

People, resources and sustainability: a study of resource management in Baltistan, Pakistan

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Abstract

In general this study attempts to highlight the conditions of subsistence communities living in four different agro-ecological zones of Baltistan, that 'lead to unsustainable use of certain resources both in terms of their over-exploitation and under-utilisation.

This study establishes that the variations among the needs of the communities, availability of the resources and the use of resources are not an absolute function of the agro-climatic differences among the zones rather are more influenced by the access of the communities to the town market and their level of awareness. Nevertheless their needs and priorities vary from community to community. Study -reveals that the majority of the local people eke out their living from their existing natural resources through the establishment of integrated farming practices. In their prevalent limits of knowledge, farmers are well aware of the comparative advantages of resources. It is evident from the more dependence of high mountain communities on livestock and that of lower mountain communities on crop cultivation. However, in the face of increased needs there has been identified an alarming pressure on the resources. Biophysical indicators of unsustainability are invariably the function of environmental fragility, degradation of local institutional management systems and mismanagement of resources especially forests and rangelands resulting from labour shortage and youth alienation from traditional socio-cultural practices of harnessing living.

Furthermore, it concludes that overall socio-economic conditions of the communities are positively connected with their accessibility as well as their ability to respond rationally to the changing socio-economic needs, without abandoning their traditional practices. Fragile environment of the mountains and cultural fragility of their inhabitants are highly subjected to deterioration by unsuitable social and economic interventions. There is an overriding need to develop alternative local income generating activities, to alleviate general poverty and consequently alleviate pressure on natural resources because their degradation leads to serious regional as well as national environmental and economic problems.

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