

## **Migration strategies and the role of remittances in rural Kyrgyzstan**

### **The state of migration in Kyrgyzstan**

In 2013, three percent of the world's population or - in other words around 232 million - people lived outside of their homeland (United Nations 2013). Although Central Asia contributes only a small fraction to the world's total migrant population, migration as a livelihood strategy plays an even more crucial role in this region. Kyrgyzstan is a demonstrative example from the region.

Today, in Kyrgyzstan, migration and remittances are essential features of income diversification and function as an insurance to protect people from income shocks, such as unemployment or crop failure. Contemporary migratory currents in Kyrgyzstan can be interpreted as a response to the economic downturn in the initial years of the independence in 1991 (Isabaeva 2011: 542). The radical reforms after the independence were accompanied by rising poverty due to unemployment and a decline in agricultural and industrial output. When it became clear that the economy of Kyrgyzstan only improved slightly and the deteriorating living conditions still remained at the end of the 1990s, migration among the Kyrgyz' population to Russia and Kazakhstan gained momentum. Especially in rural areas, the population reacted to unemployment and the inability to provide for family and community needs with mass migration, both internal and international. Although the real number of migrants is difficult to ascertain, statistics state that more than 15,700 Kyrgyz people emigrated in 1998. Since then migration increased annually; in 2007 the number of emigrants has more than tripled. Official sources suggest that between 2004 and 2008 more than 800,000 Kyrgyz people left Kyrgyzstan for Russia or Kazakhstan (International Crisis Group 2010).

In light of this development the present paper analyses migration processes and the role of remittances for rural livelihood strategies in southern Kyrgyzstan. To explore present labour migration a survey was conducted in Gumkhana, Jaradar and Bel Terek - three settlements in the Bazar Korgon *Rayon*. The objective of the research was to analyse types and means of recent labour migration phenomena as well as the socio-economic impacts of remittances.

The recent appearance and growing dimension of labour migration in Kyrgyzstan has been widely discussed in literature (Thieme 2008, 2012, Schmidt & Sagynbekova 2008; Rohner 2007 etc.). In the current debate on migration and remittances, the focus was often on direct economic consequences for individuals and for specific regions. Our research however tries to shed light on social networks contributing to migration and socio-economic consequences of migration and remittances for families, households and communities in the research area. For this purpose we have been guided by the scientific approach called the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), which gives priority to families and households as units of analysis rather than individual migrants. Additionally, we focused on network analysis approaches which emphasis on social emigration networks

that significantly contribute to increasing migration processes in rural areas (Haug 2000: 16).

The first section of this paper gives an outline of the theoretical framework and hypotheses underlying the case study. The following section is the empirical part, which focuses on the one hand on migration networks and their contribution to migration processes. On the other hand, an analysis of investment strategies on the basis of remittances provides insights into economic and social impacts for the local population in the research area. The following discussion section debates main findings of the research, the meaning of migration for the Bazar Korgon *Rayon* and raises new issues for upcoming case studies concerning migration in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. The final section contains the conclusion and an outlook for the future.

To gain deeper insights into migration processes, ten semi-structured qualitative interviews have been conducted in the villages. The thematic priority of the survey was set on biographical details and personal experiences of the interviewed. Additionally, 123 quantitative interviews have been carried out - 73 in Gumkhana, 25 in Jaradar and 25 in Bel Terek. To illustrate the impact of remittances on the village landscape, we used the gathered quantitative data to create maps, which show house building- and renovation activities financed by remittances.

### **Recent migration theories**

As a response to neoclassical microeconomic views on migration, the NELM emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Haug 2000: 6). The approach, further developed by Taylor (1999), renewed the academic thinking on migration by placing the behaviour of individual migrants within a wider societal context. It considers the household - rather than the individual - as the most appropriate decision-making unit concerning migration issues. The approach sees migration decisions as a part of family strategies to raise income, obtain funds to invest in new activities and insure against income and production risks (Taylor 1999: 64-65). Former migration theories seemed to be too rigid and determinist to deal with the complex realities of migration, since they viewed migrants in isolation from family and community contexts. Moreover, up to that time most migration impact studies dealt with direct economic effects for the individual migrant. NELM, however, focuses not only on broader family and community contexts but also on indirect impacts of migration on non-migrant sending or non-remittances receiving households in a region characterised by migration processes (de Haas 2008: 6, Taylor 1999: 65).

