

COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM AND LIVELIHOODS IN THE HILL ECONOMY OF NAINITAL DISTRICT, UTTARAKHAND

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Nainital as a town characterizes a tourist destination, but as a district it bears the character of an agricultural economy. Here nearly 90% of the total cropped area is devoted to subsistence crops mainly grown for domestic consumption and local market. Commercial or cash crops occupy a very negligible portion of the cropped area. The agricultural practices are far from being economically rewarding due to non-progressive and unsustainable patterns of livelihood. Since opportunities of employment and income generation outside agricultural activities are limited, the local people bear a system of subsistence cultivation.

The availability of land for agriculture in the hill region of Uttarakhand is limited as would be evident from the fact in Census of India, 2011, that the per capita cultivated land is only 0.15 hectares compared with 0.34 hectares per capita for the country, whereas 0.48 hectares per capita is considered as the minimum requirement for supporting and providing livelihood to an individual. The inability of available cultivable land in the hills to produce enough food for a rapidly increasing population is giving rise to intense pressure on land. This condition of uneconomic agriculture is posing serious threat to the land resources.

In the analysis of the primarily agricultural economy of this hill region it is found that the older and larger villages lay in the valleys where the agricultural terraces were wider and richer with two to three crops in a year. But the percentage of such areas is very low. Beside these some rainfed areas have narrower terraces with no irrigation facilities, which do not support even two crops in two years cycle,

and the farmers are practicing to leave it uncultivated for one crop season for alternate year in order to recover fertility.

In this hill economy agriculture is the main activity and a traditional cropping pattern of three crops in two years, that is paddy-wheat-mandua(Ragi) is practiced. On account of the small size of holdings and total dependence on rainfall, yields are low. The average size of holding is 1.67 ha in Nainital district which has come under severe pressure since the lands are rampantly sold by the cultivators to the builders for cash in return.

The overall cropping pattern of this district is typical of an underdeveloped agricultural economy. Nearly 90% of the total cropped area is devoted to subsistence food crops mainly grown for domestic consumption and local market. Commercial or cash crops occupy a very negligible portion of the cropped area. In subsistence farming in hills there are no savings and therefore no capital formation takes place. As it is there is no will to save and invest for the betterment of the future.

Another essential feature of agriculture in this region is that it heavily depends upon the animal dung as manure, and the animals graze on common pastures and forest lands. In the older time there was right kind of ratio between the population and pastures existed, but with the fragmentation of agriculture and rise in population, the proportion between cultivated land and pastures cannot sustain the number of animals required to maintain the level of agricultural yields. Population increase together with restrictions on agricultural extension have resulted

in fragmentation of land holdings into such small plots that very few families today obtain two or three months food from their fields. Food grains for remaining nine months are being brought into the region from Terai and foothills and plains. For the families to survive at the minimal level of subsistence the working members have to find other livelihood alternatives, mostly outside the hill region. For the most part only the men migrate leaving behind the women, children and old people. Only a small portion of men of working age find local employment in the forests, road construction or local market or local government agencies.

Even in order to maintain itself at its present meagre level, hill agriculture is drawing on the capital resources of the natural environment at a greater rate than they can replenish themselves. For this reason hill agriculture here is uneconomic and needs some alternative livelihood options. The traditional practices regarding livelihood systems, mainly agriculture and livestock-rearing are quite unrewarding. In the micro-level village survey, all production centres upon cultivation, where livestock raising is an integral component of agricultural economy. The majority of the livestock of the region is composed of cattle and buffaloes. Goat and poultry are less common. Buffalo thrives better than cattle on coarse fodder and is thus suitable for the hill region, which suffers from scarcity of good fodder.

HORTICULTURE

Nainital district has a unique location and climatic advantage in the pursuit of horticulture, but it may not be taken as an alternative to agriculture without proper planning. The promotion of horticulture in the hills poses a potential problem that cultivators could be deprived of crops for several years between planting fruit trees and their yield. Constraints in developing fruit production include lack of availability of quality plants, lack of disease and pest control measures, lack of marketing infrastructure, and lack of labour because crop harvesting, fruit

harvesting and grass cutting activities coincide resulting in labour scarcity. Though off-season vegetables and potatoes have a seasonal advantage as they are produced and disposed of before the produce of the plains comes to the market. The main fruit is apple but it is widely suffering from problems of disease rendering it total loss of horticulture. Citrus, mango and pear are the most important fruits from the standpoint of exports. Off-season vegetables like tomato, beans, peas, capsicum, cabbage, cauliflower and potatoes hold good prospects. The constraints, however, are timely availability of seed, seedlings and disease control. The higher initial investments, low returns and non-availability of technical information and poor infrastructure are some of the other hurdles.

