



## The Art of Adaptation: Seasonal Entrepreneurship of Indian Migrants in Mahendranagar, Nepal

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the seasonal and adaptive entrepreneurial livelihood practices of Indian migrant families in Mahendranagar, a Nepal border town of Sudurpashchim Province. Based on the qualitative information produced by the in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and participant observations carried out in 2024-2025, the study examines how Indian migrants (mainly the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) practice diversified and small-scale informal businesses. The results show that migrant entrepreneurs do not often rely on one particular occupation; they can effectively change the economic activity depending on the seasonal demand, weather conditions, and place of residence consumption trends. Popular businesses would be selling of vegetables and fruits in the streets, ice cream and cold drinks, hot snacks like samosa and chaat, seasonal clothes, and thela-based businesses. The paper places the practices in the larger Nepal-India open-border mobility and informal city economies. Although, migrant entrepreneurship is a boon in the local market and food systems, migrants continue to face structural risks such as lack of secure housing, social protection, legal non-recognition, and inconsistent school attendance in children. This article contends that migrant adaptability is manifested as entrepreneurial resilience as well as structural compulsion. It ends by urging enrollment at the municipal level, urban-wide policies, and bilateral coordination to facilitate sustainable migrant livelihoods in the border towns.

**Keywords:** *Indian Migrant Entrepreneurship; Seasonal Entrepreneurship; Informal Economy; Livelihood; Family-Based Entrepreneurship; Nepal India Border; Open-Border Migration*

### **1. Introduction**

The Nepal-India migration is one of the most stable and unique types of cross border mobility in South Asia. This mobility, historically, culturally, and economically interdependent, was institutionalised

in the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which gives nationals of the two countries the right to move about, to live, and to work or participate in economic activities without the need to have visas and work permits (Government of Nepal & Government of India, 1950). The result of this accommodation has created the open border regime that stands out in the migration world, one which is highly permeable, less bureaucratized, and has strong social embeddedness.

In contrast to regular international migration patterns, Nepal India mobility is mainly about informal norms and kinship ties and labour market connecting patterns instead of formal recruitment arrangements or state-controlled channels of migration. Depending on the scholars, this border is more a socio-economic contact zone, in which migration, trade, and daily life activities routinely cross-national borders (Thieme, 2006; Sharma, 2013; Bhatt, 2026). Consequently, the migration between this corridor is usually circular, seasonal and family migration that tends to defy the traditional categorization of internal and international migration.

Nepal to India migration has always been a topic of academic literature on migration in Nepal, which had hitherto concentrated on the out-migration of Nepali workers to India especially urban centres and agricultural areas. The seminal literature records the poor working conditions experienced by the Nepali migrants working under low-paid informal jobs in the construction, security services, hospitality, and household work due to poverty, lack of employment opportunity and socio-political instability back at home (Kollmair et al., 2006; Thieme, 2006; Bhatt, 2023a). These papers emphasise the way open border minimises the cost and risk of the migration process and makes frequent movements and long-term transnational connections possible.

Much more recently, it was made important through the reevaluation of Nepal-India migration of labour in comparative and socio-cultural perspectives that illustrates that the migration across the border is reciprocal and multi-dimensional and is not only conditioned by economic push-pull factors but also by the familiarity in cultural aspects, the common language, and the long-term social networks (Bhatt, 2023 b; 2024 & 2025a). His work questions the conventional discourse that isolates Nepal as a country of labour sender and India as a country of labour destination, but rather points out the new trends of labour migration of Indians to Nepal, especially along the borders.

Even border towns like Mahendranagar in Sudurpashchim Province of Nepal have turned into an attraction to Indian migrants in pursuit of livelihood. It has been indicated that emerging evidence is attracting Indian migrants, especially those of the neighbouring states, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, to Nepali border towns because of the availability of markets, relatively low costs of operation, limited competition in some of the informal sectors, and the social legitimacy of street businesses run by migrants (Sharma & Thapa, 2018; Bhatt, 2025b). These towns act as economic hubs where the cross-border labour, trade, and consumption converge.

Indian migrant entrepreneurs in Nepal are almost unknown to research, although they can be easily seen in their daily lives in the city. The literature on migration has not given much focus on entrepreneurial livelihoods, informal in nature of business and market adaptation among migrants in Nepali border towns. Less research studies migrant strategic responses to seasonality, climate change, festival economies, and the changing consumption patterns of urban consumers. This is particularly notable considering the fact that informal entrepreneurship forms one of the major livelihood approaches by most of the migrant families.

Studies of informal economies in different countries of the world have proven that seasonal adjustment and livelihood diversification are among the survival mechanisms adapted by migrants (Chen, 2012; Ellis, 2000). In border-related situations in South Asia, these approaches are also influenced by the mobility of the border, families mobilizing labour, and the lack of labour protections. According to Bhatt (2025c; 2021), the economic opportunities that Indian migrants in Nepal may get remain structurally

vulnerable since migrants are not employed legally, have unstable housing conditions, insufficient social security, and access to social services.

In addition, the significance of the family-based labour, such as the unpaid labour and involvement of children in the family businesses, has not been fully explored in the framework of the cross-border migrant entrepreneurship. Research into informal labour repeatedly indicates that the presence of family increases the resilience of business, however, frequently repeats intergenerational inequality by disrupting education and reducing upward mobility (ILO, 2017; Meagher, 2010). The dynamics of these relationships among migrant families of Indians living in the Nepali border towns are essential in terms of academic investigation as well as policy intervention.

It is against this backdrop that the article under discussion is concerned with the seasonal and adaptive entrepreneurial livelihood practices of the Indian migrants in the Mahendranagar. The ability of migrants to move economic operations as seasons change to fruit and ice-cream selling in the summer, to hot food booths in the winter and festival merchandise in the fall, among others, brings into the limelight of the study that adaptation is a response to structural constraint as well as entrepreneurial agency. Locating these practices in the framework of wider discussions concerning migration, informality, and borderland economies, the article attempts to bridge a gap in the Nepal-India migration studies which is extremely important.

Further, little is investigated on the role of family-based labour, women unpaid labour, and the role that children play in family enterprises as it applies to cross-border migrant entrepreneurship. Empirical research has repeatedly indicated that family engagement increases the resilience of the business but tends to recreate the intergenerational inequality with disrupted education and lack of upward mobility (ILO, 2017; Meagher, 2010). The problem of how these dynamics can be employed among the Indian migrant families in Nepali border towns is essential to scholarly investigation as well as policy interventions.

