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Focus on South Asia



NCCR North-South researchers focus on livelihood challenges faced by poor and marginalised people. Pictured here, internally displaced women at the Rajhena camp, Nepal. Photo: NCCR North-South

Building trust to address livelihood challenges

The people of South Asia face many livelihood challenges that broadly stem from poverty, discrimination, faulty governance, power struggles, conflict, demographic changes, and climate variability. Those who were already poor and marginalised are typically hardest hit by worsening conditions. Tensions between the leaders of South Asian countries often constrain concerted actions to address these challenges. Suspicion, mistrust, and denial persist, hindering the sorts of relationships needed to promote regional cooperation and address common sources of livelihood insecurity. Specific examples of shared livelihood insecurity in the region relate to food (availability, access, affordability), water (scarcity, upstream–downstream conflict, transboundary disputes), migration and displacement, unequal distribution and mismanagement of natural resources, as well as weak institutional, regulatory, and policy frameworks.

Yet these mutual sources of livelihood insecurity in the region mean that initiating, promoting, and strengthening regional cooperation is the only sustainable answer. Building trust is key. Creating unbiased platforms for engagement and dialogue is a good way to do this, as NCCR North-South activities in the region have shown. These platforms can provide a neutral space to explore common mechanisms for improvement, form responsive institutional arrangements, and agree on collective action to reduce livelihood insecurity in the region.

Editorial



Bishnu Raj Upreti
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The main goal of NCCR North-South research in South Asia is to help address livelihood challenges arising from various processes of global change as well climate variability, demographic shifts, poor governance, inter- and intrastate tensions and open conflicts.

Research activities in South Asia are organised according to three themes: (1) livelihood realities in the context of globalisation; (2) development, the environment, and resource management; and (3) institutions, governance, and conflict transformation. Research, fieldwork, and pilot projects are conducted in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka with local universities, research institutes, NGOs, and other partners.

Coordinated by the NCCR North-South regional office in Kathmandu, specific research projects in South Asia involve the following: conflict transformation, peacebuilding, governance, and state building; participatory management of natural resources; the livelihoods of people in resource-scarce areas; migration, multi-local livelihoods, and societal change; forced displacement; the role of development interventions for rural livelihoods; landlessness, livelihood insecurity, and social conflict; access to land and other natural resources.

Research findings are tested and channelled into broader policy and practice wherever possible. Instrumental to this are NCCR North-South pilot projects that apply research evidence locally, often combining it with local knowledge and experience according to a “transdisciplinary” approach. Referred to as PAMS (Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes), 18 of these pilot projects have been implemented in the region. Other important means of reaching key decision makers and implementers include policy briefs, media mobilisation efforts, and facilitation of policy debates, workshops, and roundtables.

Scientific capacity building is another important regional objective. To date, 39 senior researchers as well as 145 master’s and 30 doctoral researchers from the region have conducted advanced research through the NCCR North-South programme. Over 140 scientific publications – books, chapters in anthologies, journal articles – have been produced. Finally, most of the senior researchers in South Asia are actively engaged in public policy debates.

This newsletter highlights some of the achievements and innovations from partnership-based research in South Asia.

Focus on South Asia

The nature and impacts of South Asian migration

Development discourses now regard migration as an important contributor to development. However, migration is diverse and its ability to support development depends on various individual-based and societal factors. NCCR North-South migration research in South Asia aims to critically analyse the migration–development interaction by looking at flows of knowledge and skills in the migration process and their potential to promote positive change. The research goes beyond remittance-based analyses, where economic remittances are

taken as the most important contribution of migration to development.

NCCR North-South researchers are studying different forms of migration (e.g., student or labour) involving South and Central Asia as the sending regions and, primarily, Europe as the receiving region. Their studies assume that migrants – due to their experiences of different places and socio-economic environments – may become brokers of knowledge, connecting different communities in terms of knowledge and skills. The researchers seek to understand what personal and structural factors support or hinder the use of knowledge and skills gained

through migration, once migrants return to South or Central Asia, and how this can be translated into positive change for the sending regions.

Other programme research in the region focuses on the experience of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Doctoral research by Anita Ghimire has examined the livelihoods of IDPs in Nepal, people displaced during the decade-long Maoist armed conflict. Threats from the Maoists, the actions of government military forces, and the overall consequences of conflict – such as the destruction of livelihood-supporting infrastructures and services in rural areas – led to the displacement of many Nepalese. Most came to live in urban areas.



