

# **Return and Reintegration: Exploring challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 migrant returnees in small scale Agri-businesses**

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## **Abstract**

Migration and Agriculture have been the two important elements of Nepalese economy not only in terms of its contribution to GDP but also dependency of many people from rural areas in terms of source of income. However, the pandemic led to the return of a large number of migrants to cross borders and come back to the source country leaving them with very limited or simply no mode of earnings. This research aims to identify the challenges and opportunities with migrant returnees in terms of starting and maintaining agriculture business during these miserable times. This research analyses the motivational factors that pushed these returnees to opt for agriculture business upon return and the kind of support and benefits they strived for while investing for the same. This research further dwells on intersectional challenges faced by migrant returnees as roles in agriculture business and its effects differ based on gender, caste and destination country.

## **1. Background**

Agriculture is the backbone of Nepal's economy, accounting for 27.1 percent of GDP and employing 65.6 percent of the population (FAO 2021). However, People appear to be less interested in agriculture these days because it is less lucrative in terms of earning money, which has resulted in a rural-urban movement. The majority of rural Nepalese household members have been migrating to other countries for work. Out of 100 overseas migrants in the country, 81 percent were from rural areas (CBS 2011). Although, agricultural expansion is considered to be more successful than industrial expansion in decreasing poverty. Very few migrants after returning home choose to get involved in agriculture. National strategies appear to be failing to draw new generations to agriculture, which is why the sector is degrading day by day. For developing nations like Nepal, productive-agricultural transformation is critical at both the policy and execution levels.

Considering covid-19 and the upsurge of migrant returnees from various destination countries, it becomes crucial to understand migrant-returnee's interest in agricultural business. During the period of epidemic, many migrant returnees have either been involved in agriculture or shown some interest in the sector after returning to Nepal with the aim of earning enough income to sustain themselves and their family.

The Migrant's interest in agriculture has been proved through a study conducted by Bastia which shows that the linkage between migrant-returnee and agricultural business as positive. Having a migrant worker in a household increases the chances of owning an agriculture business by 0.16 (Bastia 2006). Whereas the chances of owning a general business in a household with migrant returnees reduces the chances by 0.24 (Bastia 2006; Speck 2017). This evidence further portrays the imperativeness of assisting migrant returnees to bring their experience, savings, and ideas, as well as the possibility for business.

Another version that needs attention is that Migration does add to the advantage of remittances but also leads to brain drain. Remittances sent by migrants contribute towards the GDP of the country but integration in Agriculture will contribute towards both GDP as well as 'Human Development Indicators'.

As mentioned earlier, labour migration is said to provide a significant contribution towards the national and local economy in the form of remittances. However, this nuance has been tested in different ways by distinct authors. According to Khanal, Poudel and Hussain, Labour migration induces negative impacts on food-self-sufficiency and local agriculture.

Similarly, according to Sunam and Mc Carthy, “*International labour migration and remittances have profound effects on agrarian and rural livelihoods, for instance by inflating land prices and decreasing the capacity of the poor to access land.*”

Gendered aspect in migration is another aspect that often goes unnoticed, even though gender division of agriculture roles has been prominent historically. Ploughing, irrigation, fertilization, and conveying agricultural food have generally been dominated by men, while planting, hoeing, weeding, and harvesting have traditionally been dominated by women. However, as males leave the country in greater numbers, the gendered job divide is blurring, with women handling the majority of the tasks (Adhikari & Hobley, 2011; Gartaula et al., 2010; Jaquet et al., 2015; Maharjan et al., 2012; Paudel et al., 2012). This process has led to a huge amount of land abandonment in rural areas of Nepal as women outward migration is also gradually increasing. However, after the covid-19 in March 2020, many Nepali migrants returned to the home country carrying financial debts, stigma of covid-19 and loss of employment which raised more questions on the darker perspective of migration.

Interest sector of Migrant Returnees

Country	Run own Business	Involvement in Agriculture (traditional)	Involvement in Agriculture (Modern)	Start Entrepreneurship	Stay Idle	Other
India	39.29	14.29	0	0	0	46.43
Malaysia	18.6	39.53	20.93	4.65	6.98	9.3
Qatar	33.64	30.84	25.23	2.8	4.67	2.8
UAE	47.32	23.21	8.93	5.36	1.79	13.39
Saudi Arabia	49.15	25.42	14.41	0	0.85	10.17
Bahrain	50	10	30	0	0	10
Kuwait	33.33	16.67	16.67	11.11	11.11	11.11
Maldives	66.67	0	33.33	0	0	0
Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	0	100
Thailand	66.67	0	16.67	0	5.56	11.11
Other Countries	47.5	5	30	5	0	12.5

Source -IOM 2020

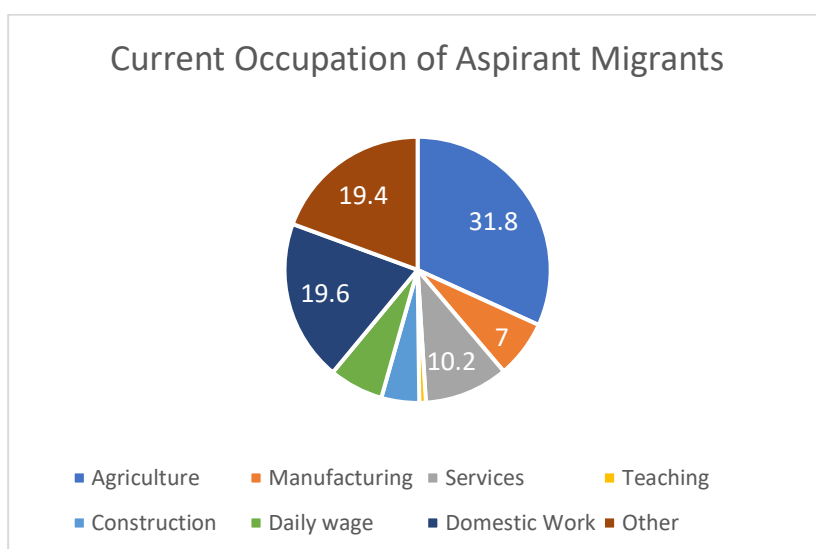
Fig- 1

Figure 1 portrays the division of migrant returnees’ interest sectors based on their country of destination. According to the figure approximately 40 percent of the current migrants expressed a desire to start their own business upon return. Around 30 percent of returnees wanted to continue pursuing traditional

agriculture whereas 20 percent showed interest in pursuing modern farming. This data leads to a conclusion that almost half of the migrants wanted to get involved in farming upon return to Nepal.

Additionally, Return and Reintegration plans of Migrant returnees in the wake of covid -19 showed a positive percentage as 65.9% of migrants were interested in working in the source country (IOM 2020). More males expressed interest as compared to women. The percentage of women was 46.2% whereas, 51.9% men were interested (IOM 2020).

The main question that needs answering is, how to utilize the entrepreneurial and experienced skills of migrant returnees and channel it in the right direction to generate employment and improve their Socio-Economic factors in the home country.



Source IOM 2020

Fig- 2

### Current Occupation of Migrant Returnees

Occupation	India	Malaysia	GCC	Other	All
Agriculture, Forestry and fishing	28.6	21.7	15.2	13.3	20
Mining and Quarrying	1.5	0	2.1	0	1.2
Manufacturing	14	12.4	12.8	11.8	12.9
Electricity, Gas, Steam and AC supply	0.1	0.2	0.4	0	0.3
Water Supply	0	0	0.1	0	0
Construction	30.1	23.3	31.9	18.1	28.4
Wholesale and trade	10.9	13.3	14.7	24.4	13.9
Transportation and Storage	6.6	10	10.2	1.6	9

Accommodation	5.5	10.2	5.4	0	6.6
Information and Communications	0	0.8	0	0	0.3
Financial and Insurance Activities	0	0.1	0	0	0
Scientific and technical Activities	0	0.8	0	0	0.2
Administrative and support service activities	0.6	0	0.5	0	0.4
Defence	0.5	0.2	1.3	1.5	0.8
Education	0.3	0.3	2	3.5	1.2
Human Health and Social Work Activities	0.5	0.6	0.8	16	1.3
Arts, entertainment and recreation	0	0	0.4	9.9	0.6
Other service activities	1	5.9	2.1	0	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100

*Source: UNDP 2017/18*

*Fig- 3*

According to Figure 2, Agriculture and domestic labour appears to employ the majority of aspiring migrants, since they were mentioned by 32% and 20% of respondents, respectively. Around 10% of the workforce worked in services, 7% in manufacturing, 5% in construction, and less than 1% in education.

According to a survey conducted by IOM, the most important reasons for people to relocate for overseas work were the following. For example, around 32% of aspiring migrants cited "poverty" as a key motivation for their move, while 27% cited "unemployment." Other reasons given were "to make life better" (17%), "to repay loans" (11%), and "to improve economic status" (11 percent).

Return and Reintegration plans of Migrant returnees in the wake of covid -19 showed a positive percentage as 65.9% of migrants were interested in working in the source country. More males expressed interest as compared to women. The percentage of women was 46.2% whereas, 51.9% men were interested (IOM 2020).

## **2. ProblemStatement**

To understand the opportunities and challenges/ roadblocks faced by existing migrant returnees in Agriculture based businesses. *This objective will outline the challenges and explore the mechanism of converting challenges into opportunities. Some challenges include- Access to market, Lack of official channels for loans and borrowings, machines and equipment required for efficient agriculture, training in modern farming etc.*

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This research is planned as an explanatory research meaning and seeks to understand and describe the motivational factors pushing migrant returnees to opt for agriculture business upon return. These factors represent duality which consists of challenges, opportunities and benefits observed by migrant returnees.

#### 3.2. Research questions

1. What are the motivations, benefits, opportunities, and challenges faced by migrant returnees while starting agri-business?
2. Are there distinct opportunities and challenges among different categories of migrants? (*Division based on Gender and destination country*)
3. What are the policies supporting Agri-business in Nepal?

#### 3.3. Research Area

The research site is based on the project implemented by UNDP (VCDP) and MoALD to support Youth migrant-returnees in small Agricultural businesses. Value Chain Development of Fruits and Vegetables Project includes 69 migrant returnees who have been shortlisted based on their interest in Agriculture business. This group is highly heterogeneous belonging to various destination countries, caste, and gender. These migrants are currently located at Syangja, Kavre, Sunkoshi and Sindhuli Districts.

#### 3.4. Sample Design

The study will be conducted applying both primary and secondary data collection. For secondary data collection various reports, research papers and existing policy documents have been referred to. For primary data collection, a **mixed method** has been applied. A combination of Qualitative and Quantitative research has been conducted to answer the above mentioned three research questions. **Semi-structured interviews (Telephonic)** have been conducted at the first stage to get a general understanding of the challenges, motivations, and opportunities of the migrant workers. Next, semi-structured interviews have been analysed to prepare a Survey **questionnaire** to meet all the above questions in quantitative measures.

1. **Secondary Data Collection**- Secondary information will be collected through government websites, national and international publications, review of policies, reports and journal articles.
2. **Semi Structured Interview**- The interview has been conducted via telephone after sampling the target group based on their gender and destination country. A detailed interview has been conducted with open-ended questions to understand the challenges they faced while starting agri-business in Nepal. 10 migrant returnees have been shortlisted based on Purposive Sampling method.
3. **Survey Questionnaire**- After analysing semi structured interviews a survey questionnaire has been prepared further to understand benefits, challenges, aspirations etc, behind opting for agriculture business and thus, quantifying these factors. The survey has provided emphasis on different categories of migrants and their challenges. The sampling method for survey has been based on convenience sampling and snowball sampling method after identifying 5 categories, Male, Female, Gulf, India, Others. Comparative analysis will be conducted based on Gender and Destination country.

#### 3.5.Limitations of the Study

1. Due to time constraints, the study was conducted in five districts out of 75 districts and only 7 municipalities/ municipalities of the nation. Therefore, primary information collected during the study cannot represent the whole nation.
2. Data collection was conducted based on Telephonic interviews which could have led to misinterpretation and communication gap. Trust on the side of the interviewee was questionable in places.
3. Non-probability method of sampling was used where 55% data was collected from a selection criterion determined by UNDP in 5 districts. The selection criteria were made on three categories:
  - a. Some knowledge and understanding of agriculture/ intention of commercial farming (this excludes those who still have intention but might lack proper knowledge and understanding).
  - b. Capacity to invest a minimum amount 3,00,00 NRS in their business (This portrays a discrepancy in inclusivity of farmers of all classes).
  - c. Accessible transportation to market.
  - d. Remaining 45% of selection was made based on the snowball sampling method.

### **3.6. Chapter Outline**

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Effects of migration on Agriculture
- Chapter 3: Challenges and Opportunities of Migrant returnees
- Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis
- Chapter 5: Policy Recommendation
- Chapter 6: Conclusion

**Chapter 1- Effects of migration on Agriculture:** The purpose of the chapter is to investigate the vulnerability of Nepali-out migrants due to covid-19. There is sufficient literature to explore migrant's vulnerability and their return to the source country with an immense burden of health and financial crisis. The chapter will further delve into general challenges faced by migrants' returnees to give a context to agri-business related challenges. The chapter further aims to explore two sub-topics majorly through literature review. Firstly, the linkage between migration and Agriculture will be explored through their juxtaposition upon one another. The correlation between land abandonment and migration and its further impact on agriculture in Rural Nepal will be shed light on. Secondly, the direct implications of migration on the Agricultural sector, exploring advantages and disadvantages will additionally be emphasised.

