Staying or Leaving?

Intergenerational Livelihood Activities and Non-Migration Decisions in Flood-Prone Settlements of Kathmandu, Nepal

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Abstract

Despite rising flood risks in Kathmandu, many low-income residents continue to live in high-risk areas. They face complex livelihood challenges, including socio-economic and political challenges. However, staying at risk is not new for them, they have been adapting to such consequences for generations. While prior research has examined environmental (non-)migration and intergenerational livelihoods separately, little is known about how livelihood changes across generations influence non-migration decisions in flood-prone urban settings, particularly through an intersectionality lens. This study addresses that gap by exploring how evolving livelihood strategies over generations shape decisions to stay or migrate in the context of increasing urban vulnerability in Kathmandu.

A qualitative approach was used, based on 32 in-depth interviews with residents from two informal settlements, Thapathali and Sinamangal, including at least two members from different generations in each family. One expert from Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj was interviewed. Findings show that while younger participants generally have more access to education and aspire to different careers, many still end up in unstable, informal-sector jobs similar to their parents. Intergenerational learning plays a dual role: some younger participants follow familiar paths because they inherit skills and knowledge, while many parents actively encourage their children to pursue education to secure better futures.

Structural constraints, including economic hardship, limited educational access, gender roles, and caste-based expectations, continue to shape livelihood options. Livelihood changes across generations are shaped by factors such as natural hazards, physical health, economic necessity, urbanization, poor working conditions, disrupted education, and social norms and expectations. These, in turn, affect aspirations to migrate. Older residents often migrated to the city for better work opportunities, but now remain due to low rent prices, community ties, and lack of alternatives, even though they live in precarious conditions. Younger generations are more open to moving, but often face financial and social barriers, particularly married women, frequently constrained by household responsibilities.

Intergenerational livelihood patterns reveal resilience, adaptation, learning, and aspiration. A key finding is the desire among youth to break from informal work through education and formal employment and seek work opportunities abroad. These aspirations are driven not only by economic motivations but also by a desire to escape life in flood-prone informal settlements. Future research could explore how social media shapes these aspirations. Additionally, studies using mixed-methods could help analyse how identity, livelihoods, and migration intersect. Expanding access to education and training is a key policy recommendation.

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1. Introduction

Flooding poses a growing threat to urban populations across South Asia, especially in resource-limited regions where extreme weather events like droughts, cyclones, and floods disrupt housing, livelihoods, and safety (Fischer, 2018; Khan, 2010; Ahsan et al., 2022). In recent years, 9.5 million people in South Asia have been displaced by disasters, contributing to a global total of 24.9 million (IDMC, 2020). Nepal, located in the middle of this vulnerable region, illustrates these dynamics.

In 2024, severe flooding in Nepal caused over 200 deaths, displaced over 8,400 people and destroyed more than 2,100 homes in informal settlements near rivers in Kathmandu and Lalitpur (O'Regan, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). Kathmandu, the capital city, faces frequent flooding along the Bagmati River, exacerbated by increasing urbanization and impervious surfaces (Dangol, 2024; Saurav et al., 2021). These conditions contribute to urban pluvial flooding, which occurs when rainfall exceeds the city's drainage capacity (Saurav et al., 2021).

The Kathmandu Valley, home to an estimated population of 2.54 million people and growing 6.5% annually, is one of South Asia's fastest-growing metropolitan areas. However, this growth has mainly been haphazard and unplanned, leading to environmental degradation, increased urban poverty, and heightened exposure to multiple hazards (Timsina et al., 2020). The city struggles to balance growth with environmental sustainability. Urban development efforts like "smart city" plans have been introduced to support resilient urban growth, but these efforts often lack coordination and face community resistance. Weak institutions, limited funding and conflicting policies make implementing these initiatives difficult, leaving poor and marginalized groups highly exposed to disaster risks (Timsina et al., 2020).

Understanding flood-related displacement is essential to addressing climate vulnerability in urban contexts. However, not everyone facing these risks is displaced, many people stay. While migration often serves as a reduction strategy, improving livelihoods and increasing well-being, many remain in place (Adams, 2016). Some are "trapped" due to lack of resources, while others stay voluntarily, motivated by secure livelihoods, access to resources, and social capital (Ahsan et al., 2022). This phenomenon, called non-migration, includes both voluntary and involuntary cases and arises from a complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors, including connections to local culture (Mallick & Hunter, 2024). The Capability Approach helps make sense of this complexity by focusing on the real freedoms people have, or lack, to choose whether to migrate or stay, highlighting how both agency and constraint shape (non-)migration outcomes (Sen, 1999; Carling & Schewel, 2020).

Livelihoods play a central role in non-migration decisions (Mallick, Sultana & Bennett, 2020). Livelihoods refer to how people sustain themselves using available resources, skills, and networks (Chambers & Conway, 1992). A livelihood is considered secure when it can withstand challenges like disasters or economic hardship, while supporting long-term well-being (FAO, 2009). The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) highlights how access to different forms of capital shapes people's capacity to sustain livelihoods and adapt to stressors (DFID, 2001). To improve livelihood conditions, people may invest in education, build social networks, or migrate in search of better opportunities (Mallick et al., 2020).

Understanding how livelihood strategies change over generations offers insight into why some people remain in high-risk areas despite increasing climate threats. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory highlights that migration decisions are not just individual choices, but household strategies aimed at diversifying income sources and managing economic risks (Taylor, 1999). In contexts like Kathmandu's informal settlements, where formal job opportunities are limited, sending family members abroad becomes a crucial means for households to secure financial stability through remittances (Kharel & Upadhyay, 2021).

Many low-income residents in Nepal that continue living in flood-prone areas are motivated by proximity to employment opportunities and cheap housing (Dangol & Day, 2018; Dangol, 2024). In informal settlements residents collectively shape their perception of flood risks through shared knowledge and experiences (Dangol, 2024). For many of these residents precarious informal livelihoods, such as petty trading in vegetables, fruits, and clothing, are a primary means of survival (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017). According to Rao (2009) these livelihoods are profoundly shaped by intersecting inequalities, especially gender and class, which influence who can access certain types of work, mobility, and resources. Women, for instance, may participate in income-generating activities, yet their work often remains undervalued or constrained by social norms and expectations. Applying an intersectionality lens helps reveal how overlapping identities increase disadvantages in informal urban economies, where marginalized groups face greater barriers to securing stable livelihoods (Rigon, 2022).

These informal-sector activities, which have expanded due to rapid urbanization, provide crucial income sources for the urban poor (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017). However, informal activities are fundamentally unstable (Stănculescu, 2005). Workers often face high living costs, municipal harassment, and disruptions caused by strikes and political unrest (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017). Additionally, floods in these informal settlements affect livelihoods for several days, as people cannot go to work. Due to these floods, people are spending more while unable to earn (Dangol, 2024). Despite these challenges, informal sector activities remain vital,

enabling residents to sustain their livelihoods in flood-prone areas (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017). These livelihoods, however, are evolving across generations in response to shifting economic, social and environmental pressures, influencing how people earn a living and whether they choose to stay or migrate (Scoones, 1998; Daskon & Binns, 2010; Bartlett, Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2012; Le & Vo, 2021).

This study offers valuable insights into the factors shaping non-migration decisions by exploring the evolving livelihoods across generations, lessons learned from previous generations, and their impact on aspirations and decisions to stay in high-risk areas despite growing flood threats. It contributes to the literature by enhancing understanding of the complex relationship between livelihoods across generations and migration decisions. This study fills a gap by exploring how evolving livelihood activities across generations influence non-migration decisions in Kathmandu's flood-prone areas, using an intersectional lens.

1.1 Scientific relevance

Several studies have explored factors influencing environmental (non-)migration (Bhusal et al. 2021; Mallick, 2023; Adams, 2016). Bhusal et al. (2021) highlighted the role of place attachment, social capital, place confidence, and structural contexts in guiding non-migration decisions in the Himalayan region of Nepal. Mallick and Hunter (2024) were the first to adopt an intergenerational lens to investigate environmental (non-)migration in rural communities affected by cyclones. They provided a historical perspective on aspirations and capabilities as lessons learned from previous generations to improve adaptation strategies. Additionally, Sharma and Pradhan (2017) investigated the livelihoods of Kathmandu's petty street vendors, focusing on the informal sector and the factors that influence the variation in their spatial distribution patterns.

Despite these contributions, no research has specifically addressed the factors that influence changes in livelihood activities across generations and their impact on (non-)migration aspirations in an urban context. This gap is significant in Kathmandu, a rapidly urbanizing city facing increasing flood risks due to climate change and urban expansion (Dangol, 2024). This study explores how intergenerational differences in livelihoods influence non-migration decisions in Kathmandu, with particular attention to the role of gender disparities.

1.2 Connection to Development Studies

This research contributes to key debates in Development Studies, including climate vulnerability, urban poverty, and adaptation strategies in the Global South. Focusing on evolving informal livelihoods across generations and their influence on non-migration decisions connects with discussions on resilience, inequality, and the role of informal economies in

development. The study draws on the SLF, the NELM, the Capability Approach and theories of environmental (non-)migration to understand how structural and contextual factors shape decision-making in high-risk urban environments.

1.3 Social relevance

Kathmandu's experiences with urban flooding reflect broader challenges faced by rapidly urbanizing cities in the Global South. By examining how livelihood changes across generations influence migration decisions, this research offers valuable insights into the role of livelihoods in shaping residents' aspirations to migrate or remain. Understanding this dynamic can inform targeted interventions to reduce vulnerability by promoting livelihood diversification, enhancing resilience, and supporting community-led adaptation strategies. The findings also highlight the socio-economic factors that keep families in high-risk areas, which can inform policies to create sustainable urban development and climate change adaptation strategies. Focusing on the interplay between livelihoods and migration decisions, this study offers a deeper understanding of the factors that shape non-migration, guiding policymakers to increase social equity and build more resilient communities.

1.4 Research questions

Main research question: How do intergenerational livelihood activities influence non-migration decisions in flood-prone areas of Kathmandu, and how do gender disparities shape these?

Sub-questions:

- How have livelihood activities changed across generations?
- What are the key factors driving changes in livelihoods across generations?
- How do changes in livelihood activities influence the aspiration to migrate or remain?
- How do gender disparities shape livelihood strategies and decisions to stay?

1.5 Outline of thesis

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, including the SLF, NELM, Capability Approach, environmental (non-)migration theories, and the use of intergenerational and intersectional lenses. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this research, including the methodological approach, data collection methods and techniques, a reflection on positionality, an overview of the study area, and an overview of participants. Chapter 4 outlines an analysis of the empirical findings from fieldwork conducted in Kathmandu. Chapter 5 discusses these findings concerning the broader theoretical framework. It also includes a discussion of limitations, policy recommendations, and recommendations for future research. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing key insights and answering the main research question.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a multi-theoretical framework to explore how intergenerational livelihood changes shape non-migration decisions in flood-prone areas of Kathmandu. Various theoretical perspectives are employed to understand how people sustain livelihoods, make decisions under constraint, and respond to environmental risks. These perspectives complement each other: the SLF analyses assets and resilience, NELM frames migration as a household strategy, the Capability Approach highlights agency and freedom, while environmental (non-)migration literature grounds these insights in context. Incorporating intergenerational learning and intersectionality adds depth by revealing how knowledge transfer and overlapping social identities influence livelihood strategies and migration aspirations. Together, these theories form a coherent, multi-theoretical framework for examining how social identities, power dynamics, and intergenerational knowledge transfers influence livelihood strategies and (non-)migration aspirations of marginalized communities in flood-prone areas. The following sections outline each component of this framework.

2.1 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Chambers and Conway (1992) define livelihood as the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. People's basic needs include food, clothing, shelter, and activities, which are how individuals fulfil these needs. These activities encompass different occupations across various sectors (Mistri & Das, 2020a). A sustainable livelihood withstands stresses and shocks while maintaining or enhancing capabilities and activities, supporting future generations (Ashley & Carney, 1999).

The SLF provides a useful tool for understanding the objectives, scope, and priorities of development efforts aimed at promoting social equity and reducing poverty (Ashley & Carney, 1999). People require a range of assets to achieve positive livelihood outcomes: human, social, financial, natural and physical capital (DFID, 2001). Human capital includes skills, knowledge, health and labour; social capital encompasses networks, memberships of groups, and relationships of trust; natural capital refers to natural resources; physical capital includes infrastructure and producer goods; and financial capital represents monetary resources. According to Mistri and Das (2020b) these assets are key to understanding migration and non-migration decisions, as they shape people’s ability to cope with challenges and ultimately influence whether they choose to migrate or not to migrate. Mallick et al. (2020) argue that aspirations for (non-)migration are largely shaped by the available livelihood adaptation options, as these options directly influence an individual’s ability to achieve a sustainable livelihood when facing potential disaster risks. However, the SLF has been critiqued for its limited attention to structural inequalities and broader political-economic forces that shape

livelihoods and mobility decisions. This may result in an overly individualistic understanding of vulnerability and adaptation (Natarajan, Newsham & Suhardiman, 2022).

