

## Rural out-migration scenario in Khaling Gewog, Trashigang, Eastern-Bhutan

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**Abstract:** Rural urban-migration is an integral part of development. Accordingly with rapid socio-economic development, Bhutan is also experiencing rapid urban expansion, mainly due to rural-urban migration. As rural out-migration is rampantly increasing in Bhutan it is important and worthwhile to examine the rural-outmigration scenario at the micro-level. A micro-level survey was conducted in Khaling gewog in December 2011 and data was collected from 210 households in the gewog. Generally out-migration in Khaling gewog was found to be very high with almost 50 % of its registered population absent from the household for more than a year during the time of survey. It was also found that huge chunk of out-migrants constitutes of working age population (15-64) and more than 70 % had at least primary and above education. Most prominent reasons for leaving home were found to be socio-economic reasons such as family move, employment, education and marriage. The flow of migration was found to be maximum towards urban hubs in Bhutan like Thimphu, Phuentsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar.

**Key words:** Rural-out migration, age, sex, education level, Bhutan, Khaling Gewog.

### Introduction

Bhutan is experiencing rapid urban expansion, mainly due to migration from rural areas. While most of Bhutan's population still lives in rural areas (69.1%), urban centres have emerged in recent decades in most districts and have attracted a considerable number of people (Ministry of Agriculture, 2005 (MOA); Office of the Census Commissioner, 2005 (OCC). Thimphu, the capital city is growing at 7 percent per annum (MOA, 2005). The rapid influx of people from rural to urban centres is becoming a major issue in Bhutan and consequences are already being felt both in rural and urban areas. Urban areas particularly Thimphu, recently has been witnessing increasing crime rates, unemployment, drug and alcoholism, prostitution, pressure on amenities etc. On the other hand, rural pockets of the country are experiencing depopulation, labour shortages, reduction in taxable capabilities, socio-cultural break ups (MOA, 2005).

Since Bhutan embarked upon its first five-year developmental activities from 1961, it witnessed unprecedented development especially in the fields of education, health, transport and communication, which lead to rapid movement of people from rural to urban centres. According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2009), Bhutan accounts for the highest internal migration rate in South Asia at six percent internal migration rate in 2009 (Kuensel, 2009). The proportion of urban population increased by more than 6 percent between 1995 and 2000 (Central Statistical Organization (CSO) 1997 and 2000) and if this trend continues it is expected that by 2020 half of Bhutan's population will be residing in urban areas (Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1999).

Based on the 2005 Population and Housing Census of Bhutan (OCO, 2005), the Trashigang District had the highest number of out-migrants totaling 23,800. In terms of net-migration, Trashigang recorded the highest loss of 16,700 thousand persons.

As rural out-migration is burgeoning in Bhutan it is important and worthwhile to conduct studies on this issue. Therefore, this study will examine the patterns of rural out-migration in Khaling *gewog* (lowest administrative unit) under Trashigang District. Recently migration has mostly been associated with international migration and less attention has been given to internal migration.

Skeldon (2006) notes that, in recent years, the word "migration" has nearly always been associated with "international migration" while internal migration has been subsumed under the such terms as "population distribution" or "urbanization" and he further argues that discussion of migration has tended to emphasize international migration only, particularly when it comes to questions of migration and development. Deshingkar and Grimm (2005) note that while international migration has received more attention in recent debates on migration, internal migration is far more significant in terms of the numbers of people involved and perhaps even the quantum of remittances and poverty reduction potential of this. Bell *et al.* (2009) further argues that despite significant changes brought about by internal migration in the pattern of human settlement across the world, remarkably few attempts have been made to compare internal migration between countries. The main reason for neglecting the internal migration has been due to lack of authentic data and difficulties in data collection (Bell *et al.*, 2009; Skeldon, 2008; Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005). Although fewer attempts have been done to study internal migration at a global level, there are few studies done in recent years on internal migration by individual countries on the basis of census and surveys.

