



ICIMOD

## National Conference

Migration, Climate Change and Societal Change in Bhutan

Royal Thimphu College

April 10, 2025



# Conference Background



**National Conference**  
**Call for Abstracts!**

“Migration, Climate Change, and Societal Change in Bhutan.”

**Submission Deadline:**  
**15th December, 2024**

**HCEH**  
HIMALAYAN CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

**For queries: [hceh@rtc.bt](mailto:hceh@rtc.bt)**

This national conference is organized in collaboration with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) as part of the project titled: ‘Successful Intervention Pathways for Migration as Adaptation (SUCCESS)’ funded through CLARE – the UK-Canada framework research programme on Climate Adaptation and Resilience. This collaborative project seeks to generate new knowledge and perspectives on the evaluation of climate adaptations and climate-resilient development that involve migration, mobility and immobility across South Asian countries.

The conference presents papers exploring the social, economic, demographic, fiscal, policy, development planning, cultural, and climate change dimensions of migration in Bhutan, aiming to better integrate migration into an understanding of contemporary Bhutanese society, policy imperatives, and emergent future scenarios

# Conference Programme

## PLENARY SESSION 1

CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION NEXUS: UNPACKING A  
COMPLEX PHENOMENON

**AUDITORIUM**  
**9:30 - 11:00 AM**

9:30 - 9:40 AM	Welcome Address   Hon'ble RTC President, <b>Shiva Raj Battarai</b>
9:40 - 10:10 AM	Keynote address   <b>Amina Maharjan</b>
10:10 - 10:45 AM	<b>Panel Discussion   Chandni Singh, Khurshid Alam &amp; Dasho Phuntsho Rabten</b>
10:45 - 11:00 AM	Q&A Session

TEA BREAK 11:00 - 11:30 AM

# Conference Programme

## PLENARY SESSION 2

TRENDS AND THEMES IN MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE  
IN BHUTAN

AUDITORIUM  
11:30 - 1:00 PM

DISCUSSANT : NEIL ADGER

PAPER 1	<b>Sangay Wangchuk</b>   Rural Depopulation in Bhutan: A Circular Relationship Perspective
PAPER 2	<b>Om Katel</b>   Climate Change Vulnerability and their Influence to Human Mobility in Bhutan
PAPER 3	<b>Lhawang Ugyel</b>   The Migration-Environment Paradox in Bhutan
	Q&A Session

LUNCH BREAK 1:00 - 2:00 PM

# Conference Programme

## PARALLEL SESSION 1

MIGRATION AND AGRARIAN FUTURES: EMPTY VILLAGES,  
RURAL ECONOMIES, AND SOCIAL SHIFTS

EXECUTIVE CENTRE  
2:00 - 3:30 PM

DISCUSSANT : NITYA RAO

PAPER 1	<b>Yoshiki Ishiuchi</b>   Village Festival in Eastern Bhutan: A Response to Modernisation and Migration
PAPER 2	<b>Kinley Dorji</b>   Fertile Paddy Fields and Empty Villages: A Case Study of the Changes in the Agriculture Practice System Due to Rampant Rural Flight in Kurtoe.
PAPER 3	<b>Katsu Masaki &amp; Lekden Wangchuk</b>   Sustaining Rural Economies Through Rural-Urban Migration: Lessons from Shingkar
PAPER 4	<b>Pema Choden &amp; Tshering Choden</b>   Enhancing livelihood resilience and food security through remittances in rural Denchukha, Bhutan
	Q&A Session

TEA BREAK 3:30PM -3:45PM

# Conference Programme

## PARALLEL SESSION 2

MIGRANTS IN THE CITY: INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY,  
LABOUR PRECARIETY, AND WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

**AUDITORIUM**  
**2:00 - 3:30 PM**

DISCUSSANT: TASNEEM SIDDIQUI

PAPER 1	<b>Choeying Selden</b>   From Dukha (sorrow) to Sukha (happiness)? Intergenerational Mobility of Labour Migrants in Thimphu
PAPER 2	<b>Tashi Paldon</b>   Exploring Labour Security of Low-Income Migrants in Thimphu
PAPER 3	<b>Samiksha Rai</b>   Gendered Pathways of Migration : Examining women's experiences in rural and urban transition
	Q&A Session

TEA BREAK 3:30 PM - 3:45 PM

# Conference Programme

## PARALLEL SESSION 3

CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION: DATA ARCHITECTURE,  
MEDIA SILENCES, AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

EXECUTIVE CENTRE  
3:45- 5:15 PM

DISCUSSANT : PRATHIJNA POONACHA KODIRA

PAPER 1	<b>Ganeshman Gurung</b>   Analysis and Needs Assessment for Advancing Disaster Data Architecture for Climate-Induced Loss and Damage in Bhutan
PAPER 2	<b>Pallavi Majumdar</b>   Bhutan's Unspoken Exodus: How Media Narratives Ignore Climate-Driven Migration
PAPER 3	<b>Sangay Dorji</b>   Community-Led Nature-Based Solutions and Springshed Management: Tarayana Foundation's Approach to Sustainable Climate Resilience in Bhutan
	Q&A session

# Conference Programme

## PARALLEL SESSION 4

THE AUSTRALIA EFFECT: REMITTANCE, CAREGIVING AND SOFT POWER

AUDITORIUM  
3:45 - 5:15 PM

DISCUSSANT : GANESH GURUNG

PAPER 1	<b>Deki Yangzom</b>   Harnessing Knowledge and Skill Remittance: The Potential Role of the Bhutanese Diaspora in Nation Development Through Return Migration
PAPER 2	<b>Nora Samosir &amp; Lionel Wee</b>   Reversing Migration Through Soft Power?
PAPER 3	<b>Kinzang Yangden , Sarala Pradhan, Pratika Pradhan &amp; Pema Lhamo</b>   An Explorative Study: Understanding the Quality of Life Among the Elderly Caregivers in Bhutan due to the Trends of Local and International Migration
	Q&A Session



# Speaker

## Om Katel

Programme Leader for PhD in Climate Studies, College for Natural Resources

### **Climate Change Vulnerability and their Influence to Human Mobility in Bhutan**

The population density in Bhutan's towns and cities has significantly increased over the years, raising demand for public amenities for habitation and livelihood. Meanwhile, some areas experience depopulation. Although this trend has been significant recently, the drivers affecting human mobility, particularly from rural to urban areas, are not clearly understood in Bhutan. Therefore, this study aims to analyze whether and how climate vulnerability has affected human mobility in Bhutan. It employs secondary sources, such as published and unpublished documents, to analyze human mobility and the factors affecting it, and to determine the extent to which climate vulnerability drives such mobility. The findings indicate that human mobility is influenced by several factors, including economic opportunities, urbanization, education, and climate change impacts, such as extreme weather events. Economic opportunities, such as the implementation of large-scale projects, significantly influence rural-to-rural mobility. The urban population is projected to increase from 37.8% in 2017 to 56.8% by 2047, at an approximate rate of 0.6% per year. Urbanization in towns and cities is significant, increasing urban amenities and livelihoods. The urban-to-rural population ratio, analyzed using GIS and remote sensing data, shows that Thimphu city alone has an urbanization rate of more than 12%. Urban areas tend to have better education facilities, attracting mobility from rural areas. This mobility puts pressure on urban areas concerning habitation and livelihood activities. Climate change significantly impacts crop yields, a primary livelihood for many Bhutanese, forcing people to migrate in search of better conditions. The study recommends comprehensive urban planning strategies to address the growing urban population. It is also important to invest in rural development projects to create economic opportunities and address the push factors for rural-to-urban migration. Implementing climate adaptation strategies is crucial to reduce the need for climate-induced mobility. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting human mobility concerning climate vulnerability in Bhutan. It is crucial for policymakers to develop targeted interventions that align with the Gross National Happiness philosophy of balanced socio-economic development. By highlighting the interplay among economic, educational, and climatic factors, the research underscores the need for climate resilience strategies in Bhutan. Furthermore, it offers an opportunity to integrate climate adaptation into national development policies to ensure balanced socio-economic and sustainable development.