Nepali labour migrants (in blue caps) at Nepal International Airport, heading to a company in Saudi Arabia. Photo: Anita Ghimire

Ghimire examined the livelihoods of IDPs in urban areas, their integration into host communities, women's experience of internal displacement, and national and international responses to the IDPs' situation. "The current understanding of IDPs fails to give a true picture – it is largely guided by a humanitarian or problem perspective, viewing all IDPs as poor and vulnerable," says Ghimire.

Ghimire's study provided an alternative understanding of the issue and possible ways to address IDPs' concerns. "The IDPs can be divided into people who are highly elite in terms of their social, economic, and political space and base, such as political leaders – and others, who are poorer and really vulnerable," notes Ghimire. "Current development interventions should go beyond providing just basic needs such as food and water. IDPs need opportunities like education and jobs, for example, to be able to build their livelihoods themselves."

Another NCCR North-South project in the region is looking at the social dynamics of recent migration processes in Far West Nepal

(M. Junginger, E. Pörtner; U. Müller-Böker). It examines linkages between internal and international migration practices, and how migration strategies adopted over generations create multi-local social networks rooted in families' place of origin. The changing position of Dalits within the community is also being studied, in particular as it relates to wider changes in the client-patron system brought about by migration and political transformation.

The NCCR North-South has published a policy brief on *Making Migration Safer*. It is available here: <http://www.north-south.unibe.ch/content.php/page/id/250>

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How grassroots movements respond to rural poverty

Rural poverty and inequality persist across South Asia, despite the effects of "the market" and myriad development efforts by state departments, donors, and parts of civil society. Several studies by NCCR North-South researchers have confirmed this. At the same time, various heterogeneous "non-state actors and movements" have arisen that challenge and even resist state-run – mostly neo-liberal – development agendas in the region. These actors and movements claim to rightfully represent people's desire to improve their lives, and adopt approaches ranging from non-violent protest to militancy. Interestingly, a shift appears to have occurred in the focus of such movements: whereas earlier groups sought to directly address the economic concerns of the rural poor (e.g., agricultural labourers, peasants), many new movements mobilise people based on issues of identity and culture (e.g., caste and ethnicity).

Do these actors and movements truly represent alternative visions of development and the aspirations of the poor? If so, what are the lessons for mainstream development policy-makers? These questions are at the heart of an ongoing NCCR North-South research project led by Urs Geiser and R. Ramakumar on "Contested Rural Development". The researchers are investigating the stated visions and the actual practices of such non-state actors and social movements, with regard to overcoming

poverty and inequality in rural contexts. How do these movements portray rural poverty, and how do they propose to overcome it? How do they interact with the poor in articulating local demands, and do they legitimately represent local aspirations? How do they attempt to influence broader development policy, and how do the poor benefit, if at all?

The NCCR North-South's well-established network in South Asia and beyond is enabling the researchers to apply a comparative methodology in this research. By comparing findings from various countries, they aim to identify the relative importance of such movements and the validity of their claims. The activities of four PhD students in three South Asian countries provide the project's core emphases: Awanish Kumar is focusing on Dalit movements in the Indian state of Maharashtra; Silva Lieberherr is looking at social mobilisation regarding an extreme expression of rural inequality, namely, farmers' suicides in the Vidharba region of Maharashtra; M. Luqman is researching non-state organisations in Pakistan that draw their inspiration from local culture; and a new PhD study is zeroing in on the specific agendas of regional movements in Nepal. These studies are complemented by shorter-term studies on specific issues by master's students and senior researchers. The insights from South Asia are also being contrasted with the experience of two other countries where non-state actors have been shown to play a crucial role in development, Bolivia and Sri Lanka.

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Northwest Pakistan: mistrust hampers forest governance

Natural forests in the mountainous region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province are disappearing rapidly. Consequently, in 1996, Pakistan's forest department began working with various international donor organisations to initiate a reform process meant to halt deforestation. Institutionalisation of participatory or joint forest management (JFM) was a major aim of the process. Globally, JFM is seen as a useful



Villagers and forest officials gather to discuss forest-related issues in the Upper Dir District of northwest Pakistan. Photo: Sustainable Development Policy Institute

strategy for developing partnerships between local communities and state forest agencies in service of sustainable forest management. However, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, research by Babar Shahbaz has revealed that various factors are hindering the local effectiveness of JFM. Foremost among these obstacles is the historically rooted mistrust between local people and state forest officials. Many locals view Pakistan's forest department as composed of "outsiders" who unfairly restrict their long-held rights to forest resources. Yet state forest officials consider it their duty to protect the forest by limiting access.

