

# Social Scars: The Impact of Out-Migration on the Livelihoods of Families Left behind in Macheke Farming Community

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## Abstract

Migration is a complex phenomenon in both developing and developed nations due to its variation across regions, countries and over time, including its possible multiple occurrences in the life of a human being. Yet, little is known about the emotional impact of out-migration on the livelihoods of women who are left behind in rural households, Macheke farming community in Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe being a case in point. A triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods was used. The research methodology followed a multi-stage approach. At first, five focus group discussions were carried out followed by a survey with 596 household-heads to quantify the magnitude of the problem under scrutiny. Five in-depth interviews were also carried out with the aid of an in-depth interview guide. Respondents were de facto household heads and the majority was females. Fifty-three percent of the migrants emigrated for employment reasons and they were a mixture of both skilled and unskilled migrants. The employment rate of household heads was found to be low, with surveyed households reporting various on-farm and off-farm economic activities. Remittances were a major contributor to household income as a supplementary to migrant households' livelihood strategies. Migrant households had higher ratings on their livelihood indicators compared to non-migrant households. However, women in migrant households had poor social integration compared to their non-migrant counterparts. The study made a recommendation on the need for institutions and policies that encourage saving as well as investment of remittances for sustainable livelihoods.

## Keywords

Out-Migration, Sustainable Livelihoods, Household, Remittances,

## 1. Introduction

Migration as a developmental issue has come to the limelight due to capital and income from remittances that are viewed as a vibrant financial support system for households in developing countries, the places of origin. Nevertheless, migration, in some instances, has drained the local communities and economies of their labour and capital, hence it has proved to be disadvantageous in some instances. In the Zimbabwean context, internal and international emigration has been adopted as a livelihood strategy to alleviate poverty in the face of the economic meltdown in the past two decades (Dekker, 2009; Dekker & Kinsley, 2011) (albeit with a temporary reprieve between 2009-2013). It is questionable as to whether that objective (poverty alleviation through emigration) has been realized. Consequently, out-migration has had an emotional cost to those who are left behind, mostly women, due to the fact that most migrants are the economically active men. Hence, the study's main objective was to test the validity of this assumption in a poor rural community.

Globally, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries have hosted a considerably large proportion of international migrants compared to middle- and low-income countries. This can be substantiated by the estimates that Europe has had a large number of international migrants of approximately 75 million by 2015 from 56 million in 2000, in contrast to Africa which had 21 million and 15 million in 2015 and 2000 respectively (UNDESA, 2016).

It can be argued that, despite the desire to understand the impact of migration on the livelihoods of the rural folk, reviewed sources and literature on international migration patterns do not disaggregate international migrants by rural and/or urban areas of origin, let alone to assess the emotional impact on family members left behind. There are various studies that have been carried out on assessing the impact of migration on the communities of origin of rural migrants. Such studies include the one done in Eastern Europe by Glytos (2002), Lucas (2006) in Albania and Morocco, Azam & Gubert (2006) in Mali and the World Bank (2015) in several developing countries. Nevertheless, there is a gap in these reviewed studies considering the fact that these studies mainly focused on international migration and remittances use without paying attention to other non-economic impact of migration.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019), migration in Southern African countries can be considered a critical regional issue due to the fact that goods and capital tend to move relatively freely and legally, but people are facing movement barriers. According to UNDESA (2019), in 2015, both males and female migrants had reached 6.5% of the total population in Southern Africa and they stood at 6.7% in 2017, hence international migrants have continued to increase in the region.

Gender seems to remain a crucial component in the Southern African migration patterns and trends. Males have continued to dominate as international migrants in Southern Africa in comparison to their female counterparts. For instance, while male migrants accounted for 3.1% of the total population in 2005, female migrants to the total population in Southern Africa were only 2.1% (Crush et al., 2017). In 2017, male international migrants stood at 7.5% of the total population whereas their female counterparts were 5.8% (Crush et al., 2017). This seems to confirm the Ravenstein (1885) Law of Migration which states that females are more migratory within their kingdoms of origin whilst males migrate over long distances.

