

1 Introduction

Background

Migration in the western Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH), as in other mountain areas of the world, is a traditional phenomenon. However, in recent years, global changes have led to a considerable increase in migration in the region with almost half of the population migrating seasonally in some places.

Socioeconomic and environmental changes are taking place across the western HKH region, including increases in the extent and severity of natural disasters, declining crop yields and availability of mountain products, a reduction in the diversity of mountain agriculture, a decline in the water flow from local springs, and growing food insecurity and poverty. The region also suffers from low incomes, lack of employment opportunities, lack of infrastructure, and lack of access to basic amenities. The specific characteristics of mountains – poor accessibility, fragility, and marginality – have contributed to the impact of the changes. At the same time, rapid economic development in the western HKH region and other urban centres in Asia has increased the demand for cheap and flexible labour. Increased awareness of opportunities elsewhere, better communication technologies, and falling transportation costs have enabled previously immobile mountain people to migrate at unprecedented rates.

Migration generates financial and human capital (skills and knowledge), which, if leveraged for development, can reduce poverty. Results from macro-economic studies suggest that, on average, a 10 per cent increase in per capita official international remittances leads to a 3.5 per cent decline in the proportion of people living in poverty (Adams and Page 2005). Remittances are increasingly becoming the most direct, immediate, and significant contribution to the livelihoods of the mountain poor in the western HKH. Remittances provide a safety net for the large number of dependents left behind. Almost 35 per cent of households in the mountains and hills of Nepal receive remittances (HMGN 2004). Migration has become an effective strategy for livelihood adaptation in the HKH region.

The benefits of remittances are not limited to recipient households, but have a wider impact on the receiving society as remittances are spent, generating demand and jobs for local workers. Remittances improve living conditions, education, and health in the origin communities, and provide insurance against income shocks. Migrants acquire new ideas, skills, perceptions, and technologies from the host communities, which they carry back to their place of origin. Migrants act as powerful agents for transformation and social change.

Although there is a very large development potential from the sheer magnitude of labour migration and remittance flows in the western HKH, the awareness of this potential and action to exploit it remains weak. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of information and knowledge on migration and remittance patterns and volumes. Before developing strategies that can help people benefit more from the migration that is taking place, it is important to understand more about the process, the way it affects and is used by society, and the flows of remittances. Most of the data and information which is available relates to country and regional level statistics, which is insufficient for understanding and addressing the dimension of migration in the western HKH. There is an urgent need to understand labour migration and remittances, and its impact on development, in the mountain areas of the HKH in order to support informed policy advocacy and development planning. In the coming decades, migration will persist in the western HKH and other mountain areas of the world, driven by globalisation, food insecurity, climate change, and escalating income disparities. The development potentials of labour migration and remittances are too substantial to remain unaddressed due to a lack of understanding and awareness.

To address the lack of information, three case studies were carried out in India, Nepal, and Pakistan looking at migration in general, and the flow of remittances in particular, at the selected sites. Information was collected on the type, volume, and mode of transfer of remittances, the impact of remittances in terms of financial flows and the transfer of new skills, perceptions on poverty and development, and gender aspects. This publication presents a synthesis of the results of the case studies.

Approach

The three case studies on labour migration and remittances were carried out in mountain areas of India (hill state of Uttarakhand), Nepal (Far Western and Mid Western Development Regions), and Pakistan; with desk research for all three case studies, supplemented by community level field surveys in India and Nepal. The field surveys were conducted in cooperation with country projects of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD): the western Uplands Poverty Alleviation Project (WUPAP) in Nepal and Ajeevika in Uttarakhand, India.

The overall approach is summarised in Figure 1. The objectives of the study were to understand the impact of labour migration and remittances, on poverty, development and gender dimensions, in terms of both financial flows and the transfer of new skills and perceptions; to identify the major constraints to enhancing the impact of remittances; and to draw lessons and recommendations to improve the development impact of both financial and social remittances in mountain areas of the western HKH region.