Internal migration in Bhutan has been mostly rural to urban, as reported in both the Population and Housing Census (2005) and the Rural-Urban Migration Survey (2005). The flow of migrants is at present from the east to west. This is mainly because most of the major urban centres are located in the west and the capital city is also located in the west.

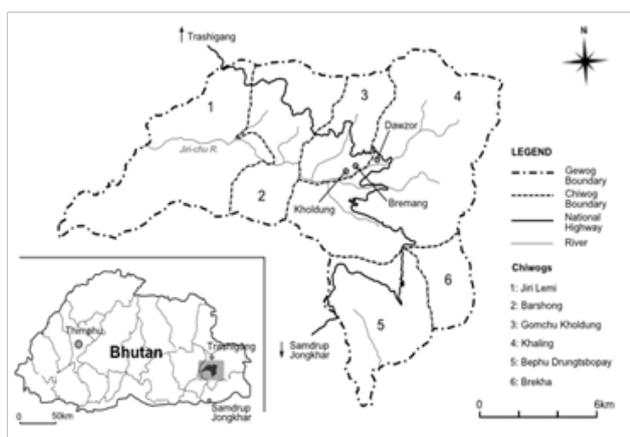
While assessing internal migration, prior to 5 years of census date in the Socio-Economic and Demographic Indicators 2005, it revealed that Zhemgang, Trashiyangtse, Trashigang, and Lhuentse were losing about 15 percent of its base population. Thimphu, Chukha and Paro were receiving maximum number of migrants. Net annual migration rate varied from 3.1 percent in Zhemgang to 2.3 percent in Thimphu. Further, the Rural-Urban Migration Survey (2005) revealed that most rural migrants are moving to Thimphu (28 percent), while other district towns represent between zero and six percent of the immigrants. Even if migration to Thimphu is omitted, migration to towns in the two western regions is twice as

high as to the towns in the two eastern regions. The survey found that rural to rural migration is very low at only six percent of the internal migrants in 2005.

Hossain (2001) found in his study in Bangladesh that persons involved in the process of rural out-migration are adult and more educated. Moreover, to the household level his study revealed that the risk of outmigration from a rural household increases with increase in level of education. He found that the propensity of out-migration is remarkably higher for the households whose member(s) attained at least primary education. The survey on rural urban migration 2005 of Bhutan also reveals that majority of the rural out-migrants are literate and relatively well educated and young (63 percent has at least primary level education). The objectives of the study are (i) to examine the volume of rural-outmigration in Khaling gewog; (ii) to examine the characteristics of out-migrants by age, sex and education level, and (iii) to find out the popular destinations of out-migrants and reasons for migration.

### Materials and Methods

**Experimental site:** The gewog lying in the area of 154.5 km<sup>2</sup> has 19 major villages and has 508 households with total population of 2,715 (Fig. 1). Barshong, Bremung, Rasung, Brekha, Beyphu/Tokaphu, Gomchu, Dewang, Kholdung, Dawjor, Lemi/Changjar and Jeri/Leza are the major villages of the gewog. Paddy, maize and wheat are the main crops grown in the gewog.



**Fig. 1.** Map of the Study Area (Source: Designed by Yoshio Akamatsu).

**Data and methodology:** Primary data were collected from Khaling gewog in the month of December 2011. During the survey, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through household interviews. The survey collected information from around 210 households in Kanglung gewog and the respondents were the heads of households. The survey instrument for this study was a set of questions that collected information on demographic, household member status, duration of absence, reasons for migration, education level of the household members, housing characteristics, land holdings, remittances and views on rural out-migration. Questionnaire was pre-tested before conducting the survey. Respondents were selected randomly from different villages.

**Data analysis:** The study was descriptive, cross sectional community based study. Data was analyzed using SPSS. Firstly member of households who had been absent from the particular household for more than one year are categorized as an out-migrants. Accordingly those out-migrants were cross tabulated with other variables like age, gender and level of education to determine the characteristics of out-migrants. Top five destinations of out-migrants and top five reasons for migration are also analyzed in this study.

