

Migration and Rural Livelihoods in a Himalayan Village

The impact of migration on individual households
and community development in Nepal



By Liv Unni Stuhaug



Master Thesis in Human Geography

Department of Geography

University of Bergen

May 2013

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ABSTRACT

In developing countries it has increasingly been recognised how rural households draw upon a range of assets and activities to form viable livelihoods. In Nepal as well as in other parts of the world involvement in migration has been an important strategy of rural households to support their living. This thesis presents an idiographic study focused on how the incorporation of migration in rural livelihood strategies affects households' abilities to form viable livelihoods in the village of Astam, Nepal. Furthermore, it discusses to what extent migration can contribute to local development. The analytical frameworks applied are theoretical approaches to rural livelihoods with emphasis on various forms of capital, as well as a perspective of contextualised interactions between migration and development. It is concluded that the capital concepts utilised in livelihood approaches in some cases tend to ignore the economic logic inherent in 'capital', and that Bourdieu's notion of capital can be appropriate for analyses of rural livelihoods. The qualitative methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews were used to produce empirical data, complemented by a survey (=50) of the village's households in order to map involvement in migration and other characteristics of their livelihood strategies. From this I found that internal and external migration are widely incorporated in households' livelihood strategies in Astam and can be a vital source of cash income in the rural context of limited economic opportunities. Although incomes from migration are in most cases spent on consumption I will argue that this should not simply be termed as 'unproductive investments' if we assume an understanding of 'development' as the enhancement of freedoms for all. An interesting finding from this study is that the migrants who have been able to initiate an accumulation of capital from migration in some cases have invested parts of this capital in community projects which have improved the poorer households' access to facilities of health care and education in particular. This may also allow poor households to further enhance their bases of capital. Thereby, even though migration to some extent may increase inequality between migrant households and non-migrant households in the village, in some cases the individual households' gains from migration are also redistributed in the community to the benefit of a larger segment of villagers.

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When I got the chance to write a thesis focused on migration in Nepal I could not have been happier. It had for long been a dream of mine to travel to Nepal, and during the years I had spent on studying development and geography I had developed a special interest of the subject of migration. I am grateful for everything I have learned during the process of producing this thesis, and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this process:

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Liv Unni Stuhaug

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(Source: Elaborated by Keshav Prasad Paudel, 2013, modified by the author.)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The branch of human geography focuses on relations between people and places, and migration processes is therefore an interesting subject for research. Even though migration processes have played a central part in the history of humans, Aase (2006) points out that these processes did not receive particular academic attention until the recent century. During the latest decades migration has also increasingly become a focus in the political agenda, leading some to believe that the extensive movement of people is a quite new phenomenon. Processes of globalisation have made people more aware of the opportunities which exist in other places of the world, but several nation states have also come to see migration as a potential destabilising force which threatens their societies. Both in the theoretical and political debate questions have been raised about the effects of migration on both sending – and receiving areas, in addition to a focus on the causes of migration.

In this thesis I will focus on migration as part of rural households' livelihood strategies in Nepal by linking empirical findings from a Nepalese village to theoretical approaches to rural livelihoods and notions of households' forms of capital. Furthermore, there will be given attention to the interactions between this form of migration and local development. In this introduction I will provide a brief theoretical contextualisation of migration as part of livelihood strategies and furthermore relate it to the geographical context of the Hindu-Kush Himalaya. Thereafter I will turn to the research questions and the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Theoretical approaches to migration in social science

The earliest theories of migration in social science were mainly aimed at generalising about the causes and effects of migration, portraying migrants either as objects influenced by magnetic forces or as rational economic agents (Aase, 2006). Even though these theories focused on the universal “laws” of migration have been abandoned during the latest decades (Aase, 2006), there have still been attempts at generalising about the effects of migration on sending areas, including foci on “brain-drain” and remittances, as well as the effects on receiving areas, concerning the need for more labourers versus the problem of putting larger pressure on scarce resources (Potter et al., 2008). There has also been a focus on the causes of migration, for instance which factors that “push” and “pull” people into migration (Aase, 2006). Furthermore, migration processes have been linked to development through debates on

whether migration facilitates or undermines development in sending areas (de Haas, 2010). These foci seem to assume static causes and effects of migration, and do thereby not adequately acknowledge the dynamics of reality (Ellis, 2000, de Haas, 2010).

In relation to the debated nexus between migration and development, de Haas (2010) stresses that interactions between migration and development are both reciprocal and heterogeneous, and in order to understand the various ways in which these processes affect each other the interactions need to be contextualised geographically, politically and socially (de Haas, 2010). Furthermore, the social positioning of migrants within households and communities has been increasingly recognised, which also facilitates a new perspective on the causes and effects of migration (de Haas, 2010). The decision to involve in voluntary migration is not always an individual decision made by the migrants themselves because migration is often made part of households' livelihood strategies, which has been particularly noticed in the context of developing countries (Ellis, 2000, de Haas, 2010). Households shift and adapt their livelihoods to changing circumstances, and the reasons for, as well as effects of, involvement in migration are therefore also complex and shifting (Ellis, 2000, de Haas, 2010).

By stepping away from nomothetic theories towards idiographic approaches based on empirical research we can receive a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of migration processes and even shed light on some aspects which can be transferable to similar contexts. In this thesis I will utilise Bebbington's (1999) framework, aimed at analysing rural livelihoods, in order to explore how the incorporation of migration in rural livelihood strategies may affect the households' abilities to build viable livelihoods in Astam. The framework is focused on households' access to five types of 'capital assets', which are both the input to and the output of livelihood strategies. Because the concept of capital are associated with the work of Bourdieu (1977) I will also explore if his notion of the forms of capital can be useful for studying interactions between migration and rural livelihoods. Furthermore, I will discuss the nexus between migration and development based on de Haas' (2010) perspective on the heterogeneity of migration-development interactions.

1.2 Migration in the context of the Hindu-Kush Himalaya

Nepal is located within the Hindu-Kush Himalaya, which is the focus area of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Even though migration is not a new

phenomenon in this region, there seems to have been an increasing tendency for involvement in migration during the recent years (ICIMOD, 2009). Improvements in communication technology, combined with lower transportation costs, have made more people aware of opportunities in other places and have also facilitated migration over long distances. Large parts of the population in the Hindu-Kush Himalaya mountain region live in poverty and the opportunities to improve their standards of living are often limited within rural areas. On the other hand, economic growth in the urban centres of the region as well as increasing demand for labourers in states by the Persian Gulf and in South Asia bring opportunities for labour migration. In the context of poverty and limited local opportunities for rural development, it is believed that migration can possibly contribute to sustainable development in rural mountain areas (ICIMOD, 2009). How do migration processes influence the rural areas of the region?

Migration does not only have the potential to bring financial remittances, but also social remittances in the forms of new ideas, skills, technologies and social relations, which can facilitate durable development in rural areas (ICIMOD, 2009). It is found that migration generates human capital, and households with migrants seem to value children's education higher than households without migrants. Financial remittances are also of great importance in contributing to rural households' incomes, and can during hard times be a vital support to the fulfilment of basic needs like food, water and clothing, as well as facilitate larger investments in houses and land (ICIMOD, 2009). According to Seddon et al. (2002), the households of the hill region in Nepal have for long struggled to survive solely on agriculture and labour migration has been a common and important strategy to support their living.

Still, it can be difficult to ensure that remittances arrive safely to remote areas (ICIMOD, 2009). Another challenge is that migrants usually need financial means in order to migrate, especially international migration may require a large initial investment. If the financial means are obtained through loans there is a bigger pressure on the migrant to succeed in order to pay back the debt. Migration can also cause social challenges in the sending communities. Many of the migrants are young men and when they leave the villages on long-term bases, the agricultural work and other livelihood activities are left to be performed by women, who also are responsible for taking care of the children and the elderly (ICIMOD, 2009).

Because migration is seen as an important strategy for development in the rural areas of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, more research is needed on migration and its impacts on

livelihoods and poverty in order to introduce helpful mechanisms which can facilitate more benefits to the rural communities and households (ICIMOD, 2009). This thesis is focused on a rural village near Pokhara, which is one of the largest cities in Nepal. Even though the study is thereby not based in the most remote areas of the region, I hope it can be informative on the interactions between migration, rural livelihood strategies and local development.

1.3 Research questions

The focus of this thesis is the incorporation of migration in rural livelihood strategies and how this affects households' opportunities for creating viable livelihoods in Astam village, Nepal. The focus is also further broadened to the interactions between this form of migration and local development in Astam. To specify the research focus I have stated two research questions and one point for discussion. The first research question is related to Bebbington's (1999) framework in which he proposes that analyses of rural livelihoods should be focused on households' access to five types of capital assets:

1. In which ways can the incorporation of migration in rural livelihood strategies influence the households' bases of capital assets in Astam?

The concept of capital is largely associated with the work of Bourdieu (1977) and the second research question is therefore stated as follows:

2. To what extent can insight from Bourdieu's notion of the forms of capital complement Bebbington's framework for analysing rural livelihoods?

Finally I will turn the focus to the debate on the migration-development nexus in order to:

3. Discuss to what degree the incorporation of migration in rural livelihood strategies can contribute to local development in Astam.

Insight from de Haas' (2010) perspective on how migration-development interactions needs to be understood within a broader development context will be the base for this last discussion.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In chapter 2 I will provide a contextual introduction to the study area of Astam, including relevant geographical and historical information about Kaski District and Nepal.

Chapter 3 is focused on the methods used for the production and interpretation of data from Astam, and includes reflections on the methodological choices which have shaped the thesis.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the theoretical foundation of the thesis, with specific emphasis on the theoretical approaches which will be utilised in the subsequent analysis.

In chapter 5 I will give a general introduction to central aspects of the livelihood strategies of households in Astam, based on the empirical findings. However, in order to avoid a constant repetition of empirical findings both in this chapter and the following analysis, more detailed findings will be directly introduced in the following chapters which are dedicated to analysis.

Chapter 6 is focused on the first research question and thereby the exploration of how migration, as part of rural livelihood strategies, influences the households access to five types of 'capital assets', conceptualised by Bebbington (1999). To structure the chapter, one paragraph is dedicated to each type of capital assets.

In chapter 7 I will discuss to what extent Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) elaboration of the forms of capital can provide another form of insight to the analysis of rural livelihoods in Astam. Furthermore I will compare the conceptualisations by Bourdieu and Bebbington (1999) in order to answer the second research question of whether the former's work can complement the latter's framework.

In the last section of this thesis I will give a brief summary of the findings and formulate my concluding remarks. The discussion point of the extent to which migration can contribute to local development in Astam will also be addressed directly in this concluding section.

CHAPTER 2: ASTAM IN CONTEXT



Picture 1: Astam provides a beautiful view of the Annapurna Mountain Range.

The study area of this thesis is Astam village in Kaski District, Nepal. On a clear day Astam provides a splendid view of the Annapurna Mountain Range to the north, with its snow-capped peaks rising 6000-8000 metres above sea level. The beautiful surroundings of terraced valleys, green hills and majestic mountains can leave any visitor breathless, and the beauty of Astam is also appreciated by the villagers. The village has a peaceful atmosphere, and despite the hard work of farmers, life there has a slow pace. A more detailed description of the study area follows after a brief geographical and historical introduction to Nepal and Kaski District.

2.1 Nepal

Nepal is located between China and India in the southern part of the Himalaya Mountain Range. The country is well known for the world's tallest mountain, Mount Everest, and for several more of the tallest peaks in the world which are located within its borders. The mountainous landscape makes Nepal an attractive destination for tourists who want to ascend or admire the majestic peaks. In 2011 more than 736 000 foreign visitors arrived in Nepal (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2012).

The natural landscape of the country is significantly diverse from south to north and can be divided into three main topographical zones, each stretching as a horizontal belt across the country (Food and Agriculture Organization, 1992). The southern Terai region is placed at a low altitude with a sub-tropical climate and flat terrain. Further to the north the Hill region is found, where the study area of this thesis is located in Kaski District. The valleys and hills of this region, which in some places rise as high as 3000 m.a.s.l., gradually lead to the Mountain region and its tall Himalayan peaks. In the mountain areas the temperature is lower and the climate can be quite dry. The western parts of the country have less rainfall than the east, and a large part of the rain falls in the monsoon period from June to September (FAO, 1992).

2.1.1 Challenges of poverty and food insecurity

Famous for its mountains and various landscapes, less attention is brought to the fact that Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world. 25% of the population lives below the national poverty line, although significant improvements have been achieved as this percentage has decreased from 42% in 1996 and 31% in 2004 (The World Bank, 2012). In 2012 it was estimated that the population of nearly 30 million had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of 1 300 US dollars (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). With more than 80% of Nepal's population based in rural areas, it was in 2012 estimated that the agricultural sector contributes 38% of the GDP, while the small industrial sector only constitutes 15% of the GDP. The left 47% is covered by the service sector (CIA, 2012).

Despite of being mainly an agricultural country, Nepal faces problems of food insecurity (FAO, 2004). The traditional subsistence agriculture has low productivity and the regions with less arable land and less rainfall, as well as a high exposure to natural hazards, are especially at risk of food insecurity. Poverty, which is often correlated with lower-caste groups and people living in peripheral areas, also affects particular social groups' food security (FAO, 2004). In 2012 it was reported that 18% of the population suffer from under-nutrition (FAO, 2012). Women are especially vulnerable to under-nutrition because of the social structures which affect the distribution of food within households (FAO, 2004).

2.1.2 The caste system

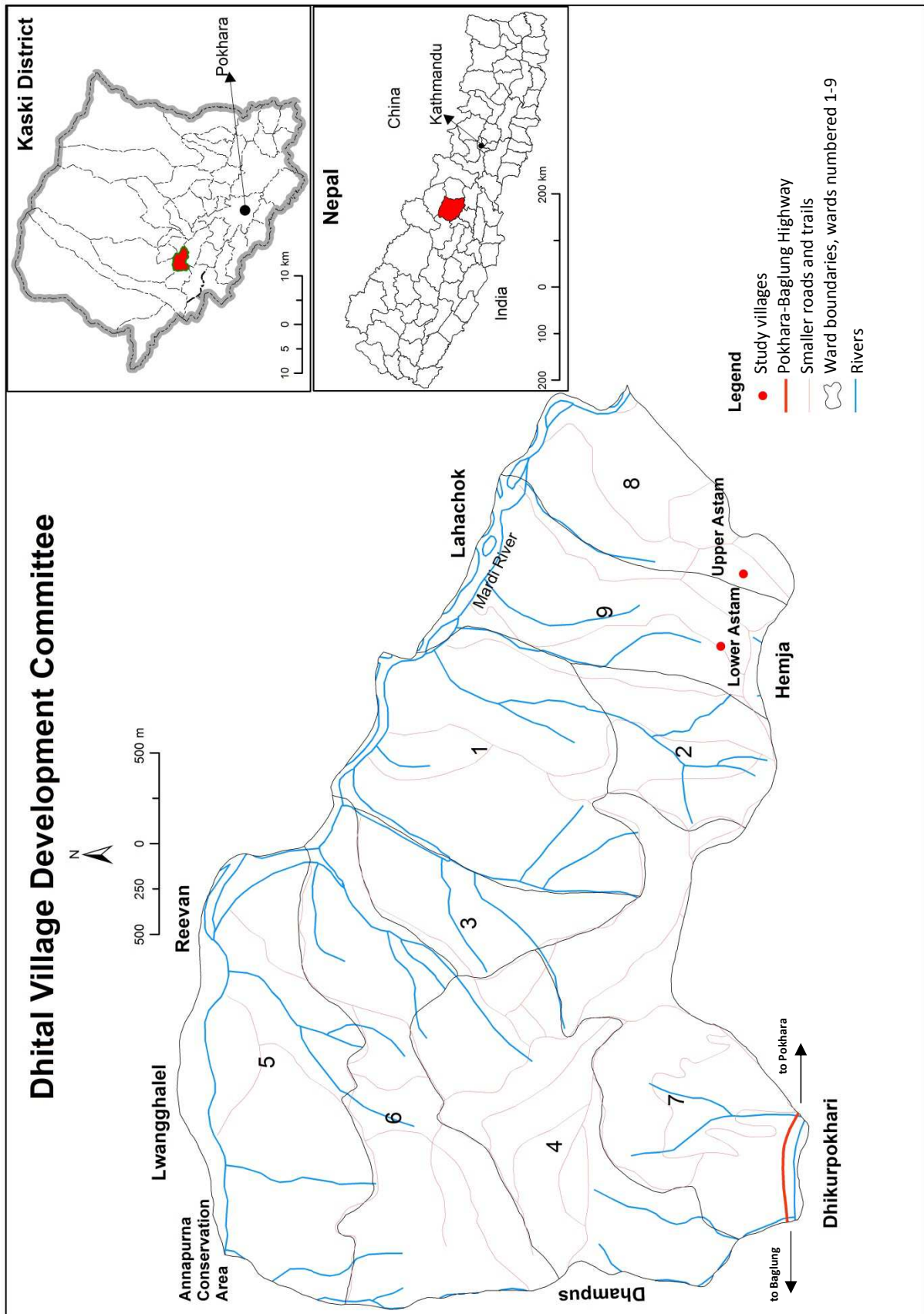
The main religion in Nepal is Hinduism, followed by Buddhism (Bista, 1996). Throughout the centuries there have been several attempts to impose the principles of caste stratification on

the entire population, but it was not legalised for the whole country until the Constitution of 1854. The caste system in Nepal is not an accurate version of the classical Varna system, and the various ethnic groups in Nepal have been dedicated their place in the caste system by powerful elites. The upper Bahun and Chhetri castes have a view of the caste system which places the Bahun caste on top, followed by Thakuri and Chhetri, then ethnic groups, and at the bottom the lower castes and the “untouchables” are found. Some of the lines drawn between castes are permeable, while the lines separating Bahun from lower castes, and “untouchables” from upper castes, should not be intersected. Discrimination on the base of caste was officially forbidden in 1963, and the younger generations are less concerned about caste stratification. They seem to be more focused on class distinctions between the politically and economically successful parts of the population from the poor and commons (Bista, 1996).

2.1.3 Political history

Nepal was unified as a country in the 18th century by King Prithvi Narayan Shah of the Ghoraka kingdom (Bista, 1996). From 1847 to 1950 the power of the Shah King line was limited and it was the Rana family who effectively controlled the country, although they gave more attention to personal aims than to the interests of the country as a whole. Shortly after World War II the rule of the Ranas was overthrown and a range of political parties was formed in Nepal. Since then there have been several attempts to introduce a democratic political system in the country, but Bista (1996) claims that there are many challenges of establishing of a democratic system which is suitable for the social reality of Nepal. In 1960 King Mahendra initiated a *panchayat*¹ democratic system, forbidding all political parties (Gellner, 2007). There was a focus on nation-building with a move away from the caste system, so that all social groups of Nepal could contribute to develop the country. In 1990 the *panchayat* democracy system was challenged by “the people’s movement” through demonstrations and battles until the King agreed to abolish the ban on political parties. A new constitution was planned, with the objective to promote Nepal as a multi-ethnic, independent and democratic constitutional monarchy. In 1996 the Maoists brought on the “people’s war” resulting in a civil war which lasted for ten years. The monarchy was overthrown in 2006 and an agreement between the Seven-Party-Alliance and the Maoists was signed (Gellner, 2007). Still, the completion of the new constitution has repeatedly been postponed and Nepal is still struggling for political stability, as well as progress in development and poverty alleviation.

¹ In this context *panchayat* refers to a one-party system



Map 1: Dhital Village Development Committee in Kaski District, Nepal.

(Source: Elaborated by Keshav Prasad Paudel, 2013, modified by the author.)

2.2 Kaski District

Located in the Western Development Region of Nepal, Kaski District lies at the foot of the Annapurna Mountain Range. Pokhara, which is one of the largest cities in Nepal, is located within the district. Kaski District covers a land area of 2 017 sq. km. and had in 2011 a number of 492 098 inhabitants (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Pokhara attracts many tourists because of the beautiful scenery around Phewa Lake with the snow-capped Annapurna peaks rising in the north. The city is furthermore a starting point for trekkers and mountain climbers who are heading for these mountains. Around the lake there have been established numerous guest houses, hotels, restaurants and tourist shops, composing a touristic area referred to as the “Lakeside”. The centre of the old city is located a few kilometres further to the north-west. When the city’s airport opened in the end of the 1950s, the transport of goods from Kathmandu to Pokhara were facilitated (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). During the second part of the 20th century there were also built highways connecting Pokhara to nearby districts, Kathmandu and the border of India. From this strategic location Pokhara developed into an important market of central Nepal (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999).



Picture 2: Pokhara city located by Phewa Lake

2.2.1 The Seti-Mardi River Valley

Further to the north, by the foot of the Annapurna Mountain Range, lays the Seti-Mardi River Valley. The study area of this thesis is located at one of the southern hills overlooking the valley. Adhikari and Bohle (1999) have studied agrarian change in settlements at the northern

slopes of the valley, opposite the study area of this thesis, and have explored how historical events at the national and regional level have actuated local changes.



Picture 3: The Mardi River in Lwangghalel VDC. Dhital VDC located at the background hills to the right.

In the northern slopes of the Seti-Mardi River Valley the upper parts have been dominated by the Gurung ethnic group, while the population of the lower villages has mainly been composed of Bahun, Chhetri and lower castes (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). The Gurung are believed to have arrived in the area first, descending from the surge of migrants who entered the Nepalese hills from Burma and Tibet during the 7th-11th century. During the 12th-13th century a stream of Hindus migrated from India to Nepal, and some of those who sought westward through the country chose to settle in this valley. Families from the Magar and Tamang ethnic groups came searching for work in the beginning of the 20th century, and established new settlements in the valley. The area continued to receive migrants up until the 1980s, resulting in a growing and culturally diverse population (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999).

After the unification of the country, the Nepalese were banned from going abroad until around 1857 (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). Nevertheless, already from 1816 several were able to go to India for work and for joining the British-Indian army. As soon as the ban was abolished, extensive recruitment of young men to the British-Indian army took place also from the inside of Nepal. During the two world wars a large number of young men from the villages were away in the army, which caused a labour shortage in agricultural activities. The shortage was

mostly filled by workers from landless lower castes, who mainly depended on wage labour. The lower castes also involved in activities which were avoided by the higher castes because of taboos, like the ploughing of farm land and the production (and for some time also the consumption) of alcohol (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999).

Particularly many Gurung were recruited for the British-Indian army and their families therefore benefited from army incomes (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). As the incomes from remittances and army pensions increased, several Gurung families became less interested in agriculture as they could afford to buy food from lower villages. Their diet preferences had also shifted towards rice, which was traditionally not grown in their upper settlements. In some areas of the valley the Gurung was the ethnic group controlling most of the land resources and when they decreased their involvement in agriculture, Gurung rented out land to the higher castes of Bahun and Chhetri. The wealthiest families were also able to migrate to Pokhara and other city areas, leaving the rural lifestyle behind (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999).

In the beginning of the 1950s, several legal acts concerning land tax and administration were passed after the downfall of the Ranas (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). Local agents who had collected tax to the government were in the Seti-Mardi River Valley known as *Mukhiya* and *Jimmuwal*, and this position was often passed on from father to son. In many cases the agents kept a part of the high land tax paid by peasants to themselves, which increased their power and enabled them to lend out money at their own fixed interest rates. Households of the villages also had to donate a certain amount of labour days to these local government agents every year. The *mukhiya* and *jimmuwal* of the villages rented out surplus land to tenants and were quite powerful in controlling how much of the produce they would receive in return. After the new legislations were passed, the government agents were left less powerful over their tenants and the tax burden of peasants was reduced. Nevertheless, descendants of these local tax agents are generally in a better economic and social position than descendants from families who were not given these responsibilities (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999).

Until the 1950s the farmers in the valley were mainly dependent on local inputs to agriculture, thus interaction between higher and lower villages was important to secure adequate food supplies (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). There was limited interaction with villages on the opposite side of the river as there were no permanent bridges. From the 1950s more bridges were built and interaction with other villages and Pokhara increased. The upper settlements

had for a long time been struggling with food shortages, and from the 1930s the lower villages also lacked food security because the increasing population had put pressure on land resources. When Pokhara developed into an important market of central Nepal, cheaper rice from Terai became available to villagers. Even though this rice was of a lower quality, villagers could secure adequate food supplies by consuming this rice and selling their own higher-quality rice to wealthier residents of Pokhara. Involvement in off-farm labour in addition to agriculture was a strategy to secure viable livelihoods (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999).

When the Pokhara-Baglung Highway (Map 1, p. 9) was constructed in 1988-1992, the journey from the valley to Pokhara became significantly easier and less time consuming (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). Market interaction increased and market centres developed nearby the highway, facilitating the development of smaller markets in some of the valley's villages. In 1992 the villages were incorporated in the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA), which put restrictions on the villagers' use of forest resources (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999).

2.2.2 Annapurna Conservation Area

A large part of Kaski District is now incorporated in the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA). Ever since Nepal opened to the outside world during the 1950-60s, visitors have been attracted to this area because of its tall mountains and various landscapes, as well as the cultural diversity of ethnic groups residing there (Baral et al., 2010). As the stream of visitors increased over the decades, problems of waste disposal and environmental degradation resulting from tourism became visible. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) was established in 1986, supported by the NGO King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, later renamed the National Trust for Nature Conservation (Baral et al., 2010). The project initiated a new form of nature conservation in Nepal, with the objective to involve the local population in the conservation of natural ecosystems (Baral et al., 2010). The aim was to create a balance between the conservation of nature, sustainable livelihoods for local people and the development of tourism (Baral et al., 2010). ACA has been gradually extended and now covers an area of 7 629 sq. km. with more than 100 000 inhabitants (National Trust for Nature Conservation, 2010). The area contains a high variety of plant – and animal species, and landscapes ranging from subtropical forests to Himalayan deserts (Baral et al., 2010). ACAP is generally recognised as successful in contributing to conservation and development, and has received international awards for its efforts (Baral et al., 2010).

A research of local people's conceptions of the impacts from tourism in two villages of ACA highlights some of the challenges within the objective to limit negative impacts from tourism while maximising the benefits to local people and their environment (Nyaupane and Thapa, 2004). While inhabitants of the first village mostly agreed that tourism contributed to increase awareness and finances for nature conservation, 68% of the sample population experienced that the income from tourism was unequally distributed in the village. Some ethnic groups had been more entrepreneurial in establishing tourism businesses, mainly employing family members, thereby a large part of the economic benefits from tourism were received by these families. In the other village the inhabitants also recognised the environmental benefits from the promoting of tourism, and a more equal income distribution was gained through collectively owned tourism businesses. However, the revenues from tourism to this village were low because visitors mostly arrive in travel groups organised by outside agencies, and the number of visitors to the area is limited because there are fewer lodges around this newer trail. The authors conclude that it is quite hard to obtain the aim of maximising economic benefits to the local population from tourism while minimising the negative impacts on environment and cultures (Nyaupane and Thapa, 2004).

2.3 Astam

Dhital Village Development Committee is located 20 km north of Pokhara by the Seti-Mardi River Valley (Map 1, p. 9). Village Development Committees (VDC) are the local units of governmental administration in the current political system of Nepal. Dhital VDC covers a land area of 12,3 sq km and is divided into 9 wards, which each constitutes one community (Dhital VDC, 2011). Upper Astam (Ward 8) and Lower Astam (Ward 9) together make up a land area of 2,56 sq km (Dhital VDC, 2011). The interconnected communities of Upper and Lower Astam is the main geographical focus of this thesis, and this total area will be referred to as Astam village. Houses, cowsheds and small temples are mostly located in the hearts of the two communities, intertwined with farm land. More cultivated fields are spread out at the outskirts of the village, while the steep slopes of the hill are partly covered by forest.