It is against this background that this article is concerned with the seasonal and adaptive entrepreneurial livelihood practices of the Indian migrants in Mahendranagar. The study by analyzing the seasonality of migration, i.e., the movement of economic activities between the summer and winter/autumn seasons, between fruit and ice-cream selling and hot food sales stalls and festivalware shows that adaptation as an entrepreneurial agency and as a way of coping with structural constraint. By placing these practices in wider discussion of migration, informality, and borderland economies, the article aims to bridge a very important research gap within Nepal-India migration studies.

Despite the fact that the migration between Nepal and India has been researched extensively, studies available showcase three significant flaws. To begin with, the academic focus has massively emphasised the Nepali out-migration to India and made the Indian migration to Nepal, especially in terms of entrepreneurial and family-based sources of livelihood, virtually invisible within the scholarly discourse. Second, the migration research in the area has paid more emphasis on wage labour with less emphasis on informal entrepreneurship, seasonal livelihood diversification and market adaptation within the migrant population. Third, the interaction between family labour, seasonality and urban consumption patterns to determine migrant livelihood patterns in border towns has not been empirically analysed.

The fact that the concept of migrant livelihoods has not been taken seriously in Nepal hides the reality of lived conditions of Indian migrants, who become important in the local economies but are not included in the official record and the social safety net (Bhatt, 2023a). Policymaking frameworks would be influenced by a lack of ground, level studies, which would in turn undermine migrant entrepreneurs.

The paper fills these gaps by evaluating the ways in which Indian migrant families in Mahendranagar form, adjust, and maintain livelihoods by engaging in seasonal entrepreneurship in an open-border

environment. Based on the problematique formulated above and on the literature available the following research questions are used to conduct the study:

1. Which are the kinds of entrepreneurial activities that the Indian migrants are involved in the informal economy of Mahendranagar?
2. How do Indian migrant entrepreneurs change their livelihood strategies in response to seasonal change, climatic conditions and urban consumption patterns?
3. What is the role of the family-based labour such as women and children in maintaining migrant enterprises over the seasons?
4. Who are Indian migrant entrepreneurial problems in Mahendranagar? What are the economical, social, and institutional problems of Indian migrant entrepreneurs?
5. What do these livelihoods practices indicate about larger processes of Nepal to India open-border migration and informal city economies?

The research answers these questions, which means that it advances the migration scholarship through prediction of the entrepreneurial process of adaptation, seasonality, and family labour among cross-border mobility, as well as by informing policy debates on inclusive urban governance and migrant welfare in South Asian borderlands.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Nepal and India Migration and Open Border Regime.**

Nepal India migration channel is one of the most unique cross border mobility mechanisms in the world considering that there has been long open arrangement of the border. Such regime has been institutionalised by treaty of peace and friendship (1950) that allows citizens of both countries to move freely to any of the countries to live, work and carry on business without passports and visa (Government of Nepal & Government of India, 1950). Such a structure, according to the scholars, will create a semi-international system of migration; the one that does not rely on the traditional regulation of immigration but remains under the condition of being interwoven with the state-to-state relationships (Sharma, 2013).

The social and anthropological researches indicate that this movement has been upheld by not only legal structures but also by the sound social-cultural continuities through sharing of languages, religious orientations, kinship and sharing of labour patterns (Thieme, 2006; Kollmair et al., 2006). Such in-built networks also significantly reduce the social and economic cost of migration, allowing one to move and travel across all three forms of mobility such as temporary, seasonal, and permanent migration to be more common and the boundaries between them become increasingly permeable. It is therefore possible to see the marginal migrations between Nepal and India as a normal livelihood and not a distinct phenomenon.

### **2.2 Policy Environment and trends of cross-border Trade and Business.**

Economic relations between Nepal and India are an old phenomenon that does not consider the modern nation-state but was historically shaped by trading networks that have connected the Himalayan region with the Gangetic plains. The Indian traders have also been involved in trading activities in Nepal and particularly the border countries where they have undertaken the trading activities in both formal and informal trade of food items, textiles and consumer products used daily (Whelpton, 2005).

In the post-1950 period, bilateral trade and mobility were institutionalised on the basis of different agreements, such as the Treaty of Trade (renewed periodically) and additional transit treaties, allowing Nepal to access Indian ports and Indian to access Nepali markets (Government of India, 2019). These arrangements, which have been witnessed with the open border, have seen the engagement of the

Indian nationals in the small-scale trading, selling and services delivery in the Nepali towns, especially in the border towns such as Mahendranagar.

Though formal trade statistics records the massive bilateral trade at the large-scaled, cross-border business activities that include street vending, seasonal food business, and petty trade are recorded in policy making to a large extent. It is worth noting that these deficits in terms of proper regulatory frameworks on small migrant enterprises have led to a policy vacuum that informal entrepreneurship prospers in, but cannot be covered in the framework of the law. This ambiguity not only supports economic inclusion but also leads to the strengthened vulnerability simultaneously, since migrant entrepreneurship is not recognized, there is no protection of labour, and access to the social security systems (Sharma, 2013).

### **2.3 Migrant Entrepreneurship and informal Economy.**

One of the major constructs of migrant livelihoods in the Global South is the informal economy. According to Chen (2012), informal economic activities are identified as low capitals investment, non-legal provision, family labour-based, and very susceptible to the market changes. This industry has the highest percentage of migrants due to restrictions to professional employment, including the requirement to present documents, pass regulatory requirements, and discrimination.

According to the literary sources, there are many typical features of migrant entrepreneurship in the informal economies, including family labour, low entry mode, flexibility of business process, and seasonal diversification (Portes and Haller, 2005; Williams and Nadin 2012). However, empirical research on border cross-border migrant entrepreneurship remains relatively underperformed on South Asian border towns particularly in the case of Indian migrants conducting business in Nepal.

This gap is beginning to be tapped by new scholarship and is currently redefining informality as not only a non-inclusive practice but also as a strategic economic field. Informal self-employment may seem to be more comfortable and reliable in terms of income than low-waged formal employment may be among the Indian migrants in Nepal, namely, in border zones where the labour and business regulation is weakly enforced.

### **2.4 Nepal India Labour Migration other than one-way Mobility.**

Much focus has been given by classical studies on the Nepal India migration on the out-migration of Nepali workers to India that has absorbed their concentration in the low-skill production sectors such as construction, security services, hospitality, and factory work (Kollmair et al., 2006; Thieme, 2006). This literature theorises migration as its key major survival-based, circular and structural inequalities of the Nepal rural economy.