In certain areas of Nainital district the fruit growing belts are well developed and a substantial quantity of fruits is supplied to the market through contractors and middlemen. The climatic conditions of Nainital district strongly favour diversification from agriculture into horticulture, namely, fruits, cut flowers, mushrooms and off-season and seasonal vegetables, including potatoes. This, however needs infrastructural support in the form of soil and water conservation measures, irrigation facilities, credit and marketing support and the development of transport and communications. However, by and large these measures have not been implemented due to lack of institutional support, scarce local capital and chronic backwardness. The arable lands in this hill region should be used for orchards, tea, nuts, medicinal plants, flowers, aromatic products, organic vegetables etc.

In the old times there was a viable agrarian economy in the hills but in the present scenario the uneconomical livelihood alternatives need to be supplemented with other economically viable options such as community-based ecotourism in this hill region. In general, community-based ecotourism refers to ecotourism enterprises that are owned and managed by the community. It implies that a community is taking care of their natural resources in order to gain income through operating a tourism enterprise and using that income to better their

lives. It involves conservation, business enterprise and community development.

In Nainital district the potential of ecotourism is high and with the prospect of developing the community based ecotourism, the field work was conducted at village level in 2012, and the data was compiled at block level. Though there are eight blocks in Nainital district, namely, Ramnagar, Haldwani, Kotabagh, Bhimtal, Okhalkanda, Dhari, Ramgarh and Betalghat.

Haldwani block lacks the landuse suitable for ecotourism, as it is mainly characterized by commercial, industrial and residential uses of urban landscape. Ramnagar block has an exception in Ramganga basin combined with the reserved forest which is suitable for ecotourism, but from the point of view of community-based ecotourism it loses the significance. The villages which are finally enlisted as the potential areas of community-based ecotourism take into account only six blocks, namely, Kotabagh, Bhimtal, Okhalkanda, Ramgarh, Dhari and Betalghat. The town areas of Nainital, Bhimtal, Bhowali and Ramnagar are not taken into consideration for the purpose of community-based eco-tourism.

In the analysis of data obtained through the primary work, the following observations are noted-

1. The **family composition** is primarily of joint family type, in which two to three generations live together in a single household. This pattern has a direct relevance to the present research that the livelihoods of present generation as well as past generation can be easily assessed, through first person account.
2. The study area of Nainital district at village level under different blocks which was brought under a field survey showed totally Hindu **religion** population. Though there is a marginal presence of Muslims and Christians in the district but in the selected villages they do not figure in.

3. So far the **caste** factor is concerned there is a majority of General category, followed by Scheduled Castes under Reserved category. The Scheduled Tribes are hardly found present in these villages.
4. The **annual income** in the study area shows a modest economy prevailing in this region. The very low income (less than Rs.30,000 per annum) is highest in Okhalkanda block (36%) closely followed by Betalghat block (35%) and Dhari block (21%). The percentage of low income group is also high in the blocks of Okhalkanda and Betalghat. The percentage of very high income group (Rs.,200,000 and above) is highest in Bhimtal block (19%), where more people are engaged in business, government services, hotel industry, self-employment etc.
 - a. The trend of income shows that those blocks which are primarily engaged in Agricultural occupations have poor economic returns and therefore they are placed in the bottom rung of income.
 - b. Those who come in the very high income group (Rs.2,00,000 and above) in otherwise low profile blocks, are mostly either retired personnel from military with pensions or the Pradhans of the Panchayats in the villages.
5. When we see the **occupational distribution** as Agricultural and Non-agricultural in the selected blocks, the percentage of Agricultural occupation is highest in Betalghat block (94%), closely followed by Okhalkanda block (90%). The highest percentage of Non-agricultural occupation is in Bhimtal block (46%), due to its proximity to urban areas like Nainital and Haldwani. Ramgarh block has also shown comparatively higher percentage of Non-

agricultural occupation than other blocks like Dhari, Betalghat, Okhalkanda, due to the fact that in last few years it has witnessed boom in real estate enterprise and substantial agricultural land has been sold out to affluent people from outside the region. But overall, the Agricultural occupations are much more predominant in this hill district.