While the SLF offers a strong foundation for analysing livelihood assets, it requires supplementation with other perspectives to fully capture migration decisions. The NELM complements this by framing migration as a household strategy.

2.2 Livelihood Change Dynamics in Urban Informal Settings

Livelihood changes are driven by various forces influencing how individuals or communities sustain themselves (Scoones, 1998). These drivers include economic factors, natural hazards, urbanization and job market changes, social and cultural influences, education and skills, and health and well-being. The focus is on how these drivers operate in informal urban settings, where livelihood activities shift frequently (Bartlett et al., 2012). This synthesis draws on a range of studies that explore these drivers individually.

Urbanization and job market changes play a significant role in urban areas, with labour markets shaping livelihoods through employment levels, job quality, and the broader economic context (Haan et al., 2002). Migrants who move to cities for better livelihoods frequently encounter barriers to entering the formal job market because of limited education, skills, or social networks (Turok, Budlender & Visagie, 2017). As a result, many enter the informal economy, which, while offering survival options, is often unstable, low-paid, and unregulated (Bartlett et al., 2012). Younger generations usually migrate to urban areas for livelihood diversification, while parents remain engaged in subsistence agriculture and gain support through remittances, which enhance household security and create new opportunities (Bouapao, 2013). While economic factors such as incomes, savings, and access to credit can strengthen livelihoods (Bhandari, 2013), challenges such as high living costs, transport strikes, and disruptions caused by political unrest hinder access to markets and employment, increasing vulnerability (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017).

Natural hazards also significantly influence livelihoods. Diversifying livelihood strategies, such as changing jobs or engaging in a variety of economic activities, helps individuals adapt to environmental stressors (Le & Vo, 2021; Roy & Basu, 2020). In addition, social and cultural factors, including traditional norms, values, and knowledge, further shape livelihood opportunities and access to resources, as seen in rural Sri Lankan communities (Daskon & Binns, 2010). In informal urban areas, networks can provide crucial access to jobs or housing, but reinforce exclusion and marginality for outsiders or minority groups (Turok et al., 2017). Education and skills development further expand livelihood options and significantly affect the types of work strategies individuals adopt (Schütte, 2005). Meanwhile, health and well-being are interdependent with livelihoods; health shocks can reduce productivity and increase

vulnerability through rising medical costs (Rahman & Ahmad, 2018; Wang et al., 2021). Informal jobs usually lack protections, while some informal work involves significant health risks, threatening long-term well-being (Bartlett et al., 2012).

Understanding these drivers is essential for examining how changes in livelihood activities influence aspirations and decisions regarding migration in informal settlements. Migration is often pursued as a means to seek better livelihood opportunities (De Haas, 2021). Therefore, the drivers of livelihood changes not only directly influence livelihood activities, but can also result in shifts in livelihood patterns after migration.

2.3 The New Economics of Labour Migration

The NELM views migration not as an individual pursuit of higher wages, but as a household-level strategy to improve overall well-being, diversify income sources, and manage economic uncertainty (Taylor, 1999). This perspective emerged as a response to classical economic theories that explain migration primarily through wage differentials (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). NELM emphasizes that in contexts where access to credit, insurance, and formal employment is limited, migration serves as a mechanism to reduce livelihood risks and to invest in education, housing, or small businesses in the place of origin (Taylor, 1999).

Migration decisions are thus made collectively by both migrants and non-migrants within the household, reflecting a shared strategy to manage risks and enhance long-term household resilience. Although migration may involve an individual leaving, it is embedded in a cooperative family effort, where those who stay behind provide initial support and receive returns in the form of remittances (Zickgraf, 2021). This aligns with the SLF, which highlights the importance of access to various forms of capital in shaping livelihood outcomes (DFID, 2001). In this context, labour migration is an adaptive livelihood strategy that can improve food security, health care, and housing at the household level (De Haas, 2007).

In Nepal, where domestic labour opportunities are limited, international labour migration has become a widespread and vital strategy. For instance, the flow of workers from Nepal to countries like India has made remittances a crucial part of national income and foreign exchange earnings. Migration has helped households cope with local unemployment and poverty, while contributing to national economic growth (Kharel & Upadhyay, 2021). However, when labour supply exceeds demand in sending areas, the departure of workers may not necessarily result in significant productivity losses (Taylor, 1999).

Nonetheless, not all households are equally able to participate in migration. While poorer households may have the strongest motivation to send migrants, high costs, limited access to information, and uncertainty often act as barriers (Taylor, 1999). Although NELM has not been

widely applied to immobility, it implicitly acknowledges non-migrants' role in the migration process. Those who remain behind are part of the household's strategic planning and may share in the benefits. However, NELM has been criticized for treating the household as a harmonious and unified entity, overlooking internal dynamics such as power imbalances, differing interests, and inequalities (Zickgraf, 2021). Migration and non-migration should therefore be understood as outcomes of complex household negotiations shaped by broader structural constraints and intergenerational relationships.

2.4 Intergenerational perspective

Mallick and Hunter (2024) argue that intergenerational livelihood resilience dynamics are key in shaping migration and non-migration choices. Past experiences with environmental challenges contribute to what is known as 'intergenerational resilience,' enabling families to adapt and choose to stay despite environmental risks. This learned resilience may increase the likelihood of non-migration across generations, as knowledge and adaptive strategies are transmitted through intergenerational learning. Denov et al. (2020) highlight that collective memory and shared experiences, at the familial, communal and national levels, strengthen resilience and guide future generations' decision-making.

In coastal Bangladesh, Mallick and Hunter (2024) found that while younger generations expressed migration aspirations, they often lacked the financial means to migrate. The study identified five key intergenerational factors shaping (non-)migration: social/community networks, land inheritance, family contentment and ancestral belonging, disaster experiences and memories, and resources.

2.5 Intersectionality lens

Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals hold multiple overlapping identities, which shape their experiences, needs, and aspirations (Rigon, 2022). These identities are context-dependent and significantly affect how individuals and communities respond to livelihood changes. Intersectionality also reveals how systems of oppression and marginalization, such as those based on gender, age, or ethnicity, intersect to shape the livelihood opportunities and vulnerabilities of slum dwellers (Rigon, 2022). In India, caste and ethnicity influence the intersections of identity that shape livelihood opportunities. These social categories often confine individuals to specific labour markets, typically at the lower end, where work is low-status and undesirable (Rao, 2009). This demonstrates how caste operates alongside other axes of identity to deepen structural barriers and shape livelihood outcomes.

Rao (2009) found that education is often viewed as a pathway to economic security and social status in India. Yet, systemic barriers, including low-quality schooling and financial constraints,

can prevent marginalized households from fully realizing these benefits. This research also found that educational investment decisions within households are often gendered and caste-based, where men are frequently prioritized for schooling based on norms about their roles as future breadwinners, although this is shifting in some contexts due to new economic opportunities for women. Educational choices are shaped by livelihood aspirations and migration expectations, as families may select schooling types perceived as relevant to future employment or migration possibilities. While migration may offer some prospects for economic mobility, social mobility is also tied to education, job prestige and regional dynamics, all of which are closely linked to the migrant's gender, age, and marital status, with married women least likely to migrate due to high levels of stigma (Rao, 2009).

2.6 Environmental (non-)migration

Environmental migration refers to the movement of people driven by environmental changes that affect their livelihoods (Balgah & Kimengsi, 2022). However, not everyone facing environmental challenges migrates (Mallick, 2023). Environmental non-migration occurs when individuals remain in place despite risks such as floods, droughts, or earthquakes (Black, et al., 2011). Mallick and Schanze (2020) distinguish between voluntary non-migration, where individuals choose to stay due to strong aspirations and capabilities, and involuntary non-migration, where people have little aspiration to stay, but are trapped due to a lack of resources. Migration decisions are also shaped by barriers such as financial constraints, bureaucratic challenges, and physical limitations (Adams, 2016).

Balgah and Kimengsi (2022) identify social factors like place attachment, cultural values, and family obligations as key drivers of African non-migration. Bhusal et al. (2021) found similar drivers in Nepal's Himalayan region, such as place attachment, social capital, and place confidence. These studies emphasize the importance of local context in shaping non-migration outcomes.

The Foresight Report (2011) highlights five key migration drivers: social, economic, political, demographic, and environmental. These interact to influence migration and non-migration decisions. In Kathmandu's squatter settlements, people came here due to challenging conditions in their place of origin, including poor economic conditions, social issues, natural disasters, and family conflict (Baral, 2019). These conditions led them to seek better opportunities in urban areas. The availability of work and proximity to markets in the settlements served as pull factors, illustrating how migration decisions are shaped by economic necessity and local opportunities (Baral, 2019).

2.7 The Capability Approach

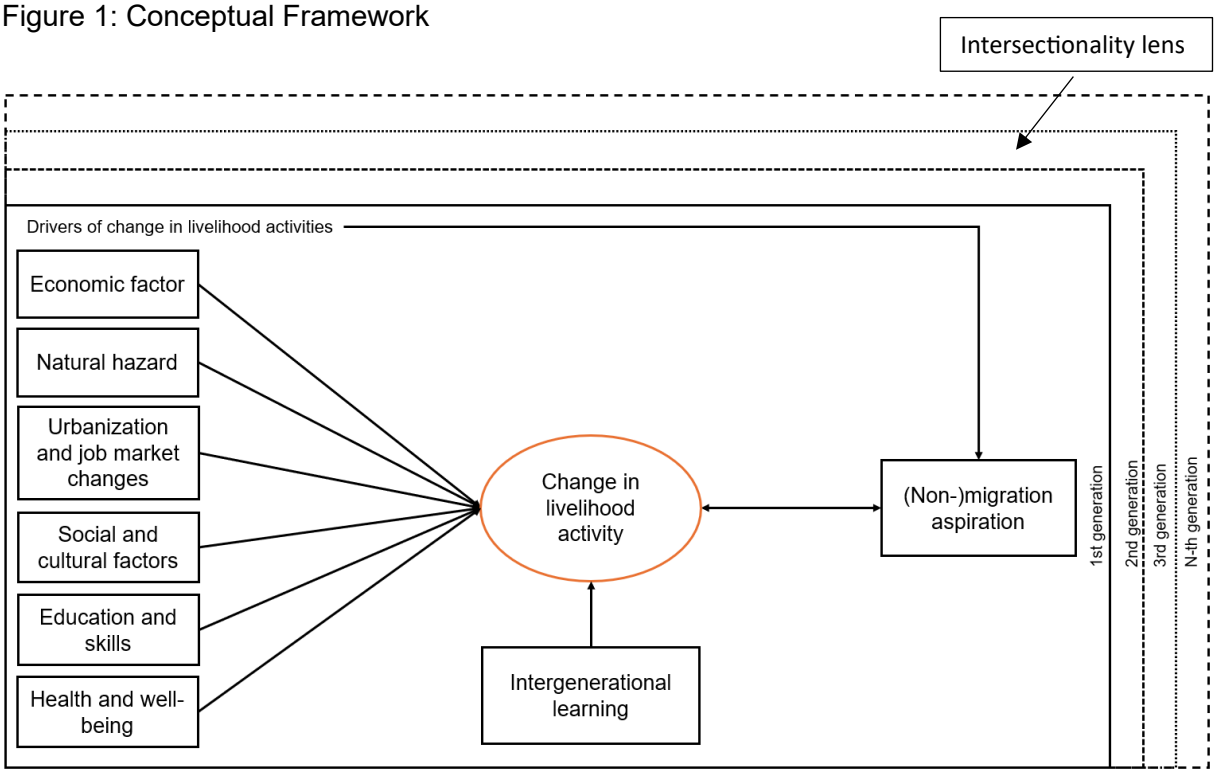
The Capability Approach offers a valuable lens to deepen the understanding of environmental (non-)migration by emphasizing the importance of freedoms and what people are actually able to do and be (Sen, 1999). Rather than viewing migration as a reaction to external pressures, this perspective emphasizes people's ability to make meaningful choices about whether to move or stay. The aspirations-capabilities framework further connects migration to broader social change, suggesting that the ability to migrate is shaped by a person's aspirations and the means to achieve them. This framework sees migration not only as a response to hardship, but also as a way to improve other aspects of well-being. The ability to migrate is considered a form of freedom in its own right, even for those who ultimately choose to remain (Carling and Schewel, 2020). In places where people are exposed to environmental hazards, but lack the resources, support or agency to leave, staying put may reflect limited capabilities rather than preference (Mallick and Schanze, 2020). This lens helps reveal how structural inequality can restrict people's choices, making non-migration a form of vulnerability rather than a voluntary choice (Carling and Schewel, 2020).