**Chapter 2- Challenges and Opportunities of Migrant returnees:** Chapter 3 will be based on primary data collection where narratives and nuances of migrants will be recorded to understand intrinsic motivations and benefits behind starting agriculture business. The chapter will further delve into Challenges and roadblocks faced by specific migrants based on their Gender, Caste, destination country, skills etc.

**Chapter 3- Data Presentation and Analysis:** This chapter will be based on data collection through surveys. The migrants in the survey have been divided based on two categories- Gender and Destination Country. Therefore, based on these categories, comparative analysis on their challenges, motivations and vulnerabilities will be examined.

**Chapter 4- Policy Recommendation:** This chapter will include policy analysis and recommendations based on secondary literature and telephonic interviews conducted. The role of the current federal system in reducing vulnerability and increasing the productivity of migrant returnees will also be explored here.

#### **4. Effects of migration on Agriculture**

The purpose of the chapter is to investigate the vulnerability of Nepali-out migrants due to covid-19. The chapter delves into general challenges faced by migrants' returnees to give a context to agri-business related challenges.

##### **4.1. Epidemic and Migrants vulnerability in destination countries**

Although the epidemic brought about immense crisis and distress among people's economic, social and political lives throughout the world, the lives of migrants and refugees were unprecedentedly affected. One of the most dishearteningly affected groups, Nepali Labour Migrants constituted the population of 4 million in the last decade. Out of this number, the female population constituted only 5.29% of the total labour migrants (MoLESS 2020). While women's migration and the statistical discrepancy continues, what needs focus is the vulnerability and response to epidemic that shapes the crucial part in understanding the situation of labour migrants in Nepal.

According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS) 2017/18, there were roughly 3.2 million Nepalese migrants living overseas, including those seeking work, education, or other opportunities (CBS & ILO 2019). According to the same report, India was home to more than 37% of all Nepali migrants (CBS & ILO 2019). Millions of Nepali migrant workers in destination nations have encountered a variety of hazards and obstacles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their human rights and security were likewise jeopardized in general which was clearly witnessed during their forced return to host/ source country (Nepal et al. 2020). Even though the government of Nepal made various attempts to collaborate with destination countries, the lack of management and data brought about more precarity and ambiguity in the lives of migrant labourers. Moreover, the insecurity and haphazardness among Nepali migrants in India was a disastrous case to witness. This situation witnessed in 2019 in particular raised questions on the concept of insecurity of migrants, which hadn't been properly catered to prior to the pandemic.

This further raised questions on the immense vulnerability in destination country as well as source country in terms of three criteria:

##### **a. Lack of Jobs at both source and destination countries**

In the destination nations, Nepali pay had been lowered by 20 to 80 percent (IOM 2020). The reductions were from 30 to 50% in the UAE, 20 to 40% in Qatar, and 50 to 80% in the Maldives (Baniya et. al. 2020). The majority of Nepalis who lost their jobs in the UAE worked in salons, clothing stores, the

construction industry, as beauticians, and as taxi drivers. Additionally, Nepalis who used to work in textiles, malls, construction, facilities, and cleaning had been the hardest hit in Qatar. It had far-reaching implications for the security and livelihood of millions of migrants and those left behind, who rely on the former (IOM 2020; Pant 2020). Due to their overrepresentation in the domestic and hospitality sectors, female migrant workers have been especially vulnerable to unemployment during the pandemic (Sreypheta 2021).

Due to these reasons the GoN launched a reintegration plan thus, including financial literacy, vocational training, shelter and psychological support to migrant returnees (Nepali Times 2020). However, these services were available only for documented migrants and excluded thousands of undocumented workers, who are also ineligible for other facilities such as Nepal's Foreign Employment Welfare Fund, which provides compensation in case of death, injury, or serious illness (Sreypheta 2021). Many migrants were additionally not eligible for government schemes such as soft loans, reintegration plan and other supports.

#### **b. Returning home and insecurity**

According to preliminary estimates from the Nepal government, a total of 407,000 migrants were estimated to return last year, including at least 127,000 employees in need of immediate repatriation and over 280,000 Nepalis who had lost their jobs in the Gulf Cooperation Council and Malaysia alone (Mandal 2020). In addition, roughly 1,500 Nepali labour licenses expired every day (Baniya et al. 2020). However, the number of migrants stranded in the border especially in India- Nepal porous border was extremely more than estimated due to which the government lacked facilities to integrate and prepare quarantine centres. Due to these reasons, migrant returnees were a great threat and challenge for the government of Nepal, as arrangements of quarantine centre, testing facility, repatriation and reintegration was a huge matter of essentiality.

#### **c. Menace to Dignity**

During the COVID-19 epidemic, many incidences of discrimination and social stigma (ILO 2020, The Business Standard 2020), as well as violence against migrant workers (Kuo&Davidson 2020), were documented, resulting in the loss of 'freedom from indignity'. Migrant returnees were seen as carriers of covid 19 thus blocking borders and denying their entry. During the epidemic, such a threat to dignity indicated the absence of human security frameworks (Tadjbakhsh 2014) in handling migratory worker difficulties in receiving nations. Instead of properly implementing international human rights principles of "non-discrimination," Nepali migrant workers had been subjected to various forms of stigmatization and have been victims of violence and hatred in their destination countries, making them feel unsafe and insecure (ILO 2020).

The loss in work possibilities, combined with perceived and real hazards of millions of Nepalis returning home from abroad in the near future, could have provided an opportunity for the Himalayan country to not only adopt policies to address urgent damages, but also to strengthen public policies (Bhattarai & Baniya 2020). By providing and retaining possibilities, macro and microeconomic policies could be altered to avoid millions of kids, including returnee migrants, from becoming trapped in the "lockdown generation." [Bhattarai and Baniya, 2020]

## **4.2. Reintegration in post-pandemic world**

Therefore, the major challenge that remained with the government was not only to accommodate the large number of youth majority population but also to create space through reintegration. The question of reintegration is usually perceived based on three basic categories: Psychological, social and

Economic. As mentioned earlier Psychological and social integration of migrant returnees was a chaos and mayhem in itself but the situation was worsened by terming them as “unwanted” in their very own home. According to International Organization of Migration (IOM 2020) the definition of, reintegration is, “*a process which enables individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and inclusion in civic life.*” This definition adds to the fact that migrants returning to their host destination is more than merely returning home. There are numerous factors that influence the act of migrants returning. It does have additional complicated components and actors, some of whom are even independent of the state (Ndreka, 2019). Because of these reasons, the type and process of return migration is unpredictable and difficult to analyze and track (Lesiska, 2013). COVID-19 can be classified as a sudden-onset disaster due to its effects, which occurred swiftly and abruptly (UNDRR, 2016).

In the current situation, a state's return migration policy has been critical to effective migration management. In the absence of robust return migration rules, the state typically implements reactive or passive state policies in reaction to already existent return migration as a result of various types of crisis situations, such as COVID-19 (Lesiska, 2013). This type of return migration is also known as crisis return or forced return, and it is triggered by political upheaval or various types of calamities (Battistella, 2018).

For quite some time, international labour migration has been a common occurrence in Nepal. However, the growth of migration as a source of income and its relationship to Nepal's economy and development is a relatively new topic of discussion (Wickramasekara, 2008). Migration and its interconnections with remittances, return migration, circular migration, and other multiplier effects in socioeconomic growth have been the subject of much debate.

### **4.3. Response of GoN in reintegration process**

The Government of Nepal, in response to epidemic and migrant returnee's crisis declared a goal to create 7,00,000 employment opportunities in the year 2020-2021 through various programmes in their home country. These programs were aimed at not only migrant returnees and among those who wished to return overseas but all the domestic labour force. The Prime Minister Employment Programme (PMEP), for example, was implemented at the local level and targeted returnee migrant workers in all of Nepal's districts. PMEP was first established in FY 2018/19 with the goal of discouraging Nepali youth from migrating abroad by giving them 100 days of work in different development projects run by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments (MoLESS 2020). The Government of Nepal had set up NPR 11.6 billion for FY 2020/21, more than doubling the previous year's allocation, which had hoped to employ 200,000 Nepalis. Nevertheless, according to a report by a government task committee investigating the effects of COVID-19 on the foreign employment sector and the economy, the government will need to generate at least 1.5 million jobs to accommodate all jobless people, including those returning from abroad (Shrestha, 2020).

Additionally, The Government of Nepal's efforts to repatriate and reintegrate Nepali migrants have been criticized. Among these, there have been requests for a centralized database system that can identify Nepali migrants and store all of the necessary information. Due to a lack of consistent data on migrant workers in destination countries, the number of probable Nepalis estimated by various GoN institutions such as the FEB, Nepal Police, and DoFE, among others, was either underestimated or lacked coherence in the early efforts to develop a repatriation strategy (Thapa, Pradhan & Bhattarai, 2020). The number of Nepalis returning from India was considerably greater than expected during the first lockdown period, posing problems in terms of administration and quarantine. An effective reintegration process necessitates a stronger framework that spans all levels of government in order to manage returnees effectively and efficiently.

Although PMEP is a solid beginning point, it falls short of covering the vast majority of returnee migrants, as well as other psychosocial components of the reintegration process (Thapa et al. 2020). Incorporating these elements into long-term reintegration plans for returnee migrants might be critical not only for the effectiveness of the programs adopted, but also for the returnee migrants' well-being. Different activities should be conducted at different levels when it comes to psychological assistance.

#### **4.4. Agriculture and Remittances**

In recent years, the newer generations of Nepalese have considered international employment as considerably more lucrative than agricultural techniques and have thus replaced agricultural methods with working abroad. Due to its low GDP per capita, which was last measured at USD 1,071 in 2019, Nepal is also one of the least developed countries in South Asia (The World Bank 2019). As a result, roughly 18.7% of Nepal's population is still living in absolute poverty (Economic Survey 2019), despite the country's current unemployment rate of 11.4 percent (CBS 2017).

In retrospect, Nepal's GDP saw a steep decline because of a decrease in remittances. Because of the coronavirus, which has caused a global economic slowdown and a dramatic reduction in oil prices, remittances fell by nearly half to NPR 34.5 billion in mid-April 2020, compared to NPR 71 billion in the previous fiscal year (NRB, 2020). Nepal received USD 8.1 billion in remittances in 2019, accounting for 27.3% of the country's GDP (Ratha et al., 2020). In terms of remittances as a percentage of a country's GDP, this is the Fourth highest in the world and the highest in South Asia (The World Bank 2020).

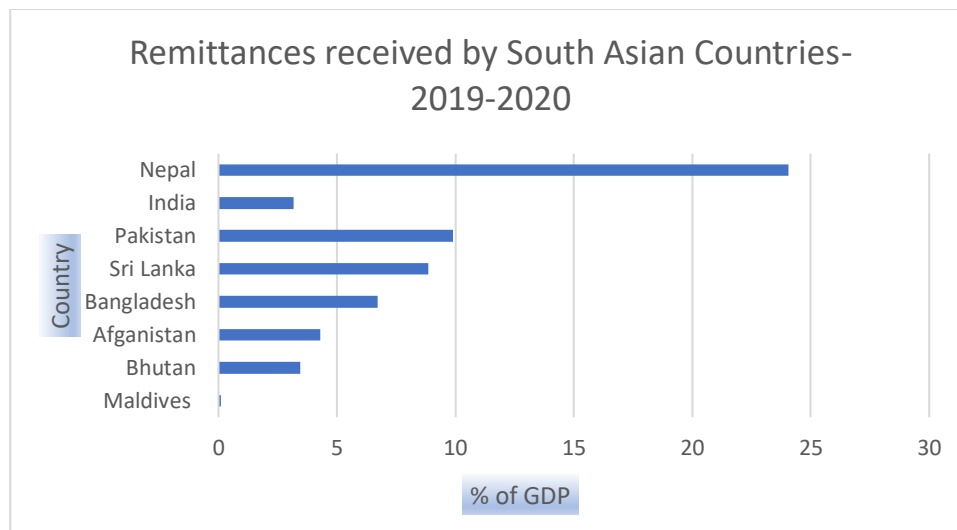
Although the advantages and disadvantages of contribution of remittances in National GDP is a highly debated topic, what becomes interesting is the effect of remittances in agriculture. In the next chapter, a concrete discussion on whether remittances have improved agriculture or not will be shed light on.

#### **4.5. Relationship among Migration, Remittances and Agriculture**

The connectedness and causation among migration, remittances and agriculture is a much-debated topic in the school of migration studies. Many theorists believe that migration can bring about a positive impact on the agriculture sector of the host country through abundant remittances. Remittance as a source of income allows family members of the migrant to use the extra income and utilise it for improving the quality and technology of their farm (Ojha 2015).

However, this argument remains futile in the context of Nepal and much of south Asia because the consistent flow of remittance led to family's deferment from agriculture. Taking a case study of Jhapa, it was observed that migration led to land abandonment and deferment of occupation from agriculture to tertiary sector.

In this context, when we look at the contribution of remittance in GDP, astonishing figures portray that South Asia has the highest contribution of remittances in GDP, where Nepal constitutes for the highest share as portrayed in the figure below. According to the World Bank, Nepal's GDP constitutes 24% of remittances from abroad as of 2020.