Om Katel is a faculty member at the College of Natural resources, Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), Lobesa, Bhutan. He is currently working as a lecturer, at the Department of Environment and Climate Studies and has 21 years of teaching experience and he teaches courses on Environmental governance, Natural Resources Management, Climate Change Vulnerabilities and Adaptation, Integrated Watershed Management and Environmental Systems Analysis. He is a visiting researcher at the Nagoya University, Japan, since 2015. Mr Katel is an alumni of Youth Encounter on Sustainability (YES), Intensive program on Sustainability (IPoS); International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD); Alliance for Global Sustainability (AGS); and South Asian Network for the Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE). Mr Katel is a focal person from RUB for Least Developed Countries University's Consortium on Climate Change, RUB representative for SWISSnex India, and country's representative to IPCC. Mr Katel's research interest are wide and particularly interested in addressing issues pertaining to climate change and development, adaptation in Mountains, Mountain urbanization, Water resources management, livelihood and ecosystem resilience.

# Speaker

## Yoshiki Ishiuchi

PhD Candidate, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University

### **Village Tshechu on the Verge of Changes: A Response to Modernisation and Migration**

In recent years, sustaining small festivals in local villages with declining populations has become gradually difficult. In general, small festivals held in local villages differ from those organised by the government or monasteries in that the residents are responsible for everything from selecting the location and date to preparation, management and funding. In a sense, these village-based festivals have functioned as a place for residents of the same community to share history and values and interact with neighbouring community residents.

However, the nature of settlements and households in contemporary depopulated areas has transformed by the dispersal of residents to cities and other countries. So-called gung stong (vacant houses) and g.yus stong (abandoned villages) have emerged in rural areas, and local religious practices have been challenged to respond to these situations. Specifically, while there are negative responses, such as the abolition or suspension of village-based festivals due to a decrease in the number of gtso bo (organisers), there are positive responses, such as reducing the burden on organisers and financial support from people living outside the village to maintain the implementation of village-based festivals. This transformation of village-based festivals in specific areas reflects the changes in contemporary rural Bhutanese society and reveals the impact of the contemporary migration phenomenon on local communities from a micro perspective based on the local context.

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on migration in Bhutan, and the situation of depopulated areas has been deciphered from various perspectives, such as social, economic and ecological. Several media outlets have reported the difficulties in maintaining lha khang (Buddhist temples) and the shortage of dancers for 'cham (masked dances) in rural areas. However, it has not yet been able to identify the specific effects that the emergence of a depopulated society has on the religious practices of the rural villages.

With all of this in consideration, in this paper, I would like to draw how the village-based festival of tshechu has been transmitted in Bartsham Gewog in Trashigang Dzongkhag. Bartsham is one of the areas of Bhutan with the highest number of vacant houses and is also known as the religious hub in Eastern Bhutan. Most tshechu at the village level in Bartsham began in the mid-20th century, but the practice has been transformed by the gradual socioeconomic development across Bhutan over the same period.

Here, I will show that a few tshechu disappeared due to the shortage of villagers who are sponsor-cum-organizer. However, some responded to modernisation and rapid changes in the village's social structure and continued practising their village tshechu. It also helps to deepen understanding of the meaning of community vitality in Eastern Bhutan.



Yoshiki Ishiuchi is a PhD candidate in the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University in Japan. He is also a Research Officer at the JICA Grassroots Partnership Program “Human Resource Development toward Community Building by University-Community Engagement in Trashigang, Bhutan”. He stayed in a rural community in eastern Bhutan from 2022 to 2024 and was involved in the research activities for Bhutan's first community museum, “Bartsham Community Museum” as part of the project. In his research, he focuses on the historical changes of the local community and its networks, and the impact of the migration on the livelihood and community's activities today.

# Speaker

## Nora Samosir

Lecturer, LASELLE College of the Arts

### Reversing Migration Through Soft Power?

There are multiple reasons for the migration issue facing Bhutan. These include Bhutanese having overseas networks, seeking employment opportunities, and the image of the destination country as prosperous and “liberal” towards immigrants (Lamsang 2023). While a common response to the migration issue is to ask how the trend can be slowed or halted, in this paper, we discuss the possibility of reversing migration through an enhancement of Bhutan’s own soft power.

Soft power (Nye 2004a, b) refers to the influence that a nation-state or alliance enjoys because of attractiveness or likeability rather than force or coercion. In the case of the Korean Wave (Samosir and Wee 2024), South Korea’s global soft power success is a contributing factor to a pattern of reverse migration. Since the early 1990s, South Korea’s foreign-resident population has soared more than 3,000 percent, owing to the nation’s increased economic prosperity and global visibility (Jo 2018). Korean returnees are motivated by perceived better medical care and a greater sense of belonging (Kwak 2024).

The potential for soft power to address migration by inducing a desire to return remains under-explored. We suggest that the following lessons can be learnt from the Korean Wave.

One, there is a need to maintain regular connections with the Bhutanese diaspora. When His Majesty The King visited Australia, about 16,000 Bhutanese gathered at Perth’s HBF Park Stadium to meet him. This shows that there is a strong desire to maintain connections with the home country, but such connections must be fostered on a regular basis rather than via occasional high-level events.



Nora Samosir teaches Voice in the BA Acting and BA Musical Theatre programmes at Lasalle College of the Arts, UAS. Prior to Lasalle, Nora taught at the National Institute of Education and the National University of Singapore. Nora has acted in stage productions with Cake Theatricals, TheatreWorks, The Necessary Stage, Teater Ekamatra, The Theatre Practice, Singapore Repertory Theatre, Wild Rice, Checkpoint Theatre, amongst many others. She has also appeared in films and on television. She is currently working with Lionel Wee on their second co-authored book (working title - *Performing the Korean Wave: The Consumption of Hallyu Across the World*).

Two, the products, activities, and artists associated with the Korean Wave are generally perceived as being non-threatening, likeable, and highly desirable. In this regard, the positive image enjoyed by Bhutanese cultural products globally is a strong point that needs to be sustained. The proposed plans for Gelephu Mindfulness City are relevant here but care must be taken that the intended megacity does not become a white elephant.

Three, the Korean Wave works as soft power because the creative industries enjoy artistic autonomy. Any messages or impressions conveyed about South Korea in songs, films or drama series, can all be seen as authentic expressions insofar as these are motivated by artistic and entertainment considerations as opposed to being political propaganda that has been dictated by the state. South Korea's artistic activities and products increase global interest in the country's culture and history, and this interest is then appropriated by the state to boost tourism, the economy, and international relations. In this regard, Acharya (2020) notes that Bhutan established a Film Commission in 2018, and its members even visited Korea to learn from the many successes of the Korean Wave. However, Acharya (ibid.) notes that 'Overzealous and self-styled cultural custodians' have been too strict in banning perceived regulatory transgressions, thus causing serious damage to the budding film industry. For Bhutan, reversing migration through soft power requires not just improvements in economy and infrastructure. Changes to cultural mindsets may be even more difficult to implement.