However, the Capability Approach has been critiqued for its high informational demands, particularly when assessing unobservable capabilities rather than observable outcomes (Clark, 2005). This presents challenges in informal settlements, where people's real opportunities and decision-making freedoms are difficult to measure directly.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

This research examines how intergenerational changes in livelihood activities influence decision-making about (non-)migration in Kathmandu's flood-prone areas. The following conceptual framework has been developed based on existing literature to guide the analysis.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: created by author, 2025

The framework illustrates multiple factors driving changes in livelihood activities, including economic conditions, natural hazards, urbanization, social and cultural influences, education, and health. Intergenerational learning represents transmitting knowledge, skills, and experiences across generations. This learning shapes how livelihood activities evolve over time, as past lessons influence current adaptations. An arrow from intergenerational learning to changes in livelihood activity highlights this dynamic.

Changes in livelihood activity ultimately affect individuals' (non-)migration aspirations. The framework is viewed through an intersectionality lens, considering how factors, such as age, gender, and caste, influence these processes across multiple layers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and N-th generations). This holistic approach helps explain the diverse livelihood and migration responses of urban residents facing flood risks in Kathmandu.

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological Approach

A qualitative research method is employed to address the research question, enabling an in-depth exploration of individual experiences. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the intergenerational livelihood activities influencing non-migration decisions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with residents living in informal settlements along the Bagmati River in Kathmandu provided valuable insights into their decision-making processes.

Interviews helped identify personal experiences and the context of participant's lives. These interviews explored the reasons behind shifts in livelihood activities, their impact on migration aspirations across generations, and the role of intergenerational learning and intersectionality in these decisions.

3.2 Operationalization of Variables

The key concepts from the theoretical framework were operationalized into themes that guided both the interview questions and the coding process. These concepts include migration, livelihood activities, floods, education, intergenerational learning, and intersectionality. A detailed operationalization table is provided in Appendix 1. These themes structured the semi-structured interview guide.

3.3 Methods and Techniques

Participants eligible for in-depth interviews were individuals living in informal settlements along the Bagmati River in Kathmandu, specifically in the Thapathali and Sinamangal settlements. These areas were selected for their location along the river, frequent exposure to flooding, and accessibility, as advised by the local translators. A total of 33 interviews were conducted with a focus on family-unit analysis, where at least two members from different generations from the same family were interviewed. This approach enabled the study to explore intergenerational perspectives on livelihood changes and (non-)migration aspirations. All participants were required to be above 18 years old, as younger individuals would not have experienced any livelihood activity changes. Participants were identified with the assistance of a local translator, who approached families and invited them to participate. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached, supporting the credibility and depth of the data.

For the purpose of the findings, generational categories are defined as follows: 'grandparents' (not directly interviewed), 'parents' (older generation participants), and 'children' (younger generation participants, typically the sons or daughters of the 'parents', regardless of their actual age).

Sampling was primarily based on convenience, as the translator approached individuals who were available and willing to participate at the time of the visit. While the selection process was informal and largely dependent on who was present and agreeable to participate, attention was paid to ensuring variation in gender, age, caste, religion, and household structure. This allowed for an intersectional reading of the data, revealing how overlapping identities shaped people's access to livelihood opportunities and migration options. The sample included 12 women and 20 men, with representation across different castes, religions, and age groups (ranging from 18 to 66 years old). Of the 33 interviews conducted, 32 were with community

members: 24 participants represented distinct family units, while eight additional interviews were conducted to confirm data. A total of 25 interviews were conducted in the Thapathali settlement and seven interviews in Sinamangal. Sinamangal was visited later, to explore whether any new insights would emerge after reaching saturation in the first settlement. In addition, one interview was conducted with an expert, a manager at Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj, an NGO representing women from landless communities and informal settlements, advocating for secure and safe shelter rights for women. This expert interview helped to validate findings and offer additional context.

A semi-structured interview guide was used, and developed based on the themes outlined in the operationalization table. Questions were designed to elicit both personal experiences and broader household strategies, building on the NELM framework, which sees migration as a collective risk management strategy, not just an individual choice. At the same time, the SLF guided the focus on how people access and use different forms of capital to sustain their livelihoods in flood-prone conditions. The same questions guided each interview to ensure reliability, but the semi-structured format allowed for deeper exploration of specific aspects based on participants' responses. While questions followed a general order, flexibility was maintained to adapt to the flow of the conversation. At the start of each interview, participants were provided with a clear explanation of the research objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the measures taken to ensure data confidentiality. Oral consent was obtained and recorded before proceeding with the interview. The oral consent form can be found in Appendix 4. Audio recordings were securely stored, ensuring ethical integrity and data protection.

Language and translation challenges were managed with the support of a translator. A second translator was employed for the final few interviews. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed manually. Only English content was transcribed, meaning statements made exclusively in Nepali were not included. This may have led to some loss of detail or nuance, particularly in emotionally or culturally significant responses that were paraphrased rather than directly translated. However, both translators were fluent in English and Nepali and familiar with the local context, which helped ensure that translations were accurate and culturally appropriate. Most quotations presented in the results chapter are based on these translations, except in cases where participants spoke English directly. It is explicitly stated when a quotation is based on a translation.

Transcripts have been manually coded using NVivo, following a structured process. Firstly, open coding helped identify and label critical sentences, separating concepts. Axial coding determined which concepts are related and are grouped under overarching categories. Lastly,

selective coding uncovered connections and patterns, leading to conclusions. Transcripts have been reviewed multiple times to ensure all relevant information is captured and analyzed thoroughly. The code tree is in Appendix 5.

3.4 Positionality

As a Dutch student unfamiliar with the culture and language of Nepal, my positionality inevitably shaped the research process. Participants may have seen me as a wealthy outsider, which sometimes led to expectations of support despite my clear stating at the start of each interview that the research did not involve financial assistance. This occasionally left me feeling conflicted, especially when participants shared difficult stories and asked for help. The translator sometimes offered small acts of kindness, like handing out snacks or clothes, which blurred the line between researcher and helper. Relying on him also brought challenges. Early on, communication issues affected the depth of some interviews. However, after discussing these concerns, translation quality improved significantly.

The lack of privacy during interviews, often held in open spaces, also affected data quality. The presence of neighbours might have discouraged participants from speaking freely. In later interviews, my translator would politely ask bystanders to give us space to ensure the participant could speak without interruption. During transcription, any parts of the conversation where outside interruptions occurred were marked, ensuring that only uninterrupted, participant-driven data informed the analysis. These experiences made me more aware of how my background, the research setting, and logistical constraints influenced both the data and the way it was collected. While these factors introduced certain biases and limitations, they also taught me the importance of being reflexive, adaptable, and transparent about the complexities of fieldwork.

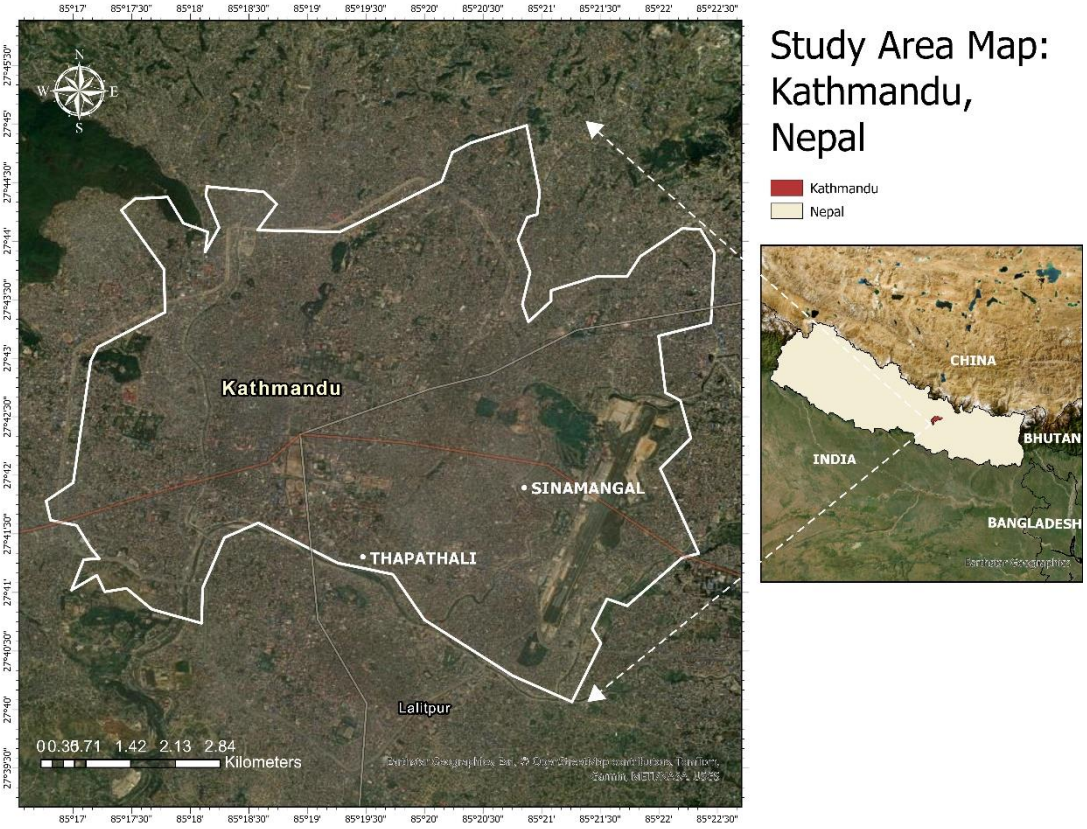
3.5 Study Area

The fieldwork was conducted in the informal settlements of Thapathali and Sinamangal, located along Kathmandu's Bagmati River. These areas are densely populated and characterised by informal housing, limited infrastructure, and frequent exposure to seasonal flooding. Both settlements face heightened vulnerability near the riverbanks during the monsoon period. Despite these risks, the areas continue attracting residents due to low rent prices and proximity to informal employment opportunities and public services. The populations in these settlements are diverse in terms of caste, ethnicity, age, and religion, reflecting broader social dynamics in Kathmandu's urban poor communities.

The two settlements were selected based on their accessibility, diversity, and location. Thapathali is one of the most well-known settlements, particularly because of its central

location. Sinamangal was included based on recommendations from local translators, who identified it as a site that was accessible and offered additional demographic variation. Together, these locations provided different experiences within Kathmandu's informal settlements. Figure 2 shows the locations of both settlements in Kathmandu.

Figure 2: Study Area Map: Kathmandu, Nepal



Source: created by author, 2025

Thapathali was established in 2006 following a political protest, when temporary shelters were quickly set up on government-owned land near the river. Like many informal settlements in Kathmandu, it includes both newer arrivals and families who have lived there for generations, even under constant uncertainty around eviction. Over time, a sense of community has developed, supported by local networks and informal groups (Bisiaux, 2015). According to Mishra and Shah (2018), Thapathali counts 142 households.

Sinamangal is situated on the western bank of the Bagmati River and is home to 689 households (Oli, Vaidya & Thapa, 2013). According to Clean Energy Nepal (2023) this settlement is characterized by poor housing and sanitation conditions, migrants from rural to urban areas are living here and adults lack formal education and skills.

Residents of these settlements face serious disadvantages due to their lack of legal land ownership and official recognition by the government. As a result, they are often excluded from basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity. In addition to poor infrastructure,

many struggle with legal identity issues. Without citizenship, they cannot access fundamental rights like registering births and marriages, enrolling in higher education, or obtaining driving licenses. These barriers create long-term social and economic hardship, making it difficult for families to escape poverty (Uprety, 2024).

