

Exploring the Role of Community Homestays in Reducing Rural Migration in Uttarakhand: An NVivo-Based Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Migration is a natural process of human beings. However, forced migration may disrupt the local socio-economic environment. A vast proportion of the population from the Himalayan range of rural Uttarakhand has reported forced migration to nearby cities in search of livelihood or a better lifestyle.

Objectives: This study attempts to investigate the root cause and consequences of the rural out-migration of Uttarakhand and people's perception of community-based homestay tourism as a solution.

Methods: The study used an exploratory qualitative research paradigm to underpin in-depth realities. Data was collected through a semi-structured survey questionnaire. Ten in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted and audio recorded using a non-probability sampling technique. To analyse the data, thematic analysis was performed using NVivo software.

Results: The study found that the local community has a positive attitude towards homestay ventures as a solution to the migration issue. However, they have faced many challenges while operating homestay ventures, which need immediate attention and intervention from policymakers and the government.

Conclusions: The study investigates the transformative role of community homestays as a solution to rural migration through a qualitative study. Key themes such as 'Cultural preservation', 'Job creation within the village', 'Support local businesses', and 'Sustainable development' were identified as factors in retaining the rural workforce through homestay business. Future studies can explore quantitative models to measure the socio-economic impact of homestays on migration.

Keywords: Community-based tourism, CBT, Migration, NVivo, Homestay

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a natural phenomenon, as old as human civilisation. It can be defined as human movement from its 'place of origin' to its 'destination' in search of more advantageous opportunities. Throughout human civilization, various human races, such as the Aryans, Europeans, Iranians, and Afghans, have migrated to other places in search of better opportunities, resources, or living conditions. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has identified four key components of migration, i.e. source, transit, destination and return. (Bradley, 2020). Migration is a flexible process. As people often return to their place of origin, we can classify migrants into 'permanent', 'semi-permanent' and 'seasonal' migrants depending upon how long people stay away and their chances of returning. Migration generally takes place from one community to another community. So, it has altered the distribution of the population, socio-economic and cultural aspects of the place of origin. The various deep-rooted societal norms such as the sub-casteism network, stringent state domicile requirements in government jobs and predominance of agriculture as a primary source of income restrict the permanent mobility of rural Indians. The latest Indian census, 2011, has reported only a 5% permanent change of residence, which is much lower than the global median of 15 % (Datta & Rajan, 2024).

However, various recent studies have raised the concern of increasing out-migration of rural Indians in search of better livelihood opportunities. (Agrawal et al., 2023; Choithani et al., 2021; Datta & Rajan, 2024; Hoffmann et al., 2019; Kumar & Misra, 2024). The major causes of this out-migration can be classified into push and pull factors. Global warming, climate change, unemployment, and lack of basic medical, educational facilities and infrastructure are major push factors that force a person to move to another place. While there are many pull factors that may motivate a person to migrate (Pant & Pandey, 2020).

Uttarakhand is a beautiful Himalayan state of India located at 77°34' and 81°02' E longitude and between 28°43' to 31°27' N latitude, covering an area of 53,119 km² and sharing its border with two other nations, i.e. Nepal and China. Uttarakhand is also known as "The land of God" and is globally acknowledged for its Hindu pilgrimage sites, cultural heritage and majestic mountain landscapes. Despite its natural beauty and cultural heritage over the last few decades, Uttarakhand has continuously reported massive hill migration. According to the recent Uttarakhand Migration Commission report (2018), almost 734 villages have been completely abandoned by the locals since 2011 and are often referred to as "ghost villages" (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017). This study examined the major factors responsible for Uttarakhand hill migrations and explored how they feel about community-based tourism (CBT) homestays as a possible solution to this problem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CBT as a Solution for Migration Control

