This case study analyses the role of migrant returnees in creating inclusive communities by extending opportunities to Dalits (also referred to as the ‘lower caste’ or ‘untouchables’) through the establishment of a Dalit run homestay businesses. The purpose of the homestay tourism service is to generate self-employment opportunities and economic growth in the rural communities by providing homestay residential services that offer a local cultural experience to their guest. The right to non-discrimination and respect, including social, physical and psychological wellbeing, is largely recognized as universal human rights and a precondition for a dignified life. Moreover, the extent to which the rights of migrants or displaced persons are protected and ensured is key for the successful integration of migrants and, consequently, their ability to contribute to society and community development. During the course of their migratory journey, migrants or displaced persons experience various forms of discrimination and xenophobia, which can affect their self-respect and prevent their full integration into their host communities. Furthermore, their personal experience of exclusion and their desire for social acceptance can also be associated with what they have experienced in their own home communities, where rigid forms of social and ethnic exclusion may exist. It is within this context that migrants, and particularly returnees, can serve as a powerful catalyst for disintegrating caste and ethnic boundaries through their involvement in locally led migration for development initiatives. For example, returnees can facilitate the social inclusion of the Dalits by organizing, inter alia, regular information and awareness raising campaigns or holding interaction meetings among groups of those within different castes. These initiatives can serve to promote the importance of social inclusion, principles of equality, and equal treatment irrespective of caste, ethnicity, sex, and religious affiliation, as is also enshrined in the new constitution (2015) of Nepal. Thus, the role of the migrant returnees can be instrumental in changing local perceptions and caste-based discriminations by sharing their own experience of exclusion.
and the constraints they faced as migrants. The role of local authorities and other local actors is crucial to support and encourage this. Indeed, their endorsement can legitimize return migrants’ efforts and thus give them more weight among the community. Moreover, working directly to support these initiatives can ensure they are in line with local development priorities. Finally, local authorities and other local actors can also link up returnees to target communities or groups.

**CONTEXT**

It is within this context that the Kalabang Ghaderi of the Kaski district in Tanahu has contributed to mitigating caste-based and ethnic exclusion through the inclusion of Dalits in their efforts to promote homestay businesses as a part of their overall strategy to eliminate caste and ethnic disparity in the community and promote local development. Furthermore, the newly formed Constitution (2015) of Nepal has also assured rights to the Dalits to participate in all agencies of the state based on the principle of proportional inclusion, including their right to use, preserve, and develop their traditional occupation. The constitution also makes a reference to a special legal provision of empowerment, representation, and participation of the Dalit community for employment in various sectors, including public services. This initiative is a key component of a project supported by the UN Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMDI) entitled, “Sustainable Local Development by Promoting Local Tourism through the Homestay by Migrants and their Families (HOST)”. The project aims to expand avenues of income generation for local youth (potential migrants, returnees and migrant families) by initiating homestay tourism services with a focus on community wellbeing.

This practice took place in the Kalabang Ghaderi of Kaski district, which is predominantly inhabited by families of migrants and where persistent caste and ethnic exclusion have marginalized certain groups of people freely exercising their rights for centuries. There are a total of 155 households in Kalabang Ghaderi, of the Pokhara sub-metropolitan city. The community is predominantly inhabited by the Gurungs (68 households), followed by the Dalits (60 households), and the Brahmin-Chettris (27 households). Migration for foreign employment and to the urban areas for livelihood opportunities is extremely common in the village. This is particularly the case for the Gurung community who have traditionally migrated, since their ancestral times, to serve in the Indian or the British Army. This practice still continues today, but with little variation in the countries of destination (i.e to Gulf Countries, Malaysia and Korea).

A number of historical markers have been responsible for re-structuring the state in Nepal, including the practice of caste-based discrimination and untouchability. One important indicator was the promulgation of the Muluki Ain (National or Civil Code) of 1854 by the Prime Minister, Junga Bahadur Rana. The National Code had four-fold caste hierarchy: (1) Tagaddhari (Sacred thread wearing or Twice-born), including the Bahun-Chhetris; (2) Matawali (Liquor drinking, i.e. indigenous peoples); (3) Pani nachalne choi chhito halnu naparne (Castes from whom water is not acceptable and contact with whom does not require purification by sprinkling of water); and (4) Pani nachine choi chitohalnu parne (Castes from whom water is not acceptable and contact with whom requires purification by sprinkling of water), including Sarki, Damai, Kami, Gaine, Sunar, Badibhad, Cunara, Pode, Hurke and Cyamakhalak (Macdonald 1984:282). These distinctions categorized the communities according to hierarchy, which led to the practice of caste-based untouchability and discrimination against Dalits, widely common on everyday basis.

