

NEPAL IN THE XXI-st CENTURY

Migration and development: complementary paths

The last twenty years in Nepal: the massacre of the royal family, the end of a war and a devastating earthquake, all defining historical events. But the undercurrent that lasts and that will last is the impact of the thousands of Nepalese who leave to work abroad. Social mobility is the airplane.

Nearly 10% of the Nepalese population works abroad, with contracts mainly in Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. This is equivalent to all the citizens of Quebec City and Lévis leaving to work abroad.

The first time that I set foot in Nepal was in 2006, with Michèle Legault and Collaboration Québec-Népal (CQN). This was before I became a journalist and had the opportunity to travel and bring back pieces of the world with my words. Some Nepalese had already left for foreign lands, but in rural areas such as the places where CQN worked, the phenomenon was still fairly novel.

Almost ten years later, I found myself surrounded by Nepalese in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. I was there to meet with young people from Syauri who were working at McDonald's. The morning of April



Amrit Lama, working at MacDonaldis in Dubai, UAE

25, 2015, when the earth shook, making houses crumble, I was following the news alongside a group of



Laly Tamang working in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

these young migrant workers, riveted to their cell phones, hoping to speak with their families at home.

My second trip to Nepal would be much more somber. From Dubai, I took a plane for Kathmandu where I published a series of reports on the devastating consequences of the earthquake.

I realized that the two events – the migration and the earthquake – were intimately related; reconstruction would be supported by the individual financial support sent by the migrants.

Every week, every month, the Nepalese abroad manage to send \$50, \$100 or \$200 to their families for shelter, food, to send the children to school, to pay for health care, in brief, just to help with everyday living.

Remittances sent home are often health or home insurance policies for families back in Nepal.

Families depend on these remittances. In twenty years, money transfers to Nepal have made a spectacular leap, attaining 10.4 billion dollars (8 billion \$US) in 2018. Since 2013, good year or bad, this sum makes up almost a third of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nepal. This means that the whole country is dependent on these transfers, on this infusion.

Not so much a so-called brain drain, Nepal is rather an exodus of life forces, the bleeding of young people who talk only about leaving. Some observers, however, see an equilibrium of the demographic pressure, with a 'surplus' of manpower in a country that is rapidly being urbanized.

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A word from the President

As you'll read in this newsletter, many young Nepalese travel abroad for employment, hoping to improve their living conditions. This causes significant consequences for many families. Women often live alone with their children or with their children and their in-laws.



As the education of children is a family affair, it is common for primary school children to live with an aunt or grandparents in order to live closer to a better school. What's important to them is that school-age children attend a good school.



Other children live with their grandparents for six months of the year, while their parents leave to work in another region of Nepal in brick-making factories. This situation is preferable for the children, rather than following their parents, where they would also begin working as young as five years of age and would miss six months of schooling.

One project we completed in 2019 at the Sanjskhot school was to offer snacks to encourage many children to attend school. Thanks to this initiative, numerous families have thus chosen to leave the children in school. We hope to continue this project in 2020 in a few of the more disadvantaged schools.



Michèle Legault

Happy reading, and many thanks for every gesture, so helpful to others. *

Migration and development (Continued from p.1)

Whether one sees a logical economic strategy or a failure in development, it remains that the young

Nepalese are traveling massively for the first time, leaving the traditional family unit.

Money transfers often are the health insurance policy or home insurance for the Nepalese. The amount of remittances notably increased after the 2015

earthquake to pay for damage. The landscape of Syauri and surrounding villages is sculpted with this migration. Another floor is added to a home, a better stone or cement wall is built, windows or coloured paint added, a cow or more goats, purchased.



Young man receiving his passport to travel for work.

The history of Nepalese migrations is also a bit like that of CQN which, over the last 20 years, has seen more Nepalese getting involved on its Board of Directors and in its activities. It is also CQN's development projects which, in the long term, will convince young people that it's worth staying home.

