

# Caught between two worlds: Internal displacement induced dilemma in Nepal

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## Introduction

The Maoist conflict that was officially declared an armed insurgency on 13th February 1996, reached a peaceful conclusion with the signing of the “Comprehensive Peace Agreement” on 21st November 2006. Over the ten-year period, it was assumed that the armed conflict had displaced an estimated 600,000 people (Aditya *et al.*, 2006). It is estimated that 250,000 of them are still living in the country, while the others are thought to have left for India. Those who live in the country are called Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) according to the definition of the United Nation’s Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement (GPID) and the Nepal’s new policy on IDPs—the “National IDP Policy—2007”. The status of IDP *Bistaphit* (in the local Nepali language) is granted by the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) and the Ministry for Home Affairs (MoHA). A person is given the status of IDP if he registers at the host community’s District Administration Office (DAO) as an IDP. However, verification has to be made by the Displaced Person Identification Committee to ascertain that he is indeed an IDP. This committee consists of members of the Local Peace Council, Chief District Officer, District Police Office and other government staff. A person is identified as an IDP if they have left their place of permanent residence due to the seizure of their house, land or property by parties at war, or if they are displaced due to threats, fear, and intimidation, physical and mental torture or due to problems associated with their livelihood. After being successfully identified as an IDP, the person receives an identity card. Those registered in this way obtain a relief package from the government, though only if they intend to return to their place of origin. In order to be able to claim the package, the IDP has to declare that he will return to the MoPR’s IDP cell or to the host community’s DAO. Thereupon the IDP is entitled to a transport allowance, a lump sum of Rs. 300-1000 (USD 3.89-13) per person and to incidental expenses amounting to Rs. 500 (USD 6.49) per person in the host community.

There is severe controversy about the government’s definition, identification process and response. For example, most IDPs displaced by the Maoists are of the opinion that in their home district a committee made up of seven political parties has to verify that they are IDPs, yet the Maoists still refuse to recognize them as IDPs. Says Mr D. L., an IDP who has been living in Kathmandu for the last six years, “When I went to claim

my allowance as a displaced person in the village, the Maoists said, 'Yes, we sealed his house and seized his property, but we did not tell him to leave the village, so he's not an IDP.' Hence I get no help. My house and land is in the Maoists' hands. How can I ever return?" There are many IDPs who face the same problem because of this controversial arrangement. According to the policy, only the district programme coordination committee includes representatives of the political parties that are represented in Parliament. This committee is entrusted with implementing IDP programmes at district level. However, in the relief package assistance programme, it is the seven-party committee headed by the chief district officer that identifies the IDPs at local level. However, as mentioned in the policy, the provision is different for registration. Yet for IDPs, since the relief package is what matters the most, they have to be identified by the seven-party-member committee.

However, what is most controversial is that the government proposes a return home as the only possible solution. The government considers that all IDPs want to return to their place of origin. This understanding comes with a political dimension. Most non-Maoist political leaders whose voices are heard in the government are unable to go back to their villages due to threats made by the Maoists. As such, other political parties see their base activities weaken at crucial times, during an election campaign. This involves the categories of people who would like to return and resume their political status. Coincidentally, at local level, these are the ones who make up the socio-economically and politically elite group, who have access to and negotiate with local government. Negotiations are mostly centred on their return and property issues, since the property of these groups has largely been seized by the Maoists. Thus at both central and local level, the voice of elite groups, who demand to be able to return home, have reached the ears of the government. For the latter, sending them back to their place of origin would lessen the strain on services and infrastructures in urban areas. Internationally, as a return is perceived to be the most commonly practised form of response, the international community also supports the government's move.