In the Southern African context, Zimbabwe was considered a major migrant destination prior to 2000, but by 2017, the country has become the single major exporter of migrants in the region (IOM, 2019). In the Zimbabwean context, there is a corpus of migration studies that have been carried out notably in Mangwe District (Maphosa, 2007), Chivi, Gwanda and Hurungwe districts (Dzingirai et al., 2015), among others. The reviewed literature showed no migration studies that have been carried out in Murewa Rural District Council and Macheke Town, in particular. Hence, this study tends to be justified in terms of its geographical relevance.

According to IOM (2018), families and households bear the bulk of economic as well as non-economic costs that are associated with migration. In as much as migrants and their families can easily take into account the economic costs of migration such as the transactional costs that are incurred, it is often difficult to quantify some of the subjective costs of migration, such as the stress of some family members living apart as well as the associated experiences of loss. Therefore, this current study sought to include non-economic costs in its exploration of the impact of migration, considering the fact that most researches that have been done were anchored on remittances and the economic side of migration. Overall, the literature on the impact of international migration is still growing and the conclusion on whether migration can be considered a good strategy for the migrants together with their families left behind are not clear-cut yet. Therefore, this study aims to focus on this gap in the literature and to explore the impact of both internal and international migration more closely on the livelihoods of migrants' area of origin.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study was to assess the impact of outmigration on the rural household livelihoods in Macheke farming community.

The specific objectives were to:

- Describe the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of households exposed to out-migration;
- Explore the livelihood strategies of the households with out-migrants; and,
- Investigate the impact of out-migration on household livelihood security.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Target Population

The research focused on resident *de facto* practical heads of households in the study area. The consideration of resident practical heads of household stems from an understanding that they are the most and directly impacted population by emigration of their family members, unlike targeting a typical and perceived head of household whose stay might be irregular and or temporary.

#### 3.2. Study Area

The study was carried out in Macheke, in Mashonaland East province of Zimbabwe, which is located 110 kilometers from Harare. Macheke has one of the oldest and typical farming community in the country, which is mostly rural and a township which is slowly developing into an urban area.

#### 3.3. Research Design

Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were triangulated in this study. Qualitative data was captured by Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) using FGD and interview guides as research tools, respectively. A survey, with the use of questionnaires as the research instrument, was used to gather quantitative data. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers in accordance with the research objectives of the current study. The inclusion of non-migrant households makes the study somewhat quasi-experimental in that migration is the only independent variable which has been allowed to vary.

#### 3.4. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Norms and values regarding the impact of emigration on household livelihoods are important and can best be captured by FGDs. Purposive sampling; availability and willingness to participate were the basis for respondents' selection. Sex and age were the background variables that were considered as the selection factors in FGDs. Thus, 6 FGDs were conducted with *de facto* head of households, each comprising 10 to 12 participants. Two FGDs focused on the youth aged 15 - 24 years, differentiated by sex, were carried out. The other two FGDs consisted of heads of households aged 25 to 49 years and two more FGDs comprised of participants aged 50 years and above, but differentiated by sex. The separation of males and females was meant to capture differently the experiences of these different sexes. This was done so as to capture the perceptions and experiences of the elderly with regards to out-migration of their family members.

The FGD guides were prepared with research objectives and questions in mind so as to maintain the relevance of discussions to the research. The researcher emphasized the importance of participants in each group to give each other an opportunity to air out their views and opinions. Although consensus

was not forced on participants, it was expected to flow out of the interaction process in the discussions. The non-directive style in FGD was adopted. This means that the moderator was participating mainly at the start of the discussion and interpolate himself only when it was necessary to keep the discussion on the topic of interest. The non-directive approach has a comparative advantage of discovery and greater opportunity for the individual participants' views to emerge, thus it provides a validity check on the researcher's understanding of the research problem as well as its relevant dimensions.

The researcher also tried by all means to moderate without participation as the latter might have produced biased results since respondents might want to give responses that seem favorable and/or in line with the researcher. The researcher facilitated the FGDs with the assistance of a note-taker who captured the discussions verbatim to the best of his ability. Permission to use tape recording was sought from the participants as it appeared to be a useful aid in data capturing. The themes and critical issues relating to the study objectives that were explored in FGDs were then taken into account in the survey to assess the extent to which they can be generalizable. Hence, FGDs acted as sort of a baseline research to the study survey on issues relating to out-migration in the Macheke farming community.