Source: world Bank 2020

Fig- 1.1

Agricultural production and labour migration have a two-way relationship. On the one hand, labour shortages on the farm may occur as a result of the workforce movement. In the near term, this may help to eliminate hidden unemployment in the agriculture industry, resulting in higher productivity and output. However, due to labour constraints, the findings may indicate a decline in the long term (Ojha 2015). As a result of the drop in production, migrant labour may leave the country, creating a vicious cycle of external reliance and food insecurity.

Since most migrants are between the age 20-35, this provides evidence to the fact that youth migration is leading to loss of skills, knowledge and brain drain in the country (CBS 2011). In addition, a shortage of human resources may inhibit private-sector inbound investment, putting further strain on government resources.

Migration, agriculture, and remittances all have a triangle relationship. Because the issue of agriculture is linked to migration, it must be included in the migration agenda. Likewise, migration must be incorporated into agricultural growth and food security plans (Crush 2012).

In order to improve food security and less dependence on remittances, agriculture business needs to look more attractive to youth. This is possible if the government creates subsidies and incentives and support to grow and increase interest in agri-business.

A large amount of budget should be allocated by all municipalities so that the agri-business in their localities can thrive, thus not only bringing food security but also making agri-business more attractive and lucrative.

In other South Asian nations, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, subsidies are available for fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, and irrigation. Nepal has recently reintroduced seed and fertilizer subsidies. Agriculture budgetary allocations account for 2.73 percent of total budgetary allocations, and are around 10 billion NRS greater than the previous year. (Republica 2021).

## 5. Challenges and Opportunities in Starting Agri-Business

This section is based on primary data collection where narratives and nuances of migrants has been recorded to understand intrinsic motivations and benefits behind starting agriculture business. The

chapter further delves into Challenges and roadblocks faced by specific migrants based on their Gender, Caste, destination country, skills etc.

The data is collected in five districts of Nepal, namely, Syangja, Sunkoshi, Kavre, Dhadhing and Sindhuli.

Syangja district is located in Gandaki Province with a hilly terrain with an altitude ranging from 300 m to 2000 m above sea level. The major ethnic groups are Baun, Chettri, Gurung and Magar. In terms of market it has close connectivity with the city of Pokhara and Bhairahwa. The research was conducted in the capital city of Syangja, Putali Bazaar which is approximately 1.5 (36.6 km) hours away by car.

Kavre district is located in Bagmati province with a hilly terrain and an altitude ranging from 300m to 2500m above sea level. The major ethnic groups are Baun, Chettri, Tamang, Magar (NPHC 2011). In terms of market it has close connectivity with the city of Kathmandu. The research was conducted in one of the rural municipalities Namobuddha, which is approximately 2 hours (42.2 km) away by car/bus (NPHC 2011).

Sindhuli district is also located in Bagmati Province with a hilly terrain with an altitude ranging from 300 m to 2000 m above sea level. The major ethnic groups are Tamang, Magar, Newar, Madhesi, etc (Lillesø et al., 2005). In terms of market the goods are usually sold in the local market of Sunkoshi. The research was conducted in one of the rural municipalities Sunkoshi and Kamalamai.

Dhadhing district is also a part of Bagmati province with a mixed terrain ranging from Himalayas to Hills and an altitude ranging from 2000-3000m above sea level. The major ethnic groups are Tamang, Magar, Newar, Gurung (Lillesø et al., 2005). In terms of market the goods are usually sold in Kathmandu Valley (26.6 km) or the local market of Dhunibesi (Municipality headquarter). The research was conducted in Dhunibesi (Municipality) and Thakre (Rural Municipality).

Challenges in Nepal's agricultural development issue has been associated from ranging factors, starting from Climate change events, labor force outmigration, land loss and degradation, pollution, and a lack of a comprehensive policy and investment framework for agricultural development. The capacity of policymakers and planners to address shifting market dynamics, policy contexts, and unpredictably altering climate conditions is currently inadequate. The following are a few of Nepal's rising agricultural development difficulties and challenges (Gauchan 2018).

Climate change is posing a growing danger to Nepal's agricultural development and food security. Given the region's difficult topography, minimal development, and largely subsistence rain-fed farming system, the country is extremely sensitive to climate change concerns. Climate hazards such as drought, flood, landslide, cold-wind, and hailstorm have increased in frequency as temperatures have risen and rainfall uncertainty has increased, posing a major threat to agricultural production, food security, and people's livelihoods (Gauchan 2018).

Water scarcity is also affecting agriculture as a result of the drying up of water supplies as a result of unfavorable climate change effects (drought, warming), as well as increased usage and waste of water due to poor management, greater cropping intensity, and urbanization.

Traditional agricultural development strategies, programs, and activities, on the other hand, lack well established road maps and programs for mitigating and adapting to climate change

consequences in agriculture. Climate change adaptation initiatives for carbon sequestration activities, for example, as envisioned in Nepal's Climate Change Policy (2011), are not sufficiently included into mainstream agricultural policies and ongoing programs and activities (Gauchan, 2015). As a result, traditional agricultural development initiatives lack dedicated climate smart agriculture programs to address climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Out Migration has resulted in a chronic scarcity of young and qualified human resources in agricultural production and agribusiness in Nepal during the last decade, posing a serious danger to food security. Despite the fact that labor out migration has resulted in a substantial influx of remittances, it has created a serious labor shortage in agricultural and other economic sectors. According to estimates, the size of rural out migration and feminization has been significantly expanding in recent years, with over half of all families (53%) having at least one migrant outside their native regions, and more than a quarter (26.6%) of women led households in 2010. (CBS, 2011). The number of Nepali migrants overseas, including seasonal workers in India and those who utilize informal channels, is estimated to be at 4 million, accounting for one-third of the country's working male population (World Bank, 2011). As a result, there has been poor agricultural management, land abandonment, and an increase in the amount of land left fallow. In agriculture, labor shortages and high production costs have resulted in an increase in the area under fallow land, which is more vulnerable to deterioration.

### 5.1. Respondent Background

In the data collected, in districts 69.40% migrant returnees had served in the Middle east- Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, UAE, Etc. Maximum number in Qatar and Saudi Arabia where Qatar included 25% of the total migrant returnees from Middle east, whereas Saudi Arabia included 23%, Dubai included 19% and total UAE including Dubai had 25% of migrant returnees. Bahrain and Oman had the least number of migrant returnees.

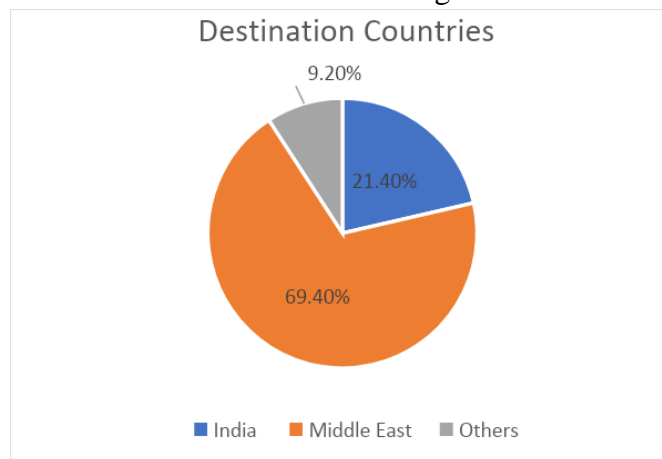


Figure 3.1

The caste composition had been divided into four major categories. This was done to shed light on the caste composition of the research sites and respondents along with highlighting any major caste based setbacks faced in the local market or agriculture business. The caste composition included Brahmin/Baun (BCT), Janjati comprising of Gurung, Tamang, Magar, Kirati etc., Dalit and others comprising of Chettri and people who do not categorise as baun, Janjati or Dalit.

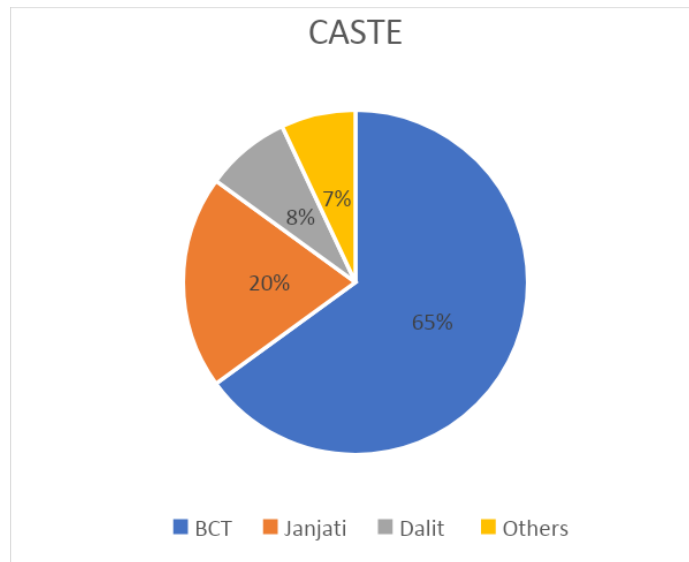


Figure 3.2

From the above data 65% of the total respondents belonged to the category BCT, 20% to Janjati, Majorly Gurung and Rai, 8% Dalit and 7% Chettri. The data of the number of Male and Female is 72% and 28% respectively.

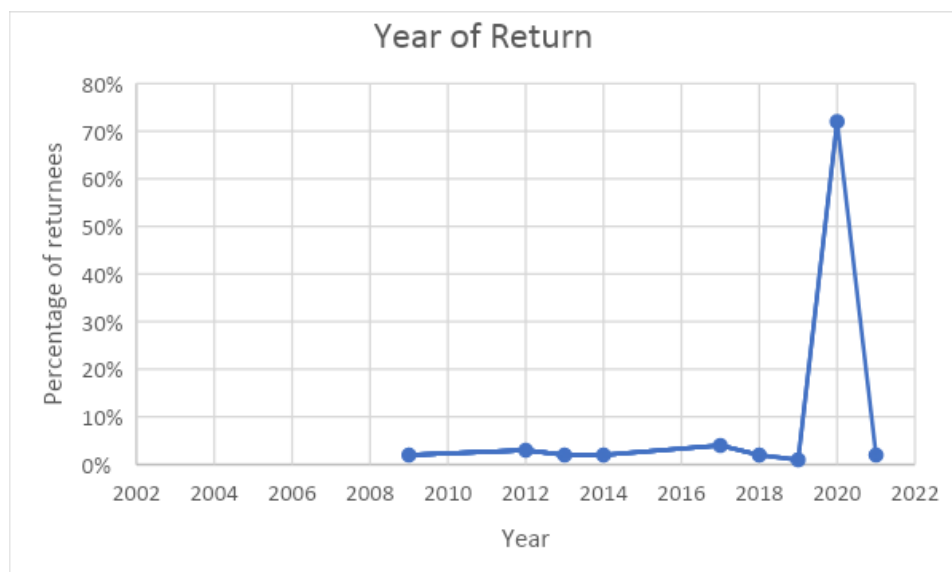
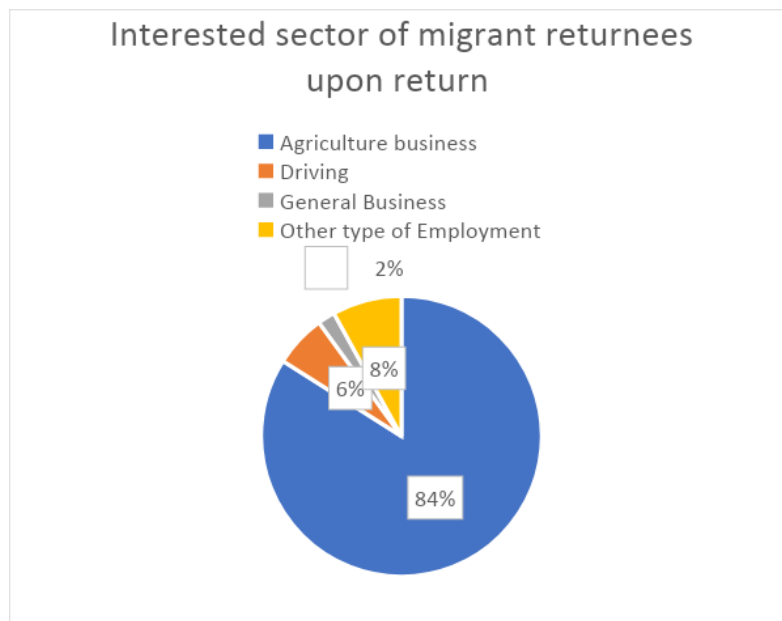


Figure 3.3

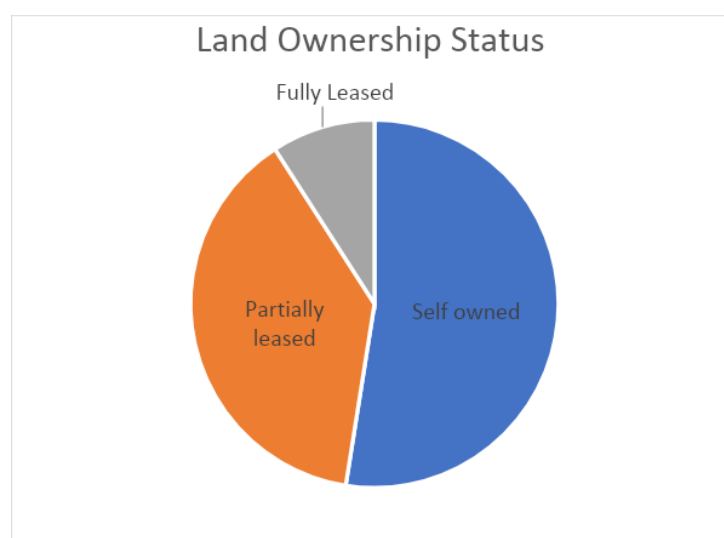
The above data sheds light on the year of return of migrant returnees to their home country. Since the research revolves around the period of pandemic and their forced migration to their home country. The year of return becomes notably important here. Among the total respondents 79% returned because of fear of pandemic and loss of jobs in the destination country. Whereas, remaining migrants 6.2%, 3.1%, 2.1% and 1% returned in 2019, 2017, 2014 and 2012 respectively.