However, our research in the field over the last three years presents a rather different picture. It finds that an unplanned move to the urban area to escape the conflict was painful, made the IDPs vulnerable and posed problems that well planned migration would have inflicted to a lesser extent. Under other circumstances, a migrant would have taken the time to plan his migration, by choosing his destination and making living and work arrangements beforehand. However, in these conditions, a person had to flee suddenly, sometimes taking with him women and children, with no proper food, shelter and work provided for in the host area. In most cases, IDPs depend on their extended families, kin, relatives, friends

or fellow neighbours to put them up as *Pahuna* until they can fend for themselves. Yet, living in an urban area for quite sometime has provided those opportunities, aspirations and networks – dimensions that influence the IDP's decision to return home, but which are often ignored in discussions concerning IDPs. The State has instituted a return home as the sole solution, which is not what a majority of IDPs choose. The study reveals that all members, even within a same family, make different choices regarding their return home. This aspect plays a crucial part in the success of the government's present response. According to the MoPR (2009), the government targets a return of 50,000 IDPs, earmarking for this a total budget of Rs 371,600,000 (USD 4,933,333) (MoPR, 2009). However, most IDPs with access to the relief package are taking the money but not returning home. The government's own data show that despite the considerable lapse of time, only 1,466 IDPs (250 wishing to rebuild and 1,216 wishing to make repairs) have accepted the assistance that is offered in their native village. Furthermore, the above-mentioned data regarding beneficiaries is based on government registration which does not take into account whether all those who benefited from assistance returned home or were able to stay home permanently once they got there. Our research shows that, those who return home and claim the daily subsistence allowance and education allowance are also claiming money in their village and going back to urban areas. This paper explains why to expect multi-local livelihoods despite a definitive return by these people.

This paper is based on doctorate research on the livelihood of conflict-induced IDPs in Nepal. Fieldwork for the research was done during the period 2006-2009 in the urban areas of five districts in Nepal: Dang, Banke, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur which are among the places with the highest concentration of IDPs (IDMC 2006). A total of 270 (150 male, 120 female) IDPs were interviewed. Research was done using standard qualitative methods which involved in-depth interviews, focus groups, formal and informal discussions with IDPs, members of host communities and State and non-State actors, as well as observations and information from secondary sources. The study used snowball sampling methods to have access to IDPs. It revealed that it was highly likely that the non-IDPs who have access to the government offices and non-government organizations also register themselves as IDPs. This even applies to some ministers who register in their local districts as IDPs and claim compensation and relief assistance. Similarly, the study also found that in attempting to increase the number of cadres to strengthen their ranks, different IDP-related and conflict victim associations have registered many people who are not really conflict victims or IDPs at all.

### **Multi-local livelihoods or definitive return: an analysis of IDP livelihoods in the host area**

The displacement of people during the Maoist conflict followed a relatively organized trend. The conflict started in rural areas and intensified there. Thus, people who had been internally displaced from rural villages in Nepal came to live in the district headquarters, area headquarters, small cities and towns, larger urban centres and the capital, Kathmandu. Their destination coincides with the general rural-urban migration routes and most IDPs chose places where they already knew someone within their social network or places previously known to them through business connections, health services, education or work.

Despite a common pattern of IDPs belonging to a single vulnerable category, the study found that, based on their livelihoods in an urban area, IDPs can be categorized into three broad groups as follows. Among the 270 respondents interviewed in the study, 5.5% belonged to the elite groups (the first category) in terms of their socio-economic and political access both in their place of origin and in the host community, 56.7% were professionals (second category), such as journalists, teachers and youths who prospered in urban centres, while the last 37.8% included the poorest (the third category) IDPs. Their livelihoods and decisions regarding their return home are also based on the attributes of these categories.

#### **The first category: “The elite”**

The first category of IDPs primarily includes those who were displaced by the Maoists as “enemies of the people – *Samanti* of the villages. They are wealthy landowners from villages, rich people who lend money on interest, influential people of other political parties, such as local representatives of political parties, local mayors and chairmen of Village Development Committees. They used to have important social economic and political status in the village and to wield influence over a significant section of the local population. Thus, their whole family was displaced. For example, Mr K. S. (aged 69) was displaced from Kalikot in December, 1999. He came from the family of “Jimmuwal”— an administrative hierarchy of Nepal which ranked third after the King, when Kalikot was a separate kingdom. He has his own share of the vast ancestral land (204 hectares worth 300 *Ropani*) which accounts for one-fifth of the family’s property. He had been the *Pradhan Pancha* (village headman) four times under the Panchayat system and was VDC Chairman for seven years representing the Nepal Congress Party during the post-democracy period. He had had a school built for the village on his own land and at his own expense, and contributed part of his land to build the road network. He headed various committees, such as forest users groups, irrigation management group,

etc., in the local village. At first, the Maoists tried to persuade him to join their party, knowing that a majority of villagers would follow his example. But when he was not to be convinced, he was issued a death warrant along with his son. He ran away with his son with the help of the Nepalese Army. Later, his wife and daughters were abducted and their property was confiscated. The wife and daughter managed to escape, with the help of a fellow villager who was one of the abductors. They now live in the Rajhena camp in Nepalgunj.

