

Perception of Local People towards Youth's Migration in Dhampus, Nepal

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Abstract

Migration is a phenomenon that explicitly affects social, economic, and cultural landscapes of societies especially in developing countries. This study examined Dhampus, a suburban village in Kaski, Nepal, to explore the factors associated with youth migration. The research question was why youths migrate from Dhampus despite the region famous for domestic as well as international trekkers, hotels and restaurants, an entry point to the Annapurna Base Camp, and having the hybrid economy of agriculture, tourism and industries. This study employed exploratory research design to answer the research questions. Six in-depth interviews with key informants and two focus group discussions with local people including farmers, businessman, hoteliers, leaders of political parties. Thematic analysis of the data revealed six factors: declining agriculture, limited job opportunities, insufficient infrastructure for tourism planning, inadequate local development planning, social and economic inequality and waning trust in political institutions. Together, these factors drive young people toward urban areas and overseas. The finding of this study implies that an inclusive and sustainable rural development planning is necessary in Nepal. The plan should focus specific local contexts in order it to hold youth's in the villages. Foremost action is job creation accompanied by quality higher education centers. Appropriate infrastructure development seems an integral to the local resources mobilization and employment generation.

Keywords: Youth migration, Dhampus, rural Nepal, socio-economic impacts, remit-

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1. Introduction

Migration is a complex phenomenon that meaningfully impacts socio-economic and cultural landscape of societies, especially in developing countries. It is influenced by various factors, including poverty, unemployment, desire for education, environmental issues, and the pursuit of better living conditions (de Haas, 2021; Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2020). The United Nations (2020) reported that 281 million people, or 3.6% of the world's population were international migrants in 2020, with a significant number being young individuals seeking better opportunities. Youth migration has become a crucial trend in developing countries, where young people move either abroad or from rural to urban areas in search of better living (ILO, 2022). These migration patterns have a dual impact: on the one hand they enhance household incomes and on the other national economies expand through the migrants remittances. According to World Bank (2023) global remittances reached \$794 billion in 2022. The global flow of remittances has a considerable economic impact, particularly in developing countries. In 2022, approximately \$626 billion, which is nearly 79% of total global remittances, was sent to these nations which was crucial for supporting livelihoods and economies (World Bank, 2022). This finance plays a vital role in the areas such as education, healthcare, and small businesses, but they also raise concerns about issues like overdependence and inequality (de Haas, 2021; IOM, 2023).

Every year, thousands of young people from Nepal leave their homeland in search of job opportunities, especially in countries like Malaysia and the Gulf nations (Paudel & Pyakurel, 2018). Research on youth employment in Nepal shows that social connections and educational achievements play a vital role in shaping their career paths (Basnet et al., 2023; Dahal et al., 2023; Dhungel, 2019). As of 2024, Nepal's net migration rate is recorded at 4.144 per 1000 individuals, reflecting an 18.26% decrease from the previous year. This rate had previously risen by 16.47% from 2022, reaching 5.070 per 1000 people, and increased by 19.72% from 2021 to 4.353 per 1000 people in 2022 (Macrotrends, 2024).

Data shows that Nepal serves as a significant case in the Global South, experiencing substantial labor migration and notable remittance inflows. By 2021, around 4 million Nepali citizens were working abroad, with remittances contributing to 23.5% of the national GDP (NRB, 2024; CBS, 2023). A significant portion of this migration consists of young individuals, with 57% of labor migrants aged between 20 and 34 (ILO, 2022; World Bank, 2022). The migrant remittances are crucial for Nepal's economy and have deep socio-cultural implications. In 2022, remittances made up over 25% of Nepal's GDP (World Bank, 2023). Besides international migration, rural-to-urban migration

within Nepal is also reshaping local economy due to flow of remittances and returnee migrants' skill and enhanced capability (Nepal Economic Forum, 2023). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2023), the urban population grew by 3.2% annually between 2011 and 2021, driven largely by internal migration. Youth migration is particularly significant, as young individuals aged 15–29 represent a substantial portion of this demographic shift (ILO, 2022). While these trends provide opportunities for economic advancement, they also create challenges such as labor shortages in rural areas, disruptions in agricultural productivity, and the erosion of traditional family structures (NRB, 2024). Rural-urban migration is evident in both remote villages and suburban areas, amplifying the strain on rural economies and accelerating urbanization in Nepal. At the global level, rural-to-urban migration exponentially increased from 30% in 1950 to 56% in 2020 (United Nations, 2020)

Various theoretical frameworks examine the reasons behind migration. Notably, Lee's Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966) and the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) (Stark & Bloom, 1985) offer insightful perspectives on this topic. Lee's Push-Pull Theory emphasizes the interaction between push factors, such as economic difficulties or political unrest, and pull factors, like better job prospects or enhanced living conditions, in shaping migration choices. Conversely, NELM shifts the emphasis from individual decisions to household strategies, highlighting that migration is often a collective family decision aimed at diversifying income, minimizing risks, and navigating market limitations.