This one-way framing is later being asked by interventions. The comparative studies formulated by Bhatt redefine Nepal-India migrant migration as a two-directed and two-way migration because it has been determined by the economic prospects on either side of the border (Bhatt, 2023a). What he observes is that an increasing number of Indian migrants are intruding into Nepal in search of livelihood opportunities, particularly in the border towns where informal economic lines of business are very easily accessed and social integration may be achieved by cultural proximity.

Furthermore, the third benefit that is pointed out by Bhatt (2024) is the socio-cultural endowment of cross-border movement since he thinks that the shared language, religious beliefs, food taste, and even relations to relatives diminish the barrier to settlement and the development of businesses. This perspective is significant to the extent that Indian migrants establish and sustain small businesses in Nepali cities such as Mahendranagar with moderately low social resistance.

## 2.5 Seasonality, Livelihood Diversification and Family Labour.

Seasonality is another issue of the informal livelihoods that are not theorised but also of paramount importance. The conceptualisation of livelihood diversification by Ellis (2000) has been formulated in a manner that links the households that are vulnerable to fluctuating incomes, to structural insecurity. Seasonality to migrant entrepreneurs translates to the occupational preference and household structures in response to the alterations of the activities that are dependent on the climate, festival, and consumption pattern patterns.

Informal economy studies show that it is difficult to have any linearities between entrepreneurship routes, instead, it is an ongoing adaptation and job shifting (Meagher, 2010). This point of observation is consistent with the empirical research study conducted by Bhatt that showed that migrant livelihoods are not characterized by rigid work identities but fluidity (Bhatt, 2024). It is an adaptive logic which can be observed more particularly in the seasonal businesses where the migrants alternate between diverse commodities and services in order to maintain the flow of income.

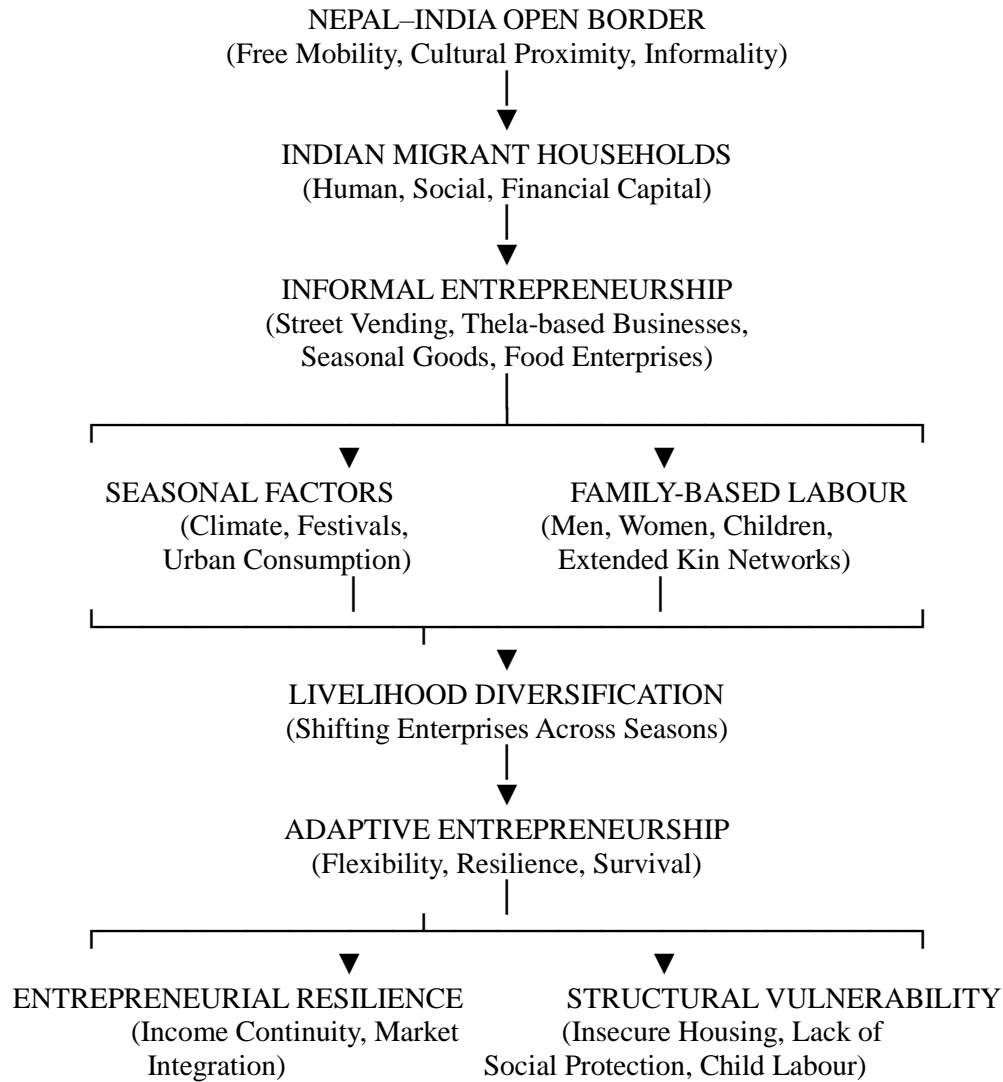
Family labour is the key to having such adaptive strategies. In South Asia, migrant families have become highly reliant on the unpaid labour of their women, and the participation of their child labour in their family industries, usually during the high season of the business (ILO, 2017). As much as this dependency makes the households more resilient, it is more likely to compromise the education of children and social mobility in the future. The same fact as mentioned by Bhatt (2023b) indicates that economic survival commonly dominates over formal education of migrant families, which also strengthens the intergenerational feedback of informality.

## 2.6 Gaps in Existing Literature

In spite of the increased academic interest in Nepal of India migration, there are still a number of gaps. First, there exists scarcity of place research on Indian migrant entrepreneurship in Nepal especially in the smaller towns in the border like Mahendranagar. Second, there is a lack of theorisation of the interaction between seasonality, family labour and entrepreneurial adaptation. Third, as recent scholarship provides valuable understanding of migration processes, it is necessary to have grounded researches that explore the processes of their implementation in particular urban and policy settings.

This paper fills these gaps by analyzing Mahendranagar as a borderland economy where Indian migrants actively make livelihoods based on seasonal entrepreneurship conditions of informality and structural vulnerability. This paper is based on the conceptual framework of Seasonal Entrepreneurship of Indian Migrants in Mahendranagar.

