making, the degree of it has also

increased. Some women are able to make decisions about things they could not decide about before male labour migration.

De-facto female head of the household (interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2010:8) explains it:

“It is not possible to ask every detail out there. I just ask some main things and proceed without asking for the smaller ones like treating the guests, going to the meetings, allocation of income from crops, maintaining daily household expenses, and so on. My husband also does not ask for every details of the expenditure”.

Parsila (left behind women interviewed by Gartala et al. 2011:12) is living with her parents in-law, this is how she describes the use of remittances:

“When he sends money he instructs me what to do with it, like this much should be given to my father-in-law for household use, this much to deposit in the bank or lending money to someone, and this much for my personal use. I do not spend much of his income, I do not buy much for myself; I want to save for the future.”

For these women ability to make choices and decisions is extremely important. Their position gets stronger. Even though these may be small decisions, “less” important, the ability to make a choice they were previously denied to make, can lead to their empowerment. A great number of women who witness the reality of being left behind, experience empowerment as decision-making actors.

Mobility and freedom of movement

Agency is also connected to the free mobility of left behind women. Desai and Banerji (2008:9) argue that women’s physical mobility is restricted in many parts of South Asia. Gartuala, Visser and Niehof (2011:16) explain that women’s living arrangements after male migration are an important factor. The women who live independently as de-facto head of the households can witness more freedom in resource mobilization and their own mobility than the women living with parents-in-law, who are still controlled by them. Sardevi (interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2011), joined group meetings and visited a market without any permission from her husband or in-laws. It is argued that by involvement in groups and cooperatives women’s self-esteem and self-confidence have increased (ibid:17). This Nepali woman, interviewed by Gartuala et al (2011:10) explains her situation:

“In our community, women are always kept inside. They are supposed to work in the kitchen only, but not on the farm or outside. After his departure, I started going out. I learnt how to transplant rice and got to know the outside world. I got introduced to many people and started going to the market [where the money transfer agencies are located] to receive the money sent by my husband. In a way, I take these as positive changes. Though I have to manage the household on my own and work more than in the past, I do not feel overburdened. I am feeling good that I can go out, know many people, and can share my feelings with others.”

Women living independently have a better subjective wellbeing than women living with in-laws. Parsila (a Nepali left behind woman is one of four respondents in Gartuala et al 2011:12 interviews) on the other hand has experienced control of the in-laws. She says: *“I do not feel that I am free to move, because I am living with his parents. As he has kept me with his parents, I have to ask them whatever I do.”*

Communication and bonding are important aspects in the relationship between left behind and a husband. According to Gartuala et al. (2011) left behind women have access to mobile phones, which were often bought for them by their husbands. Even when they did not have mobile phones they found a way to talk to husbands (using landline phone at their parents or at public booth). Some left behind women do not talk about love and such topics with their husbands. As Suhana (a left behind woman interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2011:9) points out: *“During talks, we spend a lot of time on household affairs and about his living there, not much on love; he is not that kind of person”*

On the other hand Parsila (interviewed by Gartuala et al. 2011:13) notes that: *“We always talk about love during the phone calls. What else, if you get an opportunity to talk to your husband, who would think of talking about other issues?”*

The concept of agency is very important in the process of empowerment. In the next point the achievement that is women’s participation in labour market will be described.

5.2.3. Achievements as Female Labour Market Participation

The achievements, or outcomes, of empowerment should be noticed on the basic level achievements, such as appropriate shelter or nourishment. Women in Nepal have accepted their role as mothers, wives and household keepers. Their role can expand as they enter the labour market and gain independent income. The situation of left behind women is difficult in

a sense that women witness increase of responsibilities on household level, so that additional formal work can be hard to find and keep. Furthermore, Sen (1999:194) argues that “the freedom to seek and hold outside jobs can contribute to the reduction of women’s relative – and absolute – deprivation. Freedom in one area seems to help foster freedom in others.”

Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) discuss the impact of male migration on the labour market behavior of Nepalese women. In 2004 only 19 percent of women were engaged in market wage-earning activities. Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009:5) note that formal sector includes only eight percent of female employment in Nepal. “More than 70 percent of female workers are self-employed or employed in low-wage activities in the informal sector. In urban areas, women are employed in a range of cottage industries—such as carpet-weaving, textiles, and handicrafts—and in occupations such as vending, petty trading, brewing, and vegetable selling” (ibid). Lokshin and Glinskaya (2009) argue that movement of male members of the households reduces women’s rates of labour market participation by 5,3 points (ibid:23). The impact is even stronger on women ages 25-35 and on well educated women (11 or more years of education).

