

Herds on the Move: Winds of Change among Pastoralists in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau

Abstract

Rangelands cover about one-third of the Himalayan land area and over three-fourths of the Tibetan plateau. A large livestock population and possibly 10 million livestock dependent people reside in these mountain grazing lands, along with a unique assemblage of large wild ungulates. Most of Asia's major rivers originate in these rangelands and what takes place in these headwaters' ecosystems has far-reaching effects on downstream areas which have not been fully measured. Factors, such as geographical extent, biodiversity conservation, environmental protection, economic development, and human welfare, suggest that Himalayan and Tibetan rangelands should be a priority area for development, but, unfortunately, they are not. This paper examines some of the reasons why the rangelands and pastoralists on the Tibetan frontier have been ignored, describes changes taking place on the rangelands, discusses issues facing pastoralists, highlights new perceptions emerging to help explain rangeland dynamics and pastoral systems, and outlines factors to be considered in developing strategies for pastoral development in the region.