Besides the NELM approach which offers a profound view on migration by linking causes and consequences of migration with each other (de Haas 2008: 6; Haug 2000: 7), we applied the network approach, since it might assist in explaining why international labour migration increased heavily in the past 25 years in southern Kyrgyzstan. Social networks and kin relations play an important role regarding international migration and chain migration procedures (Haug 2000: 19). People, who take permanently or temporarily migration into consideration often make use of prevailing social contacts, which provide assistance to put that idea into practice. The entire set of social connections with migration-relevant knowledge constitutes the migrant's social network or the migrant

network. Social networks can be comprised of family members, friends and acquaintances as well as of contacts to persons working in organizations or just useful strangers. Networks often characterise essentially the modalities of migration such as the destination, the chosen route, the duration, the practiced profession as well as living conditions at the destination and adjustment methods in the new environment (Elick 2008: 1).

Based on the theoretical background we hypothesize: 1) Migration and remittances are essential characteristics for households in order to secure basic needs for short term consumption (e.g. food and clothes) and long term investments such as houses or education. They might be moreover useful to stimulate developments in the communities and can have also positive effects for non-migrant households. 2) Social networks play an important role in facilitating and animating migration processes. Moreover the perception of successful migrant returnees is an important feature of increasing migration processes in the research area. 3) Migration is also connected with social consequences since it contributes significantly to changing gender - age structures in the research area.

### **Patterns of migration in the district of Bazar Korgon and their socio-economic impacts**

Migration in the 'walnut-fruit forest region' in the Bazar Korgon District has become something like a norm. For many households it is a livelihood strategy which helps to meet immediate needs and also to accumulate capital for future projects. In Gumkhana - the biggest of the three surveyed villages with approximately 1,940 inhabitants and 474 households (Kyrgyz Republic 2013) - 67 % of the sampled households have or had labour migrants abroad. In Bel Terek with 1,170 inhabitants and 233 households (ibid.) 84 % of the questioned households utilised or still use migration as a livelihood strategy. In Jaradar - the smallest of the three surveyed settlements with 590 inhabitants and 126 households (ibid.) - 86 % of all interviewed households have or had migrants abroad.

Migration processes as a widespread phenomenon started in the research area in the early years of 2000. After the first migrants returned home successfully, others got motivated to migrate. By evaluating quantitative data it appears that especially during the years 2005 and 2009 the number of migrants increased significantly.

Almost all interviewed households are dependent on walnut business (84 % in Jaradar, 97 % in Gumkhana and 100 % in Bel Terek) to sustain their livelihoods. Other important income resources are the selling of vegetables on local markets and the receipt of a pension. It is important to note that most households are traditional multi-generational-households, in which grandparents live together with married children and grandchildren and hence contribute their pensions to the household's income (Isabaeva 2011: 547). Main employment fields in the three surveyed villages are taxi- and private businesses such as the selling of groceries in small shops. A minority mentioned formal employment at the lokal forestry enterprises - the *leskhozy*, the village administration and local schools. Qualitative interviews revealed that the lack of job opportunities, low salaries and insufficient income from agriculture are the main reasons for migration.

Although large differences in levels of education (university degree, 11th grade, 8th grade) exist among the interviewed migrants, all mentioned that finding a regular employment is almost impossible. Abroad they hope to find a job, with which they can improve their material situation. Other push factors are the deteriorating living conditions in the villages, debts due to a bad harvest and insufficient educational facilities.

### ***Migration patterns determined by migrant networks***

To implement migration plans, migrant networks are of special importance. Especially less qualified migrants are dependent on this kind of assistance. Particularly during the first stage of migration social networks are extremely helpful and contribute to the “triggering of chain migration” and thereby “perpetuating migration flows” (Elrick 2008: 1-2).

In the research area, the majority of labour migrants decided in favour of external migration destinations, whereas only a small number choose migration within Kyrgyzstan. 90 % of the interviewed migrants stated that the Russian cities Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, and Krasnoyarsk are the most popular destinations. Further, but less often mentioned are the cities Ekaterinburg, Yakutsk and Tomsk. For a little number of migrants the neighbouring country Kazakhstan especially the city Almaty, is also an optional destination. When asked why these cities were chosen, almost all interviewees mentioned better job opportunities and higher salaries compared to Kyrgyzstan. Others also indicated the presence of relatives or acquaintances in the target region as reasons for migration. In many cases the availability of useful contacts and also the success stories of former migrants influence the decision-process in favour of migration to these destinations (Schmidt & Sagynbekova 2008: 119). The networks between the sending communities and destinations support would-be migrants with assistance and information about cheapest travel options, where to find reasonable priced accommodation or available jobs at the target destination.

In almost half of the cases, family members or close relatives who are already living in the destination region, provided interim financial aid until the newly arrived migrant get his or her first wage. This support in the early days of the mobility notable reduces costs and risks of migration (Haug 2000: 20). Others, who had no contacts abroad told that they had to sell their livestock or take credit from relatives in Kyrgyzstan to finance the migration process.