*Figure 3.4*

The above data gives valuable information on the interest area of returnees. According to the sample collected, it is clearly visible that 84% of the migrant returnees declared that they were interested to be involved with the agriculture sector upon returning to Nepal. Whereas, the remaining 16% were interested in Driving, General Business and other kinds of employment. By other types of employment, the migrant returnees shared their interest in construction related work, plumbing and other kinds of skill related work. These returnees opted for agri-business despite their interest in other areas because of lack of opportunities in the source country because of pandemic specifically. Few returnees shared that even though they had experience in sectors such as driving and construction at their destination country, they failed to find suitable jobs in Nepal, which further pushed them to get involved in agriculture.

Many returnees also shared their keen interest in learning plumbing and electrician related skills and set up their own service line. However, again failed to receive similar opportunities and knowledge upon return.



*Figure 3.5*

This data shows that most of the migrant returnees who opted for agriculture business had land of their own. 53% of the returnees took the step because of convenient availability of land in their towns/villages. 38% of the returnees had taken partial land in lease which also shows that they had some land which was owned by the family, spouse, self-etc. Many migrant returnees also claimed that owning a land of their own/ family motivated them to opt for Agri-business upon return. Many returnees had also started producing basic organic fruits and vegetables during the epidemic which was followed by conversion to business as they started producing and selling in bulk and developed more interest for the same.

## 5.2. Motivation

In this section the actual factor behind motivation of migrant returnee has been captured through a process of Qualitative and Quantitative analysis. The answer and reason to the interest in the agriculture sector was questioned and tested thoroughly to give and understand a better idea of what are the factors that actually push migrant returnees to opt for agri-business. In order to understand the intrinsic and external factors on motivation and aspiration for Agri-business, various kinds of questions were asked which have been presented below.

As per the above data (Fig. 3.5) on Land ownership status, this is also one of the motivating factors behind opting for Agri business. Owning of Land makes the process of starting agriculture and cultivating land much easier than taking for lease considering the uncertainty of profit during the pandemic.

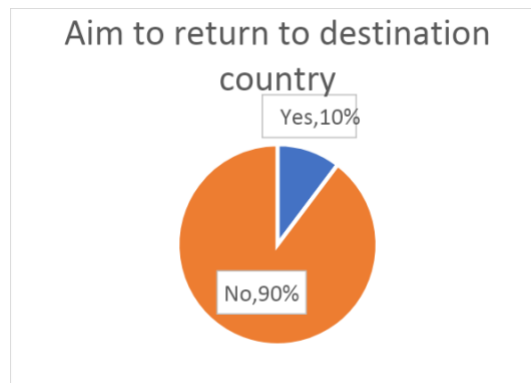


Figure 3.6

The above data portrays the percentage of respondents who were willing to return to their destination country in the future. Out of the total respondents, 90% did not have the intention to try for the destination country or any other country. They wished to settle down in the source location and carry forward with Agri-culture business. There were various reasons as to why the migrant returnees did not wish to return/ migrate such as- future success in agri-business would bring stability, staying connected to family, living in their own country etc.

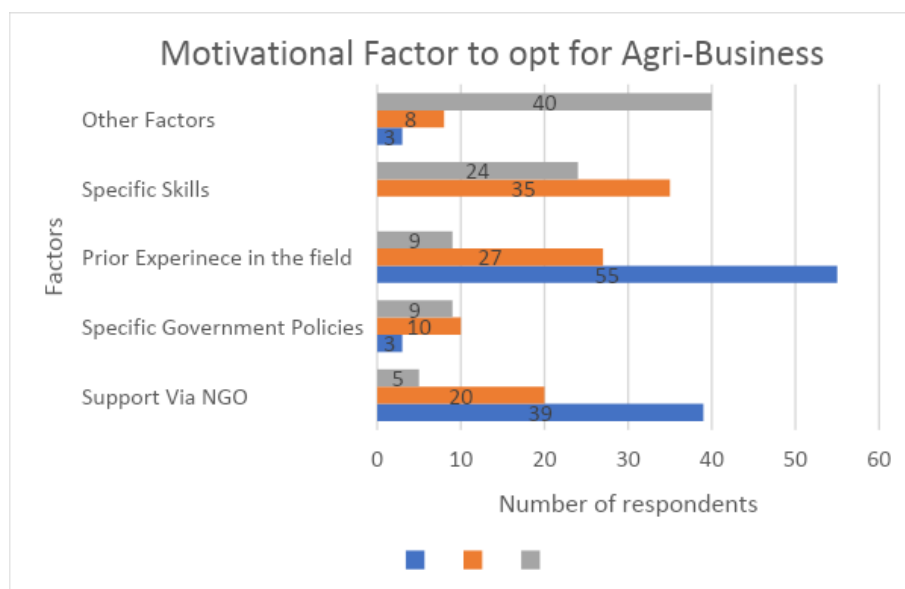


Figure 3.7

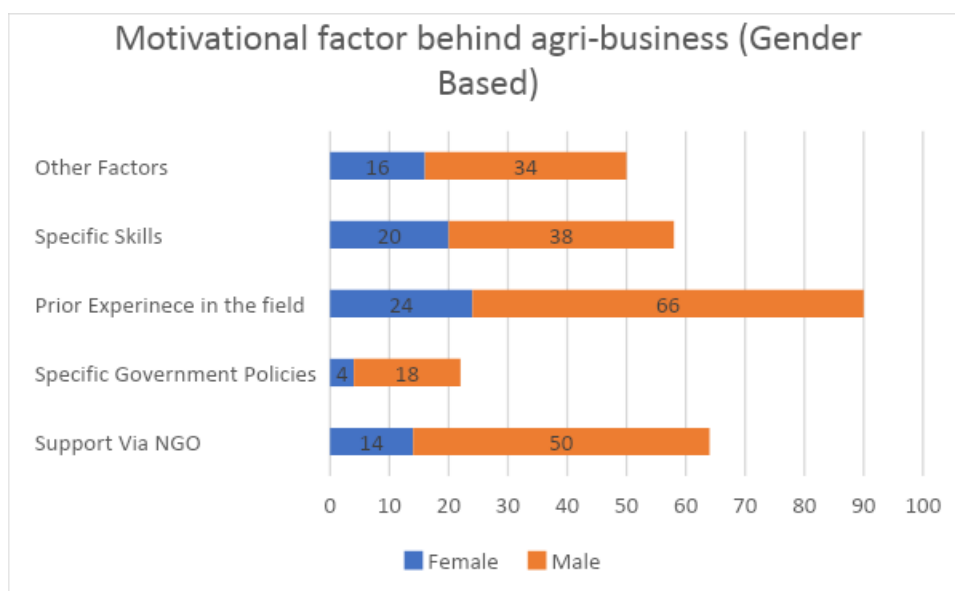


Figure 3.8

The above data is based on a direct question imposed to the migrant returnees about the factors that pushed them to opt for agriculture business upon return. The question and options were prepared based on qualitative analysis of respondents which led to 4 major factors. Maximum number of respondents chose prior experience in the field for the agriculture sector as a reason to opt for agri-business after their return to Nepal. This was the first and foremost reason for 55% of the total respondents. Followed by Support via NGO as the first reason and motivational factor for 39% of the respondents.

Others included reasons such as wishing to live in their home country and city and lack of other kinds of employment opportunities in Nepal. Few people also believed that they did not have a choice but had to opt for agriculture as the global epidemic made it harder to do anything else. As they started focussing on agriculture, they realised the importance of the same.

From the option of government policies it is clearly visible that it is the least preferable for returnees. Only 3 respondents opted for the same as their first preference, 10 as second preference and 9 as third preference. Some returnees did think that there was some form of support from the municipality in the form of distribution of seeds and irrigation drums and pumps. However, they could hardly ever depend

on their support with respect to finances specifically. Moreover, according to the above mentioned table Others option usually contains- no other option because of the pandemic.

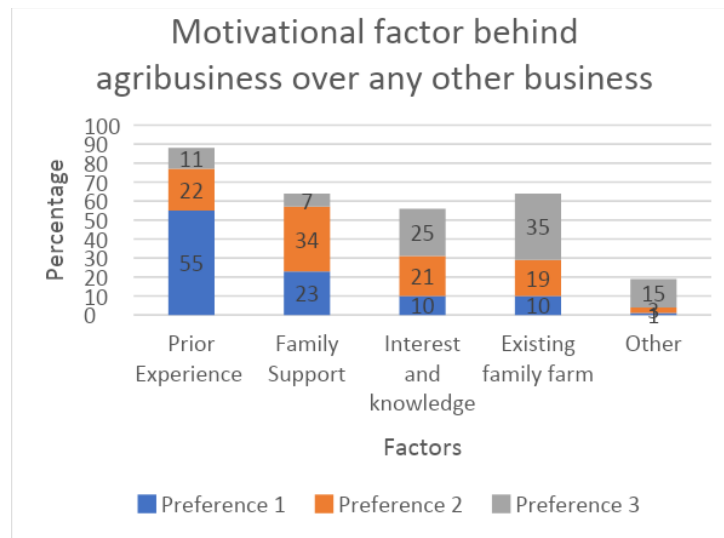


Figure 3.9

The above data represents the second factor of motivation to get a better understanding of the priority sector thus, highlighting the motivational aspects behind agribusiness over any other business. The above graph is similar to fig. Prior experience and familiarity remains a priority for 58% of the respondents, followed by family support for 26%. Family support received the highest preference in preference 2 category with 36% of the people. As discussed above Existing Family farm has been a motivational factor for a huge number of migrant returnees specifically as preference 3 with 38% opting for the same.

### 5.3. Benefits and Opportunities

This section highlights benefits and opportunities that also motivate migrant returnees to opt for agriculture business. These options have been posed Infront of them to get a better overall understanding of connection between migrant returnees and their reintegration in agriculture.

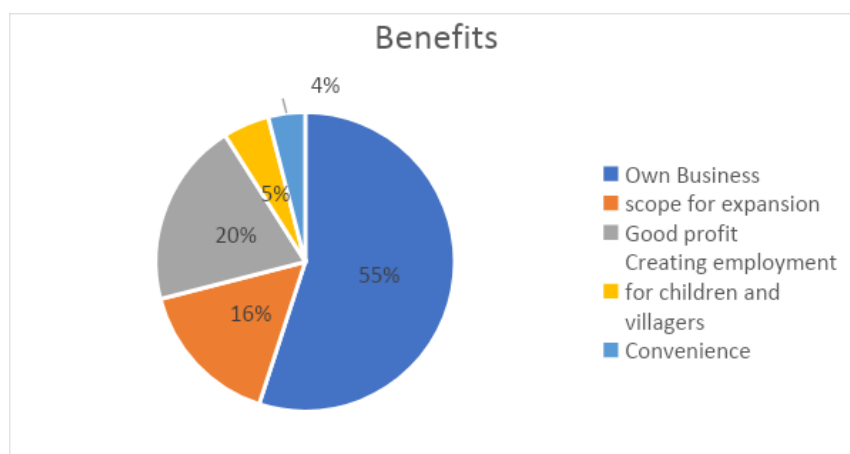


Figure 3.10

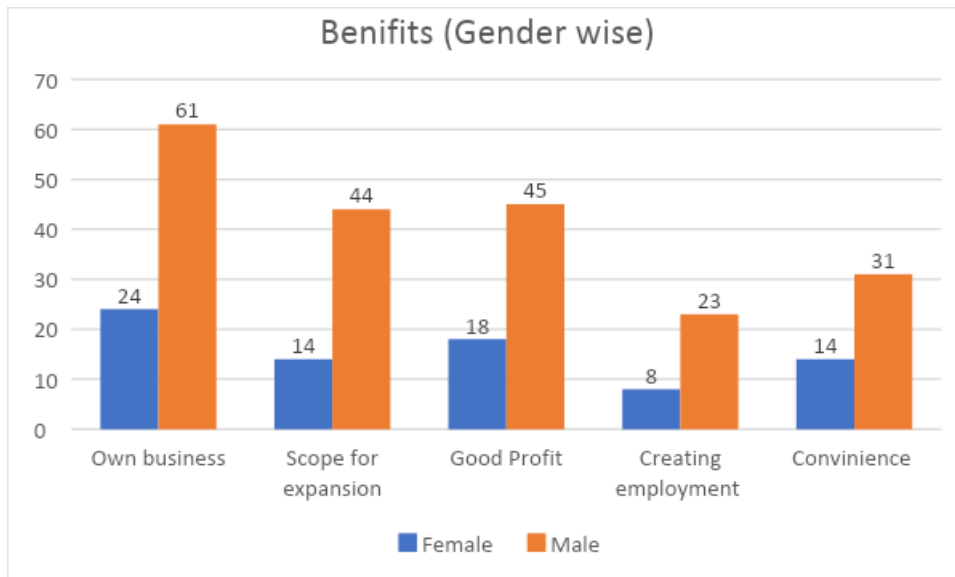


Figure 3.11

The above figures represent the benefits that further motivate migrant returnees to opt for the same. The respondents believed that owning their personal business opens room for a lot of freedom in the present and future. 55% of the respondents saw this as a preference 1 benefit, followed by scope for expansion and tailoring the same according to their own creativity and ideas for 16%. Good profit from agriculture business also remains a benefit for migrant returnees.

