**Moving Mountains: Education, Career and Migration Aspirations of Youth
in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India**

Inaugural-Dissertation
zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde
der
Philosophischen Fakultät
der
Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität
zu Bonn

vorgelegt von

Namrata Rawat

aus

Neu-Delhi, Indien

Bonn, 2025

Zusammensetzung der Prüfungskommission:

Prof. Dr. Conrad Schetter
(Vorsitzender)

Apl. Prof. Dr. Eva Youkhana
(Betreuerin und Gutachterin)

Prof. Dr. Carmen Brandt
(Gutachterin)

Apl. Prof. Dr. Carsten Butsch
(weiteres prüfungsberechtigtes Mitglied)

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 10.06.2025

Abstract

This thesis analyses how migration shapes the educational and career aspirations of school going young people in rural mountain communities. Focussing on district Almora in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, India, it explores how the widespread migration from this region influences the aspirations of senior secondary school students who have not yet migrated. Guided by the central question, "How are education and career aspirations shaped amongst the youth in the context of extensive migration in the rural Himalayan region of Uttarakhand?", the research examines the aspirations of the youth, the socio-economic factors influencing these aspirations, and the role of migration in shaping them. The study employs a mixed-methods approach to capture the diverse dimensions of aspirations among youth. The thesis analyses aspirations with reference to migration as the omnipresent social phenomenon in the lives of young people. It uses the theorisation of migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities to analyse the migration influence on aspirations, integrating theories of aspiration formation and migration processes. Key findings demonstrate that educational and career aspirations are significantly constrained by structural factors such as inadequate development infrastructure and limited educational and career guidance. The study also reveals a gender and caste-based disparity in migration aspirations. The thesis argues that the migration of family members, specifically older siblings, and young people from the community, positively influences the youth, providing financial support, exposure to broader opportunities and encouragement to try new, previously unobserved career pathways, thereby expanding the collective capacity to aspire of the communities. The thesis contributes to the understanding of youth aspirations in mountainous regions, emphasising the intertwined nature of aspirations and migration within the broader context of socio-economic development. The findings underscore the importance of addressing structural barriers and enhancing educational and career guidance to foster a more aspirational outlook among youth in rural, disadvantaged mountain villages. The research concludes with a discussion on development policy and practice, aimed at addressing the challenges of young people in Uttarakhand and enhancing the capacity to aspire.

Kurzfassung

Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie Migration die Bildungs- und Karriereambitionen von schulpflichtigen Jugendlichen in ländlichen Berggemeinden beeinflusst. Mit Fokus auf den Distrikt Almora im Himalaya-Staat Uttarakhand, Indien, untersucht sie, wie die weit verbreitete Migration aus dieser Region die Ambitionen von Schülern der Oberstufe beeinflusst, die noch nicht migriert sind. Geleitet von der zentralen Frage „Wie werden Bildungs- und Karriereambitionen der Jugendlichen im Kontext der umfangreichen Migration in der ländlichen Himalaya-Region Uttarakhand beeinflusst?" untersucht die Forschung die Ambitionen der Jugendlichen, die sozioökonomischen Faktoren, die diese Ambitionen beeinflussen, und die Rolle der Migration bei ihrer Entwicklung. Die Studie verwendet einen gemischten Methodenansatz, um die verschiedenen Dimensionen der Ambitionen der Jugendlichen zu erfassen. Die Arbeit analysiert Ambitionen im Hinblick auf Migration als allgegenwärtiges soziales Phänomen im Leben junger Menschen. Sie verwendet die Theorie der Migration als Funktion von Ambitionen und Fähigkeiten, um den Einfluss der Migration auf Ambitionen zu analysieren und integriert dabei Theorien zur Ambitionsbildung und Migrationsprozesse. Die wichtigsten Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Bildungs- und Karriereambitionen erheblich durch strukturelle Faktoren wie unzureichende Entwicklungsinfrastruktur und begrenzte Bildungs- und Karriereberatung eingeschränkt werden. Die Studie zeigt auch eine geschlechts- und kastenbasierte Ungleichheit bei den Migrationsambitionen. Die These argumentiert, dass die Migration von Familienmitgliedern, insbesondere älteren Geschwistern, und jungen Menschen aus der Gemeinschaft die Jugend positiv beeinflusst, indem sie finanzielle Unterstützung bietet, ihnen breitere Möglichkeiten eröffnet und sie ermutigt, neue, bisher unbeachtete Karrierewege auszuprobieren, wodurch die kollektive Ambitionskraft der Gemeinschaften erweitert wird. Die These trägt zum Verständnis der Ambitionen der Jugend in Bergregionen bei und betont die Verflechtung von Ambitionen und Migration im breiteren Kontext der sozioökonomischen Entwicklung. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen die Bedeutung der Beseitigung struktureller Barrieren und der Verbesserung der Bildungs- und Karriereberatung, um eine ehrgeizigere Einstellung der Jugend in ländlichen, benachteiligten Bergdörfern zu fördern. Die Forschung schließt mit einer Diskussion über Entwicklungspolitik und -praxis, die darauf abzielt, die Herausforderungen der jungen Menschen in Uttarakhand anzugehen und die Ambitionskraft zu stärken.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
DISE	District Information System for Education
GDDP	Gross District Domestic Product
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGIC	Government Girls Inter College
GIC	Government Inter College
GNI	Gross National Income
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IFLS	Indonesian Family Life Survey
IHR	Indian Himalayan Region
IMI	Integrated Mountain Initiative
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NITI Aayog	National Institute for Transforming India
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PTR	Pupils Teacher Ratio
PVR	Poverty Ratio
RTE	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TERI	The Energy and Resources Institute
UBSE	Uttarakhand Board of Secondary Education
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
UKHDR	Uttarakhand Human Development Report
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WPR	Work Participation Rate

Transliteration and Usage

Anglicised spellings for common Hindi, Garhwali and Kumauni words have been used. Common words used in development research in India like anganwadi have not been italicised as they are now common concepts in development research. All translations are mine except where mentioned otherwise stated and/or cited

Hindi, Garhwali and Kumauni terms used

pahāṛī	(adj) (person or thing) belonging to mountains
durgam	(a place) difficult to access, remote
sugam	(a place) easy to access areas
maahaul	(of a social setting) environment
anganwadi	Primary health and nutrition centre
paatar	Garhwali/Kumauni term of insult meant for girls

Chapter 1: Introduction

The study of aspirations in relation to migration has gained significant momentum with increasing migration patterns (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012, 2014; Laube, 2015; Schewel & Fransen, 2018; Sier, 2021). The term 'aspiration' or concepts addressing the future orientation of migrants have been increasingly used to analyse the processes that result in mobility. This is especially true in the context of youth, as young adults are often the most mobile (Aslany et al., 2021). In Uttarakhand, a northern Indian state situated in the Himalayan foothills, the rapid and continuous out-migration of young people has become a defining feature of the state and a significant cause for concern. The state is grappling with the phenomenon of villages left empty in the aftermath of out-migration, referred to as 'ghost villages' in the media coverage of the issue. The migration issue has become the focal point of public political discourse, and extensive research (Maithani, 2016; Mamgain & Reddy, 2017; Pandey, 2021; Rural Development and Migration Commission Uttarakhand, 2019; Sati, 2021).

Research on young people and migration often focuses on migrants' roles in facilitating further migration, leaving a gap in understanding the experiences of youth living in rural mountain villages. What happens to the aspirations of youth when *'everyone just migrates'*? This is a question critical to our understanding of both the lives of young people as well as the processes of migration. This study explores the relationship between migration and the aspirations of young individuals in the Himalayan region who have not yet migrated. These young people are contemplating key decisions about their futures, including pursuing higher education, which can be seen both as an aspiration in itself and as a step toward fulfilling hidden ambitions, such as achieving a stable income or wealth.

Educational and career aspirations are crucial for school-going adolescents as they make early-life decisions and navigate migration dynamics. This thesis aims to uncover young people's plans for education and career goals after school and their future livelihoods. The research assesses the scope of educational and career aspirations among youth in rural, disadvantaged mountain villages and highlights the conditions that enable or hinder their ability to aspire.

The research is guided by the central question: *How are educational and career aspirations shaped among youth in the context of extensive migration in the rural Himalayan region of Uttarakhand?* To address this central question, I sought to answer the following specific questions:

1. **What** are the educational and career aspirations of youth in senior secondary schools in the hill district of Almora, Uttarakhand?
2. **How** are these aspirations shaped by intersecting socio-economic factors around them?

3. **What role** does migration play in the formation of youth aspirations?

Operational definitions

Aspirations are multi-dimensional and diverse. It is impractical to capture or aggregate all the aspirations of one group of people in a single study. Therefore, in practising prudence, this study focuses on aspirational goal setting, which encompasses the choices and plans that enable individuals to achieve the lives they internally aspire to. Participation in secondary and tertiary education extends youth as a life phase and also broadens the students' horizons by offering skills and knowledge for social advancement (Naafs & Skelton, 2018). Therefore, in this study, I focus on the career and educational choices of youth with the aim of understanding their general aspirations and orientation towards the future. Within children and youth studies, aspirations often revolve around these aspects, highlighting their significance in policy discussions on educational inequality and social mobility. This study delves into the educational and career aspirations of senior secondary school youth, with the aim uncovering the factors that influence these aspirations as they approach critical decision points in their lives. Henceforth, in this study, aspirations primarily refer to educational and career aspirations unless otherwise stated. Educational and career aspirations are gauged by exploring the scope of young people's plans for higher education and career development after school, their level of awareness about these plans, and the factors that influence how they set their aspirations.

Youth is defined as a person between the age of 15 and 24 by the United Nations (UN, 2014) and though the meaning and application differ in societies around the world, this definition is widely accepted and referenced. This study focuses on young people attending senior secondary school in the rural hill regions who have yet to out-migrate. Youth or young people in this study refers to persons attending the final two school grades (11th and 12th) in the government-run public schools in the Almora district. I chose to work with senior secondary school students because this group is yet to migrate and is at an age when they are most likely to make decisions about their future, including whether to migrate.

Conceptual framework

This study is situated at the intersection of research focused on aspiration formation and migration processes. It examines the educational and career aspirations of school-going youth, how these aspirations are shaped, and the roles that migration and social context play in their daily lives and the formation of these aspirations. The focus is on the aspirations of senior secondary school students in their final two years of schooling. Firstly, I look at the aspirations of the youth with reference to Arjun Appadurai's work on the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004) and Faith Mkwananzi's work on the aspirations of young migrants in the context of poverty and disadvantage (Mkwananzi, 2018). These provide a framework to analyse the

aspirations expressed directly and indirectly by youth, to identify and categorise different types of aspirations, and to explore the factors that lead to varying aspirations among different categories of youth. Secondly, the work of Hein de Haas (de Haas, 2021) and Jørgen Carling (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2018; Carling & Schewel, 2018) on migration informs the analysis by linking the migration context with migration aspirations and with aspirations for better education. Hein de Haas' theory of migration, the aspirations-capabilities framework (de Haas, 2021), forms the foundation for analysing the formation of educational and career aspirations among youth, and more generally, the influence of migration in the region. This theory integrates the concepts of aspiration and migration, with a specific focus on the structural factors that affect a person's ability to migrate and the feedback from migration that shapes people's aspirations, capabilities, and capacity to aspire.

Using this framework as a broad guide, I analyse the structural factors that influence young people's aspirations to migrate, and examine how the migration of people around them affects their ability to imagine their own aspirations for education and career. Although I do not study general life aspirations in detail, I briefly describe how young people envision their futures. These visions, in turn, inform their perceptions and inclinations towards migration, which are analysed in depth.

Furthermore, I examine the influence of migrant family members on setting different types or standards of aspirations among youth across households. The analysis also considers the broader influence of migrants on young people, including those who are not directly related to them. The analysis does not limit itself to the ultimate decision of migration or non-migration among youth; rather, it is open to exploring the impact of migrants' experiences and the perceived value of migration on their education, career choices, aspirations, and capacity to aspire.

Thus, this framework helps me to highlight how migration influences the aspirations of young people, regardless of their mobility plans or intentions.

Key arguments of the study

Guided by the objective of examining the relationship between the aspirations of school-attending youth and the migration process taking place around them, the main arguments of this thesis can be summed up as follows:

1. Higher education and career aspirations, and the planning associated with them, are mainly restricted by structural factors rooted in the lack of development infrastructure in the region.
2. In the mountain communities, there exists only a limited stock of navigation maps for higher education and career development. Knowledge of opportunities is confined to a few

familiar options which are often repeated by every generation of young people in these communities. This restricts the development of the capacity to aspire among youth in the rural mountain communities.

3. Migration is perceived by the youth to hold both instrumental as well as intrinsic value. Migration aspirations, where migration is seen as preferable to staying, are stronger among the boys from General or upper Caste groups than among girls from all caste groups and boys from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) groups.

4. The migration of older youth within the family or neighbourhood has a positive impact on the capacity to aspire among school-going youth. Financial support and 'second-hand' exposure to new educational and career pathways brought in by these migrants enable the youth to set higher aspirations that extend beyond the limited options already known or available to them.

Significance and contributions

This thesis makes empirical and conceptual contributions to the understanding of young people's aspirations and their interactions with migration processes. It expands the discourse on migration from mountain villages and its impact by incorporating young people's perspectives on their own lives and futures.

Migration from Uttarakhand is a widely known, discussed, debated, and well-researched issue at both the state and national levels. The focus on migration from Uttarakhand is so extensive that migration has become synonymous with Uttarakhand's *pahāṛī* identity[1]. It is common to hear that *pahāṛī* people from Uttarakhand always have one foot in Delhi and the other in Uttarakhand. While the migration of young men has been well documented in both mainstream media and academic research, there has been little research on the lives and future outlooks of young people who remain.

Conceptually, this thesis combines the conceptual work of Faith Mkwananzi (2018) in South Africa, Arjun Appadurai (2004) in the context of the poor in the urban slums of Mumbai, India, and Hein de Haas' aspirations-capabilities framework, in which he conceptualises migration as a "function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within given sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures" (de Haas, 2021, p. 2). In combining these conceptual understandings, the thesis integrates the theoretical underpinnings of aspirations, their formation and the factors that shape them, and embeds them within the context of development in a specific geographical area. In doing so, it analyses aspirations and migration in an integrated manner, considering them to be processes that are invariably intertwined with each other and with broader processes of socio-economic and infrastructural development.

