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## **Male out migration and its impacts on rural women's livelihoods: The case of boloso sore woreda, wolayta zone, Snnpr, Ethiopia**

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### **Abstract**

Although rural-urban migration is dominated by women nationally in Ethiopia, the feature of out migration from certain parts of the country has been largely men's affair. Little is known how the livelihood of women is affected in the long run when their counterparts migrate out and the former assume the virtual headship of their households' in Ethiopia. This study is therefore, intended to assess how women cope with in the absence of their husbands and support their family and identifies the major socioeconomic and institutional factors that influence their effort to improve their livelihood. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative approach of data gathering. In the study, descriptive design was employed. Generally sample size of the study was one hundred twelve (112) such that 20 male households, 80 de facto women households, four chairman of kebeles, four experts from office of agriculture and four aged person from four rural kebeles were included by using multi stage sampling method. The study employed questionnaires, interviews, document reviewing and discussion with focus groups. On the basis and types of data gathered and the instrument used, both quantitative and qualitative techniques of data analysis supported by SPSS were employed. The result of the study indicates that male-out migration has greatly affected the livelihood of the women who are left behind. The labor gap created due to the absence of male head has negatively affected the agricultural production and the natural resource conservation activity in the study area. Thus, to improve the lives of de facto women heads by mitigating the social, economic and cultural barriers which hinder their effort to win a decent livelihood, certain recommendation, gleaned out from this study were suggested to the concerned bodies.

**Keywords:** livelihood, food security, male-out migration, de facto women

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### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Migration is the movement of people across a specified boundary, national or international, to establish a new permanent place of residence. The UN defines permanent as a change of residence lasting more than a year. Migration remains central for households and communities to enhance their access to livelihoods assets through investing in the creation of social capital, networks and personal relations (World Bank, 2009).

Ethiopia is at a low level of urbanization, but stands presently among the rapidly urbanizing developing countries in Africa. Vast number of people are leaving the rural areas and joining the urban people every day. The reason for this exodus to urban areas widely varies temporally and spatially. But most studies indicate the economic motives as the major driving force behind the recent very fast urbanization phenomenon in Ethiopia (CSA, 2007).

However, the efforts of women are undermined by the laborious nature of farming, labor constraints or by lack of access to productive resources, in part because agricultural research and extension services were primarily oriented to male farmers. Similarly, Sharp and Spiegel (1990) stated that although the patriarchal customs and legal structures curbed women's control over land and agricultural production, women become de jure heads of households in the highly gendered migrant labor system of South Africa. The prevalence of female-headed households in rural areas necessarily affects household and community livelihood strategies.

Local study on the impact of rural-out migration on village life in Gurage by Worku Nida, (1995) indicated that male out-migration from his study area had negatively affected agriculture and resulted in shortage of locally produced food. His study proved that remitted cash does not entirely offset the absent farm labor within the migrant households, since hired labor is more costly, less productive, less efficient and less intensive. Moreover, he further indicated that migration has changed the traditional roles and responsibilities of rural women due to the labor gap created for different farm and social activities resulting in a higher work burden on Gurage women.

Boloso Sore woreda is one of the Woreda in the Southern Ethiopia that has been experiencing out migration of its rural labor force for a long period of time. Rural urban migration from the Woreda dates back around the beginning of the 20th century, immediately following the incorporation of the Woreda into the rule of the Ethiopian government. (BOA, 2005).

Out-migration from the Woreda has been highly male-selective. This is so because of the fact that the degradation of ecology and scarcity of farming land has caused job losses. An informal activity which is the major economic activity of migrants in urban areas has been an exclusively male's business in the community. The age-old trend of male out-migration from the Woreda has forced rural women to manage the agricultural activity and the household chores alone with little or no remittance at all from the migrants. As the migrants tend to be the economically active population, the situation in the rural area becomes even worse

once they start leaving. The very young and the elderly who remain there are unable to farm the land efficiently and the problem of under production of food becomes more serious. (BOA, 2005).

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Migration tends to be seen as problematic, in academic and policy debates, and in the popular press. It is often seen as the consequence of ruptures, of environmental disaster, economic exploitation, or political or civil tensions and violence. The separation of migrants from the family unit, whether it is nuclear or extended, has profound implications for family organization and for individual family members. Migration of males from rural areas into urban areas, presented a number of challenges to both migrants and families left behind.

Thus out-migration of men resulted in considerable social costs to households and communities, as families were fragmented and women and children left behind had to bear additional burden of traditional male work (Human Sciences Research Council Report 2006).