Upper Astam is located at the top of a hill, overlooking the valleys of Lwangghalel VDC and Reevan VDC to the north, Lahachok VDC to the east and Hemja VDC to the south (Map 1, p. 9). Given the surroundings, visitors can get an impression that Upper Astam is located at a taller height than the actual 1530 m.a.s.l.. A short westward slope leads to Lower Astam, and

further in the west the rest of Dhital VDC stretches out before meeting with Dhampus VDC and Dhikurpokhari VDC. An area constituting half of the wards 5 and 6, in the north-western part of Dhital VDC, is now incorporated in the Annapurna Conservation Area. VDC records show that there has been a significant net out-migration of households from Dhital during the last decade, while only a few new households have settled there in recent years.

2.3.1 Governmental administration

The political instabilities at the national level have influenced the local governmental administration. It can be difficult to get an overview of how decisions are made through interactions between the VDC administration, the local branches of political parties and the common villagers. Since the major political turbulences in the 1990s there have not been any local elections for the appointment of VDC chair men or community leaders, but the government has appointed a VDC secretary to manage the governmental administration of Dhital. Some villagers believe that this is a temporary solution until the country's new constitution will be presented, and some point out the need for local village leaders to guide unified efforts of community development.

The VDC receives financial support from the government every year, and the VDC secretary is responsible for distributing the money for the schools, the health clinic and the various community projects which are needed in the villages. Villagers can apply for economic support to projects like the building of water tanks and roads, and may attend open meetings where decisions are being made. Nevertheless, because the financial budget of the VDC is limited, villagers often have to seek supplementary funding from internal or external actors in order to carry through community projects. In some cases donations from the villagers themselves are collected, but external actors and organisations have also become increasingly involved in local development projects, and have even initiated some of the projects aiming to improve educational facilities. I will return to these projects in paragraph 2.3.4.

2.3.2 Social structure

Upper Astam is dominated by the Adhikari kin group, which belongs to the Bahun caste, and the family story explains how their ancestors came to settle at this place. During a war between Muslims and Hindus in India, Hindus fled through the east of Nepal and further to the west searching for a place to settle, in accordance with the account of Adhikari and Bohle

(1999). Two Adhikari Hindu brothers are said to arrive in this area between the 7th and 13th century. The king who ruled the area at the time told the brothers that they could walk and circle an area of land, which would become theirs when they returned to him the next morning. Near sunset they arrived in Astam and gave it its name meaning “sunset village”. Since then the Adhikaris have been living in Astam, and recently a project of building an Adhikari ancestor temple in Upper Astam has begun. This temple is important not only to the villagers of Astam, but also to migrated members of the Adhikaris who now live in other parts of Nepal. According to a villager, all the Adhikaris originating from Astam are welcome to participate in the building of the temple: *“Everyone can bring something from their home, bring their mud or stone and put here. And it makes it - it is like ownership”* (Rubin, male 40).

An elderly Adhikari from Upper Astam could tell that his father had been a *Mukhiya*, a local agent collecting tax to the government. *“He was a big person in this area. (...) He contributed to the development of the village”* (Kailash, male 70). This *Mukhiya* had owned much of the land in the village and had employed several of workers. *“We used to have minimum ten workers every day, and more in the busy season. At that time we had 20-30 cows, so we had to cut grass for those also”* (Kailash, male 70). Workers were paid by money or in kind, depending on what they requested from the *Mukhiya*. Those who did not have any land came to ask him for help and he gave away land to many families. When the *Mukhiya*’s land was divided for his five sons, there was considerably less land left for each. Still, the families of this *Mukhiya*’s descendants are still among the wealthiest households in Astam.

In Lower Astam there can also be found a few Adhikari families, but this part is mostly populated by the lower castes of Damai and Kami, as well as a few families of the Buddhist ethnic group Tamang. The Buddhist households can be recognised by the colourful prayer flags which are put up on strings outside the houses. According to my key informants, villagers respect the religion of others and there are no conflicts between Hindus and Buddhists in the area. Nevertheless, the caste system seems to still be of relevance despite the younger generations’ claims that caste prejudices and discrimination are decreasing. While the young are less concerned about caste, the elders often find it hard to ignore the custom of treating people according to caste. An elderly couple of the Bahun caste in Astam explained that *“we would like to treat all people in the same way, but our hearts do not agree”*. This indicates that the lower castes may still face prejudices from the higher-caste population. Furthermore, inter-caste marriages have become more common during the latest decades, but

many still oppose marriages which intersect the separation between higher castes, ethnic groups and lower castes, and caste stratification is thereby sustained.

Despite the official ban on caste discrimination, caste still seems to influence people's opportunities indirectly. During my stay in the village I carried through a small household survey (n=50), and among other characteristics I mapped caste belonging and land holdings. From the survey results I found a significant correlation ($p < 0.001$) between caste and the ownership of *khet* land. *Khet* refers to land on the lower slopes of the hills, which are manually irrigated by bamboo pipes during the monsoon season (June – September), while *bari* refers to the upper land which are usually not irrigated. In the survey sample, I found that some of the lower-caste families do not own any *khet* land and only a small piece of *bari* land, while all the sampled households of the Bahun caste own both *khet* and *bari* land. Some of the lower caste households are therefore dependent on share-cropping and day labour. A relative assessment of the sampled households' wealth were made, based on land holdings and access to other assets, and showed that households of higher castes are generally better off than households of lower castes. The correlation between caste and wealth was significant ($p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that even though caste discrimination has been banned, the subsequent effects of earlier discrimination still influence the well-being of different castes, which again is reinforced by a widespread opposition against inter-caste marriages.

2.3.3 The livelihoods of households in Astam

The livelihood system in Astam is based on subsistence agriculture, although most households are no longer able to produce adequate food supplies to cover the household's needs throughout the year. Therefore the local production is supplemented with food bought in nearby markets. Rice is mainly produced on *khet* land, while crops of millet, maize and wheat, as well as vegetables, are cultivated in *bari* land. The buffalo is especially important for providing manure to fertilise the fields, while cows, ox, goats and chickens are commonly held as well. Oxen are used to plough the fields. The buffalo and cow give milk, while the goats and chickens provide meat and can also be sold locally.

Traditional farming is hard work, and the farmers in Astam frequently express despair about the problems of water scarcity and infertile soil in the village. "*The lands which are nearby the river, it is easy for irrigation, but here there is less water*" (Birendra, male 69). Farmers find it hard to cultivate vegetables as some vegetables need a continuous supply of water

during the growing season, which exceeds the period of monsoon rain. The rain washes nutrients from the soil down-hill, and because the farmers hold fewer domestic animals now than before they have less manure available for fertilising the fields. Some older villagers also pointed out that agriculture in the village is decreasing because young people leave the village for jobs in city areas or abroad. Thereby there are fewer workers available to hire for help in the busy seasons. A part of the land that was cultivated 10 years ago is now left uncultivated, and some villagers believe that this trend will increase.

There can be found two evident strategies chosen by households in Astam to relieve their dependence on traditional agriculture. Involvement in the tourism industry is one of these strategies. Some of the young men in the village take jobs as porters and trekking guides when they are less busy with agricultural work, while some are full-time involved in tourism businesses in Pokhara. Because Astam is located close to Pokhara, as well as the trekking routes up to the Annapurna Mountains, a small stream of tourists has been passing by this area throughout the years. This has been an incentive to the establishment of small ‘home-stays’ in Astam. Through the arrangement of home-stays the villagers offer tourists cheap accommodation in their family home. One household which started out with a home-stay now runs a small tourism business in Astam with a constant supply of tourists throughout the year.

The second strategy, labour migration, is more widely incorporated into the livelihood strategies of households in Astam. It is quite common that young family members are living permanently or temporarily in Pokhara or other parts of Nepal. Furthermore, several young villagers work abroad, mainly in the Gulf states², but also in other parts of Asia and in developed countries. Not all of the households with internal or external migrants reported that they received remittances, but a considerable number of households rely on the support of remittances. A more thorough description of local livelihoods will be given in chapter 5.

2.3.4 Infrastructure and facilities

The villagers in Astam have noted several positive changes in the village’s facilities during the latest ten years, but there is still a desire for better facilities of electricity, transportation and health care. Most of the households in the village now have electricity in their home, but the supply of power is unstable as Nepal runs a national power-saving programme. The power

² In this thesis the term “Gulf states” will consistently be used to refer to the states bordering to the southwest coast of the Persian Gulf (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates).

supply is cut off for several hours each day in all parts of the country, and the villagers are accustomed to manage their daily tasks without electricity. Even though the distance to Pokhara is only 20 km, the travel to the city used to be long and difficult. After the construction of the Pokhara-Baglung Highway (Map 1, p. 9), the access to Pokhara from Hemja was largely facilitated. There is a steep, gravelled road going up to Astam from Hemja, which allows motor bikes, tractors and jeeps to access the hill. Nearby markets and Pokhara has thereby become more accessible to villagers, although not everyone can afford to pay for transportation or vehicles. The road is slowly being improved, and during the recent decades villagers have also extended roads inside the village.

Some villagers are widely involved in community work to improve the facilities of the village, and there seems to be a raising awareness of the importance of local involvement in village development. Many women are involved in the Women's Group, which earlier has initiated projects like the construction of toilets in every household. The construction of roads and water tanks has also been carried out by villagers with financial support from the government, distributed by the VDC administration. Furthermore, with assistance from foreign NGOs there have been established some promising projects to improve the facilities of education and health care in Astam.

Astam has two government schools, one in Upper Astam and one in Lower Astam. The school in Lower Astam provides elementary education for children up to fifth grade, while the school in Upper Astam has developed into a middle school with students up to grade eight. After the children have finished grade eight they need to transfer to schools in nearby VDC's to obtain their School Leaving Certificate (SLC) in grade ten. After this they are qualified to seek admission in colleges and universities for higher education. Some parents also send their children to private schools in Pokhara if they have relatives in the city.

The principal of an Australian high school visited Astam as a tourist in the 1990s, and was inspired to establish a 'sister-school' relationship with the school in Upper Astam. The Australian high school started a fundraising, which provided means to significantly improve the facilities of the school in Upper Astam. Recently the not-for-profit Australian Logged On Foundation initiated a computer centre project in the same school. In the autumn of 2011 the computer centre in the school of Upper Astam opened, with new computers and internet connection provided by the foundation. There are also plans for after-school teaching in the

use of computers and internet for adults. The founder of the Logged On Foundation manage the project together with a local committee, and the school of Upper Astam has now very impressive facilities compared to other government schools in the area.

A French NGO (non-governmental organisation) has been involved in the establishment of a second health clinic in Dhital, located in the neighbouring ward of Lower Astam, which are more accessible to the villagers of the southern wards than the health post located north in ward 5. Unfortunately the new health clinic has limited staff and expertise, thus the villagers still have to approach hospitals in Pokhara for some of their health care needs. Nevertheless, the staff in the local health clinic can provide instant and vital treatment for injuries like snake bites. Short-time projects are run through the health clinic with assistance from outside volunteers. A group of foreign dentist students visited the clinic for two weeks in 2012 and provided basic dental service to the residents of Dhital. The local committee which manages the health clinic seeks to establish more of these projects by combining tourism and volunteer work.



Picture 4: The new computer centre (left) and the road leading to Astam (right)

The contextual information about Astam village which I have presented in this chapter is mostly based on the fieldwork I carried through during my visit to the village in 2012. The following chapter will provide reflections on the methods used for producing these data, as well as methodological reflections on the interpretation and analysis of data.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Methodology is essential in the processes of producing and analysing empirical data, and should therefore be presented and reflected upon together with the results (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). The empirical data presented in this thesis is based on the fieldwork I carried out in Astam and Pokhara, Nepal, during April and May in 2012. In this chapter I will introduce the methodological choices I have made during the research process. First I will shortly present the relationship between quantitative and qualitative methods and reflect upon the challenges of doing research in a foreign culture, especially the challenges of working with an interpreter during the research process. Thereafter I will focus on the methods used for producing data in the field, mainly participant observation, household survey and in-depth interviews. An introduction to the methods for analysing data will be followed by reflections on validity and reliability, as well as reflections on the ethical aspect of the research.

3.1 Quantitative and qualitative methods

Throughout the 20th century the popularity of quantitative and qualitative methods in human geography has been changing back and forth (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). Even though quantitative and qualitative methods have for a long time been presented as conflicting opposites, there is now a growing acceptance for combining both methods when aiming to reach a fuller understanding of geographical problems (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). Aase and Fossåskaret (2007) suggest that research in human geography can be more or less quantitative or qualitative orientated, which means that even if the research is mainly based on one of the two types, the other one can still be included if it brings new knowledge to the research. The research questions asked and the information sought should affect the choice of methods for the production and analysis of data. While quantitative methods are useful for producing data that explain the extensiveness of a phenomenon, qualitative methods are advantageous for producing data on the nature of a phenomenon, with a focus on human experiences and meanings. The combination of these two methodological orientations can thereby bring a fuller understanding to the phenomenon of interest (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007).

The study presented in this thesis clearly has a qualitative orientation, reflected in the chosen methods for production and analysis of data. Still, quantitative methods are not completely excluded as I find it useful to provide some statistics produced from a household survey I

undertook during fieldwork. Even though the extent of migration from Astam is of interest, the main objective is to understand the human experiences and meanings underlying this process, and how these interact with households' livelihood strategies and rural development in various ways. This is the reason for choosing a qualitative orientation in my research.

3.2 Cross-cultural research

Cross-cultural research refers to research in a foreign culture, which in some cases involves a foreign language (Smith, 2010). In this form of research the researcher should therefore be particularly attentive to cultural differences when producing and interpreting data. Even though it would be preferable to communicate directly with informants in a shared language, the assistance of an interpreter can often be necessary in cross-cultural research. It is important to be aware of how the involvement of an interpreter may influence the research process and the production of data (Smith, 2010). Clearly, the researcher should also reflect upon how her own characteristics and perspectives may affect the production and interpretation of data. My role as a researcher will mainly be discussed in paragraph 3.3.1.

3.2.1 Research in a foreign culture

A researcher should be careful to represent the empirical situation in accordance with the informants' experience of it (Smith, 2010). In cross-cultural research the perceptions of informants will often be different from the researcher's own, and it is therefore essential for the researcher to become familiar with the researched culture so that she can obtain an understanding of the local situation which is more consistent with the informants' perceptions of their realities (Smith, 2010). It is important to avoid the pitfall of ethnocentrism, where the researcher understands the local situation through the cultural "lenses" of her own culture (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007, Smith, 2010).

When I came to Nepal to do this research it was my first visit to the country. Still, Nepal had caught my interest many years earlier, and I was fortunate to have a Nepalese fellow student to help me prepare for the visit. She was also doing her field work in an area close to the village I stayed in, thus I had a helpful link between the Nepalese culture and my Norwegian culture, where she had been studying for a year. By the help of her explanations of unfamiliar customs I could better understand the local situation and people's experiences of their realities, and my fellow student thereby became a key informant in my research. She also

facilitated my learning of appropriate behaviour in the local area, which made it easier for me to interact more closely with the villagers. In total I spent more than seven weeks in Nepal, the first weeks on my own exploring Kathmandu and Pokhara, and then four intensive weeks of doing fieldwork in Astam and Pokhara. Because my fellow student introduced me to a local family in Astam, including a young man who was able to work as my interpreter, I could quickly start the fieldwork once I arrived in Astam. By being taken under the wing of this local family it was also easier to establish contact with other informants in the village. My fellow student, the interpreter and his family acted as door openers by introducing me to other villagers, which largely facilitated my access to informants. Still, my close relation to this family may also have “closed” some doors to other villagers and thereby limited the information I was able to access, even though I did not directly witness this reaction.

3.2.3 Cooperating with an interpreter

Because many of the villagers did not speak English, I was dependent on the interpreter during many of my meetings with informants. Hiring a professional translator was out of the question with my tight student budget and I had therefore planned to search for a local teenager with adequate knowledge of the English language to serve as an interpreter. My fellow student introduced me to a young man in his late teens who spoke English well and had a few months of free time available. We communicated well and he became a good friend and a loyal interpreter throughout the entire fieldwork process.

When cooperating with an interpreter the researcher needs to consider how this may affect the research process (Smith, 2010). One of the main points to reflect on is the translation strategy. A problem is that interpreters are often seen as neutral actors transferring meaning between different languages, but the process is in reality significantly more complicated. Language contains cultural meanings, which can be altered when it is translated into another language. Translating word by word is not always possible or advisable because an equivalent word may not exist in the other language, or could have a slightly different meaning (Smith, 2010).

Words are symbols that refer to an object based on an agreed upon understanding of what the symbol refers to (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). In addition to the agreed upon definition, words can have connotations which are the associations that the word brings with it. Different words referring to the same symbol can have differing connotations which can bring negative or positive associations to the word (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). These additional

associations of a word can easily be lost in translation. An alternative translation strategy can be to focus on the main points of the conversation, trying to transfer the cultural, social and political meaning of sayings from one language to another (Temple and Edwards, 2002, Smith, 2010). Some also choose to include words of the informants' native language and provide an explanation of these words instead of simply translating them (Smith, 2010).

Before we started to do the survey or any interviews in the field, I spent a few days with the interpreter in order to introduce him to the research project. My fellow student was also assisting me in this process, because she was in a better position to explain concepts to the interpreter if something was unclear to him. When we prepared to do the survey and the interviews I gave him time to translate the questions on beforehand, and when he became familiar with the process he was also comfortable to translate my unprepared follow-up questions during interviews. We agreed that he would translate the main points of the conversation during the interview so that I could follow the conversation, but the details would be discussed afterward in order to avoid too much disturbance during interviews. When allowed, I taped the interviews and later transcribed them with the help of the interpreter. I assured him that a strict word by word translation would not be necessary, as the focus should rather be on the meaning of informants' sayings. In some cases we decided to include Nepalese terms, an example being *raksi* which refers to locally produced liquor. This process worked quite well for us, and the discussions afterwards could clear up misunderstandings.

Kapborg and Berterö (2002) stress that the translation of interviews raises threats to validity, and these threats increase when more than two languages are involved. When a Norwegian researcher poses a question in English to an interpreter who translates this to Nepalese for the informants, it is difficult to know whether the question gives the same meaning as the researcher intended. Also when the informants' answers are translated back to the researcher, she cannot know if the answers have been modified by the interpreter. The researcher is unable to control the interview situation when the conversation is in an unknown language, and has to trust the interpreter's ability to transfer meaning between the languages (Kapborg and Berterö, 2002). Kapborg and Berterö (2002) points out that it is an advantage for the researcher to spend some time in the researched culture before she carries out interviews, because cultural knowledge is a precondition for understanding cultural meanings.

It is possible that some information got lost during the translation process in this research, or that questions and answers were misinterpreted. Still, I believe that it was an advantage that the interpreter became a good friend of mine, and that we also spent much of our free time together. Thereby we had the opportunity to discuss information also outside the interview settings. An example of a misunderstanding we later cleared up was when I thought that the interpreter had translated that the informants did not want to sell their land to a lower *caste*. I found this saying a bit surprising and later asked my interpreter for the reason why the informants did not want to sell their land to a lower caste. During the discussion I understood that he had actually said that they did not want to sell their land to a lower *cost*. In other words it was a misunderstanding based on the pronunciation of words, a mistake which underlines the fact that none of us speaks English as a first language.

Based on the challenges of depending on an interpreter during interviews, I felt that it was easier to reach a shared understanding with my informants during the interviews which could be performed in English. Still, based on experiences from earlier fieldwork in rural Asia, I knew that I could miss the deeper meaning of information, because it could contain cultural meanings that I was not familiar with. In this research also, many aspects became clearer to me after some time, and if I had stayed longer I would probably have obtained an even deeper understanding of the information. Being aware of this constraint, I often discussed the information with my interpreter and my fellow student. Because they spent more time with me they had some insight into my perspectives of the world and could explain some of the local attitudes to me. Being able to discuss most themes openly as friends with my fellow student and interpreter was of high value to my understanding in the fieldwork process.

By accepting that the interpreter is not a neutral medium for translating meaning between different languages, the researcher should also reflect upon the interpreter's social characteristics in relation to how it may influence the research, as well as how it can influence informants' response to the interview situation (Smith, 2010, Temple and Edwards, 2002). My interpreter is from a local family in Astam, but has been going to school in Pokhara for many years. In one way he is well known in the village, but many villagers had not seen him for a long time and he was not particularly familiar with the situation of everyday life in the village. When we visited households in the village many people were delighted to see him again and informants mostly agreed to interviews when asked. His family is of the higher Bahun caste and is widely involved in community work in Astam. My impression is that

many villagers respect the family for contributing to local development, and that cooperating with an interpreter from this family may be one of the reasons for the fortunate fact that most villagers agreed to interviews when asked. Furthermore, because of the interpreter's young age he was perhaps perceived as less threatening than an older man, and this may have facilitated a more open and informal conversation with the informants. However, if I had chosen a female interpreter, women might have been more comfortable during interviews, which could have led them to more openly express their meanings. The social characteristic of gender can have constrained the information obtained from interviews with women. The fact that the interpreter was from a local family may also have constrained information concerning sensitive issues, as gossip travels fast in small villages. Despite the referred to challenges of depending on an interpreter in a research process, the assistance of my interpreter was crucial for my ability to carry out the fieldwork in Astam.

3.3 Fieldwork methods

Combining different methodological techniques during fieldwork can be advantageous for reaching a deeper understanding of the research theme and each method should bring new knowledge to the theme (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). Aase and Fossåskaret (2007) point out that empirical data are not simply collected in the field, but produced when the researcher ascribes a concept to an empirical observation. The researcher does not collect data on human experiences and meanings like picking mushrooms in a basket, because the observations made in the field has to be categorised and ascribed an explaining concept, in the same way as we identify mushrooms as poisonous or safe, as an amanita or a chanterelle. Also, the researcher is not a neutral actor who collects and presents the data in an objective way, but rather takes part in producing knowledge through interaction with informants in the field, and furthermore shapes the data through her interpretations (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). Here I will present the methods of participant observation, household survey and in-depth interviews, as well as a few supplementary techniques I used in order to produce data in the field.

3.3.1 Participant observation

The method of participant observation is often used in cross-cultural research because close interaction with informants in everyday life can give the researcher a deeper understanding of the informants' realities (Laurier, 2010). Observation is not strictly limited to seeing, and all senses can be utilised in the effort to obtain information (Laurier, 2010). Through listening

and talking in informal conversations the researcher can also access other types of information than what is provided during formal interviews (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). In these field conversations the researcher may share stories as well as listening to others, underlining the method's essential aspect of *participating*, not simply *observing* from the outside (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). The researcher will achieve a deeper understanding of a form of interaction through participating in it, and will thereby be better able to provide insightful commentary on the topic of interest (Laurier, 2010). Wadel (1991) pointed out that in interaction with informants the researcher takes on a local role and can thereby become her own informant by reflecting on the experiences gained by acting in this role. How can a researcher gain access to participate in interaction with informants in the field area?

In order to be able to participate in a researched society the researcher has to form personal relations to informants (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). When reflecting on these relations, Aase and Fossåskaret (2007: 61) build on Linton's (1936 in Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007) concept of a 'status' as a social position which brings with it certain rights and duties. A status like 'mother' or 'teacher' relates to another status in a status set, like 'teacher – student' (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). Formal rights and duties, but also informal role expectations, can be connected to a status. The exact way a person decides to behave when acting in a status may vary and can be referred to as a 'role', while the informal role expectations connected to the status set the limits for the acceptable behaviour of a person acting in this status. If both parts in a status set share an apprehension of the behaviour expected from each other, they can to some extent predict each other's actions and establish trust. The other way around, if a person's behaviour is not in accordance with role expectations the trust can be broken because the two parts do not know what to expect from each other. During fieldwork the researcher has to enter a local status, in other words a status which the local people can relate to, when interacting with informants. The researcher should reflect upon this status and whether it gives access to participate in forms of interaction which are relevant to the research theme. If this is not so, the researcher can try to behave in contradiction to role expectations in order to be ascribed another status which may increase access to information (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). Which statuses did I act in during fieldwork?

From 'tourist' to 'friend'

When I came to Astam I initially entered the status of a 'tourist' and in the beginning I behaved in accordance with the role expectations of this status. Accommodated in a small

tourism business run by a local family, I spent time with other tourists and was guided around the village together with them. After a few days I realised that I had not come to the village to behave like a tourist, but to understand the livelihoods of local households. In order to obtain this understanding I needed to interact more closely with the villagers. By spending time with tourists I had reinforced my social status as a 'tourist', but I was also ascribed this status by my host family in the status set of 'tourist – host'. I was served Western-inspired food from the tourist menu because the family's preferred meal of *dal bhat* [traditional Nepalese meal] was considered too spicy for my taste. Nevertheless, the family did not hesitate to involve tourists in everyday activities. Because their friendliness is a natural element of their hospitality, I realised that the meals were one of the indicators that clearly pointed to my status as a 'tourist'. I thought that the friendship with my fellow student would allow me to quickly enter the status of being a 'friend' to the host family, but I realised that I had to alter my own behaviour in order to be treated as a 'friend'.

I tried to do so by acting less like a tourist and more like a visiting friend, by sometimes insisting on taking my platter out in the kitchen after meals, as well as making my own tea instead of being served by the staff. Furthermore I asked if I could have *dal bhat* for dinner together with the family some days. The host family and I developed a routine of playing cards every evening, and when the family spoke Nepalese to each other I tried to let them carry on without switching the conversation to English. In this way I felt that my 'tourist' status became less disturbing to the natural interaction among family members, especially on days when there were no other tourists staying there. After some time I had also become tired of interacting with tourists who came and left, therefore I rather enjoyed socialising with the family. Instead of placing myself at the same table as the other visitors for dinner, I rather sat down by the table where the family usually gathered. In other words I had turned to limit my interaction with other visitors and tried to avoid being categorised as a 'tourist'.

After staying there for a few weeks I realised a change in my attitude as I came to perceive myself partly as a representative of the family's business, because I now felt more of a belonging to the host family than to other visitors. For this reason I also felt that my behaviour against other tourists would influence their impression of the family's business, as the visitors got to know that I had been staying there for weeks. I suddenly found myself politely interacting with the tourists, in order to mirror the hospitality of the host family, even though I no longer found any personal interest in getting to know new visitors every day. Because the

family had made me feel very comfortable while staying with them I wanted to give something back, and in return I therefore shared my appreciation for the family and the village with the visiting tourists. At the same time I more or less consciously tried to distinguish myself from these tourists, for instance by utilising the Nepalese words I knew in conversations with the family members, to underline that I was not simply a 'tourist'.

Because of my connection to this host family, some of their relatives and friends also gradually accepted me as a 'friend' or at least as a friend of this family. During an interview with a close friend of the family, he talked about tourism development and how it could be tiring to constantly interact with tourists in the village if tourist visits to Astam would increase. Then he quickly added: "*Sorry, you are not a tourist, you are already like a friend - family*" (Pramesh, male 33). Two points can be derived from this conversation. Firstly, the notions of 'family' and family relations like 'sister' are widely used in symbolic terms in the Nepalese culture when referring to friends. I appreciated when members of my host family referred to me as a 'sister' or as 'part of the family', because I felt it confirmed me as their 'friend' more than a 'tourist'. Secondly, I could relate to this informant's thoughts because I had experienced myself how tiring it could be to constantly interact with tourists who came and left while I stayed with my host family. In some way I had become my own informant in accordance with Wadel's (1991) point. In relation to this matter I feel obliged to point out that a member of my host family expressed that he did not experience it to be stressful to constantly interact with tourists and that he truly enjoyed a life revolved around tourism.