# Speaker

## Lhawang Ugyel

Senior Lecturer, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University

### The Migration–Environment Paradox in Bhutan

Migration in Bhutan, both internal and external migration, has been increasing in recent years. For instance, 38% of its population migrated from rural to urban areas between the period 2005 to 2017. The migration from Bhutan to international destinations increased two-fold between the same period (i.e., from 8,979 in 2005 to 15,756 in 2017). The external migration numbers have increased drastically over the last five years, and as of 2024, approximately 64,000 have migrated. Based on data from Bhutan's second population and housing census conducted in 2017 this presentation is part of other broader studies that examine the characteristics and trend of internal and international migration. These migration trends are analysed against the various socio-economic variables, such as, income, economic activity, education, health, agriculture and infrastructure. In this presentation, we focus on some of the key determinants of migration and their relationship with the environment. Of all the variables examined, construction of roads was the key variable that was statistically significant. On the one hand, road connectivity is important to reduce out-migration. And, on the other hand, there are clearly issues related to the construction of roads, particularly poorly constructed farm roads, on the environment. The other dimension of migration and its relation to environment is the depopulation in the rural areas of Bhutan and its impact on land use.



Lhawang Ugyel is currently a Senior Lecturer at the Crawford School of Public Policy, the Australian National University. He has an extensive background and experiences working in both academia as well as public service. As an academic, and in addition to ANU, he taught at UNSW Canberra, Tallin University of Technology (as Visiting Professor) and University of Papua New Guinea (as Visiting Lecturer).

He also worked with Bhutan's civil service for close to 10 years (as Policy Analyst and Senior Human Resources Officer) and worked with the Australian Diabetes Educators Association (as a part-time research officer) for approx. three years whilst doing his PhD at ANU. Since 2019, Lhawang worked with WHO as a short-term technical consultant on three separate projects related to community health workers programs in PNG and Vanuatu.

Lhawang's research specialises in public policy and administration focusing on public sector reforms in developing countries, and has published with journals, such as, Democratization, Policy and Politics, Review of Policy Research, Australian Journal of Public Administration and Public Administration and Development. His PhD thesis was also published as a monograph (Palgrave Macmillan 2016). Lhawang is currently working on Buddhist and Oceanic aspects of Non-Western Public Administration and the implementation of happiness and well-being policies.

# Speaker

## Ganeshman Gurung

Researcher and Project Consultant



Dr. Ganeshman Gurung is a researcher and project consultant specialising in disaster risk management, climate studies, education, and social sciences. Holding a PhD in Climate Studies, he is dedicated to enhancing Bhutan's resilience to climate-induced disasters. Currently serving as Programme Director at Startup First Institute for Entrepreneurship and Management, he has held academic roles including Lecturer, Dean of Research, and Project Coordinator at Samtse College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan. His expertise spans project management, data analysis, and policy research in education, climate adaptation, and disaster risk reduction. He has led research projects funded by UNDP, UNICEF, and other international agencies, focusing on governance, education, and disaster preparedness. His recent study, *Analysis and Need Assessment for Advancing Disaster Data Architecture for Climate-Induced Loss and Damage in Bhutan*, critically examines Bhutan's disaster data systems, highlighting institutional, technological, and standardisation gaps. Advocating for an integrated disaster database, his work aims to strengthen evidence-based policymaking and access to climate finance.

**Analysis and Need Assessment for Advancing Disaster Data Architecture for Climate-Induced Loss and Damage in Bhutan**

Climate-induced disasters pose significant challenges to Bhutan, affecting critical sectors such as agriculture, hydropower, and infrastructure. However, limitations in data collection, management, and dissemination hinder effective disaster response and climate adaptation. This study assesses Bhutan's current disaster data architecture, identifying key gaps in institutional coordination, technological infrastructure, and data standardisation. The study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating stakeholder consultations, literature review, and technical assessments. Findings indicate a need for a centralised and interoperable disaster database to enhance evidence-based decision-making and access to climate finance mechanisms such as the Loss and Damage Fund. The paper proposes a framework for improving disaster data architecture, including policy reforms, technological upgrades, and capacity building. Additionally, the study highlights the fragmented nature of existing data management practices, which limits inter-agency collaboration and the integration of real-time hazard monitoring systems. Addressing these gaps through a harmonised approach can improve disaster preparedness, response efficiency, and long-term resilience. The research further underscores the importance of aligning national disaster data management efforts with global best practices, ensuring that Bhutan can leverage international funding and expertise to mitigate climate-related risks effectively.

# Speaker

## Deki Yangzom

Associate Lecturer, Social Science, Royal  
Thimphu College

### **Harnessing Knowledge and Skill Remittance: The Potential Role of the Bhutanese Diaspora in Nation Development Through Return Migration**

Bhutanese who have voluntarily migrated to Australia have created a vibrant diasporic community, many of whom retain a strong connection to their homeland. These migrants were deeply touched by His Majesty's effort to personally visit them in 2024. The visionary 'Gelephu Mindfulness City' project, a commitment stirred by His Majesty to better Bhutanese citizens, have instilled a sense of responsibility as well as an urgency in many Bhutanese migrants to return home. In this age defined, by global integration and networking, and increasing transnational mobility of not just people but also knowledge and skills, Bhutanese diasporic community can emerge as a significant contributor to Bhutan's national development. The Bhutanese diaspora remains a powerful resource of knowledge vis-à-vis skills upon incentivizing reverse brain-drain can forward Bhutan's socio-economic and cultural progress in sustainable but also innovative ways. This anthropological study invites its readers to the Australian city of Perth that beholds around 25,000 Bhutanese migrants to reflect on their shared experiences of being a 'Buddhist-Bhutanese' and how our entrenched value of 'compassion' flourishes especially into work and educational spaces in the foreign land. The study investigates the Bhutanese migrants' aspirations and motivations to return and remit, particularly knowledge capacity and entrepreneurship skills, inspired by His Majesty's drive for innovative Bhutan and his plea for their contribution. Bhutanese migrants perceive His Majesty's plea as a welcoming environment that recognizes and values diaspora contributions, and hence must be rendered. This study employing semi-structured interviews and participant observation allows an understanding of the Bhutanese diasporic community in Perth and their effort to strengthen knowledge and skills with the hope to bring in expertise and innovation along with capital upon their return. This research contributes first, to the Bhutanese migration studies from anthropological lens that fills in the dearth of ethnographic studies from Bhutan. And, second to the larger scholarship on diaspora and development studies from a small nation state like Bhutan in the Eastern Himalayas.



Deki Yangzom is a young Bhutanese Researcher. She currently teaches in Anthropology programme at Royal Thimphu College, Royal University of Bhutan. Driven by her background in Sociology and Anthropology, she is committed to furthering anthropological study in Bhutan along the themes of cultural heritage and identity, climate change and ecology, livelihoods and migration. Her current research engagement has been in the emergent fields of Environmental Humanities and Multispecies Studies in Bhutan's climate change context. Drawing on her research work, she is also engaged as a Youth and Climate Advocate, working closely with various youth organizations in Bhutan.

# Speaker

## Sangay Dorji

Technical Director, Program Specialist at  
Tarayana Foundation

### **Community-Led Nature-Based Solutions and Springshed Management: Tarayana Foundation's Approach to Sustainable Climate Resilience in Bhutan**

Bhutan's dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, livestock, hydropower, and forestry, coupled with its mountainous terrain, amplifies its exposure to climate-induced risks. Key indicators such as rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, glacial retreat, and increasing extreme weather events threaten Bhutan's ecosystems, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of its rural communities, requiring immediate and strategic interventions. Realizing these threats from climate change, Tarayana Foundation integrates community-driven approaches with nature-based solutions (NBS) to address Bhutan's pressing environmental and climate challenges. A key focus lies in springshed management to combat the critical issue of drying water sources. Following ICIMOD's six-steps springshed management guidelines, the Foundation has successfully rejuvenated 24 springs out of 54 assessed, while forming 45 water user groups to ensure sustainable water governance. Complementing this, the Foundation has introduced rainwater harvesting systems and payment of environmental services (PES), fostering resilience among water-stressed communities.