## Conceptual Framework: Seasonal Entrepreneurship of Indian Migrants in Mahendranagar



### **3. Study Area and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Study Area Mahendranagar, Nepal.**

Mahendranagar (technically, Bhimdatt Municipality) is a municipality in the far-western Terai region of Nepal in Kanchanpur District, which borders the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Its geographical location on the border of Nepal and India has in the past determined the demographic composition, the economic structure and livelihood patterns of the town. The open-border regime facilitates the intensive cross-border mobility, which has made Mahendranagar a large hub of trade, movement of labour, and small-scale entrepreneurship.

Mahendranagar has experienced rapid urban growth over the last two decades that has occurred due to internal migration, cross-border trade, and an increase in the consumer goods and services demand. The town serves as a trading and consumption center to the surrounding rural communities, peri-urban communities and the neighboring Indian communities. Informal haat bazaars, weekly markets, roadside vending zones, and seasonal market clusters constitute an important component of the urban economy and they provide affordable food, clothes, and daily necessities.

These informal market places have easy entry ways to migrant entrepreneurs, especially Indian migrants, who venture in small scale, low capital enterprises like food selling, mobile kiosks and seasonal trades. Such activities were concentrated around and given that Mahendranagar is characterized as a borderland area and lacks strong regulations to regulate the area, it is a good place to study the seasonal entrepreneurship, informality, and migrant livelihood strategies.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The qualitative research design was used in this research to understand the lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and daily economic practices of the Indian migrant entrepreneurs in Mahendranagar. Qualitative approach was deemed to be best in this case because the research was more exploratory and the study focused on the comprehension of meanings, processes, and strategies as opposed to measurement of predetermined variables.

The epistemological orientation of the research included the interpretivist perspective, as migrant entrepreneurship and livelihood adjustment are a social phenomenon and context-dependent. The study did not consider migration or entrepreneurship as fixed categories but aimed at knowing how migrants can strategize opportunities and limit through seasons in an informal border economy.

#### **3.3 Study and Sampling Strategy and Study participants.**

The purposive sampling strategy was chosen to be used to identify the participants who were directly involved in informal entrepreneurship and were knowledgeable enough on the topic of the research. Indian migrant entrepreneurs have been chosen following the following criterion:

- Cross-border mobility experience in nationality of India.
- Participation in informal or semi formal entrepreneurial activities in Mahendranagar.
- One year or more of permanent or seasonal residence in the town.
- Enterprise participation in family or self-managed businesses.

Under this method 10 in-depth interviews have been carried out with the Indian migrant entrepreneurs, both male and female. Diversity in terms of age, nature of business (e.g., food vending, seasonal goods, mobile stalls), and time of stay in Nepal were tried to be ensured. Although the majority

of entrepreneurs were men, the involvement of women was also planned to incorporate the gendered aspects of family labour and enterprise management.

Besides, 5 key informant interviews were carried out with the persons who had institutional or contextual awareness of the local markets and migration processes. These were municipal officials, market management committees members, local shopkeepers, and long-term residents. The key informants were chosen through the integration of purposive and snowball methods to make sure that they were relevant and rich in information.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods and Research Procedures.**

The fieldwork was performed during 2024 and 2025 which enabled the researcher to monitor changes in the economic activities in the various seasons. There were several qualitative methods used to collect data to improve the depth and triangulation.

#### **In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guides with the migrant entrepreneurs. Some of the relevant areas of interview were migration, reasons behind the formation of enterprises, seasonal business plans, use of family labour, fluctuation of income, housing, access to services and the experiences of dealing with local authorities. The interviews were done in local dialect, Hindi or Nepali, according to the choice of the participants; the duration of the interview was generally 45 to 90 minutes.

#### **Key Informant Interviews**

The key informant interviews were to put the migrant entrepreneurship into context in terms of the wider urban, institutional and policy settings. Such matters as market regulation, informal trading, cross border movement, municipal reaction to street vending, and local attitudes to migrant entrepreneurs were investigated in these interviews.

#### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation was an essential part of the design of the research. The scholar was staying long durations in informal markets, vending points in the street, seasonal haat bazaars, and residential migrant locations. The observations were centered on everyday life, seasonal changes in businesses, relationship between migrants and the customers, family involvement in business, and negotiation with the government. Field notes and informal conversations were also documented in a systematic manner so that the data could be used to complement the interview data.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The transcribing of all interviews was done and where necessary translated to English. Thematic analysis was the method of data analysis since it was an iterative and inductive process. Preliminary open coding was carried out to determine common patterns and concepts occurring as a result of the data. These codes were subsequently narrowed down and organised into larger analytic themes which were livelihood strategies, seasonality, family labour, entrepreneurial adaptation, and structural challenges.

A conceptual framework of the study that was used in the analysis incorporates the livelihood theory, informal economy perspectives and borderland migration approaches. Both convergences and divergences of the narratives were considered by the participants, which permitted a subtle approach to the concept of adaptive entrepreneurship in the circumstances of informality and precarity.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The consideration of ethics played a central role in the research process as many of the participants were informal and of a legal gray nature. All respondents gave an informed consent, and the decision to participate was voluntary. The identities of the participants were withheld using pseudonyms, and no identifiable information was included during transcripts and publications.

The researcher was reflexive as she was conscious of power relations, trust-building, and the risks that migrant respondents might expose her to. Caution was observed to ensure that the participation did not bring harm, surveillance, and legal implications to the respondents.

#### **The methodological limitations are as follows:**

Although the qualitative design allowed exploring the topic of migrant entrepreneurship in depth, the study also has some limitations. Results rely on a local context of a border-town and are not aimed to be statistically generalisable. Also, the use of self-report data can be subject to these effects as recall bias, or strategic narration. However, the application of the various techniques and the extended field work makes the research more plausible and analytical.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The section gives the empirical results of the study and discusses them based on the in-depth interviews, the key informant interviews, and the participant observation that was conducted within the timeframe of 2024-2025 in Mahendranagar. The analysis is structured in accordance with the key thematic areas that were identified based on the available data and in accordance with the research questions in the study.

### 4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Indian Migrants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the Indian migrant entrepreneur in Mahendranagar show the tendencies of long-term settlement, integration of language, and household-based livelihood organisation. The majority of the respondents were found to be of rural districts of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand due to historical and geographical association to the far-western border of Nepal.

