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Poverty and environment interactions in Himalayan Ecosystems

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The Himalayas, one of the 34 global hotspots of biodiversity, support about 2 billion human beings in the HKH region. Despite the accelerating socio-economic and environmental costs of ecosystem change, reliable information about the drivers of this change and its consequences in the Himalayas are not well known. Dependence of rural poor on local ecosystems for livelihood has potential to accelerate loss of biodiversity and associated ecosystem services in forest ecosystems. To design effective policies and responses to improve their economic well-being, it is vital to understand the poverty-environment interactions. The current work investigates this complex issue using ecosystem services framework in the Darjeeling district, West Bengal, India. Ecosystem services framework developed by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has been applied in the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region to examine the direct and indirect drivers of ecosystem change. In this study, socio-economic status of six villages in biodiversity rich area is assessed using multidimensional poverty assessment tool. Key drivers of ecosystem change are also identified. This paper concludes with the options for sustainable development in biodiversity rich areas to improve livelihoods and minimise impacts on forest ecosystems and its resources.

Biography

Harpinder Sandhu is a Research Fellow in the School of the Environment, Flinders University, South Australia. His research focuses on ecosystem services in managed landscapes. Harpinder also works on poverty-environment interactions in developing countries with their implications for equitable and sustainable development. He is also interested in land use and land cover change and its impact on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Harpinder has published over 60 scientific and technical articles in peer reviewed journals and conference proceedings. He is an Editorial Board member of PeerJ Journal, IAFOR Journal of Sustainability, Energy and the Environment and Associate Editor, Environmental Studies, Versita Publishers.

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