Tourism is a major pillar of any country's economic development. However, it has been identified that the monotony of traditional mass tourism may negatively impact a tourist's destination. It may hamper local traditions & culture and cause pollution. Serious financial leakage occurs when a disproportionate number of outside investors are involved in tourism strategy-making (Canavan, 2016; Murphy, 2013). To mitigate these negative impacts of mass tourism, the World Tourism Organization (2004) has framed three aspects of 'Sustainable Tourism' which are 'environmental', 'economic' and 'socio-cultural'. For the long-term sustainability of the tourism destination, a proper balance between all these three dimensions of sustainable tourism must be maintained (Jatav, 2022). A study by Okazaki (2008) found that power redistribution, collaboration, and social capital are key elements for successful community-based tourism (CBT). Power redistribution ensures that local communities have a core position in tourism decision-making. In contrast, collaboration among stakeholders like community members, local authorities, and businesses may help to address tourism challenges. Building social capital, which fosters trust and cooperation within the community, further supports sustainable tourism development by encouraging active local participation. In the 2000s, international organizations like the UNWTO formally recognized CBT as a method to achieve tourism sustainability (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). CBT includes a range of tourism activities that empower local communities and promote sustainable practices such as community-based ecotourism, cultural tourism, agritourism, community-based homestays etc. (Cheuk et al., 2017; Chourasia, 2023; Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Krishnanjaykrishnan et al., 2024; Okazaki, 2008; Singh et al., 2020). In a recent study by (Agrawal et al., 2023) confirmed that CBT has increased the potential income of the Khati village, Kumaon region (Uttarakhand) and gradually increased the village population, preventing the emergence of new ghost villages.

Community-based Homestays

Homestay is a community-based alternative accommodation system in which tourists can stay and enjoy the traditional hospitality of the host community (Chourasia, 2023). It is very easy to start a homestay venture with minimum investment. In India, various state Government has different schemes and subsidies that promote community-based homestay establishments. Generally, Indian Homestays can be broadly classified into gold and silver categories depending on the quality and amenities of the service (Sood et al., 2017). Homestays are an alternate form of lodging that promotes poverty reduction and community involvement in addition to offering tourists distinctive cultural experiences. Staying with local families helps to maintain and promote local culture by giving visitors a direct look at traditional crafts, lifestyles, and rituals (Janjua et al., 2023; Sakshi Singh, 2022; Samsudin & Maliki, 2015). Furthermore, homestays strengthen communities by generating local jobs and enabling locals to profit directly from tourism revenue. Particularly in rural or deprived areas with few economic prospects, this direct revenue flow can lower poverty and raise living standards (Janjua et al., 2021).

Considering all these potentials of community-based homestays which have been discussed above, this study aims to investigate how these homestay accommodations can create sustainable livelihoods and empower local communities, which can ultimately reduce rural migration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used an exploratory qualitative research approach and an in-depth interview method to collect the necessary primary data. Qualitative research methods provide a way to uncover the reality of a research question by delving into the context, beliefs, and lived experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A total of ten participants were interviewed for this study, with each interview being audio-recorded. The respondents were from Kameri Village (Bageshwar District) of Uttarakhand. To analyse the data, a six-step thematic analysis was performed using NVivo V 12 software to identify and extract codes and themes as per the recommendations of (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). As the study is not language-specific for analysis purposes, all responses were translated from Hindi to English.

RESULT

From the thematic analysis, it has been determined that residents face multiple challenges that compel them to migrate. One major reason is '*Agricultural Challenges*', as farming in the hills is often difficult and not very productive, it is difficult for locals to rely on traditional farming as a stable source of income, which pushes people to look for better options. Another significant factor is the desire for a '*Better Lifestyle*', including improved Connectivity, Healthcare, Supply chains, and Education opportunities available in the plains. '*Climate Change*' has also brought various climatic challenges to the localities, adding to the reasons for leaving. '*Economic factors*', like limited job opportunities and a '*Lack of Private Enterprise*', further push people to migrate. These factors encourage villagers to seek better living conditions and work opportunities in nearby plains.

