

Chapter 16

Reconceptualizing the Migration Strategy in Uttarakhand: A Comprehensive Case Study of Uttarkashi

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates migration challenges and their impact across Uttarakhand's districts, focusing on Uttarkashi and its government policy implementation. High out-migration from rural areas due to limited opportunities is a key concern. Three of Uttarkashi's six blocks (Chinyalisaur, Dunda, and Bhatwari), categorized by accessibility (SUGAM/DURGAM), were selected using systematic sampling. Two villages per block were then chosen through convenient sampling. Data was collected via telephone interviews and in-person interviews with 50 respondents each, conducted in June 2024. The research analyzes the impact of government policies on key sectors like infrastructure, tourism, environment, agriculture, education, and healthcare in mitigating out-migration. The study aims to inform policy and promote inclusive development in Uttarkashi.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a socio-economic phenomenon particularly in regions that are characterized by challenging geographies and societal disparities. The state of Uttarakhand in northern India exemplifies such a region where the interplay of limited employment opportunities, environmental constraints and challenges to policy implementation has spurred significant out-migration from rural areas. This chap-

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ter delves into the critical issues associated with migration in Uttarakhand with a specific focus on the Uttarkashi district to evaluate the socio-economic impact and assess the role of government policies in mitigating this pertinent issue.

The phenomenon of migration in Uttarakhand is a complex and varied pattern with extensive repercussions on both the origin and destination regions. Uttarakhand is nestled in the Indian Himalayan region and is characterized by unique topography i.e., vast tracts of rugged terrain, limited arable land and scattered settlements. These geographical constraints have long posed challenges to livelihood generation contributing to out-migration trends. Significant patterns of outmigration to plains have been observed in backward economies with distinctive regional characteristics. This migration is mostly due to disparities in opportunities and amenities between two separate locales, and it is essentially a coping mechanism (Awasthi & Mehta, 2020). Migration provides economic benefits to individuals and families such as remittances and improved living standards but it also imposes significant costs on the source regions i.e. depopulation, labour shortages and the erosion of traditional social and cultural structures. It is an important socio-economic issue in Uttarakhand. Lack of adequate infrastructure and socio-economic disparities in rural areas prompted many individuals, particularly young individuals and families to urban centers or more developed states in pursuit of better education, work opportunities, and living conditions. According to the report of the Rural Development and Migration Prevention Commission of Uttarakhand, 3.3 lakh people migrated from Uttarakhand, and 76.9% migrated within the state between 2018 and 2022. The current demographic report revealed that out of 16,793 villages in Uttarakhand, 1,700 have turned into “Ghost Villages”(Singh, 2023).

This study addresses key issues within the broader framework of migration studies focusing on the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand. The Uttarkashi district has rich cultural heritage and scenic landscapes which has also witnessed significant migration over the years. However, the consequences of this out migration trend have been far-reaching affecting not only the socio-economic fabric of the region but also its demographic composition and developmental trajectory. Recognizing these challenges and revitalizing the region, the government has implemented a number of initiatives, including tourism promotion and focused agriculture aimed at addressing the root causes of migration and promoting sustainable development in the region. The effectiveness of these interventions remains a subject of debate while necessitating a closer examination of their impact on key sectors such as infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, education, health care and the environment.

The present study examined the two major state policies aimed at mitigating the issue of migration in Uttarakhand i.e., the *Mukhyamantri Swarojgar Yojana (MSY)* and the *Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grah Aawas (Home Stay)*. The methodology employed in this study provides a robust framework for analyzing these policies and its associated challenges. The study gives nuanced understanding of the regulations and how geographical accessibility influences migration patterns and policy effectiveness. A critical dimension of this study is its focus on the key industries and sectors such as Road connections, hydroelectric projects, tourism development, homestay facilities, environmental preservation, agricultural production, educational infrastructure, and healthcare facilities that influence migration dynamics in Uttarkashi.

Infrastructure development in Uttarakhand plays a pivotal role in shaping migration patterns by improving connectivity and access to market, education and healthcare. The tourism sector is also significant for economic development in Uttarakhand. The seasonal nature of tourism activities in Uttarkashi serves as a catalyst for reducing out-migration by generating local employment opportunities. Similarly, the agricultural sector in Uttarkashi is the traditional backbone of rural livelihoods and has been significantly affected by out-migration. Labour shortage, reduced agricultural productivity and the abandonment of

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