DISSERTATION TITLE
The Impacts of Foreign Labor Migration of Men on Women’s Empowerment in Nepal

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT
My dissertation looks into the changes in the lives of Nepalese women due to the rapidly increasing foreign labor migration of men. Literature on migration from Nepal mostly focuses on economic gains made through remittance inflows. The changes in intra-household power relations and the transformations in women’s lives, due to the male-dominated nature of Nepalese migration, are largely neglected. My study fills this gap, by examining women’s experiences, as they assume the role of household heads, financial managers and single parents, in a society that has historically suppressed their freedom. I specifically focus on the changes in women’s work responsibilities, their decision-making abilities and their participation in social activities to draw inferences about the impact of men’s temporary absence on women’s empowerment. My analysis is based on insights from interviews with migrant wives and econometric research using data from national level surveys.

I find that, in general, men’s migration increases women’s unpaid work responsibilities and often reduces their ability or willingness to participate in market work. I also find that women’s position in the household is central to influencing their participation in decision-making and their involvement in social activities. Women who take on the role of household heads are more likely to gain decision-making power and experience an increase in social participation, while those left under the supervision of other members (usually their in-laws) may suffer from reduced decision-making ability and increased restrictions on their mobility in public spaces. These consequences are highly sensitive to the regional socio-cultural norms as well as women’s caste, class, and individual characteristics. The findings from this study help understand the consequences of migration from a gendered
perspective and provide insights that may be valuable in developing policy measures for fighting gender inequality and providing women with the resources to cope with the challenges faced during men’s migration.