From the places where they live, they probably bring back the best, whether it be good ideas, an entrepreneurial spirit or financial independence for women, as well as the worst, like fast-food or a sedentary lifestyle. One can't deny culture shock, while hoping it will be productive. *



Sarah R. Champagne

Contributors:

Sarah R. Champagne, Narayan Dhital, Doris Fréchette, Michèle Legault, Baburam Rijal, Anna Van Ermengen, Patricia Stewart

Sarah R. Champagne is a freelance journalist. She has worked, amongst other things, for Le Devoir and Radio-Canada and has reported from 15 countries.

Visit to the projects and other information

In January 2019, I visited the projects in Nepal and to meet the new members of the NGO that we work with, SPSWO: Nima Lama and Suresh Magar.

During my stay, there were funerals and a wedding, where everyone gathered. It was an opportunity to share in the rituals of the culture of the local people. Prayers, meals, discussions, laughter and tears, all intense moments in life.

After almost a year and a half since the start of a large potable water project, I finally got to visit the installations. The route that the pipeline follows to join the water source in Sano Bugdeo and the four villages that will benefit, is long and sinuous, over eight kilometers through terraces, fields and mountain sides.

Construction time was slowed down by complications encountered but water can now arrive in large amounts. The committee responsible for this work accompanied me and I was able to understand the numerous challenges that these people overcame: construction of a new road that crossed the water pipes, dangerous trails, usage conflicts despite the permissions they had received.

No one was injured and solutions were found for constant problems that occurred. "One has to be patient but, above all, perseverant", according to those in charge. The biggest reward was to see the villagers using the water for their families, agriculture, animals, even in the dry season.



My second visit of a water project was that in Massarangue, located in a high-altitude region where the trails are very slippery. You have to stop to look around to

appreciate the view, because when you're walking,



Distributing bracelets made by students from St.Barthélemy School

you have to keep your eyes on the ground and be careful not to fall. I'm not as agile as the locals, who kept a watchful eye on me. This project is getting started and the people hope to get the most out of it before the rainy season. I prefer not to be part of the group who will be carrying the bags of cement, pipes, etc. along these same trails.

I visited eight primary schools this year. I met more women teachers than ever before. Is it different in a school managed only by women? I dare to say yes and positively, but this

is limited to a few observations. I don't want to generalize.

The aid that we bring is always very appreciated: the projects, paper-pencil kits, first-aid kits, snacks, little round tables for early primary grades...and yet, as is the case everywhere, the books are more expensive than before so we can't



help as many students with the same funds. We have to increase our objectives for fundraising!

Finally, I must say a bit about the reconstruction of houses, that is ongoing. Five years after the earthquake, some of the people live in small houses built according to standards and design more resistant to earthquakes. But again, many of them are beginning this construction or are planning it. It is the government that gives funds that barely cover the costs of a house and a toilet.

I'd like to emphasize the fact that we can now also work on more projects in collaboration with local governments, with a 50%-50% cost participation. Nepal is now a federation with a new constitution, which is proving to be very positive. ✱

Michèle Legault

Social Security in Nepal

Social security refers to government-funded financial support programs to promote the welfare of the population. It is potentially directed at vulnerable segments of society, such as children, the elderly, the sick or disabled and the unemployed. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes social security as a human rights issue to ensure a life with justice, equality and dignity.



voluntary retirement after 20 years of service. In addition to this pension plan, government employees are also provided a contribution-based pension plan (Sanchaya Kosh) where the government matches 10% of the employee's gross monthly salary deducted at source. This fund is managed by the government.

Until 1951, when Nepal was ruled under feudal and dictatorial regimes, social security was an issue of the then head of state, ordering the benefits to the population of their choice. Since 2015, the Nepal Constitution has recognized the issue as a fundamental right of the people.

