

# Migration Matters



## Why does it matter?

In this era of globalization, the movement of goods and people is taking place at an unprecedented scale. The UNFPA estimates that there are 244 million people globally who live outside their country of birth. The FAO estimates that there are also an estimated 740 million internal migrants worldwide as of 2012. While the impact of migration on host communities receives significant policy interest, there is more limited study on its impact on the sending regions – in particular, on agriculture and natural resource management.



## Who is migrating and its significance for agriculture?

Migration occurs across all class lines, with even members of richer farming families leaving the land to seek salaried work. The migrants in the Majority World today often retain strong links to their home communities. Migrants may be supporting family members still engaged in agriculture, and may return seasonally to assist in agricultural production. New divisions of labour are emerging. Labour migration may follow gender lines (as in South Asia), or generational lines, as in the case of China, with women and older people respectively looking after the land. For many, remittances nor agriculture alone are sufficient for households to meet their subsistence needs, making it increasingly crucial to understand the relationship between the farm and migrant economy.

## Where is IWMI's current research based?

At present, IWMI's migration research has been focused on Asia – in particular, the Gangetic Plains, the east and central Himalaya, Central Asia and South China. However, the research programme is continuously expanding, and will move into other regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia in the years ahead.



Source: Google Maps

## Projects at a glance

- [Sustainable and resilient farming systems intensification \(SRFSI\)](#)

Donor: ACIAR | May 2014-June 2016

The overall aim of the project is to improve the productivity, profitability and sustainability of smallholder agriculture and the reduction of poverty in the Eastern Gangetic Plain by facilitating the adoption of practices that optimize the productive use of water, inputs and labour, while safeguarding soil resources and reducing climate- and market-based risks.

- [Improving water use for dry season agriculture by marginal and tenant farmers in the Eastern Gangetic Plains](#)

Donor: ACIAR | September 2014-August 2018

This project seeks to help these rural farmers capitalize on two crucial underutilizations in the region's agricultural sector: excess surface and groundwater resources as well as increasing urban demand for high-value dry-season crops like vegetables. As part of creating sustainable, long-term solutions, this project also seeks to empower women and women-headed households that are too often overworked and undersupplied, especially as males continue to emigrate elsewhere for work. The core intervention is the piloting of collective farming so marginal and women farmers can increase their political power and gain economies of scale in production.

- [Impact of Water Users Association on water and land productivity, equity and food security in Tajikistan](#)

Donor: USAID | May 2014-June 2018

IWMI researchers are studying women's role and constraints in irrigation water management. The gendered divisions of agricultural labour and decision making as a result of male outmigration and how Water User Associations can benefit women is also being studied.

- [Poverty squares and gender circles: unravelling agriculture gaps, challenges and opportunities in the Eastern Gangetic Plains](#)

Donor: WLE | January 2015-December 2016

This research in Bangladesh, West Bengal and lowland Nepal, explores development interventions in agriculture and irrigation in an era of migration induced feminization of agriculture.

- [Gender profile of the Ganges basin and watershed case study](#)

Donor: WLE | February 2014-December 2016

IWMI recently developed a gender profile for the Ganges Basin, mapping district wise key gender and socio-economic indices across the region as a tool for policy makers and practitioners. Spatial analysis of the data identified the striking impact of migration in particular agro-ecological domains within the basin. Link to Gender Basin maps- <http://maps.vista-info.net/gis/htm/IWMIBasinMaps/>

- [Gender, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in the Indo-Gangetic Plains](#)

Donor: CCAFS-Core, WLE | July 2012-December 2015

The project undertook research in lowland Nepal, Bangladesh and India's Bihar state, to understand the patterns of vulnerability to climate change and the adaptive capacity for women and men farmers respectively, with a focus on agricultural water management. The relationship between migration and climate change adaptation was a critical component of this research.

- [Participatory videos in Nepal: Voicing men and women's perceptions on climate change](#)

Donor: CCAFS-Core, WLE | July 2012-December 2015

Another component of gaining a further understanding of gender's role in rural communities was achieved through the use of participatory videos in the Dhanusha district of Nepal. By creating their own films, farmers in Nepal's eastern Terai were given a direct mouthpiece to voice their experiences and ideas on climate change, adaptation, and the inter-related impact of male out-migration on farming and livelihoods.

## Past events



### Migration Matters: Out-migration and the feminization of agriculture- A regional policy dialogue

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) convened for a major policy dialogue on migration in New Delhi, India on 26th and 27th November 2015.

Over 30 representatives from the government, civil society and research organized from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh participated in the meeting. A summary of event can be found here -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFZ8ufYw7UQ>  
and [https://storify.com/IWMI\\_/migrationmatters](https://storify.com/IWMI_/migrationmatters)

## People at IWMI working on migration

- **Dr Alan Nicol**, Theme Leader – Governance, Gender and Poverty, IWMI Colombo, [a.nicol@cgiar.org](mailto:a.nicol@cgiar.org)
- **Dr Fraser Sugden**, Senior Researcher (Political Economy and Water Governance) and Country Representative - IWMI Nepal, [f.sugden@cgiar.org](mailto:f.sugden@cgiar.org)
- **Dr Floriane Clement**, Senior Researcher (Institutions and Policy) and Sub-Theme Leader (Gender and Poverty), IWMI Nepal, [f.clement@cgiar.org](mailto:f.clement@cgiar.org)
- **Dr Liza Debevec**, Researcher – Social Sciences, IWMI East Africa, [l.debevec@cgiar.org](mailto:l.debevec@cgiar.org)
- **Dr Stephanie Leder**, Postdoctoral Fellow – Gender and Poverty, IWMI Nepal, [s.leder@cgiar.org](mailto:s.leder@cgiar.org)
- **Panchali Saikia**, Scientific Officer, IWMI India. [p.saikia@cgiar.org](mailto:p.saikia@cgiar.org)
- **Farah Ahmed**, Coordinator for Research into Impact – Asia, IWMI Colombo, [f.ahmed@cgiar.org](mailto:f.ahmed@cgiar.org)
- **Nitasha Nair**, Senior Communications Officer, IWMI India, [n.nair@cgiar.org](mailto:n.nair@cgiar.org)
- **Andrew Reckers**, Princeton in Asia fellow, IWMI Nepal, [a.reckers@cgiar.org](mailto:a.reckers@cgiar.org)

For more information on IWMI's work on migration, please visit  
<http://MigrationMatters.iwmi.org/>

Photo Credits: Fraser Sugden / IWMI, Nitasha Nair / IWMI (front) and Shaoyu Liu / IWMI (back)

Copyright © 2016, by IWMI. All rights reserved. IWMI encourages the use of its material provided that the organization is acknowledged and kept informed in all such instances.



IWMI is a member of the CGIAR Consortium and leads the:



RESEARCH PROGRAM ON  
Water, Land and Ecosystems

**IWMI Headquarters**  
127 Sunil Mawatha, Pelawatte,  
Battaramulla, Colombo, Sri Lanka  
Mailing address: P. O. Box 2075, Colombo,  
Sri Lanka, Tel: +94 11 2880000, 2784080  
Fax: +94 11 2786854,  
Email: [iwmi@cgiar.org](mailto:iwmi@cgiar.org) |  
Website: [www.iwmi.org](http://www.iwmi.org)