To address mistrust between state forest officials and local forest users in northwest Pakistan, NCCR North-South researchers initiated a process of independent mediation. In a pilot project (PAMS), they selected villages and contacted nearby forest officials, organising a series of round-table discussions and activities to bring the groups together. Not only did the project enhance interaction between local communities and state forest officials, it also increased locals' awareness of forest laws and rules, the responsibilities of concerned state agencies, and the responsibilities of the communities themselves.

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Globalisation, development, and marginalised *adivasis* in Kerala, India

C.P. Vinod has been researching the complex interaction between global and local change in the lives of *adivasis* ("original inhabitants") in the Western Ghat region of Wayanad, Kerala,

India. Evidence from his PhD study suggests that intensifying processes of global–local interlinking have enhanced the agency of certain marginalised adivasis, such as Paniyans. Some have begun diversifying their livelihoods, negotiating with formal and informal institutions, and participating in collective movements to improve their land rights. This is particularly important since Paniyans – “ex-bonded” labourers – represent a marginalised community, or “outlier group”, in an Indian state, Kerala, otherwise known for relatively high standards of human development.

Deepening global–local interplay is visible in many ways. For example, local prices of agricultural products have become very unstable due to Wayanad’s expanding integration into global cash crop markets. This has made most local communities, especially Paniyans, more vulnerable. On the other hand, global discourses on and shifts towards state decentralisation have meant more local involvement by globally networked NGOs that emphasise participatory approaches to local development. Local communities have been swept up in social and political movements based on new local and global conceptions of identity, processes of social exclusion, and resistance movements. Finally, the growing penetration of local and global media into people’s lives, particularly electronic media, serves as a constant catalyst for change.

Though they live in a marginal context – spatially, socially, and economically – Paniyans are not immune to the unprecedented, globalisation-fuelled changes occurring around them. A key research question is how the various local communities differ in their ability to negotiate these changes. That capacity appears to vary greatly between marginalised communities such as Paniyans. Much depends on their livelihood practices and local power structures. As a group, Paniyans have not yet gained access to the sort of globally connected socio-political networks that have helped other non-adivasi communities leverage better local development and power relations. Nevertheless, as individuals, Paniyans are beginning to expand their manoeuvring space by engaging with state, civil society, and market actors. The emergence of empowered groups of Paniyans, capable of challenging local power relations, appears inevitable. This will gradually lead to increasing socio-political differentiation within the community in the coming years.

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A conflict-sensitive code of conduct for tourism in Nepal

Tourism to Nepal has rebounded since the peace agreement was reached between the Maoists and government forces in 2006. Yet structural conflicts, even within the tourism sector itself, persist and continue to compromise tourism’s growth. Disputes between tourism employers and labour unions, for example, threaten the sustainability of a local tourism industry that is just beginning to rediscover its potential.

Doctoral research by Pranil Upadhayaya revealed the need to formulate and apply a conflict-sensitive tourism code of conduct covering five major areas of Nepal’s tourism industry: planning and management, economic concerns, socio-cultural aspects, environmental issues, and tourists’ safety and security. A PAMS project was launched by researchers to support creation of an alternative trekking route – implementing code-of-conduct recommendations – in the popular Annapurna Conservation Area, west of Pokhara. Now a reality, the recently opened Machhapuchhre Model Trek features five new campsites and shelters for trekkers and porters in addition to homestay opportunities in seven villages along the route. Local villagers, especially women, were trained in hospitality, culinary arts, and homestay management. A comprehensive map, 25 trail markings, and a written code of conduct ensure responsible use of the route.

By linking seven villages comprising 16,000 people from diverse ethnic groups, the trekking route demonstrates the potential of community-based tourism to encourage cooperation and economic growth in Nepal. The researchers involved recommend replicating the project’s participatory approach to create other mutually beneficial tourist sites elsewhere in Nepal. They also urge establishment of local and national tourism codes of conduct to prevent conflict between stakeholders, ensure responsible use of Nepal’s environment, and foster appreciation of its diverse culture. Besides benefiting the economy, a tourism industry collaboratively built and governed by conflict-sensitive codes may itself contribute to lasting peace.