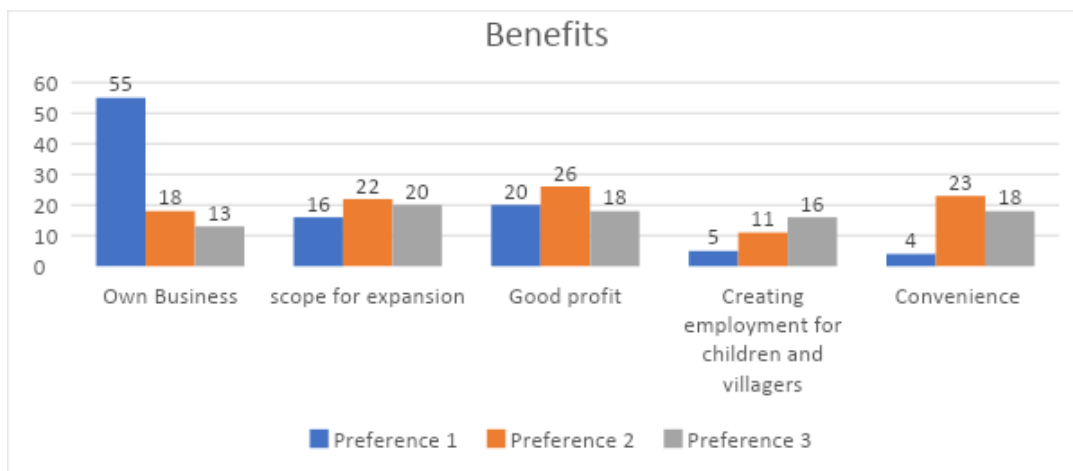


Figure 3.12

The figure presents the preferences for the above mentioned data and figure as well. Good profit, scope for expansion and convenience was mentioned as second preference for 26%, 22% and 23% migrant returnees respectively. All the options in average present has been a preferable benefit for migrant returnees however, owning a business remains the favourable one for majority of respondents.

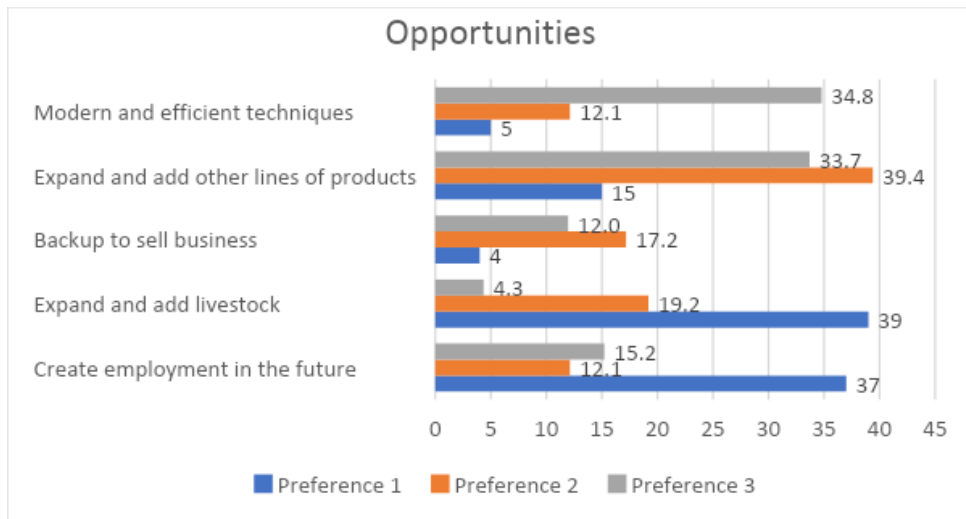


Figure 3.13

The opportunities of agriculture business ranges from multiple factors, however, 39% of the total respondents opted for fruits and vegetable agri-business with the aim of expanding and adding livestock in the future. Many also expressed their disappointment with regards to not receiving enough support and benefit/ financial for their livestock business dream. 37% of the respondents saw the creation of employment in their village as a very effective opportunity and development. 39.4% of the respondents saw adding other lines of production to their farm and business as an effective opportunity.

#### 5.4. Challenges

This section sheds light on the challenges faced by migrant returnees while starting and maintaining their business. Starting from their direct challenges, the kinds of support that has been sought by migrant returnees also portrays other forms of challenges which they continue to face till date.

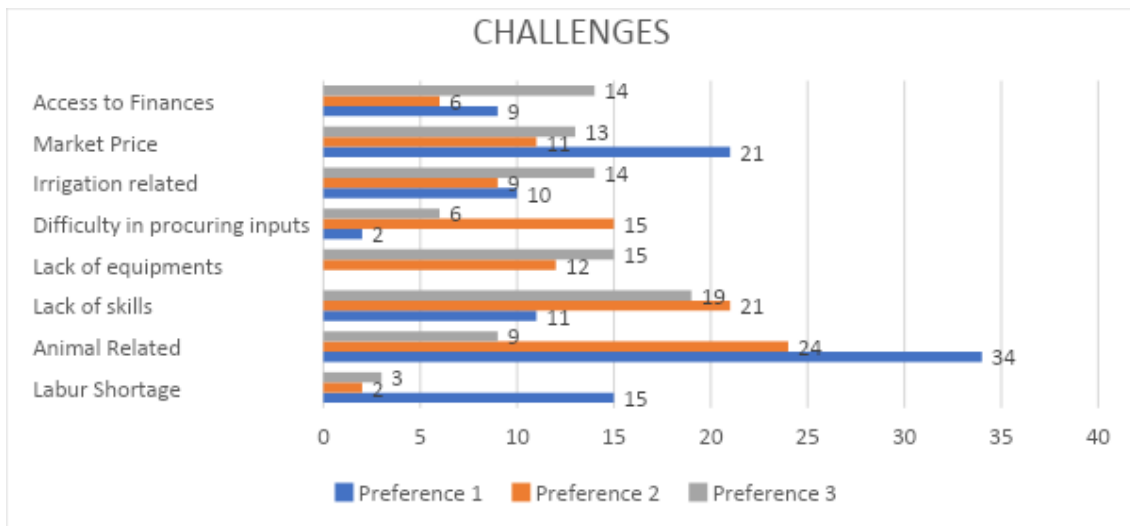


Figure 3.14

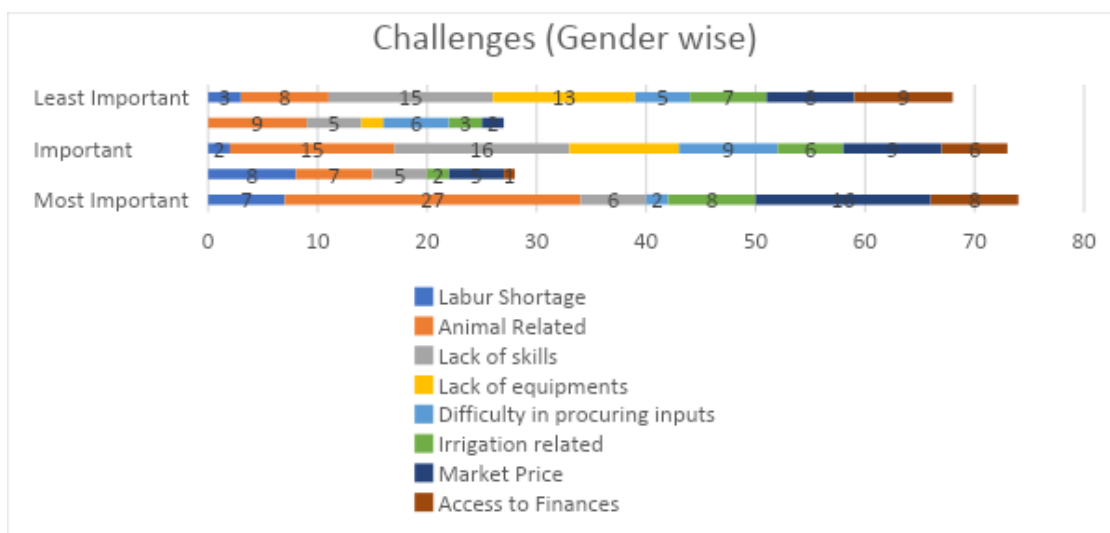


Figure 3.15

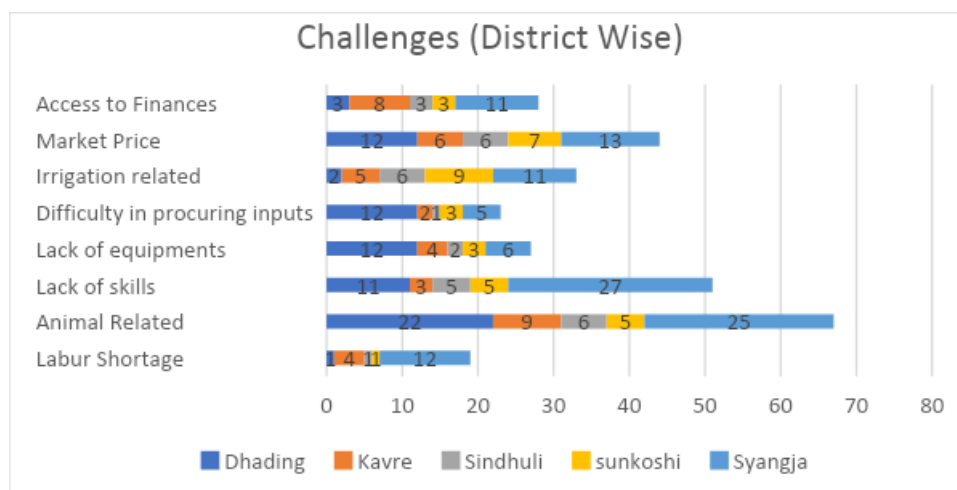


Figure 3.16

The above graph represents the direct challenges faced by respondents in agri-business. These challenges are contemporary in nature and continue to affect their produce, profit and lifestyle. 34% of the respondents believed that animal related challenges are the most difficult for them in the present time. This is due to the high number of monkeys, rats etc eating their crops and fruits/vegetables. Due to this reason many had particularly opted for production of merely lemon and chilly. This challenge brought about a vast number of limitations in their scope of production as well the options of their produce. 24% opted for the same as a second preference for challenges thus portraying its effect. This was mostly prevalent in the district of Syangja.

Market Price was another challenge that had its huge effect on their profits. The ever fluctuating market price was a demotivating factor for many respondents. 21% of the total respondents struggled with getting a profitable return value for their goods. 11% claimed it as their second preference whereas 13% claimed it as third preference.

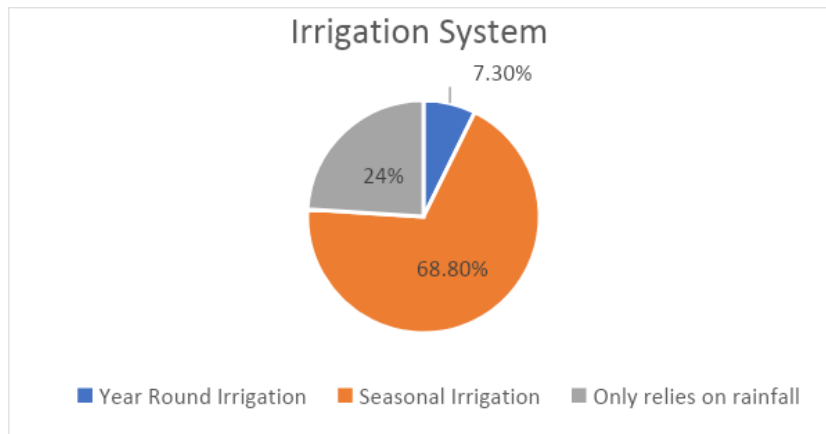


Figure 3.17

Irrigation system did affect the farm and produce immensely except for those whose lands were very close to the river thus making pipeline facilities accessible. Out of the total respondents 68.80% respondents relied on seasonal irrigation with the help of drums and Sano Sinchai facilities. 24% relied completely on rainfall and 7.3% had access to year round irrigation because of motor facility and location of the farmland. However, majority of the people still claimed that irrigation was comparatively manageable in comparison to other challenges.