---

[1] *pahāṛī* meaning '(a person) belonging to the hills'

Different geographies, and the accompanying education and employment landscapes, impact youth differently in terms of access, opportunities, and success (Naafs & Skelton, 2018). This thesis advances the discourse on migration from mountain regions by focusing on individuals deeply connected to mountain geography. It particularly emphasises the aspirations and challenges of the younger generation living in these areas. Given the challenges of climate change and its impact on ecologically sensitive regions, mountains and their inhabitants assume heightened significance. Any discussion about the future of mountains must inherently involve consideration of the people who currently live there.

This research aims to expand the discourse on migration beyond conventional push-and-pull narratives by including the voices of those directly experiencing or impacted by migration. The thesis starts with the aspirations of youth who witness migration around them, linking these aspirations to the broader migration phenomenon. It does not assume migration or mobility as the goal. Instead, it first examines the types of aspirations youth harbour, then analyses how these aspirations form, and finally explores the relevance of widespread migration to their aspirations, regardless of whether they intend to migrate.

The focus is on understanding and enhancing the capacity to aspire among youth in mountainous regions, with migration as a background element rather than the central narrative. This thesis thus contributes to the literature on youth futures in mountain geographies.

Thesis structure

This thesis is structured into eight chapters, each with distinct themes and purposes, beginning with this introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 provides background information on the state of Uttarakhand and the Almora district, where the research study is located. It traces and explores the political evolution and development trajectory of Uttarakhand since it achieved statehood in 2000. The chapter offers an overview of the political-administrative structure, demography, geography, and the current socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions of Uttarakhand society. With a specific focus on education and migration, it explains the developmental challenges faced by the people, which have led to significant out-migration of young people from the state and the Almora district. While the chapter primarily relies on secondary data, it also includes vignettes drawn from primary data to provide a more vivid picture of the situation, especially concerning the state of educational infrastructure.

Chapter 3 discusses the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings that shape this study and presents a systematic review of literature on young people's migration from Uttarakhand. It begins by focusing on how aspirations have been conceptualised, particularly within education research.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the methodology adopted for conducting the research. It explains the original thought process behind selecting the topic, my positionality as the daughter of migrants from Uttarakhand, and the philosophical worldview that informs this study. The chapter then details the multi-phase, mixed method research design, the methods used for data collection, and the sampling strategies for both qualitative and quantitative phases. A detailed section explains how data analysis for both sets of data was conducted in multiple phases and how these analyses were linked to complement each other. The chapter also documents the challenges faced during data collection, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and impacted the study's scope. Additionally, it addresses the ethical dilemmas encountered at various stages, from data collection to data analysis, and how they were resolved. This chapter serves as a thorough documentation of the entire research process, detailing how each step was visualised, planned, implemented, and, in some cases, modified and re-implemented.

The next three chapters present the results of the data analysis collected through various methods with youth and other relevant stakeholders in the study area. These chapters culminate in the key arguments of this thesis.

Chapter 5, the first empirical chapter, titled "*What Do You Want To Be*?: Youth educational and career aspirations", addresses the first research question: *"What are the educational and career aspirations of youth in senior secondary schools in the hill district of Almora, Uttarakhand?"*. This chapter explores the aspirations of youth in the study area regarding their education, career, and general outlook on their futures, including possible migration choices accompanying these aspirations. It primarily analyses data from the 'higher education and career aspirations survey', focus group discussions with youth, and personal interviews with their teachers. The chapter examines the influence of intersecting factors such as family background, gender, caste, and geographic location. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, it presents an integrated analysis of aspirations and the factors shaping them. The findings highlight that a lack of basic infrastructure, such as proper roads and transport connections to higher education institutions, affordable and reliable internet access for exploring career opportunities, and career guidance in schools, limits students' aspirations. The chapter argues that family background, gender, caste, and accessibility significantly influence how youth set their aspirations and make decisions about higher education and career opportunities, particularly regarding where to pursue these options.

Following the exploration of the most commonly expressed aspirations by youth, Chapter 6, titled "*I Don't Know What To Do*: Aspiration Formation and Capacity to Aspire," narrates representative stories of aspirations from the study. This chapter addresses the second and third research questions: *"How are these aspirations shaped by intersecting socio-economic factors? And what kind of aspirations are formed among youth, and what is their underlying 'capacity to aspire'?"* The chapter analyses different types of aspirations expressed by youth,

drawing on Faith Mkwananzi's (2018) categorisation of aspirations among disadvantaged youth. The title reflects the sentiments of many participants who expressed uncertainty about their future after school. The chapter examines the capacity to aspire underlying the observed aspirations and the structural factors inhibiting the development of this meta-capacity. By breaking down environmental elements that limit the young people's capacity to aspire, the chapter concludes that, despite facing multiple challenges, the youth possess a capacity to aspire. However, structural limitations such as poor-quality education, cultural restrictions, and a lack of diverse options hinder them from converting this capacity into concrete choices. These limitations force them to modify or abandon their original aspirations and settle for what seems achievable within the constraints of their rural, disconnected mountain villages.

This discussion on the limitations of life in the mountains raises the question of whether migrating out of villages is the only option for youth and how migration is perceived by those looking towards their future. Chapter 7, "*What CAN We Do Here?*: Migration and Aspirations," addresses these questions and other relevant aspects of migration, answering the fourth and final research question: *"What role does migration play in the aspiration formation of youth?"*

This chapter is divided into two distinct parts. Part one focuses on the migration aspirations of youth, the value they perceive in migration, and the factors affecting their ability to migrate. For young people, migration appears as the most visible solution to achieving their aspirations, both explicit and hidden. Migration is seen as more than just an opportunity for earning money, though this is a significant motivation for boys. It carries intrinsic as well as instrumental value, promising possibilities for self-development, personal freedom from conservative rural values, and positive changes in personal and family lives. This part also highlights a gender divide in the perceived value of migration. For girls, migration has instrumental value as a means to achieve personal and career aspirations, while for boys, migration itself constitutes an aspiration with intrinsic value. Additionally, girls and youth from Scheduled Castes (SC) backgrounds are less likely to aspire to migrate than boys from General or upper caste groups. The chapter argues that this is because migration from villages requires capabilities that depend on structural and social factors, including caste-based networks and gender-based freedoms. The second part of the chapter relies on Hein de Haas' theory of migration, based on the aspirations-capabilities framework (2021), to analyse the interaction between aspirations and migration. It explores how ongoing migration processes influence the ways in which young people set their aspirations. This analysis concludes that migration positively impacts youth's aspiration setting, as the experiences and exposure brought by migrants expand the general know-how of achieving various education and career goals, thereby enhancing the capacity to aspire among youth. The migration of a close family member in particular, positively impacts girls' ability to set and plan for higher aspirations regarding their education and careers.

The eighth and concluding chapter brings all the findings together, as it attempts to analyse the research in its entirety. It briefly recaps the arguments made throughout the thesis, discusses the findings, highlights the empirical, conceptual, and methodological contributions of the research, and identifies the limitations and gaps encountered during the implementation of the research project. Following this contribution and gap analysis, the chapter makes recommendations for further research on related topics, as well as development practice and policy recommendations specific to the research area. The chapter concludes with brief personal reflections based on observations made during the research process and the findings of the study.

Chapter 2: Background & History

2.1 Political background of Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand, formerly known as Uttaranchal, is one of India's 28 states. Located in the foothills of the Himalayas, this northern state shares international borders with Tibet (China) to the north and Nepal to the east (Figure 1). It borders Himachal Pradesh to the west and northwest, Haryana to the southwest, and Uttar Pradesh to the south. Covering an area of 53,483 square kilometres, 86 percent of the state is mountainous, and 65 percent is forested (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Uttarakhand, 2024).

Uttarakhand was established as the 27th state of the Republic of India on 9 November 2000, when it was carved out of the northwestern mountainous region of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. It is broadly divided into two culturally distinct regions: Garhwal in the northwest and Kumaon in the southeast. Only three of the state's 13 districts are in the plains, while the remaining 10 hill districts are collectively referred to as the 'hill region' of the state. Geographically, the state can be divided into three zones:

- Upper Hills: Chamoli, Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh, and Bageshwar.
- Middle Hills: Tehri Garhwal, Pauri Garhwal, Rudraprayag, Almora, Champawat, the hill regions of Nainital, and a small portion of Dehradun.
- Foothills: Dehradun, Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar, and the remaining area of Nainital.

Figure 1:Map of Uttarakhand with districts
Source: Government of Uttarakhand[2]

---

[2] Government of Uttarakhand; Website: https://www.uk.gov.in

According to the last official Census of India conducted in 2011, the population of Uttarakhand was 10.86 million, with 70 percent living in rural areas (Census of India, 2011). The hill districts account for 48.1 percent of the population (Directorate of Economics and Statistics Uttarakhand, 2024).

Uttarakhand's climate and vegetation vary greatly with elevation, from glaciers at the highest altitudes to subtropical forests at lower elevations. Most of the northern part of the state is covered by high Himalayan peaks and glaciers. Uttarakhand is renowned for its high mountains, natural beauty, and numerous Hindu temples and shrines. According to ancient literature, it is considered '*Dev Bhoomi*'– the abode of the Gods (Negi et al., 2016). The state is home to some of the highest mountains in the Himalayas and to the origin of the river Ganges, the holiest river for Hindus.

2.2 Historical evolution of Uttarakhand

Before 1790, the Garhwal region was ruled by the Parmar and Panwar dynasties, while the Chand dynasty ruled Kumaon. In 1791, the Gorkha Empire overran Almora, the seat of the Kumaon kingdom, and by 1803, it had also occupied the kingdom of Garhwal. The formation of Uttarakhand can be traced back to the Treaty of Sugauli, signed between the East India Company and the King of Nepal in 1815 (Joshi, 2016). Following the Gorkha War, the western half of Uttarakhand formed the princely state of Tehri Garhwal, while the eastern half, Kumaon, came under British control (Mawdsley, 1997). In 1856, Kumaon became part of the province of Awadh, and in 1901, the combined province of Agra and Awadh was formed. After India's independence from British rule, the province of Awadh was renamed Uttar Pradesh. Despite attempts to retain or regain their separation from the plains, Kumaon became part of Uttar Pradesh in 1947, followed by Garhwal in 1948 (Mawdsley, 1997).

2.2.1 The Uttarakhand movement

Uttarakhand became a state in 2000 following a prolonged political movement for separate statehood from Uttar Pradesh. The demand arose from the belief that the specific development needs of the mountainous districts were neglected within the larger, more populous state of Uttar Pradesh. These needs stemmed from geographical constraints, terrain challenges, limited resources, and heavy reliance on natural resources, particularly forests (B. K. Joshi, 2016). At the core of Uttarakhand's formation was the perception that the development of the hilly and mountainous region had suffered because of its numerical and, hence, political insignificance as part of the larger state (Maithani, 2016). The special needs of the hill region were addressed by both the Government of India and the Government of Uttar Pradesh.

Responding to the Planning Commission of India's recommendation, the Government of Uttar Pradesh established the Department of Hill Development in 1974-79. This department, mirroring typical state structures, was led by a government secretary, and served as the planning department for hill districts. It was overseen by a senior minister from the hill region, and the state also designated nodal officers for various social sector and development departments. Some authors, such as Joshi (2016), who had served as administrators in the state, argue that the hill region's welfare and development needs were not entirely side-lined while being part of the larger administration of Uttar Pradesh. However, the larger narrative behind the demand for a separate statehood rested on poor development of the hill region, high unemployment, and the distance of state capital, Lucknow, from the hill regions, which extended beyond physical distance and translated into administrative delays regarding any decisions or processes concerning the people from the hills, and the question of *pahāṛī* identity which differed culturally from that of the plains of Uttar Pradesh. Culturally and linguistically, people from Uttarakhand are *pahāṛī* and share more in common with those from the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh to the west and Nepal to the east (Mawdsley, 1997).

Historically, the demand for a separate political identity is at least a century old. When India gained independence in 1947, the issue of consolidating princely states and provinces into the Indian union, as well as reorganising them, became significant. In his preliminary analysis of the Uttarakhand movement, Shekhar Pathak (1999) traces the key milestones in the Uttarakhand movement. This section summarises his analysis of the key events. In 1815, following the East India Company's capture of the Kumaon Himalaya, Harsh Dev Joshi advocated for special rights for the hill people, though these demands were not realised after his sudden death. In 1918, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report rejected linguistic provinces but suggested smaller homogenous units (Report on Indian Institutional Reforms, 1918, cited in Pathak (1999)). The Indian National Congress (INC) accepted linguistic redistribution as a political goal in 1920 and 1927. The demand for autonomy for Uttarakhand was formally expressed in 1928, through a memorandum submitted during the Lt Governor's visit to Almora. Initially, the first Prime Minister of independent India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru supported autonomy for the hill regions, but his stance shifted after independence. The Linguistic Provinces Commission, also known as the Dar Commission, later opposed the reorganisation of provinces on linguistic grounds.

Although the idea of a separate state was not unpopular, it did not command widespread or dedicated support always (Mawdsley, 1997). The most decisive moment for the Uttarakhand movement came from another important development that took place in 1994. Following a national government decision, the Uttar Pradesh government introduced reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in state government jobs to an extent of 27 percent. This sparked some opposition, mainly among people of the upper castes, but did not lead to any significant

reaction in the state. However, when the same reservation was extended to all higher education institutions, it evoked a significant reaction from students, in the form of protests. The extension of reservation meant that the 85 percent upper-caste population would have to compete for only 50 percent of the seats in these institutions. Given that the OBCs constituted only 2-4 percent of the population, the people from the region began to fear that 'outsiders' would start moving in to take advantage of the new quotas and that the local youth would be denied opportunities for advancement in an 'already poor economy' (Mawdsley, 1997, p 2226). On 25 July 1994, students led large demonstrations in Pauri and Nainital. At the time, the movement's demands centred on the withdrawal of 27 percent OBC reservation in the hill region, the rejection of the delimitation of gram sabhas, and the implementation of the hill cadre scheme. However, these soon snowballed to include opposition to reservations in state government jobs, and issues of forests rights, land, development and tourism (Pathak, 1999). As the movement grew, the demand for a separate state became increasingly prominent, overtaking the reservation issue. The following months saw the hills ablaze with several protests, demonstrations, and violent clashes. The regional demand was rooted in the much long-standing discontent over the lack of development in the hills (Mawdsley, 1998a). The movement grew from there and eventually turned violent, garnering mass support (Dube, 1995; Moller, 2000; Pathak, 1999). Between August and December 1994, more than 20,000 people were arrested, and about 400 agitators were sent to jails located 300-800 km away from their place of arrest (Moller, 2000; Pathak, 1999). As these protests intensified, the demand for separate statehood again took precedence over the reservation issue, encompassing broader concerns such as environmental degradation, women's rights, and the anti-alcohol struggle (Mawdsley, 1997). Finally, in 1998, the Government of India declared that a new state, Uttaranchal, would be carved out of the Himalayan region of the state of Uttara Pradesh (Mawdsley, 1998a).

