

Second Monthly Forum

MIGRATION AND LABOUR DYNAMICS IN POST DISASTER NEPAL

EVENT REPORT

Kathmandu, 19 July 2017: South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) organised a forum to discuss the interaction of migration, labour and remittance with the ongoing post-disaster reconstruction efforts. Despite decelerated outflow of migrant workers from Nepal post April 2015, the reconstruction work is hit by the shortage of manpower, the experts pointed out during the interaction.

The discussion program was organised under a project called 'Initiating Dialogue on Post-Disaster Reconstruction' with support from The Asia Foundation. Under the project, a series of dialogues is being conducted on various topics related to the post-disaster reconstruction. Today, a discussion was held on '*Migration and Labour Dynamics in Post Disaster Nepal*', in which, Nepal's prominent labour and migration expert Dr Ganesh Gurung presented his research findings.

The data shows that the monthly outmigration for foreign employment stood at around 50,000 persons has stabilised below 40,000 since the earthquake, he pointed out. At the same time, reconstruction efforts have been affected by lack of labourers, he added.

To meet the labour shortage, reconstruction is being handed over to migrant labourers from India and Bangladesh, he said. Moreover, the earthquake has also diverted migration from Nepal's mid and far western hills to the earthquake affected districts in central and western Nepal, he pointed out. The earthquake has pushed the daily wage from NPR 500 to NPR 800 in the rural areas.

Similarly, speaking as a discussant in the programme Mr Ramesh Badal, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs at General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions, said that we should not be swept away by counting remittance income without considering the other social costs in terms of health, missed opportunities, breakdown of families among others. He also pointed out that many migrant workers wanted to stay in Nepal but could not stay, due to contracts with the employers, which has made their state as that of bonded labour.

During discussion, Dr Posh Raj Pandey, chairman of SAWTEE expressed that remittance can emerge as a resource for reconstruction financing but then it can only be taken as a means to sustain in the short-run.

Mr Kiran Nepal, Editor at the Himal Khabarpatrika also stressed on the social cost of the migration of labour which is creating a negative impact on our strong social fabric.

Similarly, Dr Jagadish Chandra Pokharel, former vice chairman of National Planning Commission also pointed out that people in the affected areas have postponed plans to seek jobs abroad due to delayed distribution of government compensation to rebuild destroyed houses.

Participants representing civil society organisations, academia, labour unions, foreign employment agencies pointed out issues such as, 'free visa, free tickets' for migrant workers post-earthquake has, in fact, created confusion delaying the departure of workers; expenditure of remittance income on education should be considered an investment not consumption creating positive impact on the economy; country has not focused on utilising expertise of returnee migrant workers for rebuilding, among others.