Another question rises, namely, if women need to find work? In some cases the increase of household income, through money remittances sent by the husband, lets the family to live normal life, pay debts and meet all their needs. It shows limited needs for women to enter labour market. On the other hand, some women would like to be involved in formal work, however they lack the skills, education or self-confidence. In this situation, women do not witness changes in their economic and social positions.

It is important to mention that female labour market participation is often influenced by many different factors, such as education level, age or rural vs urban areas, which are not included in this study.

The pressure on the interconnectivity between the three dimensions is one of the main point of Kabeer’s (1999) analytical framework in measuring empowerment of women. It is impossible to see one indicator as a dimension of empowerment, without referring to the two other dimensions (ibid:23).

6. Conclusion

This study examines the consequences of male labour migration on the economic and social position of left behind women in Nepal. Although the phenomenon of migration has been greatly elaborated by scholars, those who stay behind also need the attention in the whole migration discourse. Presented literature points out the importance of remittances in lives of left behind women in Nepal and other countries as well. Motivations of the movement have not been covered in this study, however it is mentioned that better economic opportunities and higher income are the crucial factors for labour migration worldwide.

In order to understand the connection between male labour migration and position of left behind women a literature review was conducted and a suitable analytical framework was chosen. Naila Kabeer's (1999) explanation has served as a guide through the whole process of writing this thesis. The notion of empowerment of women goes together with three aspects: resources, agency and achievements (ibid). Each one of the three aspects are equally important in the process of empowerment.

Resources have been discussed as economic, human and social ones. Money remittances and land entitlement are seen in this thesis as crucial ones in the process of changing Nepalese women's economic and social position. Agency in this thesis refers to three aspects: role of women in decision-making, mobility and free movement and new responsibilities. Achievements or the outcome of empowerment includes women's labour market participation.

The increase in responsibilities was considered as burden for women, however some of them looked at this in more positive way, as a challenge where they can learn new things. The decision-making process has shown that some decisions (not very important ones) were made only by left behind women. But decision-making in many cases included husbands as the one who was in charge of them. The husband, father in-law, or brother in-law were mainly involved in decision-making. The traditional patriarchy was kept in place, even though the husband was abroad. Some women are capable to use given circumstances and resources in order to change their position in the society. Although many of them choose not to choose and remain in the same position as before male migration.

In this paper, women's participation in the labour market was considered as an achievement of the process of empowerment. As the analysis presents, participation of women in labour market rates were reduced after male migration. In this sense, women did not experience the

opportunity to make their own strategic life choices, such as independent work. Male labour migration can limit the capability of women to make choice of joining labour market.

The importance of establishing connection of three dimensions is mentioned above. Kabeer (1999) argues that different studies on women's empowerment may lack an analysis of all three dimensions and the transferability as they only discuss one or two dimensions. The theoretical framework presented by Naila Kabeer (1999) can be used as a tool in theoretical discussion of how women's empowerment could be measured.

This thesis helps to understand the complexity of the situation of left behind women. For women living in a traditional society e.g. in Nepal, where the institutions of patriarchy, virilocality and patrilinearity play a fundamental role, it is extremely difficult to change the present way of life. Although they experience increase of resources, they are involved in decision-making, the situation is too complex to draw one conclusion. Taking all that into consideration, it cannot be argued that male labour migration leads to women's empowerment in Nepal. Some changes may occur with the connection to male absence, however it is also individuals (women) who decide whether to act or not. Another potential limitation in answering given research question is that it is not obvious whether the new circumstances for left behind women are really advantage for them. Why do left behind women consider their temporary situation as a burden, and not as intuitive expectations that they would be more positive about it? This question would be clearly affirmed from an outsider's and feminist's perspective, however Nepalese women often argued that the new situation is difficult to handle, and that they liked the old way of doing things and sharing responsibilities with the husband.

On an overall level presented findings demonstrate that male labour migration, despite its potential, does not encourage women to take actions and does not initiate the process of empowerment. It cannot be translated into increased agency or improvements in achievements of empowerment, such as female labour market participation.

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