From 'tourist' to 'foreign student'

To some degree I had been able to enter the status of a 'friend' in relation to my host family and their close friends, but it seemed impossible to enter the status of 'friend' in relation to all of the villagers in the time perspective of one month. The children would call "*give me candy!*" as I walked through the village, making me realise that to many of the villagers I was just another 'tourist'. Although, when I started to carry out the household survey I broke with the behaviour expected from a 'tourist' in relation to my informants. The interpreter introduced me as a friend of my Nepalese fellow student, and as a university student who was gathering information about migration from the village. Thereby I entered the status of 'foreign student' in relation to the households we surveyed.

My visible characteristics of a foreigner indicated that I was rich and powerful, which seemed to lead some of the villagers to expect or hope that I could contribute to solve their problems of water scarcity and poverty. I was quite uncomfortable with these role expectations as I did not want to give them the impression that I was able to initiate any helping projects for them in return for their sharing of information. Therefore I repeatedly explained that I did not have the means to implement any projects that could improve their situation. I was also worried that they would concentrate on expressing their problems to me, even exaggerate their despair, in a way that would narrow the information that they chose to share with me.

Because I could not escape from my visible characteristics as a *gori* [“white person”] I found it hard to break out of the statuses as a ‘foreign student’ or ‘tourist’ in relation to the villagers. What I could do was to be open and friendly, dress appropriately and utilise the Nepalese words I knew while interacting with villagers. By doing this I hoped that they would also be friendly and open to me in return. My fellow student explained the importance of using titles instead of names when addressing villagers, like *didi* [big sister] and *dai* [big brother]. Even though addressing strangers as family members felt unnatural to me, I tried to do so in order to be polite. I think these efforts of adjusting to the local culture was advantageous, because at the end of my field work some relatives of my host family could tell that they had become used to my presence in the village and that they would feel a little sad when I left. They appreciated the politeness and friendliness I had showed them and to my delight they could tell that “*you have almost become like a chori [daughter] to us*” (Madhushri, female 49).

Access to observe natural interaction

As the villagers became used to my presence during the weeks of my stay in Astam, I felt that I was given increased access to observe natural interaction. One day while I was walking in the village with my interpreter to search for an informant whom we had scheduled an interview with, we found him in the middle of an informal outdoor meeting with some other villagers as they discussed the plans for a new water tank. While we waited for him, we decided to find out what they were discussing. Even though my interpreter asked questions and thereby involved in the group discussion, the villagers did not seem to be disturbed by my presence. I got to know that they were discussing where to place a new underground water tank which they were planning to build with economic support from the VDC. The villagers had identified two suitable fields where the tank could be placed, but none of the two owners of this land wanted to sacrifice it for the water tank as no compensation could be offered. The

argument got quite heated. The next day we asked some of the villagers if they had reached any agreement and they could tell that one of the owners of the land had agreed to give it up for the water tank. Stumbling upon this meeting brought me insight into how villagers made communal decisions, and I would probably not have heard about this incident otherwise.

Furthermore I got the chance to take part in some cultural rituals, like watching a buffalo being sacrificed during an offering for the Mai God, a ritual performed by some of the lower castes in the village. In the beginning of my stay in Astam I was also invited to a wedding. Both the bride and groom belonged to the middle-castes of the ethnic groups, but several villagers from Astam who belonged to the higher castes were also invited. Some hours into the wedding most of these villagers had gathered in one room where they enjoyed alcoholic drinks, and I was also offered a drink when I came to join the group. A few weeks later during separate interviews with some of the same villagers, the topic of alcohol came up. All of them could tell that they did not drink alcohol because they belonged to the higher caste, even though I had seen them drink alcohol during the wedding. This incident made me realise two points. Firstly, as a participating 'friend' in the wedding I had been able to observe natural interaction and thereby access information that I would not have been able to gain through interviews when I acted in the status of 'foreign student'. Secondly, the social statuses I was ascribed did not only change over time, but also according to different settings. When I carried out formal interviews I was a 'foreign student', while even the same evening I might be ascribed the status of a 'friend' when I was not explicitly doing my "student work".

To sum up, I was in some cases allowed to observe and participate in everyday interactions among the villagers, especially when my status as a 'foreign student' was less explicit outside the setting of a formal interview. The efforts of my interpreter and fellow student to explain the different situations we participated in were essential to the understanding I gained from the interaction with villagers. My close relation to the host family furthermore brought me a deeper understanding of their way of life, and to some degree I was able to become my own informant in relation to Wadel's (1991) point. However, the method of participant observation is mainly a way to gain access to information that are hidden in more private arenas which are usually not open to strangers, while additional methods are needed in order to produce and interpret the information (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007).

3.3.2 Household survey

For this research I decided to do a small household survey (n=50) in Dhital VDC, mainly in Upper Astam and Lower Astam. A simple two-page questionnaire was designed to map household structure, as well as aspects of involvement in agriculture and labour migration. I visited all of the households together with my interpreter, sometimes also accompanied by my fellow student. While the interpreter translated the questions and answers, I noted the information on the sheet in order to retain some degree of control over the process.

A challenge I faced was to identify the family members who were actually recognised as a part of the household. While daughters traditionally shift to the husband's household after marriage, the sons sometimes choose to stay together in a joint household with their parents, while in other cases they split up and form new households. This became clear to me half-way in the survey process, but I was able to adjust this by going through the earlier surveyed households with my interpreter and re-draw the household maps when we had settled with the definition of a household as "the family members who were sharing land together". Still, in a few cases I chose to make exceptions from this definition if it became explicitly clear that family members who were entitled to the household's land had formed new households and did not take part in the consumption and production of the surveyed household's assets.

Agergaard (1999) pointed to similar problems of defining a household in relation to the study of migration processes in Nepal. For instance in cases when joint households split up, the households can be in a transitional phase "where joint ownership continues while production and consumption is split between new household units" (Agergaard, 1999: 103). Despite these challenges, it is necessary to focus on the household unit in studies of migration because it is one of the most important social units in the Nepalese society (Agergaard, 1999). Still, researchers should be careful not to conceptualise households as units with a unified will and strategy, because such an understanding ignores the fact that different household members often do not share the exact same opinions (Agergaard, 1999, de Haas, 2010).

When using the method of questionnaire survey, one has to consider the sampling strategy, which is the process of deciding how to choose survey participants (McLafferty, 2010). In most cases it is not possible to survey the entire population who is targeted in a research, and a sample has to be chosen (McLafferty, 2010). For this survey I applied a combination of snowball sampling and purposive sampling. The former strategy refers to a process where the

researcher starts out with a few respondents which fulfil the requirements of the targeted sample population, and further relies on these respondents' recommendations for other qualified respondents (Gobo, 2004). The latter strategy involves targeting as diverse cases as possible in order to mirror the variation of the topic (Gobo, 2004).

In the beginning I mainly targeted households with migrants to secure that I would receive information about migrant-households, and followed the suggestions of my host family and other villagers to find households with migrants. Still, I was aware that I also had to include households without migrants in order to compare them to the migrant-households. During the process it became evident that the challenge was not to find households with migrants, but rather to find households which did not include any former or current internal or external migrants. The strategy of purposive sampling became more prominent when I had to avoid households with migrants in order to include some no-migrant households. Furthermore I made an effort to include households of different castes and households involved in different types of economic activities. The choice of respondents representing the households was based on availability. In some cases more than one representative was present and respondents generally included both men and women.

Qualitative researchers in social studies have been criticised for not using probability samples, and critics have pointed out that the samples are therefore not representative of the population, which makes it impossible to generalise the findings (Gobo, 2004). Gobo (2004: 439) stated that "using representative samples is plausible if there is no doubt that they mirror the characteristics of the population", which can be difficult to secure in social research. On the other hand, Gobo (2004) points out that to generalise about a population is only one of the ways to generalise findings. There is a second way, which is to generalise about "the nature of a process" and this is often referred to as transferability (Gobo, 2004: 435). We need to distinguish between these two different ways of generalising, as well as to separate the idea of a representative sample from the idea of the generalisability of findings, because the latter does not necessarily follow the former. In qualitative research the focus should rather be on generalising about the structures of a process, not singular incidents or individuals (Gobo, 2004). This also brings other forms of requirements to the sampling strategy, based on the variance of the studied topic (Gobo, 2004).

The two sampling strategies I have chosen to utilise are common in qualitative research, but the sample in this household survey is not necessarily representative for the entire population of the village because I have not been able to access an overview of all of the households in the village. Nevertheless, I do not seek to generalise specific findings from the household survey to be valid for the entire population in Astam. Singular findings, like the average land holding of lower-caste households, cannot be generalised to the entire lower-caste population of the village. Still, findings from the household survey may shed light on general structures which can also be valid for parts of the population outside the sample. The finding of a correlation between caste and land holdings (see paragraph 2.3.2), could be transferable to other parts of the population, even though the size of land holdings cannot be generalised.

3.3.3 In-depth interviews

In addition to informal field conversations I carried out 20 semi-structured interviews with informants from 12 different households, as well as an interview with a key informant who could provide insight in the farming system of the village. Among the informants chosen there were former and current internal and external migrants, as well as members from migrant-households, in addition to a representative from a no-migrant household. For some of the interviews there were more than one informant present, for instance both husband and wife.

I found it especially interesting to talk to the migrants themselves, whether they were former or current migrants, as well as internal or external migrants. This interest was based on the objective to gain insight into why migrants chose to leave the village to work in other places, as well as how the migration experience had influenced their perspectives on the village life. Because external migrants from Astam are mainly men, this focus unfortunately led to a certain gendered bias towards males. This is a weakness in my methodological choices, which may have affected the findings. Still, for the interviews with representatives of households with and without migrants, the gendered balance between informants was more even.

The information I gained led me to adapt some of the questions as well as introduce new ones. In some cases I interviewed the same informants twice if new relevant questions had risen during my reflections on the first interview. Several interviews were carried out with the assistance of my interpreter, but when the informants were comfortable to do the interview in English I preferred that option. In these interviews I felt it was easier to reach a shared understanding with my informants, because I could better control the exchange of

information. I also realised that I could more easily relate to the perspectives of external migrants because we shared some knowledge of the world outside Nepal. It seemed like these informants also felt that I could better understand their experiences from the stay abroad, indicated by sayings like “*you are from Norway, right? You know this*” (Sanjay, male 33).

From one of the in-depth interviews I also became more aware of the point of how researchers take part in the production of data. At the end of my field work one informant pointed out that I had taught him the importance of confidence. At first this statement confused me because the informant was the one who had brought up this matter when I asked him what he found especially important in order to succeed as a labour migrant. Then I realised that this informant had probably not consciously thought about the importance of confidence in relation to this issue until I posed the question. This case illustrates how data are produced through the interaction between researcher and informants (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007).

3.3.4 Supplementary methods

During the field work I also applied a few supplementary techniques for the production of data. Photo eliciting refers to the method of using photos to initiate a conversation about the presented image (Harper, 2003), and I utilised this method during some of the interviews. Furthermore I approached the VDC administration office of Dhital in order to access statistical information about the VDC. The VDC secretary was very helpful to answer some general questions about Dhital, and also allowed me to make copies of the newest edition of the Village Profile report. The report was written in Nepalese, but with the help of my translator I could interpret some of the statistical data.

Now that I have presented the methods for production of data during field work I will turn to aspects concerning the interpretation and analysis of data.

3.4 Interpretation and analysis of data

Interpretation and analysis of data starts the moment the researcher engage in a research theme, and the insights obtained during the research process will influence how the findings are represented in the written thesis (MacKian, 2010). Data are produced through the researcher’s interpretation of observations made in the field, therefore the researcher needs to justify the ways in which these empirical observations are interpreted (MacKian, 2010, Aase

and Fossåskaret, 2007). By ascribing analytical concepts to the interpreted observations the data can be related to existing theory (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). Analysis furthermore involves the sorting and coding of data, which influence the final choice of how the data will be represented in text (MacKian, 2010). Here I will provide some reflections on the interpretation and analysis of the data I accessed through my field work.

3.4.1 Categorising observations

In the same way as we select, more or less consciously, what to observe and note in the field, we also select a way to interpret this observation (MacKian, 2010, Wadel, 1991). This involves a cognitive categorisation of the observations (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). The categorisation of sensed observations is a universal human capability which helps systemise our impressions of the world. Still, it is important to be aware of culture as a differentiating factor, because it influences the content and meaning assigned to a cognitive category (ibid). In paragraph 3.2.1 I pointed out that it is important to present empirical findings in accordance with the informants' understandings. When interpreting empirical observations, the researcher should therefore try to obtain an understanding of the cognitive categories which informants relate to and place observations in (Wadel, 1991, Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007).

Through reading theories of migration I had assigned a variety of cognitive sub-categories of migration in my own mind, but I was aware that I needed to find out how my informants categorised different acts of migration. Furthermore, as I will discuss in paragraph 4.1.1, categorical distinctions between different forms of migration is often based on migration motives and the nature of the migration processes, which in reality can be complex and shifting (de Haas, 2010). Because I was aware of these challenges, I asked questions of how the informants perceived acts of migration before I went on with other aspects of the topic during in-depth interviews. This effort resulted in some discussions of the concept, and also led to the introduction of a Nepalese concept in relation to the topic.

The direct translation of the word 'migration' into Nepalese language was by informants defined as the act to sell all land at the home place and settle somewhere else. "*Migration is to forget the native place and go to other places for permanent settlement*" (Birendra, male 69). The direct translation of migration was thereby interpreted as permanent migration or re-settlement. It became evident that I needed another concept to refer to members of rural households who went to work in other places. "*Even though I went to the Gulf, I did not sell*

my home and land, and I worked in the Gulf for eight years. I was looking for some good opportunities and a good job. We cannot say that is migration” (Sanjay, male 33).

This led to the introduction of the word *lahure*. Originally *lahure* referred to the Nepalese who went abroad to join the army of the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh in the city of Lahore, which is now located in Pakistan (Seddon et al., 2002). Now the concept is more widely used for the Nepalese who go to other countries, including those who work in foreign armies as well as those who find other occupations abroad. “*People who go to other countries to earn money or something else, we can call them lahure*” (Birendra, male 69). While many of them go to India and the Gulf states, some also go to developed countries. Nevertheless, the concept does not seem to include those who go to work in other areas of Nepal. Therefore I will use the concept of ‘internal migrant’ when referring to villagers who work temporary or permanently in other parts of Nepal. In the thesis the concepts of ‘external migrant’ and ‘*lahure*’ will be used interchangeable for villagers who work abroad.

3.4.2 Coding and organising data

Through coding, the data can be classified on a descriptive and analytical level, relating it to both themes and theory (Cope, 2010). Coding can help discover new links between themes and bring up new questions, therefore it is an advantage to start coding the data during fieldwork (Cope, 2010). By the help of the analytical frameworks I had chosen as a theoretical foundation for this thesis, I started coding information and relate to theory during fieldwork. In this way I obtained a better overview of accessed data and was able to identify themes that needed further investigation in order to answer the posed research questions.

When I had finished the fieldwork and transcribed all of the interviews I also organised the observations in descriptive themes on A3 sized paper. Through this work of coding I had to read through all of the interviews several times, which gave me an extensive overview of the interview material and also led me to re-discovered information that I had previously overlooked. The further reading of theory also shed a new light on my findings and led me to add a new discussion point to the thesis. As Wadel (1991: 129, 160) states, qualitative research often involves a “circular dance” between theory, methods and data during field work, which is partly repeated in the writing process when the researcher chooses how to conceptualise the data in order to relate it to theory.

3.4.3 Reliability and validity

The concepts of reliability and validity are mostly associated with quantitative research, but these principles should also be reflected upon in qualitative research (Silverman, 2001).

Reliability concerns whether the same observations would be identified if another type of method were applied or if the investigation were carried out at a different time or by another researcher (Kirk and Miller, 1986). While some researchers have argued that this principle cannot be applied in qualitative research of dynamic social phenomena, others have identified ways to ensure reliability also in qualitative research (Silverman, 2001). In relation to reliability Seale (1999: 148) points to the principle of ‘low-inference descriptors’, which means that the observations should be described as detailed as possible separately from the researcher’s own interpretations and perspectives. He also points to the value of including direct citations in addition to the researcher’s interpretation of informants’ accounts, because the latter may include the researcher’s modification. We need to distinguish between the emic and etic level of analysis, where the former refer to the researched subjects’ own descriptions, while the latter refers to the concepts applied to these observations by the researcher, which may differ if the observations had been interpreted by someone else (Silverman, 2001).

This furthermore relates to the categorisation of observations discussed in paragraph 3.4.1.

Despite the various ways of categorising an observation there has to be an agreement that the observed incident actually took place (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). For instance, some may interpret the beheading of a buffalo as cruelty to animals while others see it is an offering to the gods, but there can still be reached an agreement of whether or not a buffalo was killed.

To ensure reliability I have tried to describe the observations on the emic level before interpreting them at the etic level throughout the analysis. In the thesis I found it useful to utilise the concept of ‘internal migrant’ in order to identify a category for the villagers who worked in other parts of the country, whether temporarily or permanently. This concept belongs to the etic level of analysis because the villagers themselves did not use this concept during interviews, and in their view the concept of ‘migrant’ mainly refers to those who have re-settled permanently. It is therefore important that I specify what meaning I give to the concept ‘internal migrant’ because other researchers would perhaps not apply the concept in the same manner. Furthermore, because my informants and I assigned different meanings to the cognitive categories of ‘migration’ and ‘migrant’, I needed to reflect upon my choice of words during interviews. If I had carried through all of the interviews without realising the differing meanings we ascribed to ‘migration’, it would have raised serious threats to validity.

Kirk and Miller (1986: 22) stated that in relation to qualitative observations validity concerns “whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees”. As indicated above, the researcher needs to be certain that her conversation with informants is based upon mutual understanding, so that the two parts are indeed discussing the same subject and not two different issues. For instance, if I as a researcher believed that we were discussing the positive and negative aspects of temporary labour migration while informants believed that we were discussing aspects of permanent re-settlement, the conclusions drawn from the conversation would probably not have been valid in relation to the topic of labour migration. In some cases I therefore asked informants to explain a concept before I used this concept to pose a more specific question, in order to explore whether we had the same understanding of a word.

Furthermore, by posing different types of questions about the same topic, various kinds of information about the researched topic can be revealed (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Through face-to-face interviews I had the opportunity to adjust questions and pose them in another way if I suspected that the informants did not understand the question in the way that I had intended. Furthermore, I had the chance to “check” my findings by summing up my understanding of the informants’ accounts and ask them whether I had understood their answers “rightly”. Even though the researcher may never fully understand the perceptions of informants and the cultural meaning inherent in information, fieldwork allows the researcher to constantly test her developed hypotheses in relation to different informants, at different times and in different settings (Kirk and Miller, 1986). With these points in mind I have tried to limit threats to validity in this thesis, but there is still a risk that I may have unconsciously made mistakes.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The relationship between researcher and informants will often not be mutual beneficial because the researcher takes advantage of relations to informants in order to obtain data for research purposes which will not necessarily benefit the informants in return (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). This asymmetrical relationship is one of the ethical challenges that researchers face, especially in qualitative research. I am very grateful that informants were willing to share their thoughts with me because without their cooperation I could not have written this thesis. I therefore found it hard to accept that I could not properly return the favour, especially as some of the villagers’ expressed that they hoped I could contribute to

solve the problem of water scarcity in the village. Still, I never indicated that I was able to initiate any changes in the village and was always honest about the objectives of my research. When I was confronted with their expectations I repeatedly pointed out that I unfortunately did not have the power or means to initiate any projects that could improve their situation. Nevertheless, one informant expressed a wish which I felt I would be able to fulfil, namely that I would always remember the village and continue to share the information about their challenges of water scarcity and lack of facilities. Furthermore, if the informants were especially curious about me or the research project I also shared my perspectives in return. To show my appreciation for the informants' willingness to spend some of their time to contribute to my research, I gave them a small gift at the end of the in-depth interviews.

The gratitude I feel also reinforces my wish to present the findings in a way which the informants can agree to and not in any way that can be offending or cause harm to informants. Even though I explained the objectives of my research to the informants before interviews in order to obtain informed consent for involving them in the research, they could not know exactly how the information they provided would be presented in the written thesis (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). I have therefore given much thought to the presentation of findings and in some cases I have excluded relevant information or details from the written presentation of the thesis in respect of the informants. During informal interaction and field conversations it can be difficult to obtain informed consent from all participants, and also in cases where I formed friendships with some of the informants I had to evaluate which kind of information I could include in the written presentation without breaking with any role expectations. All the informants have been given pseudonyms for concerns of anonymity, and in some cases details and migrant destinations have been anonymised as well in order to limit the potential for recognition. Still, in a small society like this village it can be difficult to secure full anonymity (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). If villagers from Astam read the thesis they may be able to identify some of the informants, and it is therefore necessary to reflect on the use of citations even though informants are given pseudonyms. Research often involves a degree of violation of the informants' privacy (Dowling, 2010). Therefore, when the findings from Astam are presented in written text I do not only have a responsibility to secure reliability and validity, but also to secure a respectful presentation of the informants' contributions.

The following chapter will outline the theoretical foundation for the production and analysis of empirical data from Astam, while these data will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AND MIGRATION-DEVELOPMENT INTERACTIONS

There have earlier been attempts at presenting generalising theories of the causes and effects of migration, but in order to analyse how migration interacts with rural households' livelihoods in Astam I find it more relevant to utilise theoretical approaches which place migration in the context of livelihood strategies. I believe these approaches can facilitate an understanding of the dynamic and place-specific causes and effects of migration in Astam which I aim to uncover in this idiographic research. However, the idiographic orientation does not exclude the potential transferability of the findings, a point I will return to in the concluding section of the thesis. Bebbington's (1999) framework for the analyses of rural livelihoods is focused on households' access to five types of capital assets. This framework will be presented here as the base for my subsequent analysis of how migration influence rural households' access to these assets. Furthermore I will present Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) notion of the forms of capital for the purpose of analysing whether his approach can bring additional insight to the interaction between migration and rural livelihoods in Astam.

For decades it has been debated whether migration facilitates or undermines development in migrant-sending communities, but de Haas (2010) points out that interactions between migration and development are complex and cannot be determined by generalising theories. Rather, the interactions should be contextualised within the broader development context of which they are an inherent part (de Haas, 2010). This perspective will be presented in the end of this chapter and will be the base for a short discussion of how the findings from Astam relate to the debate on the migration-development nexus. I will start this chapter by providing an introduction to migration as part of rural livelihood strategies.

4.1 Migration in the context of rural livelihood strategies

In order to contextualise migration within the livelihood approaches, I find it relevant to provide some thoughts on the concept of migration and the terms that have been utilised to categorise different acts of migration. Thereafter I will give an introduction to the livelihood approaches and present how migration can be seen as part of a livelihood strategy.

4.1.1 Conceptualising migration processes

“Migration is defined broadly as a permanent or semipermanent change of residence.” (Lee, 1966: 49). This general definition captures migration in all its forms, but several nuanced terms referring to various forms of migration have been presented, both concerning migrants’ motives (like labour migration) and the nature of the migration process (like seasonal migration). Still, because migration motives and processes can be complex and may shift over time it can be difficult and problematic to make definite distinctions between different forms of migration in empirical research (de Haas, 2010). One of my informants in Astam had been able to accumulate financial means from migrant work abroad which were used to support his household in Nepal, but he specifically pointed out that he did not migrate abroad with a motivation to earn money, as his motive rather was to escape from the stressed situation of civil war in his country. This finding supports de Haas’ (2010) statement that the categorisation of migration, for instance as labour migration, can be problematic because the intentions behind an act of migration could be different from the resulting effects of it.

Despite these concerns I have chosen to utilise some nuanced concepts of migration in this thesis. I find it relevant to distinguish between ‘internal migration’ inside the migrants’ home country and ‘external migration’ to other countries. The term ‘labour migration’ will be used in cases where migrants have provided financial remittances to his or her rural household, regardless of the migrants’ initial motivation for, and nature of, the change of residence. Furthermore, the concept of ‘temporary migration’ will be used to refer to acts of migration where the migrant has expressed a wish to return back home, both in the time perspective of months and years. Because I found the informants’ conceptions of ‘migration’ to be slightly different from my own, I have provided further considerations of the understandings of ‘migration’ in paragraph 3.4.1, where I discussed the interpretation of cognitive categories.

4.1.2 Livelihood approaches

Rural households in developing countries have often been thought of as solely dependent on agriculture or other forms of main occupations (Bebbington, 1999). During the latest decades researchers have increasingly come to acknowledge that households in many cases draw upon a range of activities to secure their living (Ellis, 2000, de Haas, 2010). Because many rural households cannot make a living from agriculture alone, they often also depend on involvement in off-farm labour as well as remittances from migrated household members

(Bebbington, 1999, Ellis, 2000). It is therefore difficult and unreasonable to classify these households as simply dependent on their main occupation, for instance agriculture, and this misunderstanding could also lead to weak results from efforts of poverty alleviation (Bebbington, 1999). Livelihood approaches can better reveal the complex and shifting nature of how households form a living, which also can facilitate better-targeted initiatives for poverty alleviation (Bebbington, 1999, Ellis, 2000).

In order to define the term 'livelihood' I have chosen to use a modified version of Ellis' (2000: 10) definition of the concept: A livelihood comprises the assets, the activities, and the access to these that together determine the living gained by the individual or household. Ellis (2000) points out that such a definition might ignore the dynamic aspect of livelihoods, like households' ability to shift and adapt their livelihood activities to changing opportunities and constraints. It should therefore be recognised that households' assets and activities, as well as access to these, may change from one year to another and even within seasons (Ellis, 2000).

Many of those who have followed similar definitions of the livelihood concept have referred to households' assets as forms of capital, and various capital concepts have been suggested (Ellis, 2000). Ellis (2000: 8) recognises that not all of these capital concepts are in accordance with "the orthodox economic definition of capital, whereby an investment is made in order to achieve a future flow of returns, and a conventional rate of return to investment can be calculated". This point will also be referred to in chapter 7. Another important aspect of the definition is access. Different individuals and households will have varying degrees of access to certain assets and activities, influenced by their social characteristics, as well as institutions and organisations on various geographical levels (Ellis, 2000). This thereby influences the opportunities and restrictions faced by households in their efforts to form viable livelihoods.

A 'livelihood strategy' can be defined as "a strategic or deliberate choice of a combination of activities by households and their individual members to maintain, secure, and improve their livelihoods" (de Haas, 2010: 244). Scoones (1998) suggested three broad types of rural livelihood strategies: agricultural intensification/extensification, livelihood diversification and migration. Still, we should be careful to make such distinctions based on the main activities of the households because it cannot represent the reality of rural households' complex and dynamic livelihood strategies (Ellis, 2000). In many cases households continually adapt their livelihoods to shifting circumstances, thus we have to see the activities they involve in as

parts of dynamic livelihood diversification strategies (Ellis, 2000). How can migration be incorporated in rural livelihood strategies?

4.1.3 Migration in rural livelihood strategies

“[M]igration has been increasingly recognised as one of the main elements of the strategies households employ to diversify, secure, and, potentially, durably improve, their livelihoods.” (de Haas, 2010: 244).

In areas where opportunities for agricultural intensification and rural employment are limited, involvement in migration can be vital to the survival of rural households (Bebbington, 1999). Ellis (2000) points out the different ways in which migration can be incorporated in households' livelihood strategies. Temporary migration can be both seasonal and circular, the former version being in accordance with agricultural peak seasons, while the latter one is more independent of seasons in agriculture. Both forms indicate that the migrant regularly return to the original household as his or her main residence. Permanent migration, in this context, refers to cases where family members of rural households settle in other places, often city areas, on a long-term basis while still contributing to the survival of the rural household by remitting support regularly or sporadically. All of these migration processes can be carried out both as internal and external migration. The main point is that the migrated household members continue to contribute to the well-being of their original household (Ellis, 2000).