Mawdsley's research (1998) on the Uttarakhand movement identifies two key aspects about the demand for a separate state entity, amongst common people. First, is the idea of internal colonialism – the belief that the hill region's resources were being exploited by the rest of the state without adequate compensation or economic and infrastructural development in return. Further, with the depletion of forests, restrictions on access to natural resources, environmental degradation, and heavy reliance on male migration from the hill state which resulted in a decline in agricultural yields, people's lives in the rural mountains became harder, even as the state continued to progress. The *Chipko* movement, for example, was aimed at securing greater subsistence and commercial access to forests for local people, but the economic demands of the movement have often been downplayed and even refuted (Mawdsley, 1998b). Later, the controversial Tehri dam project, the protests surrounding it, and the squashing of the movement further demonstrated the prioritising of power generation for the plains over local development

needs   and   safety   (Paranjpye,   1988). The second, concerns the role of the state and governance, centring on the cultural and geographical divide between the people in the hills and the decision-makers in the plains – "in terms of the rule and administration of *baharis* (outsiders) and *maidānī-walas* (plains people)" (Mawdsley, 1997, p2226) who did not understand the needs and challenges of the people living in mountains. Disenchantment with a political setup devoid of mountain-living experience led to frustration. Decision-makers in Lucknow often overlooked the unique challenges of living in the hills, as high transportation costs escalated basic expenses. Constituting only 4 percent of Uttar Pradesh's population, the region lacked political significance. After a prolonged struggle, Uttarakhand was finally established as a separate state in 2000 to address these issues.

2.3 Uttarakhand today

This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of present-day Uttarakhand, covering its administrative and demographic profile, as well as key socio-economic aspects of development. The goal is to paint a detailed picture that helps readers contextualise the findings presented throughout the thesis. Specific emphasis is placed on topics crucial to the thesis, such as the education system and its challenges, which will enrich the analysis of the findings.

2.3.1 Demography

Uttarakhand's total population, according to the Census 2011 data, is approximately 10 million, making it the 20th most populated state in India. The state's population is relatively younger than than the national average, with the median age population of the state being 23 years in comparison to India's 24 years in 2011-12 (Government of Uttarakhand, 2021). The working-age population (15-59 years) is expected to increase from 60 percent in 2011-12 to 65 percent by 2026-27 (Government of Uttarakhand, 2021). During the decade spanning 2001 to 2011, Uttarakhand's population grew by 18.8 percent, higher than the national average of 17.7 percent. However, population growth in the hill districts like Almora and Pauri have been lower than the state average, with some districts even experiencing negative growth since 2001 (Census of India, 2011). This follows a continuing trend of slowing decadal growth of the population in these districts since 1981 (Government of Uttarakhand, 2021). Key demographic details sourced from the Census of India (2011) are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic details: Uttarakhand vis a vis India
Source: Census of India, 2011

	Uttarakhand	India
Total Population (in millions)	10.86	1210.19

Male (in %)	51	52
Female (in %)	49	48
Urban Population (in %)	30	31
Rural Population (in %)	70	69
Decennial Growth rate (2001 to 2011) (in %)	18.81	17.70
Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 males)	963	933
The density of Population (per sq km)	189	382
Scheduled Caste population percentage of State population	17.9	16.63
Schedule Tribe population percentage of State population	3	8.6
Literacy Rate (in %)	78.82	74.04
Male	87.40	82.14
Female	70.01	65.46
Scheduled Castes	74.41	66.07
Scheduled Tribes	73.88	58.95
Workforce Participation	38.39	39.79
Male	49.67	53.26
Female	26.68	25.51

2.3.2 Administrative structure of Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand is divided into 13 districts with 2 administrative divisions (mandals) – Kumaon and Garhwal. In political terminology, these are referred to as the Kumaon mandal and the Garhwal mandal. The 13 districts are further divided into smaller administrative units called blocks, with a total of 95 blocks across the state. The structure of governance followed in India has been explained in Figure 1to provide a perspective on the scope of governance at different levels.

Structure

```
                        Republic of India
                              |
          +-------------------+-------------------+
        States                            Union Territories
          |
       Divisions
          |
       Districts
          |
  +----------------+------------------+------------------+------------------+
  Blocks          Municipal Corporations   Municipalities      City Councils
 (Tehsils/Talukas)  (Nagar Nigam/Maha Nagar  (Nagar Palika)    (Nagar Panchayat)
  |                      Palika)                  |                  |
  Villages                                   +-------------------+
 (Gram Panchayat/Gram                              Wards
      Sabha)
```
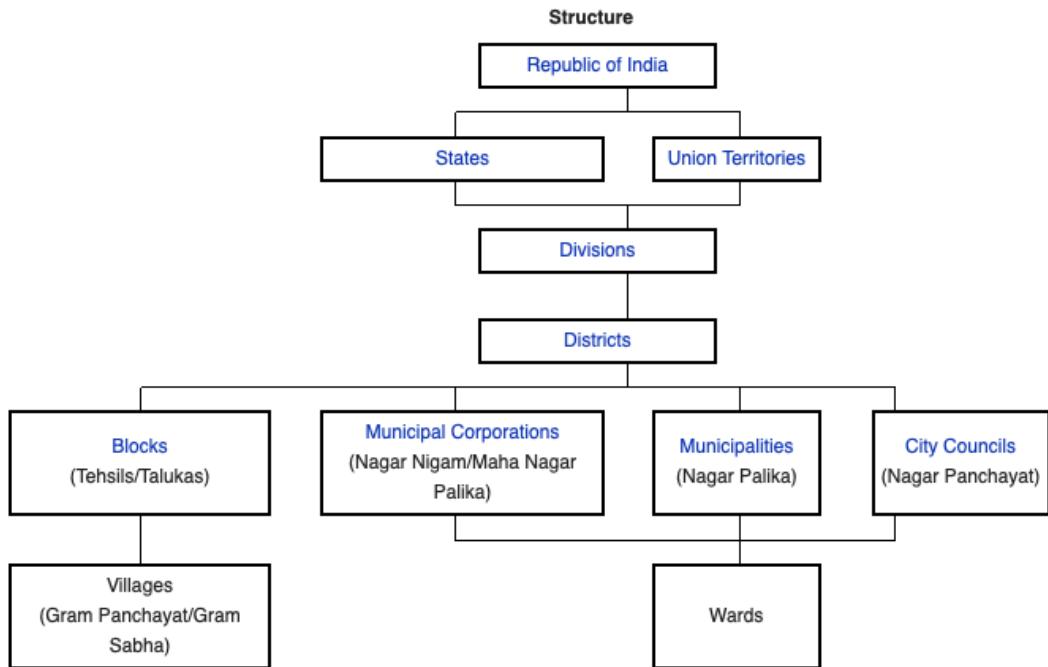
Figure 2: Structure of governance in India
Source: Government of India[3]

Uttarakhand is predominantly a rural state. Most people (70 percent) reside in rural areas and hill districts. The proportion of people living in rural areas is even higher (90 percent) (Census of India, 2011). As per the Census of India 2011, there are 16,793 villages in the state, out of which 15,745 are inhabited and 1048 are uninhabited. Of the inhabited villages, 81 percent – 12,699 villages – have a population of fewer than 500 people. In most districts, more than 75-85 percent of rural settlements have a population of fewer than 500. Only 17 percent of rural settlements have a population between 500 and 1999, and villages with a population of 2000 or more are extremely rare (2.7 percent) (Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b).

The average density of the population is 189 persons per sq. km. However, there is an enormous variation in the density of the population between the plain districts and the hill districts. For instance, the population density in Haridwar is 817 persons per sq. km, whereas it is as low as 41 in Uttarkashi. As of 2011, there are 7,954 gram panchayats in the state. A gram panchayat is a village-level, democratically elected political institution for governance in rural areas. Gram panchayats are the lowest level of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, established under the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India, 1993, to strengthen rural local governance. The state also comprises 8 municipal corporations, 41 municipalities, and 43 city councils in the urban areas of Uttarakhand (Directorate of Economics and Statistics Government of

---

[3] Government of India; website: www.india.gov.in

Uttarakhand, 2022). The Census of India (2011) enumerates 41 towns and 2 industrial townships in Uttarakhand.

2.3.3 Socio-economic profile

Uttarakhand is one of India's fastest-growing states. The period between 2001 and 2011 was marked by high economic growth for the state. In fact, according to the World Bank factsheet on Uttarakhand, the state recorded the highest growth rate in the country since 2005 – with 6.77 percent in the financial year 2017-18 (Government of Uttarakhand, 2019). With an estimated per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) of Rs.177,000 in 2017-18, almost 60 percent higher than the national income, it also emerged as the sixth richest state in India (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018). Economic growth in the state is primarily driven by non-farm sectors. (World Bank, 2017b).

As far as employment and livelihood are concerned, Uttarakhand is largely an agrarian state. Agriculture, including horticulture and animal rearing, is the main occupation of the people. The workforce participation rate in the state is 38.39 percent, with 40.81 percent of the total workforce in the state engaged in agriculture as cultivators and 10.41 percent as agricultural labourers (Census of India, 2011). Agriculture plays an important role in the state's economy, employing almost half of the workforce but contributing only 11 percent to the state income. At the same time, the secondary and tertiary sectors employ 22 percent and 29 percent of the workforce, respectively, while contributing 37 percent and 52 percent to the state income (Institute for Human Development, 2018). Further, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of people working in the agricultural sector. In 1994, 75 percent of the population in Uttarakhand was engaged in the farm sector. This proportion had fallen to 49 percent in 2012, while in the same period, the proportion of people employed in non-farm sector jobs increased from 25 to 51 percent (World Bank, 2017a). World Bank data (2017) shows that overall employment growth in the state has been negative since 2005. This indicates that even though people increasingly prefer regular, salaried, or paid non-farm sector employment to self-employment in agriculture, the number of jobs created in non-farm sectors since 2005 has not been enough to offset the jobs lost in agriculture (World Bank, 2017a). It is not surprising, then, that 51 percent of the state's working population is engaged in agriculture when the total cultivable area constitutes less than 15 percent of the total geographical area (Chopra, 2014). Such an imbalance in employment between the desire for jobs in the non-farm sector and the limited availability of jobs in the sector is a telling story which can be correlated with the scale of migration from this state. This is discussed in the later section of this chapter.

2.3.4 Socio-cultural background

With respect to the cultural milieu of the state, the population comprises 83 percent Hindus, 14 percent Muslims, 2 percent Sikhs and a small proportion of Christians, and Buddhists (Directorate of Economics and Statistics Government of Uttarakhand, 2022). With the Hindus constituting the majority of population in the state, the caste system is a crucial feature of social and cultural life in Uttarakhand. The term caste, derived from the Portuguese word *casta* (meaning lineage or purity), was first applied to the Indian context by Portuguese traders in the 15th century (Sahoo, 2017). However, the Indian caste system is complex and more accurately understood through the indigenous concepts of *varna* (Sanskrit: *varṇa*) and *jati* (Sanskrit: *jāti*), which are often oversimplified as synonymous with caste.

The concept of *varna* refers to a hierarchical system described in Hindu scriptures and consists of four *varna*s. According to this religion based hierarchical system, the society is divided into four broad *varnas*: the Brahmins (priests and scholars) at the top, the Kshatriyas (warriors and the ruling class) next, the Vaishyas (farmers, traders and merchants) in the third place, and the Shudras (labourers, servants and peasants) at the bottom (Zerjal et al., 2007). These four groups are collectively known as *savarna.* Outside of the *varna* system are all non-Hindus and the *avarna* – the so-called Untouchables who still often perform menial and dirty tasks like skinning dead animals and scavenging. They were considered to be on the fringe of the ranked *varna* system as Outcastes (Deshpande, 2010; Sana, 1993). Today, these communities, i.e. *jati*s, are known as the Scheduled Castes (SC) by the Constitution of India or as Dalits, meaning "the oppressed", as many of them prefer to be addressed (Deshpande, 2010; Sana, 1993). Only marginalised Hindu communities can officially be classified as Scheduled Castes in India, according to The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. The Government of India Act, implemented by the British in 1935, carried this definition of the term "Scheduled Caste," in Part 14 of the Act, and the same definition continues to be used by the Indian government post-Independence.

The concept of *jati* refers rather to one's socio-economic group identity from birth (Béteille, 1996). Unlike *varna*, which applies only to Hindus, *jati* refers to the numerous individual communities that can be part of the *varna* system, but are also found among members of all other religions in India. For instance, since each *varna* contains many *jatis*, they are also referred to as subcastes by some scholars. Even within the Dalits – those outside the *varna* system – there is internal stratification based on different traditional occupational groups, i.e., *jati*s, like the other orders of the four *varna*s (Goghari & Kusi, 2023).

The difference in the concepts of *varna* and *jati* is not the only feature that complicates the caste system. In their exploration of the caste system in India, Goghari & Kusi (2023) highlight

that the complex caste system can be understood through two contrasting lenses: the book-view and the field-view (Sahoo, 2017). The book-view is based on brahmin-authored Hindu texts like the Vedas and presents caste as a religious and cultural construct with a strong focus on religious purity and impurity. This perspective often overemphasises the theological aspects and may not reflect lived realities. On the other hand, the field-view draws on everyday practices and interactions. It highlights how caste is shaped not only by religious norms but also by local customs, economic conditions, political influence, and access to formal education and jobs. For instance, Srinivas (1984) illustrates how caste-based power is complex and context-dependent. While Kshatriyas held political authority, Brahmins had to serve kings through ritual and religious knowledge to maintain their relevance.

In Uttarakhand, the majority population identify as Brahmins and Kshatriyas (Negi et al., 2016). Brahmins and Rajput groups, who in most cases identify as Kshatriyas, tend to dominate the politics and administrative field of the region. (Koskimaki, 2017). In Kumaon, where this study is based, caste evolved historically through regional socio-political processes rather than the scripture-based four-fold *varna* system. Nineteenth-century stratification was threefold: upper castes who did not till land, the *Khasa* peasantry engaged in agriculture, and the *Dom* artisan castes considered ritually polluting (Pande, 2013). British colonial classification and census practices further institutionalised caste hierarchies by relying on upper-caste informants and inaccurately mapping local categories onto the *varna* model (Pande, 2013). By the 1960s, caste stratification in Kumaon increasingly resembled broader pan-Indian Hindu patterns (Pande, 2013).

