

**A Toolkit  
for**

**Unpacking Gender Dynamics of Migration in Rice-based Agricultural Systems in South Asia**

*Rohini Ram Mohan and Ranjitha Puskur  
International Rice Research Institute*

## **Background**

Studies exploring gender dynamics in migration have so far been wanting in methodological rigour. In the context of South Asia, mixed method studies continue to be few and lacking in interdisciplinary content. Prominent quantitative studies have dominated the assessment of gendered ‘impacts’ of migration in agricultural livelihoods, particularly that of male out-migration<sup>1</sup> (Paris et al 2005; Desai & Banerji 2008; Lokshin & Glinksya 2009; Singh et al. 2011; Maharjan et al 2012; Singh et al. 2014; Slavchevska et al. 2018), with the exceptions of a few qualitative studies (Gartaula et al. 2010; Datta & Mishra 2011; Tamang et al . 2014, Debnath & Selim 2009). Within these , most studies have been limited to themes of labour participation, distribution of household and farm roles, and household decision making dynamics in a few areas , highlighting a few mixed effects of migration. Despite the growing interest in the subject, there is an absence of conceptual clarity and innovative tools in framing gender , explaining and capturing the diversity of ways in which gender dynamics define experiences in migrant societies.

This toolkit was developed to support mixed methods research to explore how gender dynamics is constitutive of male migration, in the context of eastern India, in line with a conceptual framework developed to address the existing gaps in literature. Viewing migration as a prominent household livelihood trajectory, the scope of ‘gender dynamics’ explored in the toolkit and framework includes (i) Understanding of the power inequalities and the vulnerabilities that engender migration (ii) assets, capitals and resources that shape and are shaped by migration (iii) Habitus and (iv) Life cycle and interrelated trajectories.

### **Key concepts and definitions**

The tools encompass a broader view of ‘gender’, attempting to study the cause and consequences of migration by reflecting on the dynamics between men and women of different age and social groups. Each tool and a combination of elements within these tools are used to extract and delve on the four major aspects that are intrinsic to the discussion of gender dynamics in migration. The operational definition and the underlying are discussed here briefly.

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<sup>1</sup> In the past 15 years.

(i) *Understanding of the power inequalities and the vulnerabilities that engender and perpetuate migration*

Migration is viewed as a process embedded in a socially stratified context where hierarchies of class-status-power determine who, when and how people migrate. Social norms, caste and gender rules reinforce these hierarchies and determine what livelihoods can be pursued by men and women. Inability to expand livelihood portfolios or limited economic opportunities can drive out-migration in rural areas particularly when resources like land, livestock are tied to ethnic and caste and gender (status) identities. This is useful to contextualise out-migration and also assess whether out-migration impacts or reshapes class-status-power positions of migrant households and those who stay behind.

Livelihoods in rice farming areas have been shown to be highly susceptible to losses from climate hazards and households do not generate enough resources to cushion the impacts of these shocks (Duncan 2017). Migration emerges as a resilience trajectory in the light of these vulnerabilities for specific communities and socio economic groups. Vulnerabilities shape the nature of migration - short-term, long term, seasonal or marginal. Changes through migration and other outcomes of migration can also impact the extent of exposure to vulnerabilities and the resources of these households to manage these shocks. Vulnerabilities are both a driver and outcome of migration. Mapping vulnerabilities through the tools in this kit enables surveying all aspects historically, agro-ecological and politico-economic, that render pressure on vulnerable households to consider migration as a livelihood trajectory. The tools help understand and identify specific and common vulnerabilities, which households are exposed to and assess to what extent they directly or indirectly shape migrant trajectories of men and women.

(ii) *Assets, capitals and resources that shape and are shaped by migration*

'Capital' refers to something of value to one's livelihood which can be owned, mobilised, deployed or invested. 'Assets' more often are confined to something of value that is owned (collectively or individually) or has a legal status. 'Resources' refer to intangible and tangible things, including objects that one may be aware of but may not own (Van Dijk 2010). Migration (of men or women) can increase or decrease the CAR (Capital, Assets and Resources) owned, accessed or deployed. The toolkit enables the collection of information on both tangible and intangible assets and thus look closely at all forms of social, economic, human, natural and, physical capitals to enable a comprehensive understanding of how migration changes the dynamics of access and use of CARs and its implications for the gender dynamics within the households and communities.