In this way migration of one or more household members can give access to new income sources and assets which can serve to improve the living of the entire household (Ellis, 2000). Still, it is important to recognise that an act of migration gives no guarantee that migrants will be able to earn an income which allows them to make significant contributions to the welfare of their original household (Ellis, 2000). Furthermore, the incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies will clearly affect the local activities which households involve in, for instance through the loss of local labour force. Bebbington's (1999) framework for analysing rural livelihoods is theoretically located within the livelihood approaches. In chapter 6 the framework will be the base for my analysis of how migration influences rural households' access to 'capital assets' in Astam and an outlining of the framework therefore follows here.

4.2 A framework for analysing rural livelihoods

Inspired by debates on peasant viability in the Andes, Bebbington (1999) introduced a framework for analysing rural livelihoods with a focus on viability and poverty. Bebbington (1999) proposes that the analyses of rural livelihoods should be focused on rural households' access to five types of 'capital assets' and their capability to transform these assets into viable and meaningful livelihoods. Furthermore he gives particular attention to households' abilities to form relations to other actors in the spheres of market, state and civil society, and to which extent these relations can give households access to alter the rules which influence the distribution and control of resources. Rural livelihoods have become increasingly diversified and are no longer necessarily equivalent to agrarian livelihoods based on natural resources. Bebbington (1999) therefore emphasise the importance of acknowledging all of the forms of resources, or capital assets, that rural households utilise to form livelihoods which satisfy both their material and experiential standards of a viable livelihood.

4.2.1 Capital assets: Resources, meanings and capabilities

Bebbington (1999) includes five types of capital assets (produced, human, natural, social and cultural) as central elements in the framework, and these will be presented in the next paragraph. In his view, capital assets should not only be seen as inputs used to build livelihoods which satisfy households' material needs. This is because the capital assets are furthermore the outputs of the livelihood strategies which households choose to form, and do not only reflect the material standards which the households aim to secure, but also the experiential aspects of what individuals need in order to feel that their lives are meaningful.

Bebbington (1999) emphasise that poverty should not only be measured objectively in terms of income and the coverage of basic needs, but also subjectively by bringing attention to the individuals' own perceptions of poverty and thereby also viability. In his view the concept of 'livelihood' can capture both of these aspects, because the subjective perceptions of poverty influence households' choices regarding livelihood strategies. For instance, some may choose to stay in their rural home place where economic opportunities are limited rather than trading the experienced benefit of living in rural areas with an alternative of migrating to urban areas where they could possibly gain access to higher incomes (Bebbington, 1999).

Households' choices regarding livelihood strategies are also clearly influenced by economic, political and social structures which pose opportunities and restrictions to households' efforts of creating viable livelihoods (Bebbington, 1999). Still, it must be recognised that these structures are renegotiable. Capital assets can give household members the capability to change the world they live in. In this way the rural population can be enabled to contribute to change the structures that govern their access to capital assets, as well as their possibilities to transform capital assets into viable and meaningful livelihoods. Bebbington (1999) points out that access to external actors in the spheres of the market, state and civil society can be especially important for the rural population's ability to alter structural constraints.

4.2.2 Five types of capital assets

In the framework Bebbington (1999) does not provide deep elaborations of all of the five types of capital assets included, therefore I will present these by the help of his references to other authors' work. To a certain extent Bebbington (1999) builds on the work of Serageldin and Steer (1994), who utilised four types of capital concepts to discuss sustainable development, although their work was focused on a global and national geographic scale. What Serageldin and Steer (1994) refer to as 'human made capital' have also later been termed 'produced capital', which is the notion Bebbington has chosen to utilise in his framework (Bebbington, 1999). This form of capital includes assets like machines, buildings and infrastructure, all of which can be produced by humans (Serageldin and Steer, 1994). In the framework it becomes evident that also financial means are included in produced capital (Bebbington, 1999, Bebbington and Perreault, 1999). Natural capital encompasses assets provided by the environment, both in the tangible forms of soil and trees, as well as the less tangible aspect of environmental services, exemplified by the hydrological cycle (Serageldin and Steer, 1994, Scoones, 1998).

Human capital refers to individuals' knowledge, skills and health (Serageldin and Steer, 1994, Bebbington and Perreault, 1999). Bebbington (1999) acknowledges Sen's (1997) view that human capital not only enhances a person's capacity to perform economically productive work, but also contributes to the person's quality of life, and can make he or she able to produce social change. Accumulation of human capital gives a person more freedom to live a life which he or she finds meaningful, and enables people to debate, question and potentially change the society they live in (Sen, 1997, Bebbington, 1999). This supports Bebbington's (1999) point of how capital assets can empower people to become agents of change.

Bebbington (1999) furthermore choose to include the notion of cultural capital, which he refers to as the value of taking part in cultural practices which are often tied to place. By recognising that parts of the rural population in the Andes seek to hold on to their rural residence, which enables the participation in certain cultural practices, Bebbington (1999) points out that the meaningfulness people find in these practices should be accounted for in the analyses of rural livelihoods. This meaningfulness can be related to subjective perceptions of poverty, and unless this aspect is recognised when identifying policy interventions for poverty alleviation the interventions could neglect the rural population's own understandings of well-being. Still, cultural capital does not only contribute to make people's lives more meaningful, it can also be empowering and influence their abilities to access other forms of capital by enabling certain forms of action that cannot be derived from the other types of capital alone. Bebbington (1999) does not provide any concrete examples to explain this potential effect, but give reference to the work of Kleymeyer (1994).

From research in Latin America it is found that certain forms of grassroot development projects "have encouraged social and economic change by both drawing upon and reinforcing the cultural traditions of low-income and ethnic peoples." (Kleymeyer, 1994: 2). Culture is important to people's effort of orientating themselves in the world, and the cultural aspect should therefore not be neglected in initiatives to produce local development (Kleymeyer, 1994). Furthermore, Kleymeyer (1994) claimed that cultural expressions - like dance, art and oral histories - can produce a social force which he terms 'cultural energy'. "This force is a prime source of motivation that inspires people to confront problems, identify solutions, and participate in carrying them out." (Kleymeyer, 1994: 4). This view can be related to Bebbington's (1999) claim that cultural capital can enable certain forms of actions which can enhance households' access to the other forms of capital assets.

Because there are various opinions of what social capital constitutes and how it should be investigated in empirical research, it has been difficult to state an absolute definition of the concept (Bebbington, 1999). Still, there exists a general agreement that it is based on different forms of social networks on various geographical scales, and that a common understanding of norms inherent in a network facilitates trust among its members. These social networks can range from community groups and kinship groups on the local level to formal organisations on the regional, national and global level. Bebbington (1999) gives particular attention to rural

households' access to other actors in the spheres of the market, state and civil society, because he believes that these relations can be important in order for households to access other resources and even influence the rules governing this access. He thereby finds social capital to be a central asset for rural households' access to resources:

“Indeed, seen this way, the distinction between *access* and *resources* breaks down, because access becomes perhaps the most critical resources of all if people are to build sustainable, poverty alleviating livelihoods.” (Bebbington, 1999: 2022, emphasis in original).

The various spheres of market, state and civil society have their own logic which determines the opportunities and restrictions of what can be achieved within each sphere (Bebbington, 1999). Household members' abilities to interact with other actors in these spheres thereby influence their opportunities to access resources controlled in the various spheres as well as their opportunities to contribute to change the rules governing the distribution, control and transformation of these resources. “People's ability to gain access to those spheres, is in turn greatly affected by the capabilities they have as a result of their initial endowments of the different types of capital asset.” (Bebbington, 1999: 2035). Initiatives for poverty alleviation should also be focused on how social capital can be built because it can be more difficult for the households with fewer assets to gain access to actors in the spheres of market, state and civil society. Facilitating poorer households access to other actors is especially important because “such relationships become almost *sine qua non* mechanisms through which resources are distributed and claimed” (Bebbington, 1999: 2023, emphasis in original).

4.2.3 Overview of the framework

Bebbington (1999) divides his framework into two parts. Firstly, the households' use, reproduction and transformation of five types of capital assets influence their material life-standard as well as the meaning and capabilities they gain from their livelihoods, which again affect their access to capital assets. Capital assets are therefore both the inputs and outputs of households' livelihood strategies. Secondly, individuals, households and organisations may form relations to external actors in the spheres of market, state and civil society in order to defend, receive, claim and transform capital assets, in addition to potentially change the rules governing the access to capital assets. While the households who have been successful in forming viable livelihoods generally have been able to claim and receive increased access to capital assets, those who struggle to form a living have often not been able to defend their

existing assets and let alone increase their access to capital assets (Bebbington, 1999). Capital is thereby a central concept in the framework, but from where does this concept originate?

4.3 Outline of a theory of practice

Bourdieu's introduction of 'a general science of the economy of practice' in 1972 made him one of the originators behind the conceptualisation of the forms of capital. By stating that "[t]he social world is accumulated history" Bourdieu (1986: 241) emphasised that all agents do not have equal bases for taking advantage of opportunities that rise in society. The concept of capital can be useful to understand various agents' different starting points for performing certain actions because "the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1986: 242). Capital consists of labour accumulated over time and has an inherent potential to be reproduced and expanded, as well as to produce material and symbolic profits (Bourdieu, 1986). The concept of capital should not only be limited to the economic sphere, because:

"...practice never ceases to conform to economic calculation even when it gives every appearance of disinterestedness by departing from the logic of interested calculation (in the narrow sense) and playing for stakes that are non-material and not easily quantified."
(Bourdieu, 1977: 177).

This is not to say that all forms of actions are consciously guided by economic calculation so that they are simply reducible to economic practice, but rather that the narrowly economic practices are only one part of the wider economy of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991). The concept of capital should therefore not only be applied to the strictly economic form of capital, but also to other forms of capital which can be accumulated and produce profits (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). Here I will narrow the focus to four forms of capital elaborated by Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1991), as well as the conversions between them.

4.3.1 Four forms of capital

The four forms of capital which will be emphasised here are economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Economic capital refers to financial means and the goods which can be directly exchanged for money, as well as landed property (Bourdieu, 1986). The other forms of capital can be seen as "disguised forms of economic capital"

(Bourdieu, 1986: 252), but are still not simply reducible to this basic form of capital. I will return to this issue in the next paragraph focused on the conversion of capital.

Cultural capital can exist in the embodied, objectified and institutionalised state (Bourdieu, 1986). In its embodied form, cultural capital accumulates in a person as knowledge or cultural competence, and demands that this person invests his or her own labour and time in obtaining it. The transmission of accumulated cultural capital in the domestic sphere, which depends on the extent of family members' accumulated cultural capital as well as their ability to allocate time for transferring it to another family member, can be very influential on a person's ability to obtain extended cultural capital through education. In addition, as cultural capital requires the investment of time, the family's ability of providing a child with free time to obtain this form of capital also influences the extent of cultural capital the person is able to accumulate (Bourdieu, 1986). In chapter 7 I will relate Bourdieu's (1986) outlining of the domestic transmission of cultural capital to my empirical findings in order to investigate whether the findings indicate that a household's extent of capital can influence the accumulation of cultural capital in the following generation.

Objectified cultural capital can exist in materialised forms like paintings, writings and machines (Bourdieu, 1986). Even though these objects can be easily accessed through economic capital or hereditary transmissions, embodied cultural capital is required to utilise the objectified capital effectively. Cultural capital can also be institutionalised, as in the form of academic qualifications. This institutionalisation gives a formal value to obtained cultural capital, and can in relation to economic capital establish a conversion rate which guarantees the person a monetary value for his or her effort of accumulating cultural capital, as when entering the labour market (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social capital rises from relations to other people in formal or informal networks, and is the potential or actual amount of resources a person is able to generate through these social relations (Bourdieu, 1986). Social relations are maintained through the mutual exchange of gifts and services, and these acts have a symbolic value of maintaining and reproducing the relations. A person's amount of social capital is determined by the extent of his or her network as well as by the volume of capital controlled by persons in the network. To be considered part of a group can bring both material profits in the form of services, and symbolic profit by being associated with a prestigious group, even though these profits are not

necessarily consciously sought. “The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible.” (Bourdieu, 1986: 249).

Institutional rites are important for the reproduction of relations between members in a group, as proximity and mutual acknowledgement is crucial for lasting relations (Bourdieu, 1986). The maintenance of relations and the reproduction of social capital require the investment of time and energy, as well as economic capital in exchanges affirming the relations. According to Bourdieu (1986), a person who is well endowed with social capital is often also known to several people outside his or her close relations, and these people may find it useful to form a relation to a person rich in social capital. This means that the person well-endowed with social capital does not have to put much effort into reproducing these acquaintance relations as long as his or her social position is maintained (Bourdieu, 1986).

This also relates to symbolic capital, which is the recognition a person receives from other individuals or groups, often referred to as prestige or reputation (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991). Symbolic capital can be institutionalised as a particular position or role in the society, or it can be based on the possession of cultural valued objects. An example of the latter is when a family buys an ox apparently to utilise it in farming, but then sell it again before the annual season when it would have been most useful. The underlying reasons for buying the ox at that moment could have been to increase their symbolic capital during the time marriages are negotiated. In this case the act could have been highly symbolically profitable, even if the buying and selling of the ox was not profitable in the terms of economic capital (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991). A person who is the representative or leader of a group or network also possess great symbolic power from being in this recognised position (Bourdieu, 1986). In chapter 7 I will analyse how the villagers of Astam can accumulate symbolic capital and how other forms of capital can be converted into symbolic capital.

4.3.2 Conversion of capital

In order to convert one form of capital into another, work must also be put into the conversion process and this thereby requires an investment of time in addition to the time spent on accumulating a form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Because there is often no fixed conversion rate between the different forms of capital, conversions can be risky because of the possibility of loss, but they can also produce significant benefits. Conversions between forms of capital are thereby a strategy for reproducing and expanding bases of capital. For instance, the access

to certain positions in the job market has become increasingly controlled by institutionalised cultural capital. An investment of economic capital in the effort to obtain this form of cultural capital through education can thereby give access to accumulate more economic capital if a desired job position is obtained as the result. However, this result cannot be guaranteed when the investment is done, and the requirements for obtaining the desired position may change during the time spent on accumulating this form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1986) pointed out that for some of the more concealed forms of economic capital, the very concealment of the economic logic can be a precondition for the production of significant profits, thereby these forms of capital are not simply reducible to economic capital. On the other hand, when the concealment of the economic logic of a conversion increases, the potential of loss from the conversion also increases (Bourdieu, 1986). Insight from Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) elaborations on the economic logic of capital and the conversion of capital will be discussed more in depth in chapter 7 when I will relate it to the empirical findings from Astam, with emphasis on the relation between economic and symbolic capital. Here I will now turn to the interactions between migration and development.

4.4 The migration-development nexus

The relationship between migration and development have been debated for decades, shifting from optimistic views celebrating the potential of migration as contributing to development in both sending – and receiving communities, to negative views stressing the ways in which migration reinforce underdevelopment in sending countries, and back again to more optimistic views of remittances as an important contribution to development (de Haas, 2010). According to de Haas (2010), these shifts can be related to larger shifts in the paradigms of social and development theory, like the shift from Neo-classical approaches to Neo-Marxist approaches. On the other hand, empirical research on migration and development from the 1980s and 1990s has indicated that migration may affect development in various ways. In de Haas' (2010: 240) opinion “the heterogeneity of real-life migration-development interactions is too high to fit them into deterministic theoretical schemes predicting the development outcome of migration”. Another point which becomes evident here is that migration should not be seen as an external factor which cause or hinder development, but rather as an integral part of development processes. Interactions between migration and development are reciprocal, because both processes may affect each other (de Haas, 2010).

4.4.1 Heterogeneous interactions between migration and development

Quite a few paradigms in social and development theory have tended to over-emphasise either the effects of structure or agency, while approaches inspired by Giddens' (1984) structuration theory allow for the effects of both structure and agency to be taken into account (de Haas, 2010). The central notion of Giddens' (1984: 25) structuration theory is the 'duality of structure' which refers to how the structures of rules and resources which enable and constrain human practice "are both the medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize". The interactions between migration and development are to a certain degree determined by social, economic and political structures, but individuals still have an (limited) ability to influence and change these structures, in line with Giddens' (1984) thoughts (de Haas, 2010). How can the heterogeneity of these interactions be captured?

The pluralist approaches of the new economics of labour migration (NELM), livelihood strategy approaches and transnational perspectives on migration and development give attention to both agency and structure, which facilitates an understanding of the complex interactions between migration and development (de Haas, 2010). Insight from these approaches and empirical studies underlines the different ways in which migration interacts with development. According to de Haas (2010), an integration of these approaches can facilitate the understanding of the heterogeneous interactions between migration and development. Furthermore, he proposes to utilise Sen's (1999: 3) definition of development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy". In the concluding section of my thesis this definition of development will also be related to Tucker's (1999) call upon a pluralistic meaning of 'development', which is based in his critique of the Eurocentric domination of the discourse on development.

Like the livelihood approaches, NELM focuses on the household as a social unit (de Haas, 2010). Migration can be seen as an opportunity for households to spread risk by gaining access to incomes which are less affected by local constraints, thereby it can also be a way to overcome local market constraints in order to make investments in the local area (Taylor, 1999). However, these market constraints may also limit migrants' ability and incentive to invest in productive activities at their original home place (Taylor, 1999). "Creating a fertile ground for migration and remittances to contribute to broad-based income growth in migrant sending areas is the key to promoting development from migration" (Taylor, 1999: 81).

Transnational perspectives in migration studies have stressed migrants' abilities to create transnational identities through becoming integrated at the destination country while still maintaining close ties to their place of origin (de Haas, 2010). Migrants' involvement in the development of their community of origin is therefore not necessarily linked to their return. Even though these approaches reflect optimism for migrants' ability to contribute to development, this ability is clearly enabled and constrained by larger structures. This is why the migration-development interactions need to be understood within the development context of which they are part (de Haas, 2010).

4.4.2 Contextualising the interactions

Interactions between migration and development can be related to both the macro-level (national and international) development context and the micro-level (local and regional) development context, as well as to the migrants and their places in households, families and communities (de Haas, 2010). Social, economic and political structures at the national and international level influence local development contexts, as well as the general opportunities for migration. The local development context more specifically influences individuals' desires and abilities for involvement in migration. In turn, migration processes may reshape the local development context, and this form of changes in the local context can influence the broader development context, although only to a limited extent (de Haas, 2010). Effects from migration are mostly experienced locally by households and communities, and we should avoid the pitfall of directly transferring these effects to higher geographical levels, like the national and international development context (de Haas, 2010).

By contextualising interactions between migration and development in this way, an understanding of the heterogeneity of the interactions can be facilitated, while taking into account the reciprocal relationship between structure and agency (de Haas, 2010). On the one hand, migration can be an advantageous strategy for households to increase their access to assets and spread risk, and furthermore might allow migrants to remit financial means and ideas. This could lead to productive investments in their home area, with a potential to also increase local opportunities for no-migrant households (Taylor, 1999, de Haas, 2010). On the other hand, migrants' ability to make productive investments and contribute to development is clearly restricted by structural constraints, thus migration is no panacea for development (Taylor, 1999, de Haas, 2010). Even though migration processes may reshape the local

development context, this will only to a limited degree influence the broader development context which again enables and constrains actions in the local context (de Haas, 2010).

“General development is a complex and multifaceted process, involving and requiring structural social, political and institutional reform, which cannot realistically be achieved by individual migrants or remittances alone, and requires active state intervention.” (de Haas, 2010: 255)

In the concluding section of this thesis I will provide a few comments on the extent to which migration can facilitate local development in Astam by including references to the broader development context of Nepal. The livelihood approaches and the notions of capital presented in this chapter have been the theoretical base for my production of empirical data from Astam. The aim of the following chapter is to give an introduction to central aspects of households' livelihoods in Astam as a base for the subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER 5: LIVELIHOODS AND SOCIAL COMMUNITY IN ASTAM

Several of the households in Astam have incorporated different types of activities in their livelihood strategies. Even though most of them are involved in agriculture, few of the households are able to survive solely on subsistence agriculture, let alone to produce a surplus which can be sold in the market. In addition to subsistence agriculture, the other main activities I identified as important in the households' livelihood strategies were involvement in the tourism industry as well as internal and external labour migration. Notwithstanding, some households have also included supplementary activities in their strategies, like tailoring, the production of *raksi* [locally produced alcohol], and day labour in construction work as well as in agriculture. A few of the villagers have also acquired jobs as teachers in government schools, and government jobs give access to pension after retirement. A former teacher could tell that he receives 7000 Nepalese Rupees (NPR)³ each month as pension.

Figure 1 provides a simplified overview of the livelihood activities which I have identified as available to the villagers of Astam. There are dotted lines directed to tailoring and production of *raksi* because these activities are mostly exclusively performed by the lower castes.

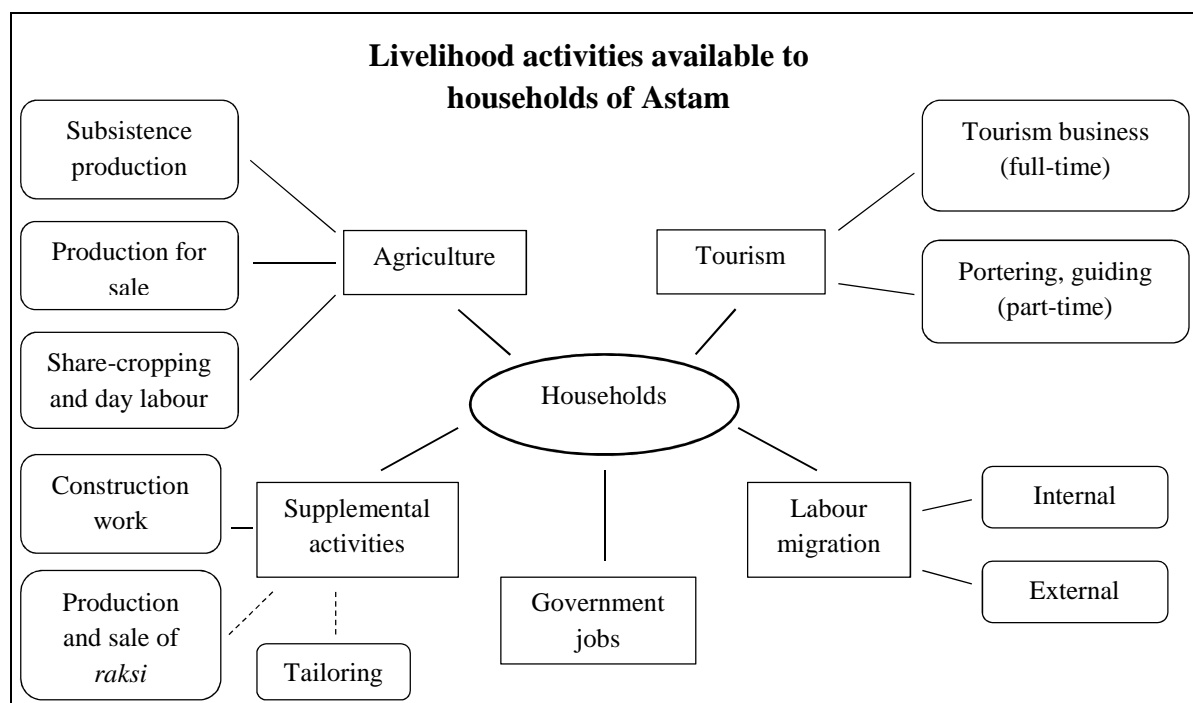


Figure 1: Livelihood activities available to households of Astam.

³ 100 Nepalese Rupees (NPR) equals 1,15 US Dollars or 6,64 Norwegian Kroners (2013).

The villagers' involvement in subsistence agriculture, tourism businesses and labour migration will be described in this chapter because I found that subsistence agriculture and labour migration were widely incorporated in the households' livelihood strategies, while involvement in tourism businesses is very important to some of the households and will possibly gradually become more important to the other villagers. One paragraph is therefore dedicated to each of these three activities. In the end of this chapter I will also bring attention to social cooperation between villagers. Social cooperation seems to be a prerequisite for the villagers' abilities to create viable and meaningful livelihoods in Astam, especially in relation to the limited access to public services for social security. Social cooperation is also central to the villagers' effort of improving local facilities through community work.

5.1 Subsistence agriculture

For many of the villagers who reside permanently in Astam, life still revolves around traditional subsistence farming. In spite of this, several households have not been able to rely solely on their own produce in recent years. Approximately two-thirds of the households sampled in the survey were not able to produce adequate food supplies for the entire year. A villager could tell that nearly all of the households in Astam could survive on subsistence farming 20-30 years ago, and then it was quite a shame if a family had to buy their food. The family of Gopal did not have enough land to produce sufficient food for the family, thus the father had to buy rice in the village: *"I know that he bought this rice in the night, because otherwise people could see it and they would think he was lazy"* (Gopal, male 42). Even though many villagers still prefer to eat fresh and organic food produced in their own field, it is now more common that households supplement their own produce with food bought from nearby markets. The conditions for farming in Astam are quite difficult because of the steep and hilly landscape, as well as the constraints of infertile land and water scarcity:

"Doing agriculture in this place is almost impossible - this is not a good place for agriculture. (...) No one can be good farmers here." (Birendra, male 69)

Rice is a highly valued crop among the Nepalese, and in Astam they grow their rice on *khet* land in the lower parts of the hill. Villagers could tell that the cultivation of rice requires hard work, but this work is concentrated in the months of late May to early October. In the upper *bari* land, which is mostly located close to the villagers' houses, they grow different crops like maize, millet, wheat and mustard, as well as vegetables and pulses. In a good year it is

possible to grow three different crops on the same land, as wheat and mustard are mainly cultivated from October to March, maize from April to August and millet from May to September. A variety of vegetables are cultivated by villagers, among the most common are squash, tomatoes and spinach. The traditional diet of the farmers is based on the Nepalese *dal bhat* meal, which is usually eaten morning and evening, consisting of rice (*bhat*), lentils (*dal*) and vegetable curry. Lentils and spices are mostly bought in the market, and the villagers can buy most of the food they need in the market of the neighbouring VDC Hemja (Map 1, p. 9).

5.1.1 Challenges to agricultural production

“We continue traditional farming like our ancestors did. We would like to change it, but we cannot because we do not have money” (Sanskriti, female 38). In the steep and hilly landscape of Astam, the farming fields are divided into small terraced pieces, thereby it is inconvenient to use motorised equipment in the fields. Oxen are still used to plough the land: *“Other places they can use tractors, here we can only use plough”* (Birendra, male 69). Wind and hailstorms can critically damage crops near harvest time, and two years ago a hailstorm destroyed many harvests. Some farmers could not even save any seeds for the next year and had to buy new ones. *“If the rain falls at the right time and the wind blows at the right time, we can do good agriculture. (...) But a hailstorm can destroy everything”* (Sudip, male 59).

Infertile land also poses challenges to subsistence farmers. *“There is loss, we do not even get as much as we invest [in agriculture]”* (Lalita, female 35). Because soil nutrients are washed down-hill by rain during the monsoon, a large supply of fertiliser is needed every year, and the villagers mostly use manure from domestic animals. Nandin (male 51) explained that there is less manure available in the village because households keep fewer domestic animals now than before. Because grass has to be cut for the animals every day, more workers in the family are needed in order to keep more animals. Nadin pointed out that the young, educated people now rather frequently leave the village to work in city areas or other countries, thus the households have fewer members who are able to work in agriculture. Does this indicate that labour shortage is one of the main constraints to agricultural production in Astam?

In the household survey, farmers were presented six suggested input factors which could potentially increase the output from cultivated land, and were asked to rank these factors by their own priorities. Figure 2 (next page) shows the percentage of sampled households (n=50) that ranked the respective factors as first, second and third priority.