Caste continues to be a central feature of Hindu society and influences the lives of the majority of Hindus (Sana, 1993). Caste-based discrimination has been outlawed and is a punishable offence but caste-based prejudices and biases are still practised in some form or the other in Indian society, irrespective of the rural-urban locations (Deshpande, 2010). As Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar noted, caste is not a physical barrier but a mindset; true equality requires cultural and mental transformation (Ambedkar, 2014).

To combat caste discrimination and reduce the inequality between the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the higher castes, the Constitution of India provides for compensatory discrimination measures primarily through a quota-based reservation system in the public and government sector, namely education, employment, and legislative bodies (Saxena, 2004). India's affirmative action programme, which started in 1950, initially focused on the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs). Originally formed to last 10 years, these measures remain in place due to ongoing need (Haq & Ojha, 2010). Over time, the scheme expanded to

include the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the 1980s (Ramaiah, 1992), and the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) from higher castes in 2019 (Pillalamarri, 2022). Affirmative action measures are relevant for this study as they are applicable to higher education opportunities.

2.3.5 Education

Education in Uttarakhand follows the 10+2 system, where students study common subjects from Grades 1 to 10 before choosing specific subject streams – Science, Humanities, or Commerce – for their final two years of schooling. Schools in Uttarakhand are affiliated with the Uttarakhand Board of Secondary Education (UBSE), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE). The medium of instruction is Hindi and English.

According to the Unified District Information System for Education[4] (UDISE), Uttarakhand has a total of 23,559 schools, including both government and private institutions. The total number of government schools[5] is 17,752 out of which 8,651 schools have Anganwadi centres[6] – early childcare and education centres. The total number of students enrolled in these schools is 2,325,612, with 41.6 percent enrolled in government schools and 48.8 percent in private schools. According to the District Information System for Education (DISE) 2015-16, total enrolment across all school grades is 1,128,193 in primary schools and 757,209 in elementary schools, with a higher enrolment rate for girls across all types of schools. The annual school dropout rate varies across levels of schooling. At the primary level, it is 8.16 percent. At the upper primary level, the dropout rate is 10.05 percent for boys, while for girls it increases to 12.06 percent. There is a sharp increase in the dropout rate at the secondary level, as 12.24 percent of boys and 9.26 percent of girls quit education at this stage. The average annual dropout rate at the higher secondary level is 4.45 percent for boys and 1.66 percent for girls. The total number of teachers is 58,724 in government schools and 54,667 in private schools.

As far as the development of school infrastructure is concerned, the state fares well according to DISE 2015-16 data. 99.34 percent of all government schools have their own buildings. As

---

[4] Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) is the management information system initiated by the Department of School, Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India. It collects, consolidates data from all recognised schools from pre-primary to class XII level in India; website: https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/

[5] Government Schools include schools administered under Central Government, Local Bodies, Tribal and Social Welfare Department and Department of Education

[6] The word Anganwadi means "courtyard shelter" in Hindi. They were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program to combat child hunger and malnutrition. Anganwadis are the focal point for implementation of all the health, nutrition, and early learning initiatives under the ICDS

per Right to Education (RTE)[7] norms, every school should have a library inside the school campus. District-level data collected through DISE shows that 93 percent of all primary and elementary schools have a library on their campus. Of all all-grade schools, around 96 percent have separate toilets for girls. The literacy rates in Uttarakhand are higher than the national average (Awasthi, 2017; Koskimaki, 2017; Mamgain & Reddy, 2015a; Rural Development and Migration Commission Uttarakhand, 2020). While data relating to school infrastructure presents a promising picture, the quality of education in schools still needs improvement. Poor quality learning is an issue across India, and Uttarakhand is no exception. Learning outcomes for schools have been improving in recent years, and Uttarakhand outperforms the national averages at the elementary level (National Achievement Survey 2017, 2017). However, performance falls below national averages at the Class 8 levels (National Achievement Survey 2017, 2017). The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) also indicates that quality issues persist at the primary level, where students are unable to read texts recommended at their class level (Pratham, 2018). The survey conducted by Uttarakhand Human Development Report (UKHDR) shows that almost all children in the age group of 6-14 years of age are enrolled in school. However, in the age group 17-18 years and 19-24 years, less than half the populace is enrolled at the appropriate level of education (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018). Thus, when we look beyond the statistics on school infrastructure, the quality of education is an issue that still needs to be addressed.

In the case of higher education, Uttarakhand has nine state universities, one central university, eleven private universities, and three deemed universities. In addition to these, there is one University of Agriculture and Technology and one Indian Institute of Technology. In 2016-17, there were 468 colleges in the state and 39 colleges per lakh population – well above the all-India average of 26 (AISHE, 2017). The government has also set up the Uttarakhand Skill Development Mission (2013) to provide free skill training to youth, but the awareness of and access to this programme remain low in the state (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018).

2.3.6 Development experience: hills-plain divide & migration

Uttarakhand generally performs well on various development indicators. Poverty reduction in the state has been particularly rapid since 2005, with only 11 percent of the population living below the poverty line, significantly lower than the national average of 22 percent (World Bank, 2017b). Life expectancy stands at 71.5 years, higher than the national average of 68.5

---

[7] The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 is a legislation enacted by the Indian parliament in 2009 that defines the modalities of the public education system in India. As the title of the act suggests, it guarantees free and compulsory education to all children aged 6-14. Among other provisions, it sets the norms and standards for good quality elementary education

years. The state boasts a literacy rate of 79.63 percent, surpassing the national average of 74.04 percent (Census of India, 2011), reported even higher at 87.4 percent in the Uttarakhand Human Development Report (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018). School enrolment rates are also high, with 88 percent at the secondary and 72 percent at the higher secondary levels (Government of Uttarakhand, 2023).

However, beneath these positive indicators lie challenges, particularly for the hill districts. Despite overall economic growth, the benefits have disproportionately favoured the three plain districts, leading to significant income and employment disparities within the state (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017). Economic activities and growth have predominantly centred around the plains, leaving the hill regions – such as Bageshwar, Champawat, Tehri Garhwal, and Almora – with nearly half the per capita income of Dehradun and Haridwar (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017). Population dynamics also reflect this disparity. The hill districts recorded a population growth of only 0.70 percent and the rural areas in these districts registered a growth rate of only 0.38 percent. Districts of Almora and Pauri Garhwal even experienced an absolute decline in population, at the rate of - 0.13 and - 0.14 respectively (Census of India, 2011). While the plain districts developed rapidly, the hill districts continued to rely on subsistence farming as their main economic activity, due to which subsistence farming, migration and remittance economy have emerged in the hill districts (Sethi, 2008). Despite the state's overall economic growth, out-migration has become a significant concern for Uttarakhand.

Some authors argue that migration from the Uttarakhand Himalayas, although not new, gained momentum after the 1990s and particularly following the formation of the state (NSDC, 2013; Sati, 2021; Srivastava, 2011). There has been a slowdown in the decadal growth in all hill districts in the state (Census of India, 2011). In recent years, this phenomenon of rapidly emptying villages in Uttarakhand has been referred to as "ghost villages" – villages which have been left uninhabited in the state. Census data (2011) indicates that, out of 16,793 villages in Uttarakhand, 1,053 are uninhabited and 405 have a population of less than 10. Analysing the migration data from the Census and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Srivastava finds that, with a high gross out-migration rate of 7.81 percent, Uttarakhand ranks the highest among Indian states in inter-state migration (Srivastava, 2011). Over 60 percent of the migration is outside the state, while the remainder consists of rural-to-urban migration within the state. A detailed study conducted by Mamgain and Reddy (2017) for the National Institute of Rural Development revealed that migration from Uttarakhand tends to be of longer duration, primarily to major cities both within and outside the state. The study also shows that three-fourths of out-migrants are longer-duration migrants (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017). This is contrary to the migration pattern observed in other parts of India, where short-term migration from rural households, mostly cyclic in nature, tends to take place (Srivastava, 2011; UNESCO, 2013). This is partly because, unlike migrants from Bihar or eastern Uttar Pradesh

who move to agriculturally prosperous states for seasonal work, the majority of migrants from Uttarakhand seek salaried jobs in the government or private sectors (Mamgain, 2007).

The lack of economic and infrastructural development in the hill districts of the state has been a major factor behind the uninterrupted rate of out-migration. Various studies consistently cite reasons such as lack of livelihood opportunities, low agricultural productivity, inadequate infrastructure, and limited educational facilities as primary drivers of out-migration. (Awasthi, 2017; Bose, 2000; Jain, 2010; Mamgain, 2007). Characteristics specific to hilly areas, such as environmental shocks, poor accessibility, fragility, and marginality, along with the lack of quality health care and higher education opportunities in Uttarakhand, have further contributed to this need to out-migrate. In Uttarakhand, out-migration and economic underdevelopment reinforce each other and create a vicious cycle that further accentuates the process of underdevelopment (Joshi, 1980 cited in Awasthi, 2017). Development policies and programmes fail to address the differences in rural-urban incomes and infrastructures. It is widely argued that one of the main reasons for the region's underdevelopment is the neglect of mountain perspectives in the design and implementation of development plans, despite their distinct specificities (Jodha, 2000). Mountainous areas differ significantly from plains in terms of resource access, infrastructure, technology, knowledge, and opportunities, necessitating tailored planning that is currently absent from development policies and interventions (Awasthi, 2017). There is a belief that the lack of policies and programmes to attract the skills and capabilities of returning migrants has led many out-migrants to settle permanently outside their villages, along with their households. This trend has increased the tendency for entire households to migrate out of the region (Mamgain & Reddy, 2015a).

Migration is also a politically significant issue in the state. Successive elections have revolved around this issue, prompting governments to take visible steps to address it. In 2017, the state government established the Rural Development and Migration Commission to assess the scale of migration from the state and propose strategies to mitigate it.

Nationally, the underdevelopment of the Himalayan region has garnered considerable attention. In 2010, a task force formed by the Planning Commission of India advocated reshaping national policies and planning with a 'mountain perspective' (Planning Commission Government of India, 2010). It recommended leveraging local social capital, and addressed issues such as natural resources, environment, human capital, skill development, and fiscal policies. Additionally, NITI Aayog, India's apex planning body, set up five thematic working groups in 2017 to promote sustainable development in the Indian Himalayan Region. These groups focused on transforming shifting agriculture, promoting sustainable tourism, spring revival, strengthening skills and entrepreneurship, and data-driven decision-making. Their 2018 report on 'Strengthening the Skill and Entrepreneurship Landscape in Himalayas'

highlighted youth migration as a critical challenge for regional development. The report recommended enhancing skills among migrant workers and fostering entrepreneurship among returnees. Key actions proposed included promoting agriculture and rural tourism, developing rural infrastructure, and implementing tailored education and skill-development programmes.

Despite youth being a central focus in migration policy discussions, there have been limited efforts to understand youth aspirations in the state. Following the migrant exodus triggered by the COVID-19 lockdown, Uttarakhand experienced a wave of return migration. The state government conducted surveys through the Migration Commission to understand the aspirations of return migrants for the first time. However, as lockdown measures eased, another wave of out-migration ensued, and concrete initiatives to retain migrants in the state did not materialise.

Thus far, the general context of Uttarakhand has been explained, which is crucial for understanding the challenges faced by its hill districts. This study focuses on the Almora district, reflecting development issues common to other hill districts in the state. Such contextualisation is vital for interpreting the findings presented in the next section, which provides an overview of the district, including key information on schooling, education, and migration.

2.4 Almora

Uttarakhand comprises two divisions: the historical kingdoms of Garhwal and Kumaon. This research focuses on Almora, a district in the Kumaon division of Uttarakhand. It is one of the state's 13 districts, specifically one of its 10 hill districts (see map in Figure 3).

The district's administrative headquarters is located in Almora town, which derives its name from the 43rd ruler of the Chand dynasty, King Bhishm Chand, who founded it in 1530 (Atkinson, 1974). The Chand dynasty ruled the area until the 18th century, briefly interrupted by Gorkha control following their capture, until the British defeated them in the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-16). Situated at an elevation of 1,638 meters above sea level, Almora town is bordered by Pithoragarh district to the east, the Garhwal region to the west, Bageshwar district to the north, and Nainital district to the south. Almora is renowned for its hill station located on a horseshoe-shaped ridge of a mountain. Established under British rule in 1864, Almora municipality is the oldest in Uttarakhand.

Presently, the Almora district is subdivided into 6 Sub-Divisions: Almora, Jainti, Dwarahat, Ranikhet, Bhikiyasain, and Sult. It comprises 12 tehsils, 2 sub-tehsils, and 11 Development Blocks. Additionally, there are 95 Nyay Panchayats, 1,166 Gram Panchayats, and 2,289 census villages. The district is renowned for its Himalayan vistas, rich cultural heritage, handicrafts, cuisine, and serves as a commercial centre for the Kumaon region.
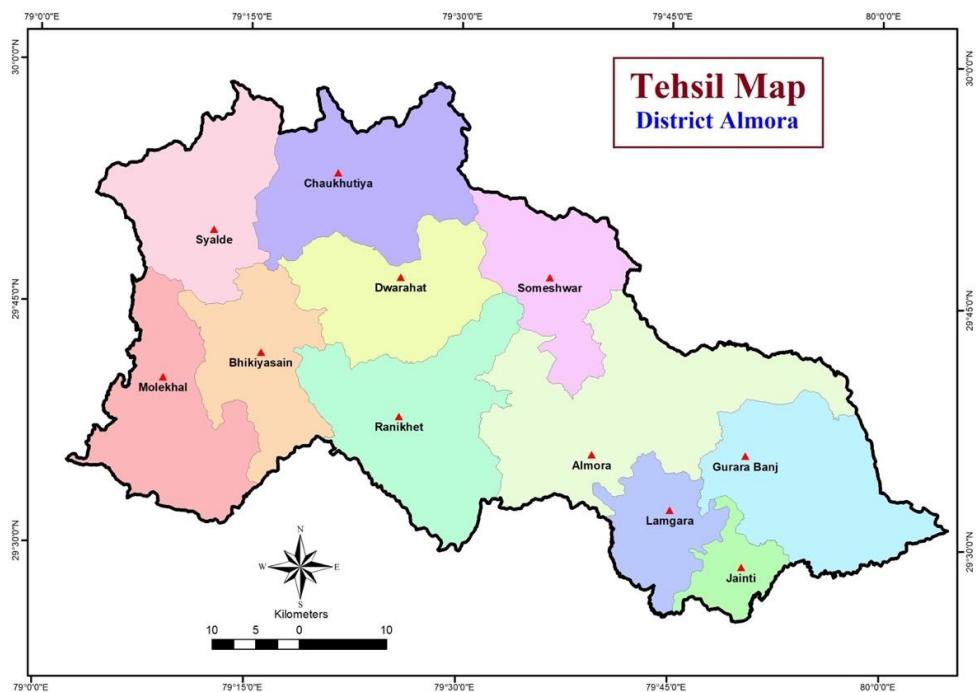
Figure 3*: Map of Almora district*
Source: Almora district administration[8]

The district has two urban centres – Almora town and Ranikhet. Besides being historically significant and traditionally described as the land of lords and demons, Almora is also known as the cultural heart of the Kumaon region (Atkinson, 1882). Historically, the Kumaon region encompassed what is now divided into two separate divisions: Kumaon and Garhwal. Today, Almora is revered as the cultural capital of Uttarakhand. Over the years, its history and presence have enriched it culturally, spiritually, and politically, earning it recognition as a significant intellectual centre in Uttarakhand. The district has also been a home to numerous writers, some native to India and others who settled here. Almora gained popularity among Western academics, particularly those involved in Tibetan and Buddhist studies.