3.6 Overview of Participants

Table 1 provides an overview of participants' family relations, gender, caste, religion, occupations, and the informal settlement in which they reside. The arrows represent a change in occupation in the participants' lives. All names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1: Overview of Participants

Participant	**Gender**	**Age**	**Caste**	**Religion**	**Occupation**	**Informal settlement**
Family 1						
Bikram	Male	60	Majhi	Christianity	Farmer → Carpenter → Rickshaw transporter	Thapathali
Sagar	Male	34	Majhi	Christianity	Taxi driver	Thapathali
Family 2						
Anita	Female	47	Magar	Hinduism	Farmer → Construction worker → no job	Thapathali
Nabin	Male	60	Magar	Hinduism	Iron maker	Thapathali
Heena	Female	27	Magar	Hinduism	Passport-photo photographer → Financial company → housewife	Thapathali
Family 3						
Tara	Female	56	Rai	Kirat	Farmer → House cleaner → no job	Thapathali
Viva	Female	18	Rai	Kirat	Waiter	Thapathali
Family 4						
Bimal	Male	44	Majhi	Hinduism	Farmer → carpet weaver	Thapathali
Ramesh	Male	19	Majhi	Hinduism	Chef	Thapathali
Family 5						
Harish	Male	65	Pariyar	Hinduism	Tailoring → no job	Sinamangal
Jay	Male	42	Pariyar	Hinduism	Tire maker → Tailor	Sinamangal

Family 6						
Pema	Female	40	Magar	Hinduism	House cleaner	Thapathali
Niran	Male	60	Magar	Hinduism	Construction worker	Thapathali
Pema	Female	18	Magar	Hinduism	Student	Thapathali
Family 7						
Nisha	Female	43	Sarki	Hinduism	Housewife and farmer	Thapathali
Ramila	Female	23	Sarki	Christianity	Student and consultant	Thapathali
Family 8						
Yash	Male	66	Chepang	Kirat	Farmer → Leadership job → army → security guard → trekking guide → construction worker	Thapathali
Kavi	Male	36	Chepang	Kirat	House painter	Thapathali
Family 9						
Biren	Male	65	Tamang	Buddhism	Farmer → Construction worker → no job	Thapathali
Gyan	Male	34	Tamang	Buddhism	Construction worker	Thapathali
Family 10						
Sabin	Male	55	Tamang	Buddhism	Construction worker, rickshaw deliverer, farmer and dishwasher	Sinamangal
Prati	Female	28	Magar	Buddhism	Waiter	Sinamangal
Family 11						
Karuna	Female	57	Pariyar	Hinduism	Road division office → Tailor	Sinamangal
Kiran	Male	30	Pariyar	Hinduism	House painter and construction worker	Sinamangal
Individuals						
Krishna	Male	20	Bishwakarma	Hinduism	Chef	Thapathali
Ram	Male	27	Newar	Hinduism	Chef and Taxi driver	Thapathali
Bishal	Male	48	Majhi	Hinduism	House painter	Thapathali
Suman	Male	59	Magar	Buddhism	Farmer → construction worker	Thapathali

Kamal	Male	40	Newar	Hinduism	Driver assistant → Furniture maker → No job	Thapathali
Samita	Female	40	Chaudhari	Hinduism	Farmer → Housewife	Thapathali
Sona	Female	46	Majhi	Hinduism	Construction worker → no job	Thapathali
Sajit	Male	40	Magar	Buddhism	Construction worker	Sinamangal

4. Results

This chapter discusses and analyses the data collected through in-depth interviews. The results address the four sub-questions guiding this study and are examined through the conceptual framework (Figure 1.).

4.1 Changes in livelihood activities across generations

Participants came from families where different members held various jobs over time, such as construction work, taxi driving, tailoring, and domestic work. These occupations were generally informal, precarious, and low-paying. Some participants followed their parents' occupation paths, but most did something else. The findings contribute to how structural constraints, intergenerational learning, and intersecting identities shape livelihood choices.

4.1.1 Continuities Across Generations

A dominant pattern is what may be termed "involuntary continuity", which is the replication of parents' occupations by children due to structural barriers rather than active choice. This is especially evident among families lacking educational opportunities or access to alternative livelihoods. Typically, the older generation (parents) had followed their own parents' (grandparents) occupations. Most of the grandparents were farmers and passed on farming skills to their children so they could contribute to the household. For instance, Biren assisted his parents with farming, and later shifted to construction work after moving to the city. His son Gyan followed him into construction, stating he had no choice due to limited education. The translator explained, *"There is no opportunity. So that's why he is doing this job*." Similarly, Sabin initially helped his parents with farming and delivery but now juggles several informal jobs in the city. Like Gyan, his choices are shaped more by necessity and limited opportunities than preference. These examples reflect livelihood diversification as a coping strategy and highlight the importance of human and social capital. They also demonstrate how intergenerational knowledge transfer contributes to resilience in constrained contexts. Ultimately, the pattern underscores how economic necessity, rather than aspiration, drives livelihood decisions, as outlined in the conceptual framework.

Although younger generations often had access to secondary education, this was not always enough to enable upward mobility. These cases illustrate that change is occurring, but for many, the shift is limited to a change in setting rather than occupation, revealing that aspirations alone are not enough when material and educational access is lacking. This leads to children following similar paths out of necessity rather than choice.

Many women, however, followed a different kind of continuity: one shaped not by inherited skills, but by gendered social norms, highlighting how overlapping social positions constrain livelihood options. Women were often expected to stay at home or take up informal jobs such as domestic work or housekeeping, which could be balanced with family responsibilities. As Samita described, "*They are very happy because she is a housewife and she is taking care of everybody*" (quote by translator). This quote reflects how socially sanctioned roles reproduce continuity rooted in expectations rather than skills. Pema, for instance, became a cleaner after marriage to support her children's education, despite her parents having worked in a post office. Her story contrasts with her husband Niran's construction job and underscores how caregiving responsibilities shape women's economic decisions in ways that differ from men's. These cases illustrate how gender, as a key axis of intersectionality, restricts women's livelihood choices even across generations.

Figure 3: Photo of Jay showcasing his sewing machine (photo by author).

While caste did not appear to influence occupational choices for most participants, it played a more significant role among individuals from the Pariyar caste. This distinction also marked one of the few clear differences between the two settlements. In Sinamangal, most participants belonged to the Pariyar caste, while none from Thapathali identified as such, despite being more ethnically diverse. For Pariyar people, skills were passed down through generations, specifically in tailoring. Harish learned tailoring from his parents, and his son Jay continued this trade after working in tire production (Figure 3). Karuna and her parents were also tailors, belonging to the Pariyar caste. In these cases, occupational choices were not only based on necessity, but also on what kind of work was considered 'suitable' due to caste identity. However, Karuna's son Kiran did not want to become a tailor, even though his parents wanted him to. He preferred to work as a house painter, which his friends also did. This suggests that while caste was not a dominant factor for most individuals, it still influenced occupational choices for Pariyar, especially through

intergenerational transmission of skills and norms. In these cases, caste identity intersected with livelihood pathways, highlighting how cultural expectations can constrain individual choice or even amid broader shifts.

These intergenerational patterns of "involuntary continuity" also have spatial consequences. Because informal jobs do not provide stable or high incomes, they often restrict families to affordable housing in high-risk areas. Despite aspirations for upward mobility or safer living conditions, many families remain ‘trapped’ in these settlements due to their continued reliance on low-paid informal work. In this way, livelihood precarity shapes economic futures across generations, but also reinforces place-based vulnerability.

4.1.2 Generational Aspirations for Change

While many participants inherited their livelihood paths, others, particularly the younger generation, actively tried to move away from their family’s path, demonstrating a shift in livelihood aspirations. Parents often strongly desired their children to have better types of occupations, that are less physically demanding, more secure, and better paid. “*I want to give my children the best education, I don’t want their life to be like mine*,” said Nisha, a farmer. Her daughter Ramila is pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in accounting and has no interest in farming, which she sees as too complicated and financially unrewarding. Nisha’s desire for her daughter to avoid farming reflects a strategic household investment in education as a means to secure upward mobility and diversify future income sources.

Similarly, Sagar rejected his father’s job in construction, stating, “*I don’t want to do that job, because it’s a hard job*.” Instead, he became a taxi driver, which he considers easier and more flexible. Although Sagar only completed primary education and works in the informal sector like his father, his choice reflects a shift in personal priorities and aspirations, towards flexibility and less physically demanding labour, rather than solely upward mobility.

Younger participants (aged 18-28) were more likely to work in jobs such as waiting tables, cooking, or consultancy, which were perceived as more stable or desirable than their parents’ occupations. In contrast, those aged 30-42, also part of the “children” generation but older, were more commonly found in informal jobs such as taxi driving, construction, or tailoring. This generational shift highlights how children’s livelihood choices are shaped not only by education and opportunity but also by a desire to avoid the struggles they witnessed growing up. Rather than following a specific ambition, some participants chose based on what they did not want to do. This suggests livelihood shifts are driven by negative aspirations, escaping undesirable work rather than actively pursuing an ideal career, even if the alternative offers only marginal improvements in livelihood stability.

4.1.3 Education as a tool

Education emerged as the most consistently cited pathway to change, viewed as a tool for possibilities and a measure of a better life, reinforcing its importance not just as an individual aspiration but as a collective household strategy for upward mobility. Participants repeatedly expressed a desire to support their children in gaining what they did not have. The translator explained Sabin's words "*What he is basically saying is, for his children, he don't want similar things. He wants improvement. That's why he wants his children to get an education. So, the education, moving abroad, and earning money*." While participants did not explicitly link education to housing or environmental security, the implication was clear: education offers the financial means to move beyond flood-prone, insecure living conditions, reinforcing aspirations for long-term stability. This highlights the importance of financial and human assets in strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity, including the ability to relocate.

Education was also discussed as something people had been denied, often due to economic hardship, gendered household responsibilities, or broader structural marginalization. For example, Gyan could not attend school because of family financial constraints, while Sabin described public schools as inaccessible: "*Though they were a public school, they did not teach people like him*" (quote by translator). This suggests caste-based exclusion in education access, reinforcing structural inequalities. These findings resonate with Rao's (2009) research in India, which shows how caste stratification not only restricted access to education but also confined individuals to low-status labour markets, highlighting that education is not just a personal choice but a privilege shaped by intersecting social marginalizations. Most older participants had no more than primary education. In contrast, children's education ranged from primary to bachelor's degree. Those with a bachelor's degree previously worked in jobs as consultancy and for a financial company, indicating upward shifts linked to educational access. Thus, education represents both a livelihood asset and a structural constraint, as unequal access limits its transformative potential.

Migration to Kathmandu was often linked to educational aspirations. Suman, for example, "*Came here to Kathmandu to get a better education for his children. Otherwise, he will stay in his village to do the same thing what his parents do.*" Similarly, Kiran said, "*Cheaper education. Government education. So where they can find cheaper education and be accepted easily, they move to that place.*" Parents described sacrifices they had made to ensure their children could attend school, like moving repeatedly in search of affordable schooling or taking additional work to afford tuition fees and supplies. These findings further illustrate how education and migration are intertwined in household strategies, showing how families invest collectively in children's futures, not only by funding education, but by relocating and reorganizing livelihoods. This reflects elements of the conceptual framework, particularly how

urban migration and education act as drivers of livelihood change. One women took up adult literacy programs run by the government that allowed her to learn to read and write, a program specifically for people without access to formal education. Even when such programs did not lead to immediate livelihood changes, they expanded individuals' capabilities and sense of agency.

These findings show that education is a personal aspiration and a shared strategy for generational change. According to the translator, Nisha said "*You have to do an education, for a better living, and if you can't, then you have to follow my path [farming]. This is the last option*." This reflects how education is often understood as the only route out of informal and precarious work. If it is impossible, then following in the family's footsteps becomes a default. Migration, whether for education or the jobs it enables, was framed by participants as a form of freedom, allowing the next generation to pursue safer, more stable livelihoods.

Even when education did not guarantee upward mobility, it remained a powerful symbol of hope and transformation. For many participants, it represented both what they had been denied and what they most wanted for the next generation. It embodied constraint and possibility, limited by structural inequalities, yet central to how families imagine a better future.

4.1.4 Key Takeaway

The following table summarizes generational livelihood patterns, illustrating common livelihood activities and the factors influencing these occupational choices. This provides a clear visual representation of how livelihood choices evolve across generations and the structural factors influencing these shifts.

Table 2: Intergenerational Livelihood Activities

Generation	**Common livelihood activities**	**Influencing factors**
Grandparents	Farming	Skill transmission, rural setting
Parents	Construction, tailoring, rickshaw delivery and house cleaning	Skill transmission, economic necessity, limited education, caste expectations and gender norms
Children	Chef, waiting tables, construction, taxi driver	Education access, aspirational divergence, structural constraints, gender norms

4.1.5 Synthesis: Intergenerational Livelihood Patterns

This chapter has shown that while many participants follow in their parents' footsteps due to necessity or lack of options, others strive for better opportunities, mostly through education.