Desk research and literature review

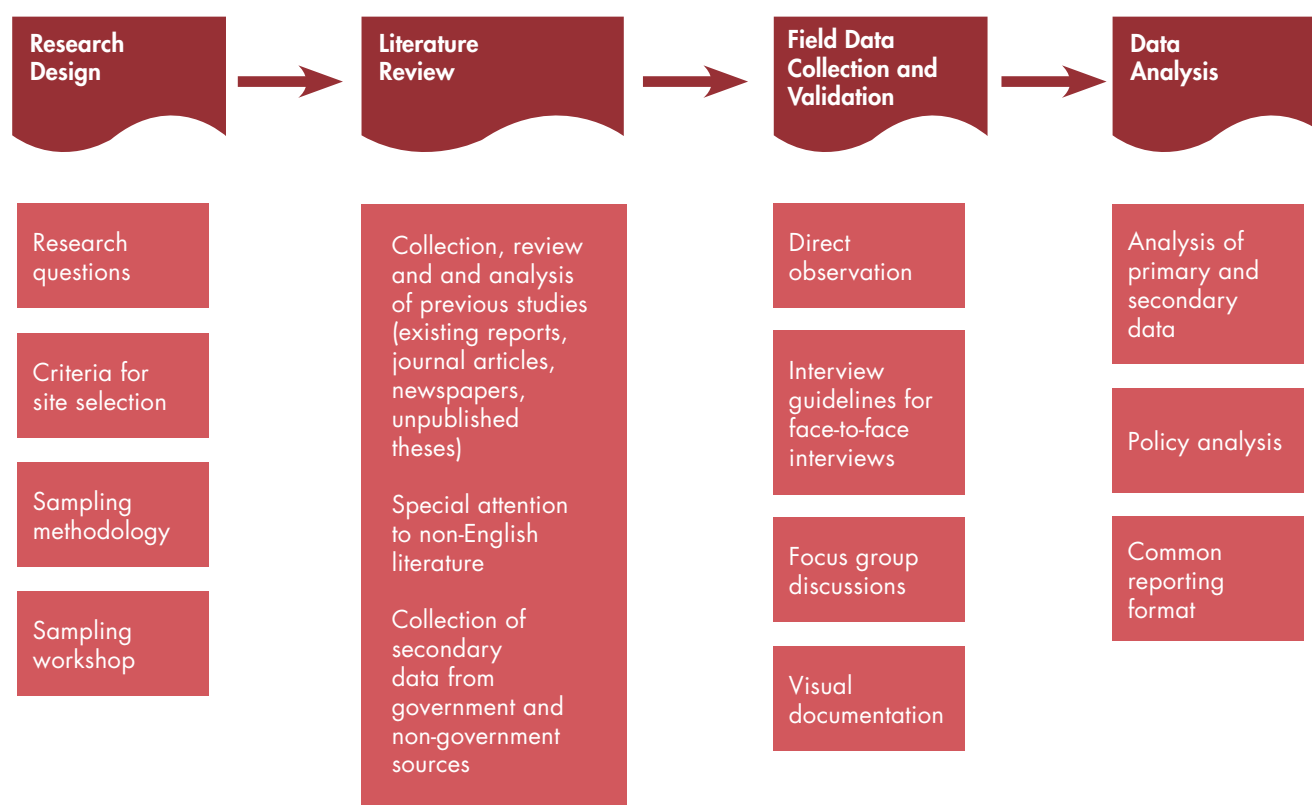
At a macro-level, secondary data were gathered to assess the various dimensions of labour migration and remittance flows from the western HKH over time. Census data and national livelihood surveys were consulted for national representative data on migration and remittance flows. Secondary and grey literature with a focus on the same study area offered valuable insights and a basis for comparison.

Field surveys

At a micro-level, the two community level field surveys examined the following questions:

- Who migrates and for what reasons? What are the consequences of migration for the dependent households? Have these reasons changed over time?
- How do migrants identify jobs? What are the strengths and challenges of various recruitment processes?
- What channels are used to transfer remittances and why?

Figure 1: **Methodological framework for labour migration and remittances study in the western Hindu Kush-Himalayas**



- What institutional arrangements are in place to offer financial services to migrants?
- What role do social remittances play in the mountain areas?
- What are the effects of expansive male outmigration on mountain societies, particularly women?
- What are the challenges to improving local investment in both financial and human capital acquired by migrants?
- What are the community demands and perceptions towards improving the development impact of labour migration and remittances.

In Uttarakhand the primary survey was conducted in six villages in the districts of Bageshwar, Chamoli, and Tehri Garhwal. The villages were selected based on discussions with the District Coordinators of the IFAD supported Ajeevika project (IFAD no date a) using criteria such as distance of the village from motorable road, distance from nearest urban area or market, and visible trend of outmigration from the village.