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In a nutshell: NCCR North-South South Asia

The South Asia Regional Coordination Office provides a shared, accessible platform for partners to engage in the overlapping spheres of research, policy, and practice. Activities in the region bring together researchers – senior, post-doctoral, doctoral, and master's level – from five countries: Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Collaborators are invited to conduct research, contribute to public policy debates, publish results, build a knowl-

edge base, and develop the capacity of local partner institutions. The extended network of collaborators in the region includes universities, think tanks, commissions, government ministries and departments, NGOs, the private sector, the media, and civil society. Research in the region emphasises a multi- and transdisciplinary approach, policy-relevant content, and context-specific objectives to address the challenges of sustainable development.

Outlook 2011 – 2013

The South Asia partnership region is collaborating on five NCCR North-South Research Projects: “Contested rural development”; “Livelihood futures”, “Migration and development”; “Private-sector peace promotion”; and “Adaptation to climate change”. It is making key contributions to three globally oriented Special Research Projects: “Transnational pressure on land”; “Beyond the MDGs”; and “Mobility and migration”.

New findings are being disseminated through policy briefs, journal articles, news outlets, and more. Synthesis publications based on over a decade of research in the region are in the works. The Regional Coordination Office aims to establish itself as a “research and resource centre” that offers local services (coordination, networking, use of facilities), content-specific resources (data, libraries), and thematic expertise to interested collaborators. Another key aim is to formalise cooperation with the International Graduate School (IGS) North-South and selected universities in the region.



Vegetable Market, Puttalam, Sri Lanka. Despite a long civil war (1983 – 2009), Sri Lanka has managed to sustain economic growth. Now, two years after the end of the conflict, the country is trying to regain composure while pressing forward for the future. The role of business in this conflict transformation process is one factor worth consideration. Photo: Rina M. Alluri

Some of the PhD projects taking place in South Asia include:

- Rina M. Alluri of the University of Basel is researching corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the changing role of the private sector in a post-conflict context. Her fieldwork in Sri Lanka has been carried out as an affiliate student of the University of Colombo. She is conducting interviews to learn how businesses have developed over time, the effect of the civil war, the role of CSR policies, and whether businesses have supported post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation, and socio-economic development.
Contact: rina.alluri@swisspeace.ch
- Mathias Junginger of the Development Study Group Zurich is investigating the social and economic impacts of labour migration in Far West Nepal's hill zone. Focussing on three villages in the hill district of Bajhang, Junginger's PhD study seeks to shed light on how people make a living in this fragile post-conflict environment characterised by international and internal migration.
Contact: mathias.junginger@geo.uzh.ch
- Bart Klem of the University of Zurich is studying the effects of civil war and subsequent peace on civil servants in Sri Lanka. Examining the former conflict between the central government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Klem's PhD research asks how government employees went about their work when caught between two state formations and what has changed since peace was declared.
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- Awanish Kumar of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, India, is analysing the connection between agrarian relations and emerging Dalit social movements in rural Maharashtra. Kumar's PhD study posits that village-level agrarian structures and labour processes shape the nature, politics, and organisation of various agrarian, peasant, and Dalit movements.
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Alumni Interview

In this edition, we feature Ghana Gurung in our Alumni Interview. Ghana Gurung's PhD – "Reconciling Biodiversity Conservation Priorities with Livelihood Needs in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, Nepal" – focused on understanding the effectiveness of participatory biodiversity conservation in the context of protected area management in Nepal. He currently works for the WWF in Kathmandu.

What has your career path been after leaving the NCCR North-South? I joined WWF Nepal as Director of Program Development and Support immediately after returning from Zurich in August 2006. Since 2007, I have been working as Conservation Program Director, responsible for managing all the programs and projects of WWF Nepal, and functioning as Deputy to the Country Representative. I also hold a number of positions: General Secretary of the Nepal PhD Association, Advisor to the Nepal Buddhist Federation, Chairperson of the Chandra Gurung Conservation Foundation, and member of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group. In these capacities, I am directly involved in many biodiversity research projects.

How has your research made a difference? My research helped me to gain a more holistic understanding of conservation and development issues while honing significant methodical and analytical skills in me. For example, my research findings and experience greatly contributed towards successfully handing over the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) to local people for its management, institutionalising a community-based livestock insurance scheme to reduce the conflict between snow leopards and humans, and replicating this approach across the mountain protected areas.

What are you currently working on? The role of Conservation Program Director calls for a lot of multi-tasking on my part. I am currently overseeing two major landscape programs - Sacred Himalayan Program in the Mountains and Terai Arc Landscape Program in the lowlands. With strong teamwork and partnership with the Government of Nepal, I am in the final phase of completing the KCA management by local people with legal, managerial and sustainable financing mechanisms in place. I am playing a major role in developing large landscape level programs with a focus on climate change adaptation, REDD+ and biodiversity. I am also engaged in Tiger translocation/research, snow leopard studies, Rhino count and

documentation of community-based climate change adaptation projects.