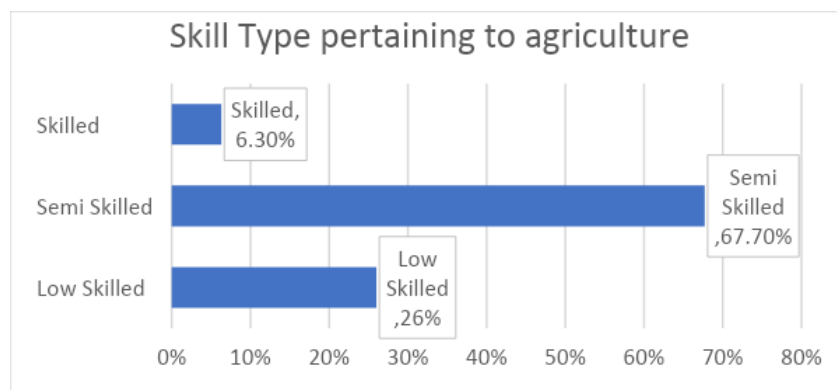


Figure 3.18

Skill was another major challenge mentioned by all the respondents. Only 6.30% of all the respondents believed that they had sufficient skills to maintain and carry forward their agri-business whereas 67.70% believed that they would require training on a timely basis and have scope to learn. Additionally they believed that training workshops in the past have helped them and will do the same in the future.

26% of the total respondents believed that lack of adequate knowledge, training sessions and skills is hampering their produce thus leading to continuous losses.

According to fig. 3.12, 16% of the respondents did believe that lack of skills was one of the major three challenges faced by them.

## 6. Intersectional Challenges

This chapter is based on data collection through surveys. The migrants in the survey have been divided based on two categories- Gender and Destination Country. Therefore, based on these categories, comparative analysis on their challenges, motivations and vulnerabilities has been examined.

This retrospectively sheds light on intersectionality which derives its themes from the concept of minority and certain roles that have been prevalent in the society. For example: The role of women in the household does affect agriculture through different forms of challenges as compared to men.

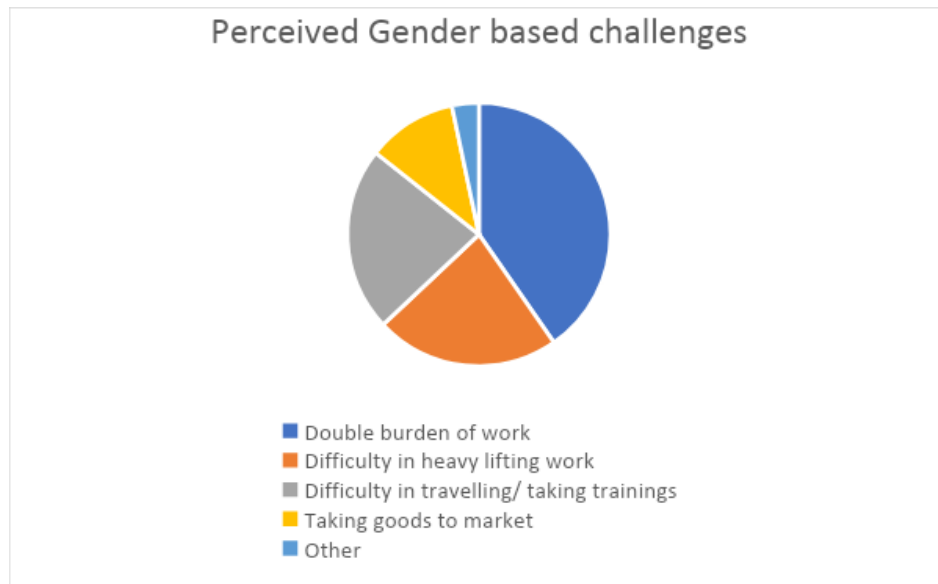


Figure 4.1

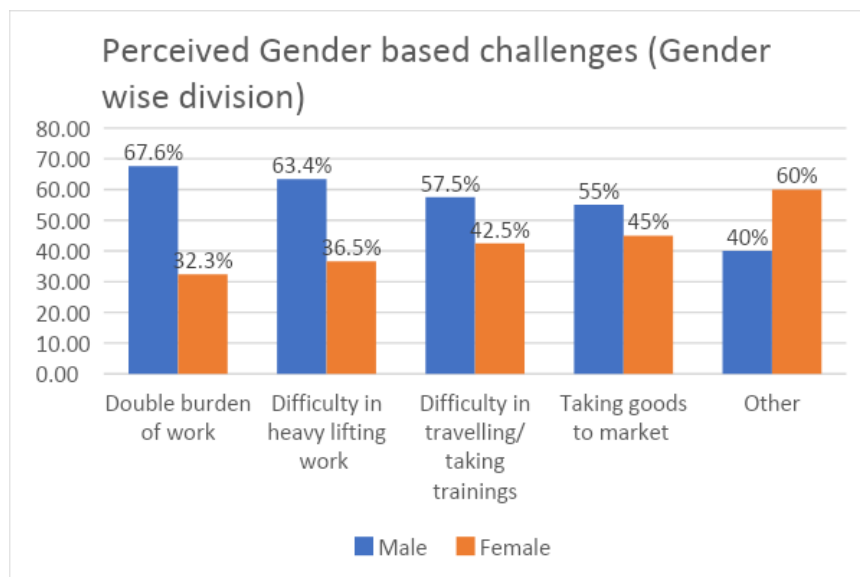


Figure 4.2

The above figure represents the challenges faced by women in starting and maintaining their agri-business. In qualitative interviews conducted, it was clearly visible that women felt pressured and burnt out because of the workload, however, kept going to take care of the family.

From the data it is evident that 40.33% of the respondents believed that women faced a double burden of work as they are responsible for day to day activities related to household as well as farm related workload. These returnees were engaged in agriculture because of some force in the family leaving them behind with no option. “My husband is sick so he can’t work much. I do most of the things. I do face shortage of labour sometimes.” Said Laxmi Kunwar from Syangja. 22.65% believed that women had more difficulty in doing heavy lifting work and the to ride tractor. Many women also stated that they had to depend on other male members of the family for these kinds of tasks.

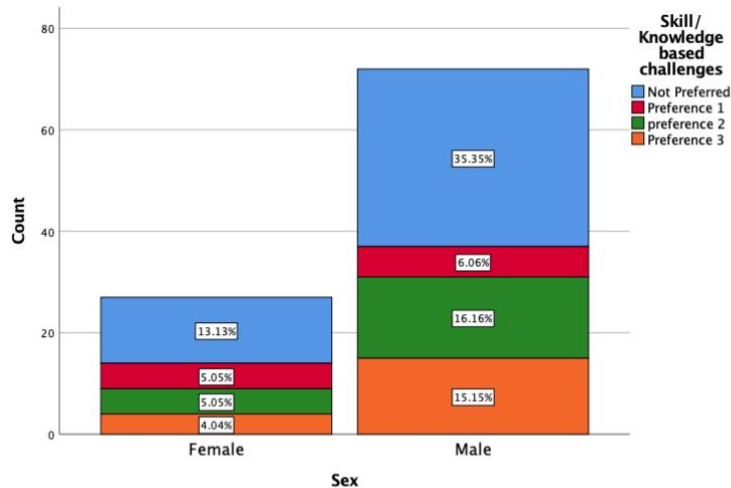


Figure 4.2

The above mentioned figure represents the skill based challenges faced by migrant returnees in terms of gender. This correlation was formed to perceive the ratio of male to female in receiving agricultural skills/ knowledge. Out of the total respondents, 6.06% male and 5.05% female mentioned skill related challenges to be a major priority (Preference 1). In total 18% of women believed that lack of skills/ knowledge was hampering their business and product. Whereas, only 8.08% of total men believed that lack of skills/ knowledge was hampering their business and product. This contrast is visible due to multiple factors seen in fig. where 22% of respondents believed that women struggled to travel for training workshops.

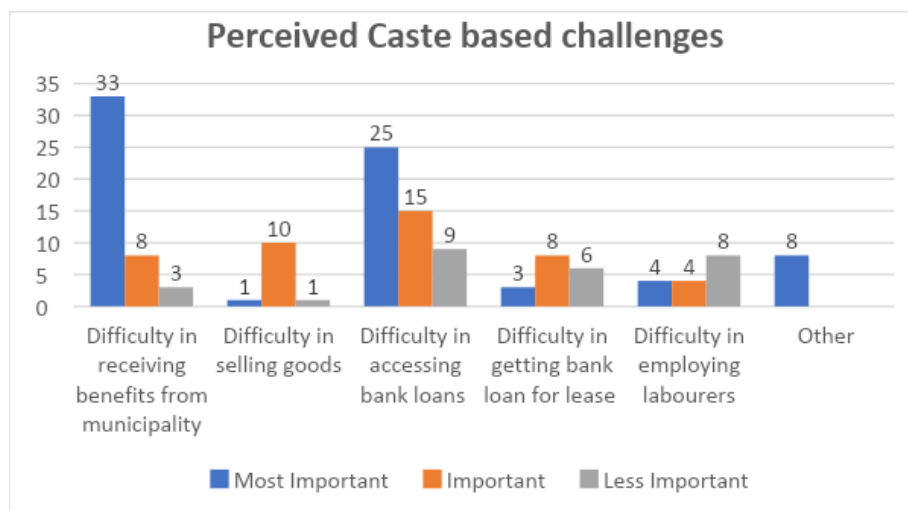


Figure 4.3

The above mentioned figure represents caste based challenges in the research sites. This question was posed subtly to understand the role of Dalits/ Harijans in Agriculture business and if there were any at

all. Out of the total respondents, few of them denied the engagement of Dalits in agriculture and stated that they were involved with different kinds of work. Out of the total respondents 8% belonged to the Dalit category thus problematising their responses. Many respondents belonging to caste categories such as Baun, Chettri and Janjati often stated that “They live just like we do, the challenges are the same. There is no discrimination in current times, those days are far gone.”

The above data comprises of Dalit and other respondents who wanted to answer the question as many were extremely uncomfortable and answered as “I don’t know”. The other category which includes 8 of the respondents did not think Dalits had to go through different kinds of challenges on the basis of their caste. Whereas, 33 respondents stated that “Difficulty in receiving benefits from municipality” as priority 1 because of discrimination and subtle forms of ostracization. “Difficulty in accessing bank loans” was also stated as first priority by 25 respondents thus shifting the focus to discrimination by bank employees. Additionally, other reasons such as Difficulty in selling goods, Difficulty for getting land for lease etc. were stated by 12 and 17 people respectively. “difficulty in selling goods” and the response of less returnees for the same stems from the fact that people from other castes do not touch/buy liquid products such as milk while solid commodities are exchangeable. “*Pani na Chalne*” emerged from the phrase.

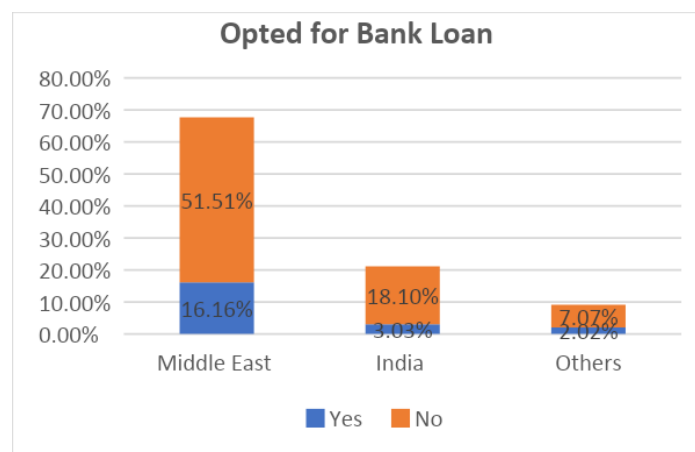


Figure 4.4

The above mentioned figure aims to portray a comparative analysis of bank loan demand with respect to the destination country. Out of the total respondents, only 21% tried for bank loans after their return to their home country. Out of these respondents the majority belonged to the Middle East. With 16.6% respondents who actually tried for bank loans to support their agri-business.

23.87% of respondents from the Middle East claimed that they had tried for a bank loan upon return whereas 14% of the total respondents from India had tried for the same. Here it is also interesting to see that out of total respondents from other categories- inclusive of European countries and other Asian countries, 20.01% had tried for bank loan.

These percentages portray less dependency of farmers in bank loan mechanisms as many did not appear due to either lack of knowledge or lack of trust. Many preferred going to their peers, relatives and cooperatives for the same.

