

Remittances: A Key to Adaptation?

Perspectives from communities exposed to water stress in the Himalayan Region

Labour migration is a significant livelihood strategy for mountain people. But more needs to be known about all aspects of migration in order to provide an informed basis for the development of policies and plans to address the impacts, maximise the benefits, and minimise the challenges of migration. ICIMOD is studying diverse aspects of labour migration and remittances in the mountain areas of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. A regional study in China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, looked at the influence of water hazards on the migration behaviour, and the impact of remittances on the adaptive capacity of households.

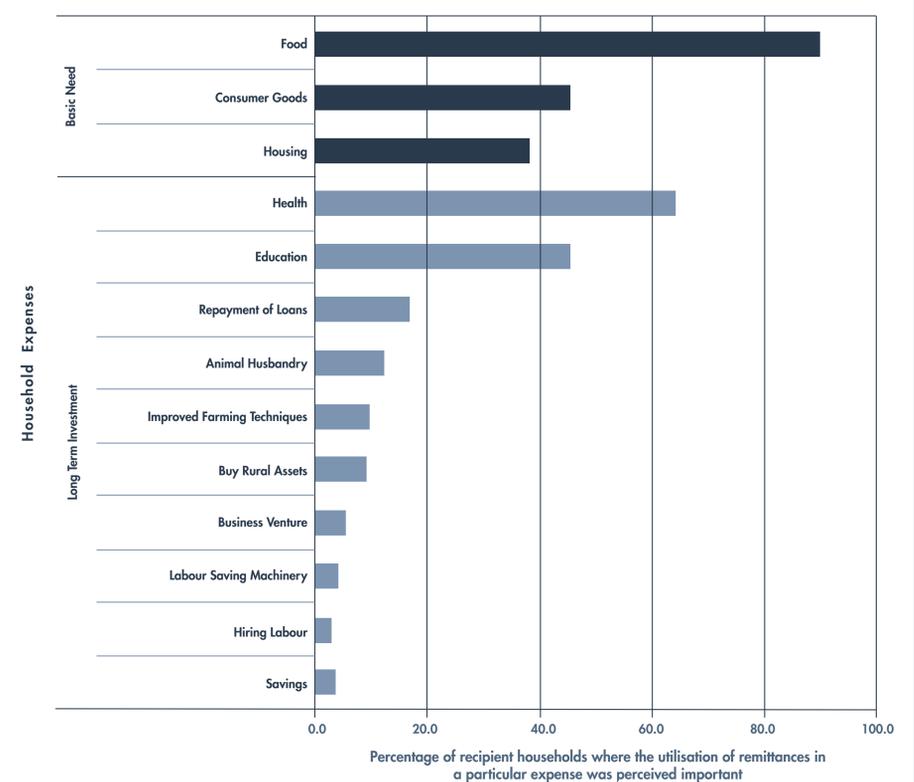
Remittances are the most tangible linkage between labour migration and the adaptive capacity of households, including the ability to respond to water stresses. Despite their relatively low volume, remittances contributed to the adaptive capacity of the recipient households.

- **The contribution of remittances to recipient household's income is significant.** Remittances supplement household income from agriculture or daily wage labour. In some households it is the only source of income.
- **Remittances fund basic needs such as food, housing and consumer goods.** In the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, the major share of the remittances is spent on basic needs, particularly food.
- **Remittances are spent on long term investments such as health and education.** The spending on health and education helps improve the quality of life and human capital in the recipient households.
- **Remittances provide an income stream that is not undermined by natural disasters.** The primary means of livelihood in the origin community and the income source(s) in the destination community are rarely disrupted by natural disasters at the same time.
- **Remittances assure immediate relief for the household during periods of livelihood shocks.** For example, remittances are used to procure food and other basic needs during lean periods.
- **Remittances aid in recovering in the aftermath of water-induced disaster.** They are used to rebuild livelihoods, reconstruct houses, meet health expenses, and procure household goods to replace those lost in water-induced disasters.
- **Remittances contribute to disaster preparedness.** They are used to improve or strengthen housing quality, procure irrigation facilities in drought affected households or buy boats in households affected by floods.



Suren Lahan (25 years old) from Chokham village in Assam worked in Dibrugarh town for a year and a half. He has bought a boat with his earnings, which he uses during floods to shift his family and belongings to safer locations.

Perceived Importance of Remittance Utilisation in Various Household Expenses
Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region, 2010



"My husband is a soldier. The money he sent back helped us to overcome the difficulties when flash floods washed away our farmlands."
– Sumaira Bibi, Kashendail village, Chitral district, Pakistan.

Jin Changwen, 42 year-old male migrant from Baicai village, Yunnan, China, works in a stone factory in Ying Jiang county, Yunnan. The remittances are spent on food, clothing, consumer goods, animal husbandry, and education. The money was also used to buy water pipe for land irrigation, helping the household deal with drought.