Promoting sustainable livelihoods, the Foundation employs NBS such as climate-resilient agriculture and ecosystem restoration, aligning with Bhutan's National Adaptation Plan (NAP 2023). These initiatives enhance water and food security, preserve biodiversity, and mitigate climate change impacts. With active community engagement, capacity building, and inclusion of marginalized groups, Tarayana Foundation not only restores ecosystems but also empowers local communities, exemplifying a rights-based, inclusive approach to sustainable environmental management and climate adaptation.



Sangay Dorji, is a Technical Director/Program Specialist at Tarayana Foundation. He is leading initiatives in climate resilience, agroecology, livelihoods, natural resource management, biodiversity conservation, and community engagement. He holds a Ph.D. in Conservation Planning and Climate Change from Australia. With over 15 years in the Department of Forests and Park Services, He has worked extensively on protected areas, conservation policies, research community-based projects, ecological restoration, and climate change in the public sector.

His passion lies in bridging scientific research and policy to create meaningful impact, empowering rural communities to become stewards of their natural resources for future generations.



# Speaker

## Samiksha Rai

Research Assistant, SUCCESS Project, Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities

### **Gendered Pathways of Migration: Examining Women's Experiences in Rural and Urban Transitions**

This study explores the gendered dimensions of migration by comparing the experiences of women in the rural origin of Denchuka in Samtse Dzongkhag and the urban destination of Pasakha under Chukha Dzongkhag. While migration is often driven by the pursuit of better economic opportunities, it also brings new social, economic, and emotional challenges. Limited livelihood options in rural areas drive individuals to urban centers, where they must navigate unfamiliar environments, shifting social dynamics, and structural inequalities. The study examines how these transitions reshape gender roles, labor patterns, and household dynamics, and their impact on the well-being of women migrants. It highlights the unique constraints women face in adapting to new socio-economic landscapes and the strategies they employ to achieve stability amid uncertainty. This study draws from qualitative fieldwork in both places, encompassing ethnography, in-depth interviews, life-histories and focus group discussion conducted across rural and urban setting



Samiksha Rai is a Research Assistant at the Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities at Royal Thimphu College. She holds a degree in Environmental Management and aims to specialize in migration, gender, and climate change. Her research explores the lived experiences and challenges of women driven by migration. She has also co-authored a paper titled "Female Migrant Workers in Bhutan's Liquor Industry." for The Diplomat

# Speaker

## Tshering Choden (presenting with Pema Choden)

Law student, Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law

### Enhancing livelihood resilience and food security through remittances in rural Denchukha, Bhutan

The emerging research shows that internal migration is increasingly recognized as a significant component of climate adaptation strategies. While it is a critical adaptation strategy, it is not a panacea. Coordinated policies that recognize the multifaceted nature of migration are needed to facilitate adaptation and reduce future costs, benefiting both origin and destination regions (Adger et al., 2020). A tracer study is carried out between Denchukha, Samtse and Thimphu using life histories and semi-structured interviews to focus on lived experiences of local households including migrants and their family left behind to explore the extent to which migration alleviates or exacerbates vulnerabilities and how it impacts well-being in both the origin and destination areas. In Bhutan, agriculture and to a lesser extent pastoralism, is a primary livelihood for many local communities that increasingly leave them vulnerable to climate change impacts and causes significant crop losses, affecting food security and prompting shifts in cropping patterns (Katel et al., 2024). Climate change affects agricultural productivity and livelihood security especially in regions heavily dependent on agriculture (Alverio et al., 2024), and Denchukha is no exception. Using the Scoones' Sustainable Livelihood Framework, the paper will set the vulnerability context of Denchukha and analyze the role of migration in enhancing wellbeing in the origin. For instance, migration-based income / remittances hence help farmers to secure their food and access non-farm livelihood options to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience.



Tshering Choden is a law student at Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law and currently attached as a research intern at the Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities. During her academic period, she has conducted policy analysis, case reviews, and advocacy on critical environmental issues, including water privatization, biodiversity conservation, and corporate social responsibility in Bhutan. Her forthcoming publications include “Corporate Social Responsibility in Climate Change: A Path Towards Transparency, Accountability and Sustainable Development” and “From Public Springs to Private Fountains: Examining the Ecological and Environmental effects of Excessive Privatization of Water resources”. Tshering has also engaged in climate negotiation workshops and legal forums, exploring Bhutan’s legal standing in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding climate change. Her work reflects a strong commitment to environmental justice and the role of law in shaping sustainable policies.

# Speaker

## Tashi Paldon

Research Associate, SUCCESS Project, Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities

### Exploring Labour Security of Low income Migrants in Thimphu

While urban centers may offer more job opportunities and attract migration from rural areas, workers often face challenges related to employee and job security. A key issue is the lack of awareness about labour laws and employee rights, coupled with varying levels of education amongst these employees/workers. This research aims to explore the existing practise between employee and employer relationship - in private organizations and companies in Thimphu - and see if there is an added advantage to the employees being aware of their labour rights. This research will also explore if level of education plays a role on how informed an individual is and if it plays a role in accessing jobs with better employee security.



Tashi Paldon is Research Associate for the Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities at Royal Thimphu College. She is currently engaged in the Successful Intervention Pathways for Migration as Adaptation (SUCCESS) project. Her research interests include labour policies, gender and social inclusion, and migratio

# Speaker

## Choeying Seldon

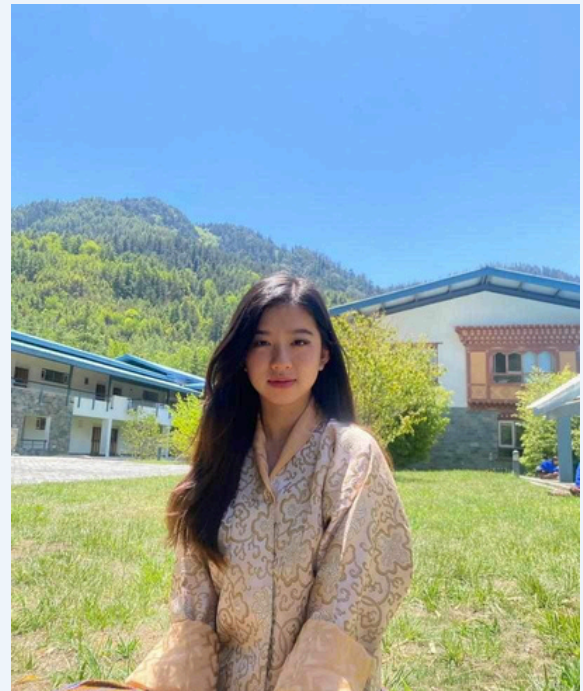
Research Associate, SUCCESS Project, Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities

### **From Dukha (hardship) to Sukha (happiness)? : Intergenerational Mobility of Low-Income Migrants in Thimphu**

Migration is often regarded as a pathway to upward socio-economic mobility for migrant families. However, this process is complex and shaped by various structural and contextual factors that influence their experiences in destination areas. While first-generation migrants aspire to improve their lives and those of future generations, their aspirations are shaped—and at times constrained—by broader socio-economic forces beyond their control.

This paper examines the trajectories of poverty and well-being among low-income migrant families in Thimphu across generations, with a focus on how education and occupation mediate mobility outcomes. While migration creates opportunities for socio-economic advancement, the intergenerational transmission of vulnerabilities can limit progress. This study assesses the extent of mobility observed thus far and identifies the conditions that facilitate upward mobility, stagnation, or downward mobility.

