

Outmigration, Abandonment of Agricultural Land and Houses and Their Impact on Environment, Economy and Women in Uttarakhand Himalaya

Outmigration and abandoned villages in Uttarakhand

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In Himalaya, the nature of terrain and climate imposes severe restrictions on the carrying capacity of natural resources as well as on the efficiency of infrastructure and services. As a result, subsistence farming constitutes the main source of rural food and livelihood. Owing to constraints of subsistence economy a large proportion of youth male population out-migrate the rural areas in search of livelihood and employment creating scarcity of farm labour. As a result, large proportion of agricultural land and houses are now abandoned affecting food productivity and rural livelihood; and socio-economic and environmental sustainability. Secondly, women have become the primary resource developers and back-bone of economy leading to feminization of mountain farming system. Women make implicit contribution towards subsistence economy and sustainability of mountain socio-ecological systems. However, women enjoy highly restricted ownership of natural resources and limited access to the opportunities of social and economic development due to skewed power relations and traditional cultural and social norms, and this further leads to feminization of poverty in mountains. Moreover, the steady depletion of natural resources and climate change have further accelerated the trends of outmigration which have enhanced women's roles and responsibilities, and increased their workload both in farm as well as non-farm sectors rendering them more vulnerable to environmental changes, particularly climate change. The study revealed that women constitute the highest proportion of population affected by natural disasters primarily due to lack of preparedness, information and exposure.

However, it was observed that the increasing trends of male out-migration not only provided stability to rural economy in terms of income through remittance, but also marginally improved women's access to education, local institutions, resources, development opportunities, grass-root leadership, natural resource management and growing market from local to global level. These changes are not only contributing towards social, economic and political empowerment and main-streaming of rural women, but also providing them with the opportunities to involve in decision making process from family to village levels. Furthermore, women have developed critical traditional knowledge to understand, visualize and respond to environmental changes including the climate change. Nevertheless, increasing trends of outmigration and abandonment of agriculture and settlements are having severe and irreversible impacts on social quality of life. It is therefore highly imperative to improve rural livelihood and create opportunities for employment in traditional as well as non-traditional sectors in rural areas, and extend the good-practices of women's mainstreaming across the Himalayan States of India.