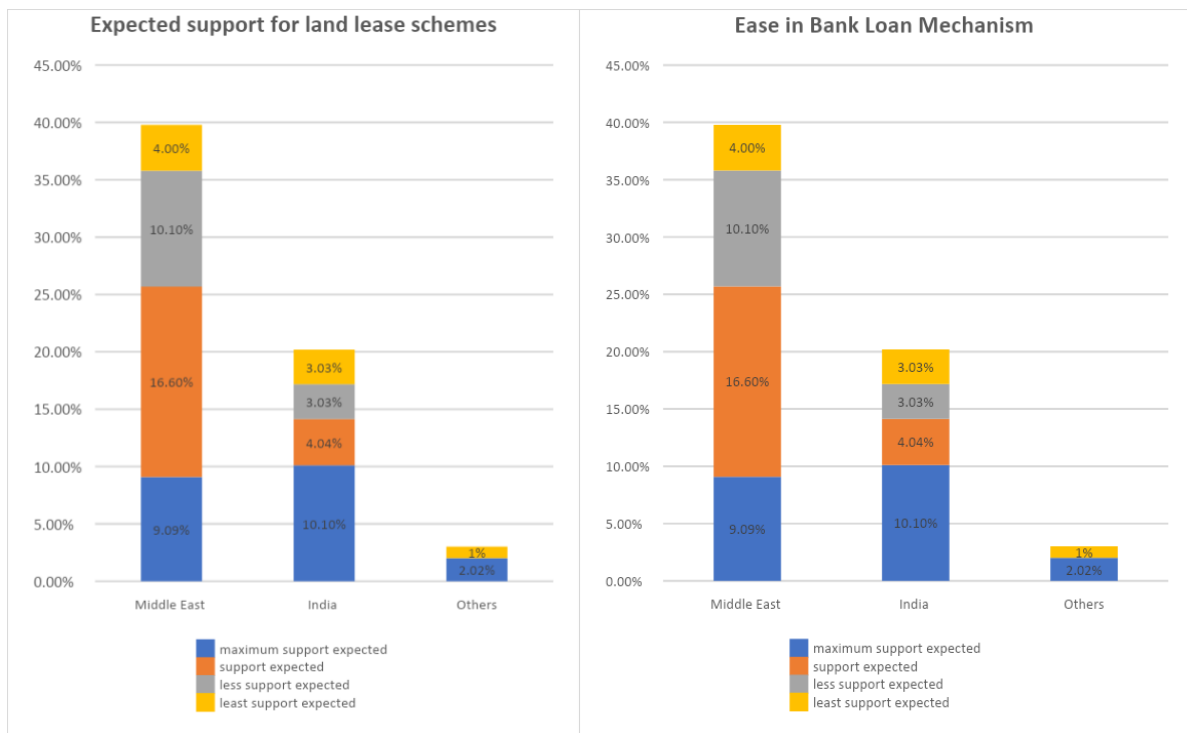


Figure 4.5

Figure 4.6

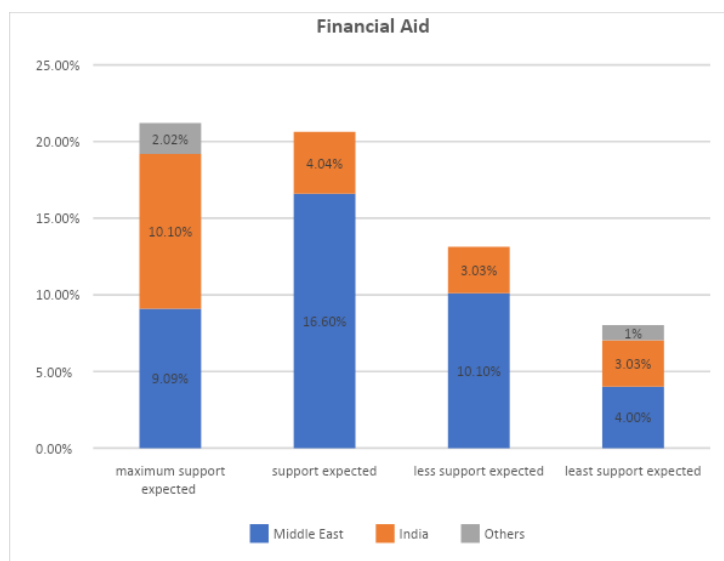


Figure 4.7

The above mentioned figures portray three challenges observed in the survey which has been examined with reference to the destination country of migrant returnees. The migrant returnees have expected support from the GoN majorly in easing the process of land lease, bank loans and any form of financial aid (specifically upon return). The above data clearly shows that 16.9% of the total migrant returnees who wanted land lease support belonged to the Middle East. The percentage of people who wanted more bank loans also belonged to this category, however, preference 1 for bank loan remains at 9.09% in the Middle East whereas preference 1 is hardly given to bank loan for any other category.

However, in the case of Financial aid, 80.01% of total returnees from India preferred financial aid related support. In contrast to the Middle East where 40.29% claimed it as preference 1 and in others category, 39% claimed a preference 1.

## 7. Policy Recommendation

This chapter includes policy analysis and recommendations based on secondary literature and primary data collection conducted. The role of the current federal system in reducing vulnerability and increasing the productivity of migrant returnees will also be explored here. Government led policies and certain bank loan mechanisms to support migrant returnees will also be the focus of the chapter.

- Training
- Federalism: Accountability of distribution of irrigation pumps, seeds etc. on what basis is it allocated, is there a proper mechanism in which it is done. Who are the people who get access to these perks from nagarpalika.
- Market Price/ Insurance

In order to address the issue of **lack of skills and lack of farm related knowledge**, GoN and other organisations needed to go to the grass root level to provide financial literacy, vocational training, business related advice. Even though the government has provided training facilities to migrant returnees, those efforts and schemes did not reach rural municipalities. It wasn't applicable for many migrant returnees because of the issue of non-documentation. Certain schemes that the government had launched remained inapplicable for many returnees who were not documented as migrants. For Example: Nepal's Foreign Employment Welfare Fund, which provides compensation in case of death, injury or serious illness will not compensate un documented migrants.

The issue of lack of concrete data interrupts all kinds of policy implementation because of lack of data in the hands of GoN thus, disrupting the reintegration process in the past. The number of migrant returnees from India was largely underestimated by the GoN, thus, making the process of reintegration ineffective. Stronger Framework with consistent data accountability is needed to manage the returnees effectively and efficiently.

The GoN implemented certain schemes in order to generate employment at a large level. These schemes included a specific focus on migrant returnees and Youth involvement. The scheme PMEP was a solid beginning point, however, constantly fell short of covering the vast majority of returnee migrants, as well as other psychosocial components of the reintegration process (PMEP 2020). This could have been supported with financial training sessions and one to one discussions with municipalities suggesting them the correct mechanism and guidance for their agri-business. The scheme did not include special intervention for the reinstatement of migrant returnees. Therefore, leading to short term failure.

Apart from lack of database systems and coherent focus on migrant returnees' integration, Lack of information also becomes a key problem for agro-processors in Nepal. Firms have identified "lack of information on markets and marketing opportunities" (ILO 2020).

Strengthening current agribusiness models headed by private and other non-state players such as cooperatives and farmers' groups has the potential to boost resource poor farmers' productivity and revenue (IOM 2015). By fostering modernization of agriculture, improved governance, more investment, public-private partnerships, and building an enabling regulatory environment, the agricultural development plan must focus on enhancing the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of smallholder farming. The following are some of the potential options and paths forward for agricultural growth in Nepal.

The main land-related barrier for agro-enterprises which is mentioned in chapter 3, is finding a sufficiently big and technically adequate site with decent access to clean water, power, and road infrastructure from which to conduct their processing activities. Huge companies, which often demand a large amount of land, have the most difficulty. Other land-related issues include the challenges of acquiring the necessary re-classification of land for industrial uses from government land authority. The fragmented structure of land allocation in certain locations, as well as excessive over-regulation of land use zoning, may be contributory factors that significantly increase the cost of locating and acquiring a suitably big parcel of land for the processing company (Asian Development Bank 2020).

Migrant workers provide not only monetary benefits to their families but also new experiences and information that needs to be made effective. For Example: Migrant laborers in the past have introduced certain species and crops in Nepal. Coffee production was started by migrant returnees from India (Assam). Organic Coffee was started by migrant returnees from South Korea and Japan. Kiwi Production was started by returnees from East European Countries.

Therefore, a proper credit and loan scheme by keeping municipalities and municipalities in the loop needs to be implemented. Furthermore, guidance on loan schemes by various banks needs to be made better and accessible.

### **7.1 Federalism**

In the changed context of federalism and decentralized governance, the present R&D system and structure have not been able to adapt adequately to provide suitable and equitable access to agricultural technology and agricultural inputs to varied socioeconomic groups of farmers. Due to poor agricultural R&D governance, Nepal lacks suitable investment in agricultural R&D, institutions, road networks, and market infrastructure for agricultural growth. Input prices have risen, as have production costs, reducing profit margins and farm revenue, providing disincentives to use yield-increasing technology and practices.

Despite significant obstacles such as steep terrain, limited connectivity, and land-locked conditions, modernization and commercialization offer prospects for enhanced agricultural output and selling. Nepal is fortunate to have a diverse range of agroecological zones as well as access to large markets in India, Bangladesh, and China (Asian Development Bank 2020).

The challenge for agriculture commercialization in Nepal is therefore to create mechanisms for working with industry stakeholders to plan and manage the commercialization processes by focusing on individual value chain systems and their linkages. The objective of such a project, and in this case the HIMALI project, would be to maximize aggregate value added by improving productivity and/or reducing costs and increasing scale of production in selected value chain systems (Asian Development Bank 2020).

Nepal is characterized by a variety of agro-enterprises, ranging from many micro- enterprises composed mainly of family members to few very large enterprises with hundreds of employees. The future development of commercialized agriculture in Nepal depends on the growth of small, medium and large enterprises that goes beyond employing mainly family members. The development of such —corporate agro-enterprise structure in Nepal is still at its very beginning. The growth of many MSMEs has been strong in recent years and most of the agro-enterprises make a profit and are confident about investing in the sector (Agriculture Sector Performance Review – ASPR survey results). However several constraints remain. The major constraints are related to access to suitable land, access to capital/credit, technology, marketing and infrastructure (Asian Development Bank 2020).

## **7.2 Lack of credit and suitable loan system**

One of the primary issues impacting agro-enterprises is a shortage of finances and restricted access to loans. Firms' capacity to buy raw materials, improve and expand their facilities, promote their goods, and thereby build their company into a lucrative, effective, and efficient engine of economic growth is limited by a shortage of credit. By most accounts, interest rates in both official and informal lending markets are too high.

For agro-processors in Nepal, a lack of knowledge is a major issue. Companies have noticed a lack of market and marketing information, both locally and globally, as well as insufficient information on ultimate consumer costs for their processed and reprocessed products. Although businesses must make their own business decisions based on available information, the government and private sector can work together to make it easier to gather and disseminate information on marketing possibilities and prices.

## **7.3. Government Policies and Agribusiness Development**

*During the 1990s the Government initiated (i) reforms to move toward a more market oriented economy, and (ii) devolution of responsibility to local bodies under the Local Self Governance Act 1999. The 1995 Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP) and subsequent plans provide the development framework. Agricultural growth is considered key to poverty reduction and the APP stresses diversification on the basis of geographic location and commercialization of agricultural products. The ninth and tenth five-year plans (1996–2001 and 2002–2007) draw on these strategies. To diversify and commercialize agriculture, the current strategic approach includes (i) mobilizing government and non-government service providers in partnership and on a contractual basis, (ii) promoting cooperative and contractual farming, (iii) devolving local agricultural programs to local bodies, (iv) strengthening agricultural research stations as resource centres, and (v) providing technical backstopping.*

(Kharel 2018)

Smallholders have traditionally focused on production of subsistence crops. High value crops do offer farmers significantly higher returns, but the products are perishable, prices are volatile, and the marketing process is time critical. Lack of an effective marketing chain results in losses, victimization by traders may cause farmers to perceive high risks in changing to high value crops. Technology constraints from production to consumption, along with insufficient and poorly shared market information, a lack of product standardization, and inadequate quality assurance systems hinder commercial agriculture development. Insufficient knowledge of technology and market needs, and infrastructure (rural roads and access to highways, collection centres, cool and cold stores, and rural transport), and inefficient water resource management and crop variety selection affect farmers.

Currently in Nepal, farmers are faced with market uncertainty for their products, and processors and traders are constrained by unreliable quantity and quality. This has slowed the rate of commercialization of agriculture. In addition, membership of the WTO has brought obligations to meet international quality standards and this has significantly impacted on the export of high value crops both to India and to potentially rewarding markets in Europe and USA.

The main beneficiaries will be farmers involved in private sector entities (farmer groups, cooperatives and companies), and assemblers, wholesalers and retail traders. The consumer would also benefit from the availability of better quality and healthier organically grown produce. The other beneficiaries are the private sector entities involved in this sub- sector. Government staff and entities will also benefit

from improved training, capacity and facilities, as would agro-vets and other private sector service providers.

### 7.4. Public Private Partnerships

Over the last 20 years, PPPs have been increasingly recognised as a viable option for realising development objectives. However, experience with PPPs is not exclusively positive.

*The following range of views on PPPs are frequently expressed: (a) PPPs are particularly useful for implementing large-scale projects, primarily based on contractual relations between public and private entities, mostly through design–build–finance and operate/maintain (DBFO or DBFM) type contracts; (b) PPPs are an instrument for generating private-sector creativity which may contribute to the cost coverage and thus fast implementation of various socially desirable projects; (c) PPPs are a structure in which public and private entities cooperate, preferably in a separate legal entity, which can be applied in various sectors of the economy; and (d) PPPs do not affect public responsibility. Government stays responsible. Under public responsibility, firms are invited to provide services either to the government or directly to the public.*

- (MoF 2015)

When assessing the potential contribution of PPPs to social and economic development, a strategy is needed for (at a minimum) the policy formulation, project preparation and implementation stages of PPP development. For each stage, initiatives should address all relevant stakeholders. These at least include: a sponsoring government entity (most likely national); local government; the local private sector; international donor and lending agencies; (inter)national commercial lenders; (inter)national project investors; the end-users of the project; and trade unions.