### 3.5. Survey

A survey was conducted in this study as part of the quantitative methodology aimed at quantifying the magnitude of the research problem as well as helping in answering some issues such as what are the major reasons for out-migration in the study context, as raised in FGDs. Therefore, a cross sectional survey was carried out using a sample that is representative of the target population in Macheke so as to enhance generalizability of the research findings.

### 3.6. Sample Size Determination

The calculation for sample size in this research was done using the conventional formula that has standard statistical guidelines that maintain a considerable degree and guaranteed representativeness as well as an allowance for drawing inferences. The researcher considered two assumptions in order to apply the conventional formula in sample size calculation for this study:

- 1) The Mashonaland East out-migration rates on a provincial level are representative of the out-migration rate for Macheke.
- 2) There is a normal distribution of out-migration exposure for the targeted population.

In light of these assumptions, the following formula was applied to compute the sample size of the survey based on the estimated proportion of Mashonaland East out-migrants (548,649) to the estimated provincial population (1,337,984), as well as a standard error of 0.05. (ICDS, 2017)

$$n = z^2 pq / e^2$$

where:

$n$  = sample size.

$z$  = standard deviation set at 95% confidence level.

$p$  = estimated prevalence of out migration which is 548,649.

$q$  = proportion excluding the desired attribute which is out migration ( $1 - p$ ).

$e$  = maximum allowable error which is 0.1.

$P$  = total population for Mashonaland East Province = 1,337,984.

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{1.96^2 \times (548649/1337984) \times (1 - 548649/1337984)}{0.05^2} \\ &= \frac{3.84 \times 0.41 \times (1 - 0.59)}{0.0025} \\ &= \frac{1.57 \times 0.41}{0.0025} \\ &= 257.48 \end{aligned}$$

An adjustment on the sample size which takes the design effect and number of domains into account was also done. With a design effect of 1.1 and number of domains set at 2, the sample size was adjusted using the formula:  $N = n \times \text{design effect} \times \text{number of domains/response rate}$ . Thus, the adjusted sample size =  $257.48 \times 1.1 \times 2/0.95 = \underline{596 \text{ households}}$ .

### 3.7. In-Depth Interviews

Typical and extreme cases that were identified from FGDs and Surveys were followed up with detailed in-depth interviews. Five IDIs were carried out, with each participant being purposively selected from the survey. The intention was to capture in-depth experiences and meanings of the identified cases. For instance, in-depth interviews were crucial in capturing in-depth experiences with regards to the notion of social scars resulting from out-migration and how this phenomenon varies across age, gender and socio-economic divides. Therefore, the selection criteria of IDI participants were predicated on that of FGDs as highlighted above. Interview guides were used as data collection instruments in these interviews. Smartphones were used to record the interviews and note-taking was done on major points, as a backup plan in case of a technical glitches.

## 4. Findings of the Study

### 4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Household in the Sample

The researcher had targeted approximately 596 survey respondents. However, a total of 489 household heads were interviewed successfully, thus yielding an 82% response rate. The age of participants ranged from 17 years to 79 years, with a mean age of 35 years. The majority of the respondents of the survey were females (53%) (**Table 1**).

The sample constituted of respondents who had different living arrangements. According to the reported positions in the household, respondents were most likely to be mothers (47%) or fathers (44%) of the households. 4% of the res-

pondents came from child headed households and about 4.4% were grandparents in the household.

**Table 1.** Percentage distribution of respondents' demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

<b>Age Group of Respondents</b>	
	<b>PERCENT (%)</b>
15 - 19	7.6
20 - 29	25.6
30 - 39	33.1
40 - 49	14.5
50 - 59	5.7
60+	13.5
Total	100
<b>Sex of Respondent</b>	
Male	46.7
Female	53.3
Total	100
<b>Position in Household</b>	
Father	43.5
Mother	47.0
Child	4.0
Grandparent	4.4
Relative/ Other	1.1
Total	100
<b>Level of Education</b>	
Primary	3.7
Secondary	64.0
Tertiary	32.3
Total	100
<b>Religion of Respondent</b>	
Pentecostal	62.0
Apostolic	19.3
Orthodox	16.0
African Traditional Religion	1.8
Other	0.9
Total	100

N = 489. Source: Research field data.

There was evidence of a high literacy rate from the study sample. The commonly reported level of education was secondary education (64%). A significant proportion of the sample (32%) reported to have reached tertiary level of education whilst 4% reported to have had at least primary education. In terms of religion, the study was dominated by respondents who were Christians. The largest proportion belonged to the Pentecostal denomination (62%). Respondents who belonged to Orthodox churches constituted 16% of the sample whilst about 2% reported to be following the African Traditional Religion. With regards to marital status, more than half of the household members (56%) were reported to be married, 38% were never married whilst 4% were divorced or separated.

#### 4.2. Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Migrants

Approximately 52% of the surveyed households had an emigrant at least within the 5 years prior to the study. The majority of the out-migrants (82%) were between the ages 15 to 39 years (**Table 2**). Whilst a small proportion of about 10% were migrants aged 15 - 19 years, 40% of the out-migrants were in the 20 to 29-year age group. A proportion of about 32% of the out-migrants were between 30 and 39 years. The remaining 18% of the out-migrants was equally shared between the age groups 40 - 49 and 50 - 59 years. Male migrants were almost equal to female migrants. About 51% of the migrants were reported to be males as compared to 49% of their female counterparts.

The surveyed households were also asked about the relationship of migrants to the household head. Children were more likely to be reported as migrants in comparison to other household members. More than half, of the out-migrants (53%) were reported to be children of the surveyed households. Fathers and mothers of the studied households combined constituted about 32% of the migrants. Only 10% of the migrants were reported to be grandchildren, while 5% were described as other relatives.

#### 4.3. Migration Destinations

The study revealed variations in areas of destination of the migrants. The data from the survey indicated that the majority of out-migrants from the farming community surrounding Macheke are residing in the Southern African region. For instance, while South Africa was reported to be hosting the majority of the migrants (37%), Botswana had 6% and Mozambique had 4% (**Figure 1**). Other specified destinations in the region such as Malawi, Namibia and Zambia accounted for 5% of migrants combined. Outside the African continent, China had the relatively largest proportion of migrants (3%), followed by Britain with 1.7% and Australia hosting 1.2%. Other specified non-African destinations hosted 4% of the migrants from the study area.

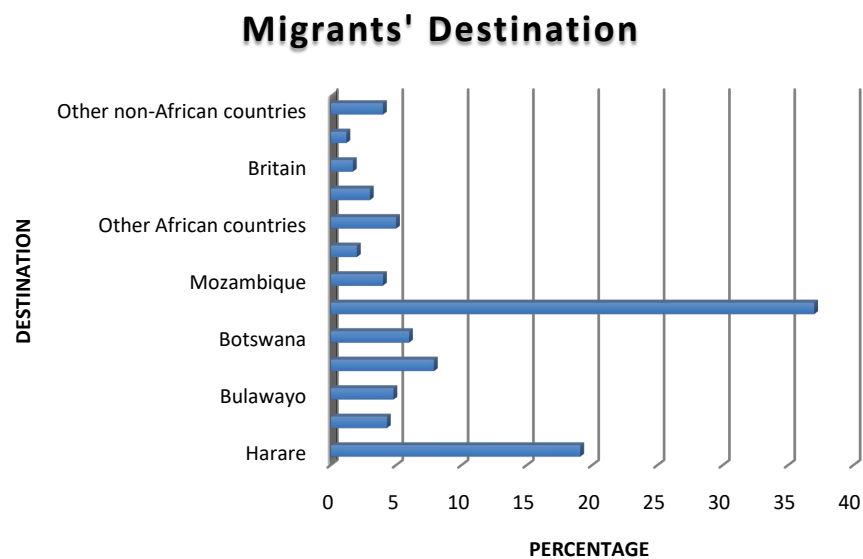
Harare was reported to be the dominant internal migration destination which hosted approximately 19% of the migrants. Other internal destinations, including Mutare and Bulawayo, hosted about 4% and 5% of the migrants, respectively.



**Table 2.** Percentage distribution of the demographic characteristics of out-migrants.

Age Group of Migrants	
	PERCENT (%)
15 - 19	10.0
20 - 29	40.0
30 - 39	32.2
40 - 49	9
50 - 59	8.8
Total	100
Sex of Migrant	
Male	48.6
Female	51.4
Total	100
Relationship to Household Head	
Father	18.5
Mother	13.5
Child	53.0
Grandchildren	10.3
Relative/ Other	4.7
Total	100
Level of Education	
Primary	10.7
Secondary	54
Tertiary	35.3
Total	100

N = 254. Source: Research field data.

**Figure 1.** Percentage distribution of migrants' destination. N = 254. Source: Research field data.

#### 4.4. Livelihood Strategies

The study found that approximately 33% of the participants were employed. A greater percentage of the respondents who reported to be employed were farm laborers (14%), followed by informal traders (11%) while 5% were employed in other professions and 3% were in the civil service sector. Focus group discussions confirmed the high unemployment in Macheke and noted that the significantly high presence of farm labourers which is associated with the history of the community. Note the remarks that were made by one of the FGD participants;

*The natives of this community told us that the area came into being during the time when white settler farmers had occupied the land. You can see that there is no other industry which you can find, but only these neighboring farms are the source of employment for the generality of people here.*

Hence, the sample showed participants' involvement in livelihood activities which are non-generalizable as they ranged from off-farm to on-farm economic activities.

#### 4.5. Livelihood Security Indicators

Non-migrant households had higher ratings as compared to migrant households in social integration as a livelihood security indicator, which was according to expectations. Whilst 76% of the households without exposure to migration rated their social integration to be at least good, only 52% of migrant households reported their social integration to be equally good. These statistics can also be corroborated by qualitative data that was gathered from FGDs. Note the comment from one of the female FGD participants;

*When their husbands go, a lot of women are left with quite a heavy emotional burden. Some of the women begin to change behaviour patterns. Others begin to make decisions and start looking after their families and themselves, hence it keeps them busy all day. However, on one hand, it can be seen as a great opportunity for them but on the other hand, it can be seen as a source of anxiety as they might not have a know-how of carrying out these new responsibilities. This will affect a person's ability to fully participate and integrate with others in our community because she will be absent in most of our gatherings and when she comes, she will be feeling out of place.*

A 35-year-old female in-depth interviewee also gave a detailed account of her experience with the migration of her husband;

*When we finally decided that my husband should join his former class-mate who was now working in South Africa, I felt like the world was becoming an empty space for me. I interacted with most people through him, so the moment that he left, I lost most friends and the networks that we had. It is difficult for a married woman to be seen hanging around with a lot of people, especially of the opposite sex when your husband is not around as people may start raising suspicions of extra-marital affairs. Therefore, you will end up with your tail between your legs.*

Another participant also lamented;

*We have relatives who moved (to towns), but we haven't heard from them or seen them sending anything (cash or non-cash remittances) back here...if they have succeeded, why don't they send something back. My opinion is that they are faced with even more challenges than what they faced here (in the villages) because in town you have to buy almost everything...and it pains us heavily...*

#### 4.6. Perceptions on Livelihood Security

A greater percentage of the surveyed households had a perception that their current livelihoods were not going to remain sustainable. Approximately, 78% of the surveyed households felt that their overall livelihoods were insecure in comparison to 19% who considered their livelihoods to be sustainable. Only 2% of the respondents failed to be certain about the sustainability of their livelihoods. However, there was a greater proportion of the migrant households (21%) who perceived their livelihoods to be secure compared to non-migrant households (13%). Whilst 6% of the migrant households were not sure about the sustainability of their livelihoods, none of the non-migrant households were uncertain about their livelihood security. This can also be corroborated by the FGD remarks of a migrant household head who is in his late fifties;

*As you can see, our source of income is farm labour and sometimes we sell firewood to be able to put food on the table. At the same time, our children who work in Harare are equally facing the challenges and hardships of this country. In as much as they try by all means to send us some items and money, we can't say with certainty that we have a bright future ahead of us based on sources of livelihood that we are not seeing or even witnessing their successes and failures.*

Another participant also lamented;

*We have relatives who moved (to towns), but we haven't heard from them or seen them sending anything (cash or non-cash remittances) back here...if they have succeeded, why don't they send something back. My opinion is that they are faced with even more challenges than what they faced here (in the villages) because in town you have to buy almost everything but here, we are surviving from our God-given environment.*

The research also sought to explore whether migrant households would be affected by return migration of a migrant member in terms of their access to basic necessities such as education, food and healthcare. The majority of migrant households confirmed that their access to selected basic needs would be affected if migrant members decide to return home permanently. For instance, while 57% of the migrant households reported that their access to food would be affected, about 52% cited the negative impact of return migration of a migrant household member on their healthcare. Approximately, 47% reported that their access to education would be affected whilst 14% were uncertain about the impact of return migration on their educational security.

## 5. Discussion of the Findings

The high rate of out-migration from the farming community of Macheke can be attributed to the proximity of the farming community to Harare, considering the fact that about 52% of all the surveyed households had at least one migrant member, as shown by the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of migrants. This high rate of out-migration can be attributed to the proximity of Macheke to Harare. A higher proportion of out-migrants were reported to have migrated for economic reason. Most migrants were reported to be within the Southern African region with South Africa being the major country of destination. [Crush et al. \(2017\)](#) pointed out that Harare through Beit Bridge to Limpopo farms, Johannesburg and the Western Cape can be seen as one of the major migration corridors in the Southern African region.

The male and female proportion of out-migrants from Macheke farming community mirrors the findings that are documented in the reviewed literature. Approximately 53% of the respondents in the study were females and about 51% of the migrants were reported to be males. This shows more out-migration of males as compared to females. According to [IOM \(2018\)](#), globally, 52% of international migrants are male. Regionally, the Southern African region is undergoing feminization of migration due to increased independence of women with regards to migration. [IOM \(2019\)](#) posited that the number of female migrants in the Southern African region is now over 2 million migrants.

South Africa was reported to be hosting the majority of the migrants of up to 37% in this study. Similarly, South Africa has been identified as the major destination country of migrants in the region which hosts female migrants which are 40% of the total migrants ([IOM, 2019](#)). In the Zimbabwean context, [Chereni & Bongo \(2018\)](#) pointed out that male migrants appeared to be the largest group in any migrant category, although the proportion of female migrants cannot be considered insignificant. This current study reported that fifty-one percent were male migrants whilst 49% were female migrants and this difference was attributed to emancipation of women and changing gender roles. However, current literature on the proportion of male and female migrants in Zimbabwe on a national scale portrays a different picture from what was observed in the study area. For instance, the [ICDS \(2017\)](#) noted that 62% of all emigrants are males whilst 38% are females. Therefore, the preceding analyses of migration trends as well as the findings of this study concur on the fact that the dominance of male migrants transcend nationality, occupation, level of education among other socioeconomic characteristics.

The social, emotional and psychological impact of migration found in this study mirrors the findings from other studies. For instance, this study found that most women and children in migrant households are left with quite a heavy emotional burden after the out-migration of their husbands and parents respectively. This is similar to the findings by [Hossain \(2003\)](#)'s research which revealed that migration causes breakdown in traditional family obligations, thus the move

away from the extended family leads to the emotional nucleation of the family. Similarly, Salah (2008) pointed out that the surveys by CRIC figured out that almost all the respondents in the survey reported that parental migration has produced significantly lower performance than children staying with their parents. The children have suffered psychologically due to lack of parental supervision and the more household duties have affected their education negatively.

Consistently, a survey by Save the Children in 2006 in Sri Lanka which was conducted in 1200 households with migrant parents for more than six months revealed that children of migrant mothers performed worse in school compared to their non-migrant counterparts despite similarities in socio-economic backgrounds.

## 6. Conclusion

Migration is an important demographic process which requires careful consideration in policy formulation and programming due to its impact on the sustainability of rural households. Migration has economic and non-economic impact and the main thrust of this paper was on the non-economic impact that has largely been overlooked in literature. It is recommended that social institutions should be strengthened to cater for the emotional needs of families left behind. Limitations of the study included the fact that the research had a small sample size whose findings cannot be generalizable on a provincial or national level. This therefore calls for large scale studies that explore the impact of out-migration on the livelihoods of rural families left behind. The current study also ended at univariate level of analysis on factors and characteristics associated with out-migration on the livelihoods of rural households in the study area. It is therefore incumbent upon future studies to do bivariate and multivariate analyses on the topic.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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