Compared to the past, more and more migrants choose to travel by plane than by train, due to the much shorter duration of the journey and cheaper ticket prices. Interviewees reported that the journey from Bishkek to Moscow by train lasts more than four days and a one way ticket costs around 12,000 KGS (ca. 160 €). The trip by plane lasts less than four hours and a ticket from Bishkek to Moscow and back costs approximately the same.

### ***Working and living conditions abroad***

The majority of the migrants (81 %) in the surveyed households worked only temporarily abroad: surveyed migrants spent on average three years abroad. Some also reported that they returned after a few weeks due to bad luck. For migrants who are working abroad, the duration of the stay is not fixed a priori. The duration of the stay is usually dependent

on successful job-hunting and on reasonable living conditions at the place. In three cases of the survey, the entire household migrated permanently to Russia.

Some of the interviewed migrants expressed their wish to migrate again, although they complained about the tough living conditions in Russia at the same time. Especially young people feel attracted to the large Russian cities and are interested in repeating their migration.

Almost all (98 %) of the interviewees declared, that they only found jobs in the low-paid labour market and worked for instance as waiter/waitress, construction worker, factory worker, sweeper, porter or housemaid. Those who went to Kazakhstan stated they often found jobs on the textile markets in Almaty.

Due to the low-income, typically associated with such work, migrants are often forced to live together with other migrants in shared flats. Informants explained that it is not unusual to live with up to eight persons in a two-room flat. They accept these hard living conditions since this is often the only way to save some money, which will be sent home later on.

Labour migrants, who worked in Russia, reported about occasional harassments by Russian policemen and other office bearers. Many migrants do not possess an employment permit and hence reside illegally in Russia (Schmidt 2006: 31). With the assistance of their social networks, migrants are able to buy forged documents, which is generally known by the official authorities. Some reported about corrupt policemen, who threatened migrants to pay a certain amount of money so that they can further stay illegally in Russia.

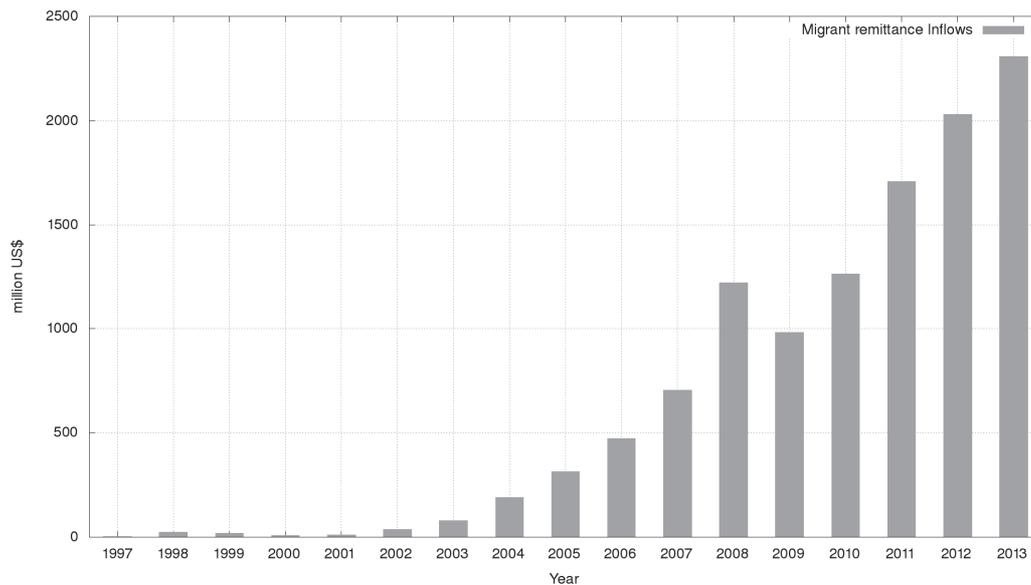
Three former male migrants narrated their experiences of racism in Moscow and Novosibirsk. According to their reports, on a certain day in the year, a racist organization called “White Wolves” marches through the cities and acts aggressively towards migrants, especially towards migrants from Central Asia. The interviewees stated that they avoided the metro or public taxis in Moscow. They always tried to ride with friends in their cars, since they had perpetual fears of being attacked or offended, especially by young male Russians<sup>1</sup>. Due to that recent development in Russian cities people told that internal migration within Kyrgyzstan is taken more and more into account.

