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Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security



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Inter-municipal Collaboration on Safer Migration



Ramesh Kumar Basnet, Mayor of Manthali municipality, and Radhika Shrestha Newar, Vice-chairperson of Gokulganga rural municipality, in the district of Ramechhap, shake hands after signing the joint agreement / Photo by Sagar Basnet

Promoting inter-municipal cooperation on foreign employment: first lessons learned

The 2015 Federal Constitution of Nepal stipulates the transfer of key responsibilities to local governments, including responsibility for employment and labor migration. The 2017 Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) further detailed local governments' competences on foreign employment and grants them the authority to inform their population and provide key support services to migrants' households.

Rates of labor migration vary around the country. Two districts in which foreign labor migration is common are Nawalparasi Bardaghat Susta West and Ramechhap. In both districts, the newly formed local governments (urban and rural municipalities) have decided to pool their resources in providing safe migration services and have developed a mechanism of inter-municipal collaboration accordingly.

They have been supported in this process by the Safer Migration Project (SaMi) - a bilateral initiative of the Governments of Nepal and Switzerland, with technical assistance from Helvetas Nepal. Designed to institutionalize safer migration mechanisms in the context of federalization, phase III of SaMi is supporting local governments in their efforts to collaborate over service provision for migrants. While still in progress, these two experiences of inter-municipal collaboration offer useful lessons both for the continuation of the program as well as for other interventions active in promoting cooperation between local governments.

A major shift of responsibilities towards the local level

Nepal's 2015 Constitution establishes the country as a federal state and outlines the responsibilities of each level of government. "Social security and poverty alleviation" are shared responsibilities of the federal, provincial and local levels. However, neither the Constitution nor the "2017 Unbundling Report" give details regarding the division of responsibilities on foreign employment. The 2017 LGOA [chapter 3, section 11, sub-section (2)q] clarifies the situation. It mandates local governments (urban and rural municipalities) to exercise key responsibilities both on domestic and foreign employment. They are responsible for data collection, including the labor force working abroad, and are expected to establish employment information centers. They are furthermore responsible for promoting safe foreign employment through information, financial literacy and skills training to migrants. They are also required to support the reintegration of returnees.

Federalization thereby changes the logic of responsibility for foreign employment in important ways. It places local governments at the forefront of providing a series of key services, while the MoLESS continues to play a key role in formulating national level policies, regulations and standards for safer migration. This underlines the need for a close and regular coordination between all levels of government for the effective implementation of their altered functions under the federal system.

Why inter-municipal collaboration ?

A safe migration model starts with access to reliable information. This not only implies raising awareness at community level but also ensuring that relevant information is available to prospective migrants. Migrant Resource Centers (MRCs) are therefore located within the premises of the district administration offices where citizens apply for a passport. In other words, the MRC located in one municipality provides services to citizens of an entire district - a far wider geographical area. "Returnee volunteers," who are mobilized by SaMi to disseminate information at community level, also refer citizens seeking migration-related information to MRCs.

This logic of service provision underlines the need for inter-municipal collaboration as foreseen in chapter 6 [section 26] of the LGOA. Collaboration between local governments allows for coordination on priority messages regarding migration and for the standardization of information dissemination approaches. It can also lead to cost sharing for the running

"The decision to collaborate has given local governments the opportunity not only to share resources but a platform for learning and sharing expertise. The joint modality has been very fruitful to assure people that we, local governments, can come together when there are common issues to be addressed. The representatives of other local governments who are currently not participating often ask us to share our learning."

*Radhika Shrestha Newar,
Vice-Chairperson of Gokulganga Rural
Municipality, Ramechhap.*

Key responsibilities of local governments on Foreign Employment (FE)

Establishment of Employment Information Centers (EICs)¹

SaMi supports local governments establish Migrant Resource Centers (MRCs) for information on foreign employment and a system of referral to support services. Collaboration between SaMi's MRCs and recently established EICs will be piloted.

Collection and management of employments data

SaMi supports local governments develop migration profiles. MRCs collect key data on foreign employment at local level.

Provision of financial literacy and skills trainings for the labor force going for FE

SaMi supports local governments in providing financial literacy and referring migrants to pre-departure skills trainings.

Support to social reintegration of returnees

SaMi supports local governments provide psycho-social support to families left-behind and returnees.