In Brazil, women whose husbands have left as an environmental adaptation strategy are known as “widows of the drought” (World Bank, 2009). This evolution in the composition of rural households can challenge traditional roles and contribute to women’s empowerment through increased autonomy and decision-making power. In China, for example, the shortage of male farm workers due to migration has resulted in girls being pulled out of school in order to take care of younger siblings and to help with farm work (IOM, 2009: 270). The psychosocial consequences of male migration on their wives left-behind are still under addressed. Adequate access to tailored health and psychosocial services is cruelly lacking.

The struggle for women-headed households can be particularly frustrating when women are left to deal with increased workload and responsibilities, but without equal or direct access to financial, social, and technological resources (World Bank, 2009).

The study in, Sudan had indicated that the absence of men from major social occasions like negotiations, feasts, and general meetings among villagers have reduced community interaction and management agreements among villagers in the region. As a result relation between villagers and neighboring pastoralists has deteriorated resulting in frequent clash (Mary Myers *et al.* 1995) Local study on the impact of rural-out migration on village life in Gurage by Worku (1995) indicated that male out-migration from his study area had negatively affected agriculture and resulted in shortage of locally produced food. His study proved that remitted cash does not entirely offset the absent farm labor within the

migrant households, since hired labor is more costly, less productive, less efficient and less intensive. Moreover, he further indicated that migration has changed the traditional roles and responsibilities of rural women due to the labor gap created for different farm and social activities resulting in a higher work burden on Gurage women.

The impact of male out-migration on rural women’s livelihood is among the least researched areas in Ethiopia. Understanding the situation of rural women, as well as the social and economic forces affecting their livelihood in a dynamic way is vital for development practitioners and policy makers to design appropriate interventions, and planning efforts which could benefit rural women and make them a major actor in development process McEvoy, J.(2008). However, in the study area there was little empirical research conducted concerning the causes and consequences of male outmigration on the livelihood of rural women. Therefore, this study was, intended to fill the gap through assessing how women cope with difficulties in the absence of their husbands and support their family and identifies the major socio economic and institutional factors that influence their effort to improve their livelihood.

### 1.3 Objective of the Study

General objective of this research was to identify and investigate the major social, economic and institutional barrier that affect rural women’s effort to secure livelihood for their family due to male out migration.

The specific objectives of this research were to:

- Investigate the impact of male out migration on the livelihoods of rural women left behind.
- Identify the strategies rural women generally adopt to overcome problems associated with male out-migration.

### 1.4 Significance of Study

This study hopes to prove useful for policy makers, development practitioners and researchers who in one way or another are involved in rural development endeavors. Thus, study is intended to improve the lives of de facto women heads as results of male out migration by mitigating the social, economic and cultural barriers which hinder their effort to win a decent livelihood, and suggest certain recommendation.

## 2. Study Area

The Boloso Sore is located in the south western part of Ethiopia in Wolayta Zone, which is one of the administrative Zones of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State/SNNPRS/. Boloso Sore is located at about 420 km south of Addis Ababa.

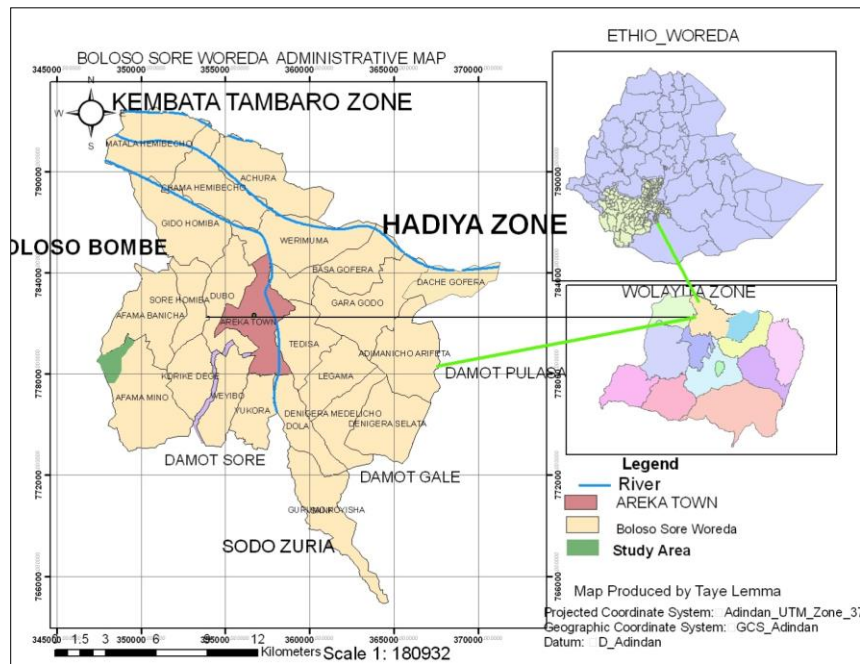


Fig 1: Location of boloso sore woreda (BOA, 2014)