A community meeting with members of the HOST Project
THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL (GoN) first introduced and provided operational guidelines for the homestay programme in 2010 with the aim of encouraging the micro-economic sector, generating self-employment, and economic growth in rural communities. Given the patriarchal social structures and a deep rooted ethnic caste system embedded in the predominantly Gurung community of the Kaski district, the Homestay Tourism initiative, supported by the JMDI and led by civil society organisation Asian Forum in coordination with local authorities of Kaski districts, focused on engaging the migrants and their families, as well as the lower caste/Dalits, in homestay business¹ for income generation.

To increase the potential inclusion of beneficiary households from a lower caste/Dalit community in the HOST initiative, culturally sensitive information campaigns were carried out that encouraged equal participation of all community members irrespective of their caste, gender, or ethnicity in the targeted districts. The Asian Forum, an association of migrant returnees comprised of migrants who have experienced discrimination and exclusion during their migratory journey, encouraged the participation of the Dalits and lower caste community members in the initiative through a series of meetings, information campaigns, and counselling to promote acceptance, participation, and engagement in the HOST business set-up. Community members, including Dalit households that expressed their interest to establish the homestays, were then selected based on criteria developed by the Asian Forum and local authorities and in line with the operational guidelines² of the GoN. In order to provide equal income-generation opportunities and benefits to the lower caste households through the HOST initiative, an integral non-discriminatory approach was employed whereby all 18 participating households were coded with serial numbers for anonymity and the placement of the arriving guests organised on a rotational basis. This was ensured by the management committee comprised of the HOST business operators and community leaders who are in charge of maintaining client records and allocating households for incoming guests. The guests were discouraged from changing their allocated household, as the business operators strove to implement a no change policy. This way each participating household had an equal chance to host the guests and ensured that individual HOST tourism service providers did not experience discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, or religious orientation. Given that the perception of purity is a key factor in the caste system and maintained through eating practices, upper caste households, who were initially hesitant to host any fellow national tourists belonging to the lower caste, constructed an annex building for kitchen or cooking purposes. This allowed for the hosting of the Dalit guests who were previously discouraged from entering the households.

OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICE

As a further step to mainstream the inclusion of the Dalits in the target community, and what can constitute a truly inclusive approach, homestay business related meetings and training sessions were often organised at the homes of Dalit homestay entrepreneurs. This, together with the regular interactions among the heterogeneous community members promoted by the project in

¹Homestays are community based residential sites for tourists. Through homestay, visitors get to integrate into the host community’s way of life by experiencing their local culture, customs and cuisine.

²The guidelines of the government stipulate that the host family should offer the local cultural experience to their guest and serve the local foods whatever the host family themselves eat. Homestay operating houses have to ensure a hygienic, clean, safe, peaceful and secure environment with minimum standard of bathroom and toilet facilities.
to build trust and cooperation among different caste and ethnic groups. In addition, meals served during the training and events helped to change separatist eating practices and bring all stakeholders together. This steadily changed the rigid norms, as the Dalits community members, who were reluctant to enter into higher caste households, started to interact and eat together with other castes.

Furthermore, a whole of community approach was also adopted whereby the HOST initiative ensured that those non-participating Dalit households also benefited through the provision of technical training on areas such as organic farming, tourist guide training, and language courses. This thus enhanced their capacity to respond to the derived service needs that accompany influxes of tourists and also ensured their ability to implement income generating activities.