While the younger generation has more opportunities for formal education and different career paths, many still find themselves in similar low-paying, informal jobs. Structural barriers, such as limited access to education, gender roles, caste-based expectations, and economic hardship, continue to shape livelihood choices. Nevertheless, education remains a powerful tool for changing intergenerational livelihoods, with many parents making significant sacrifices to ensure their children can escape the cycle of low-wage, informal work and move to safer areas. The aspiration to provide a better future for the next generation remains a motivator, yet the persistence of structural inequalities underscores the difficulty of achieving lasting change in livelihood patterns.

These findings reflect the role of intergenerational learning, structural constraints and intersectionality in shaping livelihood trajectories, as outlined in the conceptual framework. They also illustrate how changes in livelihood activities are embedded in broader social processes, which intersect with migration aspirations explored in 4.3.

4.2 Factors driving livelihood changes across generations

Across generations, participants described unstable and shifting livelihood patterns shaped by necessity rather than long-term planning or aspiration. Within each generation, job change was common throughout participants' lives. Livelihood strategies reflected a broader pattern of survival-oriented work in precarious conditions rather than career-building.

4.2.1 Natural hazard

Participants face recurring livelihood disruptions due to environmental risks. Flooding has had a direct and damaging impact on residents' livelihoods, validating the conceptual framework's attention to natural hazards as a driver of livelihood change. The September 2024 flood destroyed homes, belongings, and halted income-generating activities for days or even weeks. While most did not lose their jobs entirely, the NGO worker noted one woman whose livelihood was permanently affected: "*And we asked them that, if their livelihood was directly affected? Then they said that there was only one, like a tiny kind of shop was there. That shop has been totally taken away by the flood. So because of that, her livelihood options have been stopped. So after the flood, she was not able to resilient her life. Because her livelihood options are gone*." This case shows how natural hazards can lead not just to temporary income loss, but to the complete erasure of a livelihood, with long-term consequences for recovery. It reinforces the importance of financial and physical capital in sustaining and rebuilding livelihoods after environmental shocks.

Intergenerational knowledge sharing helped families protect themselves during floods. Parents taught their children practical safety measures, often learned from their own experiences with floods, such as staying away from the river, switching off electricity, and saving valuables,

through lived experience rather than formal education. This operationalizes the intergenerational learning component of the conceptual framework: families transmitted adaptive capacities that shaped livelihood responses and increased resilience due to previous disaster experiences. According to the translator, Harish taught his children "*Don't go near the river, don't stay around the river, when the rain is coming and when the flood is coming, he taught these kind of things*." Likewise Biren taught his children "*Run away from here, don't stay in the flood area. Empty the house and then go away, these kind of things they teach. The human security is the first priority, then the stuff*." These strategies exemplify intergenerational resilience, as families transfer adaptive knowledge and survival techniques, enabling them to adapt and choose to stay despite environmental risks.

Sometimes this knowledge even flowed in the opposite direction, from children to parents. Sabin said according to the translator "*So, instead of him teaching his children, since they know because of education, they teach him. Like going far away from the nearby river. That's the thing they teach him*." While this intergenerational learning improved disaster preparedness, it did not eliminate economic losses caused by disrupted livelihoods.

Notably, Sabin and Prati, who live in Sinamangal, mentioned that flooding no longer affects them, due to the construction of a protective wall near their home. This case highlights physical capital, where infrastructure plays a key role in reducing environmental risks, though access to protective measures remains uneven across settlements, reinforcing structural disparities.

4.2.2 Economic necessity

Economic constraints were a dominant and cross-generational driver of livelihood changes. Usually people did not have a specific plan and just worked the job available to them at the time. Yash, for instance, worked as a sand collector, trekking guide, soldier, security guard, and more. It was common for many participants, especially in the older generation, to have more than one job at the same time, some even mentioned working three jobs. This was not out of ambition, but out of necessity, as most jobs people do are unstable. Often, people waited at home to be called for a new project, which can take weeks or even months. Many take up whatever work becomes available alongside their main job to increase their income. This aligns with Scoones' (1998) framing of livelihood diversification, where people take on multiple informal jobs due to structural precarity. As Bishal explained, "*If there is no painting job, I will do a labour job.*" This reflects how economic pressures interact with unstable labour markets to shape livelihood choices, as outlined in the conceptual framework. The pattern of waiting for casual labour and taking on any available work reveals the precarious nature of informal economies. While floods sometimes contributed to livelihood disruptions, the primary driver of economic instability was structural precarity.

Working multiple jobs was more common among older participants. Only a few younger people reported doing so: Ramesh, Ram, and Kiran. Ramesh did this to save up for his visa to Dubai, while Ram said he wanted to support his family. Kiran's work situation is unstable, so he takes on whatever extra jobs he can find. In some cases, this approach may have been modelled after their parents, who had also worked multiple jobs to survive. Others said they would have liked to do more work, but not enough jobs were available. These generational differences reveal evolving livelihood coping strategies, while older generations rely on multiple jobs for survival, younger participants seek migration or education as alternative ways to escape instability, reflecting an adaptation of intergenerational resilience rather than direct replication of parental livelihoods.

4.2.3 Physical Health Issues

Several participants experienced health-related disruptions in their work, especially in physically demanding jobs. These health problems included diabetes, frost bite, knee problems, pneumonia, and more. This was especially common among the older generation, who had spent years doing heavy, manual labour without adequate health support or safety. Physical exhaustion, illness, and age-related decline became reasons for leaving work. Health-related livelihood disruptions align with the conceptual framework and highlight limited financial and human capital, without formal safety nets, individuals struggle to recover economically after illness or injury.

Health also intersected with other drivers. In some cases, illness prompted relocation to urban areas for treatment, disrupting previous livelihoods. After years of collecting sand near the river, Anita stopped working altogether due to health issues. Harish had to leave tailoring work because of eye problems: "*Mentally he wants to work, but his eye is not that good. So that's why he can't work*." Tara also stopped working due to lack of available work and physical difficulty, including hearing loss. These situations reflect how the kind of work available often led to health issues over time, and how employment could be suddenly disrupted.

Figure 4: Photo of Anita working as a housewife (photo by author).

Heena highlighted how floods increased these challenges: "*Last time my father was also very sick. The house was full of water and he was very sick. I came here and took a medicine for my father, so those were difficult times*." Heena and her

father could not continue working. In such cases, flooding disrupted work not by causing illness, but by making it harder for sick individuals to cope or access care.

Health also shaped work decisions for younger participants. Viva, for example, had to quit her waitressing job due to prolonged pneumonia, though she planned to return once she recovered. While younger people may have more flexibility in the types of jobs they pursue, they are not immune to the health risks of informal labour and poor living conditions.

These experiences show that livelihood change is not always driven by aspiration or opportunity; sometimes it is forced by illness. Across generations, poor health in the absence of robust safety nets remains a critical driver of livelihood disruption. These cases highlight health as a driver of livelihood changes.

4.2.4 Urbanization

Most parents migrated from villages to Kathmandu for better work opportunities. Participants explained their move was driven by a lack of alternatives in their home areas: "*In his place there is no opportunity to do anything else*," said the translator about Bikram, and similarly, "*Here are more opportunities because he can get a labour job here in Kathmandu, in a village, there is nothing at all*," the translator explained about Biren. In the villages, most had worked as farmers alongside their own parents, but this form of livelihood was not viable in the city. Migration to Kathmandu marked a significant shift in their work lives, not necessarily toward more stable or better-paying jobs, but to jobs that offered at least some income. This shift illustrates urbanization as a driver of change in employment sector: from agricultural to informal urban labour.

Farming had been about subsistence, not earning, so even low-paid, precarious labour in the city was seen as an improvement. These changes highlight how migration is not only a physical movement but a restructuring of livelihood itself, often from subsistence-based to income-based work, even if the jobs remain informal and unstable. Findings suggest that urbanization does not necessarily lead to greater economic stability. Though migration is often a strategy to escape rural hardship, risks like flooding in informal urban settlements demonstrate that precarity persists in different forms.

Children were either born in Kathmandu or moved to the city with their parents, so they did not actively choose to migrate, except for Ramila, who moved from a village to Kathmandu after marriage. This enabled her to pursue education instead of helping her parents with farming. Other children did not think about moving back to their original villages, as the city offered more opportunities. For many children, urban life represents possibility, yet remains shaped by the instability their parents also faced.

4.2.5 Dissatisfaction with working conditions

Several participants changed jobs due to poor working conditions, including unpaid wages, verbal abuse, and low pay. Dissatisfaction with working conditions was related to both current and previous jobs, but this did not always lead to a change in occupation. Despite facing poor conditions, some participants stayed in their jobs due to limited alternatives, family responsibilities and family support and motivation, which encouraged them to endure. These findings reflect how a lack of financial and human capital can constrain individuals' ability to act on dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction is closely tied to broader economic factors and shifts in the urban job market, where low wages and limited formal job opportunities leave individuals with few alternatives despite poor working conditions.

Participants changing their jobs for these reasons were only men and most of them were part of the younger generation. This suggests a generational shifts in expectations and capacity to act upon dissatisfaction. Ramesh said "*Some people were yelling at me and I don't like this. So I changed the job.*" The conceptual framework situates this dissatisfaction within a broader analysis of livelihood change: responses to poor conditions were not solely personal but shaped by access to assets and opportunities, influenced by intersecting social positions. The NGO worker explained that they often found that women changed their jobs because of violence with their employers and contractors. However, women included in this research did not mention this as a reason for changing their occupation, which may reflect gendered silencing or stigma. From an intersectional perspective, gender and age intersect to shape whose dissatisfaction leads to action, and whose does not.

4.2.6 Disrupted Education

Although participants consistently emphasized the importance of education, not all had the opportunity to access it. While nearly everyone valued education as a means toward a better life, their ability to pursue or provide it was shaped by poverty, gender, and structural barriers. Several women described quitting school to help with household work or due to early marriage. Nisha said, *"I had to help my mother, that's why I quit the school."* Tara shared that her daughter could not continue school due to lack of money. Other participants stopped school early to start working and support their families.

These examples highlight how access to education was determined by income and gendered responsibilities, reflecting inequalities in financial and human capital. For parents, limited education often restricted their ability to change jobs, confining them to a narrow range of livelihood options. The ability to attend and complete school, and later access stable work, depended on financial means but also on social norms and household dynamics, reinforcing intersectional disadvantages. The conceptual framework's inclusion of intersectionality is

crucial here, as access to education and its impact on livelihoods varied within gender and class.

4.2.7 Social and Cultural Expectations

Gendered expectations further influenced livelihood outcomes, particularly for women. Education shaped career paths, but traditional norms around marriage and household duties often overrode professional aspirations. Heena had previously worked as a passport photographer and in a financial company but stopped working after marriage and became a housewife. Both women with bachelor's degrees had to quit their jobs after marriage due to expectations to manage domestic responsibilities. As the translator explained about Ramila: *"She has to look out for the house, she got married so she could not continue work and schooling, and then there is no time, she has to take care of these parents."*

These examples reflect how persistent social norms and gendered divisions of labour continue to constrain women's livelihoods, even when education is available. As Sona mentioned according to the translator "*In ancient times, for the ladies, women, they don't go to school because they have to work in houses. This kind of culture in that time. That's why they didn't go to school*." Although times have changed, this shows how historical norms continue to shape expectations, limiting long-term participation in jobs across generations. This reflects an intersectional constraint: while education offers women potential job opportunities, marriage and caregiving responsibilities often override professional aspirations. These dynamics illustrate how social and cultural factors, particularly local customs and family obligations, continue to structure livelihood transitions across generations, as also observed by Rigon (2022).

4.2.8 Key Takeaway

The following table presents the key drivers that most prominently shaped livelihood changes across generations. While each driver may have affected both parents and children to some extent, the table highlights those that were particularly influential within each group, based on the patterns that emerged from this study.

Table 3: Key Factors Driving Livelihood Changes

Generation	Key drivers
Parents	• Natural hazards • Economic necessity • Health problems • Urbanization • Social and cultural expectations
Children	• Disrupted education • Poor working conditions • Social and cultural expectations

4.2.9 Synthesis: Patterns of Livelihood Change

Changes in livelihoods across generations in the settlement were shaped less by ambition and more by a complex interplay of economic necessity, constraint, and limited opportunity. Participants' stories reveal how different factors repeatedly push people to change jobs. These findings align with the conceptual framework, where changes in livelihood activities are driven by similar drivers found in the literature.