In addition to its long-standing historical and cultural significance, Almora also gained prominence in administrative and political aspects (Gnanadev & Soundari, 2017). The British developed hill stations as administrative, military, and economic centres because they provided respite from the summer heat in India (Pradhan, 2007; Scrase et al., 2015). Almora was developed in a similar manner, as the British continued the tradition established by the kings of Almora and set up their administrative seat there. Almora boasts a rich history with renowned civil servants and politicians, including Bhairabh Datt Pande and Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, key architects of modern India. The town's cultural, literary, spiritual, and

---

[8] Almora District Administration; website: https://almora.nic.in/

political significance ensures its unique place in the history of Uttarakhand and the Himalayan region.

2.4.1 Demography & socio-economic profile

The population of Almora is 622,506 according to the Census of India (2011). Like the rest of Uttarakhand, the majority of the population (98.19 percent) comprises Hindus, followed by 1.25 percent Muslims, and 0.30 percent Christians. The overall literacy rate of Almora district is 80.47 percent, while the male & female literacy rates are 92.86 percent and 69.93 percent respectively (Census of India, 2011). In Almora, the tertiary (services) sector contributed the largest share – 53.4 percent – to the Gross District Domestic Product (GDDP), which is slightly higher than that of Uttarakhand's share of 51.9 percent to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in 2013-14. The district's primary (agricultural) sector contributes about 1/5th to GDDP (21.57 percent) while the secondary sector's contribution is 18.93 percent. The GDDP of Almora in the primary sector is more than double compared to that in Uttarakhand. The per capita income or average income measures the average income earned per person in a given area in a specified year. Almora's per capita income (Rs. 86,699) is less than that of the state (Rs. 1,12,428). Low per capita income is usually an indicator of poverty in a region. According to the Planning Commission, Government of India (2009), Almora has the sixth-highest proportion of population living below the poverty line in rural areas, with a Poverty Ratio (PVR) of 44.06 per cent in 2004–05. In the urban sector, it ranks tenth, with a PVR of 6.26 per cent. Overall, 99.06 per cent of the poor in Almora live in rural areas, while only 0.94 per cent reside in urban areas. Considering the distribution of the poor across districts of urban and rural Uttarakhand, 9.78 percent of the rural poor and 0.34 percent of the urban poor population reside in Almora. In terms of the work participation rate (WPR) in the district, the male WPR at 48.94 percent is higher than that of the female WPR at 46.99 percent. The main occupation of people is agriculture (39.35 percent) and manual labour (34.13 percent) (Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b). Tables 2 and 3 provide a consolidated demographic profile of the district, compiled by the district administration.

Table 2: *Almora demography details*
Source: Almora district administration[9]

Details of the district Almora	
Total area	3139.00 sq. km
Forest area	1309.00 sq. km
Total population	622506

---

[9] Almora District Administration; website: https://almora.nic.in/demography

Male population	291081
Female population	331425
Urban population	73400
Rural population	549106
Literates	436497

Table 3: *Almora demography details;*
Source: Almora district administration

Parameters	Units	District	State
Population growth (per annum)	%	-1.64	18.81
Population density (persons/sq.km)	Nos	198	189
Urbanization	%	11.79	30.23
Literacy	%	80.47	78.8
Male literacy	%	92.86	87.4
Female literacy	%	69.92	63.89
Urban literacy	%	93.73	84.45
Rural literacy	%	78.6	76.31
Workers as % of total population	%	47.9	38.39
Agriculture workers as % of main workers	%	65.71	36.42
Mining & quarrying workers	%	0	0.08

As the research primarily focuses on youth attending higher secondary schools, it is imperative to discuss the status of schooling and education in the study area – the district of Almora. The context of the research is pervasive migration in the area, which may have implications for the young people planning their futures. The next two sections highlight key aspects related to the status of education in Almora and out-migration from the district.

2.4.2 Education in Almora

According to Unified District Information System for Education Plus[10] (UDISE+) data for 2020-21, Almora has 1,713 government schools. Out of these, 118 are secondary schools and 221 are higher secondary schools (Government of Uttarakhand, 2023). Almora reports the highest proportion of household expenditure allocated to education (14.3 percent) and also records the highest proportion of children attending government schools and receiving

---

[10] Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) is the management information system initiated by the Department of School, Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India. It collects, consolidates data from all recognised schools from pre-primary to class XII level in India; website: https://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/

scholarships (37.3 percent) among all districts in Uttarakhand (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018). These are positive indicators for the state of education in the district.

In Almora, the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) at the elementary level is 10, while it is 12 across schools with elementary to higher secondary grades (Government of Uttarakhand, 2023). The enrolment rate among girls remains constantly higher than that of the boys across all blocks in Almora. In Almora, government schools account for 46.37 percent of boys' enrolment and 53.63 percent of girls' enrolment (Government of Uttarakhand, 2023). PTR at both elementary (9) and higher secondary school (15) levels remains below the Right to Education[11] (RTE) mandate of 30 and 35 respectively. Further, the UKHDR survey (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018), reports that Almora has the lowest proportion of households (35.38 percent) with access to a school within a kilometre. The accessibility to schools has implications for enrolment, attendance, and retention in hill districts and for aspirations of higher education as this research study also details in later chapters. Some challenges that have been discussed and highlighted by participants in this study also pertain to the quality of teaching and teaching time, which are a result of inadequate PTR and unnecessary administrative duties imposed on teachers. The teachers are regularly taken out of their teaching duties to dispense off other public service duties, such as census enumeration and conducting election processes in the state, which takes time away from actual teaching responsibilities.

Additionally, the issue of accessibility affects the quality of teaching and learning, as noted by the teachers who participated in this research. Posting areas are classified into *'durgam'* (difficult to access, remote) and *'sugam'* (easy to access). Teachers complain that while the system has clear rules and regulations for posting and rotating teachers between these areas to ensure that no one is posted in difficult and remote areas for too long, mismanagement and certain malpractices keep teachers in such areas for extended periods. During these times, teachers often stay away from their families and work under challenging circumstances, leading to a poor quality of life and a decline in their motivation and commitment to work. Teachers also point out that the shortage of teaching staff, coupled with overwhelming additional responsibilities that encroach on teaching time, are the main reasons Uttarakhand is lagging in providing education that goes beyond merely producing literates (Interview with Teachers, multiple)

---

[11] The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 is a legislation enacted by the Indian parliament in 2009 that defines the modalities of the public education system in India. As the title of the act suggests, it guarantees free and compulsory education to all children aged 6-14. Among other provisions, it sets the norms and standards for good quality elementary education

2.4.3 Migration from Almora

Although all hill districts have experienced slow decadal population growth in Uttarakhand, Almora and Pauri districts have, in fact, witnessed negative population growth rates in the census years between 2001 and 2011 (Census of India, 2011). This has been cited as evidence of out-migration from these districts (Mamgain & Reddy, 2015a). In Almora specifically, the decline in population growth was the highest (-1.73 percent).A further cause for concern is that one-tenth of the rural population migrates out, and one-third are long-term migrants- those who have been away for 12 months or more (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018). An interim report on the status of migration in villages of Uttarakhand has been published by the Rural Development and Migration Commission of Uttarakhand in 2018. This commission was set up by the Government of Uttarakhand in August 2017 to assess the magnitude and extent of out-migration from the rural areas of the state and examine all aspects of the problem (of out-migration) (Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b). Analysing the data from 2011 to 2018 in this report, Sati (2021) reports that migration from Uttarakhand to other states is the highest from Almora district where 80 percent of all migrants migrate to destinations outside of Uttarakhand. In the last 10 years, 646 villages in Almora have seen permanent migration of all the village inhabitants and a total of 16,207 people have migrated permanently from the district (Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b). Major causes for out-migration are unemployment, lack of quality education and adverse conditions for agriculture in the district (Khan et al., 2016). Majority of migrants from Almora (76.8 percent) report to have found salaried employment in private sector jobs (Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand, 2018). The absolute population decline has been in smaller villages in the district (Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b). With long-term migrants, people moving from smaller villages and most of them migrating outside of the state, migration from Almora is a distinctive feature of the district and has the potential of turning into irreversible migration which will have serious socio-ecological repercussions for the Himalayan state.

This chapter has summed up the history of Uttarakhand, its current socio-economic status, and the development experience since its formation in the year 2000. The chapter also throws light on the history and development of the district of Almora, where this study is based. It is important to keep the history of the formation and background of the hill state in mind while reading the findings of this study. It brings into focus the development infrastructure, and how it affects young people's access to opportunities and constitutes the social set-up of their lives. Further, some of the main reasons for out-migration – unemployment and lack of access to good quality education – are relevant for the young working population in the state, which is projected to increase in the next 5 years (Government of Uttarakhand, 2021). This brings into focus the two key issues – the opportunities available for young people and the development

infrastructure accessible to them – both of which have implications on how they develop their aspirations considering how they envision their future, in the mountains and outside.

Chapter 3: State of the Art and Conceptualisation of the Study

This chapter presents a theoretical discussion on the concepts of aspiration, capacity to aspire, and migration. The chapter starts with a review of literature on internal migration in India, and migration and migration aspirations from the research area. After highlighting the gaps in the literature, it delves into the concept of aspirations encompassing the concept of capacity to aspire, aspirations in the context of migration and migration aspirations in the context of the socio-economic development of the region. Since this study attempts to study educational and career aspirations in the context of migration, combining the theorisation of such aspirations and migration helps understand the nexus between these two processes in the lives of the youth. Thus, the consolidated conceptual framework for analysis comprises theories on educational and career aspirations of youth in disadvantaged contexts and theories on migration aspirations and migration and socio-economic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Internal migration in India

We are living in an age of migration (de Haas et al., 2019). There has been an enormous growth in the literature on the links between migration and development (Bredtmann et al., 2019; Page & Plaza, 2006; A. Quisumbing & McNiven, 2020; A. R. Quisumbing & McNiven, 2005; Yang, 2008). At the international level, migration is no longer seen only from the risk perspective (e.g., security and human rights), but is increasingly recognised for its potential to deliver significant benefits to sending and receiving countries and their inhabitants (UNDP 2009). This holds true for internal migration within developing countries as well. Changing aspirations of young people, rise in education levels, declining interest of youth in agriculture, declining agricultural productivity, and the declining contribution of local smallholder agriculture to rural livelihoods all drive internal migration within developing countries (IFAD, 2019; Laube, 2015; Wymann von Dach, Romeo, Vita, Wurzinger, & Kohler, 2013; Ye & Pan, 2016).

In India especially, internal migration with its diverse, integrated factors and multi-layered nuances at play, is an interesting phenomenon. Historically, internal migration in India has been low (Davis, 1951 cited in Mishra, 2016). Even till the 1990s, mobility remained on the decline. With liberalisation reforms, known as the New Economic Policy, in 1991, the country experienced economic growth and it was expected that this would give impetus to rural-to-urban migration flow. However economic development did not lead to any drastic increase in migration within the country (Mishra, 2016). Some factors that can be associated with the low mobility are the rigid caste system and its implications for social institutions such as marriage, low levels of education attainment, joint family systems in rural areas, and slow agrarian

reforms (R. B. Bhagat, 2010; Davis, 1951; Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2009). However, the recent upsurge in economic growth, developments in transport and communication infrastructure, increasing educational attainments and the associated rise in aspirations has led to higher levels of mobility (R. B. Bhagat, 2010). Internal migrants in India constituted 453 million, accounting for 37 percent of the Indian population in 2011 (Census of India, 2011). Analysing the trends and patterns of internal migration in India based on the census data, one sees that the majority of migration in India is within districts (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005). Among the intra-district migrants, most are women who move away from their parents' household to their husband's household after getting married (Srivastava & Sasikumar, 2003). Seasonal and circular migration is a livelihood strategy for people living in poverty in India (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005; Deshingkar & Start, 2003). Deshingkar and Akter (2009) note that people from agriculturally and industrially less developed states, such as Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, migrate to more developed states like Punjab, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Most migration in India is intra-state but inter-state migration has also been increasing steadily (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). Internal migration is generally being driven by increasing urbanisation and development of growth centres in urban areas. The concentration of good-quality healthcare and education services in the urban centres is a major reason behind rural-to-urban migration.

Further, there are region-specific features that either expedite or impede the migration process. Certain geographies tend to be more susceptible to out-migration. This is particularly true for mountainous regions, not only in India but globally. People living in the mountains resort to migration as a strategy to optimise the use of natural resources, ensure food security, strengthen social networks, improve economic gains, and fulfil personal aspirations (Bachmann et al., 2019). The role of migration in meeting aspirations, as well as the impact of migration and remittances on Himalayan households, has been extensively documented (Bhadra & Khanal, 2002; Jain, 2010; Pandey, 2021; Pandey & Dasgupta, 2014; Pathak et al., 2017; Sati, 2021; Siddiqui et al., 2019a, 2019b; Singh, 2015; Yadav et al., 2018). The next section looks at how migration from mountain regions of Uttarakhand has been studied and identifies the gaps in existing research.