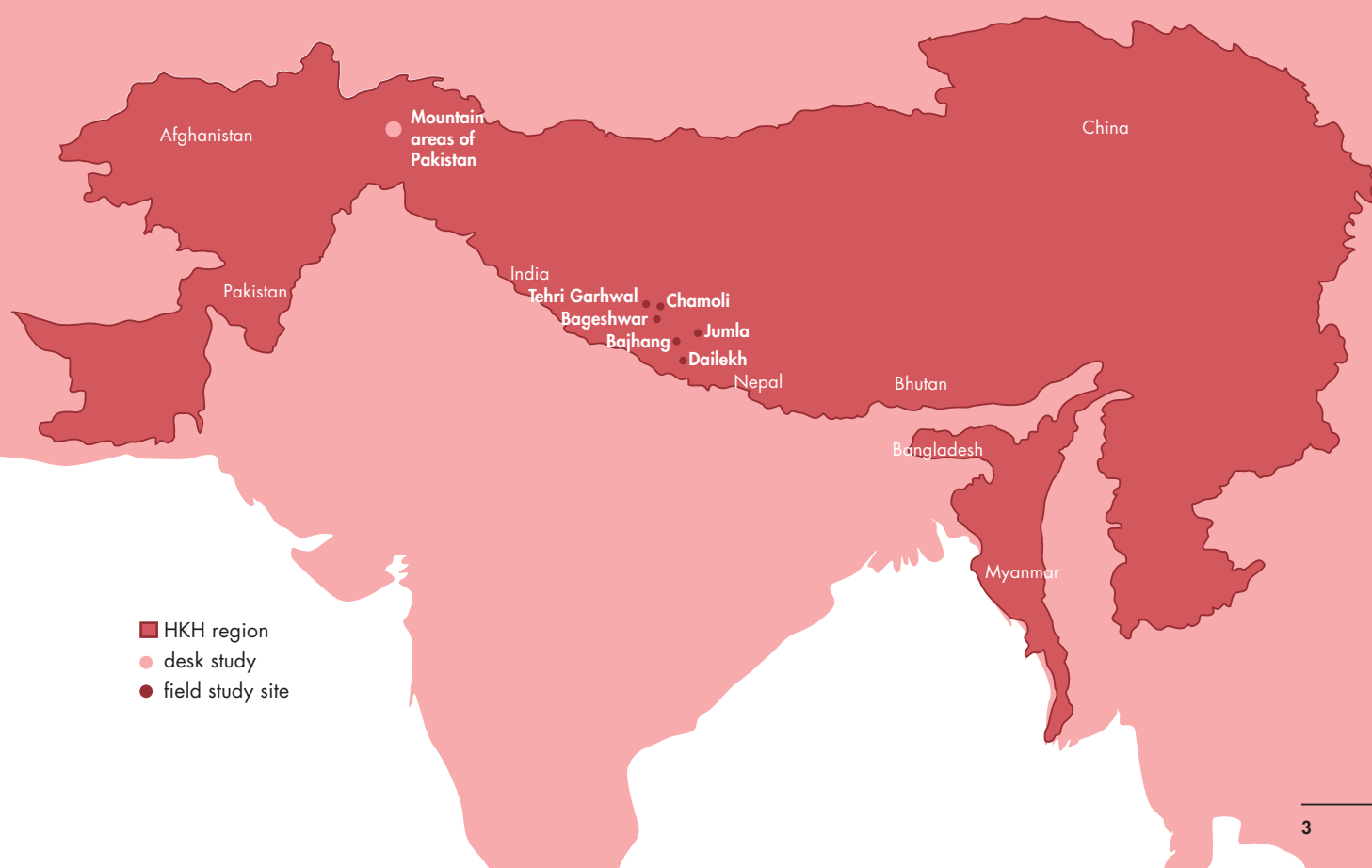
In Nepal, the districts of Bajhang, Dailekh, and Jumla were chosen based on their poverty status and dependence on migration as a means of survival. A primary survey was conducted in some of the poorest village development committees (VDCs) in these districts, where the western Uplands Poverty Alleviation Project (IFAD no date b) had been implemented.

The surveyed villages in Uttarakhand were comparatively better off (families' food grain from their own land was sufficient for 6-8 months) than those in the Mid Western and Far Western development regions of Nepal (where food from own land was barely sufficient for 1-2 months of the year). In total, 545 individuals were interviewed, either in face-to-face interviews or in focus group discussions.

Overall Findings

The findings from the literature review, the three desk studies, and the field surveys were analysed, synthesised, and linked to ongoing research to develop an overview of the situation, and regional differences, in the western Hindu Kush-Himalayas, which is presented in the following chapters. The detailed case studies are being published separately and will be available at www.books.icimod.org.

Figure 2: The Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region





Village in Baltistan, Pakistan