While younger generations may have more access to education or flexibility, they remain subject to insecure work, health risks, and cultural constraints, especially women. Migration to Kathmandu opened new possibilities but also exposed families to new forms of urban precarity. Even when aspirations existed, such as education for children or better work, these were often constrained beyond individual's control. Ultimately, the livelihoods described in this chapter reflect adaptation and intergenerational resilience in the face of limited choice. Change was rarely about career-building, but survival, family support, and hope for better futures, often for the next generation.

4.3 The influence of changes in livelihood activities on migration aspiration

Participants migrated to informal settlements in Kathmandu for various reasons, with livelihood opportunities playing a central role. Many were drawn by the availability of low-cost housing near workplaces, schools or hospitals. Some moved to live with relatives already settled in the area. Others were forced to migrate due to environmental disasters such as floods and landslides, health needs, or family conflict, making it difficult to sustain a livelihood in their original locations. However, while these informal settlements offered access to work and services, residents now live in highly vulnerable areas next to the Bagmati River, exposed to floods and eviction threats.

This chapter explores how changing livelihood conditions influence residents' desires and capacities to migrate or remain. These conditions influenced not just immediate decisions but also longer-term aspirations across generations.

4.3.1 Livelihood disruptions

People in the settlements are prone to floods and live in insecure tenure. These livelihood disruptions often lead to migration aspirations. However, high rent in other areas and lack of relocation support means that most residents stay, rebuilding homes each time a flood occurs. Some participants temporarily left the settlement to stay with relatives or in safer locations, returning once the waters receded. These short-term movements highlight the role of temporary, risk-responsive mobility as a coping strategy. This illustrates how residents manage immediate livelihood threats with limited means.

This pattern created a cycle where environmental shocks threaten livelihoods, spark migration aspirations, but ultimately leave people stuck due to limited financial resources. The repeated loss of natural capital and insecure tenure undermine livelihood sustainability. NGO support after disasters, including food and clothing, and help rebuilding houses, enabled many residents to remain in these settlements, reflecting the importance of social and physical capital, particularly the role of a social support network in creating non-migration aspirations. One NGO installed a water tank, improving daily living conditions. In contrast, government support is minimal, with electricity being the only service consistently provided. Figure 5 showcases the informal settlement of Thapathali.

Figure 5: Photo of Thapathali area next to the Bagmati River (photo by author).

The threat of government eviction creates additional uncertainty. Residents know their settlements are technically on government land, and eviction notices have been issued, yet no alternatives are offered. Ramesh said, "*We have a lot of challenges here. The government is still trying to remove this area for a park*." Despite these threats, most residents choose to stay, resisting displacement until better livelihood alternatives or secure housing options are available.

4.3.2 Motivations for moving to current settlement

Many older participants migrated from rural areas with limited livelihood options. Even if conditions in Kathmandu were difficult, they found more diverse economic opportunities and remained due to affordability, familiarity, and proximity to jobs and schools. While economic need was a primary motivator for moving to Kathmandu, cultural and familial obligations also shaped migration. For example, Ramila, who moved to the city after marriage, explained, according to the translator, "*In Nepali culture the women has to move to where her husband lives*." This underscores how livelihood and migration choices are embedded in social norms, as captured by the intersectionality lens. Others mentioned motivations such as children's education, hospital treatment, physical safety, and the lack of space in their family homes. This highlights how migration decisions are often driven by economic necessity and social obligations, not always by choice.

Some participants lived in rented apartments before moving to the informal settlement, but rising rent costs pushed them towards lower-cost housing. This highlights how economic pressures can lead to involuntary migration toward cheaper housing in high-risk areas. Over time, participants developed strong community ties. Viva expressed this clearly "*The people are very good. The community is close with each other, they help each other. That's why I love to be here*." Her mother Tara shared this sentiment, noting that community and NGO support helped her stay despite difficult living conditions. These examples highlight how social capital contributes to place attachment, offsetting the negative effects of precarious livelihoods.

However, when livelihood conditions changed significantly, such as when participants could not find work, some considered return migration, demonstrating the fragility of livelihood outcomes and the interplay between aspirations and capability. Jay, for example, had moved to the city for hospital treatment but could not find a job and planned to return to his village, where family support could help him cope with depression and financial stress. However, his father will stay in the informal settlement as he still hopes to find work in the city, even though he will be without his family, while facing physical health problems and living in a vulnerable place. According to the NGO worker, others had also returned to their villages when they could no longer sustain themselves in the city. This shows how even though participants came to the city searching for work, unstable or insufficient livelihoods could eventually lead to involuntary return migration. In these cases, individuals have strong aspirations to live in the city, but lack the resources to stay.

4.3.3 Current and future migration aspirations

Across generations, livelihood opportunities, or the lack thereof, played a central role in shaping migration aspirations. Many older participants were content with staying, particularly

because of the low rent costs, community ties and access to nearby services. However, their willingness to move was often conditional; they would consider migrating only if better opportunities emerged, such as improved housing offered by the government, job opportunities, or better education for their children. For example, Ram stated, "*I am ready to move if the government gives me a proper place*." His statement reflects how migration decisions are shaped less by individual preference and more by the availability of structural opportunities. Others similarly noted that without government support, relocation was financially unfeasible, highlighting how livelihood assets shape not only aspirations but also the capacity to act on them. Additional motivations for relocation included being closer to work, flooding risks, and the legal insecurity of living on government land.

Several participants explicitly mentioned aspiring to migrate because of frequent flooding in their settlements. Although the floods disrupted their lives and caused damage, they often lacked the financial means to move elsewhere. In these cases, participants felt stuck and hoped that the government would eventually offer support or resettlement options. This highlights how environmental hazards shape migration aspirations across both generations but do not necessarily lead to mobility when structural constraints, such as poverty, limit people's ability to act.

Younger participants were more likely to aspire and be able to migrate, especially abroad, where they believed they could earn more. This underscores economic pressures as a driver of migration aspiration. Those who had these aspirations and pursued them often had access to education. For many, education and migration are imagined as tools for mobility and better futures, usually tied to a desire to escape underpaid and unstable work, as discussed in 4.1.3. In these cases, migration is framed as a strategy to improve economic security.

Participants like Viva and Kanchi both want to migrate, but face obstacles like cost and education. Young men seem to have more concrete plans, such as Ramesh and Krishna, who plan to leave and work abroad. Krishna is motivated to leave Nepal by his parents, who migrated abroad to work. However, migration access is not equal to everyone. Krishna and Heena are both studying Japanese language to be able to move and work in Japan. However, Heena's plans have been interrupted because she must care for her family. Additionally, Prati wanted to migrate and work abroad, but her husband opposed it, believing it was unsafe. This suggests that gender shapes migration opportunities and constraints, intersecting with other identities like age and marital status, with young men having comparatively more mobility. The conceptual framework highlights this through its integration of intersectionality.

Social media also influenced migration aspirations. As the NGO worker noted, "*Because they see in Facebook, in social media and Instagram that their friends are enjoying in beachside*

area, they are enjoying the restaurants. Once a month, they are going to the clubs and all. And they used to see that, you know, like that is the life. So dreaming that life, they used to want to go abroad." For many families, sending children abroad was a strategic livelihood decision, they supported the idea of their children going abroad, even though they did not or could not migrate. This suggests a generational shift in how migration is viewed, it is increasingly normalized and desirable, especially among younger people, regardless of caste or religious background. Parents took on expensive loans to pay for travel, hoping their children would send remittances once they had repaid the debt. Suman, for instance, said, "*I had to collect a lot of money and took a lot of loans to send my son to Croatia*." These decisions reflect household-level strategies, where older generations invest in youth mobility as a response to long-term livelihood precarity.

While gender often shaped migration opportunities and constraints, religious background and caste did not show a clear pattern in determining migration aspirations. Participants from all religious groups and castes expressed both their desires to migrate and their intentions to stay. This suggests that religion and caste do not necessarily shape migration aspirations.

4.3.4 Key Takeaway

The following table outlines generational differences in (non-)migration aspirations, shaped by livelihood transitions, financial stability, and structural constraints.

Table 4: Differences in (Non-)Migration Aspirations Across Generations

Generation	**(Non-)migration aspiration**
Parents	Most aspire to remain in the settlement due to proximity to services and work, affordability, limited alternatives, and community ties; migration occurs primarily if better opportunities arise or to escape hazards.
Children	Show stronger aspirations to migrate, especially abroad, motivated by both economic opportunity and a desire to escape the settlement's vulnerabilities; however, financial constraints and gender roles influence actual mobility outcomes.

4.3.5 Synthesis: Livelihood changes and (Non-)Migration Aspirations

This research shows that changes in livelihood, driven by economic necessity, environmental disruptions, or structural constraints, directly shape whether individuals aspire to migrate or remain. Job transitions play a key role in shaping household stability and generational mobility aspirations, reflecting the conceptual framework's focus on how livelihood shifts affect (non-)migration aspirations across generations.

Older residents were pushed to Kathmandu by poor rural conditions and often remain due to affordability, community ties, and limited alternatives despite urban precarity. Younger residents more frequently aspire to migrate, especially abroad, but their ability to do so depends on the household's capacity to bear financial and social costs.

Migration aspirations are shaped not just by preference, but by livelihood stability, affordability, family roles, and support systems. While youth seek migration to escape instability, older generations often stay, highlighting how livelihood changes, particularly job transitions, mediate migration aspirations. These findings underscore that migration decisions are influenced more by livelihood realities than by aspiration alone, reflecting the broader conceptual framework.

5. Discussion

This research aimed to examine how intergenerational changes in livelihood activities influence decision-making about non-migration in flood-prone urban areas of Kathmandu. This chapter discusses the findings concerning the study's four sub-questions. By interpreting these results alongside the theoretical framework, the chapter highlights key patterns, contradictions, and implications for understanding environmental (non-)migration and changing livelihoods in urban informal settlements in Kathmandu, Nepal.

5.1 Intergenerational livelihood changes: opportunity, constraint, and adaptation

Findings from chapter 4.1 reveal that livelihood shifts across generations in Kathmandu's informal settlements are shaped by a complex interplay of opportunity, constraint, and aspiration. Older generations largely relied on informal, manual labour, while younger individuals increasingly pursue education and diversify into service-sector jobs. This confirms urban livelihood literature that portrays informality as a persistent feature of poverty (Bartlett et al., 2012; Turok et al., 2017), but extends it by showing how intergenerational learning and shifting aspirations are key drivers of transition.

The findings suggest emerging forms of agency among younger residents who, despite structural constraints, pursue education and diverge from traditional livelihood paths. This reflects Rao's (2009) insight into education as a tool for economic and social mobility. However, many educated participants remained in insecure informal work, revealing a gap between aspiration and actual opportunity. This reflects the aspirations-capabilities framework (Carling & Schewel, 2020), which shows how people may desire upward mobility but face barriers that limit their ability to act. The Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) explains that while education is seen as the main route out of informality, structural constraints mean many cannot convert this into better livelihoods. In these cases, following in the family's footsteps becomes the default.

In this context, education, and often migration for education or work, is framed as a form of freedom, a way to expand real choices and secure a more stable future for the next generation. This confirms the role of education as a driver of livelihood changes in the conceptual framework.

The SLF helps explain how growing human capital (education) does not always result in improved livelihood outcomes when financial or social capital remains limited. This confirms previous critiques (Natarajan et al., 2022) that the SLF may underplay structural inequalities that shape livelihoods. Livelihood shifts, therefore, are not always upward or linear. Instead, they reflect aspirational change shaped through intergenerational learning and often hindered by labour market exclusion. This nuance adds depth to theories of intergenerational resilience by highlighting how inherited knowledge and aspiration alone may be insufficient in the face of persistent structural constraints

The findings also point to spatial consequences of intergenerational livelihood continuity. Despite aspirations for upward mobility, families often remain in environmentally vulnerable settlements due to economic constraints. This echoes Bartlett et al. (2012), who note how informal urban livelihoods are rooted in risk-prone areas, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability across generations. While environmental risks were not central to livelihood decision-making, they acted as background stressors that shaped long-term aspirations, particularly among youth, by reinforcing a desire for mobility. Within the SLF, this reflects how vulnerability contexts shape both assets and adaptive strategies. Meanwhile, the aspiration-capability framework (Carling & Schewel, 2020) explains why such aspirations often remain unrealised due to structural constraints.