Existing Social Security Plans in Nepal

In economically deprived countries like Nepal, the aging population is more likely to need state support. Realizing this, the Government of Nepal (GON) has formulated a number of social security programs to address various issues and needs of its population, including the elderly, single women, children, disabled people and the unemployed. Some of the programs are identified as follows:

- **Old Age Allowance:** Nepal defines the elderly as people over 60 years of age. This group makes up 8.1% of the population. The GON introduced the Universal Old Age Allowance (OAA) Program for people over 75 years of age in 1995, when the late Manmohan Adhikari was the prime minister of Nepal. It is a non-contributing social assistance program. The rate of OAA was 100 rupees (1.15\$CA) per month at its inception but has increased to 2,000 rupees (23\$CA) per month for the elderly over 70 years of age.

- **Pension Plan for Public Service Employees (including armed forces and teachers):** This pension scheme is for retired public servants and their widows and children. It is a defined pension plan based on the number of years of service and the age of the employee. Employees do not contribute in this plan. Government employees retire when they are 58 years of age or reach 30 years of service. They have access to a defined pension plan and can take

- **Other plans for elderly citizens:** Pashupati Bidharasram and Ashram (home care) for elderly citizens is offered. GON established a Senior Citizen Welfare Fund, which offers funds to provide care for the elderly at provincial and local levels. The GON established Jeshtha Nagarik Swashthopachar Kosh (an old age citizen healthcare fund) in each district to deliver health care services to the elderly. Efforts have been made to subsidize treatment costs for the elderly in private nursing homes and clinics. GON has established social service units and geriatric wards in different hospitals and free treatment for some diseases. GON also mobilizes NGO or Civil Societies and coordinates with other agencies such as GOs, UN, INGOs, National NGOs for the welfare of senior citizens. In public transport systems, senior citizens (people over the age of 60) are legally provided a 50% discount.

- **Allowances for single women and ethnic and disadvantaged groups:** Since 2008, GON offers allowances for single women and endangered races (Dalits) and the old-age security payment age threshold has been reduced to 60 years for Dalits and citizens living in Karnali province. These are non-contributory payments.

Social Security Plan for private sector workers:

This contribution-based scheme was rolled out in 2019. The main goal of this scheme is to protect and offer security to private sector employees, whose safety and welfare has long been a cause for concern. Workers from the private sector are offered a financial security plan covering medical treatment, health protection, maternity, accident and disability, family dependants and an old-age security. *continued on p.7*

Social Security in Nepal

According to the working procedure of the plan, an amount equal to 31% of a worker's basic salary—11% deducted from the worker's monthly salary and 20 % employer's contribution— is deposited into the social security fund, managed by the government.

Conclusion

Social security has long been a concern in Nepal. Current trends show that the population of the county is aging. Except for government employees, who enjoy a defined pension plan, the situation of social security is precarious especially for the elderly. In general, farmers, private sector workers and self-employed people are excluded from social security plans. It is also a political and election issue in the country. Old age allowance is not enough for senior citizens to live on. Most of the plans are non-contribution based. There is always a question of sustainability with this type of plan. Employers are not interested in enrolling in contribution-based plans. At the same time, workers are not aware of the plans. To make the plans more effective, an existing legal framework should be strengthened to make contributions mandatory. During the election campaign, parties should also explain how they are going to pay for the plans in their platform. ✱



Narayan Dhital

Narayan Dhital grew up in Patleket, a village near the CQN project area. He earned a PHD in Forest Science from Laval University in Quebec City and currently works as a forest policy advisor for the Government of Alberta. Narayan served as a CQN board member for two terms in the early days of CQN.



Sanjshkot schoolchildren thank you for your generosity

Projects to finance

Lunch and warm clothing for Sanjshkot School

Given the success of this project last year, we would



These boys attend school, while living in a shelter with their grandparents.

like to again support Sanjshkot school for the coming year in order to allow several students to go to school on a regular basis, all year long. In fact, last year several children remained in the village with their grandparents rather than follow their parents elsewhere

in Nepal where they worked for companies making bricks. We have also added an amount to provide 30 students with warm clothing.