Promotion of the use of the knowledge, skills and entrepreneurship gained during FE

No systematic support by SaMi. Case by case referrals to other relevant support programs by MRCs.

1. Also called Employment Service Centers (ESCs) under the Prime Minister Employment Program

of MRCs. There are potential substantial economies of scale through the pooling of resources. “Safe labor migration” also goes beyond information and includes capacities for legal referrals, financial literacy training or psycho-social support. Collaboration is a way to develop this expertise jointly and achieve more effective intervention.

SaMi's support to the federalization of labor migration governance

The Safer Migration Project (SaMi) is a bilateral initiative of the Governments of Nepal and Switzerland. It is implemented by the government of Nepal at all its levels under the leadership of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS) and with the technical support of Helvetas Nepal. Since 2011, SaMi and the MoLESS have together developed mechanisms to inform and support potential migrants and their families throughout the migration experience.

SaMi phase III (2018-2022) supports the federalization process. This implies a specific focus on supporting local governments which, as part of the program, are now in charge of running information and counselling services for aspiring migrants as well as providing financial literacy or psycho-social support to migrant families. The project further promotes inter-municipal collaboration as a modality to organize service provision over a wide area and to promote standardized approaches, synergies and a fair distribution of the costs between local governments.

In 2019, SaMi phase III established partnerships with 156 local governments and oriented them on foreign employment. Some of them were also supported in the development of municipal migration profiles and to address migration in local periodic plans.

In 2020, all local governments are supported in establishing their MRCs through inter-municipal collaboration and in coordinating the provision of safe migration services on their territory.

“Now that elected representatives have been in place for quite some time, the role and responsibilities of local governments are becoming clearer. The federal structure brought a lot of changes. Our choice for a joint modality is based on the basic principles of our Constitution: Coordination, Collaboration and Co-existence.”

*Ramesh Kumar Basnet
Mayor of Manthali Municipality,
Ramechhap*

Inter-municipal collaboration in practice

The first year of SaMi phase III implied a transition and a phasing out of project funds from the districts of Nawalparasi Bardaghat Susta West and Ramechhap. However, this did not put an end to their activities on foreign employment. The local governments of both districts have continued their engagement.

In Nawalparasi Bardaghat Susta West district [Province 5], seven local governments² decided to pool resources. They allocated a total of NPR 3,600,000 as the annual budget for safer migration programs.

This allowed continued collaboration with the local service provider³ in charge of running the MRC located in Ramgram municipality and the Sub-MRC located in the rural municipality of Pratapur (inside the Illaka Administration Office). Through their joint funding, the seven local governments also managed to coordinate awareness programs at school and community level, public service announcements on the radio, and psychosocial counseling programs.

In the district of Ramechhap [Province 3] a similar process of collaboration was followed. Four local governments⁴ allocated an annual budget of NPR 2,090,000 for safer migration. With this fund, the local governments continued the collaboration with the local service provider⁵ in charge of running the MRC located in the municipality of Manthali.⁶

They further financed and coordinated awareness programs in schools and at community level, “returnee volunteers” mobilization and psychosocial counseling programs.

2 The Municipalities of Ramgram, Bardaghat and Sunawal as well as the Rural Municipalities of Palhinandan, Sarawal, Susta and Pratapur

3 Indreni Social Development Forum was the service provider selected under phase II of SaMi and in charge of running the MRC and coordinating services.

4 The Municipality of Manthali and the Rural Municipalities of Doramba, Gokulganga and Umakunda

5 Chaghare Sewa Samiti was the service provider selected during SaMi phase II.

6 Local governments of Ramechhap have in the meantime opted for a model of “direct implementation”, according to which they recruit directly the staff for service provision, without relying on a service provider. The modalities for inter-municipal cooperation have been maintained to support broader program coordination. SaMi will also document the lessons learned from this different model in the coming months.

Mechanisms for collaboration

The effective mechanisms of inter-municipal collaboration described here can serve as a source of inspiration for other local governments.