- a. The non-agricultural activities seem to have stagnated or declined in traditional activities like black smithy, carpentry and spinning or weaving while the activities which have shown increase are grocery selling, tea shops/ small provision shops and tailoring.
6. The **assets** of the people are modest, like TV, cycle, mobile phones, sometimes two wheelers or four wheelers like car, van or jeep which is used as taxi.
 7. The pattern of **land availability** shows bigger holdings in the less developed areas, such as Dhari (33%), Betalghat (24%), Okhalkanda (23%) blocks have very large land holdings of more than 50 "naalis" (1 naali = 2275 sqft), whereas the smaller holdings in the more developed areas where the lands are largely sold out and now less and less lands are at the disposal of the locals, such as Bhimtal block has very large holdings only (10%) and Ramgarh block (15%).
 - a. This inverse relationship between the size of land holdings and economic development is clear among all the blocks. It is an irony that where the land prices have gone up due to infrastructure, better accessibility, contact with outsiders, boom in real estate etc. the agricultural lands are sold out for higher economic returns for non-agricultural uses like residential purposes etc. But in the less accessible areas or in the interiors the large chunks of land are still under cultivation with very low productivity and economic return.
 - b. This clearly shows that how the agricultural economy of this region is breaking down.
 8. The subsistence farming of this region is heavily dependent on **livestock** for manure and animal power in farming. Generally the number of cows is higher than buffaloes in all the districts, followed by ox and others like goat, sheep etc. The livestock like cows and buffaloes are more for domestic use of milk, manure etc. rather than the commercial sale of dairy products. In fact, the yield is generally very low so far the dairy products are concerned and it barely fulfils the domestic needs. The number of cows is higher due to free grazing practice in the forest areas, whereas due to low availability of fodder in the hills, the buffaloes which are maintained in stalls and sheds, are comparatively less preferred. The intensity of grazing in hills is consequently very high. It has been observed that the Reserved Castes such as Schedule Castes prefer to keep goats, sheep and mules etc.
 9. The **veterinary services** are mostly available or accessible at or near the villages. Though the proper veterinary service is available at block and district level only.
 10. So far the availability of the **basic amenities** like water, electricity, health are concerned, they are by and large accessible everywhere if not available. **Water** is available through natural source such as rivers, rivulets, springs or public water supply as

community tap in the village. Only a small number of locals have their private water supply. Sometimes the women folk have to walk down long distances to fetch the water. In last few years a large number of hand pumps are provided under various govt. schemes but most of them are lying dysfunctional.

11. **Electricity** has reached almost all the villages of Nainital district but in the far interiors the supply of electricity is quite erratic and prone to frequent faults due to rains, hailstorms etc. The electricity in most of the cases is found to be either un-metered or on flat rates.
12. The **health** services at the village level are largely available in nearby Primary Health Centers, but for any health problem more than the primary nature may be available at block level or district level.
13. The **transport services** are mostly used in all the blocks for availing the health facility at far or less distances. The other uses of transport is for work and education. The blocks like Bhimtal and Kotabagh show higher percentages of users of transport for work or education. Okhalkanda, Betalghat, Dhari blocks show as small as 2 to 3 percent for using transport services for work. One of the main reasons behind this is that that majority of them engaged in their own agricultural pursuits.
14. The **irrigational infrastructure** in the selected blocks of Nainital district is quite undeveloped. The subsistence farming of this hill region is rainfed. There is limited use of irrigational sources like local streams and rivers.
15. The **out-migration** is much more important than the **in-migration** in this district. Most of those who migrate to plains or bigger

cities, are young people in search of employment and better life styles.

- a. An increasing trend of out-migration has been there from rural to urban areas. The level of poverty and unemployment are the main reasons to migrate to urban areas. Other kinds of migration are related with education and social motivation and tend to affect a smaller size of population. Whereas the in-migration is very low, except those cases where retired people come back to their native places or in some case it is due to inter-district migration, for example from Pithoragarh district to Nainital district. In this study of community-based ecotourism for livelihood alternatives the locals are taken into consideration and not the labour force coming as migrants from other States like Bihar, Jharkhand etc.
16. So far, the **past livelihood** is concerned almost 100% people of the earlier generation were practicing agriculture.
17. This may be at times more than a hundred years that agriculture continued to be the mainstay of their livelihood. Most of the agricultural land they own is ancestral. But with the extensions in the family-structure the land holdings have become fragmented and scattered over large areas, making it more and more unsuitable for agricultural reforms.
18. In past generation though the cropping pattern was not very different from today, Rabi and Kharif; but there were three crops a year whereas now there are three crops in two years. The pressure of population was not so alarming on the land and forest.