Most of the IDPs in the first category have a similar story to tell. These people already owned houses, land or some form of business in urban areas. For example, Mr K. S. had three houses in the district headquarters, Khalanga bazar, which were rented to the Nepalese Army. Since they could afford it, most of their children and extended family members were already living in urban centres either to pursue their studies or with a well established means of livelihood. It was mostly the elderly members of families, who held prestigious positions who had stayed in the villages.

Our research finds that, in the host area, these people have been able to support themselves with their own resources. They are well aware of the government's programme and policies and have registered with the government. Most of them have been able to obtain regular support from the government thanks to their political ties. Like IDPs, these people have access to non-government organizations. Most of them have houses in the residential area of the urban centres, but very few are rentiers.

Regarding their relationship with the people of the host community, these people are no different from them because of their IDP status. Says Mr P. K, a lawyer who was displaced from Salyan and now runs an NGO that negotiates housing to shelter IDPs: "I don't need to tell people that I am an IDP. I have my own house here and I am like any other community member. My neighbours know that my property has been confiscated by the Maoists. But they do not regard me as an IDP. My sons and daughters were already living here. So, I am only registered as an IDP as far as the government is concerned". He has so far helped around 250 households settle on land belonging to the District Forest Office of Nepalgunj by negotiating with the latter.

With a house in the host area, the first category of IDPs attends community meetings, "Tole meetings" of the area, and work towards developing their community. They are involved in its social and cultural activities and are accepted as any fellow neighbours. They assume responsibilities within their respective political parties in the place where they now live, and sometimes represent their districts in Kathmandu. Some have started their own businesses or have helped their sons in this undertaking, while others have set up their own NGOs. Their major source of income comes from business and services.

However, among all IDPs, this group includes the highest number of people wishing to return to their place of origin. This is because most of their property including land and houses has been confiscated by the Maoists in their home villages. What they have in the urban area is just a very small proportion. Their chief concern is their return home to recover their property. Due to the pressure they are putting on the government, the latter has held negotiations on several occasions with the Maoists for the return of property. However, these people have more openings in local politics than in central politics. They are candidates for local political representations and have the responsibility of carrying out party activities at village and district level. Thus, they were much more active in their villages than they are now in urban areas, district headquarters and the capital. They are destined to become VDC chairman, mayor and CA members from the districts, whereas they have fewer opportunities in central politics. The Maoists have informally categorised IDPs according to their previous characteristics. These people cannot go back because for the Maoists they are primarily ranked as “Group A” (list of criminals and wrongdoers). According to the IDPs, those in group ‘A’ are forbidden from returning home because the Maoists believe that such people have committed serious wrongdoings, such as extorting heavy interests from poor people, and oppressing the poor or spying for the government.

As their property, including land, has been confiscated, they cannot cultivate, lease or sell it. Therefore, while in the urban area, they receive no crops or cash from their property. They are not allowed to visit their village. However, they maintain links with the village by exchanging information with their family members and villagers, and through visits by the latter. They learn about the local political scene and news about the villages. Due to their influential positions, villagers, relatives and people who know them from other networks of the village *afna mancheharu* visit them when they are in town, which keeps them in touch with village activities even when they themselves cannot go there. At times, some of these people even go to their district headquarters and urban areas near their villages.

However, for these families, there is an interesting contradiction in the idea of returning home. While the elderly generation see their village as their home, the younger generation who have grown up here, see it as their village home (*gau ko ghar*). For them it is more a question of retrieving their land and property in order to sell it rather than simply settling down again. The study reveals that they are still tied to their village only because their extended kin live there and the village house (*gau ko ghar*) is a place where most people go to celebrate major festivals.