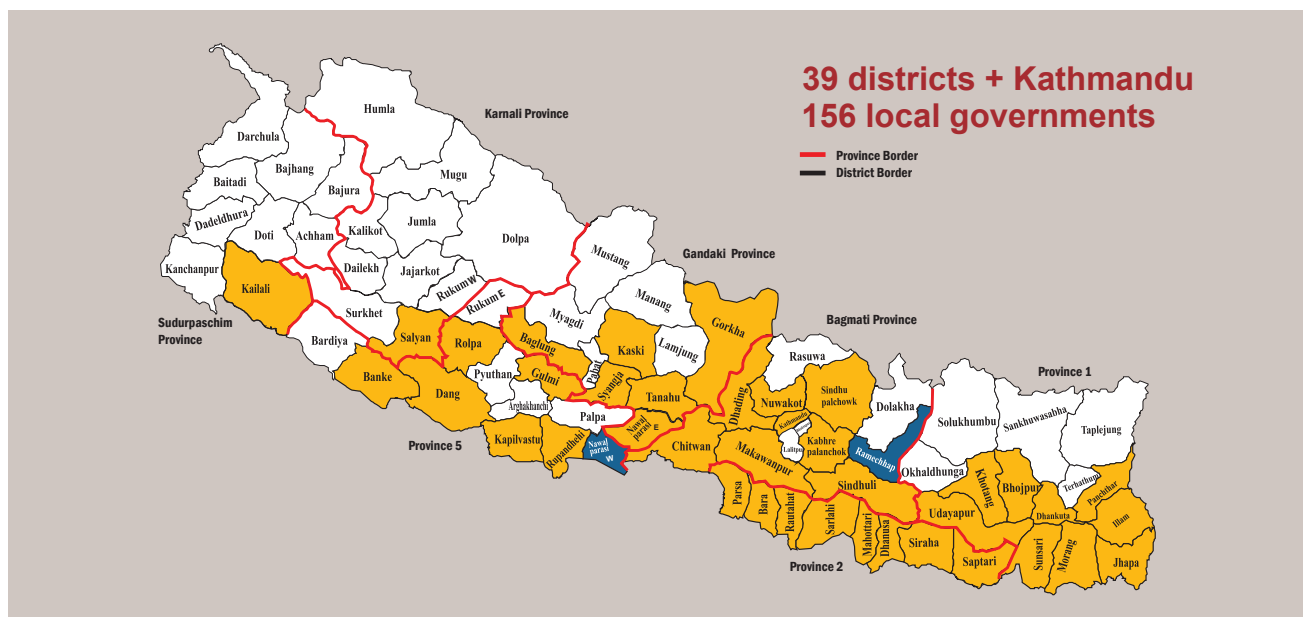
- **Memorandum of understanding:** local governments have signed joint agreements to run the program. These agreements define the roles and responsibilities of all related stakeholders (local governments, implementing partners and SaMi as a technical assistance provider).
- **Establishment of a management committee:** a “Local Government Project Management Committee,” gathering representatives of each participating local government, was established to ensure coordination. The committee has responsibility for planning, supervision, validating reports and payments.
- **Joint budget planning:** participating local governments approved a common budget.
- **Contracting of a local service provider (LSP):** this provider coordinates the services of the MRC, reports and documents progress.
- **Joint monitoring:** all participating governments jointly assess progress and exchange information through the management committee.

Lessons learned

- **Labor migration is considered a priority issue by local governments** in which foreign employment numbers are high. In Ramechhap

and Nawalparasi, their consolidated experience on the topic and the availability of detailed data on migration within their locality fostered their readiness to invest their own resources.

- **Inter-municipal collaboration is possible when there is political will.** The local governments have developed simple and practical mechanisms for effective and transparent collaboration.
- **Inter-municipal collaboration on foreign employment offers immediate benefits.** It ensures standardized approaches to support migrants’ households. Moreover, it allows the sharing of the costs of interventions, especially for the services that necessitate geographical concentration. The pooling of resources can result in useful savings given the wide range of new competences of local governments and their limited resources.
- **Regular and fluid communication** is a prerequisite for transparent collaboration and for consolidating trust and the feeling of mutual benefits between the partners.
- **Joint budgeting should be accompanied by an agreement on the modalities of fund disbursement.** It is important to agree on procedures for joint decision-making on fund release and to explore possibilities for joint bank accounts.
- **Technical advice and facilitation – in this case through SaMi - can be crucial** in the early establishment of inter-municipal collaboration mechanisms.



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