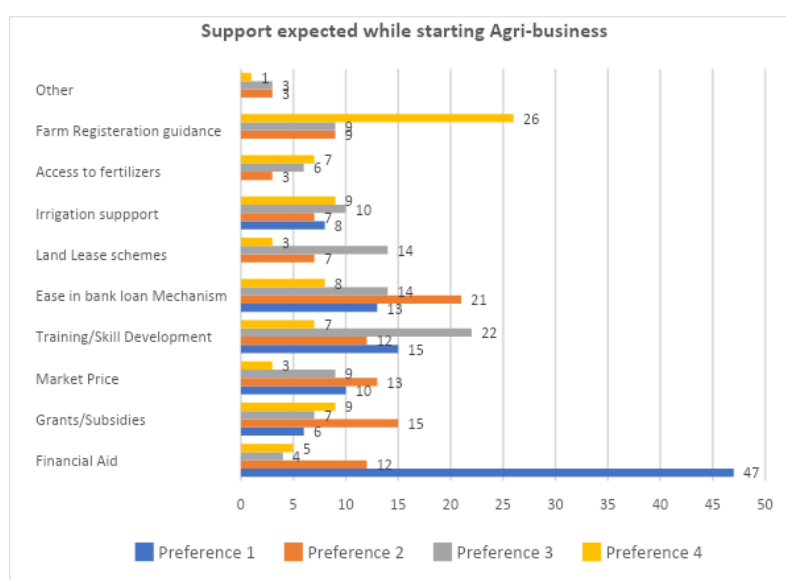


Figure 5.1

The above mentioned figure represents the kind of support migrant returnees needed when they returned to Nepal. 47% respondents believed that financial aid was what was lacking when they returned which was needed to start an agri-business. Investment was needed in sectors for seeds, irrigation, land lease etc. Training and skill development workshops was also another support that migrant returnees expected

from their municipalities and government. While starting many faced challenges because of lack of knowledge and skills. 56% respondents marked that training/ skill development was the expected support upon return to Nepal. Bank loan mechanism was another challenge that migrant returnees wanted to support. 56% respondents believed that support in bank loan process and making bank loans more accessible would be supportive.

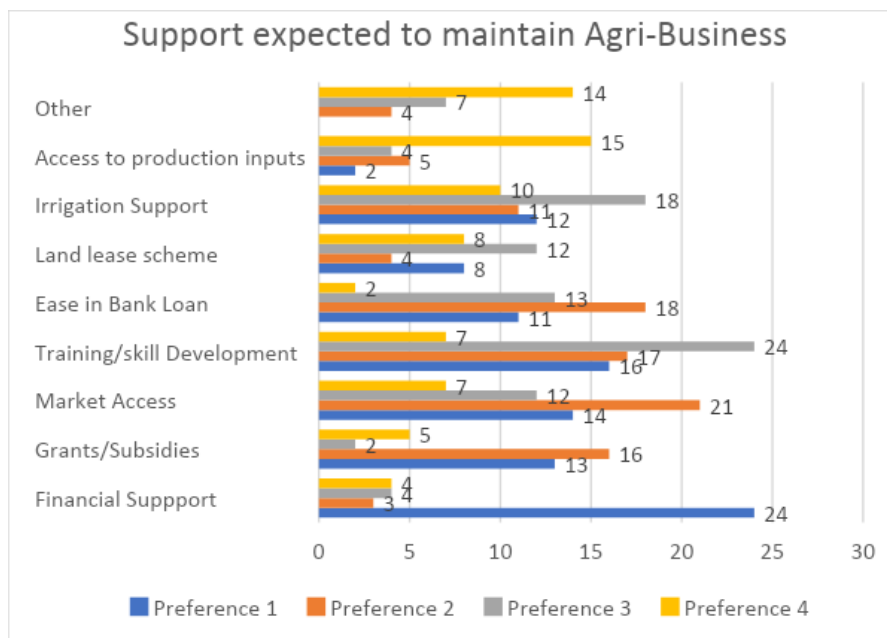


Figure 5.2

The above mentioned figure represents the kind of support migrant returnees needed to maintain their agriculture business. These are the support respondents are currently expecting from the government or any other sources which will help them in maintaining their agri-business.

Similar to fig. financial support is needed for expansion of agri-business and adding new lines of products. 24 respondents believed that financial support to maintain.

### 7.5. Organic sector for Migrant Returnees

A transition away from traditional and external input agriculture toward safe and sustainable organic farming has been spurred by increased pesticide use, rising production costs, and declining ecosystem health. The study conducted by Bhatta and Doppler has selected farmers from Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts and consumers from the Kathmandu valley, thus investigating the constraints and prospects of organic agriculture, as well as consumer knowledge and willingness to pay a premium price for organic vegetables (Bhatta et al., 2020).

Nepal's organic industry has been growing, although at a modest rate. Private effort and inspiration by various NGOs are the driving forces behind integrating the organic sector into Nepal's mainstream agriculture boom. Organic producers and marketers receive essentially little government help. Before beginning to raise organic crops, it has been established that their marketability, particularly at a premium above conventional and contemporary food, must be assured. The inability to obtain a premium price, at least for the period it takes to reach the production levels of the traditional crop, will be a setback. The exorbitant pricing of these items continue to deter customers.

The limits might be seen in three different parties in organic production: growers, marketers, and the government. The primary restrictions at the grower level are lack of awareness, lack of skills in managing complex problems in the farm land, lack of suitable organic technology to support production, no certification and labeling, poor investment capacity, small holdings, limited risk carrying ability, and so on. Constraints at the marketer level include a lack of consumer awareness of organic products, their quality and availability, a lack of faith in the products' authenticity, a higher price for the products, a lack of market infrastructure, and a lack of market regulation. The government's obstacles include failure to hammer out effective policies and insufficient implementation mechanisms, political meddling, no farmer subsidies, no marketing research and technology generation to promote the organic sector, and so on.

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On average, women were more involved in vegetable cultivation than in decision-making, which might explain some of Nepal's vegetable agricultural inefficiencies. Despite being often invisible in decision-making processes, women farmers, according to the IFAP (2010), are critical in creating the world's sustainable future through contributing to food security and poverty reduction. As a result, for the growth of the vegetable industry in underdeveloped countries, women reaching decision-making levels and having access to resources and opportunities are crucial.

Given the significance of women's participation in vegetable production, measures promoting women's capacities (such as training, assistance for women farmer's groups, and specialized programs for women-headed families) are advised. We urge that governments adopt programs to make production credit more available to small farmers, notably through cooperatives, microfinance groups, or other cost-effective mechanisms of administering small loans (FGD, GD, 2014).

## **7.6. Few factors that led to slow progress of agriculture in Nepal**

Instability in the government system and short-term as well as long term upheaval led to lack of commitment in policy dialogues, plans and investments specifically for returnees.

Despite the fact that the majority of policies are supportive to agriculture, they are still in draft form and are not being implemented correctly due to a lack of human and financial resources, lack of supporting legislation, and poor monitoring, evaluation, coordination, and planning.

Because relevant institutions' ability in policy analysis, planning, service delivery, and implementation is weak, policy development frequently occurs without proper analytical or evidence-based examination (KII, 2014). Due to a lack of human resources and improperly qualified service providers, poor service quality and an inability to meet the demands of a vast population of farmers are the outcome (FGD, 2014).

1. Some other factors and reasons for slow development of the agriculture sector and its reintegration includes, for security and geographical considerations, the government and other organizations seeking to promote the agriculture sector are frequently unable to reach the grass-

roots level. Considering the newly established federal system, the reachability of policies and benefits should have been comparatively more efficient and effective, however, one cannot deny the challenges persisting and complementing the hierarchical system of government.

2. Frequent bandhas and import-export restrictions wreaked havoc on the agriculture sector's market.
3. Local elites moved to cities for security reasons leading to less investment in the agricultural sector in the rural areas.
4. Land kept barren because of emigration for employment and engagement of productive labour in the armed conflict.
5. Huge destruction of physical infrastructure; water system, local agriculture extension delivery system, irrigation system, transportation system etc.

Nepali agriculture sector comprises both opportunities and challenges. Nepal's entry into the WTO led to this opportunity too. Nevertheless, challenges exist along with such as meeting the food safety rules, quality standards, road network, human and institutional development, and marketing system.

For the last few decades, the government has given high priorities on the sustainable agricultural development for poverty alleviation and to assure food security. The amount of government and external support is accelerating. The performance of the agriculture sector in the nation has improved as compared to the past, however is not satisfactory as it is far away from the goals and targets. Agriculture policies in the nation are generally appropriate; however there are gaps and inconsistencies amongst the many sectors and sub-sectors, implementation and management parts are very weak, confusing, and lack a bottom up approach. Hence, high emphasis should be given for the proper implementation of the formulated policies, programs, and plans to transform the subsistence to commercial agricultural production to initiate sustainable agriculture development and attaining food security in the nation.

## **8. Conclusion**

During Epidemic the GoN launched few interventions for reintegration and repatriation of migrant returnees. This scheme by GoN was highly criticized by scholars and academicians mainly because of lack of concrete data on the number of migrant returnees. Due to a lack of uniform data on migrant workers in destination countries, the number of possible Nepalis estimated by various GoN agencies such as the FEB, Nepal Police, and DoFE, among others, was either underestimated or lacked coherence in the early efforts to establish a repatriation strategy (Thapa et al., 2020). The returnees from India were highly underestimated which affected the limited number of resources and facilities arranged for the repatriation and quarantine processes. An effective reintegration process necessitates a reinforced framework that spans all levels of the GoN in order to manage returnees effectively and efficiently.

The spread of improved technology, practices, and the adoption of market-oriented production systems necessitates access to agricultural loans and state assistance. Agriculture research is a vital engine for agricultural progress, as the dynamics of farming are changing. Supporting and facilitating investment in breeding and seed production, as well as giving access to plant genetic resources, protecting breeders' rights, and assuring seed quality control, policy and legal frameworks are required. To strengthen farmers' access to farm finance, policies should encourage community-based groups, credit cooperatives, microcredit, and the growth of formal banking services in rural regions. Farmers' access to inputs, adoption of new technologies, and farmer-market linkages all benefit from adequate investment in rural infrastructure and markets. Financing and credit policies for agricultural machinery and commercial agriculture in rural areas are advised, including soft and simple loans. The adoption of

farm mechanization and commercialization of agriculture requires the implementation of insurance schemes covering all agricultural commodities in order to reduce risks in farming.

Given the variability in geography, agroecology, socioeconomic environment, and farming system, selective youth and women friendly mechanization is recommended, depending on the context. This would necessitate a variety of governmental incentives and support measures for farmers and stakeholders as part of a goal to modernize and commercialize agriculture by increasing the adoption of appropriate agriculture and rural mechanization technology. Immediate action plans are required for the implementation of the new Agriculture Mechanization Promotion Policy (2014), which includes the formulation and implementation of other policies, legislations, and regulations that promote agricultural commercialization (e.g., Contract Farming Act, Land leasing legislation, Agriculture Land Use Act, Cooperative Act etc.). Finally, in order to build ties in the country's new federal system, current R&D systems must be restructured to be more inclusive, farmer-led, market-driven, decentralized, and cost-effective.

This research based on organic farming of migrant returnees brings about multiple recommendations that can be implemented in the hands of GoN with the indulgence of municipalities. Organic food, rather than a market and business-oriented agriculture system, should be the focus of policy and program. If the focus is constantly on the exportable market, health certification will be questioned, and organic promotion will be limited. Farmers will support organic agriculture if they realize it is crucial for their health rather than their bottom line. Sustainable agriculture is another sector that requires focus. Domestic supply and increasing demand for organic and sustainable agriculture can contribute to the development of agriculture in the country. This, however, needs to be supported by policy makers and ministries of Agriculture to provide subsidies and minimum market price in the initial levels of agri-business. Because of the high cost of production, Nepalese farmers are unable to compete with Indian and other international farmers. As a result, the government must encourage organic farmer organizations and cooperatives in order to reduce costs and increase mass production.

According to this research, the majority of migrant returnees have opted for organic and vegetable farming upon their return because of accessibility with respect to manure and land availability. The interesting element here is their lack of knowledge and skills in maintaining their businesses as they require support on market price, knowledge through training and credit system.

## Annex I

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## **Annex II**

### **Background**

1. Name \*

First and last name

1. Sex \*

1. Education qualification \*

below class 5

below class 10

below class 12

undergraduate

Above undergraduate

1. Caste/ Ethnicity \*

1. What is your Destination country/ Countries?

India

UAE

Others

1. If GCC countries or others, please specify?

1. How many years did you work outside Nepal?
2. In which year did you return to Nepal?

#### Farm Details

1. What is the name of your Farm?
1. In which year was it established?
1. Is your farm/Agri-business registered?
1. What is the ownership category of your agri-business/ Farm?

Sole Proprietorship

Partnership

Family Business

1. If Partnership, then what are the number of partners?
1. What is the land ownership status of your farm land?

Self owned/ Family  
owned Partially leased

Fully leased

1. Where is the farm located? \*
1. What are the market products of your farm?

#### Motivations, Benefits and opportunities

1. Do you wish to return to your destination country?
1. When you returned home, what was the sector you wished to work in?

Agriculture business

Driving

General Business

### Other type of employment

1. The reason behind your desire to work in this particular sector?
  
1. What are the factors that motivated you to opt for agriculture after return?
2. What are the benefits you see from agri-business?
  
3. What is your skill type pertaining to agriculture?
  - a. Low skilled
  - b. Semiskilled
  - c. Skilled