



CHAPTER 12 BRIEF

UNDERSTANDING AND TACKLING POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY IN MOUNTAIN LIVELIHOODS IN THE HINDU KUSH HIMALAYA



This chapter critically reviews the existing knowledge on livelihoods, poverty, and vulnerability in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH). The characteristics of mountain areas or 'mountain specificities' uniquely condition the lives and development of people. While inaccessibility, fragility, and marginality act as constraints on development, the abundant biological diversity, ecological niches, and adaptation mechanisms present windows of development opportunities for mountain people. Mountain specificities need a distinct frame of analysis from what is used in the lowlands. This chapter explores the changing contexts of HKH mountain economies and livelihoods, detailing their specific conditions and challenges, as well as of the determinants and challenges in measuring and addressing poverty and coping with vulnerability to climate change.

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, in the mountains and hills of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), the poverty incidence is one-third compared to one-fourth for the national average.
- Poverty reduction approaches/programmes designed at national level are likely to miss crucial subnational and local manifestations of poverty.
- Determinants of vulnerability and of poverty in the HKH overlap substantially.

POLICY MESSAGES

- Allocate resources for mountain poverty reduction programmes
 - Infrastructure suited for fragile mountain ecosystem
 - Targeted approaches for indigenous and marginalized communities
 - Social protection for climate threats
- Address multidimensional poverty: education, health, living standards
 - Regular, systematic collection and sharing of data among HKH
 - Information on determinants of poverty, duration of spells, and causes of transient poverty
 - Data by mountain specificities: fragility, marginality, and remoteness
- Raise the benchmark for mountain people to more than USD 1.25 per day
 - Higher costs of living: heating costs, food prices, access to public services
 - Cost of living surveys for mountains

LINKS TO





OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

MOUNTAIN REGIONS OF THE HKH HAVE A HIGHER INCIDENCE OF ECONOMIC, MULTIDIMENSIONAL, AND INCOME POVERTY LEVELS THAN THE PLAINS

Precise measurement of mountain poverty and vulnerability is a challenge, given the large gaps in mountain-specific data for most HKH countries. The United Nations Development Programme's Multidimensional Poverty Index currently does not take account of mountain specificities. Income poverty has declined in all countries over time, most rapidly in Pakistan, India, and Bhutan. However, national scale poverty estimates may mask significant inequalities between mountain and non-mountain regions, as well as inequalities among mountain areas. For example, in Nepal, the poverty incidence in 2010/2011 was 42% in the mountains, compared with 23% in the plains and 25% nationally. If China and Bhutan are excluded, the multidimensional poverty rate is well above 40% across the region. The average intensity of deprivation is fairly consistent across HKH countries, varying from 43% in Bhutan and China to 52% in Pakistan.

In 2009, on average, 31% of the HKH population (excluding China and Myanmar) was below the poverty line, compared with 26% of the total population of these countries.

- Estimates of national-scale poverty may mask significant inequalities between mountain and non-mountain regions, as well as inequalities among mountain areas.

Apart from remoteness, poor accessibility, and high dependence on natural resources, major determinants of poverty and vulnerability in the HKH are socioeconomic inequities, conflicts, gender inequities, and caste or ethnicity based discrimination.



26%

NATIONAL AVERAGE
IN HKH COUNTRIES

31%

AVERAGE IN MOUNTAIN
AREAS OF THE HKH
(excluding China and Myanmar)

POVERTY IS HIGHER IN MOUNTAIN AREAS

THE HKH IS HOME TO MILLIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO ARE THE REGION'S POOREST AND ARE POLITICALLY AND SOCIALLY MARGINALIZED

The HKH is home to the region's poorest, politically and socially marginalized people who are often known as ethnic minorities, minority populations, and tribal groups.

Mountain poverty is associated with social markers and inequality at the intersection of class, caste, ethnicity, gender, education, occupation, and employment status. Factors that predict poverty and its persistence in the HKH broadly fall under the following five categories:

- Remoteness and low access to markets and basic facilities
- Access to natural resources — and high dependence on them
- Demographic factors
- Social and cultural factors
- Marginalization (political and socioeconomic)

All five types of determinants may hinder the conversion of resources, such as income, into desirable outcomes for wellbeing (increasing food and nutrition security, raising educational achievement, and improving health).

MOUNTAIN HOUSEHOLDS INCREASINGLY RELY ON LIVELIHOODS THAT COMBINE FARM WORK WITH NON-FARM ACTIVITIES

In the mountains of the HKH, land is scarce, for the most part, and formal property rights either do not exist or are ill-defined. Employment is largely informal, and access to social and economic services — including financial instruments — and social protection is limited. In this context, mountain livelihoods in the HKH are evolving. The past three decades have seen a significant shift from the agro-pastoral to a combined subsistence-labour system: mountain households no longer rely entirely on their land, though they cannot make do entirely without it. Mountain households increasingly rely on livelihoods that combine farm work with non-farm activities, such as wage labour, circular labour migration, and tourism services.



Mountain households no longer rely entirely on their land, though they cannot make do entirely without it.



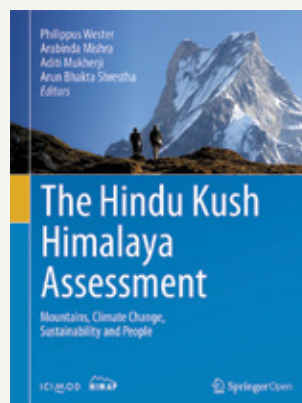
ACTION POINTS

DESIGN INTERVENTIONS TO TARGET POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY

Interventions that tackle challenges facing marginalized groups — including ethnic minorities— can boost economic returns from cultural tourism, alleviating poverty among the poorest, while preserving the region's ecological and cultural diversity. National, regional, and global institutions should allocate resources to develop mountain-specific policies.

GATHER DATA TO IMPROVE POLICIES IN THE FUTURE

There is an urgent need for gathering longitudinal data on poverty and vulnerability determinants, the duration of poverty spells, and the causes of transition in and out of poverty — disaggregated for mountain areas, while harmonized with national surveys and databases that enable the disaggregation of data for mountain areas. If future data gathering is to include information on key potential drivers of poverty in the HKH — such as the impacts of climate and other global drivers of change on mountain-specific livelihoods — then new investments and research on the ground will be needed.



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