Education plays a critical role in shaping intergenerational mobility. Although second-generation migrant children in Thimphu have better access to education than their parents, low educational attainment remains a significant barrier to upward mobility. Their educational outcomes are influenced by the socio-economic context in which they are raised, including parental social class, adaptive capacities, and broader social conditions. This paper explores how these intersecting factors shape the futures of migrant children as they navigate spaces that are both familiar and foreign.



Choeying Seldon is a Research Associate for the Successful Intervention Pathways for Migration as Adaptation Project. Her work focuses on livelihood trajectories of low-income migrants in destination places and non-migrants in origin places. Her research interests lie in the fields of child and family welfare and social innovation. She is the lead author of a chapter in the upcoming Routledge Handbook of Himalayan Environment and Development. She has a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Sociology.

# Speaker

## Pema Choden

Erasmus Mundus Scholar, University of  
Copenhagen and Warsaw

### **Enhancing livelihood resilience and food security through remittances in rural Denchukha, Bhutan**

The emerging research shows that internal migration is increasingly recognized as a significant component of climate adaptation strategies. While it is a critical adaptation strategy, it is not a panacea. Coordinated policies that recognize the multifaceted nature of migration are needed to facilitate adaptation and reduce future costs, benefiting both origin and destination regions (Adger et al., 2020). [Denchukha should come in earlier] A tracer study is carried out using life histories and semi-structured interviews to focus on lived experiences of local households including migrants and their family left behind to explore the extent to which migration alleviates or exacerbates vulnerabilities and how it impacts well-being in both the origin and destination areas. In Bhutan, agriculture and to a lesser extent pastoralism, is a primary livelihood for many local communities that increasingly leave them vulnerable to climate change impacts and causes significant crop losses, affecting food security and prompting shifts in cropping patterns (Katel et al., 2024). Climate change affects agricultural productivity and livelihood security especially in regions heavily dependent on agriculture (Alverio et al., 2024), and Denchukha is no exception. Using the Scoones' Sustainable Livelihood Framework, the paper will set the vulnerability context of Denchukha and analyze the role of migration in enhancing wellbeing in the origin. For instance, migration-based income / remittances hence help farmers to secure their food and access non-farm livelihood options to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience.



Pema Choden is an Erasmus Mundus scholar pursuing her Joint Msc in Global Environment and Development specialising in Sustainable Environment Development from the University of Copenhagen and Warsaw. She graduated with a degree in Anthropology from RTC. Her current field of study is lively ethnography, multisensory ethnography, multispecies studies, sustainability and environmental humanities in the Bhutan highlands.

Pema brings her vast experience working with young people in Bhutan and the Asia Pacific, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Copenhagen on global problems ranging from Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), climate change adaptation and mitigation, agroecology and sustainable intelligence. She aims to empower all young people to make free and informed decisions in order to protect themselves from all forms of harmful practices, and aims to advocate sustainable initiatives.

# Speaker

## Katsu Masaki

Faculty, Konan University

### **Translocal Community Economy: Leveraging Rural-Urban Migration to Enhance Livelihoods in Shingkar**

Bhutan has experienced rapid rural-urban migration—the fastest in South Asia—creating an urgent need for the government to promote balanced development. As highlighted in the Economic Development Policy, its priority is to create an “enabling environment to transform [rural economies] from subsistence to commercial production, including post-harvest value addition, processing, and marketing.”

How can the government leverage the potential of rural-urban migration to help create an “enabling environment” for livelihood improvements in migrants’ places of origin while mitigating its possible negative impacts, such as social fragmentation and cultural erosion? This presentation addresses this question by analyzing Bhutan Healthy Tea as a case study—a herbal tea manufacturer located in Shingkar, Ura, Bumthang. The enterprise was launched in March 2021 by an entrepreneur who was born and raised in the mountain village but later migrated to the central town of Bumthang.

What sets Bhutan Healthy Tea apart is that its final products are packaged and shipped directly from the village, unlike other businesses that only source raw materials from rural areas. Despite challenges in quality control and market accessibility, the enterprise became profitable from its inception. It directly employs three residents for manufacturing and packaging and engages nearly half of the 40 households in herb collection, helping them increase their earnings and cope with economic difficulties while also empowering household members with financial independence.

Bhutan Healthy Tea exemplifies the promotion of a “translocal community economy,” integrating commercial success with community well-being. It not only challenges the conventional practice of locating higher-value activities like processing and packaging in central areas but also strives to ensure equitable benefits across the village.



Katsu Masaki is on the faculty of Konan University, Japan. His research has focused on post-capitalist approaches to development. Among his major publications are “Operationalizing Farmers’ Cooperatives as ‘Social Innovation’ in Bhutan: Lessons from a Mountain Village Dairy Cooperative” (*Journal of South Asian Research*, 2(2)) and “Reorienting the Sustainable Development Goals: Lessons from Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness” (*Journal of Developing Societies*, 40(2)). He is a member of the executive committee of the Japan-Bhutan Friendship Association and also serves on the editorial board of the *Bhutan Journal of Management*. He holds a D.Phil. from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, UK.

To achieve this, the enterprise encourages the participation of villagers with limited mobility and economic challenges in herb collection and plans to expand its operations to involve a larger segment of the community in production. Additionally, the proprietor, with his strong sense of belonging and homeland membership, allocates a portion of the profits to rural development projects that benefit all residents.

A crucial factor in the enterprise's promotion of a "translocal community economy" is the presence of "translocal social capital"—trust and solidarity among people who share ancestral ties to their homeland. This has historically been nurtured by Shingkar Dechenling Phendey Tshogpa (SDPT), a welfare association founded in 2006 by individuals originally from the village but residing in Thimphu. SDPT has supported the restoration of Buddhist rituals and monuments, among other initiatives, with villagers reciprocating by contributing to their implementation. The proprietor has been an active participant in this association and has extended such bi-local collaborations to his enterprise's operations.

A key policy implication is that the government can actively engage out-migrants in initiatives to improve livelihoods in their places of origin while nurturing their connection to these areas. Just as the government plans to leverage the diaspora's sense of connection to Bhutan to support the Gelephu Mindfulness City project, a similar initiative could be implemented to address the challenges and opportunities associated with the acceleration of rural-urban migration within the country.

# Speaker

## Lekden Wangchuk (presenting with Katsu Masaki)

Acting Regional Secretary, Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry

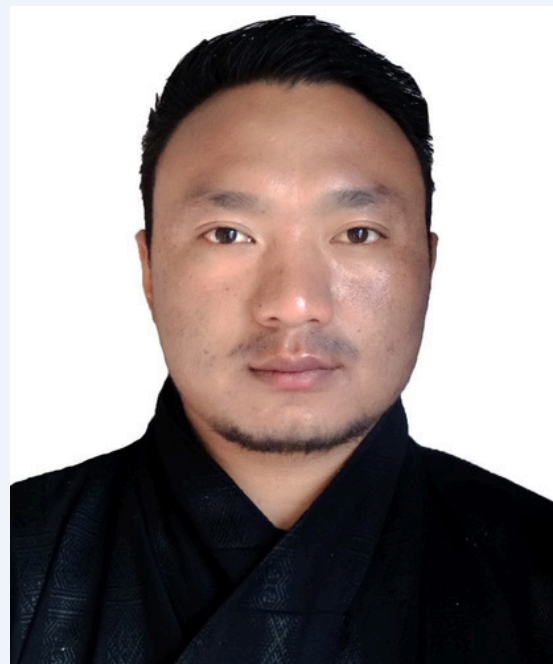
### **Translocal Community Economy: Leveraging Rural-Urban Migration to Enhance Livelihoods in Shingkhari**

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Lekden Wangchuk is the Acting Regional Secretary of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) and an individual business consultant. He has successfully advised numerous CSI startups, bringing a wealth of experience and a passion for driving business success. Additionally, he is a social entrepreneur engaged in the production of high-quality herbal health tea, with a vision to uplift rural livelihoods. He also volunteers in various community development activities in leadership positions, with a track record of improving the livelihoods of a number of rural people. He holds a diploma certificate in financial management from the Royal Institute of Management, RUB.