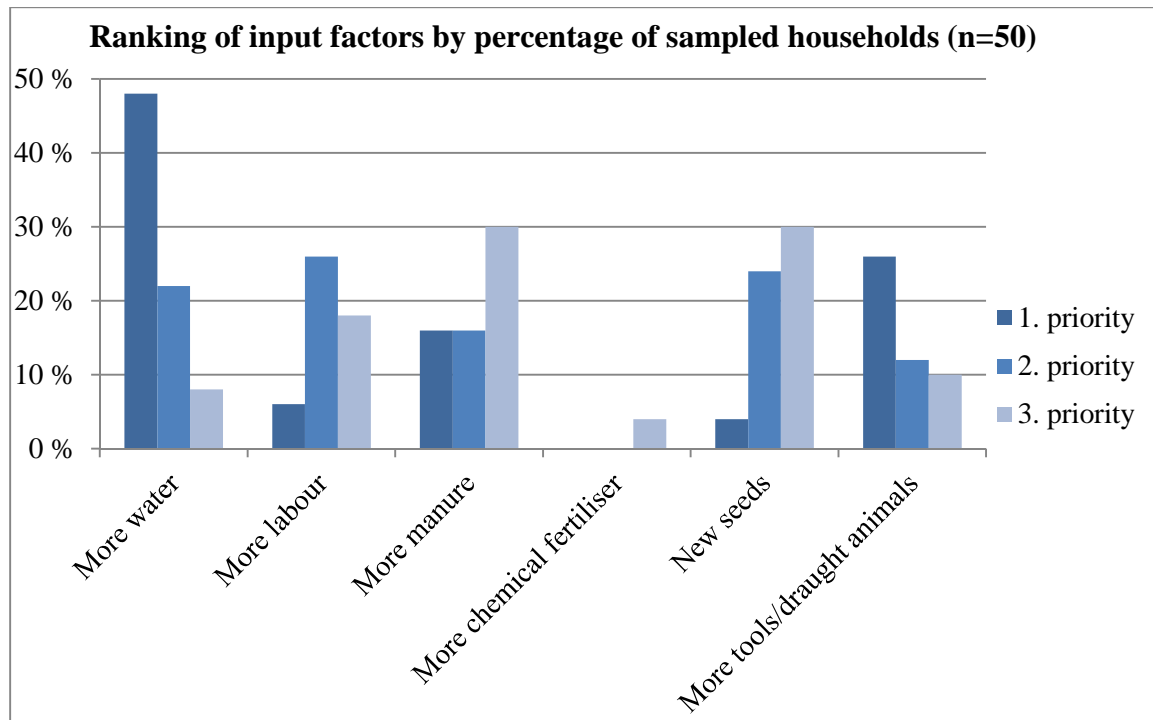


Figure 2: Ranking of six fixed input factors which can increase output from land (own survey).

These findings indicate that many households do experience a lack of labour force, but the main bottleneck to agricultural production seems to be the scarcity of water, which I will turn to in the following paragraph. From figure 2 we also find that none of the households ranked “more chemical fertiliser” as first or second priority, even though the problem of infertile soil affects many of the farmers. Because almost none of the households sampled in the survey used chemical fertiliser many refused to include this factor in the ranking at all. Some emphasised that they want to keep farming organic, while others are open to the use of chemicals in agriculture if it would increase the gain from cultivated land. One of the households which do utilise chemical fertiliser is also self-subsistent in food. A representative of this household, which consists of five members, could tell that he buys 50-60 kg of chemical fertiliser every year which are mainly used to cultivate rice and wheat, but some of it is also used for the cultivation of vegetables.

5.1.2 Water scarcity

Figure 2 shows that “more water” was ranked as first priority by 48% of the sampled households. “*Water is everything to us*” (Saroj, male 41). Four of the nine wards in Dhital have problems with water scarcity and among them are Upper and Lower Astam. Some

villagers pointed out that they would like to cultivate more vegetables, possibly also for sale in the market, but they are not able to do this because of the scarcity of water.

There are built a few water tanks in the village to collect rain water, but during the months with less rain these water tanks and the wells in Astam quickly dry up. For several years Astam has been supplied water from the neighbouring Dhampus VDC, where there is a surplus of water. During night the water was streaming in pipes from Dhampus to Dhital and from a chamber it was distributed further to taps which are scattered all over the village. The problem is that there was never signed a contract between Dhital VDC and Dhampus VDC to secure this supply of water. In 2012 there was no longer water in the taps because another VDC had gotten the privilege of receiving Dhampus' surplus water. During the dry months of April and May in 2012, villagers were seen queuing by the wells for hours every day in order to get their needed supply of water for drinking and cooking. The problem of water scarcity has thereby become quite critical during the latest year. *"It is a human right, we need to have water...people from Dhampus have to give water"* (Bindu, male 32).

A villager could tell that the water from Dhampus was mainly used for drinking, thus even before this supply was cut off there was not much water available to use for irrigation of the fields. Villagers hope that the government will turn its attention to their problem and find a new supply of water for the village. Some also have an idea of how water can be brought from a river down in the northern valley, but to carry out the idea they would need a large amount of funding as well as technical expertise. If the village could have a safe supply of water which would be adequate to also use in agriculture, they could potentially increase their production of vegetables. Nevertheless, the securing of drinking water has to be first priority.

5.1.3 Organisation of work

Both men and women work in agriculture, but some think that women do more light work than men. Due to cultural customs the women are not allowed to plough the land, but except from this restriction the genders can mostly perform the same kind of work in agriculture. Earlier it was also a taboo for higher-caste men to plough the land, and still men of lower castes are often hired to do this work. Some of the men of lower castes therefore have their own plough: *"Before when I was strong everyone knew I had a plough and asked me to come to their house"* (Darshan, male 78).

While some households own a relatively large amount of both *khet* and *bari* land, others own only a small piece of *bari* land. As many people from the younger generations leave the village in search for better opportunities in the cities or abroad, some households are no longer able to cultivate all of their land:

“The young ones are leaving the village, some go to the city area, some go to other countries, and the older people cannot do, so we are slowly leaving agriculture. (...) We leave a little land unplanted now, but later we will leave a lot of land unplanted” (Purna, male 67).

Some of those with large endowments of land let other villagers cultivate parts of the land and receives half of the produce in return, a practice referred to as share-cropping. Those who own less land can be dependent upon cultivating other villagers’ land unless they have other income sources. Nevertheless, a poor farmer points out that this arrangement is not satisfying when the conditions for agriculture in the village are tough: *“It is not sufficient to cultivate others’ land and share the output. Lots of labour, but not enough gain”* (Lalita, female 35). Some households are also dependent on hiring extra workers during the busy seasons in agriculture, but as there are fewer young villagers left in Astam it is hard to find strong workers. A hired worker can usually earn 200-300 NPR for one day’s work.



Picture 5: Villagers queuing for water (left) and ploughing land (right)

5.1.4 Innovation in agriculture

Even though agriculture in Astam is mainly kept traditional, some of the villagers have experimented with the cultivation of new kinds of crops and the use of green houses. Vikash (male 33) could tell that his green house has been a success and that he has sold 15 000 kg of tomatoes in the market. He also keeps a poultry farm with 1000 chickens. Villagers occasionally plant fruit trees and bushes around their houses for own use. One villager pointed

out that they could also plant fruit trees in *pakho* [private land for grazing] to cultivate for sale. More than half of the households sampled in the survey had tried to cultivate new crops or vegetables during the latest decade, to varying degrees of success.

A family who runs a tourism business in the village grows coffee as well as chamomile, lemon grass and mint to use for tea. They also cultivate a range of vegetables, and a few spices. One of the household members explained that tourism can be seen as a cash crop: “*Tourists come, they eat food and they pay money, cash. This is the cash crop*” (Rubin, male 40). In his opinion the combination of tourism and organic agriculture can constitute a sustainable livelihood for the villagers in the future.

5.2 Tourism development in Astam

Located at the border of ACA, but outside the most popular trekking routes up to the Annapurna Mountain Range, Astam has not yet been widely influenced by tourism. However, new trekking routes closer to Dhital have been introduced and the neighbouring Dhampus VDC is becoming an attractive destination for a short trek from Pokhara. Furthermore, as open minded locals have invited tourists to visit Astam and offered them a stay in their home, the village seems to slowly develop into a tourist destination providing the peaceful atmosphere of a traditional village complemented by a stunning view of the Annapurna Mountains and surrounding hills. Even though many of the villagers in Astam have continued their everyday life revolved around agriculture, unaffected by the occasional presence of tourists, several informants believe that tourist visits to the village will increase and most of them think that this will be a good opportunity for business development in Astam. Like I referred to in chapter 2, there are already established a few ‘home-stays’ in the village, as well as two larger tourism businesses. Some of the men in the village have also obtained guide certificates and occasionally take jobs as trekking guides or porters.

5.2.1 The establishment of two tourism businesses

A Japanese business man has established a recreational resort in Astam for Japanese and European tourists. The resort is often referred to as an “eco-village” and is placed discretely at the outskirts of the village. It runs a high standard with luxurious Japanese-inspired interior, and the high room rate indicates that the resort is meant for wealthier tourists. On the fields surrounding the buildings, different types of vegetables and fruits are grown organically and

beehives are set up. A local man hired as the hotel manager, working from Pokhara, could tell that the Japanese business man who built the resort wanted to promote organic farming in less developed countries. The Japanese was suffering from cancer and believed that the developed countries' use of chemicals in agricultural production have contributed to diseases like cancer in the population. Because of this he wanted to share information with farmers in less developed countries about the dangers of using chemicals in agriculture and inspire them to keep farming organic. Despite this, other villagers seemed to be less informed about his objectives and a local man pointed out that this foreign-owned project does not contribute to development in the village, even though some local villagers are employed at the resort.

A local joint household has built tourist cottages on their land in Astam and seeks to promote the whole of Astam as an “eco-village” by relying on environmentally-friendly technologies and organic agriculture to facilitate sustainable tourism. Their aim is to grow most of the served food organically in the village, and the family has experimented with the cultivation of a variety of vegetables and tea species, as referred to in paragraph 5.1.4. They furthermore see possibilities for involving the whole village in tourism through home-stays and opportunities for volunteer tourism both in relation to agriculture, the local school and the local health clinic. Through volunteer tourism the tourists get an opportunity to contribute to the local community by doing volunteer work. In addition to the visit of dentist students referred to in paragraph 2.3.4, some tourists have volunteered to give English lectures at the local school.

The family also runs a tourism business in Pokhara, but is deeply attached to their home village. The business gives the family a chance to support and promote tourist volunteering in the village, as well as inspire both tourists and villagers to protect the environment and support organic farming. Through developing close relations to tourist friends, the family has received new ideas of how to operate an environmentally-friendly tourism business. They have introduced solar energy to reduce the use of electricity, and bio-gas based on toilet waste is used in the kitchen. To limit the waste of plastic bottles, tourists can fill their used water bottles from a tank of purified water for a smaller fee. The family emphasise that they want to promote sustainable tourism in order to protect the local environment and culture.

This local “eco-village” is a quite unique initiative in the context of a relative poor village located outside the main touristic area, and the question of how the family has been able to build their business raises:

“Most families separate after marriage. I married, and my brothers married, but we did not separate because we found that without team work it is very hard to live. If we are separate we can be in problem, so we choose to be a team working together. And because we work as a team and we are together, that is the reason we brought the eco-village.” (Rubin, male 40)

Furthermore Rubin explained that when he was young the family had to work hard to produce enough food and he was constantly thinking of how they could escape from the hard work of doing subsistence agriculture in Astam. When seeing tourists on his way to school he found that there could be money in tourism and started to work as a porter by finding trekking jobs in Pokhara. After some time the family started to run a tourism business in the city. When their father went abroad as a migrant, he earned enough money to buy some high-quality land near Pokhara. The father and sons used to offer tourists to come to Astam and stay in their family house. Many tourists fell in love with the village and the family realised that they could develop tourism in Astam. *“My sons told that the place had a good potential for tourism, it is a nice place”* (Birendra, male 69). They decided to sell the higher-quality land they had bought and to use the money to set up tourist cottages in Astam.

The business has grown over the years, but the family has faced challenges as well. During the civil war (1996-2006) tourism to Nepal decreased dramatically and it was thereby quite tough to operate a newly started tourism business, but during the recent years tourist visit to the country have increased again. When asked if it does not feel stressful to always be surrounded by tourists in their home the answer is clear: *“I think this is the field for our family, I think we do not really feel stressful, we feel happy when we see more tourists here”* (Rubin, male 40). He also emphasises that he has learned much about the rest of the world and other cultures from relations to tourists: *“Tourism is one of the best things, a beautiful thing. It is culture, education - you are sharing the culture.”* When asked if they are not worried that tourism will affect the culture of the village, they are aware of the risk, but think that it is possible to avoid: *“Doing responsible tourism, then culture will be saved. (...) We respect their [tourists’] culture, they have to respect our culture here”* (Rubin, male 40).

5.2.2 A future in tourism?

The smaller home-stays in the village are mainly run by locals who work in tourism businesses in Pokhara. Tourism to Astam is thereby mostly promoted by the villagers who reside in the city, as the village has not yet become a widely recognised tourist destination in

itself. Still, through the villagers' effort of attracting tourists to the area, tourist visits has increased and will probably continue to do so. The local villagers who work part-time as porters and trekking guides are usually also assigned jobs from their relatives or fellow villagers who are operating tourism businesses in Pokhara. Through this arrangement the local guides can still reside in the village and continue subsistence farming, but take on trekking jobs when they have time: *"This season was good, but now I cannot go [as a trekking guide] for some months because I have to work on the land"* (Saroj, male 40).

The family who runs the local "eco-village" initiative furthermore wants to inspire others in the area to involve in environmentally-friendly tourism. Recently the Western Development Region's branch of the Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal (TAAN) also held a meeting in the area to promote home-stay initiatives. The association is an umbrella organisation which aims to promote and develop mountain tourism in Nepal (TAAN, 2012). One of the villagers involved in tourism hope that the promoting of home-stays in the area and the development of tourism will eventually bring the government's attention to the water problem in Astam. If the water problem is solved they can introduce "agritourism" which is based on tourist activities revolved around agriculture. Rubin (male 40) thinks that this form of tourism can limit the commercialisation of the traditional village.

During interviews some of the informants mentioned that they would like to involve in the tourism business if tourists visits increase, although not all of them seem to believe that they will be able to carry out their ideas. Sudip (male 59) suggested that he could make a home stay if he had more money, but thinks that his lack of education would make it difficult to carry through. Nevertheless, he has some of the details in mind already:

"I would make a ladder go straight up to first floor from the outside. I would need 400 000 rupees to decorate this house for tourism. (...) My sister's son have a hotel in Pokhara, they could send tourists from there" (Sudip, male 59).

A villager who now lives in Pokhara also think that there are possibilities for tourism development in the village, and furthermore believe that there can be arranged several activities like horse-riding and paragliding to make it an attractive destination. In his opinion the young villagers should cooperate to develop tourism in Astam so that it can lead to development for the entire village, instead of being limited to a few private businesses. *"If young people come together to talk and make a plan and they work well, then there are*

chances for success” (Mahdur, male 40). His friend has been thinking of building simple bamboo cottages for tourists in Astam as it would not require a large amount of investments. *“I suggest them to do so. But they have not decided yet because there is the water problem also”* (Mahdur, male 40). A reliable supply of water is important both for the construction of buildings and for operating a successful tourism business.

5.3 Labour migration

The limited economic opportunities and the difficult conditions for agriculture in the village are some of the reasons why several villagers leave Astam on a temporary or permanent basis. 27 of the 50 households sampled in the household survey reported that they had one or more family member(s) working abroad at the present moment, while members of some of the 23 remaining households have worked in other countries earlier. *“We can say about one house – one man”* (Sanyaj, male 33). Additionally, several households have family members living in Pokhara or other parts of Nepal, and some of these contribute to their original rural household’s well-being by remitting support regularly or sporadically.

5.3.1 Working in Pokhara

In relation to migration within Nepal I will mainly focus on internal migrants who have moved from Astam to Pokhara, as I got the chance to speak to some of the migrants themselves in addition to their relatives in the village. Because Astam is located close to Pokhara, those who migrate to this city also have the chance to keep a close relation to their relatives’ in Astam. Hitesh (male 38) has not separated from his parents’ household even though he has been living in Pokhara for 20 years. *“Our parents land is ours land. (...) I have one house here [in Pokhara], but still my permanent address is in Astam”* (Hitesh, male 38). One joint household consisting of three brothers’ families and parents even combine living in Pokhara and Astam on a rotational basis to enjoy the benefits of both places.

As villagers have come to know of better opportunities in city areas and abroad, many would like to escape from the hard work of farming in Astam, and especially the younger generation is not satisfied with the lack of infrastructure and facilities in the village. Some villagers have chosen to move to Pokhara in search for higher education, more job opportunities and urban facilities. Nevertheless, because the price of land is much higher in Pokhara than in the village, migrating to the city is often not a realistic option for an entire household:

“If they sell their land here in Astam, they cannot buy even a small piece of land in Pokhara. That is why people cannot go. Otherwise everyone would like to get in an easier place.”
(Gopal, male 42)

Sanjay claimed that villagers often would like to follow the example of friends who move permanently to the city, but he thinks that they do not always consider that life in the city can also be tough: *“They think like if they move to Pokhara, everything they will get from the skies. (...) People should think about if they can survive in the cities or not”* (Sanjay, male 33). Those who move from Astam to Pokhara typically have to rent a place to live for several years until they have saved enough money to buy a piece of land and build their own house. In some cases the wives still live in Astam while the husbands work in Pokhara. An old man in Astam explained that his sons moved to Pokhara and later obtained a loan to buy land. Now they are planning the construction of their house in the city. *“If they do not success to build a house they will maybe have to go back here”* (Purna, male 67).



Picture 6: Early morning at the ‘Lakeside’ in Pokhara

Several of villagers who move to Pokhara have found jobs in the city’s touristic area, the ‘Lakeside’. A typical pattern for young men is to start out as porters and trekking guides, and then later involve in the businesses of trekking agencies, trekking shops or guest houses. In order to start a tourism business it is often necessary to cooperate with a relative or friend as a business partner. *“In the beginning, if you don’t have a lot of money there is no choice, you have to cooperate with a partner”* (Hitesh, male 38). Involvement in tourism does not necessarily require a higher education, while those who are able to complete a degree in

universities or colleges can find jobs in teaching or governmental administration. Mahdur pointed out that work in the tourism business often means working long hours:

“Sometimes you feel so tired because you do from morning 7 o’clock to evening 11 o’clock, season time. It is a hard job, no Saturday, no holiday, no Dashain festival [important Hindu festival]. If I had a good education I could have an easier life than this” (Mahdur, male 40).

Household members working in Pokhara sometimes give economic support to their original household in Astam, although the extent of support varies from bringing some money to their parents every time they visit to larger investments on relatives’ behalf, as well as the down-payment of debt. Some of the elderly villagers also move to their sons in Pokhara when they become in need of more care: *“While I am strong and can live in my own home I will stay here, later I have to move to my sons in Pokhara”* (Purna, male 67). While some of the elderly villagers point out that their children would not like to stay in the village, some of the internal migrants expressed that they enjoy very much to spend time in Astam and claim that they would like to stay there if there had been more opportunities for earning a livelihood.

5.3.2 Opportunities abroad

Several informants pointed out that it is hard to get a well-paid job in Nepal for those who do not have higher education and some think this is the reason why many of the less educated villagers go to work abroad. Then again, they point out that those who have higher educations and have the chance of obtaining a good job abroad would also like to go because they can live a better life in wealthier countries. Stories of Nepalese migrant workers who have acquired well-paid jobs abroad inspire many others to follow. The recent civil war (1996-2006) also caused several young men to leave Nepal as migrants in fear of being dragged into the war by either of the conflicting parts. Even though the current political situation is more peaceful, some villagers blame the government for not creating job opportunities in Nepal: *“Well, we do not have job opportunities here in Nepal. (...) There is no job creation here. You have to work your own or you have to do a very hard job”* (Gopal, male 40).

India has attracted a large portion of Nepalese labour migrants, as it can easily be reached by train and no visa is required for Nepalese citizens. Nevertheless, other South Asian countries and the Gulf states have now become frequently chosen destinations for the migrant workers. Among the 27 surveyed households who currently had household members’ working abroad, 16 of them had household members’ working in the Gulf states, while only a few work in

India. Recruitment agencies in Nepal give an easy access to low-paid jobs in Gulf states for everyone who can pay the initial fee for a working permit and a plane ticket.

North-America, Europe and Australia are desired destinations for many of those who want to work abroad, due to the expectation of high wages and excellent facilities. However, it is quite difficult for the average Nepalese citizen to access these countries. A villager from Astam who now lives in Europe could tell that a large amount of financial savings are required to obtain a working permit there and because the Nepalese currency is low it is very hard to meet the requirements. In most cases it would be necessary to have relatives or friends in the destination country who can provide a sponsor letter for the migrant. Some students also receive a scholarship for studies in these countries, but their visa is often limited to the years required for the study program. From the survey I found that 9 of the sampled households had household members working or studying in these regions of the world.

On the one hand, those who succeed to obtain a job in developed countries are considered to be lucky, but on the other hand villagers point out that people should stay in their home village where their ancestors have lived for several years. Some also emphasised that the Nepalese should work in their own country in order to contribute to development. Especially those who are working in tourism express strong feelings about the importance of staying in Nepal and contributing to the development of the country. Some are worried that those who gain access to developed countries will not return to Nepal, and pointed out that some of the villagers from Astam who have gone to work in wealthier countries only come back for holidays now and then, even though some of these still own land and houses in Astam. Because those who are able to go to developed countries often also have higher educations, Gopal points out that this may hinder development in Nepal:

“Suppose those who go to Europe: They get good food there, they get a good job there and clearly they would like to stay in Europe.(...) The government has to have this infrastructure that brings intellectual Nepalese from there to here and involve them in creative things. The government does not have this idea or plan.” (Gopal, male 42)

“If people get more opportunities here, if the country is developed they don’t like to go abroad, I am sure. (...) When everyone goes abroad, we have stopped our development as well. There is no ‘new’ thought and the country is not developing when people go abroad.” (Gopal, male 40).

5.3.3 Experiences and remittances from external migration

Still, some of the villagers who work in wealthier countries plan to return to the village and so do most of those who go to work in the Gulf states. Some villagers tend to perceive the returned labour migrants to be rich, and believe that the *lahure* can contribute to development in the village. Mahdur (male 40) pointed out that those who study abroad can bring new ideas back to Nepal, but thinks that those who go to work in a factory, for instance in the Gulf states, will not bring any useful ideas with them when they return. Some of the migrants who have worked in Gulf states explained that they cannot utilise the skills they learned from working abroad when they return home. Nevertheless, some have learned more about foreign cultures abroad, and some have also gotten a new perspective on their life in Astam.

Krishna (male 33) who works in Europe thinks that the deeper understanding of foreign cultures he has obtained from living abroad will be useful when he returns to Nepal because he plans to start a tourism business. He explained that when he lived in the village as a young boy, life was hard and he could not understand why the tourists would come to visit a poor village like his own. Now he appreciates the beauty of the place in a new way:

“Now I understand you know, after being abroad and sharing, learning, cultures and languages. And education of course. That really helped me to understand the difference between other places and this place. (...) It is going to be helpful to me in order to manage to keep this culture alive here. That’s interesting to foreigners, so knowing them and what they want, then it is easier for me to show them what I have” (Krishna, male 33).

Even though he would like to stay in the village when he returns to Nepal permanently, he has not made up his mind of where he wants to establish his business:

“I want to do a market research, find out how many tourists are going to come to Astam. Maybe my hotel is going to be down there [in the valley] somewhere, but my living is going to be here” (Krishna, male 33).

Anil (male 34) explained how he got a new perspective on his life in Astam while he was working abroad. The long working shifts made him think of how many changes the villagers could make in Astam if everyone gave time for community work. He also realised that rather than working abroad he should focus on improving his life in Astam:

“We need to improve together, myself and all the villagers, that is the truth. We have to give some time, during the whole year, two months everyone has to give for this social work. But people they don’t understand this. (...) When I involved in the Gulf and gave long time there, this consciousness came to me. (...) We have a big problem with water, and everyone is very thirsty of water. (...) They are always being thirsty, because they are not trying to give time to find a good solution, which means there will not become a solution.” (Anil, male 33)

On the other hand, some of the former migrants pointed out that they have not been able to involve in any economic activities which provides them a satisfactory income after they have returned to Nepal. A few admitted that they considered going abroad again, especially when they were thinking of their children’s future:

“I want to give them a good education, but I cannot earn more money. I am thinking of going abroad again. I cannot read, I want the children to become educated.” (Siddharta, male 32)

Despite the common expectation that a higher income can be earned abroad, a former migrant have also experienced that there is no guarantee of earning a satisfactory income abroad, especially for workers without formalised skills or higher education. Rajan (male 40) went to a Gulf state with the aim of earning money to improve the economic situation of his family and provide education for the children. However, the hard work affected his health and he felt that he did not succeed to earn the expected income, thus he returned after two years before he had saved enough money to pay back the loan he obtained in order to go abroad. Sanjay (male 33) explained that because he wanted to escape from the pressure of the civil war ten years ago, he accepted to go for work in a Gulf state even though his lack of formalised skills meant that he had to work hard for a low income. Even for those with a higher education it can be difficult to obtain a job abroad according to their qualifications from Nepal: *“They did not validate my education as a Bachelor. (...) Now I have to study for three more years if I want to have a Bachelor”* Krishna (male 33) explained about the difficulties of having his Bachelor Degree from Nepal validated in a European country.

Although not all of the surveyed households with family members working abroad reported that they received remittances, migrant incomes seem to be an important contribution to some of the households’ incomes. Because many are no longer able to survive on subsistence agriculture and because other economic opportunities in the rural area are limited, the money earned by migrants can be an important source of cash income. Most of the households

reported that they spent remittances on basic needs like food, clothes and medicines, as well as on the children's education. When accounting for remittances from both internal and external migrants, 21 of the 50 sampled households reported that they received financial remittances. 19 of the 21 households' who received remittances reported that some of the money was spent on food. Furthermore, 11 of them pointed out that they spent remittances on health care and medicines, and an equal number of households spent remittances on the children's education. Because the question on the use of remittances was an open-ended question, these numbers may also be higher.

A few former labour migrants told that they had used a part of their migrant incomes to build new houses. On the other hand, few of the sampled households have invested migrant incomes in businesses, but some of the internal migrants who work in Pokhara have spent their incomes on establishing businesses there and often also enrol their children in schools in the city. A few of the current external migrants, like Krishna referred to above, are also planning to invest their migrant incomes in businesses when they return home.

5.4 “We live for each other”

Villagers express that they appreciate to live in Astam where their ancestors have lived before them and where they have developed close relations to fellow villagers. When describing the Nepalese society, informants pointed out that the Nepalese culture is less individualistic than their impression of Western cultures:

“Persons who come from families in the West, they were born in that society, and in their culture they say: ‘I live for myself’. But here my father lives for us, I live for my children, my brothers live for me, and like this we live for each other. And we live for the village people.”
(Vishal, male 40)

Close social relations between villagers and relatives in nearby areas seems to be very important when it comes to cooperation and mutual help during hard times, and the villagers often work together in agriculture. *“One day I and my friend can work together at his field, then another day we can work together at my field”* (Bidhan, male 72). They also have to cooperate in community work: *“If anything happens we are together and discuss it, and this is very good cooperation”* (Anil, male 33). For some of the subsistence farmers in Astam, help

from friends can be vital if a problem of food shortage or illness arise. *“I help friends when I have money, and when I do not have I can ask from them”* (Lalita, female 35).

