



Reverse Migration: Fostering Entrepreneurship in the hills of Uttarakhand

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Abstract

The covid-19 pandemic has deeply affected the global economy; Uttarakhand is no exception. A new trend of reverse migration has been observed in Uttarakhand, especially in the hills region. Reverse migration posed various challenges as well as opportunities for the rural economy. Uttarakhand, a Himalayan state characterized by its fragile hill ecosystem, rural economy, large-scale rural-urban migration, difficult agricultural terrain, and poor infrastructure. Approximately 215875 people have returned to their native villages in Uttarakhand, which indicates reverse migration in Uttarakhand, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has opened new possibilities for entrepreneurial development. This study examines opportunities for entrepreneurial development in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand due to reverse migration. The paper also highlights status and causes of rural-urban migration in the state using secondary data collected from various sources.

Keywords:- Outmigration, Reverse migration, Rural economy, Entrepreneurship

I:- Introduction-

The State of Uttarakhand which was separated from Uttar Pradesh on November 9, 2000, covers an area of 53,483 square kilometers, which accounts for 1.6% of Indian mainland and 0.83% of its population. The state is bifurcated into two major administrative divisions: Kumaon and Garhwal. The Kumaon division comprises six districts: Nainital, Almora, Udham Singh Nagar, Bageshwar, Champawat, and Pithoragarh. The Garhwal division includes seven districts: Chamoli, PauriGarhwal, TehriGarhwal, Uttarkashi, Rudraprayag, Dehradun, and Haridwar. At the administrative level the state is further

subdivided into 102 tehsils, 95 development blocks, 670 NyayaPanchayats, 7,950 Gram Panchayats, and 16,793 census villages.

Uttarakhand, since its formation in 2000, has faced significant outmigration challenges. Many residents, especially from rural areas, have migrated to cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and other urban centers in search of better economic opportunities. This trend of outmigration has led to a decline in population in several districts, with Almora and PauriGarhwal recording negative population growth between the 2001 and 2011. However, in recent years, a new and contrasting trend known as reverse migration has emerged. Generally reverse migration is known as the trend of people returning to their villages or places of their origin from where they were they were previously employed or settled.

II:- Methodology-

This study is based on secondary data collected from the report of Uttarakhand Rural development and Migration Commission Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand at a glance and Department of Tourism, Govt. of Uttarakhand.

III:- Literature Review-

The corona virus pandemic presented a significant challenge to India; however, the national lockdown mitigated a serious issue in the state by alleviating the out-migration problem. Long-term unemployment and the loss of livelihoods in urban centers forced many villagers who were working in informal and private sectors in many cities across India to return to their native places. (SeemaParveen, 2020).

Reverse migration has been observed in approximately 850 villages across all 13 districts of Uttarakhand. Notably, increased tourist traffic has motivated many locals to venture into the trekking business, with several applying for loans to purchase essentials like tents, sleeping bags, and horses. This shift has also led to a remarkable trend of villagers, who had left their ancestral homes decades ago in search of better livelihoods, now returning to their roots. (Malik & Kotdwar, 2022)

Over the years, Uttarakhand has experienced significant out-migration, with large numbers of people leaving the hill regions to settle in the plains. This trend has primarily been driven by the lack of adequate employment opportunities and economic prospects in the state's mountainous areas, compelling individuals to seek better livelihoods elsewhere. However, the nationwide lockdown imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a dramatic shift in this pattern. The closure of businesses, loss of

jobs, and economic uncertainty in urban centers forced many migrants to return to their native villages in Uttarakhand's rural and hilly regions.(Mamgain & Reddy, 2017)

Out-migration has long been a persistent challenge in the mountainous regions of Uttarakhand. This issue is primarily attributed to the low agricultural productivity across much of the state's geography, coupled with minimal industrial development, particularly in the hill areas. These factors have significantly limited local employment opportunities, driving residents to seek better livelihoods in the plains and urban centers.

IV- Outmigration in Uttarakhand

Prior to the formation of the state, people from the hilly regions migrated to metro cities in search of employment. Now, after the formation of the state, this phenomenon continues and the rate of outmigration from the hilly region of Uttarakhand has accelerated.(Pant & Chandra, 2023)

In Uttarakhand, improved infrastructure has connected villages with roads and electricity, but life in the hills remains challenging, especially for rural farmers facing high costs to transport produce to markets. Seeking better income and living standards, many households from hilly areas have migrated to plains regions like Udham Singh Nagar, Ramnagar, Haldwani, Dehradun, and Haridwar.(Sharma et al., 2019) . Out-migration has long been a persistent challenge in the mountainous regions of Uttarakhand. This issue is primarily attributed to the low agricultural productivity across much of the state's geography, coupled with minimal industrial development, particularly in the hill areas. These factors have significantly limited local employment opportunities, driving residents to seek better livelihoods in the plains and urban centers.