19. The pattern of **present livelihood** shows the agricultural as well as non-agricultural components, such as cultivation, business/self-employed, Government jobs and others. Okhalkanda block shows the highest percentage (97%) engaged in cultivation, followed by Betalghat block (90%), Dhari block (89%). On the other hand the percentages in these blocks are quite low in reference to business, Govt. jobs, and others. In Okhalkanda block the percentage of people in business is as low as 1%, followed by Betalghat block (2%) and Dhari block (3%).
- a. The Bhimtal block shows the lowest percentage (55%) engaged in cultivation, whereas the percentages of business and Govt. jobs are highest (29%) and (14%), respectively in this block. In Ramgarh block also the percentage of people engaged in cultivation is comparatively low (68%) to other blocks such as Okhalkanda, Betalghat, Dhari. In Kotabagh block the percentage of people in cultivation is moderate (77%), whereas the percentages of people in business is (14%).
 - b. It is noticed that mostly those who are engaged in business have shops or transport and majority of the self-employed people are dealing in real estate. When it comes to Govt. jobs the percentage goes up due to taking into account all those who are elected members of Panchayat system at grass root level and those who are in education system like Primary Schools, High Schools, Inter Colleges, even Anganwadis; otherwise the picture would have been different because there is not much scope of having Govt. jobs at village level.
20. Though the present generation is still carrying on with the agricultural practices of their earlier generation, but they are simultaneously practicing other occupations such as business, local politics, transport, land dealership or even Govt. jobs such as local governance, teaching etc.
21. The Green Revolution has not touched this region because of the different set of conditions here which were not conducive to such a revolution. The agriculture scenario has become dimmer over the time having no major changes in terms of crops sown, infrastructure, irrigation etc. But the use of fertilizers and hybrid seeds has come in without understanding their consequences. Since the agriculture is primarily rainfed in this hill region, the hybrid seeds are not suitable as they require lot of water supply. They may give higher yields only in river valleys where the supply of water is assured from the river. The rampant use of fertilizers and pesticides in these areas has already assumed dangerous proportions. Now the traditional use of green manure is becoming less and less. Ironically enough, even in villages here the 'organic food' is a specialized item.
22. The **satisfaction level** of agriculture in all the selected blocks of Nainital district is alarming. More than 90% of people are dissatisfied with the returns from agriculture- Dhari block (98%), Okhalkanda block (96%), Betalghat block (94%) and Bhimtal block (97%). The satisfaction level is comparatively higher in Ramgarh block (69%) and Kotabagh block (67%), probably due to better yields from horticulture and seasonal vegetables.
- a. The problem of dissatisfaction among the people with agriculture

as an option of livelihood is phenomenal. On an average the agricultural yield is not sufficient to sustain a household more than three to four months a year, as result they have to buy the cereals, vegetables etc. to sustain for eight to nine months a year from the local market which come from terai and foothill region.

23. When it comes to the solution to make the agriculture a better option of livelihood, various measures are sought out such as change in crops, water availability, horticulture, loan facilities etc. The majority of people asked for better water availability, as they feel that the use of hybrid seeds is the only answer to make agriculture a better option of livelihood with better loan facilities. Relatively a much smaller percentage of people feel that horticulture should be encouraged in this region which has the reputation of 'Fruit district' of Uttarakhand, but so far the shifting the gear from traditional farming to horticulture is not successful. It may be due to the fact that the shift of area under fruits into agricultural crops in the case of small farmers could mainly be due to the fact that the nature of cultivation of fruits is quite different from agricultural crops primarily because of long gestation period involved in fruit production, more so that they cannot bear the cost involved in maintaining orchards.

24. All the people have heard of tourism in the region but very small number of people is actually aware of Ecotourism as a livelihood alternative. When it comes to relating to various options of livelihood under ecotourism, maximum people opt for transport, catering and guide services. The options of souvenirs and folk music/art have very few takers, may be because the

tradition of handicrafts is not so well evolved in this region and there is not much to offer in terms of local souvenir items of specialized local character to tourists. The folk traditions are also on the brink of fading out in the new generation.

25. However, the people are totally ignorant of community-based ecotourism. When explained the idea of community-based ecotourism, almost all of them showed positive interest in being part of such development programme if it holds to offer them the sustainable livelihood alternatives along with their traditional livelihood from agriculture.

As a complex service industry, tourism is dependent on a wide range of general and specialised services and facilities to fulfil the needs of tourists. The tourism enterprise begins with a tourist, travel agencies and tour operators, and ends with suppliers of services such as accommodation, transportation, and excursions. The processes involved in community-based ecotourism include all aspects of planning, developing, marketing and managing resources and facilities for this form of tourism. Visitor provision includes access to natural areas and cultural heritage, guiding and interpretative services, accommodation, catering, sales of produce and handicrafts, and transport. Community-based ecotourism is a viable option to avoid the degradation of resources and upgrade economic status of people of this hill district. To do this, the basic infrastructural facilities would have to be improved as per the requirements and needs of the tourists and suitable arrangements for the tourists would have to be made in professional terms of the matter.

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