3.2 Existing research on migration and aspirations from Uttarakhand

Mountain ecosystems, like the Himalaya, are some of the most fragile in the world, sensitive to natural and anthropogenic changes (Sonesson & Messerli, 2002; Tiwari, 2000). Mountain communities have traditionally depended on subsistence agriculture, livestock, small-scale trade, and wage and casual labour for their livelihoods (Erikkson et al., 2009; Macchi, 2010; Maithani, 1996). With little arable area available for agriculture and low agricultural productivity, these communities are characterised by prevailing poverty, food and livelihood insecurity, and poor community health (Huddleston et al., 2003). In the Himalaya, a large

proportion of the adult male population out-migrates from the region in search of work (Macchi, 2010; Maithani, 1996). In fact, the Hindu Kush Himalayan countries[12] are the top migrant-sending countries in the world (Hoermann & Kollmair, 2009b). According to Anmol Jain (2010), this region experiences intra-regional (from remote rural locations to developed urban centres in the hills) as well as inter-regional (from the hill regions to the developed plains) migration. People in these countries still suffer from low incomes and lack of employment opportunities, infrastructure, and basic amenities. Specific characteristics of mountains – such as poor accessibility, fragility and marginality – further aggravate these problems (Kollmair & Hoermann, 2011; Siddiqui et al., 2019a).

The Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), occupying about 20 percent of the country's geographical area, encompasses ten mountain states and four hill districts of Assam and West Bengal. People in these states have extremely limited access to basic amenities such as electricity, health services, education, roads, sanitation, broadband connectivity, and water (IMI, 2014; Planning Commission Government of India, 2010). A study by the Planning Commission of India, ranking states on a range of indicators representing the basic components necessary for development, found that the IHR states are the most developmentally disadvantaged in the country, suffering from deficits in both the availability of land as well as the infrastructure necessary for development (Planning Commission Government of India, 2013). These states have been accorded Special Category Status, given to states with hilly, difficult terrain and economic backwardness (S. Sharma et al., 2015)

The central Himalayan foothills in Northern India are characterised by marginal agricultural productivity, widespread rural poverty (Guha, 2000; Semwal et al., 2007), high vulnerability to natural disasters (Semwal et al., 2007), and experience significant rural out-migration (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017; Sati, 2021). Uttarakhand, particularly, is characterised by large-scale migration of people from rural mountain villages to urban centres in the plains. With the tradition of young men joining the armed forces, migration has historically been accepted as a livelihood strategy by the hill communities of Uttarakhand (Mamgain, 2004; Yadav et al., 2018). The scale of migration has been detailed in the previous chapter in depth. Both permanent and semi-permanent migration are observed in Uttarakhand (Jain, 2010). Permanent migration has been occurring mainly from rural areas (Sati, 2021). Main reasons for this scale of out-migration are lack of employment, adversely affected livelihoods and poor rural infrastructure (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017; Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018a; Sati, 2021). Based on migration data from revenue villages of Uttarakhand collected by Rural Development and Migration Commission for period 2011-2018, Sati reveals that

---

[12] Hind Kush Himalaya is a mountainous region that stretches 3500km over eight countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Myanmar, and Pakistan

migration destinations include nearby towns, district centres, within state, and outside the state. Migration out of the state was the highest from Almora district (47.08 percent), followed by Pauri (34.15 percent) (Sati, 2021).

It is also important to note that migration experience is not uniform across all social divides. The ICIMOD report, on the basis of data collected from three hill districts of Tehri Garhwal, Bageshwar, and Chamoli, argue that socially dominant caste groups – Brahmins and Rajputs – have greater tendency to migrate than the Scheduled Castes because of differences in levels of education, awareness, economic status and urban contacts (Jain, 2010). Historically in India, the upper castes have always been more mobile than those deemed to be untouchables and now the Scheduled Castes (Bhagat, 2017).

Migration from Uttarakhand is often referred to as a challenge that needs to be solved. Comparing the scales and impact of migration remittances with other states in India that have significant historical patterns of out-migration, Tumbe (2012) notes that migration from Uttarakhand is largely viewed negatively. However, the public discourse that perceives migration as a negative phenomenon to be reversed is not reconciled with the academic theories, such as livelihood approaches, which focus on the positive impact of remittances flow (Daehnhardt, 2019). Uttarakhand has, in the past, frequently been referred to as a money order economy (Kandari, 2013; Kar, 2007). Several studies point out how remittances enhance the income and livelihoods of the sending families. It has also been noted that the role of remittances is limited to meeting daily consumption requirements, health and education needs (Hoermann & Kollmair, 2009a; Jain, 2010; Mamgain, 2004; Mamgain & Reddy, 2015b; Mittal et al., 2008b). Because they are not invested into any non-farm business activities other than opening a few grocery shops (which again only meet the daily consumption demands), remittances do not have any multiplier effect, and do not lead to any transformation of the village economy (Mamgain & Reddy, 2015b). At the same time, people also feel conflicted between leaving their homes in rural areas in pursuit of better quality of education, healthcare, and employment, and a dichotomy presents itself in conversations with them about migration (Daehnhardt, 2019). According to Madeleina Daehnhardt, the contrast between media, political, and public representation of migration as negative; academic discourses of migration as an important livelihood strategy; and people's own motivations provide a contrasting picture of migration in Uttarakhand (Daehnhardt, 2019).

3.2.1 Focus on aspirations in migration

How are aspirations and migration related to each other? How do they impact on each other: is aspiration a cause or consequence of migration? Czaika and Vothknecht (2012) have explored the relationship between aspirations and migration in the context of Indonesian internal migrants, by analysing why such migrants have higher aspirations than the non-migrants. The

authors use the data from Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS) to conclude that aspirations are pre-requisite but can also be the consequences of migration. Migration experience feeds back into individual future aspirations (Czaika & Vothknecht (2012). More specifically with youth, a study conducted with youth from Georgia and Moldova aged 11-19 years finds that individual capabilities and aspirations drive migration aspirations among youth. Research with young people participating in an international study of child poverty in Peru explores the relationship between migration and education aspirations and suggests that parents and young people connect migration with not only their high education aspirations, but also the process of 'becoming somebody in life' (Crivello, 2011). More locally, research conducted on aspirations of youth in Darjeeling[13], another small town in the Himalayan foothills in East India, shows that migration goes beyond meeting the employment need in fulfilling and shaping youth aspirations, and that 'exposure' is an integral part of the migration process that the youth want to experience (Brown et al., 2017). Another important finding from this study about the Himalayan town is about how migration helps the youth from such regional towns escape traditional family norms where parents value 'government jobs' at the centre of employment aspirations.

In Uttarakhand, Vishwambhar Prassad Sati (2021) opines that studies on out-migration from Uttarakhand Himalaya are rare and the ones that exist, mainly focus on the magnitude, pattern and the adverse effects of out-migration (Awasthi, 2017; B. Joshi, 2018; Lusome & Bhagat, 2001; Mamgain & Reddy, 2015b; Nagalia, 2017; Pathak et al., 2017; Rawat, 2017). These studies focus on explaining the trends and patterns of young male out-migration from the state, the causes of out-migration and the socio-ecological effects of the emptying of rural villages, and recommendations for policies on countering out-migration. These causes are structured along the push-pull factor reasoning (Sati, 2021) and have been elaborated upon in 'Chapter 2: Background and History'. Therefore, I do not revisit the findings of these studies again here.

Migration and its influence in Uttarakhand extend beyond the simple 'money-order-economy' rhetoric. It has an influence on all aspects of the lives of migrants as well as those who are left behind, those who are members of migrant sending families and those who are not. Migration studies in general tend to focus on migrants on receiving ends, while more recently, sending sources have been studied from the perspective of return migration (Daehnhardt, 2019) but perspectives of people who are yet to migrate are still not comprehensively developed. For example, education and career development are crucial aspects of young people's lives, and education is the key modality through which aspirations are forged (Brown et al., 2017). The link between education aspirations and migration is gaining increasing attention in literature on young people (The World Bank, 2005; Whitehead, Hashim, & Iversen, 2005 cited in

---

[13] Darjeeling was also the summer capital of the Bengal Presidency under the British rule

Crivello, 2011). However, in making the connection between education aspirations and migration from Uttarakhand, the literature gets limited to explaining the role of education in being either the push or pull factor. At the same time, research studies documenting the employment destinations and experiences also note that the education system fails the majority of migrants from the state, who do not have adequate skills and education, and therefore find work as domestic helps, servers, manual labourers, and in other such unskilled jobs (Awasthi, 2017; Bose, 2000; Mamgain & Reddy, 2017; Tiwari & Joshi, 2015). Even though most of the migrants from Uttarakhand are in salaried work, about 70 percent of this work is in low-paid petty jobs (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017). That begs the question if the aspirations of young male migrants are limited to finding petty jobs or is there more to their pre-migration deliberations. Unfortunately, in the context of migration from Uttarakhand, the pre-migration processes have not been studied with the same vigour with which the socio-economic and ecological impact of migration have been, and they are all swept under the broad umbrella of livelihood approaches. This kind of 'livelihoods' blanketing makes it appear as though all the migration from Uttarakhand is labour migration and entails nothing beyond labour remittance benefits. Whereas, migration has implications beyond receiving remittances. Recently, Madleina Daehnhardt has attempted to study the reasons for, and impact of, migration in all its forms on a rural households and individuals in a village in the Kumaon Himalayas in her book aptly titled: Migration, Development and Social Change in the Himalayas (Daehnhardt, 2019). With the help of case studies on different forms of migration – out-migration, in-migration, non-migration and return migration, she exhibits how in some cases migration is not so much of a livelihood strategy as it is an individual endeavour for self-realisation (Daehnhardt, 2019). She uses a capabilities-based perspective (Nussbaum, 2016; Sen, 1999) to reflect on the choice to migrate as a capability – a way to achieve better facilities of education, health, employment, etc (Daehnhardt, 2019). Her study explores multidimensional migration dynamics and juxtaposes the role of family unit in livelihoods approach where migration is seen as a livelihood strategy with capabilities approach where migration is seen more as an individual capability (Nussbaum, 2000). She also depicts that distinction between distress migration and opportunity migration is an important aspect of multidimensionality (Daehnhardt, 2019). This thinking on migration as a means of achieving and/or influencing individual aspirations remains missing in literature on Uttarakhand migration which is heavily tilted towards push and pull reasons and quantum and consequences of migration.

3.3 Gaps in literature

Studies on migration from Uttarakhand tend to get limited to studying migration as an economic phenomenon, livelihood strategy and have largely ignored young migrants and their individual situations. The closest they come to studying youth aspirations has been the

commentary on younger generation's averseness to agriculture and influence of education as an important push factor to move out of the hills as the youth feels disillusioned with agriculture and they believe that they can secure better livelihood opportunities in urban areas outside the hill region (Bose, 2000; Nautiyal, 2003). However, such findings also while generalising the role of education in migration, rather consider the quality of and access to education to be equally well developed across districts or they only are reflective of districts that have well developed institutions of higher education and only those youth for whom such institutions are accessible – the youth who live close to the district headquarters where such institutions are generally cantered. Access plays an important role in defining the aspirations of the youth as this study finds out. Thus, the youth who live in further remote areas of the state, away from the district headquarters, their conditions and their aspirations have not been really taken into consideration.

Even when the research studies have focused on the out-migration with a focus on youth, they miss out on considering the aspirations of youth for whom the recommendations are largely made. For instance, Tumbe (2018) notes that the most common recommendation that comes up in literature regarding ways to address out-migration in this state is to diversify the agricultural base into horticultural activities. However, agriculture is not regarded highly by the youth in the region. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) conducted three case studies on the phenomenon of migration and remittances in India, Nepal, and Pakistan (which fall in the western Hind Kush Himalayan region). The findings from this report on Uttarakhand point out that youth who have obtained only secondary education feel they can find better opportunities outside hill regions and do not want to take up agricultural activities (Jain, 2010). The younger generation's exposure to the wider world through schooling, popular culture and media is shaping their aspirations for a different kind of life (M. Mehta et al., n.d.). Similarly, the attempt to study the influence of migration from the region beyond the impact of remittances is also limited. Further, these studies do not explain why some youth might want to stay. Even with high rates of out-migration from the state, people from Uttarakhand often report not wanting to leave their villages in the mountains. A recent report by India and Bharat Together and Udayam on aspirations of youth in Uttarakhand reveals that 80 percent of the participants aged 17-31 years do not want to leave the state and want to find livelihood close to their villages or within the state (IABT & Udhyam, 2019). This is in contradiction with the report of increasing out-migration among young people in the state and thus far not addressed in any of the studies reviewed while conducting this research. Thus, it becomes important to focus on youth and their aspirations in this region and to scratch beyond the surface aspirations of migrating or finding public sector jobs. It also necessitates looking closely at how these aspirations are developing, changing with migration increasingly becoming a permanent background of lives in the region. A clear gap in the study

of aspiration from this region also emerges when we think about how migration impacts aspirations beyond those that lead to migration. These are some of the critical gaps that this research study tries to address.

The next section explains the concepts that form the foundation of the study.

CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.4 Concepts of aspiration

The concepts under this section largely inform the arguments and analysis presented in Chapter 5 & 6.

3.4.1 Understanding aspirations

Aspirations are the key driver of an individual's life path and well-being. The focus of the research is on the aspirations of senior secondary school students in the final two years of schooling. Aspirations can mean different things to different people. This necessitates exploring what aspiration means and how this concept has been theorised in academic inquiry. In this section, I summarise conceptual work on aspirations in different domains and follow this with an elaboration of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's work on the concept of the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004).

Reviewing the theoretical work about aspirations reveals various aspects of this complex internal trait. In common parlance, aspiration means hope or ambition to achieve something. It inherently reflects future-oriented thinking or behaviour. It is also defined as the perceived necessity of goals (Copestake & Camfield, 2010) or simply as a target one wishes to achieve (Bernard et al., 2008). Hart (2016) argues that "aspirations are future-oriented, driven by conscious and unconscious motivations and they are indicative of an individual or group's commitments towards a particular trajectory or end point". In development studies, the concept of aspirations follows the common-sense language (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013) whereby aspirations mean hope or ambition to achieve something *(Oxford Dictionary).*

Several features have been outlined by work exploring the concept of aspirations spanning across disciplines in education, psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology. According to Jørgen Carling & Francis Collins (Carling & Collins, 2018), aspiration marks an intersection of personal, collective, and normative dimensions. Aspirations have been described as being dynamic, relational, held concurrently, and often connected to other aspirations held by the individual as well as the others and subject to change (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013; Hart, 2012). Hart (2012) explains that they can relate to multiple aspects of one's life such as professional success (being a good engineer), personal traits (wanting to be a good person), personal relations (being a good daughter), social status (wanting to better off

compared to others in society), beliefs and values (wanting to be a good Christian, an honest person). However, all factors influencing aspirations are not readily observable. Martha Nussbaum (2005) observes, "habit, fear, low expectations, and unjust backgrounds deform people's choices and even their wishes for their own lives". Thus, there are 'revealed' and 'concealed' aspirations (Nussbaum, 2005). Insightfully, Oyserman & Markus, (1990) concluded from their empirical studies that individuals imagine not only the future they want for themselves (aspirations) but also the "possible selves" they fear. They argue that avoiding certain kinds of futures is an important impetus for action alongside motivations to achieve desired "possible selves" (112).