Thus this sub-group finds city life more appealing. Mr S.M. (19 years old), who came to Kathmandu from Sindhuli, says that in Kathmandu he

finds he can go to private college which is much better than the college in Sindhuli. Furthermore, he is free to choose management studies (his chosen field), while he discovers an interest in computer-based education, all of which was lacking in his hometown college. In addition, he is working as a junior clerk in a business. He has friends from different parts of the country and though they know his property in his native village has been seized by the Maoists, they do not regard him as an IDP - *bisthaphit*. He says: “neither my friends are interested, nor am I interested in knowing who is *bistaphi* or who is not”.

This new generation has also readily adapted to the ways of the city in terms of daily life. For example, in Nepalgunj, elderly women spend their time worrying about the difference in the dress code, the hot weather, the lack of fruit trees and the idea of having to buy a few kilos of rice (they are not used to buying food in the village, since they believe that only the poor have to buy food), while the younger generation are not affected by this. One elderly woman even tried to abandon traditional dress (*Faria cholo*) - sari and blouse for city attire (*Kurta Suruwal*). However, after comments from her brother-in-law, she felt so self-conscious she went back to wearing her traditional dress. Mr S.M., who says he often wore cotton trousers in Sindhuli, now only wears jeans. When asked “why”? He says, “so that my friends here don’t treat me differently”.

However, the elderly generation also realizes that it would be a hard life back in the villages. “Those people who worked for us for wages are living in our houses now. They have taken over our land, they use our utensils and have become masters. If we return, they would have to leave, so they would not let us return. Relationships with these people and other relatives and kin (*nata kutumaba*) would not be the same again. But still it is where my ancestors lived (*bau baje baseko thau*), so I’d like to return there.” This is how Mr K.S. perceives his life after his return home. Yet he is in a quandary as to whether to let his children and grandchildren seize the opportunities available (in cities).

However, women are essentially caught between their husbands’ wishes and their children’s aspirations. Interestingly enough, a large majority of women wanted to stay in urban areas, their children’s education being the first reason and access to health facilities the second. Says Mrs D.S. (wife of the above-mentioned, Mr K.S.), “I want to go back to sell all my property in Kalikot, then build a house in Nepalgunj. My children want to stay here. They get a better education here. If they are sick, I can take them to good hospitals here. In Kalikot, we only have a health post and no proper treatment is available. We have to wait for days for a flight so that we can take the sick children to Nepalgunj. I have to consider a better future for my children. But my husband wants to go back.”

### **The second category: professionals and youths**

The second category of IDPs includes professionals (army, police, civil servants, journalists, teachers, health workers) and their family members. They were targeted by the Maoists due to their profession or affiliations with the perceived enemies—the government forces. This group also includes youths who were caught between the atrocities caused by the warring sides. The youths were afraid of being abducted and forced to enrol into the Maoist army (for a detailed explanation of strategy, see Ghimire and Upreti 2008) and were equally harassed by the security forces who suspected them of being Maoists. The latter forced able youths to join their war, abducted them and, if they met any resistance, tortured them. The security forces from the government were suspicious of such youths and harassed them. Thus parents would try to send their young children away from the villages to the safety of urban centres.

However, interviews with people who pursued their college education in their native village reveal that they would have preferred to have stayed in urban areas. The war drove them to urban areas. This unprepared arrival to escape the conflict was painful, made them vulnerable and posed serious problems. They mainly relied on their friends and relatives when choosing which destination to migrate to and when sustaining their livelihood in the first period of their stay in the host community. However, after spending some time in an urban area, they now prefer because of the education and employment opportunities it offers and the lifestyle. They have lost any interest in agricultural work after achieving a significant standard of education and learning skills in the urban area. For example, Mr R. B., an IDP from Jumla, said that when his friend came to Surkhet after passing his School Leaving Certificate (tenth grade), he wanted to settle in Surkhet. However, he could not leave his elderly parents or afford to move. Without a job in Jumla, he was helping his family on the farm. He did not like this type of work. According to him, it does not provide anyone with a proper income. He wanted to get a job in an office, where he could earn money, but there were no opportunities in Jumla. He therefore studied science as far as the tenth grade, but could not continue because the college did not offer any science courses. However, after “shoes *abhiyan*” in Jumla, he left for Nepalgunj with another friend. He now studies science at the state college in the morning and works as a teacher in a private school during the day. He is very happy with his work and enjoys his studies. On graduating, he would like to work in an NGO.