As part of a case of youth's migration from rural or suburban areas to urban and abroad, this study explored the factors causing youth migration from Dhampus, a popular trekking spot in the suburban area of Machhapuchhre Municipality, Kaski District, Nepal. While existing research on migration and remittances often look broader trends of migration and remittances at the national and transnational levels (World Bank, 2022; ILO, 2022), there are paucity of focused studies on the area specific factors driving youth migration from rural or suburban areas. It is evident that migration trends are influenced by contextual factors (Lee, 1966). This study aims to examine specific factors causing youth's migration from Dhampus, Nepal. In order to explore the factors perception of local residents are analyzed because they would have a firsthand information of the local contexts. Their views reflect the real-life experiences of youth migration. This approach emphasizes community-driven solutions to address youth migration and ensure inclusive and sustainable development in rural Nepal.

1.1 Dhampus: The context of the study

Dhampus, located in Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipality (MRM) in the Kaski District of Gandaki Province, is a known destination for national as well as international tourist,

especially for trekkers. Situated at the top of ridge, Dhampus provides a stunning views of Machhapuchhre, Annapurna, Dhawalagiri mountains and the panoramic beauty of Pokhara city. Nestled on the southern slopes of the Machhapuchhre and Annapurna ranges, Dhampus covers an area of 15.49 square kilometers. It is an entry point to Annapurna Base Camp and several other mountains in the region. This village is not only a key trekking spot in the Annapurna region but also a cultural and economic center that draws both local and international tourists (NTB, 2022; MRMC, 2024). In its vicinity lie scenic landscapes, fertile valleys to snow-capped peaks, with elevations ranging from 1,026 to 6,998 meters.

The region is inhabited by all social groups, the majority being Brahmins, Kshatris, Gurungs, Magars, and Dalits respectively. The total population is 2,483, with females 1,285 and 1,198 males. The main sources of livelihood include agriculture, tourism, remittances, and jobs in the government sectors. A trend of joining the Indian and British armies is also evident among youths in the Dhampus. Among others, tourism is a vital sector of Dhampus's economy, visible in the growth of lodges, restaurants, and hotels along popular trekking routes (MRMC, 2024). While specific data on annual remittance inflows to Dhampus is scarce, research suggests that in villages such as Dhampus, remittances and agriculture are the main sources of household income for about 40% of families (K.C., et al. 2019). This underscores the important role of remittances in the local economy, enhancing agricultural income and supporting overall economic stability.

In terms of accessibility, Dhampus is 25.6 km far from the Pokhara town, connected by modern pitch road. Social indicators also characterize Dhampus an advantageous suburban region. The village hosts five educational institutions, including two secondary schools, one primary school, and two basic schools, serving a total of 281 public-school students and 87 private-school students. To the hindsight there are no institutions of higher education. On the healthcare front, Dhampus has a sub-health post that offers basic services like immunizations and reproductive healthcare, along with a community health unit staffed by five workers. Nevertheless, absence of advanced medical facilities and private pharmacies means that residents often travel to nearby Pokhara for specialized healthcare (MRMC, 2024). Thus Dhampus stands a suburban area with growing urban facilities and cannot be compared with the typical rural areas in Nepal which are primarily inaccessible, socially backward and economically stagnant.

