

# Social Cost of Migration

September 2016

## Why does it matter?

**Foreign Employment brings economic benefits to families and the country, but it also causes certain social strains. The strain of labour migration in Nepal has come with a significant cost affecting the women returnee migrants and women left behind. Discourse on this aspect of foreign employment has yet to gain momentum in Nepal.**

The separation of family members, estrangement in husband-wife relationships, disputes between family members for control over resources, tainting the image of the wife left behind, wrongfully accusing women returnee migrants of being involved in sex work, are some of the challenges families have to deal with.

Most Nepali men migrate to Malaysia and GCC Countries unskilled, low-paid and in unprotected jobs. Women undergo the hardship of being apart without the assurance of being able to improve the quality of their life. In the absence of the men, wives take on additional responsibilities such as labour work, farming jobs otherwise performed by men, and selling products in the market. Women also have to carry the sole responsibility for children and the elderly. Women who leave the house for work are often looked at with suspicion by their relatives and neighbours, and blamed of infidelity. And those who do not work, are accused of squandering money.

Women returnee migrant find it difficult to reintegrate upon her return as she is often the subject of gossip and ridicule. The social stigma attached to women returnee migrant is so widespread that these preconceived notions make it difficult for women to live happily in their communities.





## Does the problem really need our attention?

### Some facts

- In 2015, SaMi conducted a media monitoring focusing on women left behind and women returnee migrants. The findings showed that some media coverage tarnished the image of women migrants and women left behind based on hearsay, assumptions or common perception of the society and were hardly based on research, data or factual information. Wives of migrant workers remarrying or squandering money were common topic in several news reports.
- A recent internal survey conducted by SaMi in 8,933 migrant households in two Village Development Committees (VDC) each in nine districts (Khotang, Sarlahi, Ramechhap, Kailali, Nawalparasi, Dhading, Dhanusha, Saptari and Sunsari) showed that 36% spouse had remarried from women migrant households, whereas 2% spouse had remarried from male migrant households. In general, there are widespread views of women being the major cause of social cost.
- During SaMi Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in 2015 and 2016 with 2,766 persons, the findings showed that communities had biased views towards women migrants and women left behind. Several participants in the FGD said that women who go abroad to work return sexually exploited. Field observation has also shown that women left behind are often accused of squandering money, and extra-marital affair.
- SaMi's national partner for psychosocial intervention, Centre for Mental Health and Counseling (CMC), in their 2015/16 progress report have showed, that there are more women than men who suffer from anxiety, depression and social withdrawal among migrant worker's families.

My husband works in Qatar. I have to manage everything at home. When I am talking to men who I want to hire as daily wage labour for my field, or seek help to repair my roof, I hear people in the village gossiping about me. It bothered me a lot earlier. I would get worried and lose my sleep over it. Since I started taking the psychosocial counselling sessions conducted by SaMi, I have started to think differently. I don't care about such trivial gossip anymore. I have learnt to avoid them and invest my energy in my daughter and managing home.

Mother of one daughter,  
Ramechhap.





## What SaMi Does

- Psychosocial counseling to families left behind and returnee migrants in nine districts: Khotang, Sarlahi, Ramechhap, Kailali, Nawalparasi, Dhading, Dhanusha, Nuwakot and Sindhupalchowk.
- Shelter support to returnee women migrants in need. Psychosocial counseling to women returnee in distress and their family members.
- Take women returnee migrants as paid volunteers in SaMi districts to reinstate their worth in their communities and share their experiences first-hand with potential women migrant workers.
- Provide Financial Literacy Classes to remittance receiving families in six districts (Khotang, Sarlahi, Nawalparasi, Ramechhap, Kailali and Sunsari) to enable them to make informed choices about proper use of remittance and savings.
- Continued research work on social cost of migration with emphasis on women left behind and women returnee migrants.
- Training and sensitizing journalists, SaMi staff and partners in Kathmandu and SaMi districts on social and psychological impact of migration on families and enhance their capacity to deal with the gender dimension of migration.
- Regular work with media for reconnecting families by carrying stories and videos of missing migrants on Facebook for wider dissemination in destination countries.

## What needs to be done further

- Conduct media monitoring and in-depth study on social cost of migration.
- Create positive image of migrant women and wives left behind
- Programs and intervention with families left behind
- Support mechanisms that reduces the negative psycho-social effects of migration on families left behind.
- Acknowledge returnee women as economic contributors in remittances
- Relate findings from studies and research to existing policy frameworks and indicate possible entry points for policy dialogue.
- The Government of Nepal, organizations and institutions working in the migration sector, civil society and journalists' engagement to understand and internalize the impact of social stigma on women left behind and women returnee migrants.

# How SaMi made a difference from 2013 to 2015

39

psychosocial counselors  
tutored and presently  
working at district level



1,067

returnee women received  
shelter support



1,428

persons received individual  
psychosocial counseling in  
nine districts



3,298

persons received group  
psychosocial counselling in  
nine districts



12

cases of 'missing migrant'  
videos developed in 2015.  
Video appeal by family  
members posted on media  
website and Facebook.  
7 reconnected with their  
families.



1,938

persons received financial  
literacy classes.