After being displaced, these people have been able to support themselves by virtue of their physical and human assets (like skills, ability to do physical labour), activities and knowledge base, though a significant



number of them have resorted to menial jobs on the competitive urban labour market. Despite these difficulties, they perceive urban areas to hold more hope for the future. Consequently, they have invested in their children's education, in improving their academic and professional qualifications and in building their savings. Young people in this group are able to significantly increase their human capital, such as their education and skills, in the urban setting and have therefore become important contributors to the family.

With regard to their socio-economic activities, the majority are teachers, employees in private and government organizations, and businesses or they have their own small business. They do not encounter any significant integration problems on the labour market due to their IDP status. Most of them have found work via social networks in areas where other migrants work. For example, in Kathmandu Valley a significant number of young people have learnt to drive and now work as taxi or microbus drivers, which they usually find with the help of friends or relatives working in the same sector. Others have become computer-literate and now have a relevant job. In Dang and Nepalgunj, young people are involved in running small shops, working for large shop owners or in schools and other services.

Another important advantage of living in the host community is the possibility of being affiliated with political and non-political organizations. This involves working in political associations related to home districts, organizations for war victims, organizations for landless and homeless people (*Sukumbashi*). Organizations such as the Maoist Victim Association (MVA) have a large number of young cadres in their youth wing. These youths go through physical and ideological training which is provided by the associations. They are then made representatives of their relative districts and mobilized on occasion to recruit more war-affected youths into the party as well as to demonstrate against the Maoists and the government. The MVA also pays for the youths' food and accommodation if necessary. The youths feel that the association has become a platform for social networks, providing a sense of security, purpose and a home to them. They now get together and play games and become involved in other recreational activities. Thus they do not feel segregated and alone. The same support is given to other people who are members of the associations. Their membership in the organizations has provided them with both physical and emotional support in urban areas. They sometimes hold important positions in such organizations, mostly in the decision implementing level, while the first category of IDPs makes the decisions.

Similarly, in places like the Patu settlement of Dang, (Picture 1), Ektanagar in Nepalgunj, and the Manahara slum settlement in Kathmandu

valley, IDPs along with other migrants have developed their own community. Here people from a specific area, live in close proximity with each other, though embedded in the larger new community. So, for example in the Patu settlement (a large community), one would find a cluster of *Rolpalis*—people from Rolpa living in a neighbourhood with a cluster of *Salyanis*—people from Salyan. When a new member arrives, it is easy to identify where people from his district live within the settlement. When IDPs from here migrate to India (which is common practice), the relationship is maintained at both ends. A Salyani who comes home from India, brings money and goods sent by his neighbour for the latter's family, and takes things (usually foodstuff, pickles, etc.) from the neighbour's wife back to him in India. Thus they create their own networks in both places.



**Picture 1: An organised community of IDPs and other migrants in the Patu riverside settlement of Dang. Source: Anita Ghimire, 2007.**

In these new communities, IDPs along with other migrants have built roads, established communities, set up schools for their children and arranged for running water and electricity (Picture 2) on their own initiative. Up until 2008, except in Kathmandu, these communities had no support from either the government or any NGOs. Yet IDPs actively participate in all the community activities. They have invested money and work into establishing the new community where they have their new home. They do not have much to go back to. Most of their land and other

property has either been given to their extended family, such as their separated brothers or their parents, or put out on lease. Some managed to sell all their property after they became displaced. According to the Maoists, such people come under category “B”—people who will be allowed to return after fulfilling certain criteria imposed by the Maoists. However, till the end of 2008, these people were in no way prevented by either side from travelling back to their native villages.



Picture 2: **Self management of electricity by the community in Manahara settlement in Kathmandu. Source: Anita Ghimire, 2007.**

Women in this category have come up against a paradox in experiencing both a difficult but empowering time both within and outside the family. Though women’s employment in cash-income generating jobs has brought about a change and has been a strain on women, for many families it has come to be a major and well-accepted strategy. The immediate and visible contribution made by cash income in contrast to the modest, intermittent income in rural areas has given women the power to negotiate their place within the family. They represent the family at community meetings. For example, in families where the men have gone to work in India, women take part in community meetings and contribute to community work. An increase in social and political affiliations such as mother groups, microcredit associations, associations aimed at different forms of victims of the Maoist war has increased their socio-economic space and has empowered them. This trend is particularly marked in major urban areas, like the Kathmandu Valley, but also in Dang and Nepalgunj. Thus the proximity to the politically central and economically dynamic areas provided by the

urban structure has positively influenced the agency of the displaced women in midst of a difficult situation. Through microcredit and mother groups, women have been able to find seed money for small investments in businesses and livestock. They have negotiated access to the community forest and have set up a home in the new environment. Via these associations, they approach various NGOs which provide them with information on health issues, their rights as citizens, and voice their concerns. One such example is the work of two organizations, Lumanti and Rudec, with IDP women from Rajhena camp and Ektanagar