Figure 1; Dhampus

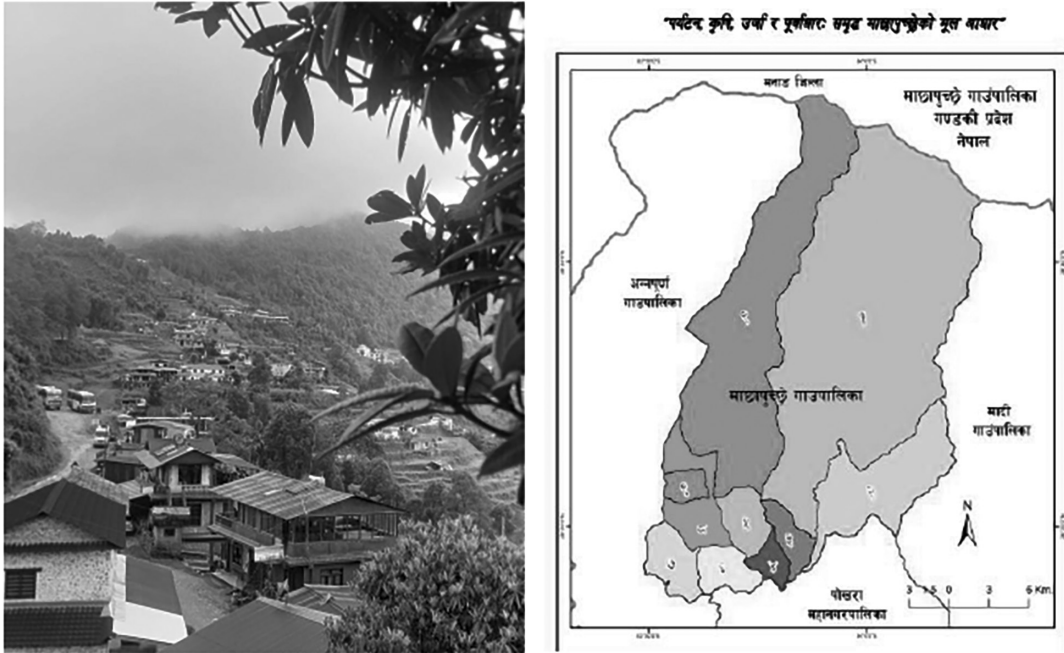


Figure 1 Dhampus, MRMC, 2024.

Nevertheless, Dhampus still faces the challenge of youth outmigration, a trend that mirrors broader patterns seen throughout rural Nepal. According to the local source, 50 youths per annum migrate from Dhampus to the destinations inside Nepal and abroad (MRMC, 2024). The trend overshadows the social and economic opportunities and future development potential in the region. Previous research has examined the general migration patterns in Dhampus and similar areas, concentrating on the economic and social consequences (Mahato, et al. 2022). Additionally, a study by the World Bank (2022) analyzed the determinants of youth migration intentions in Nepal, highlighting economic conditions, educational achievements, and familial ties as significant factors. While these studies offer useful insights, they often fall short of providing a comprehensive understanding of why young people in regions with modern amenities and economic prospects still opt to migrate.

2. Methods and Materials

This study uses explorative research design to explore the perceptions of local people towards youth migration in Dhampus, Kaski, Nepal. Being a growing suburban region in the lap of the Mountain Annapurna and growing as a service center, it experiences an exodus of migration of youths, hence loses potential resources for development and planning. What is unknown regarding this is why youth leave a suburban service center

despite it offering substantial educational, health and economic opportunities. Hence, an exploration of the factors causing youth's migration and the subsequent analysis adds to the discourses of inclusive and sustainable rural development . This study aimed to analyze local people's perceptions towards youth's migration assuming that they are the real agents who capture the lived experiences and insights of the contexts. .

Fieldwork was carried out between 2080/9/17 to 2080/9/27 to explore the youth's migration contexts in Dhampus and carry out interviews with the local people with diverse experiences and roles within the community. Data were collected through six in-depth interviews ranging between 15 minutes to 70 minutes with key informants who included farmers, business owners, educators, and politicians. Additionally, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were also held, with six and eight participants respectively, to ensure a range of perspectives on youth's migration from Dhampus across different age groups, occupations, and genders. The selection of the participants was purposive as well as informed by the parent participant, who was the ward chair of Machhapuchhere Rural Municipality-3 (MRC). The leading questions asked were: In your opinion, why do youths migrate from Dhampus to other places in Nepal and abroad? What factors cause youth's migration from Dhampus?

The interviews and focus group discussion were recorded in mobile phone. The interview and FGD voice were transcribed in the word processing software. The transcripts were manually coded while exploring the codes with reference to the Push and Pull factors as described above. The similar codes were put together and thus middle level themes were coded. Thus explored themes were considered the factors causing youth's migration from Dhampus and analyzed juxtaposing them with similar past studies.