What shapes aspirations?

Aspirations are not formed in a vacuum but rather depend on social context (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). They can be influenced by multiple factors that can be individual, family related, social, or completely outside these domains. In her work on student aspirations in the United Kingdom, Caroline Hart (2004) explains how an individual's agency in forming aspirations, may vary from high to low depending on whether they are in "conflict with significant others (such as parents, teachers or senior co-workers)". She explains that individuals experience varying degrees of agency and control over their aspirations – some aspirations come about for people on their own whereas some come with external influence – persuasion from parents, a strong positive image attached to some popular aspirations – harbouring the aspiration to become a doctor, for example, is highly valued in Indian society. So even without anyone explicitly applying any influence, the aspiration to become a doctor is likely to appeal to a young school student deciding on a future course of study. Hart explains that some aspirations are more independent of external influence whereas some come about with persuasion, encouragement, or discouragement from others. She also adds that individuals may have short, medium, and long-term aspirations and these may vary in importance both to the individual and to significant others. At the same time, aspirations are fluid and changing in nature.

Arjun Appadurai (2004) and Debraj Ray (2006) have argued that aspirations are not evenly distributed in the society and that people born into poverty and other structural disadvantages are less likely to aspire to make significant changes in their lives.

Appadurai (2004) specifically tackles this question in his work on the relation between poverty, aspirations and culture in which he determines aspirations to be shaped by culture. According to him, aspirations do pertain to an individual's wants, preferences, and choices but they are hardly ever isolated. Rather they are part of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms:

'*Aspirations form parts of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms. Aspirations are never simply individual... They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life*" (p. 67)

He states that aspirations are never individual but rather culturally located. The individual wants and desires and even the desire to better one's future are tied to the more general prevalent norms and value systems. In the context of studying the social production of aspirations of youth in the process of becoming a farmer in India and Indonesia, Huijsmans, Ambarwati, Chazali, & Vijayabaskar (2021) state that if the aspirations are formed in the thick of social life, then young people are never just young people; youth is then gendered, young people are located in class structure, carry religious and caste identities. This directs attention to institutions, social relations as well as everyday practices and specific encounters, all of which, together play a role in shaping aspirations (Huijsmans, Ansell, et al., 2021).

Economist Debraj Ray (2006) builds on Appadurai's work and defines aspirations as the social grounding of individual desires. He elaborates on the idea of an 'aspirations window', which is formed by an individual's cognitive world-a zone of similarly placed individuals from whom the individual draws feasible sets of aspirations. Ray argues that the degree of social mobility in a society is likely to impact the scale of the aspirations window. In other words, if it appears that others like the individual succeed in achieving particular goals, then similar goals are more likely to figure in a person's aspirations. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1996) (cited in Hart, 2016) describe something similar as "horizons for action" which refers to the way individuals identify the zone of possible actions in relation to how they might live their lives and the goals they seek to attain. The conceptualisations of Ray and Hodkinson et al. resonate with Bridges' view that: "in choosing what they will do, how they will spend their time or resources, or what kind of life they will lead, people are affected by, or consider, for example, what they can afford, the likely responses of others to their choice, and the values and practices which shape them and the communities in which they live" (Bridges 2006, p. 1). Hart (2016) also argues that an individual may set their aspirations – being aware of their circumstances – to something they know they can achieve, or they might be ambitious and set aspirations to something they are unsure of realising but strive towards.

Appadurai (2004) defines aspirations as capability and in describing the cultural embedding of aspirations, he addresses the differential level of aspiration among different social groups with the concept of 'capacity to aspire' which has had implications for all recent work on the subject. The next section discusses the concept of the capacity to aspire.

Capacity to aspire

In describing the differential aspiration levels, Appadurai (2004) introduces the concept of 'capacity to aspire' which according to him is "a navigational capacity which is nurtured by the possibility of real-world conjectures and refutations" (p. 12). This means that honing one's capacity to aspire involves exploring, experimenting, and experiencing the links and pathways between different ends and means. The capacity to aspire is the ability to navigate social life and align one's wants and preferences with the circumstances into which one is born and acculturated. This navigational capacity is unevenly distributed in society. While everyone aspires, individual circumstances can enhance or diminish the capacity to achieve them. Limited opportunities to imagine a future result in an underdeveloped capacity to aspire.

> *"Because the better off, by definition, have a more complex experience of the relation between a wide range of ends and means, because they have a bigger stock of available experiences of the relationship of aspirations and outcomes, because they are in a better position to explore and harvest diverse experiences of exploration and trial, because of their many opportunities to link material goods and immediate opportunities to more general and generic possibilities and options."* (Appadurai, 2004, p. 11)

Individuals with better access to resources, networks, power, or experiences are more likely to know the steps needed to achieve their aspirations. They have greater opportunities to observe, explore, and experiment with the pathways to their goals. In contrast, the poor face limitations in imagining and navigating these pathways due to fewer resources, weaker networks, and limited experiences. Their 'navigational map' contains fewer combinations of means, methods, and ends, restricting their ability to experiment and achieve their aspirations (Appadurai, 2004).

Rather than asking 'what does one aspire to?', the question then becomes 'WHO can aspire?'. Individuals whose circumstances do not enable them to imagine or make connections between different actions and possible outcomes will always be limited in their imagination of what they want. Many potential aspirations will not occur to them simply because either the goals or aspirations themselves do not figure in their pool of options, or they are unable to mentally map the way to reach the goals, or both might be absent from their pool of possibilities.

While this approach has been important in bringing forth the differences in the capacities of people in imagining and pursuing the future, it attracts criticism for placing the onus of development of the capacity to aspire on the individual. Such an approach which focuses on people's 'defective mental models' exists in tension with approaches inspired by 'political economy' which focus on constraining and oppressive structures and relationships which limit people's options' (White, 2021, p. 59). There exists further literature highlighting the role of unequal social relations and economic conditions in the formation and realisation of aspirations (Byun et al., 2012; Hart, 2012; Jeffrey et al., 2005). Conducting a review of anthropological

and sociological literature, Siddique & Durr-e-Nayab state that aspirations are strongly influenced by the overall ideological structure and socio-economic institutions in the society (2020). The authors cite the example from Bowles and Gintis (cited in Siddique & Durr-e-Nayab, 2020) of the education structure in the US which is designed such that students belonging to working-class families will only strive for the type of education that will ensure them the jobs that are typically available for them.

The capacity to aspire is a key concept in any work pertaining to future-oriented aspirations because thinking about the future requires at least a basic level of capability in anticipating and imagining the future, and exercising practical reason (Hart, 2016). However, we must be careful in applying the concept, especially in avoiding oversimplifying it and placing the onus of enhancing their capacity to aspire on individuals alone. This has been the case in recent policy studies concerning young people's aspirations in developing countries, where poverty is blamed on defective aspirations, and aspirations are described as either too low, too high, or unrealistic (White, 2021). Therefore, the next step is to explore the aspirations of the youth within a framework that balances both individual agency and structural factors.

The following section reviews the literature specifically regarding rural youth aspirations, with special attention to the linkages between individual and structural factors influencing their aspirations.

3.4.2 Youth aspirations & the context of disadvantage

Since the research focuses on exploring the aspirations of youth, it is essential to explain how youth aspirations, specifically, have been conceptualised. This not only helps to deepen the understanding of the concept but also strategically narrows down the focus on specific facets of the concept of 'aspiration'. The study of aspirations is particularly relevant in the disciplines of children and youth studies, where special attention has been paid to educational aspirations and the futures that young people aspire for (Naafs & Skelton, 2018). Youth aspirations are often considered to centre around education and career choices, although they can also encompass other general life ambitions, such as the desire to start a family or achieve a certain level of social mobility (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). Educational aspirations have increasingly become an important reference in policy debates about educational inequality and social mobility (Baker et al., 2014).

An important aspect of life for school-going youth is education and career planning. The youth in this research are yet to make major life decisions and have not experienced migration. Decisions about their further education and career will be some of the first significant decisions they make. Thus, this research conducts an in-depth inquiry into the career aspirations of senior secondary school youth and explores the factors that affect these aspirations. It is also important to review the literature on career aspirations. Education researchers have extensively studied

the aspirations and factors influencing aspiration levels among youth from different socio-economic backgrounds, as well as the support and challenges they face in achieving their aspirations (Berzin, 2010; Byun et al., 2012; Howard et al., 2011; Huijsmans, Ansell, et al., 2021; Madarasova Geckova et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2021). In her work on migrant youth's education aspirations in disadvantaged contexts, (Mkwananzi, 2018) deepens the understanding of aspirations formation using Amartya Sen's capability approach.

Before diving into Mkwananzi's work, a brief introduction to the capability approach is in order. This is not only because it informs the conceptualisation of aspirations in her work but also because, as will be discussed later in the thesis, Hein de Haas's theorisation of migration also uses this approach as its foundation.

Capability approach

The capability approach is a theoretical framework by Amartya Sen in which development is conceptualised as a process of expanding substantive freedoms that people enjoy (Sen, 1999). Sen explains that this can be done by developing human capability which he defines as the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have. The capability approach has reconceptualised development as it focuses on people's ability (or capability or freedoms in Sen's words) to control their lives as an indicator of development and as it rejects arbitrary indicators such as Gross National Income (GNI) or the gross domestic product (GDP) alone. Capabilities are central to the process of development because firstly, they have intrinsic value adding to people's quality of life and secondly, they also have an instrumental value which contributes to human and economic progress (Sen, 1999). Originally conceptualised in the context of poverty reduction, this approach has found widespread application in numerous disciplines that relate to different aspects of human development. The use of the capabilities approach in studying aspirations in education and youth research has been extensive (Stephenson, 1998; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). In particular, it is extremely relevant in studying the participation of youth from deprived and disadvantaged communities in higher education and relating them to questions of social justice (Egdell & McQuaid, 2016; Gore & Walker, 2020; Hart, 2011; Walker, 2003; Walkington et al., 2018). Simultaneously, the capabilities approach has also been extended to study the aspirations, life expectations and well-being of young migrants (Balsera, 2014). Research-based on capabilities approach in education has made contributions to conceptual understanding of the nature of aspirations (Hart, 2011). The appeal of the capabilities approach lies in its right-based approach to development. This is also the reason it has been used to further research that aims to advocate for youth rights (Campbell & McKendrick, 2017; Selvam, 2008). This holds for its application in research on educational aspirations as well. Another important aspect is that the focus is on discussing what people are ultimately able to do and not what they have (Sen, 1995, 1999). This important aspect also relates to the capacity

to aspire as Appadurai, by his own account, brought in aspirations as a feature of cultural capacity in an effort to create a dialogue between capacity and capabilities (Appadurai, 2004). Thus, the fundamental idea behind the capabilities approach is what both Mkwananzi and Hein de Haas apply in building the concept of aspirations formation and theory of migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities respectively.

Aspiration formation among youth at disadvantage

In her work "Higher Education, Youth and Migration in Contexts of Disadvantage: Understanding Aspirations and Capabilities" (2018), Faith Mkwananzi explores the lives, experiences, and formation of aspirations among marginalised migrant youth in South Africa. She conceptualised aspiration formation in the context of "marginalisation, vulnerability and disadvantage experienced by the youth" (Mkwananzi, 2018, p. 20). She explains how levels of individual agency combined with social and cultural conditions shape youth aspirations. She identifies four types of aspirations which lie on "different points along two intersecting continua of positive external influences (social and structural conditions), and low levels of agency (internal influences), and these operate in the space of the aspirations window" (p. 97). The 'aspirations window' is formed by an individual's cognitive world – a zone of similarly placed individuals from whom the individual draws what could be feasible sets of aspirations which means individuals draw inspiration or are influenced by the lives, achievement and ideals of those who are on their 'radar screen'– the ones whose lives they can observe (Ray, 2006). The framework of this conceptualisation is represented in Figure 4.

The four types of aspirations relating to education and career are: resigned, powerful, persistent, and frustrated aspirations.
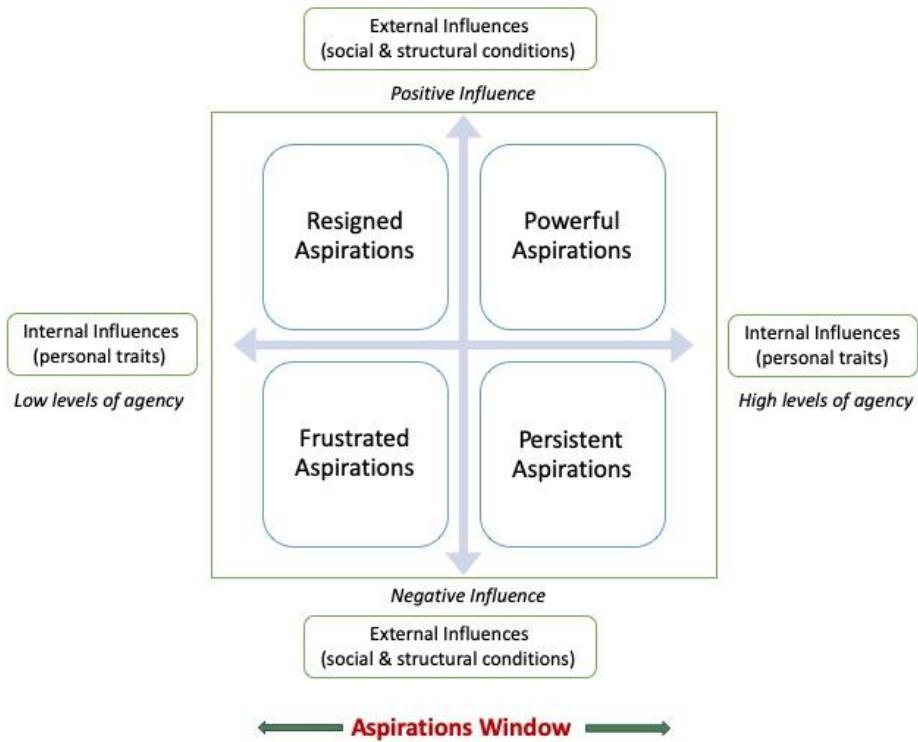
Figure 4*: Types of aspirations*
Source: Mkwananzi, (2018)

These are briefly summarised from Mkwananzi, (2018)'s work, as follows:

Resigned aspirations are aspirations produced at the intersection of positive external influences and low individual agency.