The women in this group were mainly interested in education and health opportunities for their children. They feel that they have a lot less to go back to. Similarly, the relative flexibility as far as culture and tradition are concerned due to nuclear families and the growing socio-economic space has made women's lives easier in urban areas. In cases where families have split up due to their displacement, women find themselves with more responsibility as wage-earners but also greater freedom to live their lives as they choose. As new financial contributors, they have more room, even in conventional joint families, to negotiate their own wants. The women in this category like those of the first category, do not want to return to the village.

Thus most of these groups are not set on returning for good, i.e., they wish to stay in an urban setting, to have access to education, employment and health services, while maintaining links with their place of origin. These links are maintained via extended family members, parents and their ancestral home, during visits, festivals and rituals. However, they receive no food or crops from their place of origin. For those whose land has been returned, the land is cultivated by their extended family, e.g., brothers, parents or it is sold or leased out. They say that they have left their ancestral property to their parents and brothers and are trying to make a living here in town. For unmarried youths, land is a joint possession: so family members, such as brothers and parents, who have remained in the villages look after it. For example, Mr H. D. (26 years old) came to Kathmandu from Rammechapp in 2003. He was abducted by the Maoist from his college, but managed to escape. He now works in a publishing house during the day and goes to college in the morning. Back in his native village, his parents and his elder brother look after the house and land. Nothing stops him from returning on a permanent basis. However, he now only goes to his village occasionally. As he now earns his living in Kathmandu, his parents and brothers come to Kathmandu for medical treatment and for visits. He plans to bring his younger brother with him to Kathmandu for his college education in a year's time.

### **The third category: the poorest**

According to the Maoist category, these people are allowed to return freely and unconditionally. However, all third-category IDPs were not displaced solely because of the Maoists. Some were displaced as a direct consequence of the conflict, others indirectly. Both parties at war, the Maoists and the government security forces, posed a threat to them, although most third-category IDPs were in fact displaced by the security forces after the situation worsened from 2001 onwards. This category consists of poor people, irrelative of their caste, who worked as agricultural labourers, tenants, blacksmiths, players of traditional musical instruments (*Gaine*) and priests. Most of them have a nuclear family in the urban area.

However, in the host area, this category of people is the most vulnerable. They have none of the required skills or schooling for a well-paid job or any money or jewellery to invest in business. Most of them now living in Kathmandu are daily wage labourers, working as porters on building sites. In Dang and Nepalgunj they quarry stones, collect sand from the river to sell, sell firewood or work as dishwashers in hotels. Others work as maids or agricultural labourers, run small a *nanglo pasal* (bamboo plate shop) or find other forms of daily wage labour. They live in temporary housing in the slum or rent a single room with inadequate basic facilities which they share with the whole family. Due to living in such insalubrious conditions, they are exposed to environmental and other health hazards. Studies on IDPs' living conditions (IDP Working Group, 2009; Tamang and Fedrick 2006; Caritas 2005; Rai, 2005) have shown that these groups face difficulties in providing themselves with the basic necessities in urban areas. As in rural areas, men and women are equally involved in money-making activities. In order to cope financially, most families find their children various jobs.

They are very little aware of their status as IDPs and the government relief programmes. While the first two IDP categories are for the most part registered at government offices as IDPs and receive regular support, the third category is rarely registered and therefore receives no government support. In addition, they have no contact with organizations of any kind, and thus have very little social and financial capital that might benefit them in times of trouble. These people believe that as they have to work to earn their living they have less time and interest in integrating the host community. According to Mrs S. Karki, an IDP from Sindhupalanchowk, "If we don't work during the day, we stay hungry at night, so I don't have time to chat with the neighbours or attend community meetings". They are rarely involved in community activities as they are busy providing for their own everyday needs. This greatly limits their socio-economic space

in the host area. However, they feel that in their workplace all their fellow workers are poor like them. According to Mr R. Thapa, an IDP from Dhading, “no one cares why anyone came to the city, we do not need to say that we are IDPs, and even if our friends know, they don’t care. We are all poor and in the same boat”.