.3. Results and Discussion

In this section, thematic analysis of themes explored from interview and focus group discussion is presented. Six major middle level themes explored from the coding of the participants perceptions towards youth's migration in Dhampus are analyzed and discussed. The themes include a) declining agriculture b) limited job opportunities c) insufficient infrastructure for tourism planning d) inadequate local development planning e) social and economic inequality f) waning trust in political institutions. This study aimed at exploring what local people perceive of youth's migration from Dhampus, a rural and suburban area in Kaski, Nepal. Therefore, the data analysis is juxtaposed with available literature and ascribed in view of the factors that cause youth's migration from a rural and suburban centers to urban or foreign land.

A. Declining agriculture

Decline in agriculture was a common theme that surfaced in all the codes generated out

of the data from interviews as well as focus group discussion. Participants perceive that youths who used to engage in subsistence agriculture from centuries are now distancing themselves and seeking jobs with higher wages somewhere. Participants pointed out youth's shifts from farming as well as livestock sectors in Dhampus.

Dhankaji Gurung, a 67-year-old resident from Panorama Point Dhampus, expressed the worsening condition of agricultural sector. He said:

Farming is on the decline, and young people are going abroad for better wages. Youngsters prefer white color jobs than jobs in agriculture. They earn more in other sectors than in agriculture. Education is also taking youths away from agriculture. While they get educated, they do not want to do farming, do not want to leave in the villages. Not only this, job opportunities in Dhampus is also low, and those with education find it hard to earn a decent living. Our children don't see a future here, so the trend of emigration continues.

Vijaya Gurung, 65, also pointed out that along with agriculture livestock farming is also in decline in Dhampus. Agriculture and livestock used to be the major allied component of Dhampus' economy from centuries.

Deepa Basnet, a 37-year-old social worker, emphasized that the lack of arable land and stagnation in agricultural development are driving many youths away to seek jobs outside the village. She remarked:

With limited arable land and a decline in agricultural development, many are looking for work abroad. In the earlier days, everyone used to work in farmland. They grow whatever they needed. Every member of a household used to engage in agriculture. Nobody needed to leave the house for living. Now, the situation is changed. People have few pieces of land and that is mostly for housing.

Deepa perceived that traditional pattern of farming and the farm holding is declining in Dhampus. Maya Gurung (participants in Focus Group Discussion I) indicated that wages in agriculture are not stable, they often fluctuate and therefore agriculture sector is unreliable for job. This has caused youths to walk out the traditional occupation and find stable jobs in non-agriculture sectors. In this process, youth's leave the villages. This situation is evident in many other rural areas of Nepal. Pokharel and Thapa (2022) pointed out that the decrease in agricultural activity results in land fragmentation, a situation that has significantly impacted agricultural output in rural regions, which in

turn has fueled rural-to-urban migration (CBS, 2023).

B. Limited job opportunities

A significant theme that appeared in the interview and focus group discussion was the shortage of local job opportunities. Participants experienced that youths seek jobs in modern sectors than in traditional agriculture sectors. Youth's demand require promotion of local industries, businesses, and tourism in Dhampus. Nevertheless, these new sectors are also struggling. According to Rudra Gurung, a 60-year-old farmer and homestay operator;

The government doesn't provide enough support for local businesses. Without job opportunities, young people are leaving for work abroad. I'm struggling with my homestay, and industries like leather factories have shut down, leading to a loss of trust in local employment. If we don't make changes, the youth will keep leaving.

Participants experienced that despite an entry point to Annapurna Base Camp and so a popular trekking hub in Nepal, Dhampus lacks proper tourism development to create jobs for the increasing numbers of educated youths. Some participants were doubtful of the future of tourism in Dhampus.

Baikuntha Bhandari, the 48-year-old Ward Chairman, explained that lack of job opportunities is pushing youths from Dhampus. Mr. Bhandari criticized government for not taking proper action to address these problems. He stated,

The absence of jobs and opportunities forces youth to seek work outside the village. The tourism sector is nearly non-existent, and government institutions are not supporting the youth. We need central policies that promote self-sufficiency, such as concessional loans for agriculture, to help reduce emigration.

Similar concerns were raised by the participants during FGD II. The discussants reiterated that while local jobs are not available and not attractive enough in terms of wages, youths decide to migrate and seek jobs in cities or abroad. They also believed that youth's interest in quality higher education also leads them to move from the villages.

Research shows that limited job opportunities is one of the major factor driving youth's migration. A report from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) pointed out that the trend of seeking foreign employment is on the rise, emphasizing the importance of improving workers' technical and vocational skills to meet the demand for Nepali labour market. Maharjan(2023) highlights that the scarcity of local job options is a

significant reason for the increase in overseas labor migration from Nepal.