**2.2.3 Method and Design of the Study**

This study involves mixed research method and descriptive design. This method was chosen for its appropriateness to the nature of the topic, which needs wider description, investigation of facts and information related to it and complement to it. Descriptive design is important and helpful to show situations, as they currently exist (Anderson 1990).

**2.2.4 Sampling and Sampling Procedure**

Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the samples. The researcher favored this technique as it helps to get more representative sample from geographically scattered participants (Koul, 1984). According to Levy, Yalew Endawok and Limshow among the total population 10-30% can fulfill the sample sizes. Four successive sampling techniques were used to select sample rural kebeles; women headed household, chairman of each rural kebeles.

There are 800 women headed household in four selected rural kebeles (80) twenty from each rural kebeles (10 %) were selected by using proportional sampling system. 20(five from each kebeles) male headed households were selected purposively out of 4200 male headed household through judgmental sampling system. Four rural kebeles chairmen was included through their availability and four experts and aged person from four rural kebeles by quota sampling system respectively.

**3.2.5 Source of Data**

Both primary and secondary data sources were used to generate appropriate information for the study. Primary data was collected from the study area using survey questionnaires, interview of key informants and focused group discussions with different women groups. Secondary data was gathered from different published and unpublished documents in the Woreda and elsewhere.

**3.2.7 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected from respondents and documents were tailored,

tabulated, organized in systematical forms. To analyze the quantitative data, depending on the nature of the basic questionnaire mean score, percentage and rank order was used to guide the analysis and interpretation of the findings by using SPSS version 21. Data that was collected through interview and documentary sources were analyzed correspondence to the main research questions and cross checked with quantitative data for factual verification.

**4. Result**

**4.1 demographic Characteristics of respondents**

**4.1.1 Age of Respondents**

The average age of the household head in the study area was 40.1 (sd=10.4). The age of the youngest respondent in the study was 18 years old whereas the oldest respondent was 74 years old. The average age for women respondents was found out to be 39.06 years (SD=9.6) whereas that of men was found to be 44.25 years (sd=12.6).

**4.1.2 Marital Status**

All the respondent of the survey are married. The culture of polygamy is still prevalent in the study area. Ten per cent of the men respondents to the survey reported that they are married to two wives, whereas the rest of the men are married to a single woman. Similarly, thirty-four per cent of the women said that they are a second wife to their husband and the rest 66% of the women in the sample are the only wife to their husbands.

Table 1: Marital status of sampled households

marital status	Gara		Dache		Bassa		Dubbo	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Monogamous	5	11	5	8	5	17	5	17
Polygamous	-	9	-	12	-	3	-	3

Source: Survey data, 2016

Table 4.1 indicates that polygamous marriage is quite dominant in

the rural kebele with a highest rate of male out migration (Dache and Gara) and where the average land holding per individual is the highest (Dache).

#### 4.1.3 Educational Status

Out of the total respondents 18 per cent are literate whereas 82 are found to be unable to read and write. Out of the male

respondents 13(65%) are literate of which 2(10%) have attended high school classes and the rest attended elementary school and below that. Out of the 5(3.37%) of the literate women in the sample only one of them completed elementary school the rest are dropouts from elementary school at various levels. No one of the women in the sample attended high school.

**Table 2:** Education level of sampled respondents

Educational background	Types of Respondents		
	All Respondents(n=100)	De facto women heads(n=80)	Male Heads (n=20)
Education Status	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Unable to read and write	82(82)	75(93.7)	7(35)
Read and write	4(4)	-	4(20)
First cycle	11(11)	4(5)	7(35)
Above first cycle 2(10)	3(3)	1(1.25)	2(10)

*Source:* Survey Data 2016.

## 4.2. Household Characteristics

### 4.2.1 Family Size

The average family size for the respondent households was found out to be 4.93 (sd=2.27), which is slightly higher than the regional average of 4.7 (CSA, 2007). The minimum family size in the sample respondents was found to be 1 whereas the maximum was 10 persons. The average family size for de facto women head households was 4.52 (sd=2.01), whereas the average family size for male-headed households was 6.55 (sd=2.26). The age dependency ration was found to be 1.04 which is higher than the regional figure of 0.85 (Regional Statistic and Population Office 2007). Existence of large family size might have its own role to accelerate migration of both women and men.