Cost: \$1985/school year



Gabions to divert water to an intake tank

Pencil and paper project for the 2020-2021 school year

Help for ten government primary schools in the Kahare Pangu region. CQN provides notebooks and a few other basic school supplies to students who cannot afford them, thus enabling them to go to school.

The cost of notebooks has greatly increased over the last few years.

Cost/student/year: \$40.00

The objective is to help 10 students/school = \$400/school. We work with 10 schools.



Notebooks for all

Building materials to finish a water project for four villages

Two small constructions are necessary to finish a big water project that provides water to four villages. Unforeseen expenses often arise when doing water projects. They are nevertheless very necessary if the project is to be finished in a sustainable way.

- 1- Cement cover for the intake tank
- 2- An additional gabion (wall) in the river to help divert the water to the intake tank ✱

Michèle Legault & Anna Van Ermenegen

Make a donation to help CQN accomplish its mission in Nepal

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You can also make a donation by sending a check to the address below. Thank you for your generosity!

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www.collaboration-quebec-nepal.org

Geopolitics and Governance in Nepal: Part II 1960 - 2019

Eight years after its initiation, a democratic government was formed in 1958. However, in 1962, the King seized all political power, dismissed the system within two years of the creation of democratic governance and declared a party-less panchayat system with a new constitution. Underground political movements to restore the multiparty democracy grew and the movement proliferated across the country. During this time, several of their cadres were killed or disappeared.

There was another people's revolution against the party-less Panchayati monarchy in 1980. The revolution ended with a nationwide referendum, an important milestone for political change in Nepal, although the ruling system won. The no-party Panchayat regime lasted eleven years, under the direct rule of the King. However, there was slightly more freedom, which brought about a non-party electoral system in the name of people's governance and democracy, despite the fact that political parties



were still banned. It allowed for ground-level political movement in the national parliament because democratic politicians were also elected and

propagated their voices for democracy and against the anti-democratic monarchy. The next milestone was in 1990, with the restoration of a multi-party democracy, brought about by several people's strikes ("Jana Andolan") against the then ruling system. The movement ended with negotiations between the King and political parties. After this, the King remained, with the constitution limiting him to ceremonial power and giving all executive power to elected officials.

A few years after the reinstatement of the multi-party democracy, the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal started the "Jana Kranti" revolution, whose goal was a complete revolution with some remarkable demands of the constitutional assembly instead of a



parliamentary system of democracy. There was a state of political unrest for ten years in the name of the Maoist party's armed insurgency (1995-2006), with the loss of thousands of lives from both sides, including civilians. It ended with a peace accord between existing political parties, namely the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist and Leninist). During these 10 years, there was much political instability, corruption and the tragic murder of the ruling King, Queen and Crown Prince in 2001. Following this, King Gyanendra, brother of the murdered King, took power. However, the power of the monarchy was deteriorated because of this event as well as an undemocratic action by Gyanendra in 2005. This helped the ruling political party to build an alliance with the revolutionary underground party. Consequently, another move, "Jana Andolan", occurred in 2006, restoring the democratic parliament. This parliament suspended the King, amended the constitution to include representatives from the revolutionary party in order to go forward with the election of a Constitutional Assembly. A multi-party coalition government was formed and an election to create a new constitution was held in 2008. This assembly immediately abolished all royal power and the country was declared a republic nation. However, since this elected assembly was unable to bring forward a new constitution, due to unsuccessful negotiations, a second election was held in 2013.

The new constitution was promulgated in 2015, with a federal republic system in the country. The long historical unitary Kingdom was hence changed to a federal republic with seven States. According to the new constitution, there are three levels of governance, local (villages and municipalities), provincial and federal, all formed by a democratic procedure. Since then, a parliamentary democratic system is practiced in Nepal. *



Baburam Rijal