

Trans-Himalayan land of Upper Mustang in Nepal may face serious food insecurity

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Land tamed through generations of hard work in Mustang is threatened by unanticipated freaky weather patterns in the recent years. Credit: INASP

Food security is a global challenge especially in developing countries with a growing population and less land to cultivate. Erratic weather

patterns due to global warming in the recent years have increased uncertainty in the productivity of agricultural produce particularly in mountainous regions.

New research published in *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, a journal hosted on the INASP-supported *Nepal Journals Online* platform, has shed light on the new aspects of [climate change](#) in Nepal's Himalayan region and has linked it with the state of [food insecurity](#) in the Trans-Himalayan land of Upper Mustang.

The research article titled *The State of Food (In)Security in the Trans-Himalaya, Upper-Mustang, Nepal* has concluded that many households in Upper Mustang are facing severe to chronic [food](#) insecurity in terms of self-production.

"People have started consuming less meat than before for two reasons," says Dr Rishikesh Pandey, author of the research article and an associate professor in Pokhara University, Nepal. "First, they have started producing less meat, and there is also a problem in the storage of meat due to climate change."

As in other areas of the Himalayan belt, people in Mustang keep animals for meat, milk and wool. The average herd size of mountain goats per family has reduced from 200-300 to 20-30. Moreover, people cannot store goat carcasses for as long as they did in the past.



The researchers conduct a Focus Group Discussion among villagers of Chhusang in Upper Mustang, Nepal. Credit: INASP

Housing in the Mustang area is flat-roofed made of clay or mud. It used to collect snow in the winter, which worked as natural refrigeration. However, with climate change, the snowing season now starts late and melting starts sooner than before.

Explains Dr Pandey, "In the past [people] used to cut the goat and store the carcass inside the house, which worked as a natural refrigerator due to snow-covered terraces. They could then chop out a small piece for every meal or so and cook it. Today, they cannot store the meat long enough as there is no adequate snow to keep the house cool."

"Traditionally, people in Mustang grew their own food and bartered it with other essentials," continues Dr Pandey. "Although, the soil is coarse and the climate harsh, people in Mustang tamed it into fertile land through several generations of toil and adapted to appropriate cultivation methods and food culture."

However, this age-old practice of self-production is being challenged by climate change, urbanization and out-migration. Young men and women have migrated out for work. They send remittance back home. Others in the village prefer to spend more time in their tourism businesses than in the fields. People prefer to buy market food that is transported from the Terai or other parts of the country and is easily available in the local market.



Mountain goats in Mustang. The average herd-size per family is decreasing year by year. Credit: INASP

"However, market food doesn't ensure [food security](#)," adds Dr Pandey. As people are becoming more and more dependent on market food, their nutritional requirements are not adequately met.

Dr Pandey recommends the adoption of an integrated agriculture policy (crop-livestock, fruits and vegetables, cash crops and production of medicinal herbs and their marketing). In addition, households are encouraged to reduce the share of food grain in daily food consumption and increasing the consumption of other items such as dairy and meat products, and fruit and vegetable, including potatoes to support food security in the Trans-Himalaya regions.

The article "The State of Food (In)Security in the Trans-Himalaya, Upper-Mustang, Nepal" appears on page 92-122 in the latest issue Vol 10 (2016) of *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. It is available online on the NepJOL platform supported by INASP and maintained by TUCL.

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More information: Rishikesh Pandey. The State of Food (In)Security in the Trans-Himalaya, Upper-Mustang, Nepal, *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* (2016). [DOI: 10.3126/dsaj.v10i0.15882](https://doi.org/10.3126/dsaj.v10i0.15882)

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