They do not suffer any direct harassment due to their IDP status, yet they are aware of some discrimination against them by the neighbouring residential community that categorises them as slum settlers and poor. Nevertheless, the latter admit that in the slum where there are all sorts of migrants, they have never encountered any problem related to their IDP status. Although urban areas have seen a significant increase in their slum population, there are no figures for the slum population or for IDPs living there. However, slum settlements house all forms of migrants, and sometimes rich locals (even members of parliaments) settle there purely to occupy the land. There are no figures for the ratio of the IDP population in slums. Slums shelter rural-urban migrants, IDPs, farmers from nearby Kathmandu, who rear pigs, migrants from the Terai and sometimes wealthy landowners. Providing land for slum settlers as advocated by political organizations (mostly during election campaigns) and by some NGOs, such as Lumanti, has catalysed this process of occupying land in the slums.

Nothing prevents these people from freely returning to their native village. However, they had little land of their own; they worked the landowners’ land according to different types of arrangement or lease. Since they no longer work in their place of origin, they receive no food or other items from the village. However, some of them go back to their village to work during festivals and the planting and harvesting seasons.

They have very little incentive to return permanently since they have a limited means of livelihood in the rural area and they make no financial losses by leaving their native village. What attracts them to urban areas are the cash income opportunities and brighter prospects for their children. A number of elderly people wish to return as they feel that urban areas are too much a contrast to their place of origin. However, they were indeed aware of the opportunities that urban areas held for their younger family members. On the other hand, young people are reluctant to return; just like the youths in the other two categories, they feel the “pull” of the urban community. Hence these groups are less willing to go back permanently to the villages.

The present government instability makes it even more unlikely that the State will be able to satisfy these needs or to provide better opportunities or incentives to returning to rural areas. Once in urban areas, as described above, most families share their lives between rural

areas as their ancestral place and urban areas for all the positive prospects it holds, rather than returning to the village with the whole family.

## **Conclusion**

While urban areas have always attracted people because of their “pull”, achieving an end to internal displacement is often measured by I/NGOs, governments, etc., in terms of the number of IDPs returning home. Consequently, the Nepalese government has promoted “return” as a solution for IDPs. When examining their livelihood in urban areas, our study reveals that although the lives of IDPs are fraught with difficulties, these difficulties are largely outweighed by the perceived opportunities offered by the urban environment. From a livelihood perspective, the factors that influence their return are based on the differences between the possibilities of improving their living standards in the host area and in their place of origin. The study highlights the fact that, though these populations were initially forced to move to urban areas, all of them have in some way benefited from the valuable opportunities available. Nevertheless, the prevailing plight of individuals upon being displaced differs. Consequently, instead of opting for a definitive return, IDPs prefer to share their lives between rural areas and urban areas: making their lives multi-local.

Contrary to the IDPs’ wishes, the government has initiated a return programme as the sole response to the IDPs’ predicament, since the government sees it as the least expensive solution. Within an internationally recognised scheme for addressing internal displacement, there are three solutions: a return to one’s place of origin, settling where IDPs now live after having been displaced (host community) and resettling in a place of the IDP’s choice within the country. This means that if an alternative to returning home is chosen, the government has to provide for the IDPs’ basic needs, employment and make the environment propitious for them to integrate the host population. Under the circumstances, returning IDPs to their place of origin where they own property is the easiest alternative, since the government only has to make arrangements for their return and to provide compensation for lost property. Thus in order to solve the problem, the government is keen to send people back in the most cost effective way. However, the government does not realize that for a fully successful return, a suitable environment for a return home and the IDPs’ wishes need to be taken into account. It is very unlikely that IDPs will opt for a definitive return. Though this case emerged in Nepal, it is highly likely that similar phenomena exist in other instances of displacement to urban areas. If the

natural migration trend continues, urban areas will continue to retain IDPs even if they initially arrive by force.

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