Over the last decade, a total of 3,83,726 individuals from 6,338 gram panchayats have migrated on a semi-permanent basis. While they periodically return to their villages, they have not settled elsewhere permanently. During the same period, 1,18,981 people from 3,946 gram panchayats have permanently migrated. The data reveals a clear trend across all districts of the state, showing that semi-permanent migration significantly outnumbers permanent migration.(Rural Development and Migration Commission, Uttarakhand, 2019).

Table- No. 1

Age wise migration Status in Uttarakhand (in Percentage)

S No.	Districts	Less than 25 years	26 to 35 years old	More than 35 years of age
1	Uttarkashi	30.68	36.56	32.77

2	Chamoli	26.71	43.49	29.79
3	Rudraprayag	28.97	41.83	29.20
4	TehriGarhwal	29.26	40.92	29.82
5	Dehradun	38.41	34.47	27.12
6	PauriGarhwal	29.23	41.67	29.10
7	Pithoragarh	28.32	42.58	29.10
8	Bageshwar	33.92	42.1	23.97
9	Almora	29.19	42.22	28.59
10	Champawat	25.23	45.49	29.29
11	Nainital	29.48	44.57	25.96
12	Udham Singh Nagar	16.66	43.34	40.00
13	Haridwar	13.99	52.79	33.22

Source- RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION COMMISSION, UTTARAKHAND,

The table presented above shows the age-wise distribution of migrants from Uttarakhand. It highlights the age group of 26 to 35 years to be the one with the highest percentage of migration, which is followed by age group representing people above 35 years and age group less than 25 years respectively.

Table no.2 shows major reasons for out migration across all districts in Uttarakhand. Study shows employment is biggest reasons for people to migrate followed by education. Medical facilities, infrastructure and agricultural destruction by wild animals are other reasons which forced people to migrate to urban areas.

Table no.2

District wise reasons for Outmigration (in Percentage)

S No.	Districts	Employment	Medical facilities	Education	Infrastructure	Poor agricultural produce	Followed the family that migrated	Destruction of agricultural produce	Others
1	Uttarkashi	41.77	6.04	17.44	2.29	7.14	2.10	4.04	19.17
2	Chamoli	49.30	10.83	19.73	4.93	4.73	2.51	3.09	4.87

3	Rudraprayag	52.90	8.64	15.67	4.43	4.27	3.26	5.11	5.72
4	TehriGarhwal	53.43	7.84	18.24	3.07	6.17	2.47	4.26	5.52
5	Dehradun	56.13	6.33	12.5	1.2	2.08	1.40	1.65	18.70
6	PauriGarhwal	52.58	11.26	15.78	3.03	5.35	2.53	6.27	3.21
7	Pithoragarh	42.81	10.13	19.52	4.97	4.66	2.36	4.08	11.48
8	Bageshwar	41.39	9.09	14.49	4.32	2.18	1.45	3.42	23.65
9	Almora	47.78	8.61	11.75	3.81	8.37	2.68	10.99	6.02
10	Champawat	54.90	6.67	10.24	5.46	6.31	4.30	6.65	5.46
11	Nainital	53.70	7.79	10.37	4.96	4.94	2.10	6.38	9.76
	U. S. Nagar	65.63	4.27	3.52	0.6	0.38	5.40	2.60	17.60
13	Haridwar	76.60	1.62	2.73	0.05	0.64	1.69	0.82	15.85

Source- RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION COMMISSION, UTTARAKHAND.

V-Reverse migration status in Uttarakhand

By looking at table no.3 it becomes clear that following the outbreak of COVID-19 approximately 2,15,875 individuals reverse migrated to Uttarakhand. Pauri district in Garhwal recorded the highest number of returnees accounting for 60,440 individuals, reaffirming its position as a major contributor to human resource migration. Almora follows closely with 43,784 returnees, showing a significant increase in migration from this district. Thousands of individuals also returned to other districts across Uttarakhand.