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# Speaker

## Sangay Wangchuk

Research Fellow at Charles Sturt University

### **Rural Depopulation in Bhutan: A Circular Relationship Perspective**

This talk explores the phenomenon of Gungtong – abandoned households due to rural outmigration and the interconnected factors driving this trend. Using a mixed-methods study involving surveys and stakeholder interviews, the presentation uncovers four key circular relationships: (1) economic motivations, where perceived income gains drive migration; (2) social impacts, where depopulation leads to reduced development and services; (3) environmental consequences, where fallow land increases human-wildlife conflict (HWC); and (4) sustainability challenges, where HWC further undermines farming viability. Understanding these feedback loops is essential for crafting policies that mitigate rural depopulation and support sustainable livelihoods in Bhutan.



Sangay brings a unique blend of academic and professional experience to his work in environmental management and sustainability. With 14 years at the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Forestry Research and Training, he developed a strong foundation in forestry research. He then pursued a PhD in Human Geography in Australia and subsequently taught at Charles Sturt University for two years. Currently, as an Adjunct Research Fellow at Charles Sturt University and NSW Regional Manager for Communities at NGH, Sangay specialises in community engagement and social impact assessment, supporting the development of renewable energy projects across Australia. His expertise spans academia, research, and practical solutions, driving progress in sustainable environmental management and energy transition.

# Speaker

## Pallavi Majumdar

Professor, Communication Arts & Creative Media, Royal Thimphu College

### **Bhutan's Unspoken Exodus: How Media Narratives Ignore Climate-Driven Migration**

Migration in Bhutan is shaped by economic aspirations, agrarian distress, and climate variability. While external migration is primarily driven by better opportunities abroad, internal migration is influenced by declining rural livelihoods, changing water availability, and shifting agricultural productivity. However, despite Bhutan's climate vulnerabilities—including glacial retreat, erratic monsoons, and rising environmental uncertainty—climate-induced migration remains largely absent from national media narratives.

Comparative studies from Bangladesh, Nepal, and India show that climate-driven displacement is gaining recognition in both media and policy discourse. In Bhutan, however, migration is predominantly framed through economic and social lenses, with little media attention to environmental stressors as migration triggers. News coverage of climate change tends to focus on disasters such as glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and landslides, while slow-onset environmental changes—such as the depletion of Cordyceps harvesting zones, shrinking pasturelands, and decreasing crop yields—are underreported as migration factors.

This study investigates these media silences through thematic analysis of news content, blogs, and social media posts, alongside interviews with journalists, influencers, and media professionals. Using Environmental-Drivers, Social-Causal, and Media Representation frames, the study assesses how migration is covered in Bhutanese media, why climate factors are often overlooked, and how public perception is shaped by media discourse.

Findings indicate the need for stronger media engagement with climate-migration linkages, greater emphasis on slow-onset climate effects, and improved journalistic capacity to report on environmental drivers of migration. By addressing these gaps, Bhutanese media can help foster a more informed public dialogue on climate migration, ensuring that environmental displacement is no longer an unspoken crisis.



Dr. Pallavi Majumdar is an academic leader and media expert with over 27 years of experience in higher education, research, and media practice. She is a Professor at Royal Thimphu College (RTC), Bhutan, where she teaches journalism writing, communication research, media theory and global media practices, with a strong emphasis on how media shapes societal discourse.

Beyond academia, Dr. Majumdar has extensive journalism and consultancy experience. She has worked as a journalist and editor with publications such as *The Times of India* and *Business Standard*, covering governance, environmental issues, and policy analysis. She has also led consultancy projects with UNICEF, Save the Children, and the Journalists Association of Bhutan, focusing on media literacy, misinformation, and advocacy communication. Additionally, she has led advocacy initiatives, including the Bhutan-CMS Vatavaran Forum on Climate Action and Biodiversity Conservation, and national campaigns promoting Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights and entrepreneurship in Bhutan's handicrafts sector. Her research explores media's impact on social change, digital inequalities, and the evolution of higher education in Bhutan.

# Speaker

## Kinley Dorji

PhD Scholar, Royal University of Bhutan

### **Fertile Paddy Fields and Empty Villages: A Case Study of the Changes in the Agriculture Practice System Due to rampant rural flight in Kurtoe.**

Bhutan's rural depopulation has primarily been attributed to rural-urban migration. The decreasing population trend in rural areas is also increasingly attributed to overseas emigration. Within Lhuentse, an eastern district, Kurtoe has the highest percentage of Gungtong with 86 (38%) out of 226 households declared Gungtong (Lhuentse Dzongkhag, 2024). The term Gungtong, widely used in public discourses, is sketchy but describes empty registered houses within the district. Widely prevalent in Eastern Bhutan, the shift in population is gradually changing the rural landscape, economy, and society (Wangchuk et al., 2024).

Primarily an agrarian society, Lhuentse produces various cereals, fruits, and vegetables. Livestock is an important element in the agriculture system. Kurtoe is one of the four primary gewogs under Lhuentse producing paddy with more than 90% of the households owning paddy fields. The socio-cultural and economic lives of the people are deeply influenced by the calendric field activities surrounding rice production, or more so, it used to be. Informed by the data collected – quantitative as well as qualitative – through surveys, interviews, and participant observations, certain changes in the agriculture practice system can be observed. Mostly due to rural depopulation, the agriculture system has principally changed in three aspects: i) the land-ownership and land-use dynamics, ii) the adoption of a hybrid (manual-mechanical) production system, and iii) the incoming of new commercially lucrative crop species.

These changes depict the sustainability of Agriculture in two important ways. On the one hand, it not only illustrates people's ability to adapt to the changing demographic landscape but also presages flexibility and resilience in the face of climate uncertainties. However, on the other hand, certain characteristic changes, basically related to land ownership and land-use dynamics, foretell the visible future complex situation, which can result in the abandonment of overall agriculture work.

This paper, aimed to understand the changes in agriculture practice in Kurtoe primarily as an aftermath of rural flight, by evaluating the comparative labour economy, characterizing changes in seasonal agricultural practices, assessing implications of migration on land ownership and land use, and discussing implications surrounding socio-cultural-economic elements of the Kurtoe community.



Kinley Dorji is a lecturer and Programme Leader for Environmental Management at Royal Thimphu College. Originally from eastern Bhutan, he holds a Bachelor's in Sustainable Development and a Master's in Environmental Sciences. Currently a PhD scholar at the Royal University of Bhutan, his research explores climate-induced migration as an adaptation strategy, focusing on eastern Bhutan.

His work integrates quantitative environmental research with Bhutanese environmental philosophies, emphasizing sustainability, Buddhist philosophy, and traditional livelihoods. His latest publication, *Storied Toponyms in Bhutan*, examines the connections between environmental change, cultural narratives, and spirituality. An avid traveler, Kinley collects stories from across Bhutan to deepen his understanding of its landscapes and traditions.

# Speaker

## Lionel Wee (presenting with Nora Samosir)

Provost's Chair Professor in the Dept. of English, Linguistics and Theatre Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore.