What, for you, are the greatest challenges in your current work? Based on the conservation work that I do, the greatest challenges are loss of habitats/forests and indicator species (e.g. tigers and snow leopards), finding resources to address livelihood needs of local people, and making conservation a national priority in the face of climate change. For conservation institutions like WWF Nepal, our main challenge is to develop the strategies and means to deliver and scale up conservation and sustainable livelihood results on the ground, bring about conservation-responsive policy changes, and to be an adaptive implementer in order to achieve desired conservation outcomes in an unstable political working environment. Another challenge includes building the capacity of government and community-based organisations for sustainability of our interventions on the ground.

What would you change, if you could? What Nepal needs is a stable political environment. I would like to see stability in which we can better tackle the conservation and development challenges for the benefit of nature and people – sustainability of our development efforts. Another important change I would like to bring is framing positive attitudes and sustained actions for the environment amongst people from all walks of life, particularly the youths.

Where do you see yourself in ten years' time? I hope that the experience and exposure I have gained in this field enable me to transfer this wealth to budding conservation leaders in the future and influence development policies for conservation excellence in Nepal.



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NCCR North-South regional policy briefs and *Outcome Highlights*

The NCCR North-South recently began publishing a series of regional policy briefs. Written by regional partners with support from programme headquarters in Bern, the regional editions of *evidence for policy* feature research and development policy recommendations directed at local audiences. Three have been produced to date in collaboration with the South Asia Regional Coordination Office: "Nepal's peace process and challenges ahead"; "Mediated policy dialogues to address conflict over natural resource governance"; and "Community-based and peace-sensitive tourism: fulfilling Nepal's potential". These and other regional policy briefs are available for download at: <http://www.north-south.unibe.ch/content.php/page/id/305>

Please visit our website to download issues of *Outcome Highlights*, a series of concise information sheets featuring effective collaborations between researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and local communities in the NCCR North-South network. The second edition, "Land for Dalits" describes a project that was instrumental in anchoring the rights of landless Dalits in Nepal's interim constitution. The sheets are available at: <http://www.north-south.unibe.ch/content.php/page/id/315>

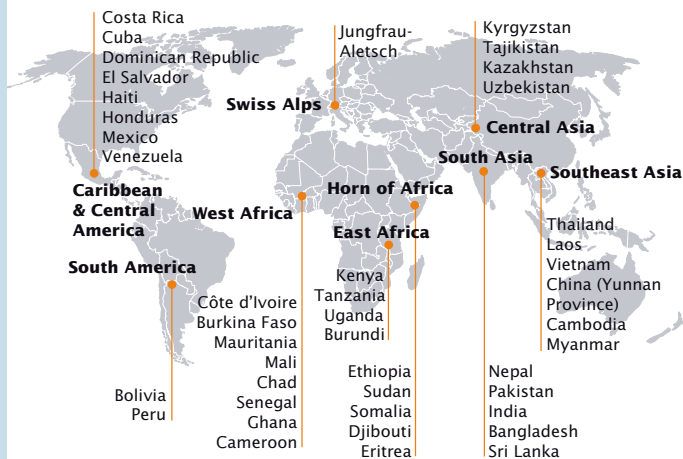
North-South Forum

The next North-South Forum will focus on water conflict. The Forum, which takes place every six months, will be held on 28 November 2011 in Basel. It is jointly organised by the NCCR North-South and the North-South Centre of the Federal Institute of Technology Zurich. More details will be announced when they become available at: www.north-south.unibe.ch

Final NCCR North-South conference in 2012

Ten years after its launch, the NCCR North-South has begun planning its final event: an international conference open to interested participants. The conference will be held from 20 to 22 August 2012 at the University of Bern, Switzerland. The NCCR North-South was conceived as a 12-year programme right from the start; its work will be continued within the International Graduate School North-South.

Partnership Regions



Programme Management

- The NCCR North-South is directed by a board made up of representatives from the Swiss Partner Institutions together with the Regional Coordinators. It is headed by programme directors Hans Hurni and Urs Wiesmann, and coordinated by Thomas Breu.

Swiss Partner Institutions

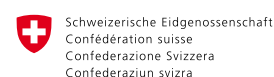
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