### ***Economic impacts***

The economic impacts of migration are significant for Kyrgyzstan: in 2013 Kyrgyz migrants transferred more than US\$ 2.3 billion to the country, which constituted 31.4 % of Kyrgyzstan’s GDP in 2013 (World Bank 2013). In 2009, a decrease of remittance inflows could be observed. This is mostly due to the global economic crisis by which Russia was heavily affected (Marat 2007: 41). Since 2009 the remittance flows to Kyrgyzstan increased again annually (Fig. 8.1). Moreover these numbers are expected to be higher, since many remittances are sent through informal channels. Hence, the actual importance of remittance is even greater than official figures show (de Haas 2008: 9).

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<sup>1</sup> A Russian NGO based in Moscow reports that the number of killings in 2008 motivated by racial hatred doubled in 2008, reaching 113 dead and 340 wounded migrants (*The Economist*, 15 January 2009). Marat (2009) sees reasons for this development in Russia in declining population numbers and increasing migration inflows - not only from Central Asian countries (Marat 2009: 21-22)



**Fig. 8.1: Remittance inflows in Kyrgyzstan**

Draft: Atam & Göpel 2014, based on data of World Bank 2013

Apart from the financial aspect, not only remittances, but also knowledge, ideas, material goods and skills flow back to the sending communities (Isabeava 2011: 543).

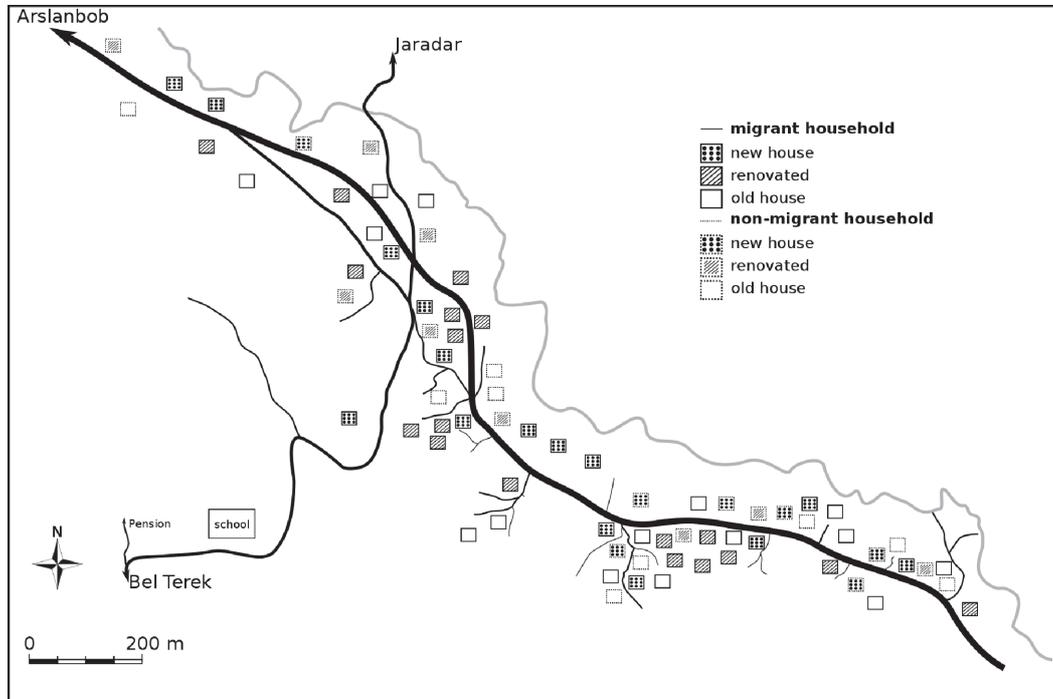
Nonetheless, those interviewed affirmed that the transfer of remittances is the most important benefit of migration for them. In the literature remittances were also acknowledged as more stable, reliable and less-volatile compared with other types of financial inflows such as foreign direct investments (Marat 2009: 40, de Haas 2008: 8).

In all three surveyed villages more than 67 % of the interviewed households with migrants abroad told that they received remittances at least once. Most households confirmed they receive remittances on a regular basis. Out of concrete answers concerning the amount of remittances it was possible to get an idea of average sums, which were sent back monthly to households: In Gumkhana and Bel Terek the average amount of remittances is around 11,000 KGS per month (ca. 146 €). In Jaradar the remittances are not as high namely around 7,700 KGS per month (ca. 102 €). These differences are mostly due to the fact, that in Jaradar some of the interview partners explained they had difficulties in finding a job abroad or had to change their employers several times.