Table No.3

Reverse Migration Data (Uttarakhand)

S. No.	Districts	Number of reverse migrants
1	Almora	43784
2	Nainital	9650
3	Pithoragarh	5451
4	Champawat	15097
5	Bageshwar	1925
6	Udhamsingnagar	21958
7	Pauri	60440
8	Chamoli	5877

9	Dehradun	2254
10	Haridwar	3136
11	Uttarkashi	19405
12	Tehri	19242
13	Rudraprayag	7656
	Total	215875

Source- RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION COMMISSION, UTTARAKHAND.

VI- Entrepreneurship Development& Innovations

HILLANS : New brands HILLANS, Almora Bhog, Fresh and Craft were launched in ILSP phase and all federations are using this brand image in local produces. The centre procures spices at approved prices from the producer groups and processes them, to be sold locally and in bigger cities too, including Delhi, 400 Km away. At present, this unit is producing 23.5 Quintals of Mandua flour and 3 quintals of spices every month.

Mandawa biscuits made by women members of Monal Ghati in Bageshwar are high in demand. On April 26th 2018 , Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi appreciated these biscuits made of manduwa floor by women member of livelihood Collective of UGVS in Mann ki baat. Namak wali & Pahadi Pisi Noon- Flavoured salt , Cultivation of Gulab In block Joshimath, Poultry Farming, Fish Ponds and Mushroom cultivations, Kiwi farming are the other areas in which reverse migrants are initiating their enterprises.

Collective Marketing: In the Sult block of Almora, Seema Molekhi, president of Maa Lakshmi self-help group started selling local produce to nearby market.

Exhibitions: Vibrant Exhibitions were organized in Dehradun ; it provided one platform to all traders, buyers, government and private companies, federations, self-help groups, and societies to display their produce, agricultural equipment & tools,

Rising number of home stays – The rise in homestays in Uttarakhand to 15,204 signifies a transformative shift in the tourism industry, aligning with sustainable development goals and community empowerment.

Govt schemes and assistance:-

INTEGRATED LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT PROJECT (IFAD): Integrated Livelihood Support Project (ILSP) is a joint initiative of Government of Uttarakhand and International Fund for Agriculture

Development (IFAD) and being implemented in Uttarakhand in 44 blocks of 11 hill districts under the Rural Development department. The overall goal of ILSP is to reduce poverty which would be achieved via the more immediate development objective to “enable rural households to take up sustainable livelihood opportunities integrated with the wider economy”.

Entrepreneurship Development training and financial assistance of INR 75000 to innovative students in the government colleges of Uttarakhand.

Challenges to Entrepreneurship Development

- 1- Geographical and Topographical Challenges : Transportation and costly logistics, Natural disaster, Scattered Population
- 2- Infrastructural Challenges- Poor Connectivity and lack of industrial cluster.
- 3- Market Access
- 4- Education and Skill development
- 5- Environmental Regulation
- 6- Financial Constraints

Conclusions.

Reverse migration in Uttarakhand especially post COVID has highlighted both obstacles and opportunities for the state. For example, this phenomenon represents a "return to roots" for many people. However, it also highlights many of the system-wide problems that the area has been facing for decades; such as limited job options, limited infrastructure and the challenges associated with maintaining a sustainable livelihood in a very rugged/fragile ecosystem.

The emphasis of reverse migration is to use local resources to develop sustainable methods of economic growth and to develop entrepreneurial systems designed specifically for the unique geographical and demographic characteristics of the state. Many government initiated projects, such as the Integrated Livelihood Support Project (ILSP), and the encouragement of local brand development (i.e., Hillans) are utilizing local knowledge and organic farming practices to provide opportunities for creating robust, sustainable rural-based economies. Additionally, successes experienced through initiatives such as mandua biscuits and other district-specific collective marketing strategies demonstrate the potential of community based models.

Despite these examples of successful programs, there continue to be numerous obstacles which limit the ability of reverse migration to effectively transition people from low-income jobs to middle income jobs; such as poor connectivity, limited accessibility to markets, no or few industrial clusters, and limited access to financing. The data collected during the process of evaluating out-migration suggests that one of the most pressing needs in developing the hills of Uttarakhand into more financially sustainable areas is to address the need for skill development and educational programming to empower the residents of those areas so they may become more self-sufficient.

In summary, reverse migration provides Uttarakhand with the opportunity to develop a new story about its own development; by focusing on creating sustainable livelihoods and providing greater empowerment to its citizens. With a combination of appropriate governmental policies, innovative entrepreneurship, and active engagement by the citizens themselves, the state can turn its challenges into opportunities and ensure a bright and prosperous future for its hillside communities.

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