### 4.2.2 Land Holding

The average landholding of the total respondents (n=100) is 0.49 ha. The average landholding of the women-headed households was found to be lower than that of male headed households. Due to shortage of farming land men are pressured to leave their origin.

### 4.2.3 Household Labor Supply

In the study area farm labor was the most critical input in the production process because of the highly labor intensive agricultural production system, (Human Sciences Research Council Report 2006).

In the study area family labor, hired labor and labor sharing arrangements are the most important sources of labor for agricultural activity. Most of the respondent households in the survey have reported that they hire labor for different operation in the farming cycle. Out of the total of the surveyed women-heads, 66(82.5%) said that they relied on hired labor for some agricultural operations whereas only 6(30%) of the male-headed households reported that they hire labor for certain agricultural operation.

### 4.2.4 Livelihood Strategies

Mixed subsistence farming where the crop and the animal sub-sectors are mutually interdependent is the standard kind of livelihood for all households interviewed. All households, however, mentioned that crop production is more important than livestock production to them in terms of immediate food supply

and income to the household. Livestock ownership is considered vital for access to manure and as an important means of survival in case of unexpected crises and shock to livelihood due to natural or artificial reasons through sale of the animals.

Agriculture in the study area is highly subsistence-oriented and very few households manage to be self-sufficient in food supply. Out of the surveyed 100 households only 23% of the households reported that they are food self-sufficient. Sex disaggregation of this data showed that while 50 per cent of the male-headed households are food self-sufficient, only 16.25 per cent of de facto women head households enjoy that status.

According to results of the survey, farm households mentioned a number of problems that constrain their agricultural livelihoods. Shortage of land, low level of soil fertility, shortage of manure, crop and animal disease, shortage of labor, pest and animal damage and drought are the most important constraints mentioned by the surveyed households. Common holding of livestock and land renting are also a common way of livelihood in the agricultural sector.

**Table 3:** Various activities of sample households

Off-Farm Activity	All Respondents (n=100)	De facto women heads(n=80)	Male Heads (n=20)
Crafting	16	-	16
Petty trade	22	22	-
Wage labour	15	13	2
Fuel wood sale	13	13	-
Selling animal fodder	6	6	-

*Source:* Survey data, 2016

As is illustrated in Table 4.6, a greater number of women engage in petty trade. This petty trade involves short distance migration to different markets, which take place on different day on the highland and neighboring low lands. Petty trade in the study area is the most laborious but less remunerative activity.

## 4.3 Discussion

### 4.3.1 Male out Migration and its Impact on Rural Women's Livelihood

#### 4.3.1.1 Male Out- Migration and Impact on Agriculture

Male out migration engender complex social, emotional, economic and ecological problems in the study area. In practice

these impacts are interrelated. Impacts at the social level include stress on conjugal and filial relationships and problems associated with lack of male role model in the household, which is important for personality development of children and family cohesion. The economic impact of male out migration depends on the opportunity cost of migration and the level of income the migrant earns at the destination. At the ecological level the impact of male out migration is related to the reduction in natural resource conservation and soil fertility maintenance efforts due to reduced labor inputs for such activities. Man land ratio is being constant because the land remained in the hands of husbands even if they depart from their origin and it also intensifies the rate of land degradation.

#### **4.3.1.2 Impact of Male Out-Migration on Crop Production**

The loss of labor as a result of migration has affected crop production activity of rural women in several ways. The most important manifestations of this impact are -decline in crop acreage, change in crop mix, leaving the land fallow, and decline in Enset population.

#### **4.3.1.3 Decline in Acreage Cultivated**

Male out migration greatly affected the ability of a household to cultivate all the available land at its disposal Worku. N (1995). This however depends on the amount and capability of labor force left behind in the household, as the male household head migrate out. Out of the total of interviewed defacto women heads 47.3% reported a decline in the acreage they cultivate each year after the migration of the male heads. Only one-woman head with very small amount of land prior to her husband's migration reported renting in some more agricultural land from other women. In contrast 5 of the interviewed male heads (n=20) reported renting in more land for the sake of crop production. Some de facto women head households have reported that they leave some of their plots fallow during some season. According to the results of the survey the major reason for decreasing the amount of land cultivated or leaving the land fallow altogether is the inability to cope with the labor required for cultivating all their land, and the inability to procure farm inputs.