### Reversing Migration Through Soft Power?

There are multiple reasons for the migration issue facing Bhutan. These include Bhutanese having overseas networks, seeking employment opportunities, and the image of the destination country as prosperous and “liberal” towards immigrants (Lamsang 2023). While a common response to the migration issue is to ask how the trend can be slowed or halted, in this paper, we discuss the possibility of reversing migration through an enhancement of Bhutan's own soft power.

Soft power (Nye 2004a, b) refers to the influence that a nation-state or alliance enjoys because of attractiveness or likeability rather than force or coercion. In the case of the Korean Wave (Samosir and Wee 2024), South Korea's global soft power success is a contributing factor to a pattern of reverse migration. Since the early 1990s, South Korea's foreign-resident population has soared more than 3,000 percent, owing to the nation's increased economic prosperity and global visibility (Jo 2018). Korean returnees are motivated by perceived better medical care and a greater sense of belonging (Kwak 2024).

The potential for soft power to address migration by inducing a desire to return remains under-explored. We suggest that the following lessons can be learnt from the Korean Wave.

One, there is a need to maintain regular connections with the Bhutanese diaspora. When His Majesty The King visited Australia, about 16,000 Bhutanese gathered at Perth's HBF Park Stadium to meet him. This shows that there is a strong desire to maintain connections with the home country, but such connections must be fostered on a regular basis rather than via occasional high-level events.



Lionel Wee is a Provost's Chair Professor in the Dept. of English, Linguistics and Theatre Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. He works on language policy, World Englishes, language ideologies, and general issues in sociolinguistics. He sits on the editorial boards of Applied Linguistics, Journal of Sociolinguistics, English World-Wide, Sociolinguistic Studies, among others. His forthcoming book is *Automation in Communication: The Ideological Implications of Language Machines* (Routledge, 2025). He is currently working with Nora Samosir on a book about consumption as performance (*Performing the Korean Wave: The Consumption of Hallyu Across the World*).

Two, the products, activities, and artists associated with the Korean Wave are generally perceived as being non-threatening, likeable, and highly desirable. In this regard, the positive image enjoyed by Bhutanese cultural products globally is a strong point that needs to be sustained. The proposed plans for Gelephu Mindfulness City are relevant here but care must be taken that the intended megacity does not become a white elephant.

Three, the Korean Wave works as soft power because the creative industries enjoy artistic autonomy. Any messages or impressions conveyed about South Korea in songs, films or drama series, can all be seen as authentic expressions insofar as these are motivated by artistic and entertainment considerations as opposed to being political propaganda that has been dictated by the state. South Korea's artistic activities and products increase global interest in the country's culture and history, and this interest is then appropriated by the state to boost tourism, the economy, and international relations. In this regard, Acharya (2020) notes that Bhutan established a Film Commission in 2018, and its members even visited Korea to learn from the many successes of the Korean Wave. However, Acharya (ibid.) notes that 'Overzealous and self-styled cultural custodians' have been too strict in banning perceived regulatory transgressions, thus causing serious damage to the budding film industry.

For Bhutan, reversing migration through soft power requires not just improvements in economy and infrastructure. Changes to cultural mindsets may be even more difficult to implement.

# Speaker

## Kinzang Yangden

Lecturer at Faculty of Nursing and Public Health, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Science of Bhutan

### ***Assessing the Quality of Life (QoL) of Grandparents as Primary Caregivers Among Local and International Bhutanese Migrant Families.***

Migration is becoming an increasingly important socio-economic issue in Bhutan, as both local and international migration trends continue to rise. Young adults are migrating for work to countries like Australia, Canada, and the Gulf, while others are moving from rural areas to urban centers like Thimphu. This trend is creating a significant shift in family dynamics, as grandparents are called upon to take care of their grandchildren. Such physical movement is often viewed as a temporary solution to fill the caregiving gap, but it creates new challenges for the grandparents in terms of their quality of life (QoL), as caregiving responsibilities are known to impact their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. However, limited studies have been conducted in this context, creating a clear gap in the literature regarding the specific challenges faced by grandparents as primary caregivers in Bhutan. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring how migration and caregiving intersect to influence the quality of life for grandparents as primary caregivers in Bhutan. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study assesses caregivers' quality of life using the WHOQOL scale while examining migration patterns, specifically the outflow of younger generations to Australia and their effects on family structures. The findings reveal that while migration and caregiving responsibilities offer potential benefits, they also present significant stressors. Caregivers experience physical health decline, mental health challenges such as stress and isolation, and a lack of social support, which lead to reduced autonomy and life satisfaction. In conclusion, this research provides stakeholders with a clearer understanding of grandparents' needs, enabling more effective support for their wellbeing and positive outcomes for the children in their care.



Kinzang Yangden (She/Her/Hers) is currently serving as a Lecturer at Faculty of Nursing and Public Health, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Science of Bhutan. She teaches a range of critical health subjects including epidemiology, biostatistics, research methodologies, environmental and occupational health, and sociology. Beyond the confines of the classroom, Kinzang actively participates in skill development initiatives, particularly research and projects focused on non-communicable disease (NCD) in Bhutan, underscoring her dedication to continuous professional growth.

# Speaker

## Sarala Pradhan (presenting with Kinzang Yangden)

Project Coordinator, SUCCESS Project, Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities

### ***Assessing the Quality of Life (QoL) of Grandparents as Primary Caregivers Among Local and International Bhutanese Migrant Families.***

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Sarala Pradhan (She/Her/Hers) is a Project Coordinator for the Successful Intervention Pathways for Migration as Adaptation Project. She has a Master's in Human Rights, specializing in Public Policy from the University of Denver, and a Bachelor's in Arts, majoring in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics from the Asian University for Women.

Her work includes a diverse background in communal work, mentorship, consulting sales, and non-profit development. She also has over five years of experience working with academic institutions in various leadership capacities, including DEI (diversity equity inclusion) and immigrant advocacy-focused work.



# Speaker

## Pratika Pradhan (presenting with Kinzang Yangden)

Associate Lecturer, Royal Thimphu College

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Pratika Pradhan (She/Her/Hers) is an Associate Lecturer at Royal Thimphu College in the faculty of Social Sciences. She has a Master's degree in Development Studies from Brac Institute of Governance and Development, a post-graduate diploma in Economics Education from Samtse College of Education, and a Bachelor's Degree in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics from the Asian University for Women. Her work includes a diverse background in Politics, Economics, Sociology, Gender, Leadership, Environmental Humanities, and Social Entrepreneurship. She has also mentored young women with the Wedu Mentorship programme based in Thailand. Her passion for social change has also assisted her to facilitate a Asia Pacific Youth Exchange programme in Bangkok with regard to sustainable development goals and social entrepreneurship.

# Speaker

## Pema Lhamo (presenting with Kinzang Yangden)

### Environmentalist and Water Specialist

#### ***Assessing the Quality of Life (QoL) of Grandparents as Primary Caregivers Among Local and International Bhutanese Migrant Families.***

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Pema Lhamo (She/Her/Hers) is an environmentalist and a water specialist with an MSc in Water Science, Policy, and Management from the University of Oxford. She has considerable experience working in water resource management, climate adaptation planning, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development. With a proven track record across government agencies, international organisations, and consultancy projects, she has significantly contributed to key initiatives addressing critical environmental challenges in Bhutan. In addition to her work in water management, Pema has supported global environmental advocacy efforts, for example, through her role as Country Ambassador for the Global Energy Outlook in Bhutan.