C. Insufficient infrastructure for tourism planning

Dhampus is famous for its height tourist location that allows visitors to sink in appalling mountain views and the beauty of Pokhara Valley. However, participants in this study believed that the tourist hub is losing the attraction because of weakening infrastructure. Therefore, the youths who seek job opportunities in tourism sectors choose to migrate.

Prakash Gurung, a 44-year-old tourism entrepreneur and farmer, pointed out that tourism could be a way to curb migration in Dhampus. The hotels and restaurants, homestays, businesses and other forms of tourism entrepreneurship could offer jobs to both low skilled and high skilled youths. However, the very potential modern sector, the tourism suffers timely planning. Gurung remarked:

In these days, Dhampus is experiencing worsening tourism. I do not see community and local governments serious about this. None of the institutions have discussed appropriate and timely planning for tourism development. Government too is indifferent about this, nor is loan available with government backing. I see that better roads and investments in tourism, agriculture, and industry could help keep young people in Dhampus.

Similar views are expressed by ward chairperson Baikuntha Bhandari, 48. Bhandari argued that tourism is near to 'non-existent' in Dhampus because of low investment, under-planning, and migration. He argued that even basic infrastructures for tourism such as accessibility and accommodation are not adequately planned in Dhampus. In FGD II, participants highlighted the decreasing performance of tourism sector in Dhampus and emphasized need of proper planning. Participants in this study were hopeful of tourism growth in Dhampus but they experienced that this sector was just liquidated leaving its potential untapped.

Research shows a link between infrastructure development and migration trends. A study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2023) highlights that poor infrastructure can push people to migrate, as they look for better opportunities in regions with more advanced facilities and services. Moreover, an article by Satterthwaite & Mitlin (2020) explored how infrastructure affects migration choices, indicating that a lack of infrastructure in certain areas can result in higher migration rates as individuals relocate to places with improved facilities and opportunities.

D. Inadequate local development planning

The data analysis in view of exploring local people' perception towards youth's

migration in Dhampus revealed a new theme 'inadequate local development planning'. Participants argued that a good local development plan could create jobs, maintain tourism, and promote businesses, address social and economic inequality. This could further satisfy youth's needs and help them retain in Dhampus.

The participants emphasized seven major sectors where local government could focus and prepare plan for further development. The foremost one was tourism planning which participants thought could create sustainable jobs for youths in Dhampus. Tourism planning include planning for accessibility e.g. roads and related infrastructures, hotel and restaurants and homestay. Secondly, agriculture planning was emphasized including land use planning, wage and marketing of agro-produces. Third, participants also believed that planning for education, especially skill based education was needed in order to divert youth's decision to leave Dhampus for better education. Fourth, financial planning was emphasized by the participants which meant that government needed to investment in infrastructures, tourism, businesses promotion, education among others. Fifth, planning for returnee migrants was also demanded by the participants. According to the participants, households and the community need to know how to apply remittances and how to mobilize returnees for the development of Dhampus. Finally, participants argued that supporting youths for doing business is necessary in Dhampus. This could help retain youths in the village.

These insights are consistent with findings from the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021) which highlights the necessity of incorporating migration into local development planning to improve policy coherence and development results. The IOM's guidelines recommended that local authorities take migration into account in their development strategies to effectively tackle the challenges and opportunities it brings. Furthermore, a study on rural development trends in Nepal underscores the importance of inclusive development planning that addresses the varied needs of rural communities. The research indicates that development programs should be customized to local contexts to effectively tackle issues such as youth migration (Rai, 2016).

E. Social and economic inequality

The examination of data from interview and focus group discussion revealed that existing social and economic discrimination and inequality also caused youth's migration in Dhampus. Participants believed that besides several other factors, castes, financial status and marginalization affect youth's to leave the villages. Vijaya Gurung (65) shared the constraints smaller communities exert on younger generation. Minor social groups feel isolated and marginalized from mainstream social and economic processes. Therefore, they seek safety in distant places than in village.

According to the participants, financial status is also impacting youth's decision to migrate from Dhampus. They believed that major businesses in Dhampus are elite captured which could push people including youths to migrate from the village. Vijaya Gurung said:

'The hotels here belong to the upper castes, while the lower castes choose to migrate outside. The economic advantages such as jobs, wages and investment of tourism are not distributed fairly. This is how inequality is existed. This ultimately leaves many with no options but to seek better prospects in different locations outside the Dhampus.'