#### **4.3.1.4 Change in crop mix**

With shortage of labor in the household and lack of resources to obtain agricultural input some households have resorted to changing their usual crop mix, in order to cope with the loss of household labor through migration and the shortage of cash. The more labor-intensive crops, as well as those requiring expensive inputs, have been dropped.

The other very important change that has equally affected both agro-ecologies is the change in population density and coverage of enset plant at the household level. Enset is the central crop to the sustainable agriculture of the highland. Enset constitutes an indispensable component of every meal by the highlanders. It is only 20% of all households interviewed who produce enough amount of cereal which can last them up to the next production seasons. The decline in number of enset plant around the household is very closely related to poverty and high vulnerability to natural and household income shocks.

According to the survey results 68 (85%) of the women reported that their enset population declined after their husband migrated

out. The major reason given by women as to why the enset population has declined is the labor intensive nature of enset cultivation. Women reported that subsequent stages of enset transplanting are highly labor-intensive and cannot be normally done by women. Women have to hire labor for such operations. Lack of financial capacities to hire labor in most cases discourages them from hiring labor, resulting finally in the decline of enset population as the existing stalk get consumed.

#### **4.3.1.5 Male Out- Migration and Natural Resource Conservation**

Sustained effort in natural resource conservation and soil fertility maintenance are an important component of the agricultural activity, which is vital to sustain the agricultural livelihood of rural households. Given the low natural fertility of the soil and the vulnerability of the undulating land form of the highland for soil eroding forces, soil conservation and soil fertility maintenance are very decisive factors that influence farm productivity in the study area, Worku. N (1995).

Informants have stated that a complex set of customary laws used to apply for forestland, grazing land and agricultural land use and management, as well as resolution of conflict in case of clash and disagreement in use of these resources. However, currently many of such institutions and customary laws which used to regulate the use and management of natural resources in the study area are rendered powerless and are being disintegrating. Most key informants have disclosed that given the major role of men in such institutions, the out migration of men from the study area is one of the major factors behind the disintegration and powerlessness of the indigenous institutions and customary laws. Key informants agree that the current high rate of mismanagement and unsustainable use of natural resource is partly the result of the disintegration of such indigenous institutions also (World Bank, 2009).

At household level, on-farm measures of soil conservation activities are also less practiced by the study women. The survey indicate that only 15 (18.75%) of the interviewed de facto women heads apply on farm soil conservation measures, whereas better number of male headed households (55%) undertake the same. The high labor demand of the construction of soil conservation structures and the knowledge differential between men and women due to difference in access to information and farm experience are the most important reasons mentioned by de facto women heads for not taking soil conservation measures on their farm.

The discussions with the women group and key informants further disclosed that the traditional soil fertility maintenance methods such as application of manure, crop rotation and fallowing are all in decline. The decline in livestock population, crop disease and population pressure are the most important reasons for such decline respectively.

#### **4.3.1.6 Male out Migration and Change in the Role of Women**

Male out migration and the resulting shortage of labor have forced women to take up some roles which were traditionally within the sphere of the responsibility of men in the study area. Seventy three percent of the women in the study area have reported such changes in their households as stated by McEvoy, J. (2008).

### 4.3.2 Male out Migration and Remittance

Remittance is the most important variable that bridges the rural and the urban economy as stated by McEvoy, J. (2008). Sixty five (81.25%) of the women surveyed said they receive remittance from their migrant husbands once or more after their husband has migrated to urban areas whereas 15 (18.75%) of the women respondents have said they have never received remittance from their migrant husbands since after they have left for urban area. The number of times a migrant sent remittance to his wife in rural area varies considerably from one household to the other. Most respondents said that remittances are irregular and usually sent following the annual festivals like Timket (epiphany) Meskel(cross) Gena (Christmas) etc, through the hands of individuals coming to attend this festival at home.