# Session Chair

## Jelle J.P Wouters

*Bhutan Project Lead, SUCCESS Project, Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities*



Jelle J.P. Wouters is an anthropology professor and the director of research and development at Royal Thimphu College in Bhutan. He read anthropology in Amsterdam, Oxford, and Shillong. Prior to joining Royal Thimphu College in 2015, he taught at Sikkim Central University, India, and the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, Germany. He is the author and editor of eleven books including *Subaltern Studies 2.0: Being Against the Capitalocene* (Chicago University Press, 2022), *In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency* (Oxford University Press, 2018), *Vernacular Politics in Northeast India* (Oxford University Press, 2022), *The Routledge Handbook of Highland Asia* (Routledge, 2023), and *Himalayan Climes and multispecies Encounters* (Routledge, 2024).

# Keynote Speaker

## Amina Maharjan

*Senior Livelihood and Migration Specialist, ICIMOD*



Amina Maharjan works as a Senior Livelihood and Migration Specialist at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). She has more than 15 years of experience as an interdisciplinary researcher and practitioner working in the intersection of human mobility, sustainable development, and climate adaptation in the Hindu Kush Himalaya. She also leads the work on systems & foresight thinking at ICIMOD. She has a Ph.D. in Agriculture from University of Giessen, Germany.

# Discussants

## Nitya Rao

*Professor, Gender and Development, University of East Anglia.*



Nitya Rao is Professor, Gender and Development at the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom and Director of the Norwich Institute for Sustainable Development. She has worked as a researcher and advocate in the field of women's rights, gendered wellbeing, and justice, with a focus on food, nutrition, health and livelihood security. She has published extensively on the gendered changes in agrarian relations, migration and livelihoods, especially in contexts of climatic variability and economic precarity. She has consistently engaged with policy and practice, at both the global and local levels. Apart from supporting networks of women farmers in India, she served on the Steering Group of the High-Level Panel of Experts to the Committee on World Food Security for two terms. She is currently Commissioner, EAT-Lancet 2.0 on healthy and sustainable diets, member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub, amongst others.

# Discussants

## Prathijna Koonacha Kodira

*Researcher and Practitioner, Indian Institute for Human Settlements*



Prathijna Poonacha Kodira is a researcher and practitioner who works on climate change adaptation focusing broadly on how social and environmental systems respond to impacts of climate change, especially in urban and peri urban geographies. Specifically, her work looks at livelihood transitions including processes of migration, nature-based solutions as adaptation and the intersection of climate change and the built environment. Her work also focuses on how knowledge production and research processes can translate to achieving tangible, deep and sustaining impact on ground.

Prathijna is experienced in enabling and engaging in multi stakeholder processes for dialogue and decision-making using various participatory and scenario planning tools. In the process, she is interested in unpacking the complexity of participatory decision making, especially in the urban context.

Prathijna has worked on several large multi-country, multi-partner projects and has authored several impactful reports and academic papers.

Prathijna is trained as an architect and has an advanced Master of Science degree in Human Settlements. In her early career, she has worked in the areas of heritage conservation, architecture and design.

# Discussants

## Tasneem Siddiqui

*Founding Chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).*



Tasneem Siddiqui is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Dhaka and the founding Chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU). Her works on climate change adaptation and migration, drivers and impact of internal and international labour migration, safe and sustainable cities inclusive to migrants have been published in the journals of *Population and Environment*, *Development Policy Review*, *Urban Studies* and in different volumes of Palgrave Macmillan, Edward Edgar, Routledge, Springer etc. She led the drafting of the National Strategy for Disaster and Climate Induced Internally Displaced Persons in Bangladesh, the national Overseas Employment Policy, 2006. She was a committee member that prepared the first draft of the Overseas Employment and Migration Act of 2013.

She is in the Global Editorial Board of Oxford Journal of Migration Studies. Since June, 2019 she has joined the state led Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) as member of the Advisory Committee. She is also one of the members of Board of trustees, Transparency International, Bangladesh Chapter.

# Discussants

## Neil Adger

*Professor of Human Geography, University of Exeter*



Neil Adger is a Professor of Human Geography at the University of Exeter, UK. He is an social scientist researching economic and social dynamics of climate change, resilience and vulnerability. He collaborates with social and natural scientists globally and currently co-leads a major investigation of migration as adaptation to climate change with Dr Chandni Singh, Dr Amina Maharjan and others. He has acted as a senior author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment and the Lancet Commission on Climate and Health.



# Discussants

## Ganesh Gurung

*SUCCESS Research Lead (Part-time Consultant), Nepal Institute of Development Studies*



Ganesh Gurung was a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University USA and a Yoneyama Fellow in Japan. He did his PhD from the University of Lucknow, India. Dr Gurung was an Hon member of the National Planning Commission, Nepal, and Executive Chairman of Nepal Government's think tank "Policy Research Institute". He led several of Nepal government delegations to various countries. He has several books and articles to his credit. Currently, he is researching migration and climate change in collaboration with ICIMOD.

# Panelists

## Dasho Phuntsho Rabten

*Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, Parliament of Bhutan*



Dasho Phuntsho Rabten is an Eminent Member of the National Council of Bhutan and currently serves as the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee in the Parliament of Bhutan. He has also chaired the Good Governance Committee, the Legislative Committee, and various special committees focused on education, technical and vocational training, and economic policy. His work has been instrumental in strengthening governance, public finance oversight, and institutional reform in Bhutan.

Before joining Parliament, Phuntsho served as the Chief Planning Officer at the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources and was a founding researcher at the Centre for Bhutan Studies, where he contributed to policy research on governance, employment, and Gross National Happiness. He was a member of the interim Government from November 2024 to January 2025. He holds a Master's in International Development Policy from Duke University, USA, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Development Studies from Japan.

With his extensive experience in governance and policy analysis, Phuntsho Rabten brings valuable insight into discussions fostering sustainable development and social resilience in Bhutan.

# Panelists

## Khurshid Alam

*Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP Bhutan*



Khurshid Alam took on the role of Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP Bhutan in September 2021.

A passionate advocate for an equitable, multilateral and resilient world, Mr. Alam's work spans over 25 years in 50 countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe.

He contributed significantly to advancing the theory and practice of climate and disaster resilience and played a critical role in responding to numerous international crises.

His career combines an array of leadership, consulting, and brief media roles. Before his UN career, he was the Managing Director of ThinkAhead Limited, a UK-based consulting company; and at ActionAid, also based in the UK in various roles, including as the International Tsunami Programme Director and Global Policy Advisor.

Prior to joining UNDP Bhutan, he was with the UNDP Bangladesh Country Office, holding the dual role of the Assistant Resident Representative and Head of the Inclusive Growth and Resilience Portfolio with eight practice areas and an annual delivery of over US\$50 million.

A frequent keynote speaker, he authored three books and numerous journal articles - and has been engaged in major inter-governmental processes.

# Panelists

## Chandni Singh

*Lead Researcher at the School of Environment and Sustainability, Indian Institute for Human Settlements in Bangalore*



Chandni Singh is Lead Researcher at the School of Environment and Sustainability, Indian Institute for Human Settlements in Bangalore. Her research examines the human dimensions of global environmental change focusing on drivers of vulnerability to climate change, linkages between climate change adaptation and development, and human migration and livelihood transitions. Geographically, her work is located in rapidly transitioning, climate hotspots across South Asia, especially in dryland rural areas and coastal cities, with emerging work across Sub-Saharan Africa. Chandni leads several multi-country projects such as ‘Successful intervention pathways for migration as adaptation (SUCCESS)’ project, and ‘Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture as Green Infrastructure (UPAGrI)’ and ‘Recovery with Dignity’. Chandni is a Lead Author on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)’s Working Group II Assessment Report 6 and Contributing author to the IPCC’s Special Report on 1.5°C. She serves on the editorial boards of Regional Environmental Change, Urbanisation, and WIRES Climate Change. Chandni holds a PhD in International Development from the University of Reading, UK and an MSc in Natural Resource Management from TERI University, India.