### *Investments based on remittances*

The investments of remittances differ: All interviewed remittances receiving households told, that they use either parts or the whole sum of the sent money for consumption purposes such as food and clothes. Apart from this, it is obvious that many households invest a share of the received money in construction or renovation works of houses in the research area. From a walk through the villages it is already visible to the unaided eye that many houses are of recent date or have been renovated lately. The renovated houses often have new roofs and gates or were repainted. As the quantitative survey shows, most house building and renovating activities in the research area started in the years between 2008 and 2010. This is around three years after the aforementioned rise in migration activities in the research area began. Many migrants returned home and invested their earned

money directly in construction or renovation activities. Others managed to establish themselves on the job markets abroad and hence were able to send back remittances - which have been used for that purpose - on a regular basis. In Gumkhana 66 % of the sampled migrants households were renovated or newly built with the help of remittances (Fig. 8.2). In Jaradar it is 40 % and in Bel Terek even 72 % (Fig. 8.3 and 8.4).



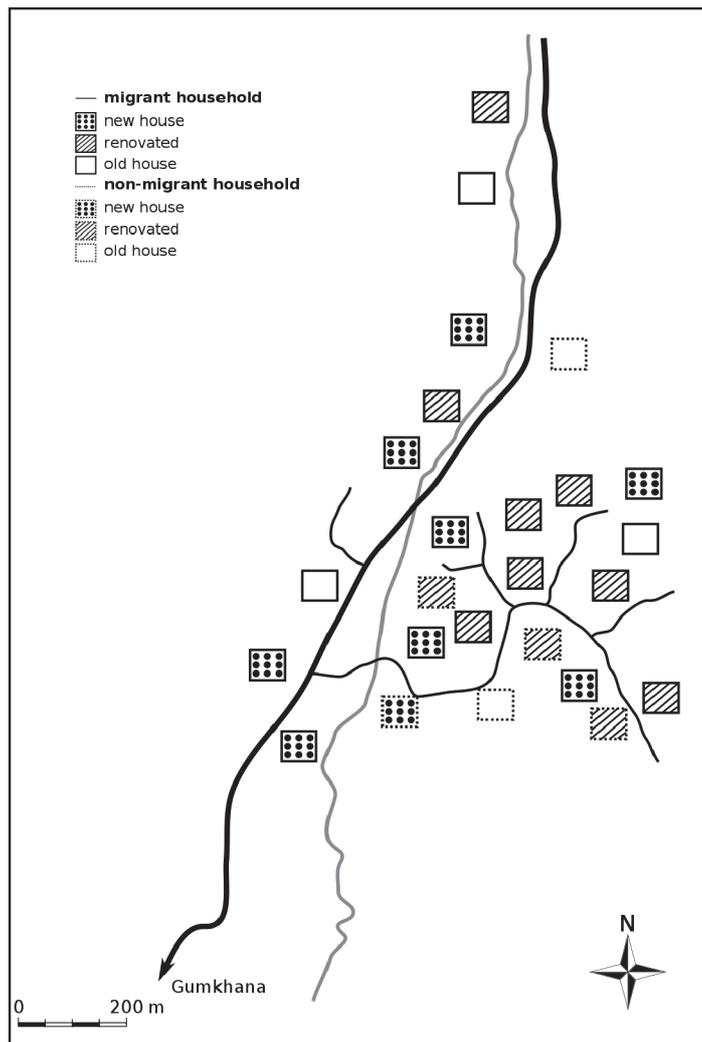
**Fig. 8.2: Gumkhana: Distribution of sampled migrant and non-migrant households with corresponding house building and renovation activities**

Draft: Atam & Göpel 2014

On the other hand investments in private businesses occur rarely. The survey revealed that only two out of six grocery shops in Gumkhana were financed with the help of remittances, although five out of six shop owners confirmed that there are migrants in the households. Three migrants told that they used their investment to buy a car which is used to provide taxi services from time to time.

This investment behaviour which focuses on spending for consumption and essential goods had also been recognised in several other migration impact studies (for instance de Haas 2003). It is therefore not surprising that the most common reason for scepticism on migration is the widespread belief that migrants rarely invest their money productively for example in private enterprises, but instead spend it on consumption and non-productive investments such as houses (de Haas 2008: 14).

However, remittances and the perceived non-productive investments can also have significant impacts on non-migrants households (Taylor 1999: 65; de Haas 2008: 16). Some interview partners mentioned that more house construction jobs have been offered recently in the research area. Hence, consumptive and house building expenses can have positive effects for the communities by providing non-migrants with labour and income.