Sudip (male 59) explained that it is very difficult to obtain even a small a loan from the bank for those who do not have large endowments of land. Villagers who need a larger amount of money in order to go to work abroad usually have to obtain a loan from family or friends: *“I got a loan, not from the bank, but from my relatives”* (Sanjay, male 33). In these situations it is thereby important to know people who both have the means to lend out money and who will agree to offer the person a loan. Some of the villagers have also established small cooperatives for credit rotation. By pooling their limited amounts of savings, the members get an opportunity to make larger investments in agricultural activities on a rotational basis.

While some villagers claimed that no one listen to or care for the poor, one of the local households who have been able to build a business based on incomes from internal and external migration also gives support to the local school and health clinic:

“The help in the school, the help in the health clinic, that is not for the rich people, that is for the poor people. The rich people they can come to the city for the medical check-ups and the medicines. In the health clinic in the village, if someone is very poor we do not charge for the medicines.” (Bindu, male 32)

Like the informant pointed out, this support to the local school and health clinic is especially important to the poorer households, while those who are richer are often able to take advantage of better facilities in the city if needed. In fact, the children of this household are enrolled in schools in Pokhara, thereby the support to the local school does not benefit the household directly. The support some of the migrant households give to community projects in the village which not only benefit their own household will be discussed in chapter 7.

This chapter has given a short introduction to the central livelihood activities of households in Astam, as well as pointed to the importance of social cooperation. In the following chapter I will utilise Bebbington’s (1999) framework in order to investigate migration’s impact on households’ bases of capital assets.

CHAPTER 6: THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON CAPITAL ASSETS

The previous chapter described aspects of households' livelihoods in Astam and supported the point that rural livelihoods have become increasingly diversified and can no longer simply be seen as equivalent to agrarian livelihoods (Bebbington, 1999). Bebbington (1999) proposed that analyses of rural livelihoods should therefore be focused on rural households' access to five forms of capital assets, including how these assets are transformed into a meaningful living. Furthermore, it should be given attention to households' opportunities to extend their access to capital assets and even change the rules governing this access (Bebbington, 1999).

Internal or external migration is incorporated in the livelihood strategies of many households in Astam, and I seek to find out how involvement in migration can affect the households' bases of five forms of capital assets, based on Bebbington's (1999) analytical framework. The purpose is not to give a quantitative measure of migration's impact on the types of capital, which would require comprehensive statistical data, but to qualitatively analyse the ways in which migration influences the households' capital bases. I will structure this chapter by dedicating one paragraph to each type of capital asset, but if relevant, there will also be made references to the other types of capital within each paragraph. In which ways does migration affect the households' bases of produced, human, natural, social and cultural capital assets?

6.1 Produced capital

Produced capital encompasses both financial and physical assets like cash, credit, houses, infrastructure and equipment (Bebbington, 1999, Bebbington and Perreault, 1999, Serageldin and Steer, 1994). Because many of the subsistence farmers in Astam live hand to mouth, they therefore find it difficult to accumulate produced capital. Agriculture in Astam's harsh conditions requires hard work and many households are not able to produce enough food for the family's needs, let alone a surplus to sell in markets. Opportunities to increase their bases of produced capital are therefore needed, but economic opportunities are limited within the village except from the recent development of tourism. On the contrary, migration to city areas and foreign countries can give access to larger job markets. To what extent can the incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies give households opportunities to increase their bases of produced capital?

6.1.1 Effects of internal migration

The nearby city of Pokhara provides more economic opportunities, especially within tourism. I will mainly focus on internal migration to this city for two reasons, firstly because I was able to talk to some of the migrated household members themselves, and secondly because the city's proximity to Astam more easily allow these internal migrants to maintain a close relation to their home village and their original rural household. In which ways can internal migration to Pokhara influence rural households' bases of produced capital?

"I understood that my parents could not spend more money for my studies in college because I would have to go there [to the city] and take a room and buy a lot of things, there would be more expenses" (Hitesh, male 38). Hitesh's parents had been working hard for his education, but he understood that he could no longer rely on their economic support when he had finished class 10 in school. Hitesh thought it would be easier to earn money in the city than in Astam, and therefore decided to go to Pokhara:

"When we went to school we walked to Hemja, we went to high school there. When we walked that way, and tourists walked in that area, we talked to them and the people guiding them. And I thought maybe it is a good job. I thought so and then I came to the Lakeside and did that. (...) When I came the first day I had some relative there, and the same day I found one trek. I did one trek and after that I stopped and learned something in the office, the travel agency. When they had a trek they sent me. (...) But it was really difficult times also, because sometimes I did not have a room. There was a very simple house, sometimes I slept there, and it was a very hard life too, but I did." (Hitesh, male 38)

During the twenty years Hitesh has stayed in Pokhara, he has worked in different travel agencies and now runs his own business. He has also built a house in the city where he lives with his wife and children. Hitesh keeps a close relation to his parents and is entitled to their land, which indicates that he has not entirely separated from the parent's household in Astam.

On the one hand, the hard work of this migrant firstly facilitated a regeneration of the rural household's base of produced capital as Hitesh' accumulated financial means were used to down-pay his parents' debt, and secondly it led to an enlargement of produced capital in the form of a new house in Pokhara. The financial assets also gave him access to rent an office at the Lakeside where he runs his business, which facilitates the further accumulation of financial assets. On the other hand, this migrant seems to have made the city his permanent

place of residence, even though he keeps a close relation to his original household in Astam. The boundaries between establishing a new household and being part of a joint household in the home village often become blurry. Like Agergaard (1999) has pointed out, households go through transitional phases and intermediate forms of households therefore may occur.

Because the costs of house rental and land are higher in the city, a household member who moves to Pokhara probably will need to spend much of the income on living expenses. Does this form of internal migration then still benefit the household members left in the village?

In Hitesh's case he has down-paid the family's accumulated debt and have given occasional financial support to his parents, for instance for the purchases of new draught animals. His act of internal migration has thereby facilitated an enlargement of produced capital which has benefitted the entire joint household. In another case an elderly couple from Astam has moved in with their son in Pokhara in his newly built house. The household's base of produced capital has thereby enhanced as the son has accumulated financial assets from work in the city and transformed some of these into the physical asset of a new house. His parents have benefitted from this enhancement of produced capital as they can now live in the city with easier access to health care and rely on their son's income during their old days. Nevertheless, can this household still be recognised as a rural household? Because the family still have land and a house in Astam, the move is not recognised as permanent migration, even though their main residence has shifted from rural to urban. Like I discussed in paragraph 3.4.1, those who own land in the village can still claim their rural belonging, and the family maintain their ties to the home village for instance by returning to Astam during the celebrations of religious festivals, which will be pointed to in paragraph 6.5.1.

This brings us to the question of whether it is also possible to incorporate internal migration in a rural livelihood strategy so that it facilitates a continued rural residence. One joint household has combined internal migration to Pokhara with a business staking in Astam, and now operates a tourism business in Pokhara with a smaller branch in Astam. Because there are many members in this household, they can live and work in both places on a rotational basis. Bindu explained how they came to start a tourism business:

“My father's salary was not enough for us, to give us education and the basic needs, we needed to buy food, many things. He was thinking to go to abroad to earn money and decided to go to Europe. There he earned some money and came back to Nepal. During that time my brother did a part time job as a trekking porter. (...) All of us [brothers] came to tourism. (...)

When father came back from Europe he had some money and he bought land. (...) And after ten years we sold that land, and used the money in the tourism [business].” (Bindu, male 32)

Starting out as trekking porters and guides, the brothers slowly accumulated financial assets and gradually started to build up their own tourism business in the city. Later they invested money in the building of tourist cottages in Astam and incorporated it as a smaller branch of their tourism business. Income from the business in Pokhara as well as from the father’s work abroad seem to have been a premise for their accumulation of produced capital, which has allowed the household to continue a rural residence while still enlarging their base of capital.

6.1.2 Effects of external migration

While the case of Hitesh proved that internal migrants are not necessarily dependent on access to financial means in order to find a job in the city, external migration usually requires an initial investment. Several of the labour migrants from Astam have gone to work in Gulf states, and the recruitment agencies usually require a fee of approximately 100 000 NPR in exchange for plane tickets and a working permit for two years, which can be extended. However, many of the households in Astam, especially those relying on subsistence agriculture, are not able to save up this significant amount of money. Some external migrants therefore have had to obtain a loan from a relative or an acquaintance in order to go abroad, which also require the payment of interests. *“We had to take a loan of 100 000 rupees, and had to pay 2% interests. The loan was from a man in Hemja”*, Devika (female 52) explained about the loan they obtained when the oldest son decided to go to work in a Gulf state. How are the households’ bases of produced capital affected by the financial costs of external migration?

Rajan (male 40) could tell that he was not able to earn the income he had expected while working in a Gulf state, and he also became ill from the hard work. Therefore he returned home before he had saved enough money to pay back the loan he had obtained in order to go abroad. His aim had been to improve the economic situation of his family, and even though he was able to send the family a small amount of money every now and then during the two years he stayed abroad, when he returned home they had to struggle with the additional remaining debt of the loan he obtained to pay for labour migration.

Because external labour migration requires an initial investment, it also leads to an initial decrease in the households' base of produced capital, either in the form of decreased savings or in the form of increased debt. Rajan's case demonstrates that external migration does not provide any guarantee of an enhancement of produced capital. Still, can external migration contribute to regenerate or enhance a households' base of produced capital?

Sudip (male 59) could tell that he suffered from a heart attack some years ago and needed comprehensive treatment in hospital. The household did not have any savings and therefore had to seek loans from a number of relatives and acquaintances in order to pay for his vitally needed treatment. Their debt accumulated critically:

"I was worried about the debt, and my oldest son became responsible and decided to go abroad to earn money to pay the debt. (...) I did not want him to go, I said we could sell everything, the house and land, to pay back the loan and give education [for the children]. My son said: 'No, you have tension in your mind. I will go abroad to earn the money and pay back the loan.'" (Sudip, male 59)

The remittances sent by the son were used to down-pay the household's debt, as well as the additional debt of the loan he needed in order to go abroad. In this case the household's base of produced capital was severely reduced as a result of illness, and external migration was an opportunity to solve their problem and regenerate their base of produced capital. If the son had not gone abroad they might have had to sell their land and house which would have led to a critical decrease in the household's produced and natural capital.

Even those who go abroad without an explicit aim of earning more money have in some cases been able to increase their household's base of produced capital. Anil left for external migration more than ten years ago during the civil war. He was not able to continue his job as a trekking guide when tourist visits to the country decreased as a result of the conflict, and he desperately wanted to escape from the tense situation in the country:

"I gave interview [with a recruiting agency] without any documents, I just had the passport. The Arabic guy said that because I did not have any documents, he would only give me 10 000 Nepalese rupees a month. But if he saw that I did a good job there then he would increase my salary. (...) And I told, 10 000, it was good for about ten years before, it was good then. (...). I signed the agreement and after 25 days the visa came and then I went there. I worked three months and then I requested them to increase my salary. They increased my salary to 20 000 Nepalese rupees." (Anil, male 33)

Within one year he was able to down-pay the debt of his loan, and he continued to work abroad for several years. When the political situation in Nepal calmed down and he decided to return home for good, he had saved enough money to build a new house for his family in Astam and used the rest for other household needs and his wedding. Anil clearly contributed to enhance the household's base of produced capital in the form of accumulated financial assets, of which some was transformed into the physical asset of a house. It is unlikely that he had been able to accumulate this amount of financial assets if he had stayed in Nepal, as the civil war caused a decrease in tourist visits which limited his possibilities of earning money from working as a trekking guide. However, some would argue that the building of houses is not a productive investment which allows further accumulation of produced capital after the migrant's return home, and this point will be discussed in the concluding section of this thesis.

Nevertheless, some of the current external migrants have planned to invest their migrant incomes in businesses when they return. One villager has already stayed abroad for twelve years and according to his wife he is planning to stay there for twelve more years. The wife could tell that he earns 50 000-60 000 NPR a month, of which a large part is saved in the bank. Together they would like to open a shop in the village when he returns. This migrant is able to accumulate a significant amount of financial assets abroad, and if these assets are invested in a business as planned it can facilitate the reproduction of financial assets also after his return to the village. Krishna (male 33), who is working in a European country, is also slowly increasing his savings, although he pointed out that his living expenses are much higher in a developed country than it would be in Nepal. He is planning to invest his savings in a tourism business when he returns to live in Astam. Coming from a poor family he feels proud that he has been able to improve his situation and his financial security, so that he can also take care of his family. This enlargement of produced capital has made him feel more confident as a person, which supports Bebbington's (1999) point of how capital assets can bring meaning to its holders. How is migration related to human capital?

6.2 Human capital

This form of capital accumulates individually in persons, and refers to people's knowledge, skills and health (Bebbington, 1999, Bebbington and Perreault, 1999, Serageldin and Steer, 1994). Even though this type of capital is individual in its form, one household member's

human capital can affect the entire household, as a household member with a higher education can access a higher income which can benefit the household, while a sick family member who are unable to work will be in need of support from the other household members. In which ways can migration influence the accumulation of human capital?

6.2.1 Education and experience

“In my generation it was not important with education. Families used to send the sons to school and the daughters to cut grass” (Pratiti, female 52). A few decades ago education was less important to villagers as most of them were involved in subsistence farming. Now the villagers are more aware of the importance of education and parents express their hope that a good education will give their children the opportunity to obtain well-paid jobs. During the recent decades it has become more common for young adults from Astam to go to Pokhara or Kathmandu to study for a higher degree in colleges and universities. Talented students can also apply for scholarships to study abroad. Both internal and external migration can give access to higher education in universities and colleges, and for the rural population temporary migration is thereby a requirement for this kind of human capital accumulation. Even though a higher education has become more attractive during the latest decades, children of poorer families often have to prioritise work in front of education. How can the incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies influence the children’s access to higher education?

“I went abroad to earn some money and to give education to my sons” (Birendra, male 69).

“Education is really important. When I went abroad I found that it is really important, there is nothing bigger than education” (Rajan, male 40).

Birendra’s type of statement was repeated by other informants, thus the wish to provide a good education for the children is a motivation shared by many of the labour migrants. The second statement furthermore points to how experiences from external migration can increase migrants’ incentives for providing higher education for their children. In paragraph 5.3.3 we found that among the 21 surveyed households who received remittances, 11 reported that some of the migrant income was used for the children’s education. Thereby migration has the potential to indirectly affect human capital accumulation in the next generation of the household, both through a rising awareness of the importance of education as well as through

financial means accumulated from migration. Furthermore, can migration lead to an accumulation of skills and knowledge for the migrants themselves?

Skills can be perceived as a vague concept, but here it will be used to refer to practical knowledge of how to perform certain work or tasks, to some degree separated from the academic knowledge obtained from theoretical education. In the case of internal migration, some of the villagers who work in tourism in Pokhara have obtained skills of how to operate a tourism business through learning by experience. *“I work in this service - that is how I learn from it”* (Rubin, male 40). This accumulation of skills in tourism management can furthermore make them able to facilitate tourism development in Astam, which can eventually lead to more economic opportunities in the village for a wider range of the households. Some of the internal migrants have already taken advantage of these obtained skills to establish branches of their city-based tourism businesses in Astam, like smaller home-stays which are advertised through the tourism businesses in Pokhara. Still, formal knowledge of business management can potentially complement the skills accumulated from the method of learning by experience.

By studying tourism management abroad, Bindu gained new perspectives on tourist service, which made him able to improve the customer service of his household's tourism business.

“Suppose like before we just gave guests a bed with clean sheets, after [my stay abroad] then we changed and gave shampoo sample and then toothpaste. We give in that way and it improved slowly. (...) We can show them something different than others, then they want to stay with us” (Bindu, male 32).

He explained that the extra services they provided as included in the room rate seemed to lead some tourists to choose this family's guest house in front of others. Bindu's accumulation of knowledge and skills from studying abroad had a positive effect on the household's business and it is likely to believe that it contributed to the business' growing success.

Many of the villagers from Astam who go to work in Gulf states do not have higher education or formalised skills and are therefore mainly offered jobs as waiters, security guards and drivers. Former migrants explained that they did not learn any skills from these jobs which would be useful when they returned to Nepal, as these occupations are not widely demanded in the country. Still, one former migrant mentioned that he had learned how to use computers, which has made him able to contribute to the work in the computer centre in Astam. Even

though few of the former migrants find use in their practical skills learned from the work abroad, can the migrant experience influence a migrant's human capital in other ways?

Anil explained how the stay abroad brought him a new perspective on his life at home:

“Where I worked we had to get to work at 6 until evening 6, at 6 we finished. 5 in the morning I left the room and 7 in the evening I came back, that means I was working for 14 hours. I would never do that in Nepal, if I was doing the same time table here in Nepal, I can change so many things in Nepal, I'm feeling like that. (...) If we do the same way in Nepal, we can change so many things in our family and even in our villages. That is why I'm conscious of the village's social work.” (Anil, male 33)

Now Anil has become more aware of the importance of contributing to development at home and is widely involved in community work in the village. This realisation can also be seen as an accumulation of human capital. Sanjay (male 33) learned about the problems of global warming and climate change from working in a gas company in a Gulf state, where he served politicians during environmental meetings. Even though the accumulation of useful practical skills from being a waiter was limited, he gained more knowledge about the global world and Nepal's place in the picture, like the role of forests in international carbon trade, which can also be seen as accumulation of human capital.

Krishna (male 33) who has been working in Europe could tell that he values the knowledge he has gained from living in a foreign culture and thinks that his understanding of other cultures will be useful also when he returns to Nepal because he is planning to start a tourism business. His understanding of foreign cultures can be recognised as an accumulation of human capital, which will be relevant for his ability to provide good customer service to foreign tourists and for his understanding of tourist preferences, if he establishes the planned tourism business.

The three last cases demonstrate that migration can facilitate migrant's accumulation of human capital in various ways, which may be valuable to them when they return to Nepal. On the other hand, can migration also constrain the accumulation of certain skills? A few young villagers who have left Astam explained that they are not familiar with agriculture activities. *“If I want I can do agriculture, but I do not have the skill”* (Bindu, male 32). Thereby migration can restrict the transfer of accumulated agricultural skills from the older generation to the younger, and specialised knowledge of agricultural cultivation in Astam can be lost.

6.2.2 Health aspects

Some of the migrants who have worked in Gulf states claimed that the long working hours, night shifts and the extremely warm climate made them ill, and for a few of them this was also the reason why they returned home. One of them explained that he needed treatment in a hospital in Kathmandu for one month at his return from the stay abroad. In addition to the physical strain of working under these conditions, a long-term stay away from home can also cause mental stress to the migrant. One migrant who went to work in Europe explained that he felt quite unhappy in the start of his stay abroad because he didn't have many friends there and found it difficult to adjust to his new life. *“When you lose your confidence you cannot work hard”* (Pramesh, male 33). His words reflect how mental well-being can influence a person's capacity to perform a job as well as daily tasks. However, after some time this migrant was able to adjust to his new life and now he generally feels more confident because of the experiences he has gained from living abroad.

11 of the 21 surveyed households who received remittances reported that they spent parts of it on health treatment and medicines. Thereby it is likely to believe that the accumulation of financial assets from migration can facilitate improvements of the other household members' health. Because the facilities of health care are limited in Dhital, villagers have to approach clinics and hospitals in Pokhara if they experience any problems with their health that cannot be treated at the local clinic. Unfortunately, not everyone can afford the cost of transportation and treatments in the city:

“Once I was walking on the road there was one boy who had cut his foot, but the family did not have any money to take him to the hospital. I gave 1000 rupees to get him to the hospital and treatment. His leg was bleeding, but they did not have money for the treatment so they left him like that.” (Sanskriti, female 38)

The support from remittances may allow more households to afford transportation as well as hospital treatment in Pokhara for household members in need. Also, nearly all of the surveyed households who received remittances reported that parts of it were used to buy food supplies like vegetables and rice. Increased household income can give access to an adequate supply of food to poorer household and thereby help to avoid problems of under-nutrition.

The findings reported in this sub-chapter point to how the accumulation of produced capital can be transformed into gains in human capital, both concerning health and education. In turn, improvements in human capital can facilitate the further accumulation of produced capital.

6.3 Natural capital

Tangible assets like land and trees are included in natural capital, along with the less tangible aspect of environmental services (Bebbington, 1999, Bebbington and Perreault, 1999, Serageldin and Steer, 1994). In my view natural capital is less dynamic than the other forms of capital assets treated in this analysis, and it is therefore difficult to assess migration's impact on this form of capital on a short-time basis. Furthermore, a large part of natural capital is not privately owned and controlled by individual households, which complicates the task of analysing how migration affects the households' bases of natural capital.

All of the households in Astam own at least a small piece of land, while access to community forests is regulated by law. The scarcity of water in Astam affects all of the households' livelihoods, as it restricts agricultural cultivation and is an obstacle to business initiatives in the village. In which ways does migration affect natural capital?

The incorporation of migration in households' livelihood strategies can relieve the pressure on the local environment, and in some cases lead to the regeneration of degraded natural resources (Preston et al., 1997). Can migration thereby positively affect the overall base of locally available natural capital? Some villagers in Astam point out that the continuing out-migration of young labour force means that the left villagers have to leave more land uncultivated. Thereby their ability to productively make use of natural capital is limited by out-migration. The question of whether or not soil fertility will be improved when more land is left fallow is outside the scope of this thesis. In another aspect, migration also relieves the pressure on the scarce resource of water, as households with migrants away would need less water than in the situation where all household members stayed at home. To some degree the same goes for the use of fire wood from forests. The incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies can give access to economic activities which are not constrained by the local scarcity of water in Astam, and thereby improve the well-being of the household.

When households incorporate migration into their livelihood strategies, agriculture become more of a supporting strategy to supply food, in contradiction to being a primary strategy for survival, which can be the reality for some of the no-migrant households (Preston et al., 1997). From the household survey I found that many of the households in Upper Astam, where both internal and external migration is widespread, left parts of their land uncultivated as they do no longer solely depend on subsistence farming. Thereby some of the households who has involved in internal and external migration are less dependent on natural capital, like land, in order to sustain a viable livelihood. In other words, migration can thereby relieve households' dependence on natural capital for survival, which can be seen in relation to Bebbington's (1999) remark of the fact that many rural livelihoods are no longer mainly based on natural resources. Still, can migration increase households' access to natural capital?

A few former labour migrants have used their migrant income to buy more land in the village or in nearby valleys. Some of those who have bought land in Pokhara or the nearby valleys do not mentioned that they used the land for agricultural purposes, but explained that they after some years sold the land for a higher price. To some degree it can thereby be seen as an investment or a form of savings, which later was converted again to suit the household's needs at that time. One household spent the money from the sale of land to invest in physical assets, in the form of tourist cottages, while another household spent the money to buy land in the village to use for agricultural production. Hitesh (male 38) could tell that his parents had lost the right to use a piece of their land in Astam because of accumulated debt. After some years of work in Pokhara he was able to support them with financial assets so that they could down-pay their debt and reclaim the piece of land.

These cases above show how migration can increase or regain households' access to natural capital through the conversion of accumulated produced capital into natural capital in the form of land holdings. There is also a possibility that the accumulation of human and social capital from migration eventually can contribute to solve the water problem in Astam, either through accumulated knowledge and skills of how to pump up water from nearby rivers to the village, or through strengthened social relations to NGO's or the government. Nevertheless, these possibilities cannot be predicted at this stage. Bebbington (1999) emphasise how the accumulation of social capital can make agents able to renegotiate the rules of access to resources governed by the logics of the state, market and civil society, which I now turn to.

6.4 Social capital

As referred to earlier, scholars have found it difficult to state an absolute definition of social capital (Bebbington, 1999). In this analysis I will focus on social relations that can give households access to the other types of capital. In relation to Bebbington's (1999) emphasis on relations governed by the logics of the state, market and civil society, I will focus on how migration can facilitate the villagers' relations to external actors in the sphere of civil society.

Relations to other actors seem to be an essential premise for the creation of viable and meaningful livelihoods among households in Astam. Subsistence farmers rely on mutual help among relatives and friends in daily work and in times of crisis. A household who runs a tourism business in Pokhara and Astam cooperate with relatives and fellow villagers who work as drivers, porters and guides. In this way they can offer a larger selection of services to tourists with the help of trusted partners, while their partners benefit from the business' recommendation of their services. In this way both of the parties can become able to increase their produced capital as well. How can internal migration affect households' social capital?

6.4.1 Relations to foreign tourists

Those who involve in the tourism business have an enhanced opportunity to form relations to both Nepalese and international tourists. Because tourism to Astam is largely marketed through the villagers' tourism businesses based in Pokhara, I choose to think of the villagers' social relations to tourists as a result of internal migration. Still, there are cases where villagers have formed relations to tourists through meetings in the rural areas also, thus migration is not a premise for the formation of these relations. How can social capital in the form of relations to tourists influence households' access to the other types of capital assets?

One household which operates a tourism business in both Pokhara and Astam often form close relations to tourists and some of these friendships last for years. To them it is very valuable that satisfied customers recommend the business to others. "*When tourists recommend to tourists, the tourists think that they do not have any interest in this, so that they will tell the real thing, and they believe them more than us*" (Bindu, male 32). In this way close relations to tourists can bear the fruit of attracting more customers which can lead to increased incomes, in other words an enlargement of produced capital.

Furthermore, some of these tourism businesses encourage tourists to visit Astam, where tourists are provided accommodation in home-stays or smaller branches of the households' city-based tourism businesses. In this way more financial assets can be accumulated, and tourism development in Astam is facilitated. Furthermore, one of the households which are involved in tourism in Astam also offers tourists to visit the local school and health clinic and inform them of the various community projects in the village. Donation boxes for community projects are put up in the common rooms of the business, both in Astam and Pokhara, to encourage tourists to give financial support to these projects. Because the household members are widely involved in the community projects, as central members in some of the committees managing the projects, interested tourists are offered a wide insight into the project work. Can these relations contribute to further development of the facilities in Astam?

The 'sister-school' relationship to an Australian high school, which has provided means for improving the facilities of the school in Upper Astam, was put into existence through the initiative of tourist who visited the village a decade ago. The Logged On Foundation carried out its first project in Astam by providing a computer centre to the school, and the founder could tell that a picture taken by a tourist of the bad conditions of the original computers in the school had inspired him to work in Astam. He already knew about the village because a friend of him had visited Astam years before, thus the relation between the foundation and the villagers in Astam was indirectly formed by tourist relations. Through tourism the villagers have thereby been able to establish relations to external actors, governed by the logic of civil society, which has facilitated local development and in this way given villagers access to enlarge their base of capital, like human capital through improved education facilities.

The household referred to in the paragraphs above has been widely involved in these relations to external actors, and their capabilities to work for local development have increased through the support from individual tourists and related NGO's. Their ability to form close relations to visiting tourists who in some cases are eager to support these projects, furthermore helps to secure the sustainability of the development projects. The business also encourages volunteer tourism by informing tourists of opportunities to volunteer in the local school and health clinic. Whether or not the social relations between the household and the foreign supporters were formed as a result of internal migration may not seem clear. Still, without the tourism business in Pokhara, the household would probably not have been able to run a tourism business in Astam as the area does not yet attract a large amount of tourists in itself.

Relations to tourists have also brought this household some new ideas of how to run an environmentally-friendly tourism business, like the implementation of solar panels to relieve the reliance on electricity. This illustrates how relations to tourists can bring new information about technology, which can facilitate an enhancement of produced capital. It is likely to believe that external migration may also facilitate the formation of relations to external actors.