**Definition and Concept:** House hold member: Every individual whose names are registered in the particular household in Khaling gewog are considered as household member.

**Out-migrant:** A household member who are absent from the household for more than one year are considered as out-migrants.

### Results and discussion

Table 1 depicts the household member status during the time of survey (December 2012) in Khaling gewog. Without considering the duration of absent from the household, it was found that more than 50% of the registered household members were absent and only 49% of the registered household members were present in the household.

**Table 1.** Household member status during the time of survey (irrespective of duration)

Member Status	Frequency	Percent
Present	1040	49.1
Absent	1076	50.9
Total	2116	100.0

Source: Field survey

**Table 2.** Migration status of the household members (Duration above one year)

Migration Status	Frequency	Percent
None migrants	1134	53.6
Migrants	982	46.4
Total	2116	100.0

Source: Field survey

However, every household member absent from the household cannot be categorized as out-migrants without considering the duration of absence. Therefore, in order to exclude those individuals who were absent temporarily like students, going for pilgrimage, visiting family members, going for medical check ups, migration period threshold was kept as one year. In other words a person who has been absent from the particular household for more than one year was considered as out-migrants in this study. Table 2 shows based on the aforesaid definition of out-migrants, almost 50% of the people out-migrated from Khaling gewog. With almost 50% of its registered population out of the gewog, the out-migration scenario

seems to be so high in the gewog. It confirms to the United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR, 2009) that Bhutan is experiencing highest internal migration rate in the region with 6%.

Table 3 shows the general characteristics of out-migrants by sex, age and education level in Khaling gewog. It was found that comparatively there are more male out-migrants (54.2%) compared to their female counterparts (45.8%). Looking at the age group of the out-migrants it was found that 75.8% belong to working age group (15-64) and only 1.3% was above 65 years. Which means that huge chunk of working population has out-migrated elsewhere to work and earn their leaving. It would certainly lead to labour shortage in the community and in the recent years this problem has been vivid in most of the rural parts of Bhutan where most rural agricultural lands are left fallow without any cultivation. On the other hand urban places are observing rapid rise in population especially young peoples in search of jobs.

**Table 3.** Characteristics of out-migrants (N=982)

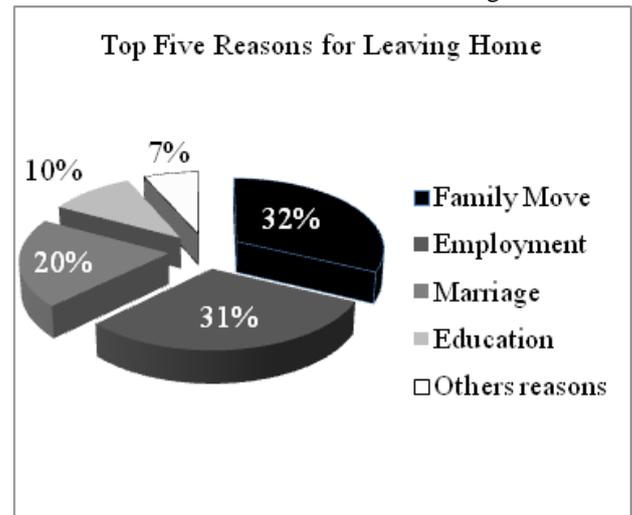
Characteristics	Percent
Sex	
Male	54.2
Female	45.8
Age group	
0-14	22.9
15-64	75.8
65 & above	1.3
Education level	
No education	30.7
Primary	26.6
High school	34.3
Diploma, degree & above	8.5