Finally, in order to promote the socio-cultural rights of the Dalits with regards to their social inclusion and empowerment, a welcoming ceremony with a specific cultural performance (Naumati Baja) by the Dalits was publicly celebrated and promoted among the homestay community to entertain tourists. The fact that this cultural performance became increasingly popular among the homestay tourists increased its common support within the community and promoted the social integration of the lower caste.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

MIGRANTS OR RETURNEES CAN PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN PROMOTING THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS OF THE MARGINALISED IN THEIR HOME COMMUNITIES DUE TO THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE OF EXCLUSION DURING THEIR MIGRATORY JOURNEY

Through the personal experience of their migratory journey, migrants and returnees empathize with and understand better the challenges faced by those most marginalized in their home territories. This thus ensures that the participation of return migrants in local development planning or development initiatives brings a crucial added value through the transfer of their knowledge, values, and new cultural practices. In this case, through the HOST initiative, the inclusion of lower caste people in the community means that this group has been guaranteed an equal opportunity to engage in social life, exercise their cultural rights, and have equal access to the economic opportunities that are crucial in tackling the daily challenges of their exclusion.
GUARANTEED EMPOWERMENT (BOTH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC) OF THE LOWER CASTE IS IMPORTANT FOR THEIR SOCIAL INCLUSION

The key success factor for the social inclusion of the Dalits is their economic empowerment through the HOST business in the target community. Economic empowerment has been achieved through earnings from the homestays and associated diversified livelihoods, as well as the HOST policies that promote the equal treatment of all, irrespective of caste/ethnicity created conditions for personal recognition or the empowerment of Dalits in the otherwise socially oppressed community of Kala-bang. This is reflected in the increasing numbers of the lower caste, or so called Dalits, interested in opening HOST tourism services due to the perceived benefits, including the gradual changes in social norms or social perceptions as they increasingly take part in community life.

MEASURES THAT PROMOTE INCREASED INTERACTION AMONG THE DIVERSE COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENHANCES THEIR SOCIAL COHESION AND ETHNIC TOLERANCE

In order to improve social or ethnic tolerance, socially and culturally diverse members of a community should interact regularly to promote mutual understanding and address the reasons and misconceptions responsible for marginalization. This creates a conducive environment for their social acceptance and integration. In this case, the Dalits and the lower caste generally refrain from social interaction due to their history of marginalization. The HOST initiative was able to provide a platform for increased interaction among its varied beneficiaries that allowed opportunities for enhanced engagement, communication, and exchange of experiences, which are essential prerequisites to build trust and gradual acceptance among community members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ENSURE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES HAVE AN ALL-OF-COMMUNITY APPROACH WITH ENHANCED SOCIAL INCLUSION OF THE LOWER CASTE, INCLUDING MIGRANTS AND RETURN MIGRANTS WHERE POSSIBLE

In order to increase the impact of social inclusion programmes, economic empowerment schemes should be targeted at a mixed or heterogeneous community that
allows for increased interactions and opportunities to engage in similar economic activities, with equal incentives, in order to mitigate caste and ethnic differences. Such programmes should have provisions for the equal participation of all caste and minority groups (i.e. should introduce affirmative measures or quotas where needed). These initiatives should include migrant returnees when possible to bring the added value of their understanding, acquired values, and knowledge from abroad that can feed into the development of targeted and successful social inclusion programmes.

**WHAT IS THE UN JOINT MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE?**

The JMDI is a programme led by UNDP in partnership with IOM, ITC-ILo, UN Women, UNHCR, UNFPA and UNITAR. It focuses on the local dimension of migrants’ contribution to development. The JMDI supports civil society organizations and local authorities seeking to contribute to linking migration and development. To achieve this, the JMDI is currently supporting 16 on-going projects funded in eight target countries: Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, Senegal and Tunisia that all efficiently link migration to local development. This series of case studies seeks to highlight the challenges, good practices and lessons learnt from these projects.

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Based on the good practices and lessons learnt from the Kaski districts, migrants and return migrants clearly have a key role to play in supporting both the social and economic development of Nepal. Mainstreaming migration into national policies and ensuring the participation of migrants in the design and implementation of the same, has the potential to enhance their effectiveness. Indeed, given its complexity, migration has an effect on and is affected by most sectors related to governance, from health to education and from social inclusion to private sector development. Thus, this necessarily implies the need to mainstream migration as a cross-cutting issue into legislation, policies, and programmes at all levels (local, regional and national) and across all sectors (e.g. access to housing, education, social security etc.) To achieve this, specific human and financial resources must be allocated for the creation of, for example, a special unit to deal with the mainstreaming of migration into social inclusion policies and generally into development policies.

**PROMOTE THE PARTICIPATION OF MIGRANTS (PARTICULARLY RETURNNEES) AND THE MAINSTREAMING OF MIGRATION INTO NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION**