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The first generation leaves Nepal carrying a surprisingly complete version of home.

They know how Dashain felt in the house where they grew up. They remember the road to their village before it was paved, the taste of food made by a particular relative, the rhythm of Nepali spoken without translation. Even after twenty years abroad, Nepal can remain geographically distant but culturally immediate.

Their children inherit something different.

They may have a Nepali name, eat dal bhat at home and spend summer holidays with grandparents in Kathmandu or Pokhara.

But their first classroom may be in Sydney, London, Dallas, Toronto or Tokyo. Their jokes form in another language. Their friends know them through another society. Nepal is part of who they are, but not necessarily the place that taught them how the world works.

That difference is becoming one of the defining questions of the Nepali diaspora: **what happens to a family when migration lasts long enough to become generational?**

Nepal's diaspora is still largely first-generation—but that will not last

The best recent global mapping gives us an important starting point. The International Organization for Migration's 2024 mapping of the Nepalese diaspora, conducted with the Non-Resident Nepali Association and in coordination with Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, surveyed established diaspora communities across 16 countries.

98.4 percent of respondents were born in Nepal. The diaspora captured by that study was therefore overwhelmingly first-generation. Most respondents had lived abroad for at least five years, and 90.4 percent were married.

That matters because today's institutions, community organisations and political debates about the diaspora are still largely shaped by people who personally remember living in

Nepal.

The next generation will not have the same relationship.

The transition is already visible in countries where Nepali migration has matured into permanent settlement. Children born or largely raised abroad will increasingly become the people deciding whether Nepali language, family obligations, property, citizenship connections and emotional attachment survive into a third generation.

Language is usually the first visible fault line

IOM found that approximately **58.4 percent** of respondents regularly spoke Nepali at home.

That is substantial. It also means language preservation cannot be assumed.

For first-generation parents, Nepali is often the language of instinct. For their children, it can become the language of instruction: something parents consciously insist upon, weekend schools attempt to teach, or grandparents require during video calls.

The difference matters.

A child may understand Nepali perfectly but answer in English. Another may speak conversationally but never learn to read Devanagari. A third may rediscover the language at university because what felt inconvenient at age twelve becomes meaningful at twenty-two.

Language loss is not simply about vocabulary. It changes access to humour, family history, literature, songs, politics and relationships with relatives who do not speak the child's dominant language.

A family can retain Nepali identity after losing Nepali fluency. But the identity will inevitably be different.

Grandparents become cultural infrastructure

For many diaspora children, grandparents are not only relatives. They are one of the strongest remaining bridges to Nepal.

Summer visits, Dashain trips and long video calls can transmit family stories that parents are too busy—or too close to—to explain. Grandparents may insist on Nepali words, teach rituals, explain kinship relationships and provide children with a version of family life that does not exist in the country where they were born.

But migration also creates distance precisely when grandparents need care.

The same family can simultaneously benefit from overseas income and struggle with elderly parents living thousands of kilometres away. A medical emergency can turn geography into a crisis within hours.

This is one reason the diaspora's relationship with Nepal often intensifies in middle age. The first generation may leave as young workers or students. Twenty years later, the question is no longer only where their own career belongs. It is where their parents will age and where their children will feel at home.

The children receive the benefits of migration without remembering its cost

Migration often changes a family's economic trajectory.

Parents may have borrowed heavily, worked long hours, shared accommodation or accepted jobs below their qualifications. Their children experience the result: better schools, safer housing, international mobility and a household with more options.

That can create a generational misunderstanding.

The parent remembers migration as sacrifice. The child experiences the destination as normal life.

Neither perspective is wrong.

But conflict emerges when parents expect children to feel gratitude toward Nepal for a history the children did not personally live, or when children interpret parental expectations without understanding the insecurity that produced them.

The emotional economy of migration is rarely recorded in remittance statistics.

Money keeps flowing home even when identity begins changing

The first generation often maintains direct financial obligations to Nepal: parents, siblings, land, houses, charities, schools or community projects.

As examined in where remittance money actually goes, these transfers finance far more than consumption. They repay migration debt, support healthcare and education, build housing and create household security.

But what happens when the sender's children take over the family finances?

A second-generation Nepali who has never depended on a household in Nepal may not feel the same obligation to send money to an uncle, maintain ancestral land or fund a village project.

This suggests a long-term structural change. As the diaspora becomes more generational, Nepal cannot assume today's remittance relationships will continue indefinitely in the same form.

Connection will have to become something more than obligation.

The house in Nepal becomes a symbol before it becomes an asset

Many diaspora families own or maintain property in Nepal.

For the first generation, that house may represent an eventual return. For the second generation, it may be the place they stayed during school holidays. By the third generation, it can become an inheritance nobody knows what to do with.

This is where emotional and financial value separate.

A parent may see ancestral land as security that should never be sold. A child living permanently abroad may see an illiquid asset requiring maintenance, legal paperwork and family negotiations.

The dispute is not really about land. It is about what permanence means.

For the migrant generation, property can preserve the possibility of going home. For their children, home may already be

somewhere else.

Return becomes harder when the family is no longer culturally synchronized

Our financial framework for returning to Nepal showed that salary alone is a poor way to judge whether moving home makes sense.

For a second-generation family, the calculation becomes even more complex.

A parent returning to Nepal may be returning to a familiar society. A teenager accompanying them may be immigrating to a country they know mainly through holidays.

The family can therefore make one physical move while experiencing two psychologically different migrations.

School systems, friendships, language, independence, gender expectations and everyday social rules can all change at once.

A return plan that works perfectly on a spreadsheet can fail because the family assumed every member meant the same thing by “home.”

Citizenship turns identity into law

Generational migration eventually encounters legal questions.

Nepal's Constitution provides for **non-resident Nepali citizenship** for qualifying people who have acquired citizenship of a foreign country other than a SAARC member state and who, or whose father, mother, grandfather or grandmother, previously held Nepali citizenship. The constitutional category provides economic, social and cultural rights as set out by federal law rather than the full political rights of ordinary citizenship.

The details matter, and citizenship eligibility depends on individual facts and current law. A cultural claim to being Nepali and a legal claim to citizenship are not the same thing.

That distinction will become increasingly important as more children of Nepalis are born abroad and acquire foreign citizenship from birth or through their parents.

For the first generation, nationality may feel obvious. For later generations, it becomes documentation.

A diaspora family can have several definitions of Nepali at once

Parents may define Nepali identity through birthplace and language.

Grandparents may define it through ancestry, religion, caste, community or village.

A child abroad may define it through food, music, family and the experience of being treated as Nepali by everyone around them.

Another child may resist the label entirely before returning to it later.

These differences are not necessarily evidence of cultural decline. Diaspora identity is usually hybrid because it has to function in more than one social system.

The mistake is expecting a child raised in Melbourne to reproduce the identity of a parent raised in Morang without modification.

Marriage can accelerate or reshape the transition

By the second generation, marriage increasingly extends beyond Nepali community boundaries.

That does not automatically erase Nepali identity. But it changes the mechanisms through which it is transmitted.

If only one parent speaks Nepali, maintaining the language requires more deliberate effort. Festivals must be explained rather than assumed. Trips to Nepal compete with visits to another side of the family. Children may inherit several religions, cuisines, languages and national stories at once.

The result can be dilution. It can also be expansion.

A culture transmitted voluntarily may become less automatic but more consciously valued.

Community organisations face a second-generation test

Diaspora associations are often built by first-generation migrants around needs they understand well: community events, consular support, networking, festivals, fundraising and connections to Nepal.

The second generation may ask for something different.

They may care less about formal organisational politics and more about professional networks, language learning, cultural events, mentorship or opportunities to spend meaningful time in Nepal.

If diaspora institutions cannot adapt, they risk becoming organisations for migrants rather than institutions for a continuing diaspora.

IOM's mapping found strong interest in continued engagement with Nepal, including knowledge transfer, investment and eventual resettlement. Notably, **61.4 percent of surveyed respondents expressed interest in returning and resettling in Nepal in the future**. But because 98.4 percent of respondents were Nepal-born, that finding primarily describes the first generation.

Whether their children will feel the same is an open question.

Nepal also has responsibilities if it wants the relationship to survive

Diaspora connection is often discussed as though the burden lies entirely with families: parents should teach Nepali, children should visit, migrants should invest and successful professionals should “give back.”

That is incomplete.

Nepal also has to make engagement worthwhile.

Clear citizenship procedures, reliable public institutions, credible investment channels, easier administrative processes, educational exchanges and professional opportunities all affect whether the next generation experiences Nepal as a living relationship or merely an ancestral story.

A second-generation engineer or entrepreneur will not invest because a speech tells them to love the motherland. Trust, opportunity and functioning institutions matter.

The second generation may contribute differently

The first generation’s contribution is often measured in remittances.

The next generation may contribute through something else: technology, research, professional networks, tourism, philanthropy, entrepreneurship, creative work or simply bringing their own children to Nepal.

This may be financially smaller in some cases and strategically more valuable in others.

A diaspora that becomes wealthier, more educated and more embedded in global institutions can become a source of knowledge and networks as much as cash.

IOM's mapping found around **80 percent** of surveyed diaspora respondents had at least a bachelor's degree. That educational profile suggests why diaspora policy focused only on remittances misses a substantial part of the opportunity.

What survives after one generation?

Not everything.

Some children will lose the language. Some families will sell the house. Some will stop visiting. Some grandchildren will know Nepal mainly through photographs and stories.

Others will move in the opposite direction. They will learn Nepali as adults, spend a year in Kathmandu, build a company connected to Nepal, research family history or return to a place their parents once left.

Migration does not produce a single trajectory.

What survives tends to be what families and institutions repeatedly make meaningful.

The diaspora is not simply Nepal living somewhere else

The first generation can create the impression that it is. Their memories, language and obligations remain intensely connected to home.

But a mature diaspora eventually becomes something of its own.

It is Nepali and British. Nepali and Australian. Nepali and American. Nepali and Japanese. Sometimes all of those identities coexist comfortably; sometimes they compete.

The question for Nepal is not whether later generations can be kept culturally unchanged. They cannot.

The more useful question is whether Nepal can remain relevant as they change.

After one generation abroad, a Nepali family may speak differently, earn differently, marry differently and imagine home differently. That is not necessarily the end of connection.

It is the moment when connection stops being inherited automatically and has to become a choice.

Research note: Diaspora demographic and language figures in this article come from IOM's 2024 *Mapping the Nepalese Diaspora*, which surveyed established diaspora communities across 16 countries and was intentionally weighted toward longer-term residents. Its respondents were overwhelmingly first-generation, so its findings should not be treated as direct measurements of second-generation attitudes. Citizenship discussion is general information based on Nepal's constitutional and statutory framework and is not individual legal advice.

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