SL	Themes	Sub-themes	Quotes
1	Agricultural challenges		"Most families here rely on agriculture, but with unpredictable weather and low returns, farming often doesn't provide a stable livelihood"
2	Better Lifestyle	Better Connectivity	"The village also struggled with inadequate infrastructure and poor road connectivity"
		Better Healthcare	"Healthcare is another major issue—when someone in the family needs specialized treatment, they often have to relocate, sometimes permanently, to be closer to hospitals and clinics"
		Better Supply Chain Management	"Due to the poor supply chain management, the prices of any products are so expensive as compared to the plains"
		Educational Need	"Many students also move to Dehradun or other cities for higher education, as our village has only basic schooling options and gradually settled in Dehradun"
3	Climate Change		"Due to climate change, the production got deteriorated day by day"
4	Economic Factor		"In my observation, many people decide to move or settle in these regions mainly in search of employment opportunities"
5	Lack of Pvt. enterprise		"Many of my friends permanently shifted to Roorkee and Dehradun to do Pvt. Blue colour job as there is no as such Pvt. company locally available"

Table Number 1: Thematic analysis of 'Reason for migration'

As discussed in the review portion of this paper, the study area also suffers many challenges due to the out-migration of the young generations. The thematic analysis reveals significant impacts of migration on the community. One major effect is an 'Aging Population', as younger individuals migrate to other places, leaving behind an older

demographic with limited capacity for all labour-intensive work. Many older people also report mental health issues like depression, loneliness, and mental health struggles as traditional family support systems gradually decrease. This shift contributes to Economic Stagnation, as the outflow of the workforce reduces economic activity and weakens local businesses. A Labor Shortage in Agriculture further affects productivity, with fewer hands available for farming tasks, which are crucial in rural economies. Additionally, the community faces a 'Loss of Cultural Practices', as traditional customs and knowledge are less frequently passed down to younger generations who have moved away. These factors contribute to a Weakened Social Structure, reducing community cohesion and resilience over time.

SL	Themes	Quotes
1	Ageing Population	<i>"As you may be seen, only the elder persons live in our villages permanently because the young generations have settled in the plain areas or non-hilly areas of Uttarakhand in search of employment opportunities"</i>
2	Economic Stagnation	<i>"The local economy suffers because there are fewer people to support local businesses, and the community's social fabric weakens as families are separated"</i>
3	Labour Shortage in Agriculture	<i>"The fields and agricultural lands, which were once filled with crops, became barren due to a lack of hands to work them"</i>
4	Loss of cultural practice	<i>"Due to the migration, our culture and traditions are hampered due to the lack of participation of young people"</i>
5	Weak social structure	<i>"The village became very quiet, and the age ratio was seen as very abnormal. The rate of migration in males is comparatively higher as compared with females, so the sex ratio is also not good"</i>

Table Number 2: Thematic analysis of 'Impact of out-migration on community'

The study has explored community homestays as a tool to reduce out-migration. The findings suggested that homestays help in 'Cultural Revival and Preservation' by promoting traditional practices and heritage. Respondents have confirmed that homestay tourists love to experience the local traditions and culture like authentic food, dance performances, traditional folk music and ritual practices etc. Homestay also contributes to 'Job Creation Within the Village', providing employment opportunities that help retain the local workforce. It has been identified that many skilled and unskilled labourers have permanent employment opportunities in homestays. Additionally, homestays 'Support Local Businesses' by boosting demand for goods and services, creating a ripple effect throughout the community. Furthermore, this CBT homestay model fosters 'Sustainable Development' by promoting environmentally friendly practices and enhancing the community's overall economic and social well-being. These findings highlight the potential of community homestays to address migration by strengthening local livelihoods.