#### 4.3.2.1 Negative Consequences of Male out Migration on their counter parts

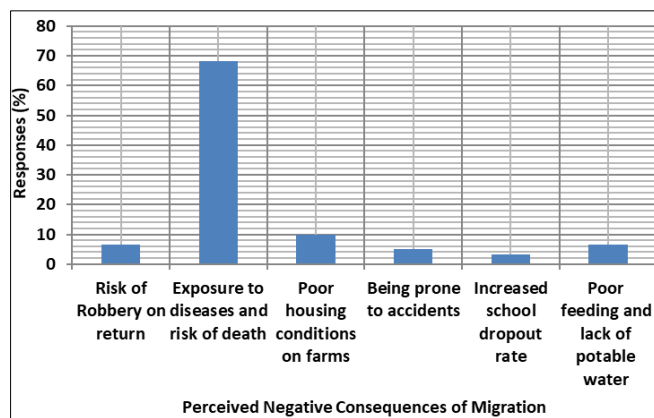


Fig 2: Farmer's Perceptions of the Negative Consequences of Migration

### 4.3.3 Coping Strategies of Defacto Women Headed Households

#### 4.3.3.1 Off-farm Activities

A number of wife's of the migrant men engage in off-farm activities to various degrees to make up for the low level of productivity in agriculture and the low and uncertain nature of remittance from their husbands.

#### 4.3.3.2. Leasing Out Land

Leasing land out is usually practiced by households with excess land or by households who can't fully utilize their lands either due to lack of inputs like seed, manure etc or labor. In the local land leasing arrangement, the landowner receives half of the produce after an amount used as a seed is subtracted from the total produce. Thirteen per cent of the women interviewed during the survey reported that they rent out part of their land to other individuals and get some amount of crop rather than leaving the land fallow during certain years.

#### 4.3.3.3 Common Holding of Livestock

As described earlier, households with no or few livestock but with access to animal feed (e.g. fallow land), take livestock from other households who have more livestock than they can keep, and made arrangements so that both households benefit from such arrangements. Out of the surveyed de facto women head

households 26(32 %) said that they took livestock in such arrangements from other households.

#### 4.3.3.4 Sending Children to Urban Areas

Some de facto women heads send their children to urban areas when they find it difficult to support all their children with in the livelihood options open to them or in hope of getting assistance in the form of remittance. The household survey revealed that 27(33.75) of the interviewed women have sent one or more of their children to urban areas for work.

#### 4.3.3.5 Ox Sharing and Hiring Labor on Credit Basis

Ox sharing arrangements are undertaken by de facto women head households who own an ox or oxen but no able bodied men to carry out ploughing the land, (BOA, 2005).omen in this kind of households lend their ox to a man who has no ox or has a single ox so that he will cultivate his own land as well as that of the lender women one after the other. In this arrangement the women benefit from the labor of the man and the man benefits from the service of oxen power of the women. The survey indicated that 8 (10%) of the interviewed women use such arrangements with neighboring men to get their land ploughed. On the other hand women in poor households who do not receive remittance on regular basis revert to hiring agricultural labor on credit basis.

#### 4.3.3.6 Leaving for Urban Areas or Divorce

The last resort to women who cannot cope with life in rural area is to follow the footsteps of her husband to urban area or get a divorce and leave for her parent. According to informants this measure is taken by the women when her husband fails to send her any remittance for a number of years and life gets intolerable to her.

## 5. Conclusion

- Based on the findings of the study the average landholding of the women- headed households is found to be lower than that of male headed households.
- Farm labor is the most critical input in the production process because of the highly labor intensive agricultural production system and family labor, hired labor and labor sharing arrangements are the most important sources of labor for agricultural activity.
- Mixed subsistence farming where the crop and the animal sub-sectors are mutually interdependent is the standard kind of livelihood for all households interviewed and crop production is more important than livestock production to them in terms of immediate food supply and income to the household.
- Currently the loss of male labor from this highly labor-intensive farming system of the highland through migration has created a complex set of problems to the women who are left behind and at the ecological level the impact of male out migration is related to the reduction in natural resource conservation and soil fertility maintenance efforts due to reduced labor inputs for such activities.
- Male out migration and the resulting shortage of labor have forced women to take up some roles which were traditionally within the sphere of the responsibility of men in the study area.

- It was overwhelmingly expressed by both migrants and non-migrants in the FGDs and through the questionnaire that migration has a lot of risks and negative impacts as well.
- Male out-migration did not bring any change with respect to women's right to land because the migrant male folk keep its title to land no matter how long he stays away from home.
- On the other hand, male out-migration combined with limited local economic opportunities can make women highly dependent on remittances. This can make them particularly vulnerable to poverty, especially when remittances are sent less regularly or cease altogether.
- The findings of the study revealed that, in absence their husband defacto women headed household Totally depend on onset for part of the year, Consume premature onset corn, Consume premature field crops, work for Food, Reduce number of meals per day, Food assistance from NGOs, Food assistance from kin or children, and money borrowing at high interest rate.
- The amount of remittance received by most de facto women head households is very small.

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