(iii) *Habitus*

Habitus as an analytical construct draws from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu 1990). Habitus is identified as a generative structure of social action and thought, shaped by an individual's beliefs and worldviews, internalised through years of socialisation. It is largely determined by an intersection of social structure and overlapping attributes like age, gender, caste, class, political power. It, however, positions women and men neither as passive products of patriarchal structure nor as free agents. Scope for improvisation and innovation within the limits of the habitus

unravels possibilities of modifications to the existing patriarchal norms without completely challenging them. The tools in this kit help tease out the guidelines ('doxa') internalised by women and men in agricultural or rice-based systems and assess whether male out-migration provides room for innovation and bargain while acting on issues that are critical to their livelihoods. It also means assessing how far they can or cannot negotiate these terms, whether these negotiations have any implications on their access to CARs, or enhance their own self-perceptions, status or power to act upon situations within the limits of the patriarchal habitus. The qualitative components of the tool kit encompass elements that attempt to capture the shifting innovations and improvements in the habitus of men and women from different groups, if any. This includes assessing and comparing differences in household decision making dynamics and labour roles within migrant households and, between non-migrant and migrant households.

*(iv) Life cycle and interrelated trajectories*

An important analytical lens supported by this framework is that looking at migration as a trajectory instead of an intentional one-off strategy. This builds on livelihood theories that identified migration as an "Iterative process" - where goals, preferences, resources and means are constantly reassessed. Life course changes, like changing age status of family members, marriage, death or larger changes in the family living arrangements, can trigger migration and even shift migration patterns. The tools help open up a discussion on the migrant trajectories and other livelihood trajectories that are interconnected with the life cycle changes of other family members and their social positions.

Given the nature of elements and concepts of the framework, mixed method design was used and piloted. Key Informant Interviews were critical in obtaining information about the power relationships in the village and the overall migration patterns, and the agro-ecological and economic vulnerabilities that shape and reinforce migration conditions. The quantitative survey was used to gain understanding of critical objective components of the habitus including decision making, labour changes, asset ownership, and various capital assets and resources that shaped and are shaped by the migrant trajectories. To understand life cycle, interrelated trajectories of the household and norms, in-depth interviews were used. The components of the toolkit are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 Components of the ToolKit

<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
Household questionnaire survey	In-Depth Interview to capture household transitions and implications of migration
	Migrant Household Prototype tool - using Focus Group Discussion
	Village Profile Tool - using Key Informant Interview

The village profile tool was used and tested first. Followed by the quantitative study. Following the quantitative study, a potential sample list of candidates for In Depth interview and group discussions was selected randomly and were simultaneously conducted. With a larger time frame, researchers could also experiment with doing a short qualitative scoping study to better the context terms and scenarios of the region better to frame sharper questions for the survey. Consent forms in Hindi were signed by respondents and copies were provided of the same when requested.

While testing the toolkit, some advantages and limitations of the tools were observed. Based on this, some recommendations for refinement in the tool or its use have also been suggested.

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## *Quantitative Component*

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**Household Questionnaire Survey:** A survey comprising of nine sections was administered to gather quantitative information that would yield itself to both analytical and descriptive analysis. This includes sections on the household demographics, migration incidence, remittances, labour use (before and current -for migration households), time allocation (9 key farm activities), resource access and control, financial services, access to credit, advisory services, participation in training and social groups, decision making authority (for 21 decision areas), farming systems, cropping systems and household food security and food consumption. The survey tool is designed to be administered to both genders, however, the information from the male counterparts is restricted to select sections of the questionnaire. Moreover, nuclear migrant households may not have male members during the time of the interview, in which case the study may reassess the feasibility of collecting data from male respondents. Retrospective components of 'before and after migration' based on recall are added to substitute for a longitudinal research design. If the study provides scope for longitudinal data collection, then it must be chosen as a preferred mode.

**Sampling technique:** A randomised sampling technique is highly recommended. The survey could yield best results when it covers a range of agro-ecological regions with notably high levels of migration. Attempts must be made to ensure an equal representation of migrant and non-migrant households in the sample. To yield the best results, choosing a sample from an updated village household list or recent census is highly recommended. However, given the dynamic nature of migration this may be challenging in several contexts. Alternatively, investing resources in preparing village household lists and then sampling maybe a key consideration for successful randomisation.