The period of stay varied between 15 and 40 years which means that a significant number of migrants are not tourists and are permanent residents of the city. Although they were Indian nationals, almost all the respondents said they are fluent in Nepali and the local dialect of Doteli, in addition to Hindi. Such linguistic flexibility helps to interact with the market, negotiate with customers, and socialize in general, which confirms that cultural proximity plays a crucial role in reducing barriers to the settlement of migrants in border towns of Nepal-India, as postulated by Bhatt (2024).

The situation in the housing conditions is precarious. Majority of migrant families occupy rented rooms or informal settlements, which are usually overcrowded and they do not have proper sanitation. Education among children is often inconsistent, due to financial demands which require them to engage in family businesses. These trends relate to informal livelihoods of the economy recorded in South Asia (Chen, 2012).

**Table 1**  
*Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Place of origin</i>	Rural districts of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand
<i>Length of stay</i>	15–40 years
<i>Family structure</i>	Nuclear and extended families
<i>Housing</i>	Rented rooms, informal settlements
<i>Language skills</i>	Hindi, Nepali, Doteli
<i>Children's education</i>	Irregular school attendance

*Source: Field Survey, 2024-25*

This paper examines entrepreneurial activities in the informal economy of Mahendranagar in five aspects. Small-scale, informal, low-capital entrepreneurial ventures that are involved with the everyday consumption needs of the urban population are predominantly practiced in Indian migrants in Mahendranagar. These businesses are clustered in the form of street vending, mobile stalls (thela-based businesses), seasonal food vending, and petty trade.

Selling snacks, tea, fruits, vegetables, garments, household goods, and the goods associated with the festival are the common activities. Bus stops, commercial commercial streets with high traffic, and areas regularly found roadside vending are considered the typical place where enterprises operate, as there is a large flow of customers, and enforcement is less than optimal.

The selection of these enterprises represents low barriers to entry, cash flow now, and fewer regulatory demands, which enable migrants to run their business without registered business names or fixed locations. These informal enterprises, according to Portes and Haller (2005), operate within the frameworks of the law, although structurally, they are part of the urban economies. The context of the borderlands of Mahendranagar also contributes to these opportunities in that migrants utilize cross-border supply chains, cross-border labour networks, and Nepal and Indian market knowledge.

These businesses are physically located in the informal markets like roadside vending areas, weekly haat bazars, bus stops, and commercial streets that have high traffic. The type of business used is a reflection of the entry barrier as well as instant cash flow that the migrants can earn without having to be registered, occupy premises, or have to inject significant capital into the business. In line with the non-traditional literature on the informal economy (Chen, 2012; Portes and Haller, 2005), the activities are not regulated by any formal system and yet they form part of the urban economy of the town. The border-town setting of Mahendranagar also contributes to such entrepreneurship, as due to the cross-border mobility, migrants could obtain goods, labour and information both in Nepal and India. The results, therefore, support the position that informal migrant entrepreneurship is not peripheral but structurally ingrained in the borderland urban economies.

## **4.2 Seasonal entrepreneurship and Livelihood diversification**

### **4.2.1 Seasonal Adaptation of the Businesses**

The issue of seasonality became a characteristic of migrant livelihood strategies. In response to climatic conditions, festivals and urban consumption patterns, migrants systematically restructure their enterprises. Instead of depending on one occupation, the households diversify in a year-round basis in order to deal with risk and income volatility. The migrants are keen in ensuring that their business operations are seasonal and based on consumer preferences, e.g. in summer, they sell cold drinks and fruits and in autumn, they trade hot snacks and festival foods. It is in line with the evidence in other informal border economies whereby economic agents adapt to climatic and cultural demand cycles. The

high seasonal earnings in festivals reveal how much the migrants have become entrenched in local cultural and market cycles.

**Table 2**  
*Seasonal Business Activities of Indian Migrants in Mahendranagar*

Season	Main Activities	Products	Key Observations
Summer (March–June)	Street vending	Ice cream, fruits, cold drinks	High urban demand; long working hours; profit margins increase due to hot weather
Monsoon (July–Sept)	Mobile food stalls	Samosa, pakora, vegetables	Rain affects mobility; stalls may be temporary; income slightly lower
Autumn/Festival (Oct–Nov)	Seasonal trade	Clothing, sweets, decorations	Dashain/Tihar festivals drive high demand; highest income period
Winter (Dec–Feb)	Hot food vending	Tea, chaat, fried snacks	Cold weather boosts hot food demand; fewer tourists reduce casual sales

*Source: Field Observation, 2024-2025*

This trend provides the evidence of Ellis (2000) who states that the primary risk-management strategy in the environment of income volatility is the one, which involves diversification of livelihoods. Informality allows quick switching of activities with no regulatory cost, however, it is a symptom of structural insecurity and not entrepreneurial choice solely (Meagher, 2010).

#### **Case Study: Family Enterprise of Ramesh Kumar.**

Ramesh Kumar (pseudonym) is a 42-year old migrant who resides in Mahendranagar and has been living there 22 years. His family has several seasonal businesses:

- Summer: Ice cream cart outside schools
- Monsoon: Vegetable vending
- Festival season: Clothes booth
- Winter: Tea and snack shop.

Preparation of food is done by his wife and even children help after school. During festivals, the income is the highest but when disrupted by the monsoons it drops drastically. We will not be able to last through the entire year doing a single business. We change with the season.” (Ramesh Kumar, interview, 2025)

The seasonality came out as a characteristic phenomenon of migrant entrepreneurial strategies. Climatic conditions, seasonal demand, and urban consumption patterns were regular events that caused migrants to change their livelihood activities. As an example, in summer cold drinks, ice cream, fruits and cooling food were related, whereas in winter hot snacks, tea booths and warm attire were related. Demand was also influenced by festival times and agricultural cycles, causing a temporary diversification in to festival-related products or high demand consumables.

Instead of having fixed occupational identities, migrant entrepreneurs were highly fluid in their livelihood by displaying a seasonal movement between activities. Such a trend holds in line with Ellis (2000) conceptualisation of livelihood diversification as a risk-management practice and Meagher (2010) concept of economic improvisation during the structural constraints.

The informal nature of businesses enables these adaptive practices because of the ability to easily enter and leave various activities without having to incur regulatory expenses. Nonetheless, this flexibility is also the reaction to insecurity, inconsistent earnings, and insufficiency of institutions support. Seasonality is, therefore, both an opportunity structure and a constraint, which strengthens the precariousness of migrant livelihoods.