6.4.2 Relations abroad

Krishna (male 33) works in Europe and has formed relations to new friends in the destination country. Some of these have expressed interest for environmental challenges and health issues, and Krishna himself is eager to improve the village's facilities of health care and to solve the problem of water scarcity. He has therefore invited these friends to visit the village and points out that he does not want to simply convince his new friends to donate money for development projects in the village because it does not give them the same feeling of trust as if they come to see the needs of the village with their own eyes. Krishna believes that these kinds of social relations potentially can contribute to improvements in the village's facilities. *"Maybe you have more experience than me, you know, then maybe you can help"* (Krishna, male 33). Through gathering resources and expertise from a wider social network, new ideas of how to solve problems, as well as financial means to carry through the ideas, can be found.

Former labour migrants who have worked in Gulf states told that they formed close relations to other migrant workers during their stay abroad. Sanjay could count 40-50 good friends which he came to know during his stay abroad, and he still stays in touch with some of them through phone calls, e-mails and direct communication over the internet. When Sanjay became ill during his stay abroad and returned to Nepal for good, he had to seek treatment in hospital and his friends from the stay abroad called him to check on his condition. Sanjay (male 33) could tell that his friends had said: *"If you do not have enough money then we will send, we will help you, please tell us"*. This statement indicates that his enhancement of social capital from external migration can give him access to financial support in times of need.

These cases demonstrate how internal and external migration can facilitate the formation of new social relations, also to external and foreign actors. In some cases these relations can give households increased access to the other forms of capital, especially evident in the cases of social relations to actors in the sphere of civil society. I will provide a figure to illustrate how

and migrant-households in the figure. The existence of close relations between the households in Astam is also important in relation to cultural capital, which I now turn to.

6.5 Cultural capital

Bebbington (1999) has noted that the rural population often holds on to their rural belonging because they value the opportunity to participate in cultural practices which are tied to their home place and the rural livelihood. He refers to this as cultural capital, which can bring meaning to people's lives and can furthermore empower them to perform certain actions (Bebbington, 1999). Because cultural capital cannot be quantified, it stands out from the other forms of capital, and I will include a discussion of the concept in the end of next chapter. Here I will give an attempt to analyse the ways in which migration can affect the households' access to cultural capital, in Bebbington's (1999) sense of the term. Which cultural aspects are important to villagers, and to what extent does migration constrain migrants' ability to take part in place-specific practices?

6.5.1 Valued cultural practices

Religious festivals are important to many of the villagers and families often gather to celebrate the holidays. *Dashain* is among the largest festivals in Hinduism and the celebration last for several days. One of the festival's traditions is that parents give *tika* [a red coloured paste applied to the forehead for wishes of good fortune] to their children, and villagers explained that everyone should return to their parents' house to participate in this ritual. To point out the importance of this festival, informants could tell that in some cases also external migrants return home for the celebration. An old lady who has moved from Astam to Pokhara to stay with her son (referred to in paragraph 6.1.1) explained that she has to return to their family house in the village during *Dashain* to give *tika* to her children. The fact that this is done even though most of her family now resides in Pokhara indicates that the cultural practice of celebrating *Dashain* is closely tied to the villagers' home place.

The elderly villagers also value the opportunity to produce their own food, and some decades ago it was considered a shame to buy food from others. The elderly lady referred to above could tell that she misses doing agriculture and she would ideally like to be self-subsistent in food. In addition to being a survival strategy, subsistence agriculture can be therefore be seen as a valued cultural practice which is increasingly constrained by migration. "*When many*

young people go abroad, much of the land will be left unplanted. Then agriculture is decreasing slowly” (Purna, male 67). Because more of the young people now leave the village to work abroad or in city areas, there is less labour force available in the village to support agricultural production. In some of the cases when the young leave their household in Astam to work in other places, the older parents express that they find it hard to do all of the work in agriculture alone. There are also generally fewer workers to hire during the busy seasons of planting and harvesting. Now most of the village’s households depend on supplementing their own produce with food bought in nearby markets, and the younger generations seem to be less concerned about the importance of producing their own food. The cultural value of subsistence agriculture seems to decrease among the younger generation when they discover more attractive opportunities for making a living through work abroad or in city areas.



Picture 7: Goat grazing in terraced fields in Astam

6.5.2 Holding on to a rural belonging

Even though more land is left fallow, many of the villagers do not sell their uncultivated land. There are even examples of both internal and external migrants who seldom visit the village, but who still own land there. Do villagers avoid to sell their land in order to hold on to their rural belonging, like Bebbington (1999) refers to in relation to cultural capital? Informants defined permanent migration as the act to sell all land at the home place and settle another place. Therefore, when migrants leave the village on a long-term basis without selling their land, it can be interpreted as a desire to hold on to their rural belonging. Nadin (male 51) thinks that the reason why villagers do not sell land even if they cannot cultivate all of it is

because they currently have other sources of access to food, but in difficult times they may have to cultivate more themselves. From this I get the understanding that by owning land in the village people have the opportunity to return to their original livelihood if other parts of their livelihood strategy fail. In this case the land holding can be seen as a form of insurance. Thus, the act of keeping endowments of uncultivated land can on the one hand be a way for migrants to hold on to their rural belonging, but on the other hand it can be seen as an economic insurance strategy in a context where social security is lacking.

Several informants expressed that they appreciate the village society and in relation to migration many think that it can be hard to be newcomers in another place, therefore some are sceptical against permanent migration. Some informants pointed to the value of close social bonds among villagers and to relatives in the area.

“Cultural traditions can be different there [in other places] and it can be difficult to adjust. (...) My ancestors have been here for more than 600 years, so if we leave this place it will be a loss for us.” (Birendra, male 69)

“I do not want to leave my village, because even in Pokhara there is a very difficult life. Cars, hospitals and schools - there are more facilities and we can do some good business - but there are so many things we will be missing from the place. (...) If we move to one place from another we will become newcomers and will be far away from our family. (...) If an accident happens to me in my home if I'm living in Pokhara, no one will come, except the police, no one will come. This is a very bad attitude there.” (Sanjay, male 33)

These accounts describe the advantages villagers experience by living in Astam, where everyone knows each other and have a common understanding of cultural norms.

Nevertheless, we must not forget that some may find it hard to fit into this close community, which would then be an incentive to leave the place. Still, for some of the villagers, the value they find in continuing a rural residence and a rural livelihood lead them to turn down the possibility of permanent migration, even though it could provide them better conditions for agriculture or other income sources. Nevertheless, because economic opportunities in the village are limited some households depend on incomes from work outside the village in order to sustain their rural living. Can household members' involvement in temporary migration be a strategy to support a viable livelihood for rural households, while allowing a continued rural residence of the household and thereby ensure the access to cultural capital?

Anil (male 33) worked in a Gulf state for nearly ten years and the financial assets he accumulated were used to build a new house for his family in Astam, as well as to cover other needs of the household. The experience from migration made Anil no less certain that he wants to continue to live in the village, and furthermore made him even more aware of the importance of working for local development in order to improve the villagers' access to facilities. The work to improve the conditions of the village can make the villagers' life easier, and thereby facilitate their continued rural residence and access to cultural capital. Thus, even though migration can constrain migrants' abilities to take part in cultural practices, it can also lead them to realise the value of cultural capital and motivate them to change the conditions of their rural livelihood in a way that make them able to sustain their access to cultural capital. This can be related to Bebbington's (1999) point of how cultural capital can facilitate certain forms of action, and furthermore enhance the access to other forms of capital assets.

Because Pokhara is located quite close to the village, it may also be possible to combine periodical internal migration to the city with a permanent residence in the village. At least one household has been able to compose a viable livelihood from doing business in both Pokhara and Astam, which makes them able to hold on to their rural residence while still increasing their overall base of capital assets. They highly value their home village and contribute to the work for local development. The work for local development could potentially also decrease their reliance on internal migration in the future. Temporary migration facilitates the households' continued access to cultural capital, without severely limiting their access to the other types of capital assets. Involvement in migration and cultural practices tied to the home place do therefore not have to be mutually constraining options, as temporary migration may indirectly sustain households' access to cultural capital.

Now that I have analysed how migration affects rural households' access to five types of capital assets, based on Bebbington's (1999) framework, I would like to turn to Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) outlining of four forms of capital. Which type of insight can his approach bring to the empirical situation of Astam, and can his conceptualisation of the forms of capital complement the framework of Bebbington (1999)?

CHAPTER 7: INCORPORATING INSIGHT FROM BOURDIEU'S NOTION OF CAPITAL

The theoretical conceptualisations of the forms of capital by Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1991) and Bebbington (1999) are written during different times and for different purposes. While the former author provided deep reflections on the forms of capital and conversions between them, the latter author shortly introduce capital assets as central elements of a framework. I therefore find it useful to take a look at Bourdieu's work in order to receive a deeper understanding of the reproduction and conversion of capital in society. In this chapter I will give particular attention to Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) notions of cultural capital and symbolic capital, as well as his thoughts on the conversion of capital. Furthermore I will use the insight from his work to discuss Bebbington's (1999) term of cultural capital, and lastly suggest how insight from Bourdieu's work can complement Bebbington's framework. To what extent can insight from Bourdieu's elaborations be informative to my analysis of livelihoods in Astam?

7.1 Cultural capital in Bourdieu's sense of the term

From the theoretical introduction in chapter 4 it became clear that Bourdieu's (1986) and Bebbington's (1999) concepts of cultural capital should not be confused, as Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is more similar to what is referred to as human capital in Bebbington's framework. Notwithstanding, it should be underlined that Bourdieu generally criticised the human capital approach because it tends to ignore the importance of "the domestic transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986: 244).

Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital sheds light on the hereditary transmission of cultural capital inside the family which influences a child's basis for the further accumulation of cultural capital, for instance in the form of academic education. Firstly, the cultural capital possessed by the family can be more or less consciously transferred to a child during childhood, which can affect the extent of cultural capital the child is able to accumulate from formal education. Secondly, this can be linked to economic capital in two ways, both concerning the family members' opportunity to allocate time for the transmission of cultural capital in the domestic sphere, as well as the family's ability to economically support the child during the years required to obtain a specific degree of academic education. This thereby goes beyond a focus on the economic means invested to pay for education fees (Bourdieu, 1986).

Because the hereditary transmission of cultural capital is very much concealed, we are often led to believe that a person's ability to accumulate cultural capital is only determined by his or her own qualities as well as the access to economic means required to access formal education and training (Bourdieu, 1986). To what extent can Bourdieu's (1986) outlining of the domestic transmission of cultural capital contribute to a deeper understanding of the various livelihoods which households in Astam are able to create and how migration is related to this?

7.1.1 The domestic transmission of cultural capital

The theoretical insight provided by Bourdieu (1986) sparked my curiosity of why and how some villagers had been able to take on a profession like teaching, on the contrary to the majority of villagers who, at least until a few decades ago, were mainly uneducated subsistence farmers. From the survey and interviews I found that two of the elderly men who had worked as teachers were the sons of the earlier *Mukhiya* (local tax agent) of Astam:

“When I was about 15 years old I used to help my father in the filing work. (...) I wanted to get a government job and serve my nation. Teaching profession would be good, so I started teaching” (Kailash, male 70).

The fact that two of the *Mukhiya's* sons became teachers, which required a few years of higher education, indicates that the family's base of economic capital made them able to allow the sons free time from economic obligations in order for them to obtain a higher education. Furthermore, the introduction to filing work can be seen as a domestic transfer of cultural capital which may have influenced Kailash's abilities to further accumulate cultural capital and become a teacher. The father's position as a *Mukhiya* allowed the hereditary transmission of cultural capital accumulated from working for the government, which may have facilitated the sons' further accumulation of the cultural capital required to become teachers.

A female teacher I spoke to was the daughter of a former teacher:

“I read up to 10th class before I married. After marriage I used to work in the house morning and evening, and joined the university to study. (...) My family wants me to study more, a higher degree. (...) My father was a teacher, he is retired now.” (Sanskriti, female 38).

This case also indicates the importance of the domestic transmission of cultural capital, as the cultural capital possessed by a family member was reproduced in the following generation.

Teachers often highly value education, but in order to provide their children free time to obtain education, they also need to have access to an adequate amount of economic capital. In Sanskriti's case it is interesting that she as a girl was encouraged to obtain a higher education because, to recite another informant, traditionally families “*used to send the sons to school and the daughters to cut grass*” (Pratiti, female 52). Because the daughters will leave their parents' household after marriage, while the sons are traditionally responsible for supporting their parents, the daughters' educations will often not be given priority. However, this attitude seems to have changed during the latest decades in relation to the increasing awareness of the importance of formal education. Even though many of the villagers pointed to the importance of education, how can poorer households be able to free their children from economic obligations in order for them to obtain a higher education?

7.1.2 Linking cultural capital to economic capital

Vishal explained that temporary poverty restricted his opportunity to obtain higher education:

“I had to work all the time, even not only me, all the boys from the village had to work all the time. When they finished their work and came from school they had to work in the fields with the parents, look after the cattle and make the food for the family, because their parents went to work in the field. We could not get our time to study, you know. I always thought of how I could get rid of this problem for the children. And maybe this is the reason that I started in tourism (...) And now my son would maybe like to study hotel management.” (Vishal, male 40)

Vishal's family was not able to free him from economic obligations so that he could obtain a higher education, but the success of his work in tourism now enables him to free his own son from work so that the son can acquire a higher education. During his up-bringing the son has been exposed to the family's accumulated cultural capital of managing a tourism business, thereby he has also been given a head-start for studies in hotel management. In contrast to Vishal's son, some of the children in Astam grow up in families which are mainly dependent on subsistence agriculture. How does this affect their further accumulation of cultural capital?

The households which depend mainly on agriculture in Astam are often struggling to form a viable livelihood because the conditions of water scarcity and infertile land pose unfavourable conditions for agriculture. Some of the lower-caste households own only a small piece of land and often have to involve in share-cropping as well as wage labour in agriculture and construction work in order to form a living:

“I go to other people's houses for work to earn money. My son and daughter also go to work for others when they are free. (...) I went to work abroad with the aim of giving good education to my children. I thought that if I could work hard and earn money then my family would not have to go to other houses for work, but I did not succeed.” (Rajan, male 40)

The migrant's aim was to accumulate economic capital in order to support the children's education by allowing them time free from work in order to obtain a higher education. He did not succeed to accumulate significant financial assets, and the family therefore still struggles to build a viable livelihood. In the family's current economic situation it is less likely that the children can be freed from economic obligations in order to obtain higher educations. Still, as pointed to in chapter 6, in other cases the incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies has facilitated economic means to support the children's education.

Bourdieu's (1986) recognition of the relation between economic and cultural capital brings a deeper understanding to the importance of a family's financial assets for the children's accumulation of cultural capital through education. Even though the public schools and universities in Nepal are free of cost except from a smaller admission fee, attendance to universities and colleges requires that students live in the city area where living expenses are higher. Furthermore it requires that they allocate time for studying, which will not bring economic profit in the short run. Thereby the households' base of financial assets can be a determinant for the accumulation of institutionalised cultural capital among their children.

This insight can provide a better understanding of an often referred to motivation of external migrants, namely that they go abroad in order to earn money for their children's education. If we only account for the economic investment of the small admission fee for schools and universities, it would seem like a drastic action to migrate abroad in order to afford this relatively small cost. By recognising the link between cultural capital and economic capital which Bourdieu (1986) pointed out, we receive a deeper understanding of how the households' base of economic capital influences households' members accumulation of cultural capital. In a village with limited opportunities for households to increase their base of economic capital, migration is one of the strategies that can enhance their access to financial means, and thereby further enhance the household members' access to accumulate cultural capital, in Bourdieu's (1986) sense of the term.

7.2 Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital

Symbolic capital can be understood as prestige or reputation and refers to the recognition an individual receives from others in a group or in a community, which means that this person's actions and utterances will also be more widely acknowledged by others (Bourdieu, 1986, Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991). In which ways are villagers of Astam able to accumulate symbolic capital, and how is this related to migration?

7.2.1 Which persons receive recognition from others?

In Astam I found two different opinions regarding which persons the villagers respected.

"No one listens to the poor people, they listen to the rich people only." (Pratiti, female 57)

"Here in Nepal, the thing is that all of those who look big, has a big belly, he is a nice person people think. (...) But those who are very thin, they are not good persons, they do not look good because they are thin, they do not get enough to eat. People are thinking that rich persons are good persons, something like that, but that concept is not true." (Gopal, male 42)

One of the opinions was that villagers respected those who were rich, but others thought that this tendency was more evident before, and that the younger, more educated generation does no longer give recognition to people only based on their wealth.

"I don't think people respect if you are rich. They can request, people will request you to help, but I don't think that people respect the rich people. They will respect for the social workers. And then the leaders, political leaders they respect I think." (Bindu, male 32)

The second opinion I identified was that some villagers gave recognition to those who contributed to local development. Furthermore I found that the villagers of Astam had various opinions about *lahure*, and in some cases the *lahure* seem to receive recognition from others. Former migrants explained that people were more curious about them after they returned to Nepal, and that villagers were impressed if migrants had earned money abroad.

"Before when I was in Nepal people did not use to care about me. When I came back from the stay abroad people thought that I had been able to do something, earn money, improve." (Saroj, male 40)

“When my son got a job in a good company abroad they thought he did good and earned a lot of money. But now they know he did not and that we had a large debt, and now they think it is not good.” (Sudip, male 59)

Saroj experienced that more people were interested in talking to him when he returned from the stay abroad, and they were impressed that he had been able to earn money abroad. This indicates that he received a wider recognition from others by being a *lahure*, thus his symbolic capital increased from migration. Because more people were interested to talk to him after he returned, this may give him access to further increase his social capital as well. However, in the second case it seems like the symbolic capital the family gained from the son's act of migration was withdrawn when people discovered that the family used the money to down-pay a large debt and had thereby not been able to accumulate wealth from the son's migrant income. Why do villagers seem to be so concerned about the *lahure's* wealth?

“The village will be developed when the lahure bring money.” (Purna, male 67)

“They feel like I have some knowledge from abroad. And when we are donating money for something they are saying ‘why, you are lahure, you have to give something more’.” (Anil, male 33)

The recognition *lahure* receive from others seems to be accompanied by an expectation that *lahure* should be agents of change who can initiate development in the village. In order to sustain the symbolic capital they gain from being *lahure* they therefore may have to affirm that they are able to contribute to local development. After his stay abroad, Anil became more aware of the importance of contributing to local development and he is now widely involved in community projects. His act of external migration did not only lead to an initial enhancement of symbolic capital, but also gave him new knowledge and sparked his engagement in community work, which have made him able to further increase his symbolic capital after his return to Astam. This is not to say that villagers contribute to local development based on a calculated purpose of accumulating symbolic capital. First of all, local development can clearly benefit these contributors themselves and facilitate their continued residence in the village if this is desired. Secondly, in relation to this form of capital

the concealment of the economic logic and calculation, not least from the holder itself, is a prerequisite for the production of significant profits (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986).

Bista (1996: 98) points to the typical group mentality in Nepal and refers to the concept of *afno manchhe* as “one’s inner circle of associates” to lean on. This can be related to the Nepalese concept *thulo manchhe* [“big person”] which refers those who in some way are “important” and respected. In relation to symbolic capital I asked the villagers if there were any *thulo manchhe* in Astam or Dhital. Some answered that “*everyone is thulo manchhe*” or that those who contributed to local development were *thulo manchhe*, in accordance with the second opinion of which persons the villagers respected. On the other hand, some said that they did not know of any *thulo manchhe*, while a few pointed out that there had been some *thulo manchhe* earlier, those who were rich and powerful, but there were none anymore. In a discussion of whether villagers mostly listened to those who were rich, which was the first opinion I identified in relation to symbolic capital, Sanjay could tell:

“10-15 years ago everyone followed the rich and powerful. Now people can think more for themselves. They may listen to what the rich people say, but they can decide what is good for them by themselves. Now there are possibilities even for poor people to go abroad and earn money, they can survive themselves. Before if they did not have any other opportunities they had to follow the powerful person or maybe he would fire them or something like that.”

(Sanjay, male 33)

This indicates that in the era of powerful *mukhiya* and village leaders, there was a clearer distinction between the common villagers and a few rich and powerful men. “*There were larger differences between people before, yes*” (Sanjay, male 33). Now that these positions no longer exist no one is clearly entitled to power and the villagers’ access to resources is more equal. Furthermore, all of the households now have easier access to opportunities outside the village, and even those who belong to lower castes can go to work abroad if they can access financial means for the initial fee. An important point here is that when those who belong to lower castes go to work outside Nepal and India, like in Gulf states, they are less hindered by caste discrimination and will be treated in the same way as any other Nepalese with similar skills. A villager who belongs to a lower caste could tell that:

“When I was abroad people respected me. When I was walking and people were driving past, they would slow down and say Namaste [greeting], even ‘big’ people would do that to me.(...) In other countries all are equal, but in Nepal people are uneducated so they respect the people who are rich.” (Rajan, male 40)

As the labour demand from the Gulf states has increased, villagers of lower castes have obtained increased access to accumulate financial means abroad and furthermore to increase their symbolic capital by being *lahure*, even though parts of the elderly higher-caste population will still treat people according to caste belonging. Some villagers of lower castes have also further increased their symbolic capital at the return to the village by working for community projects. At least one of the foreign organisations which supports community projects in the village are very conscious of involving members of all caste groups in the project, which also increases the lower castes' access to accumulate symbolic capital.

7.2.2 The effect of symbolic capital

When a person has accumulated symbolic capital, his or her opinions will be more widely recognised by others, and in this way symbolic capital gives access to power. In the current absence of formally elected leaders for the communities and the VDC, there seems to be an open space available for villagers to position themselves as informal leaders for the others to follow, for instance in relation to decisions concerning community projects for local development. However, a person cannot simply claim this position, the person must be entitled to it, and symbolic capital can give a person access to take on a leader role in the community. Nevertheless, in these situations conflicts may rise:

“If a man does something good then maybe his friends will be jealous, thinking ‘everyone follows him then he will be big. If he is big then I will be smaller’.” (Sanjay, male 33)

“Suppose if you have a good friend and if you do a little bit better than him, sometimes the friend becomes jealous. And sometime he goes angry with you, thinking: ‘How can we make him bad?’ (...) This is now starting to happen, that is not so good. (Mahendra, male 38)

It is not surprising that these conflicts among friends may rise because symbolic capital produces the symbolic profit of power and recognition from others, but it can also bring profits related to the other types of capital. In the battle over access to power, migration can be seen as one of the ways to gain access to symbolic capital, whether or not this is consciously sought. The *lahure* who have accumulated financial means and knowledge from migration can enhance their symbolic capital further by channelling work and economic support into community projects. On the other hand, returned migrants who do not have the

means or interest in contributing to local development may over time lose the symbolic capital initially gained from being a *lahure*. Furthermore, I found that some of those who are able to work for development in the village were enabled to do this work because they had expanded their access to the various forms of capital through internal migration. In many cases the accumulation of economic capital seems to be a premise for the accumulation of symbolic capital. Why is this so? I believe Bourdieu's (1986) elaboration on the conversion of capital can be informative to this question.

7.3 Conversions between the forms of capital

Bourdieu (1986) claimed that all forms of capital are based on economic capital, but this does not mean that the other forms of capital are simply reducible to this basic form. Furthermore, even though the other forms of capital can be derived from economic capital, a large amount of energy is required to carry out the conversion work. In order to convert one form of capital into another form, labour time must be invested in the transformation itself in addition to the time invested to accumulate the initial capital in the first place (Bourdieu, 1986).

In Astam I found that symbolic capital potentially can be accumulated when villagers give support to community projects, as some informants explained that they respected those who contributed to local development. In order to be able to economically support community projects, the person's access to economic capital is clearly essential. Still, the link to economic capital is also evident in relation to the ability to perform volunteer work for community projects, as the person has to allocate time for a type of work that will not give the immediate economic profit of a wage earning. A person who is poor in economic capital will be less able to do so than a person who has a larger base of economic capital. This testifies to Bourdieu's (1986) claim that economic capital is at the base of the other forms of capital, in this case symbolic capital.

Furthermore, the other forms of capital cannot automatically be derived from economic capital without the investment of labour time in the conversion itself (Bourdieu, 1986). In relation to the accumulation of symbolic capital in Astam, a person must invest time and energy in the search for needed community projects and demonstrate that he or she is worthy of making a positive contribution to the society by making reasonable choices concerning these projects. A person's cultural capital and social capital can also be influential to the

person's ability to initiate positive changes. Only if the produced changes are valued by the other villagers they will give recognition to the person who contributes to enable these changes. For the accumulation of symbolic capital a large amount of work is thereby required, which shows that also symbolic capital consists of work accumulated over time (Bourdieu, 1986). Why are conversions between the forms of capital essential?

“The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and the position occupied in social space) by means of the conversions least costly in terms of conversion work and of the losses inherent in the conversion itself (in a given state of the social power relations).” (Bourdieu, 1986: 253)

Conversions between the forms of capital can be central in the effort to reproduce and expand capital bases, and to transfer accumulated capital from one generation to the next (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) pointed out that when the official transmission of capital becomes increasingly controlled by institutions, for instance by inheritance laws, some may seek to take advantage of conversions which conceal the economic logic of the transmission, even though it also leads to a higher risk of loss. When economic capital is converted into another form of capital, like cultural capital, there are fewer guarantees that material profits will arise from the transmission, compared to a strictly economic exchange. In many cases there is not a fixed conversion rate between the different forms of capital, and inherent in conversions between the forms of capital there is therefore a possibility that valued profits will raise from it, as well as a risk that no profits will be derived from the conversion (Bourdieu, 1986).

In the earlier days, the position of *Mukhiya* brought with it wide access to all of the forms of capital. The *mukhiya* often controlled access to land and other resources, which forced the less fortunate villagers to pay their respect to the *mukhiya*, while the *mukhiya* also had increased access to economic capital from their work of collecting taxes to the government (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). The position could be transferred from father to son, but the power entitled to the *mukhiya* decreased and dissolved after the 1950s (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). The dominating families' exclusive access to these forms of capital thereby came to an end. More families' are now more freely allowed access to the various forms of capital, to some extent even families belonging to the lower castes. Still, in Astam I found that the descendants of the earlier dominating families were often better off than other villagers. The households' bases of capital seem to influence their further accumulation of capital, even

though the inter-generational transmission of capital is now more concealed. For instance, the effort to transform economic capital into symbolic capital by working for local development in Astam may give families' increased access to other forms of capital, but there is no guarantee that these profits will rise. It will also require more labour work to transfer this symbolic capital to the next generation than what would be required for the transmission of economic capital. Still, symbolic capital may give access to material and symbolic profits that cannot be derived from economic capital alone (Bourdieu, 1986).

One last point to be made here is that the reflections on the conversion of capital furthermore points to how individuals' accumulation of symbolic capital in Astam has an effect of redistributing the other forms of capital in the community. In order to accumulate symbolic capital an individual has to invest personal capital in community projects which can benefit a larger part of the population. In order for *lahure* to maintain the symbolic capital accumulated from being *lahure* they have to directly or indirectly invest their economic capital (migrant incomes) in community work and their capital thereby becomes redistributed in the community. Enriched by the insight from Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) elaboration on the forms of capital and conversions between them, I will now turn to a discussion of the theoretical foundation of Bebbington's (1999) concept of cultural capital.

7.4 A discussion of Bebbington's concept of cultural capital

In his framework aimed for analysing rural livelihoods, Bebbington (1999) suggest that cultural capital, as the value of taking part in cultural practices which are often tied to place, should be included among the capital assets that people make use of in building their livelihoods and which further bring them meaning and capabilities that can enhance their quality of life. The concept of cultural capital stands out from the other types of capital assets in the framework since it cannot be accumulated in the same manner. The concepts of produced, human, natural and social capital have been elaborated and discussed by several scholars over the years of their existence, and this new concept of cultural capital should also be scrutinised in order to find out whether it is reasonable to include it as a form of capital that can benefit an analysis of rural livelihoods. Here I will discuss to which degree Bebbington's (1999) notion of cultural capital is in accordance with the concept of 'capital', based on insight from Bourdieu's work.