SL	Themes	Quotes
1	Cultural Preservation	"Our traditional knowledge and cultural practices are gradually eroding" / "Homestays offer a unique opportunity to promote and preserve our culture and traditions, as we showcase our authentic local customs, cuisine, and way of life to visitors. This cultural exchange not only enriches the tourists' experience but also instils a sense of pride among us"
2	Job creation within the village	"Even many of my relatives have returned to their native villages and now they are successfully operating a homestay which makes them financially self-depended" / "This type of Homestay venture allows many families to improve their financial situation while staying rooted in their villages."
3	Support for local business	"There are many local shops who sell local agricultural products to the tourists, are also benefit from the homestays"
4	Sustainable Development	"There's a growing collective effort to maintain our village's greenery, cleanliness, and overall charm, which, in turn, makes it more attractive to visitors. Overall, community homestays help foster sustainable development, community cohesion, and environmental conservation while providing a stable source of income for the villagers."

Table Number 3: Thematic analysis of 'Community Homestay as a solution to Migration'

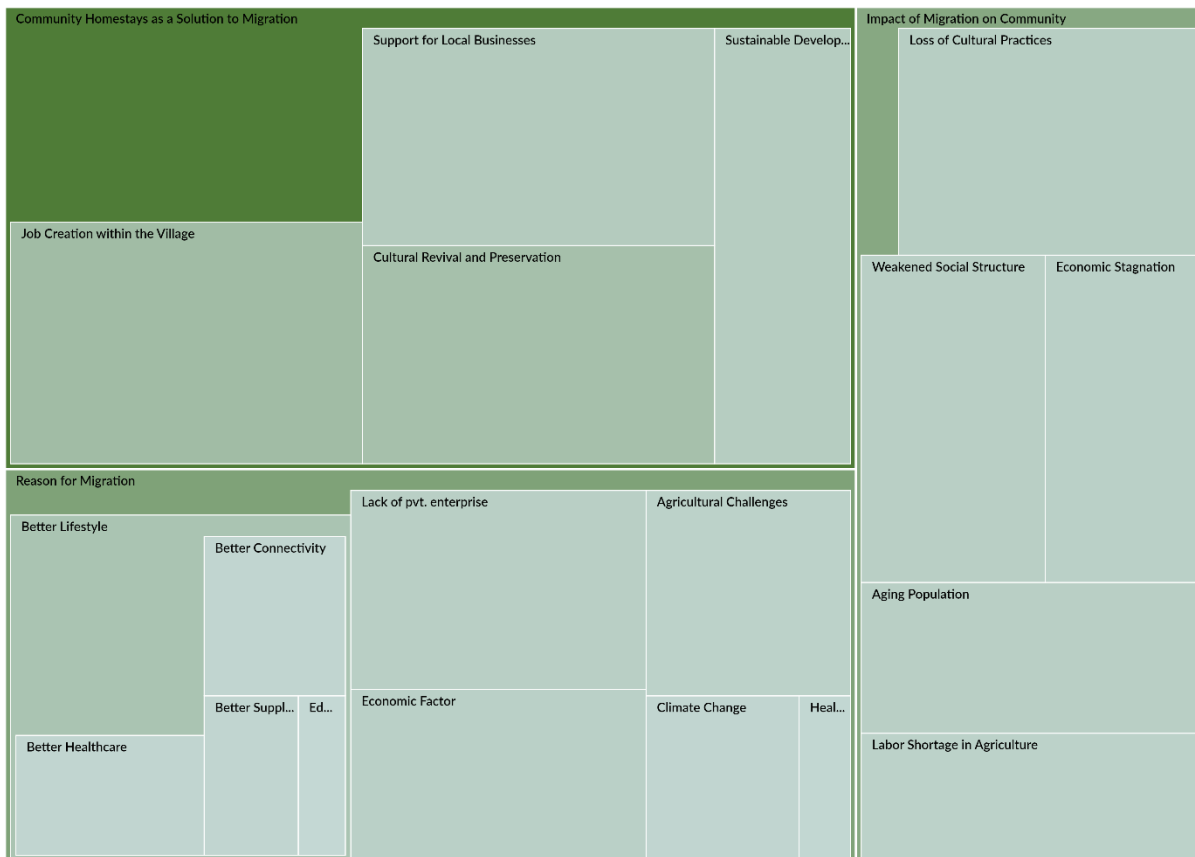


Diagram Number 1: Hierarchy Chart (Using NVivo)

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