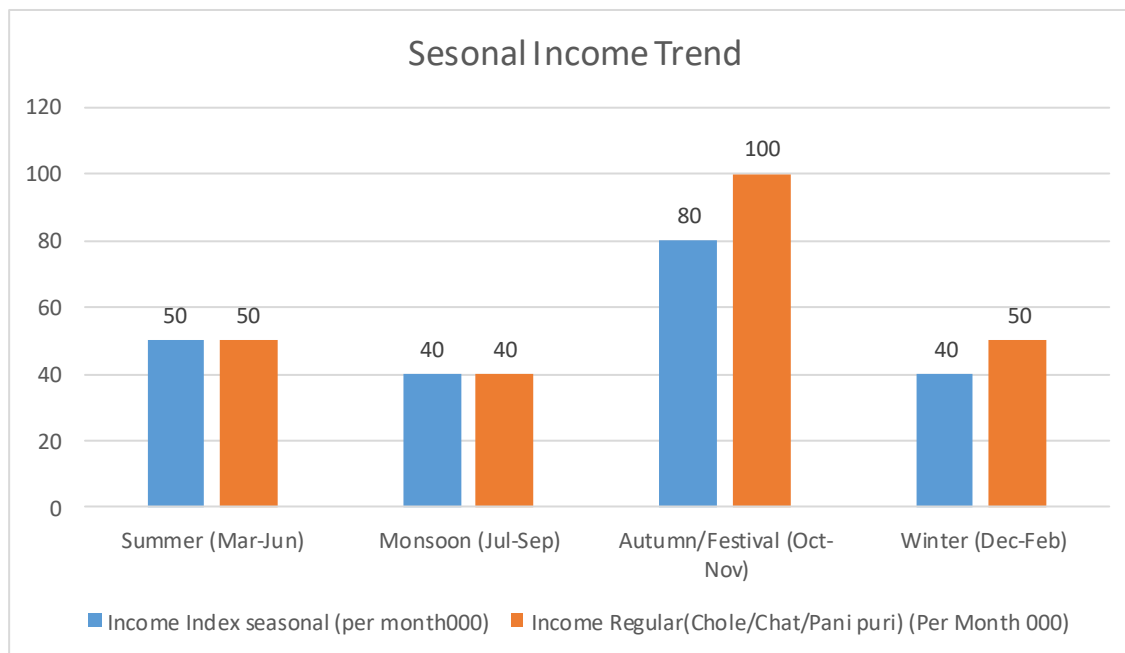
#### 4.2.2 Seasonal Income Trends

The migrant entrepreneurship adaptive logic is also reflected in the seasonal income pattern. Festivals indicate a high income level, which is an indicator of the strong integration of migrants with the local cultural and consumption cycle. The exposure of informal livelihoods to environmental disturbance is emphasized by monsoon-related setbacks, which support the precariousness of informal livelihoods.

In a line graph presented below representing the average monthly income trends between seasons, one can see that, average monthly income is high during Dashain Tihar festival, and it is averagely high during summer, low during monsoon months because of the rainfall and restrictions on movement.

**Figure 1**

*Seasonal Income Trends of Indian Migrant Entrepreneurs (two different cases)*



\*Index normalized (Festival peak = above 100,000) for comparative purposes.

This graph reveals that there is a unique seasonal trend where the income is highest during the festival (Autumn) season because of the high demand of goods and mid winter hot food sales. There are also greater earnings experienced during summer and this is as a result of cold drinks and fruit sales. Rain has the effect of reducing the monsoon earnings by a small margin because of mobility difficulties. This visualization highlights that seasonal adaptation directly influences the income patterns of migrant businesses - which is a consistent pattern of seasonal trade literature in other informal environments.

Figure 1 represents the trends of relative income of the Indian migrant entrepreneurs in the four seasons of Mahendranagar. The high income is exerted on the festival season (Dashain/Tihar) and high income is experienced in summer months because of the demand of cold beverages and fresh fruits whereas there is slight decline during the monsoon months because of movement difficulties.

The identified seasonal pattern of income highlights the strategic mobilisation of economic resources by migrants to seasonal patterns of demands in the environment and culture as an adaptive entrepreneurship that provides a more stable and resilient household. The patterns of annual earnings of

Indian migrant entrepreneurs indicate that there is a definite tendency towards market responsiveness and strategic adaptation. Figure 1 shows that the peaks of income are recorded during the Autumn/Festival period, due to the increased demand of the festival products, including clothing, sweets, and ornaments. Another important season which also brings substantial income in the form of the sale of ice cream, cold drinks, and fresh fruits is summer which represents the urban preferences in hot weather. On the other hand, the monsoon months have slightly less income, which is due to the delay of mobility and street vending caused by precipitation. These trends emphasize the dynamism and responsive measures that the migrants take in order to maximize earnings across the year. Seasonal planning does not only help in maintaining financial stability, but also shows that the migrants have a strong knowledge of the local demand patterns.

### 4.3 Family Based Entrepreneurship and Labour Division

Family labour forms the basis of trans-seasonal sustenance of migrant businesses. Organisation of enterprises is conducted at household level where men, women, children and at times extended relatives provide various types of labour.

The migrant entrepreneurial practices involve family appreciation. Mostly, fathers get to handle procurement, funds and external coordination, mothers do the preparation and cooking and packaging, and children are involved in service work and operations, particularly during seasons. Families or extended family also offers supplementary services during the peak times.

**Table 3**  
*Household Labour Division in Migrant Family Enterprises*

Household Role	Primary Roles in Business	Seasonal Variations	Additional Notes
Father	Procurement of goods, finance management, sales	Active throughout year; focuses on seasonal sourcing	Oversees business decisions and market strategies
Mother	Cooking, preparation of products, packaging	Prepares festival foods in autumn; ice cream/fruit prep in summer	Key in maintaining household-based production
Children (6–16) yrs	Serving customers, cleaning, small transactions	Rotate duties with seasons; help more during festival periods	Most children have irregular school attendance due to work
Extended family/relatives	Temporary assistance during peak seasons	Festivals and summer; rare monsoon help	Contribute during high-demand periods to support income continuity

**Source:** *Field Survey, 2024-25*

Families labour is one of the key factors in the maintenance of the migrant businesses in the seasons. The results indicate that businesses are normally structured at the home level with men, women and children playing varying roles. Procurement, mobility-intensive activities and dealings with authorities are done by men whereas food preparation, sales and dealing with customers are done by women. Children are often used in the times of maximum business, at festivals or school holidays.