Finally, the findings affirm research on how gender influences livelihood activity access and aspirations (Rao, 2009; Rigon, 2022). While younger women increasingly pursue education, this does not consistently translate into improved employment. Contrary to expectations, caste played a minor role, suggesting economic and gendered barriers were more decisive than caste-based exclusion in shaping livelihood outcomes.

Overall, chapter 4.1 illustrates how livelihoods are shaped not only by structural factors, but also by aspirations, identity, and intergenerational relationships. Structural inequality constraints opportunity, yet individuals try to challenge these constraints differently. These insights suggest the need for policies that address the social and cultural factors that shape livelihoods, particularly through improving access to education, addressing informal sector vulnerabilities, and challenging gender and caste norms.

5.2 Constraints shaping livelihood decisions

The findings from chapter 4.2 reveal that individual livelihood changes in Kathmandu's informal settlements are shaped less by long-term strategic planning and more by necessity. This reflects the dynamics outlined in the SLF, which emphasizes how limited access to key assets with a context of vulnerability shapes livelihood decisions (Scoones, 1998). Livelihood diversification did not emerge as a strategic decision, but as a reactive response to shocks, precarity, and limited access to financial, physical, and human capital. This supports Scoones' conceptualisation of diversification as a survival strategy when secure livelihood options are unavailable, yet the data also extends this by showing how such diversification becomes normalized across generations.

Environmental hazards, particularly flooding, did not emerge as a standalone driver of livelihood changes, as expected according to the conceptual framework. Instead, they tended to increase existing precarity rather than initiate new adaptive strategies. While Roy and Basu (2020) argue that environmental shocks can trigger adaptive livelihood shifts, this study suggests that flooding often led to further destabilisation. For example, the destruction of a woman's shop during the 2024 flood exemplifies how such hazards can result in permanent livelihood loss, particularly where financial and physical capital are lacking, reinforcing the SLF's emphasis on the importance of assets in recovery.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer emerged as a key adaptive mechanism. Parents passed down flood survival strategies, but in some cases, children educated in formal systems reversed this flow. This knowledge transfer supports Mallick and Hunter's (2024) work on intergenerational resilience, increasing the likelihood of non-migration across generations. However, while this knowledge saves lives, it does not prevent the loss of income during floods. The findings thus highlight a critical gap in the capability to translate resilience into improved livelihood outcomes, in line with Sen's (1999) Capability Approach.

Urbanization also shaped job changes, as many parents migrated to Kathmandu due to hazards, lack of space or in search of employment. This supports Haan et al.'s (2002) view that urbanization and labour market shifts play a key role in livelihood transitions, as highlighted in the conceptual framework. However, this study adds that such moves were often driven more by necessity than opportunity, reflecting the influence of vulnerability and constrained choices, as discussed by Mistri and Das (2020b). Migration decisions were rarely individual: they were shaped by family structures and responsibilities, with grandparents often staying behind. This shows how mobility is both a response to risk and a reflection of uneven access to resources. While NELM views migration as a strategic investment for improving household income (Zickgraf, 2021), this study suggests it often replaces one form of precarity (rural

subsistence farming) with another (urban informal labour). Rather than enhancing long-term financial security, migration in these cases appears to redistribute vulnerabilities across rural and urban settings.

Interestingly, Sharma and Pradhan (2017) found political instability and transport strikes as significant disruptions to informal employment in Nepal, however, none of the participants in this study mentioned these issues. Instead, livelihood decisions were shaped more by personal and household-level constraints such as health problems, caregiving responsibilities, and irregular job availability. This divergence may reflect differences in geographic or socio-economic contexts within the informal sector itself, or it may show how localized stressors, especially in flood-prone settlements, can overshadow broader political-economic disruptions. In this way, the findings extend existing literature by highlighting the constraints faced by the urban poor.

The chapter also shows how intersecting inequalities, especially gender and age, shape the capacity to act on dissatisfaction with work. While younger men sometimes changed jobs due to mistreatment, married women often dropped out of work entirely due to domestic expectations. This affirms Rigon's (2022) call for intersectional analysis in urban livelihoods, and shows how even when access to education improves, structural norms continue to limit women's economic choices. The ability of young men to change jobs reflects the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999), which emphasises that the freedom to pursue alternative livelihoods depends not only on aspirations but on the real opportunities available. Similarly, although education was widely aspired to, many participants were unable to pursue it due to constraints related to gender, class, and family roles. This supports the conceptual framework's emphasis on structural constraints and how their impacts vary by intersecting identities.

Overall, the findings support important ideas from the SLF and add to existing research by showing how multiple vulnerabilities affect different generations. Instead of major changes, livelihood shifts are mostly shaped by ongoing limitations, with only small improvements for some younger participants, while most continue to face unstable conditions. The drivers of livelihood changes align with those identified in the conceptual framework, which is grounded in the literature.

5.3 Migration aspirations and livelihood change

Chapter 4.3 shows how changing livelihood conditions, shaped by environmental shocks, economic instability, and socio-cultural norms, directly influence whether individuals aspire to migrate or remain. While many participants expressed a desire to leave Kathmandu's informal settlements, structural constraints such as poverty, insecure tenure, and high rent limited their capacity to act. This supports Sen's (1999) Capability Approach and Carling and Schewel's

(2020) aspiration–capability framework: migration aspirations do not always lead to mobility when capabilities are lacking. However, this study extends their work by showing how temporary, short-term migration during floods coexists with long-term immobility. While not driven by economic opportunity, such movements reflect how people navigate constrained choices during crisis, revealing mobility shaped by both aspiration and necessity.

Recurring floods and threats of eviction intensify migration aspirations. Yet, due to limited financial assets and a lack of relocation support, many residents remain. This reflects the concept of involuntary non-migration (Mallick & Schanze, 2020), where people stay not by choice, but due to constrained options. In contrast, others stay voluntarily, mostly older participants, citing affordability, social networks, and proximity to work as reasons for non-migration.

The SLF helps explain how people respond when livelihood assets are missing. For instance, young men with education and family support actively planned migration abroad, using migration as an adaptive livelihood strategy. Yet the case of an older participant, who remained in Kathmandu despite illness, unemployment, and family leaving, complicates this view. His choice suggests that migration decisions are not always based on asset logic alone, but also on hope and perceived opportunity, challenging the rationalist assumptions of the SLF that migration naturally follows asset depletion. This aligns with critiques by Mdee (2002) and Scoones (2013), who argue that SLF often simplifies decision-making by emphasizing rational calculations and underestimating the complexity of human motivations. This case suggests the need to integrate more psychological and aspirational dimensions into livelihood frameworks.

Generational differences were clear. Older participants were often rooted by familiarity and constrained by necessity, while younger people were more aspirational, especially about international migration. Families viewed sending children abroad as an investment, supporting NELM's framing of migration as a household livelihood strategy, where those who stay behind receive remittances from their migrating family members (Taylor, 1999; Zickgraf, 2021). Young people's migration desires were shaped by personal ambitions, social media, and a search for better futures, showing how aspirations are co-produced by structural pressures and individual imaginaries. This supports existing literature on youth migration, but extends it by showing how digital exposure through platforms like Instagram and Facebook contributes to 'aspirational migration imaginaries' even in low-income, disaster-prone contexts. This dual motivation reflects the SLF's recognition of individual agency in shaping adaptive livelihood strategies (Ashley & Carney, 1999), highlighting how migration aspirations emerge from the interplay between structural constraints and personal ambitions. The findings also reflect the feedback

loop in the conceptual framework, where livelihood changes recursively shape and are shaped by migration aspirations.

Gender also shaped aspirations and capabilities. While young men planned migration with family support, young women faced barriers due to caregiving roles or marital power dynamics, echoing findings from Rao (2009). These gendered constraints highlight how intersectional factors affect who can act on livelihood-driven aspirations.

This chapter underscores that migration and non-migration are intertwined and shaped by livelihoods, aspirations, and capabilities. Whether individuals choose to move or stay is influenced by environmental risks, economic pressures, family strategies, gendered roles, and the perceived achievability of better futures. Migration aspirations reflect a negotiation of what people desire, what they can afford, and what they imagine possible within their social and economic limitations.

5.4 Reflection on the conceptual framework

The framework guiding this study conceptualized how a range of drivers contribute to changes in livelihood activities over time. These changes, influenced by intergenerational learning, shape aspirations to migrate or remain. The framework also acknowledged that overlapping social identities influence these livelihood changes and migration decisions. The temporal layering shown in the framework, across generations, proved especially useful in capturing how aspirations and livelihood shifts evolve over time and are experienced differently by youth and older residents.

Findings suggest some refinements to the conceptual framework. While natural hazards like floods did not always emerge as a direct reason for changes in livelihood activities, they significantly influenced migration aspirations and household vulnerability, often acting as a reason for temporary displacement or shaping the risk context within which livelihood decisions are made. This highlights the importance of understanding environmental hazards not just as causes of livelihood change, but also as key factors that shape people's ability and desire to migrate. Additionally, the data revealed more dynamic, feedback-driven relationships between livelihood changes and migration aspirations. Finally, intersectionality seemed to be central, particularly in shaping how gender and marital status influenced both livelihood opportunities and migration choices.

5.5 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, all field visits to the settlements were conducted during the daytime for safety reasons. This likely influenced who participated, mostly people who were at home during the day, such as those not engaged in

daily wage labour, potentially biasing the sample toward those with informal or home-based livelihoods.

Secondly, using a translator introduced the possibility of meaning being changed. Although care was taken to ensure accurate translation, some statements were paraphrased, which may have led to a loss of emotional nuance or cultural specificity in participant responses.

A third limitation concerns the generational scope of the study. The perspectives of a third generation were absent, as many grandparents either remained in rural areas or had passed away. Similarly, individuals under 18 were excluded, as they had not yet experienced significant livelihood transitions.

Furthermore, while the study included participants from diverse castes, religions, and age groups, some social categories were represented by only one or two families. This limited representation makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions about how these social identities influence livelihood decisions or migration aspirations. The same applies to gender, as women were underrepresented compared to men in the sample.

5.6 Recommendations for future research

Building on the findings and limitations of this study, several ideas for future research are recommended.

Future studies could include perspectives from family members who have stayed in rural areas, providing a more holistic understanding of intergenerational livelihood transitions and long-term family strategies households adapt across both rural and urban places. Additionally, given the clear gender-based differences in livelihood options, mobility aspirations and constraints, future research could explore the role of household dynamics, caregiving roles, and decision-making power in shaping migration opportunities for women. This could also include how emerging factors, such as social media, influence youth aspirations and perceptions of success abroad, potentially accelerating migration desires and brain drain.

Longitudinal research could explore how livelihood paths and migration decisions evolve over time, offering insights into the sustainability of specific adaptive strategies. It could also reveal the long-term outcomes of those who migrate, how their livelihoods change, how remittances change household dynamics, and whether aspirations are met. Comparative studies across other South Asian cities could help assess the generalizability of these findings and highlight context-specific dynamics.

Combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys, a mixed-methods approach could help identify patterns and correlations between social identities and livelihood strategies or

migration aspirations across a larger sample. This would allow for broader generalizations while retaining the depth of qualitative insights, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how structural constraints mediate mobility choices.

5.7 Policy recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations emerge that can inform strategies to promote social equity, enhance resilience, and support community-led adaptation in Kathmandu.

Access to education and training should be expanded, as education was a key aspiration across generations, yet often disrupted by poverty or caregiving responsibilities. The government should invest in affordable and flexible learning opportunities tailored to the needs of urban poor communities. In addition, housing and environmental insecurity must be addressed more systematically in urban planning. The government continues to threaten eviction without offering sustainable alternatives. Instead, efforts should prioritize upgrading flood-prone informal settlements, securing land tenure, and offering relocation support when necessary.

Improved social protection for informal workers is also critical, as many participants relied on informal employment without any safety net. Policymakers should extend basic protections, such as health insurance and worker rights, to those in unstable and high-risk roles.

Lastly, local economic opportunities must be expanded to reduce aspiration-driven migration. Many younger participants expressed a strong desire to migrate abroad due to the limited opportunities available in Kathmandu. This reflects a broader structural lack of employment. Urban policy should prioritize job creation, particularly for youth, to counteract brain drain and reduce the perception that opportunity only exists elsewhere.

5.8 Contribution to Development Studies

This study contributes to Development Studies by showing how structural inequalities, social norms, and intergenerational dynamics shape livelihood activities and non-migration decisions in urban informal settlements. It confirms frameworks like SLF, NELM and the Capability Approach and highlights the relationship between aspirations and agency. This calls for more context-specific approaches to understanding adaptation and mobility in vulnerable urban settings.