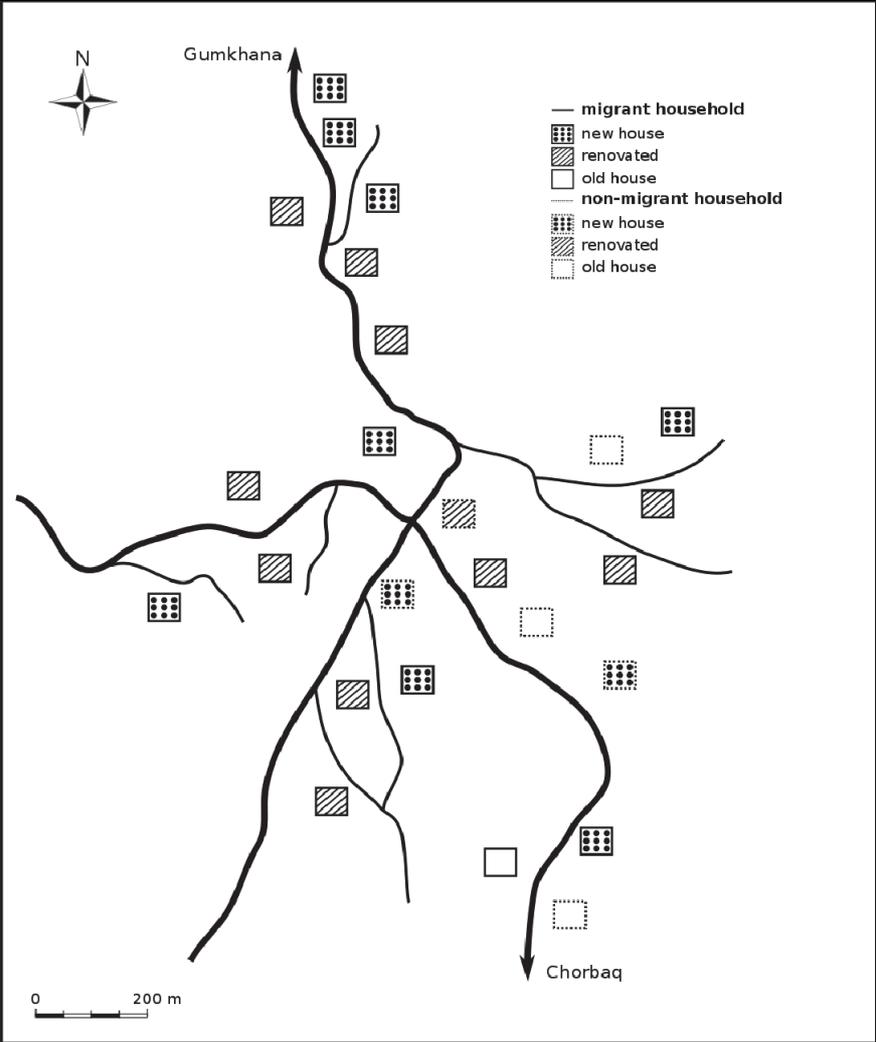


**Fig. 8.3: Jaradar: Distribution of sampled migrant and non-migrant households with corresponding house building and renovation activities**

Draft: Atam & Göpel 2014

Apart from consumption purposes, other mentioned investments are cars, livestock, savings for the family and education as well as spending on lifecycle events like weddings or funerals. Schoch et al. revealed in their research on coherences between livestock and migration in Kyrgyzstan, that livestock has significantly increased with growing migration processes in the region (2010: 216). In our survey at least one third of those interviewed migrants confirmed they already invested or will soon invest in livestock in order to diversify income resources and to provide a safety net for a later retirement. It was also mentioned that livestock is alongside houses and cars a sign of successful migration and still remains as a symbol of wealth. Additionally, it represents stability and Kyrgyz tradition and hence strengthens the relation between the individual and his home (ibid.: 215). However, negative effects of increasing livestock amounts in the communities are signs of severe overuse of pastures nearby the villages and the summer pastures as well as challenges in the pasture management.

Nearly no investments have been made to promote community development in the three settlements. Only in Jaradar there was an initiative of the population to renew the road, which had been destroyed due to heavy rains. This project was realised partly on the basis of remittances. Moreover one inhabitant told that there is a plan to build a school in Jaradar. People are willing to support this idea financially, but only if the government brings the project forward. The state is still seen as the main provider of infrastructure and services and is therefore hold responsible to realise such projects. Remittances are mostly used to cover private needs.



**Fig. 8.4: Bel Terek: Distribution of sampled migrant and non-migrant households with corresponding house building and renovation activities**

Draft: Atam & Göpel 2014

**Social Impacts**

Besides economic impacts of migration, social and everyday effects on the sending communities were of particular interest of the research: Although some interviewed argue welfare and living conditions increased in the villages due to migration processes, many expressed criticism on changing social structures in the communities.

### *Changing age structures*

One important feature is the changing profile of the villages. The mobility involves in most cases only parts of the family. The reason behind this selective migration is mostly due to social embedded patterns and power imbalances related to gender and age (Thieme 2008: 327).