The labour that women do is key to the survival of the enterprise but it remains mostly unpaid and underestimated, as it does the rest of the gendered patterns in informal economies. Their involvement allows businesses to run at low labour expenses and increases the strength of households throughout the periods of changing earnings.

The participation of children is inevitably structural and not cultural. According to the earlier researches (ILO, 2017), families are forced to focus on economic survival due to irregular schooling,

seasonal job requirements, and economic instability. Such results can be corroborated by Bhatt (2023b) who states that migrant families tend to make challenging trade-off decisions between education and livelihood security, which results in the recreation of intergenerational informality.

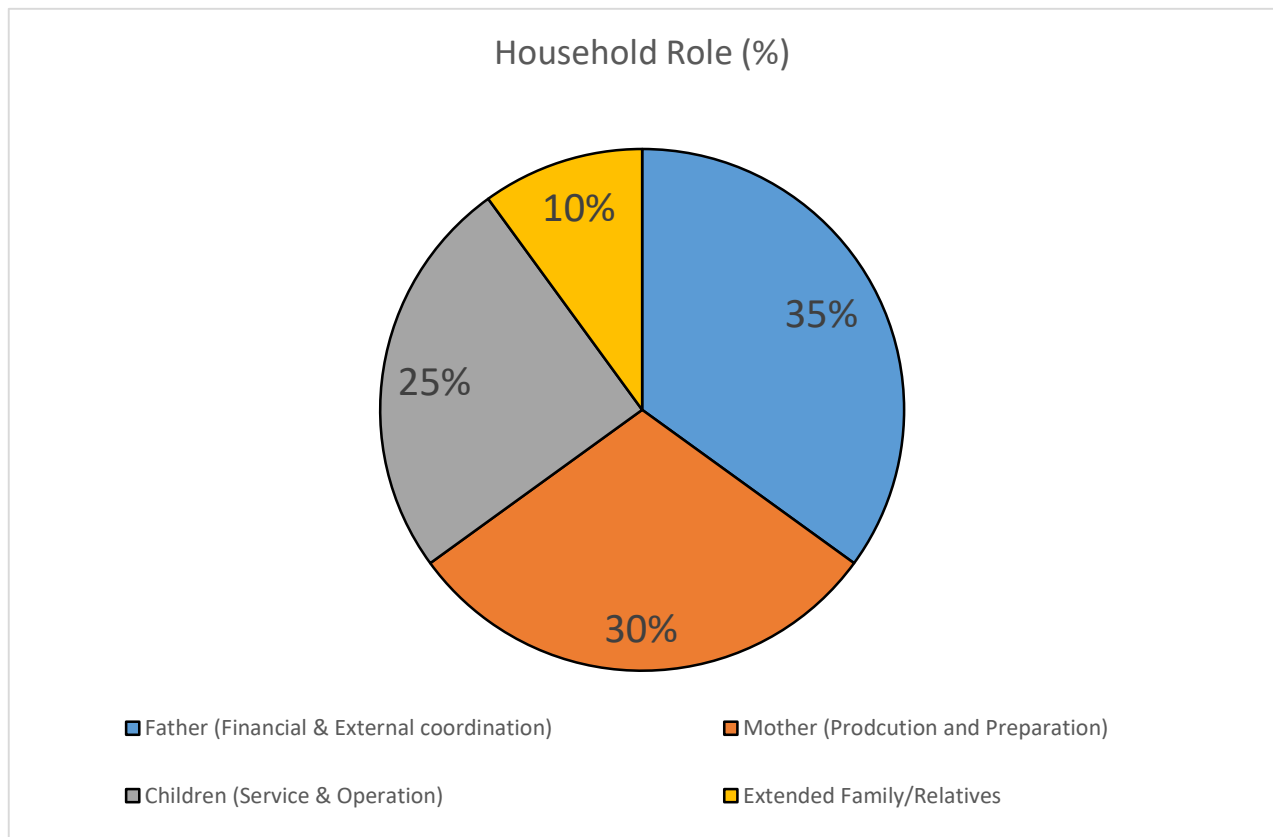
#### 4.4 Percentages of Household Labor Contribution in Migrant Micro Enterprises

The labour of women is very important but is not paid and even not valued and is gendered in informal economies (Chen, 2012). When they are in peak seasons and festivals, the children are nearly involved to the expense of normal schooling. A pie enterprise of the levels of labor contribution by family members in migrant enterprises.

The graph points to the family driven characteristic of the entrepreneurial work. External economics (buyer coordination, sourcing), production/preparation, and service operations (commonly at the expense of education) are frequently divided between fathers, mothers, and children respectively. The extended family inputs are increased in high seasons. This household allocation of labor indicates comparable results of migration attached livelihood researches that family labor plays a central role in supporting informal enterprises and address the seasonal workload.

Figure 2 includes an estimate of the percentage of labor contribution between various family members within the Indian migrant households. Fathers mainly do financial and external coordination, mothers do production and preparation, children help in service operation and extended family / relatives give seasonal services.

**Figure 2**  
*Distribution of Household Labor in Migrant Businesses*



\*Approximate contribution based on field interviews.

The family-based labor organization that is the main feature of migrant entrepreneurship in Mahendranagar is emphasized in Figure 2. Fathers manage the finances, purchase, and external coordination which makes the business run smoothly and change to the seasonal demand. The mothers are involved in the production, preparation and packaging, the children take part in service and operational activities at the cost of attending schools regularly. Labor is supplemented with the extended family members especially when there are peak seasons such as festivals and summer seasons. This segregation of labor represents an extremely supportive and adaptable domestic template and this increases the sustainability of a business and removes reliance on contracted workforce. Dependence on family work does not only enable the survival of the business, but also, it helps to pass down skills to the young generation which will ensure future sustainability of the migrant livelihoods. Such segregation increases the resilience of an enterprise and strengthens the intergenerational informality cycles, which confirm the results of the ILO (2017) and Bhatt (2023b).

#### 4.5 Living and Working Conditions

Migrant families normally live in crowded, insecure residential units, putting more emphasis on earnings than comfort of living. Working environments in South Asia do not have contracts, wages or health protection and this reflects the larger informal labour conditions in South Asia (Chen, 2012).

Despite these challenges, informal community networks provide limited support during illness or financial stress, partially compensating for the absence of state protection.