6. Conclusion

This research has addressed the following question: *How do intergenerational livelihood activities influence non-migration decisions in flood-prone areas of Kathmandu, and how do gender disparities shape these?* Drawing on 32 in-depth interviews conducted in the informal settlements of Thapathali and Sinamangal, along with one interview with an expert working for an NGO, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how residents navigate shifting livelihood activities and migration choices over time, while living in a precarious environment.

The findings demonstrate that intergenerational livelihood changes are deeply tied to broader structural and environmental pressures. Participants described how shifts in employment, from rural agricultural work to informal urban labour, have occurred largely out of necessity, driven by health issues, economic insecurity, disrupted education, urbanization, and social norms and expectations. In flood-prone settlements, these stressors are amplified by frequent flooding, which disrupts daily life but does not always lead to migration. Instead, floods increase vulnerability, particularly for those already lacking resources or secure tenure.

While floods intensify hardship, migration decisions remain shaped by a complex interplay of aspiration, capability, and social context. Many older residents migrated to Kathmandu from rural areas and remain in these settlements despite environmental risks. Their decisions to stay are shaped by affordability, social networks, access to jobs and services, and a lack of feasible alternatives. For them, returning to rural areas is not an option, and relocating within the city is financially unviable. Some express conditional aspirations to move, dependent on external support such as government relocation assistance.

In contrast, younger generations, who are often more educated and working in relatively stable jobs, are more likely to aspire to migrate, especially abroad, in search of improved livelihoods. Their aspirations are encouraged by their parents and shaped by exposure to social media, peer networks, and ideas of opportunity beyond Nepal. However, these aspirations are not always attainable due to limited financial capabilities. The findings reveal a gap between aspiration and actual opportunity that reflects the structural barriers many young people face, even when they have completed some level of education.

Non-migration includes both those who actively choose to stay and those constrained from leaving. For many, particularly older residents and married women, staying is influenced by caregiving responsibilities, financial limitations, and social norms that restrict mobility. Gender plays a central role: while young men are often encouraged or supported in their efforts to migrate, women’s mobility is more restricted by domestic expectations and household roles.

Despite these constraints, many younger participants expressed a desire to diverge from their parents' livelihoods, encouraged by their families and motivated by aspirations to avoid similar forms of precarity. This generational shift reflects a form of intergenerational learning, with education seen as a pathway to greater opportunity. However, even with higher education levels, many remain in informal work, such as taxi driving, which, while different from manual labour, still offers little long-term stability. Flood risks further complicate these aspirations, as recurring disasters damage property, increase economic vulnerability, and create a sense of uncertainty about the future.

This study contributes a grounded understanding of how intergenerational livelihood changes influence migration decisions in flood-prone urban settlements. While flooding was not a primary trigger for migration aspirations, it exacerbates existing insecurities and intersects with economic and social factors to influence decisions about staying or leaving. Livelihood strategies emerge not only from rational economic planning but also from a combination of inherited responsibilities, household strategies and aspirations, and cultural norms.

While these findings offer valuable insights into the specific context of Kathmandu's flood-prone informal settlements, caution is needed when generalizing to other settings. Differences in socio-economic conditions, governance structures, and environmental challenges mean migration dynamics may vary elsewhere. Nevertheless, the theoretical frameworks applied here provide useful lenses for understanding similar processes in comparable contexts. Future research in diverse environments will be essential to validate and expand these insights.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Operationalization table

Main concept	Definition	Sub-concept	Indicator	References
Livelihood activity	Livelihood activities are the means by which individuals fulfil the basic needs of flood, clothing, and shelter.	Type of occupation	Different types of jobs that people have had during their life.	(Chambers and Conway, 1992)
		Livelihood diversification	Engage in multiple occupations at the same time.	(Roy & Basu, 2020) (Scoones, 1998)
(Non-)migration aspiration	A desire to migrate to another place rather than stay.	Aspiration to migrate	Expressed desire to leave current location of living.	(Carling, 2014)
		Aspiration to stay	Expressed desire to remain in the current location.	
Intergenerational learning	Bi-directional learning that occurs between generations.	Knowledge transfer	Sharing of knowledge and adaptation strategies between generations.	(Chineka & Yasukawa, 2020) (Mallick & Hunter, 2024)
		Resilience	The ability of people to absorb shocks and regenerate after a disturbance,	(Foresight, 2011)

			because of previous disaster experiences.	
Intersectionality	This approach acknowledges that people hold multiple overlapping identities, which shape their experiences, needs and aspirations.	Age	Age group. Age-specific challenges, generational roles in decision-making.	(Rigon, 2022)
		Caste	Caste identification. Role of caste identity in livelihood opportunities and migration choices.	(Chandrasekhar & Mitra, 2019)
		Ethnicity	Ethnic identity. Experiences with discrimination and cultural practices in livelihood opportunities.	(Rigon, 2022)
Drivers of change in livelihood activities	Forces that influence shifts in the ways individuals or communities sustain their livelihoods.	Economic factor	Income levels and opportunities, increased living costs, access to credit, economic crisis, receiving remittances, political unrest.	(Scoones, 1998) (Foresight, 2011) (Bhandari, 2013) (Sharma & Pradhan, 2017)
		Natural hazard	Frequency of disasters, impacts	(Foresight, 2011)

			on livelihoods, time to rebuild livelihoods.	(Wang et al., 2021) (Le & Vo, 2021)
		Urbanization and job market changes	Rural-urban migration, housing affordability, proximity to workplace, change in employment sector, job availability.	(Haan et al., 2002) (Baral, 2019)
		Social and cultural factors	Barriers and opportunities linked to local customs, reliance on family support, responsibility towards family members.	(Foresight, 2011) (Yang, Feldman & Li, 2021) (Daskon & Binns, 2010)
		Education and skills	Number of schooling years, improvements in literacy level and their role in livelihood choices.	(Schütte, 2005) (Le & Vo, 2021) (Abera, Yirgu & Uncha, 2021)
		Health and well-being	Presence of diseases or health conditions impacting work ability, emotional and psychological well-being, social support network.	(Wang et al., 2021) (Rahman & Ahmad, 2018)

8.2 Appendix 2: Interview guide residents

Introduction

My name is Maura Verlinden, and I am a master's student in International Development Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. For my master's thesis, I am interested in learning about your life story.

Introduction to the Subject of the Thesis

My master's thesis focuses on how differences in livelihoods between generations influence (non-)migration decisions in Kathmandu. Specifically, I explore the varying livelihoods across generations, the lessons learned from previous generations, and how these factors impact decisions to stay in areas near the Bagmati River, despite the growing flood threats.

Interview Details

- The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.
- Participation in the interview is voluntary, and the interview is anonymous. There will be no compensation provided. You are free to stop the interview at any point if you wish.
- The interview will be recorded to ensure accurate processing of information. Only I will have access to the recording, and your consent will be recorded for proof.
- Before we begin, do you have any questions?
- Record oral consent.

Questions

1. Location and migration context
    - For how long have you been living here?
    - Where did you live before coming here?
    - Why did you move to this area?
    - What other places have you moved to in your life?
2. Livelihood activities

<u>Current job</u>

- What do you do for a living?
- What does your typical workday look like?
    - How far do you travel to work?
- For how long have you been doing this?
- Have you ever worked multiple jobs at once?
    - If yes, why?

<u>Family influence and future generations</u>

- What kind of work did your parents do for a living?

- What kind of work did your grandparents do for a living?
- Have you ever considered doing the same work as your parents or grandparents? Why or why not?
- What skills or knowledge have you learned from your parents about work?
- What is a valuable lesson that your parents taught you about work?
- Did you parents influence your job choice? How?
- Do you think your children will follow this path? Why or why not?
- What have/will you taught/teach your children about how to make a living?

Job history and livelihood activity changes

- Have you had other jobs before?
    - If yes, why did you change jobs?
    - What challenges made it difficult to continue in your previous job?
- What challenges do you face in your current job?
- Have you ever considered doing something else because of these challenges?
    - What stopped you from leaving?
- Can you tell me about a time when you struggled to make a living?
- Have you received family support to deal with work-related challenges? If so, what kind?
- Did your parents or elders help you adjust when your job or way of making a living changed?
- Have your parents taught you how to deal with these challenges?
    - If yes, what did you learn from them?

For those without a job:

- What is the reason you have never had a job?
- Have your parents influenced this decision?
- What challenges do you face in making a living?
    - How do you cope with these challenges?

3. Floods and education

Environmental and disaster preparedness

- How have floods affected your ability to work?
- Did your parents or elders teach you ways to deal with floods?
    - If yes, what did they teach you?
    - Did they learn this from their own experience with disasters?
    - Have you / will you teach your children this?

Education

- Have you had access to education?
    - If yes, what kind of education?
    - If yes, how has education helped you in your job?
- Do your children have access to education?
    - If yes, what kind of education?
    - If no, why not?

4. Migration
    - Have challenges in your life made you consider moving?
        - If yes, what challenges made you consider moving?
        - What prevented you from leaving?
    - (Participants who changed jobs): When you changed jobs, did you also think about moving to another place for work?
        - If yes, why?
        - If no, what made you stay despite the change?
    - Did the government provide this location to you?
5. Intersectionality
    - Which other family members also live in your house?
    - What is your age, and how has it influenced your job choices?
    - What is your caste?
        - How has your caste influenced your ability to find work or make a living?
        - How has this influenced your decision to migrate or stay?
    - What is your religion?
        - How has your religion influenced your way of making a living?

Thank participant for contributing to this research and sharing their knowledge. Ask if there is anything else that they would like to share on this topic.

8.3 Appendix 3: Interview guide expert

Introduction

My name is Maura Verlinden, and I am a master's student in International Development Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. For my master's thesis, I am interested in learning about the life stories of residents living in informal settlements of Kathmandu.

Introduction to the Subject of the Thesis

My master's thesis focuses on how differences in livelihoods between generations influence (non-)migration decisions in Kathmandu. Specifically, I explore the varying livelihoods across

generations, the lessons learned from previous generations, and how these factors impact decisions to stay in areas near the Bagmati River, despite the growing flood threats.

Interview Details

- The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.
- Participation in the interview is voluntary, and the interview is anonymous. There will be no compensation provided. You are free to stop the interview at any point if you wish.
- The interview will be recorded to ensure accurate processing of information. Only I will have access to the recording, and your consent will be recorded for proof.
- Before we begin, do you have any questions?
- Record oral consent.

Questions

1. Demographics and Migration Patterns

- Where do the people living in informal settlements come from? *(Geographically, caste)*
- What is the main reason why people move to informal settlements in Kathmandu?
- Do residents aspire to live somewhere else? If so, where and why?
- Do they have the financial and social means to move somewhere else?

2. Employment and Livelihoods

- Are there more job opportunities in Kathmandu compared to rural areas?
- What kind of jobs do people in the settlements typically have?
- What challenges do these people face when looking for work in Kathmandu?
- People in informal settlements often change their livelihoods—what are the main reasons for this?
- How do rising living costs in Kathmandu affect their ability to sustain themselves?

3. Migration and Economic Aspirations

- Do people who migrate abroad send money back home? If so, how does this affect their families?
- Why does the younger generation aspire to move abroad? What specific opportunities do they hope to find? How do they afford this?
- Do you think there are more job opportunities outside of Nepal?

4. Family and Social Influences

- Do parents in these communities influence their children's career and migration decisions? If so, in what ways?

5. Health and Environmental Challenges

- I noticed several people stopped working due to sickness. Are health issues common in these areas? Why?
- How do floods affect people's ability to work or make a living?

6. Support Systems and Solutions

- Do the government or NGOs provide any assistance when floods occur?
- What do you think should happen to improve the job prospects and living conditions for informal settlement residents?

8.4 Appendix 4: Oral consent form

Researcher: "This is Maura Verlinden, I am a *master student* at Utrecht *University*, today is … of 2025 and I am *conducting interviews* for my study *International Development*. Could you state your name please?"

Participant's answer: …

Researcher: "Do you confirm that you have sufficiently been informed about the study on intergenerational livelihood activities of the people in flood-prone areas of Kathmandu and that you had the opportunity to ask questions?

Participant's answer: …

Researcher: "Do you understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that you can stop at any time, even after the interview?"

Participant's answer: …

Researcher: "Do you give your permission for me to *interview you and audio record you*?"

Participant's answer: …

Researcher: "Do you give your permission for me to use the data I will be collecting from you for this study, for *my thesis*?"

Participant's answer: …

Researcher: "Do you consent to participate?"

Participant's answer:

8.5 Appendix 5: Code Tree