This situation highlights a significant issue of elite capture, where vital economic sectors like hospitality and tourism are dominated by a small number of affluent families, typically from higher castes.

Participants in the discussion pointed out that this unequal allocation of resources has created financial obstacles for marginalized communities, pushing them to look for opportunities abroad or in larger cities. Gurung added:

"While some families prosper by running hotels and tourist-related businesses, others find it hard to survive, with no choice but to migrate for labor jobs in Gulf countries or cities like Pokhara. The lack of access to capital and land ownership prevents many from engaging in tourism, leading them to seek foreign employment as their only realistic option."

These insights highlight the complex relationship between caste, economic disparity, and migration trends in Dhampus.

Previous research has shown that inequality plays a major role in influencing migration patterns. Studies suggest that social and economic disparities push individuals, especially young people, to seek better opportunities elsewhere. For example, a study focused on youth labor migration in Nepal revealed that labor migration is positively linked to educational attainment for women, while it has a negative correlation for men, underscoring the intricate relationship between social factors and migration choices (World Bank, 2022).

F. Waning Trust in Political Institutions

Another theme that emerged in the interview and focus group discussion was waning trust in political institutions. Participants consistently voiced their frustration with political leaders, viewing them as self-serving and out of touch with community needs. Many noted a lack of accountability, unfulfilled promises, and insufficient attention to

local development issues. Deepa Basnet, a 37-year-old social worker, shared:

"Political leaders only show up during elections with grand promises, but nothing changes afterward. We feel overlooked and let down. There's no transparency in how development projects are managed, who gets the contract, when does a project end. Thus Resources are squandered, and ordinary people suffer the consequences."

She felt that development funds often fail to reach the community due to misappropriation.

Participants pointed out the ineffectiveness of local governance in tackling urgent issues like job creation, education, and infrastructure development. A focus group discussion participant remarked:

"We choose representatives to address our needs, yet they often fail to act. This absence of accountability and responsiveness has resulted in widespread frustration, leading to a considerable decline in faith in our political system, undermining trust, and increasing political apathy among the public."

Research shows that political instability and a lack of trust in political institutions play a major role in driving youth migration in Nepal. A study by Shrestha & Thapa (2021) revealed that political unrest, combined with limited job opportunities and poor access to quality education, pushes young people to look for better opportunities abroad. Furthermore, another study by Giri & Poudel (2013) found that low levels of trust in political entities are linked to reduced citizen engagement in politics and a rise in migration intentions among the youth. Study suggests measures to tackle these challenges including maintaining transparency, accountability, and responsiveness within political institutions. This can help rebuild trust and foster an environment that encourages young people to stay and actively contribute to their communities.

4. Conclusion

Applying explorative research design supported by key informants interviews and focus group discussion, this study explored local people's perception towards youth migration in Dhampus, Nepal. It revealed six socio-economic factors causing the phenomenon. The factors include decline in agriculture, job scarcity, insufficient planning for tourism infrastructure, inadequate local development planning, social and economic inequality and waning trust in political institutions. These factors represent local contexts Dhampus holds up, as a suburban area famous for trekkers and general tourist from domestic as well as international market. Broadly, these factors are also

characteristics to the factors causing youth's migration from rural Nepal.

The finding of this study implies that an inclusive and sustainable rural development planning is necessary in Nepal. The plan should focus specific local contexts in order it to hold youth's in the villages. Foremost action is job creation accompanied by quality higher education centers. Appropriate infrastructure development seems an integral to the local resources mobilization and employment generation. Local development plan must concern industrial growth along with agriculture modernization. Development of agro-industries seems to be the better options in this case where youths who are frustrated with farming could engage and decide not to leave the villages. Context specific planning and investments are very much significant to create local jobs. For example, in Dhampus, investment in hotels, roads, restaurants, tourist information desk among others can play vital role in retaining youths. Additionally, local political leaders and government institutions such as municipalities and ward offices need to be transparent, accountable and deliver services efficiently. This systemic reform could remarkably treat youth's psychology to retain in the villages while engaging them in the local socio-political processes and seek livelihood options.

Any future study could compare local people's perception with migrant youth's perception to reveal more insights of the factors causing migration. In this study, people rarely described environmental factors such as climate change, flood, landslides etc causing youth's migration from Dhampus. Future research could explore on this and find if climatic factors are also causing youth's migration from rural Nepal.

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