The survey revealed that people aged between 20 and 45 years migrate most commonly. Informants reported that only the youngest and people older than 50 years remain in the villages. Many interviewed people hold migration accountable for this trend. Changing age structures and depriving valuable human resources were frequently used arguments against migration. Most of all mentioned was the fact that labour migrants usually live abroad without their families, which causes deteriorating family relations. “Irregular migration regimes” (Thieme 2012: 12) make it for instance hard for parents to stay in contact with their children, who were often left behind in the villages. Many interviewed told that these parentless children are one major disadvantage of migration in the research area. Children in the age from two to seven years live together with their grandparents, when both parents are working abroad. It is not unusual that children at the age of seven or eight stay alone in their parents’ house and were supervised from time to time by grandparents or neighbours. It is not surprising that education and nurture of the children suffer from this insufficient care. Although it is not a new phenomenon that the youngest grew up in Kyrgyzstan with their grandparents, while the parents are busy working or studying, the grandparents are often over-challenged and not capable to prevail over the youth (Isabaeva 2011: 547; Schoch et al. 2010: 55).

Although especially young migrants stated that they would go back to Russia or Kazakhstan if it is necessary, the study revealed that most migrants return home to their communities. Nonetheless some informants told that they tend to build new houses in urban centres of Kyrgyzstan like Bishkek, Osh and Jalal-Abad. It is getting more common that young returning migrants take their left behind children and spouses with them and situate their future prospects in urban areas of Kyrgyzstan. Reasons for this behaviour are prevailing poorer economic opportunities in the countryside and a lack of service and infrastructure especially concerning education facilities. Some returned migrants told they want to live in urban areas in their new homes until retirement and then return to their places of origin.

### *Impacts on education*

Positive impacts of remittances on the children’s education are often emphasised, since they enable children to attend school. Expenses on the education of children count as long term investments and as an income assurance strategy for households and families (de Haas 2008: 23). In the research area more than half of the interviewed migrants’ households affirmed that they save money for the education of the children in the family. On the other, hand there is evidence that migration also creates negative incentives for education: Being inspired by success stories of returning migrants most graduates wanted to start migration immediately after finishing school and do not think about other possibilities like attending university. Furthermore, young people tend to drop out of school because their motivation is diluted, with the greatest effort directed towards moving abroad. A disappointed school teacher explained that once parents start sending

money home or children get the possibility to visit their parents abroad, they become spoiled and tend not to care anymore about family, home or their education.

### *Gender Aspects*

In around 60 % of the cases young men migrated alone or together with other male migrants, leaving their wives and children behind. Some interviewees told that in recent years the amount of migrating women increased in the research area.<sup>2</sup> In Gumkhana, the share of migrating women is the highest with 32 %. This trend is mostly due to the fact that women are also expected to support their families in any possible financial way. Especially for younger men who remain at home while their wives are working abroad it is challenging to accept that they are no longer the main provider of the household's income. During the research we came across two cases of divorced women who had no other alternatives but to go abroad and work as labour migrants to meet the needs of their children. A father of a recently divorced woman explained that he and his wife take care of their daughter's children while she is working in Russia in order to earn enough money to build a house of her own.

Despite this recent development, changing gender structures in the three villages are undeniable, because women predominantly characterise the daily scenes on the streets of Gumkhana, Jaradar and Bel Terek. The lives of the wives change drastically when the husband leaves the household, since they have to carry the entire workload at home. If men don't return for harvest, women have to take on additional agricultural work. Being responsible for health and childcare in the households, women are moreover heavily depending on remittances of their husbands (Schmidt & Sagynbekova 2008: 121, Thieme 2008: 335). Although women told, they were gaining more influence over the use of their husband's earnings and child rearing, they do not necessarily like the sudden increase in responsibilities and tasks which were not theirs within the normative contexts of traditional societies in Kyrgyzstan.

Another problem, which had been told quite often, is that men sometimes marry new wives when they migrate to Russia or Kazakhstan. The wife back home in Kyrgyzstan is still financially dependent, waiting for remittances and moreover often has to deal with loans which were for example taken to pay the ticket for the departure of the husband. Therefore, it is not surprising that five to ten percent of the migrants in the research area are couples. Thieme (2008) argues women want to join their husbands being out of concern that their husbands might fancy alcohol or get married a second time abroad (Thieme 2008: 333).

### **The meaning of migration for the Bazar Korgon Rayon**

The phenomenon of migration is full of ambivalences and contradictions, since it is simultaneously celebrated and criticised by the informants in the research area.

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, in Arslanbob, where 2008 a research on migration strategies has been conducted (see Schmidt & Sagynbekova 2008), women migrate significantly much less than men. One informant told that this is due to the fact that more Uzbeks live in Arslanbob. The informant explained Uzbeks are perceived as being more concerned about traditional (gender) structures than Kyrgyz people, who constitute the majority of the population in the villages nearby such as Gumkhana, Jaradar and Bel Terek.