*Note: Photo shows Three numbers of Thela at early in the morning. These Thela are filled up with vegetables and fruits and move rounding to market and streets of town.*

#### 4.6 Economic, Social and Institutional problems

Indian migrant entrepreneurs go through various, interlocking issues despite their economic contribution. Seasonally, weather variability, and market competition are recurrent economic issues of instability of income. Lack of savings systems and access to credit makes people more vulnerable in off-seasons or when they fall ill.

Migrants live in the ambiguous world of belonging socially. Though there is ease of interaction because of cultural proximity and the use of a common language, migrants are still foreigners as far as political representation and social protection are concerned. Poverty, housing insecurity, overcrowding and reliance on informal rental patterns further contribute to vulnerability.

Formally, non-recognition is a significant limitation in the institutions. Such migrants occupy a regulatory grey zone, where they are periodically evicted, pay informally, and harassed by governments. As much as the open-border regime facilitates flow of people, the protection of businesses and access to municipal services is not a guarantee. The observation confirms the view by Sharma (2013) that borderland economies are not regulated by regular rules and regulations but through informal standards.



*Note: Living condition of Indian migrants, mostly sleep on the floor (ground) even in cold days. Due to this, they become sick and suffered by cold and cough. Likewise, its risky for the possibilities of snakes' bite and other health issues.*

#### Indian migrant entrepreneurs face overlapping vulnerabilities:

1. Insecure housing and risk of eviction
2. Limited access to healthcare and social protection
3. Absence of legal recognition and business registration
4. Child labour and interrupted education
5. Exclusion from formal credit systems

While cultural proximity facilitates everyday interaction, migrants remain institutionally marginal. The open-border regime enables mobility but does not guarantee labour rights or access to municipal

services, reinforcing Sharma's (2013) argument that borderland economies are governed by informal norms rather than consistent regulation. These vulnerabilities reflect broader structural inequalities in informal urban economies (ILO, 2017).

*Observation: The condition of living of the Indian migrants, they sleep on the floor (ground) even on cold days. As a result of this they fall ill and were cold and coughing. Similarly, it is dangerous to the chances of snake bite and other health complications.*

#### **Indian migrant business people are at one crossroad:**

- Unsafe housing and eviction.
- Poor access to social protection and healthcare.
- Lack of legalization and registration of the business.
- Child labour and broken education.
- Ostracism by formal credit systems.

On the one hand, cultural proximity helps to interact in everyday life, and migrants are institutionally marginal. The open-border regime facilitates movement, but it does not ensure the rights to labor and access to municipal services, which supports the idea of Sharma (2013) that borderland economies are not regulated by clear rules but by informal ones. Those weak points are indicators of the larger structural imbalances of informal urban economies (ILO, 2017).

#### **4.7 Migrant Livelihoods in the Nepal India Border Processes**

The livelihood practices that have been identified in Mahendranagar reflect the larger processes of the Nepal-India open-border migration and informal urbanisation. As opposed to following the traditional scheme of Nepal-India migration being mostly unidirectional, the results indicate a reciprocal and dependent system of mobility where Indian migrants take the initiative to seek livelihood opportunities in Nepal. Such a mobility is inscribed within the daily economic activities that go beyond the national borders and restructure the local urban economies.

The open-border regime encourages the movement of labour, goods, and entrepreneur practices, but because harmonised policies on the regulation of the small-scale cross-border enterprises are lacking, informality persists. In this respect, migrant flexibility acts concurrently as an agency and as a reaction to structural exclusion. Bhatt (2024) notes that the flexibility and resilience of migrants tend to mask their underlying vulnerabilities due to the policy neglect and invisibility of the institutions.

Mahendranagar is therefore an example of how border towns act as frontier economic spaces where informality is institutionalised and migrant entrepreneurship is in the centre spot in fulfilling the demands of urban consumption. Presenting the concept of foregrounding seasonal entrepreneurship as a major livelihood approach, the research findings add to the body of knowledge on borderland migration and enhance the knowledge of the texts of navigating uncertainty and livelihoods in informal urban economies among migrants.

#### **4.8 Discussion: Findings as related to Theory and Policy**

The results validate the usefulness of Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (Ellis, 2000) in deciphering migrant entrepreneurship as the seasonal dynamism of interaction among assets, seasonality, and institutional constraints. Informal entrepreneurship in Mahendranagar is to be seen as a non-transitional form of livelihood that is conditioned by a borderland environment.

On the policy level, the paper identifies that there is a lack of linkage between free movement across borders and lack of protective structures to migrant entrepreneurs. Although the bilateral relations ease movement and trade on a macro level, daily migrant lives are still not appreciated.

### **5. Policy Implications**

A number of policy interventions are suggested to enhance migrant entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods in Mahendranagar and other towns in the border:

1. **Municipal Registration:** The formal status of migrant entrepreneurs may allow the access to credit and training and social protection systems.
2. **Inclusive Urban Policies:** The urban planning should also include the migrant input and access to market spaces, sanitation systems and legal assistance.
3. **Cross Border Collaboration:** Nepal and India must enhance bilateral collaboration in regard to labour rights, social protection and community welfare of people in borderland.
4. **Education and Skills Programmes:** Educational support of migrant children and job training of adults can help to increase the economic stability in the long run.
5. **Housing Programs:** Affordable housing policies would not hurt economic mobility, but might enhance the quality of life.

Such proposals correlate with the desires to have harmonised cross border policies that consider both the economic advantages as well as social vulnerability of the migrant population.

### **6. Conclusion**

This paper examined how Indian migrant families in informal entrepreneurship in Mahendranagar, a border town between Nepal and India, use seasonal and adaptive livelihood in response to open-border mobility and informal urbanisation. The results indicate that migrant entrepreneurship is a fundamental component of the local informal economy, where households diversify and switch activities and businesses in line with seasonal changes of the climatic conditions, festivals, and changing urban consumption patterns.

Although these strategies are flexible and knowledgeable of the market, structural restrictions that include informality, limited capital, and poor institutional support drive these strategies. The family-based labour, in particular, female unpaid labour and child labour, becomes a focus in terms of keeping the enterprise alive, yet strengthens the gendered and intergenerational fragilities.

With the emphasis on bidirectional mobility and migrant-led entrepreneurship, the paper critiques one-way, wage-focused accounts of Nepal-India migration and establishes the border towns as new economic territories of normalised informality. The article also advances the borderland and livelihood research by anticipating seasonality and household labour in migrant entrepreneurship, and it recommends reaching out to the inclusive municipal of South Asian borderlands by reforming urban governance and coordinating cross-border to enable sustainable migrant livelihoods.

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