7.4.1 The definition of 'capital'

Bebbington (1999) did neither include an explicit definition of the concept of 'capital' nor a deeper discussion of how cultural capital can be recognised as a type of capital in his framework. Nevertheless, in another paper he referred to the question of whether social capital can be seen as a form of capital (Bebbington and Perreault, 1999). Like physical (produced) and human capital, "*social capital is an embodiment of cumulative effects of human activity*" (Bebbington and Perreault, 1999: 398). This is in agreement with Bourdieu's (1986) view that capital results from labour accumulated over time. On the one hand, cultural capital in the form of cultural practices can be seen in accordance to these understandings of 'capital' as cultural practices are maintained and reproduced through the repeated actions of humans. On the other hand, Bourdieu (1986: 252) furthermore stated that all types of capital are "disguised forms of economic capital", which can produce profits, as well as be reproduced and expanded. Cultural capital, in the sense of Bebbington (1999), does not produce material profits unless it is appropriated in economic activities, like cultural tourism or in the commercial production of cultural items. There is no economic logic evident in the meaningfulness of participating in cultural practices *per se*. Thus, can cultural capital in the form of cultural practices be recognised as a form of capital at all?

Bebbington (1999) claims that the sole value of taking part in cultural practices gives meaning to people's life and furthermore has the potential to facilitate productive actions that can not be derived from the other types of capital alone. He furthermore states that cultural capital can enable the maintenance and enhancement of the other types of capital. This is based on the view that capital assets should not only be seen as resources to build a material living from, but also as resources which give meaning to people's life and empower them to more actively interact in and change the world around them (Bebbington, 1999).

The problem is that the wide definition of the function of 'capital assets', which Bebbington (1999) proposes, tend to ignore the economic essence of the concept of 'capital' which Bourdieu (1986) emphasised. Operating with a wide definition of 'capital assets' also means that the limits of what can be defined as 'capital assets' are considerably widened. When these limits are widened to include a wide range of aspects that can be meaningful and empowering to people, the specific characteristics of the concept of 'capital' are lost. If one decides to overlook the economic aspect that Bourdieu (1986) has pointed out as essential for all of the forms of capital, it would perhaps be more reasonable to hold on to the term 'resources'

instead of 'capital assets'. How can the value of participating in cultural practices be understood from the perspective of Bourdieu (1977, 1986)?

7.4.2 Cultural practice as a form of institutional rites

If we apply Bourdieu's (1986) approach, the participation in cultural practices, which Bebbington (1999) refers to as cultural capital, can instead be seen as institutional rites that reinforce social relations among members of a community or a kinship group. Institutional rites are important in order to affirm the existence of a social group or network, in other words it has an essential function of reproducing social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). When family members from near and far gather to celebrate Hindu festivals in Astam the relations among members of a kinship group are reinforced. Also when villagers work together in agriculture the social relations between villagers are reinforced. Can this social aspect of cultural practices better highlight the value villagers find in continuing a rural residence?

"I do not want to leave my village. Even in Pokhara from one house to the next people do not know each other and from one family to another they do not know each other. Here it is, now you can see, we are like one family. If anything happens, we are together to discuss about the things and this is very good cooperation." (Sanjay, male 33)

The values of belonging and safety that villagers find in their rural way of life are to a certain degree based on the advantages of belonging to a social network in the form of a close community. Many of the poorer families are dependent on their relations to other villagers in order to get by during difficult times, as they have limited access to cash savings. *"I help my friends and receive help. I also get money from them and give them money when I have. The money I earn does not last, I need someone to borrow from"* (Rajan, male 40). Some pointed out that it would be very hard to start over in a place where they know no one: *"If you don't know the place or any persons there you don't get any help"* (Adil, male 37).

The opportunity to participate in cultural practices in rural areas does not only bring meaning to villager's life on an experiential level, but furthermore serves to reinforce the accumulated social capital of households by confirming their belonging to community groups and kinship groups. As social capital takes time to build (Bourdieu, 1986), it seems to be an advantage to reproduce the social capital that has been accumulated in households for generations in the form of relations to fellow villagers. Social capital can give access to material and symbolic

profits and furthermore facilitates the potential to concentrate capital from all of the members in a social group if one member is in need of extra support (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital seems to be very important in a country like Nepal, where the state does not provide significant social security to individual families.

Even though the participation in cultural practices tied to place can be important to villagers on an experiential basis as Bebbington (1999) suggests, it is not reasonable to define it as a form of capital which rural people draw upon to build their livelihoods. In order to define it as a form of capital it must be proved that this notion of cultural capital has an inherent economic logic. There is also a need for more theoretical elaboration of the ways in which this form of capital interacts with the other forms of capital. Unless this can be provided, the theoretical foundation of the concept is too weak. Insight from the work of Bourdieu (1986) can provide a stronger theoretical foundation to the importance of participating in cultural practices tied to the rural home place.

Furthermore I will argue that Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) outlining of cultural capital and symbolic capital, as well as of the conversion of capital, can provide another type of insight to the analysis of rural livelihoods than the insight offered by Bebbington's (1999) framework. In the following paragraphs I will sum up the discussion by pointing out the ways in which Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) work could complement Bebbington's (1999) framework.

7.5 Can Bourdieu's work complement Bebbington's framework?

In this thesis I have chosen to utilise Bebbington's (1999) framework to analyse how migration interacts with rural households' livelihood strategies in Astam. However, in this chapter I have proved that Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) work can provide another form of insight to the analysis of rural livelihoods in Astam. In this last section of this chapter I will comment on the differences between the approaches and point out how Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) elaboration of the forms of capital can complement Bebbington's (1999) framework.

Bebbington's (1999) framework aims to facilitate analyses of rural livelihoods by utilising the concept of capital assets. The framework's strengths lies in the comprehensive recognition of the forms of capital that rural households draw upon to form their livelihoods, as well as the focus on both the material and experiential levels of well-being which influence households'

choices regarding their livelihood strategies. However, as earlier pointed out, the framework is not flawless because the vague concept of cultural capital provides a challenge in relation to the theoretical foundation of the concept, as well as the practical application of it in empirical research. To what extent can Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) work be relevant to an analysis of rural livelihoods?

Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) work is based in the school of sociology, and is not specifically framed for analyses of rural livelihoods. His writings on the forms of capital, grounded in the theory of practice, are focused on the deeper sociological processes of the reproduction of capital, and by that of the reproduction of social positions in society. This brings us a thorough understanding of how the inter-generational transmission of capital, like the hereditary transmission of cultural capital, provides individuals with a certain starting point which influences their abilities to further reproduce and accumulate capital. Thus, this insight is useful in complementing Bebbington's (1999) framework.

Insight in the sociological processes of the reproduction of capital can furthermore be useful in order to understand rural households' different bases for responding to global and local changes which enables and constrains their ability to form viable and meaningful livelihoods. Their abilities to take advantage of new opportunities and adjust their livelihood strategies in relation to current restrictions are to some degree based on their already accumulated capital. In Bebbington's (1999) framework this is reflected in his emphasis on the households' access to five types of capital assets. Still, the framework does not serve to directly acknowledge the more concealed forms of transmission of capital, like the domestic transfer of cultural capital in Bourdieu's (1986) sense of the term, which can broaden our understanding of households' abilities to further enhance their capital bases. These deeper reflections on the reproduction of capital provided by Bourdieu (1986) can complement Bebbington's (1999) framework in order to avoid the typical misunderstanding of seeing agents as having equal opportunities to gain access to certain forms of capital. Bebbington (1999) pointed out that the households who have been able to sustain and increase their access to capital assets are more able to compose viable livelihoods than those who have not been able to defend their acquired assets and let alone to enhance their access to other capital assets. By recognising the households' different starting points for enhancing their access to the various forms of capital, we may reach a more thorough understanding of the reasons *why* some households are able to increase their access to capital assets, while others are not.

The two authors furthermore give emphasis to different capital concepts. Bebbington (1999) included natural capital in his framework, but does not seem to clearly distinguish the available natural resources and environmental services from the natural assets which are appropriated by property rights and thereby can be recognised as a form of capital. Still, it is an advantage to also include the aspect of access to natural *resources* in analyses of rural livelihoods because these resources are indeed central in rural livelihoods, even though many of the households in Astam have decreased their reliance on natural resources by altering their livelihood strategies. One of the cases that points to the importance of natural resources is the lack of water in Astam, which clearly poses a constraint to all of the households' livelihood strategies as it restricts economic activity also outside the sphere of agriculture.

Bebbington's (1999) concept of cultural capital is clearly too vague to facilitate an analysis of rural livelihoods, and in my view it is more useful to define the valued cultural practices as institutional rites that reproduce social capital, based on insight from Bourdieu (1986).

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital also better captures the inter-generational transmission of knowledge and skills compared to Bebbington's (1999) references to the concept of human capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) concept of symbolic capital can be beneficial to include in an analysis of rural livelihoods, especially in relation to Bebbington's (1999) focus on households' access to other actors in the spheres of the market, state and civil society. Symbolic capital in the form of prestige or recognition can facilitate access to social capital, particularly in the form of relations to actors outside the local community. Those who receive recognition from other villagers are more likely entitled to speak on behalf of the community in relation to external actors, and those who are respected in a community are more likely to be well known in the surrounding communities as well. Symbolic capital furthermore facilitates access to other forms of capital in various spheres.

By encompassing the valuable insight from Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) work which I have stressed here, I believe the theoretical foundation of Bebbington's (1999) framework could become even stronger, which can facilitate analyses of rural livelihoods. In the following section I will provide my concluding remarks on the interactions between migration, rural livelihood strategies and local development in Astam.

CONCLUSIONS: MIGRATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Researchers have increasingly come to acknowledge how rural households draw upon a range of assets and activities to form viable and meaningful livelihoods (Bebbington, 1999, Ellis, 2000). Internal and external migration are among the activities which some rural households choose to incorporate in their livelihood strategies, and remittances can be a vital contribution to these households' incomes (Bebbington, 1999). The incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies is not a new phenomenon because it has a long history in many societies of the world. In the context of Nepal, the households in the hill region have in many cases not been able to survive solely on agriculture and both internal and external migration have for long been a strategy to support their living (Seddon et al., 2002).

The hilly landscape of Astam poses unfavourable conditions for agriculture, while other economic opportunities in the village are limited. Quite a few villagers have found work in the tourism industry in the nearby city of Pokhara, where some of them have established new domiciles while others hold on to the rural household as their main residence. Furthermore, several men from Astam work abroad, mainly in Gulf states, but also in other parts of Asia and in developed countries. In this thesis I have explored the ways in which the incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies can influence the households' bases of capital assets in Astam, based on Bebbington's (1999) framework for analyses of rural livelihoods. I have also emphasised how Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1991) work can provide another form of insight to the interaction between migration and rural households' capital bases, and pointed out how his elaboration of the forms of capital can complement Bebbington's (1999) framework.

The last question to be raised in this thesis is whether the migrants' remittances of financial means and new ideas can facilitate local development in Astam, or whether migrant incomes are mainly used for consumption which may lead to a reinforced dependence on migration. I will relate the findings from Astam to the debate of the migration-development nexus by relying on de Haas' (2010) perspective of contextualised interactions between migration and development. In contrast to previous deterministic theories of the relationship between migration and development, this perspective can better account for the various ways in which migration interacts with development based on a geographical, political and social contextualisation of these interactions (de Haas, 2010). Clearly, in the scope of this thesis I

will not be able to account for all of the migration-development interactions in Astam, but my intention is to use the findings presented in this thesis to make a few comments on these interactions. First I will provide a short summary of the findings from the preceding analysis.

By utilising Bebbington's (1999) framework I found that some of the households in Astam have been able to initiate an accumulation of produced capital assets through incorporating internal or external migration in their livelihood strategies, while many of those who mainly rely on subsistence agriculture find it hard to accumulate produced capital. Still, external migration can involve an economic risk when an initial investment is required, therefore migration may also reduce households' bases of capital. While some households have invested or are planning to invest migrant incomes in businesses in the home area which could facilitate further accumulation of produced capital, others have mainly spent migrant incomes on the household's consumption needs. Quite a few households reported that migrant incomes were used to support the children's education, which can facilitate the following generation's accumulation of human capital (or cultural capital in Bourdieu's (1986) sense of the term). Furthermore, I found that the villagers' relations to individual tourists, often facilitated by migration to Pokhara, have in some cases enabled further links to external actors and organisations in the sphere of civil society. This has been a prerequisite for the establishment of some development projects in Astam in relation to education facilities and internet access.

In this thesis I have also theoretically discussed the notion of capital. Some of the scholars who utilise the capital concept in analyses of rural livelihoods have tended to ignore Bourdieu's (1977) economic definition of capital, especially his point of how all forms of capital conform to an economic logic even though the economic aspects of some forms of capital are very much concealed. If a wide range of assets and practices are to be defined as forms of capital, the concept may lose its specific meaning and thereby also its analytical power. I found that Bebbington's (1999) notion of cultural capital is not in accordance with Bourdieu's (1977) definition of capital. The practices which Bebbington (1999) refers to as cultural capital could rather be accounted for as institutional rites which reproduce social capital in networks of kin groups and local communities, in line with Bourdieu (1986). Furthermore, in relation to natural capital there should be distinguished between the available natural *resources* and the natural assets which have been appropriated as private property and thereby can be recognised as capital.

The strength of Bebbington's (1999) framework is that it takes into account a wide range of the central aspects of rural livelihoods and bring attention to both objective and subjective perceptions of poverty. However, I will argue that a clearer distinction between capital and resources can strengthen the theoretical foundation of this framework and make it more applicable to empirical research. Furthermore, I have suggested that it can be useful to include the concept of symbolic capital in an analysis of rural livelihoods. By utilising this concept in my analysis I found that individuals' accumulation of symbolic capital in Astam can cause a redistribution of other forms of capital in the community. Especially internal and external migrants have invested capital in community projects, which causes the profits from migration to be redistributed in the community to the benefit of a larger segment of villagers, while the migrants gain recognition from others (symbolic capital) in return.

This brings us to the relationship between migration and development, which is the last point of discussion in this thesis. Importantly, this discussion is clearly shaped by how we define 'development' (de Haas, 2010). I will follow de Haas' (2010) suggestion of utilising Sen's (1999: 3) definition of development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy". Poverty, the lack of public services as well as social and political oppression are among the many aspects that can constrain these freedoms (Sen, 1999). Earlier there has been a tradition for equating development with economic growth, and the spending of remittances on consumption have therefore been judged as "unproductive investments" which do not contribute to development (Taylor, 1999). Sen's (1999) definition of development takes into account all investments which can enhance people's freedoms. In this way, investments in houses, education and health can also be seen as a contribution to development if it helps reduce the factors which constrain people's freedoms (Sen, 1999, de Haas, 2010).

Some would probably protest against utilising such a wide definition of development. Still, as Bebbington (1999) points out we need to account for people's own perceptions of poverty, not only objective assessments of poverty like the increase in incomes. Also in relation to development we need to take into account people's own opinions of what development mean to them. Tucker (1999) pointed out that the focus on facilitating development during the recent decades has tended to force a Eurocentric idea of 'development' on people in other parts of the world. It has often been ignored that 'development' is not a universal or natural process, but rather an idea based on shared beliefs, and Tucker (1999) emphasised the need to question the Eurocentric domination of the discourse on development. The way towards

development has too often been equated with a way towards copying the European and North-American types of societies, which is problematic because everyone does not share the values that are promoted by these Western societies (Tucker, 1999). Other cultures have been termed “traditional” and in need of being “modernised” in order to mirror the Western societies, thereby many people have not been allowed to take part in shaping their own ‘development’. Tucker (1999) pointed out that reinstating the cultural aspect in the development discourse and questioning the Eurocentric “myth of development” is important in order to secure that the freedoms of all can be enhanced without excluding those who have “other” perceptions of development than what is promoted by the dominating Eurocentric view. Rather, these other perceptions of development should be incorporated in the discourse (Tucker, 1999). In contrast to what many of the more narrow operational definitions of development can offer, Sen’s (1999) perspective allows various interpretations and meanings of development to be accounted for without necessarily forcing any Eurocentric ideas of ‘development’ on populations in other parts of the world.

With these reflections in mind, I will provide a few comments on the interactions between migration and development in Astam. According to de Haas (2010), migration-development interactions need to be contextualised within the broader development context of which they are an inherent part. Local development contexts are influenced by structures at the national and international level (de Haas, 2010). In order to analyse migration’s effect on local development in Astam it will therefore be relevant to consider some aspects of the broader development context of Nepal. First I will point to the conditions migrants referred to when they explained their reasons for migrating, and secondly I will focus on how migration affects development in Astam. This is because the conditions that heighten peoples’ aspirations to migrate can also influence the effect of migration on local development (Taylor, 1999).

In chapter 5 I pointed out that the lack of adequate infrastructure and attractive facilities as well as economic opportunities has created incentives for migrating from Astam. The general lack of adequate infrastructure and jobs in Nepal is especially reinforced in rural areas. For instance, the limited economic means Dhital VDC receives annually from the government has to be distributed for a range of infrastructural needs in the local area, and the lack of adequate funding constrains the villagers’ efforts of improving their facilities in the village. The scarcity of water, which has become especially critical after the water supply from Dhampus was cut off, largely restricts agricultural activities as well as the introduction of new economic

activities in the village, for instance the establishment of more tourism businesses. Even though there are more opportunities as well as better facilities available in Pokhara, informants pointed out that there are generally few job opportunities in the country, especially for those without higher education. I found that the villagers from Astam who have been able to build a living from tourism in the city have in some cases built their own enterprises from the ground, and these informants pointed out that this required hard work. For the households with low bases of capital, like many of the subsistence farmers in Astam, it would be very difficult as well as economically risky to start a business on their own.

On the other hand, the Gulf states' increasing demand for cheap labour have given even low-skilled and low-caste Nepalese easier access to earn an income abroad, if they can access financial means for the initial fee. Seddon et al. (2002) point out that those who obtain contracts for work in Gulf states can often be guaranteed full-time employment at the destination before they leave Nepal, which to some degree reduces the economic risk of external migration. Nevertheless, I found that not all of the migrants from Astam who have worked in Gulf states felt that they had succeeded in earning a satisfactory income abroad.

Even though many would like to work in Australia, Europe or North-America, it is difficult to gain access to these regions, and those who succeed to do so usually have higher educations or large bases of capital. A few informants believe that those who are able to build a life in wealthier countries are less likely to return home, and pointed out that this process therefore may hinder development in Nepal. These informants emphasised that the Nepalese should work within their own country in order to contribute to development. Still, the referred to structural constraints in the broader development context as well as the specific constraints in the local development context make it difficult for villagers to build viable livelihoods. Combined with the general opportunities for migration abroad, these constraints thereby produce incentives for external migration, while the specific constraints in the local development context also increase villager's aspirations for migrating to city areas.

Still, the effects from migration processes may alter the local development context, for instance through the effects on consumption, investments and inequality in the community (de Haas, 2010), and migration's impact on these three aspects will be shortly discussed here. Even though some of the villagers from Astam who have gained access to build a life in wealthier countries have weakened their ties to the local community, others who work in these

countries have expressed a wish to return to the village. This intention is also shared by many of the migrants who work in Gulf states, which is the migration destination that was most frequently reported in the household survey (see paragraph 5.3.2). In chapter 5 and 6 I also pointed out that some migrants provide remittances to their families in the village. How do the contributions from migrants affect local development in Astam?

Several of the households in Astam with former or current migrants reported that remittances were mainly spent on basic needs like food, health care and education, as well as the building of houses (see paragraph 5.3.3). This testifies to the typical belief that remittances are mostly spent on conspicuous consumption and what many would define as “unproductive investments” (de Haas, 2005). However, by following Sen’s (1999) perspective, the securing of basic needs as well as the improvements of houses can be seen as an expansion of people’s freedoms, which furthermore can increase their capabilities to become agents of change (de Haas, 2005). Inspired by Sen (1997), Bebbington (1999: 2034) points out that the extension of households’ bases of capital assets, especially human and social capital, can increase peoples’ capabilities “to question, challenge, propose and ultimately usher in new ways of doing things”. The effect of investing remittances in education has often been ignored (Taylor, 1999). The migrants’ investments in children’s education can possibly facilitate prospective local development because a better education can increase the future generation’s capabilities to become agents of change, in line with the views of Sen (1997) and Bebbington (1999).

Based on these points I will argue that the contribution of remittances to secure basic needs could eventually facilitate future “productive investments”, understood as investments which can contribute to expand economic opportunities and increase incomes (Taylor, 1999). Furthermore, the securing of basic needs can potentially empower the rural population to take on a more active role in reshaping the discourse of development. This point therefore also relates to Tucker’s (1999) call upon a pluralistic meaning of ‘development’. Nevertheless, de Haas (2010) points out that when people’s freedoms are expanded they also have more freedom to shape their future and this may lead some villagers to leave the village behind if attractive facilities are more accessible in other places, which seems to have been the case for some of the migrants from Astam who have gained access to a life in wealthier countries.

Based on the points referred to above we should not completely ignore the potential positive effects of remittances even when it is mainly spent for consumption purposes. On the other

hand, if households rely on remittances to secure their basic needs it may reinforce a dependence on migration. In chapter 5 I pointed out that some former migrants had considered the option to go abroad again because they have not been able to involve in any forms of economic activities in their home area which provide them a satisfactory income. This points to how the lack of economic opportunities in the country may reinforce a dependence on migration, unless the migrants themselves contribute to create more economic opportunities in their home area. However, Taylor (1999) points out that it should not be expected that migrants will invest in new economic activities in their home area if there does not exist a fertile investment environment.

A few migrant households in Astam have indeed spent remittances on investments which can contribute to enhance local economic opportunities and increase incomes. One household spent parts of their migrant income to start a tourism business in Astam which has facilitated tourism development in the village. Tourist visits to the village have gradually increased and this may facilitate opportunities for more households to involve in tourism inside the village. Tourism development in Astam could thereby contribute to local development by creating more economic opportunities within the village. However, even though there may be opportunities for more households to involve in tourism, not all of the households have capital bases which allow them to do so. Furthermore, the expansion of tourism activities in the village is also restricted by the scarcity of water. Thereby, this constraint may discourage migrants to invest in local businesses, which was indicated by Mahdur (male 40) in paragraph 5.2.2, when he referred to his friend who had considered building bamboo cottages in Astam. Such constraints in the local context will perhaps have to be solved before more migrants will be encouraged to make productive investments in their home area. This points to the government's responsibility of securing a safe supply of water to the villagers.

Like I indicated in chapter 6, some of the households in Astam who have been able to expand their capital bases and involve in new forms of economic activities have been able to do so because of their involvement in internal or external migration. This is not to say that migration always leads to an enhancement of the households' capital bases, and I have pointed out that capital may even be lost from migration. Still, it raises another question in relation to development as the expansion of freedoms, namely whether migration results in more inequality between migrant households and no-migrant households in a community.

In Astam I found that some of the migrants are particularly concerned about local development and some of them have supported community projects by directly or indirectly investing the capital accumulated from migration in these projects. For instance, a local household who has established a tourism business based on income from internal and external migration has also supported the local school and health clinic in Astam, even though the children of this household are enrolled in schools in Pokhara (see sub-chapter 5.4). Although migration may increase inequality between migrant households and no-migrant households in the village, this finding points out that individual households' gains from migration in some cases are redistributed in the village through community projects which benefit a larger part of the village population. Like an informant pointed out, these benefits of enhanced access to local facilities of education and health care can be especially significant to the poor, in other words those who have not been able to expand their bases of capital. Thereby, it is not only the freedoms of members of migrant households that are expanded, but also the freedoms of other villagers, which may even make them able to further enhance their bases of capital.

In addition, merely the attention some of the former migrants give to local development can be an important contribution to the local context. In the preceding chapters I have referred to the former migrant Anil who during his stay abroad realised the importance of working for local development. In the discussion of symbolic capital in sub-chapter 7.2 I furthermore pointed out that some of the villagers may take on leading roles in the community to unify efforts of local development. Because migrants who contribute to local development seem to gain recognition from others (symbolic capital) they may also be able to lead the villagers in unified efforts of contributing to local development. On the other hand, like de Haas (2010) points out, such optimism based on the potential positive contributions from migrants to local development should not serve to ignore the state's responsibility for generating development.

Based on this short discussion I will argue that the incorporation of migration in livelihood strategies in Astam have to a certain degree contributed to expand the villagers' freedoms, but the effects of these efforts are to some extent restricted by structural constraints. Changes in the political and economic sphere of the broader development context of Nepal are also necessary in order to facilitate the potential positive effect of migration on local development in Astam. There have been emphasised that migration-development interactions are complex and needs to be contextualised (de Haas, 2010). However, can the findings from this thesis be relevant outside the specific context of Astam?

“In qualitative research, generalizability concerns general structures rather than single social practices, which are only an example of this structure” (Gobo, 2004: 453). The structural relations I have discovered between migration, rural livelihoods and local development in Astam may be transferable to other contexts, even though the specific practices may differ. The aim of this research has not been to assess and generalise on how widespread certain outcomes are, but to identify and describe the variance of interactions between migration, rural livelihoods and local development. For instance, I found that through relations to tourists, villagers in Astam have been able to form relations to actors in the sphere of civil society which to a certain degree have contributed to improve the village’s facilities in a context of inadequate support from the state. This points to the way in which the state’s responsibility for providing public services in less developed countries is in some cases substituted by the civil society.

Furthermore, I found that villagers respect those who contribute to local development in Astam, which means that the migrants who invest capital in community projects can accumulate symbolic capital. This finding demonstrates that the individuals’ accumulation of symbolic capital has an effect of redistributing other forms of capital in the community. The migrants’ contributions to community projects have enhanced many of the village’s households’ access to improved facilities, which can enable them to further increase their bases of capital. When operating with an understanding of development as the expansion of freedoms for all (Sen, 1999, Tucker, 1999), the attention given to this specific effect of migration-development interactions in Astam can be just as important as the focus given to the extent of remittances invested in income-generating activities, because there is no guarantee that the latter will contribute to expand the freedoms of everyone in the community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Acronyms and abbreviations

ACA	Annapurna Conservation Area
ACAP	Annapurna Conservation Area Project
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
m.a.s.l.	metres above sea level
NELM	New economics of labour migration
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPR	Nepalese Rupees
NTNC	National Trust for Nature Conservation
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
TAAN	Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal
VDC	Village Development Committee
WB	World Bank

Appendix II: Glossary

Nepalese term	Explanation in English
<i>Bari</i>	Upper land which is usually not irrigated
<i>Bhat</i>	Rice
<i>Chori</i>	“Daughter”, also used symbolically for friends or extended family
<i>Dai</i>	“Big brother”, also used symbolically for friends or extended family
<i>Dal</i>	Lentils
<i>Dal bhat</i>	Nepalese meal consisting mainly of rice, lentils and vegetable curry
<i>Dashain</i>	Important festival of the Hindu religion
<i>Didi</i>	“Big sister”, also used symbolically for friends or extended family
<i>Gori</i>	“White person” or foreigner
<i>Khet</i>	Lower land which are partly irrigated
<i>Lahure</i>	Nepalese who go to work abroad
<i>Mukhiya</i>	Local tax agent during the rule of the Ranas (1847-1950) in Nepal
<i>Namaste</i>	Nepalese greeting
<i>Pakho</i>	Private land for grazing
<i>Raksi</i>	Locally produced liquor
<i>Thulo manchhe</i>	“Big person”, someone who is respected
<i>Tika</i>	Red-coloured paste applied to the forehead for wishes of good fortune