It could be observed that people, who are in contact with former or current migrants, consider migration rather positive and as a possible option to diversify the household's income than others without these kind of connections. Also in literature, authors come to a consensus about the effects of migration networks concerning the promotion of migration processes (Haug 2000: 19, Elrick 2008: 2-3). However, some returned migrants characterise their time abroad as unsuccessful. As these migrants say, they were initially motivated to migrate by the perception of other migrants' success abroad and the existence of the migrant networks. But against their expectations, they had bad experiences and faced many difficulties. Due to that they do not consider repeated migration as an option. Therefore the question arises to what extent former migrant's failures abroad and also experiences with racism are inhibiting effects for future migration processes to Russia. Could it be possible that internal migration to bigger cities in Kyrgyzstan like Bishkek and Osh will gain momentum in the future? What would this trend mean for the existing migrant networks, will they also develop within Kyrgyzstan?

Furthermore in literature there are discrepancies concerning positive and negative effects of migration. There is a huge disagreement to what extent migration and remittances contribute positively to rural livelihoods or not: Especially in the current debate on migration and the investment of remittances, different opinions exist. Frequently migrants are criticised as being unproductive due to their irrational expenditure behaviour when investing remittances in house building activities. However, by applying this argument difficult social, economic, legal and political conditions which often prevail in migrant sending countries like Kyrgyzstan are not taken into account. In uncertain environments, expenses on relatively safe assets like houses can be a choice for securing, diversifying and improving livelihoods (de Haas 2008: 17). The quest to have a clean, safe and spacious place to live is moreover a universal aspect of human being. Furthermore, as we stated earlier, construction activities for new houses can have positive impacts on the local job market and hence further support the development in the communities. Marat, however, remarks that investments in houses can lead to land scarcity and therefore eventually to increasing real estate prices (2009: 18). This trend is already partly true for Gumkhana, Jaradar and Bel Terek.

Another commonly criticised aspect of investment practices is the purchase of new livestock. Connected with this trend are negative effects of growing land scarcity and pasture overuse in the research area.

It is evident that migration and remittances change social conditions and structures. On the one hand informants explained that with the help of migration poverty has been pushed back in recent years. On the other hand, changing social structures such as the emigration of the young working population can harm the communities severely in the long run. Today, most migrants in the research area return to live and work in their homes in the sending communities. The trend, however, follows a different track: the aforementioned wish of some migrants to repeat the migration process or to build new houses in urban areas can possibly lead to a long term loss of human capital.

In connection with this trend following questions arise: First, how can this process and its associated negative effects be ceased, if not even returning migrants want to stay in their

home settlements? What kind of incentives have to be created so that either the youth *and* returning migrants see positive future prospects in their homes in rural areas? Another question originates from the fact of changing care arrangements in the sending communities: Who will take care for little children and elderly people in the long run in rural areas? It can be assumed that migration processes contribute to declining traditional set-ups in the research area. The consequences for childcare and the care for the elderly population in the research area cannot be foreseen and need to be further investigated.

## **Conclusion**

As a response to economic uncertainty and unemployment many households in Gumkhana, Jaradar and Bel Terek reacted with international labour migration especially to Russia and Kazakhstan. Overall, migration is generally well received, since remittances have significantly improved the economic situation of the migrating, as well as non-migrating members of the households. Moreover, there are signs that also non-migrants in the sending communities benefit from this mobility. Through their transfers, migrants make essential contributions to their families and to a smaller extend to the communities: in the short run lives are sustained, relative wealth is generated in the families and non-migrants can partly profit from the increasing consumption behaviour. This research therefore supports the NELM approach since it clarifies the importance of migration for both migrant and non-migrants households and not alone consequences of the individual migrant.

Additionally the findings show that there is a need to treat remittances - even when they are for non-productive purposes - as a significant contribution toward human development by countering deprivation and by facilitating the access to goods and education. However, there are several critical side effects of migration: Labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan and the failure of migrants to return to rural areas, exacerbates the lack of qualified personnel especially in the service sectors and may change the already declining care arrangements for children and the elderly population. Also the enlarged social networks eventually support people's decision in favour of migration or in not returning home. The examples of Gumkhana, Jaradar and Bel Terek show that migrant networks play an important role. Provided assistance and useful information by migration networks regarding accommodation and job-hunting in an unknown country have positive effects on migration. With the help of these networks costs and risks of the migration procedure can be reduced notably. Also the economic factor concerning significant income differences between Kyrgyzstan and Russia or Kazakhstan further encourages especially young people to migrate. If migration continues to exist on this scale in the research area, negative social impacts like the disruption of traditional care arrangements will be a challenging process in the future.

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