Source: Field Survey

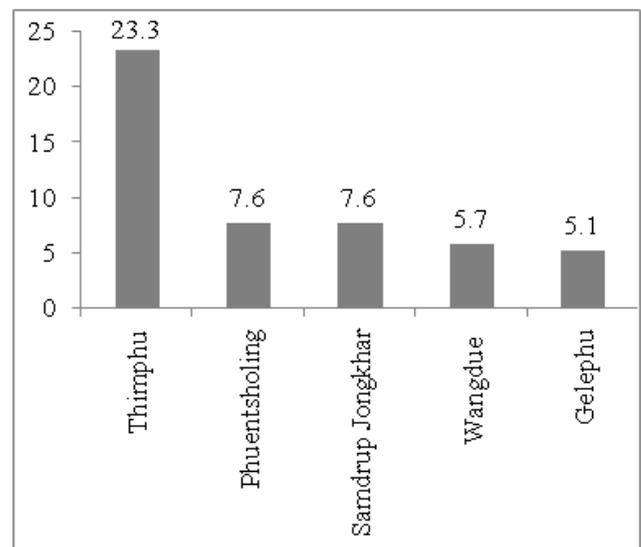
Widespread establishment of schools in Bhutan could be also important factors leading to rural out-migration. Today schools are established in every nook and corner of the country. As people get educated they gradually move out of rural areas and go to urban places in search of jobs. It was found that among out-migrants 30.7% didn't have any education, but almost 70% of the out-migrants have at least primary education and above.

According to literatures, reasons for migration can be clubbed into three categories; economic, socio-political and environmental. It seems that out-migration from Khaling gewog could be mainly credited to socio-economic reasons (Fig. 2). It was found that out-migration due to family move (32%) was the top most reason followed by employment (31%), marriage (20%) and education (10%). Family move refers to especially children's who move along with their parents and marriage refers to women who move along with their husbands. This movement mainly happens for unemployed and uneducated women. In terms of migration because of education, in Bhutan most of the higher education institutes are located away from gewog's and rural areas. Therefore, once children complete their primary and lower secondary education level in their respective gewogs they

move to other places to study. This finding also confirms to the findings of Rural-urban migration survey, 2005 of Bhutan where it was found that socio-economic factors were the main determinants of rural urban migration.



**Fig. 2.** Top five reasons for leaving home in Khaling gewog (N=982).



**Fig. 3.** Top five destination of out-migrants (%) of Khaling gewog within Bhutan (N=982).

Flow of migration in Bhutan is also similar to any other countries in the world where people migrate from rural to urban areas (Fig. 3). As expected top five destinations of out-migrants from Khaling gewog are major urban areas in the country. Majority of the out-migrants have moved to Thimphu followed by Phuentsholing, Samdrup Jongkhar, Wangdue and Gelephu. All these towns except Wangdue are classified as A category town in Bhutan. As per the PHCB 2005 Thimphu city has a population of 79,185 followed by Phuentsholing town with 20,537, Gelephu town with 9,199, Wangdue town with 6,714 and Samdrup Jongkhar town with 5,952 people. Thimphu is the capital of Bhutan and all the major offices are located there. Therefore people from all walks of life move to Thimphu in search of Job and carry out other official works. Besides

Thimphu Phuentsholing, Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar are the gateway to India and rest of the world for trade, moreover these three towns constitutes of major manufacturing industries. Wangdue attracts people from different places in Bhutan mainly because of two mega hydro projects currently being constructed in Wangdue.

**Conclusion:** Rural-outmigration scenario in Khaling gewog is so high that almost 50% of its registered household members are away from their gewog. Looking at the characteristics of out-migrants it was found that majority of the out-migrants are in working age group (15-64) and there are more male out-migrants compared to their counterparts. Almost 70% of the out-migrants have at least primary education and above. It was found that family move, employment, education and marriage were the top most reasons for out-migration in Khaling gewog. Surveys like Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2005, Rural-Urban Migration survey conducted by Ministry of Agriculture in 2005 and other micro level study clearly shows that flow of migration is from east towards western part of Bhutan. Therefore, generally it can be concluded that more people are in move from eastern part of Bhutan including Khaling gewog towards other major urban hubs in the country.

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