### **Good Practices**

- The quantitative tool was uniquely designed to obtain observations both on cross-sectional and retrospective perspectives of women respondents in male migrant households on decision making authority and labour and time use before and after migration of members. This allows for comparison between migrant and non-migrant households and additionally captures perceptions of changes within the household over the history of the household.
- The tool included a comprehensive set of indicators on assets (including ownership, sale and access) and also allowed for choices of husband dominated / wife dominated decisions when respondents cited that both spouses owned assets jointly. Moreover, multiple choices were allowed to accommodate multiple users /owners in case of assets.
- The tool was designed for both male and female to be interviewed, allowing for inputs from both genders.
- The study was not limited to merely examining spousal dynamics, but gender dynamics in the whole household. As a result, women from various age groups participated as primary respondents providing perspectives on the dynamics with a set of household members (including husband , inlaws, sons/ daughters, grandchildren).

### **Limitations observed on the field**

- While there were some households where male members had not migrated in the recent past, qualitative studies revealed that they may have a history of migration dating back a few years while still identifying as non-migrant households. The categorisation of migrant/ non-migrant may need to be qualified with this observation.
- The most challenging issue, where we piloted the tools, was to find male counterparts in the household. Over 40% of the sample were nuclear families with no male member available to answer. Even within joint family households, tracking or waiting for the male members to return was delaying the survey and seemed largely impractical. So, in our case, given the cost and time implications and the social context, responses from men were not mandatorily recorded for households.
- The timing of the survey should ensure it does not clash with any major social activity and events including major local festivals or farming activities like sowing, harvesting and post-harvest activities.
- Use of phone-based data collection may hold additional challenges for the survey administration, given the complex and interlinked coding and the length of the survey.

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## *Qualitative Components*

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**Village profile tool:** A Key Informant Interview in each village was conducted to profile the socio-economic context, the broad cultural and gender dynamics within the community. The tool provides a useful means to discuss the hierarchies in asset ownership, resources access and inequalities in the distribution of livelihood opportunities among different social groups. The tool captures information on agricultural changes, crops cultivated, climate stressors and shocks experienced, shifts in wages, opportunities for men and women of different age groups over a span of 5 years providing opportunities to evaluate the historical context of migration. These profiles bring out the underlying vulnerabilities and inequalities that shape migration patterns in the locality. Key informants can be local elected representatives or village elders or teachers, but need not be limited to them.

**In-Depth Interview:** The In-depth interview schedule (IDI) is devised to capture transitions and implications of migration in specific rice producing households. The tool discusses changes in women's work, mobility, family responsibilities among others in detail to complement an understanding of the data points in the survey and delve into the processes key to the transitions and implications. The IDI is administered primarily to female respondents, and can be extended to a male household member of any age (above the age of 18). The IDI is also devised to be administered to non-migrant households to capture their perspectives on the implications of migration on their society.

While there is no fixed number of recommended interviews, ideally the sample size should represent women from different age and social groups.

**Migrant Household Prototype tool:** This is an interactive visual discussion tool to capture and identify changes in power relations typically in a household or community. The tool builds on examining how migration changes positions of members in the household vis-à-vis others, and how they manage their new roles, responsibilities and power. The tool is useful in gathering information about typical migration patterns, characteristics of the migrant, common patterns of shifting gender dynamics in migrant households by enabling a discussion on changing roles, decision-making influence (going beyond the decision-making authority questions in the survey tool) of members. It also yields information on the influence of life cycle events on migration, and how households respond to migration. When conducted in a homogenous (age and social) group, the tool helps construct a general idea of changes that occur in a typical migrant household. However, depending on age status and living arrangement, responses around the shifts may be heterogeneous, contradictory and building consensus on a typical household dynamics can be difficult. It is important, however, to note the conflicts and the variation. If these reported variations are large, it is suggested that the interactive profiling tool is combined with the IDI to create specific understanding of changing dynamics from the vantage of women in different age groups. This exercise also helps create 'types' or 'typologies' of migrant households based on their experiences and heterogeneous arrangements.

