RESEARCH BRIEF

MIGRATION, COLLECTIVE IDENTITY & EVIDENCE FOR IMPACT: MAPPING NEPALI DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN THE POST-EARTHQUAKE ERA

There is a limited understanding of how diaspora—the movement, migration, or scattering of people away from an established or ancestral homeland—leads to change in home and host societies. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of the Nepali diaspora at the intersection of migration, immigration policy, and disaster response engagement in the post-earthquake (2015) and the US post-election (2016) context.

OBJECTIVES

- Explore the phenomenon of diasporic collective identity and what it means to leave home
- Understand the phenomenon of transnational network and social impact among the Nepali diaspora in the US
- Explore pathways of diasporic engagement in home and host communities
- Offer evidence on the role of Diaspora as important stakeholders and potentially powerful actors in international affairs and foreign assistance

Studying Nepali Diaspora Engagement

Research Questions

♦ What are the overlapping effects of migration and collective identity on levels of Nepali diaspora engagement and practice?
♦ What factors influence the engagement of Nepali diaspora in post-earthquake initiatives in Nepal?
♦ How is the US post-election context shaping diasporic activism?

Data will be collected through an online survey in collaboration with Nepal Rising Campaign (www.nepalrising.org), a global collaborative campaign launched by a group of Nepali diasporic community in the US.
Background of the Problem

Diaspora communities maintain personal, professional, business, philanthropic, cultural, and political connections with their countries of origin and provide significant contributions in their home and host countries. Most commonly recognized among these contributions is the transfer of money (remittance) they send back to their homelands.

While the importance of remittance cannot be undermined, it is also limited in capturing the exchange and transfer of other human dimensions such as social capital, skills, and technology.

Diasporas are also engaged in humanitarian and development efforts. They play significant roles in pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis events, peace-building efforts, reduction of violent conflict, direct investments, human capital transfers, philanthropic contributions, capital market investments, advocacy, and tourism.

Although there is a rise of diaspora-specific institutions in the US, diaspora engagement in humanitarian and development efforts is often overlooked. Further, women diaspora is invisible in most initiatives. This gap in knowledge is due to insufficient data and information on diaspora engagement.

Although selected good practices in diaspora engagement recognize the crucial role of diasporas, evidence of diaspora efforts and engagement still remain largely anecdotal. One such example is the crucial role of the Nepali diaspora after the 2015 earthquake that highlights the role of diaspora in development and diplomacy.

About the Researchers

Dr. Arati Maleku, principal investigator, is an expert on human migration and social demography, community resilience, social determinants of health, and mixed methods research. Becky Phillips, project coordinator, is a doctoral student interested in policy development and implementation, particularly as it applies to mental health organizations and the overall health system.

About the Research

Given the tremendous potential of global diaspora; the absence of empirical data; gaps in knowledge about the best way to leverage diaspora strengths and align them with development priorities; inadequate monitoring and evaluation frameworks; limited understanding of how diaspora activities lead to change; and challenges of diasporic activities in the post-election context, this study is distinct in addressing an unrecognized area of global mobility and migration, a growing contemporary social issue in the era of globalization, providing significant value to human and cultural dimensions.

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