De-Population in Nepal and Its Potential Future Implications

Samir KC and Pawan Lamsal

Presented at
THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DEPOPULATION
Wittgenstein Centre Conference 2021, Vienna, Austria
Mon, 29.11. – 01.12.2021 (Correspondence: kc@iiasa.ac.at)
Nepal

- South of the Himalaya
- Borders with India and China
- Geographically, Mountain, Hill and low land of Terai region
- Politically, 7 states, 77 districts and 753 municipalities [Maoist Conflict]
- Population of 11.6 million in 1971 to 26.4 million in 2011
- >28 million in 2021 (Census*) - Migration
- TFR of 2.0 children per woman (2016-2019, MICS)
- Depopulation?

Map: by Hari Dhonju, Digital Data System for Development (DDSD), Nepal
Introduction

- Depopulation started early on in some parts of Nepal
- Unique geography (political and geological): e.g. malaria eradication (Hills to Terai), people at the India-Nepal border (Hills to Terai), climate change and natural disasters
- Education and employment; marriages
- Major political changes (Monarchy - 1991- Democracy - 2007 - Republic and Federalism)
- In 2015 - Devolution of power began
- Natural Change vs Migration (Internal and International)
- How will Nepal depopulate?
- What needs or can be done? [Work in Progress]

Map: by Hari Dhonju, Digital Data System for Development (DDSD), Nepal
Research questions

- How is the trend of depopulation at the national and sub-national level (district) on the demographic structure of the population in the past (1971-2011)?

- What are the future implications?
Cohort Change

- Under-reporting of 0-4 years can be observed
- The slope is steepening, indicating that the population at higher age is declining rapidly.

Cohort Change

- Under-reporting of 0-4 years
- Slope is getting steeper for males
- Less decline among females

Data: Nepal population and Housing Census, 1971-2011
International Migration

- Rapid increase
- New destinations
- Labor migration
  - Absentees
  - Will return
- Re-population!

Data: UN Migration Stock, 2020
Sex Difference in International Migration

Data: UN Migration Stock, 2020
Population Heterogeneity in Nepal

- Data: Census, 2011
- District level (75/77)
- Decadal population change

Source: DDSD, Nepal
Out Migration started from Mountains and Mid Hilly districts

Inmigration increased in Terai districts and the regional headquarters

Internal Migration

Map Source: Open Data Nepal
Hills were continued to be depopulated.
• Depopulation spread to other parts of the country
• Eastern districts
• Some lower hilly districts

Map Source: Open Data Nepal
• Further spread to other districts
• Internal as well as International migration

Data: Nepal population and Housing Census, 1971-2011
Map Source: Open Data Nepal
Fig. 13.7 Net lifetime migration rates, districts of Nepal, 2011

Source: calculated from the 2011 census (IMAGE-Asia Project), data from the Central Bureau of Statistics

Bilateral lifetime migration flows between districts of Nepal, 2011

Reason of Migration

Fig. 13.4 Lifetime migration by age, sex and cause, Nepal, 2011

Source: calculated from the 2011 census, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics

Population Projection
2011-2016

Map Source: Open Data Nepal
Population Projection
2016-2021

Map Source: Open Data Nepal
Population Projection
2021-2026

Map Source: Open Data Nepal
Implications of depopulation

Cons

- Land abandonment and underutilization of farming
- Lack of able bodied people in the community
- Loss of culture/identity
- Unplanned urbanization at destinations
- Absentee - No vote
- Family separation

Pros

- Return of forest and biodiversity
- Female empowerment
- Remittance
Conclusion

- National level depopulation could occur in the near future due to international labor migration and low fertility
- However, the absentee population will return to ‘re-populate’ Nepal
- At the sub-national level, internal migration has caused depopulation in the past and will continue in the future
- Significant demographic, ecological, socioeconomic, and cultural implications highly likely - important knowledge generation [Work in Progress]
- What can be done? Policy makers and stakeholders - devolution of power
- urban/rural municipality - educational attainment