The ideal sampling plan for the group discussion is to have 5-6 women in a group but not more than 8 participants. If caste norms and spatial segregation is strong a more homogenous group of same caste group and age group can be selected.

Separate FGD for male members (mixed, migrant and non-migrant) depending on their availability, mixed FGDs are only suggested where gender norms are not rigid.

A suggested form of administering the tool is to hold discussions with two groups in each village, one with each age group or cluster and one addition with male members

### **Good Practices**

- The migrant household prototype tool was designed to facilitate discussions in a group on general experiences of a typical migrant household and used a set of visual aids to help the respondents and the interviewers engage in a deeper discussion on the power relations in the household and how they are affected by migration. The interactive element drew the attention of
- The IDIs were also a resource for delving into the life cycle of households, gender norms and individual circumstances that drove migration in different households. This resulted in some rich discussions particularly on decision making.
- In-depth interviews were very useful in unpacking local terms and how opinions expressed by the respondents were justified and, what values and norms they wished to project.

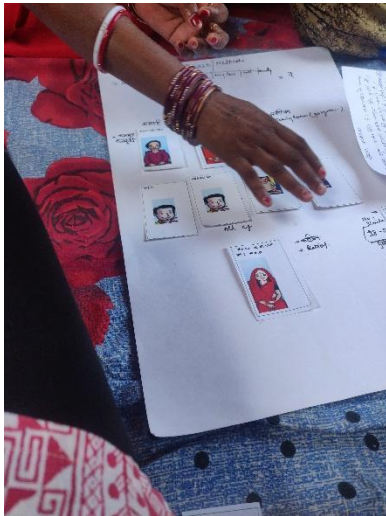
### **Limitations**

- The Prototype tool was seen to be less effective in a group setting. Women of different age groups had different perspectives on how the household was structured and there was difficulty in building a consensus on the household shifts etc. A few women raised that '*Hum apni hi baat bata sakte hai*' (we can only give the story of our household), which made it difficult to be administered during a group discussion with women of different age groups. There were no typical migrant households per se, each household cited unique circumstances depending on the family structure, changes due to death and illness of members etc. The use of the tool was, therefore, left optional and was facilitated by the interviewer depending on the comfort levels of respondents.
- Women (particularly young women) were uncomfortable sharing details of their 'private life', during group discussions. This could be due to the low levels of education, poor exposure and reservations about discussing household matters in front of other '*tola*' (community) members. Younger women also appeared to be reserved about discussing their private lives in a group where older women chided their responses and as such dominated the discussions.
- Women from Upper castes refused to participate in group discussions despite reaching out a few times. Caste norms were very strong in most villages.
- Women's low literacy levels and strong use of local dialects remained a challenge for the interviewers.
- While the Prototyping tool was made relatable, women even in individual interviews, appeared to prefer discussing it directly or verbally, as opposed to

interactively arranging the cards and material themselves due to time constraints as they preferred to be doing other work on the sides along with the interviews (Pictures 1 & 2 capture a respondent's version of placing the cards and the notes there in) .

- IDIs were extended to other household members if they were available. In some households, this enabled us to interview spouses, to get their perspectives on the changes. This however depended on availability of these members.

**Picture 1: A respondent using the tool during in-depth interview in Darbhanga**



**Picture 2 : The tool capturing before and after and notes from the discussion**





## *Recommendations for changes in the tool and administration process*

### **Administration of the tool**

- Prototyping tool when used in a group can be administered to sets / groups of women belonging to similar age and caste, given that the perspective varies largely by age and caste. This is useful in circumstances where age based gender norms are strong and hierarchies limit participants from openly discussing household dynamics.
- The prototype tool can also be used as a family interview tool, to facilitate discussion and representation of different relationships visually where different family members participate and construct the 'before and after' scenarios. This would help understand how similar or different their views are on power relationships and gender roles and whose version is finally put forward.

- Doing a preliminary qualitative analysis before quantitative survey will help narrow down key local terms, such as household head (called guardian for instance instead of a direct translation- *mukhiya*), migrant (there may be a local term for it). This is also useful for planning data collection activities and assessing social norms and customs that might impede group discussions (with multiple communities together).
- Make sure to get female interviewers and enumerators who are well versed with the local dialect. This may be a key challenge, particularly in a context where literacy levels are low.

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