Powerful aspirations are formed because of positive interaction between positive structural conditions and high levels of individual agency. These aspirations are clear and powerful and can be achieved when individuals pursue what they value in their lives. Mkwananzi also clarifies that simply the reference to positive external influences does not naturally make it easy for the youth to form such aspirations. This means that only the existence of a positive external background does not naturally lead to powerful aspirations. Instead, it suggests that despite the circumstances an individual may see the potential in a challenging environment. This makes the understanding of the nuanced intersection of agency and social environment extremely important.

Persistent aspirations are those aspirations which are formed when an individual is exercising agency, but the social and structural factors make it difficult to realise these aspirations. In this case, irrespective of external conditions, the individual has a high level of agency and maintains the capability to stay optimistic about achieving their aspirations.

Frustrated aspirations form when individuals with low agency are subjected to negative structural factors. These can happen because there's low motivation, an absence of hope and

44

stringent structural conditions. This makes it a challenge for young persons to imagine "the crossing of paths of opportunity and action" in future and therefore not aspire or give up aspiring (Mkwananzi, 2018, p. 102). It is also important to note that even if the structural conditions are changed, these aspirations don't change into persistent aspirations as persistent aspirations relate to people in pursuit of possible opportunities. This means that even if structures are altered and more opportunities become available, it does not automatically mean the person will develop the motivation to pursue the opportunities.

Similar work on conceptualising aspirations has already been done by Caroline Hart where she formulated similar typologies of aspirations – revealed, concealed, adapted and apparent (Hart, 2011). Mkwananzi has developed her typologies of aspirations in a similar vein but specifically examines the context of disadvantages for young migrants. For me, Mkwananzi's work stands out because it integrates the social and individual conceptualisations of aspirations by Arjun Appadurai and Debraj Ray, while also addressing the structural factors that are not adequately considered in these previous approaches. Moreover, her work focuses on aspiration formation under disadvantaged circumstances, which resonates with the study context of youth from rural and geographically disadvantaged backgrounds.

She analyses the migration stories and aspirations of various young people facing disadvantage and categorises the factors driving different kinds of aspirations into three distinct categories: personal, social, and institutional. These categories are also relevant for the youth in the underdeveloped mountain areas studied in my research, which is based in the Almora district of Uttarakhand, a Himalayan state in northern India. As the Background chapter explains in detail, the migration of young people has become one of the defining features of the state. Migration is highest among young males in the region.

Thus, when examining education and career development with youth, the influence of migration cannot be ignored. It plays a significant role not only in the political economy of the state but also in the daily lives of people in this region. For young people who observe young adults from their families and villages migrating and returning for shorter periods, this has the potential to influence their career planning and outlook after school. This phenomenon is not unique to this local context. Worldwide, the aspirations of young people are increasingly being studied in migration research. Therefore, the next important step is to discuss aspirations and how they have been conceptualised in the context of migration.

3.5 Concepts of migration and aspirations

The concepts under this section inform the arguments and analysis presented in Chapter 7.

After focusing on the aspirations of youth, the second line of inquiry focuses on the relationship between aspirations and the phenomenon of migration in the study context. This part of the study aims to analyse the aspirations, keeping in mind the migration process, which is the pervasive (and almost permanent) part of the lives of the mountain people in Uttarakhand. It is then imperative that the relationship between aspirations and migration be explored, not only in terms of how individual aspirations might lead to individual migration, but also how migration as a social phenomenon might be influencing the aspirations of youth as a social group. With this initial point of curiosity in mind, I now look at how the nexus between aspirations and migration have been conceptualised. The study of aspirations in migration studies has gained tremendous momentum with migration becoming an increasingly visible phenomenon in recent years (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012, 2014; Laube, 2015; Schewel & Fransen, 2018; Sier, 2021). The term '*aspiration*' or concepts addressing the future orientation of migrants have been increasingly used to analyse the processes that result in mobility. Cognitive factors driving migration have been discussed using different concepts such as migration aspirations, desires, needs, wishes, and intentions (Alpes 2014; Carling and Collins 2018; Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014 cited in Carling & Schewel, 2018). De Haas theorises migration as a function of 'aspiration and capabilities within a given set of opportunity structures' for migration to start and be perpetuated over time (de Haas, 2011). According to Castles, de Haas and Miller (2014), the volume and complexity of migration increases with economic development because 'improved access to education and information, social capital, and financial resources increase people's aspirations and capabilities to migrate, while improved transport and communication also facilitate movement' (p. 25). Czaika and Vothknecht (2012) also conceptualise migration as a "function of an individual's capability for migration, with this capability being a combination of two individual-specific 'capacities', the 'capacity to aspire', and the 'capacity to realise'". They also point out that the capacity to aspire alone is not enough to enable a person to actually migrate, they also need to possess the capacity to realise the migration move (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012). This capacity to realise migration results from endowment with various extrinsic economic, social, human, or political capabilities (Sen, 1985) that may enable migration. A lack of these capabilities limits the extent to which people can actually migrate. This again necessitates a closer analysis of structural factors that allow or restrict these capacities to be developed in the first place. Further, the authors also state that voluntary migration can happen only if both – capabilities for migration and an actual migration opportunity – are present. In such cases, an individual might either be motivated to work harder on their capabilities to migrate or entirely give up on the migration aspiration. This situation is an 'aspiration trap' where a person might not meet their aspirations and hence to avoid continued failure, might modify their aspirations downwards (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014; Heifetz & Minelli, 2015). Another interesting aspect that Czaika and

Vothknecht (2014) bring forth is that the migration process itself can change aspirations and lead to bigger aspirations, and then eventually these aspirations can either be realised or lead to aspiration traps.

In conceptualising aspirations in the context of migration and in the migration process itself, two works stand out. Jorgen Carling's work on migration aspirations in Cape Verde, and Hein de Haas' most recent work, theorising migration within an aspirations-capabilities framework. Hein de Haas's theorisation of migration and aspiration is richly informed by Carling's migration and aspiration-ability model. Since it builds on this aspiration-ability framework, de Haas' work is a more extensive framework for understanding migration and aspirations. However, Carling's elaboration of these concepts has a significant bearing on my understanding of the research topic. Therefore, I inform my analysis with both frameworks and summarise them here.

This is because of the belief that many people have certain aspirations in life and migration helps to meet those. This is the case when the individual has the capacity to aspire – which entails having the ability to realise what they want and the ability to map the way to achieve it – and the agency to follow that map.

Migration and aspiration-ability framework

In his study of contemporary migration from Cape Verde, where a large number of people wished to emigrate but relatively few were actual migrants, Jørgen Carling (2002) elaborated on the relationship between aspirations and migration in two ways. First, is that general aspirations in life can impact the migration decision which means that migration can play a role in achieving these aspirations. Secondly, the migration aspiration may be informed by the conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration regardless of the reasons.

"*When a person wishes to migrate, it could either be because migration has intrinsic value, or because migration is an instrument for achieving another objective. If the latter is the case, migration has instrumental value. The objectives that migration helps achieve are, of course, often linked to a person's broader aspirations in life*" (Carling, 2016:2)

So on the one hand, general aspirations of life such as happiness, security, or wealth affect migration decisions directly or indirectly while on the other hand, people can have the conviction that migration is preferable to not migrating – such convictions are called migration aspirations (Carling, 2016). He further explains that this conviction can be borne out of enthusiasm or out of a desperate situation where migration seems to be the lesser of the two evils, which will save people from situations of danger, poverty etc.

Further, Carling also points to the fact that actual migration requires more than just an assessment of its costs and benefits. It is also a question of who intends to migrate and who can migrate. The conceptual pair of aspiration and ability to migrate (Carling & Schewel, 2018) is relevant to migration as Carling (2002) defines migration to be the combined result of two factors: the aspiration to migrate and the ability to migrate. He explains how these two decisive factors – aspiration and ability to migrate – are shaped by both individual characteristics and the macro-level emigration environment. The aspiration to migrate emerges in a specific macro-level emigration environment which includes social, economic, and political context which shapes the social construction of migration. Individual characteristics interact with this environment to determine patterns of who wishes to leave and who wishes to stay. In this thinking, the ability to migrate is conditioned by the macro-level context of obstacles and opportunities. This is relevant for the research context of rural Indian communities where several factors can affect the ability to migrate. For example, girls would find that their migration aspirations are considered undesirable by families. Further, there is evidence in the case of the study area that out-migration is much less common among those belonging to the Scheduled Castes than among members of other castes. This is mainly due to low education levels, lack of awareness, poverty, and lack of social networks, which play important roles in migration (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017).

Carling's aspiration-ability model has expanded the understanding of migration in understanding both mobility and immobility (Carling, 2002). It calls for distinctive differences between the aspiration to migrate and the ability to do so. While the model was developed in the context of international migration from Cape Verde, it has had implications for internal migration aspirations in this research in terms of thinking about which factors affect the ability to realise migration aspirations realistically. Hein de Haas includes this framework and builds on it in the 'migration and aspirations-capabilities framework' which also relates migration aspiration and abilities to capabilities, in that people need access to a social network, and cultural and economic resources to exercise their migratory agency (de Haas, 2021). This model 'migration and aspirations-capabilities framework' is explained further in the next section.

Migration and aspirations-capabilities framework

King, (2012) states that "migration is too diverse and multifaceted to be explained in a single theory" (p11). In similar vein, Castles (2017) also states,

> "a general theory of migration is neither possible nor desirable, but that we can make significant progress by re-embedding migration research in a more general

understanding of contemporary society, and linking it to broader theories of social change across a range of social scientific disciplines" (p3)

This problem of migration being too multifaceted and entwined with other processes of society is one that applies to this research study as well. One of the key questions that the research set out to answer is how migration interacts with aspiration formation. In this context, such a theory as Castles points towards, becomes relevant. Hein de Haas also points out the under-theorised state of migration studies, noting a regression in theoretical development (de Haas, 2012, 2021). According to him, the lack of theoretical development is hindering the interpretation of empirical facts and understanding how macro-structural factors shape migration (de Haas, 2014, 2021). He also mentions a gap between qualitative and quantitative approaches, with recent work focusing more on qualitative micro-studies or quantitative regression analyses, both lacking in-depth theoretical foundations (de Haas, 2021). His criticism also extends to the failure to capture the role of structural factors like inequality and power in shaping migration processes. To address the need for a comprehensive theory of migration that addresses these gaps, he has recently proposed a theory of migration which builds on the extensive work on migration, aspiration and capabilities for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between migration and aspirations (de Haas, 2021). In this framework, de Haas addresses the issue of theorising migration from any one dimension and calls for combining different theories to improve the understanding of migration processes "across different levels of analysis (and aggregation), contexts, social groups and periods" (p. 21). Like Mkwananzi, he uses Amartya Sen's capabilities approach to focus on individual agency and structure in the process of migration and its relationship with aspirations, for both mobility and immobility.

The migration aspirations-capabilities framework reiterates de Haas' argument that migration is intricately linked to broader social change (de Haas, 2021). It views migration as a product of individuals' aspirations and capabilities to move within perceived geographical opportunity structures. This framework also distinguishes between instrumental (means-to-an-end) and intrinsic (wellbeing-affecting) dimensions of human mobility, considering both moving and staying as complementary expressions of migratory agency. Human mobility is defined not merely as the act of moving but as people's capability to choose where to live, including the option to stay. This is a key departure from models that look at migration as an automated response to push and pull factors (de Haas, 2021).

Drawing on Isaiah Berlin's (1969) concepts of positive and negative liberty, the framework explores how macro-structural changes influence individuals' migratory aspirations and capabilities. It aids in understanding the intricate ways in which social transformation and development shape migration patterns, providing a comprehensive lens for analysing various

forms of migratory mobility. The framework is presented in Figure 5 and the components have been summarised from de Haas' explanation in the following section.
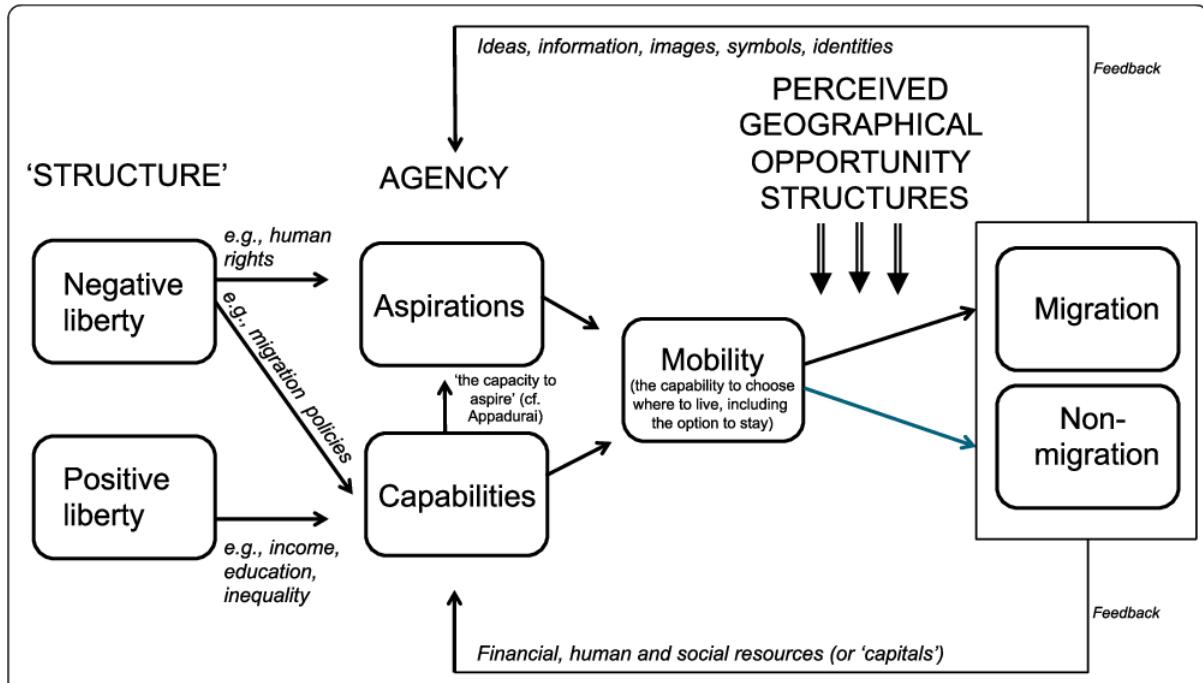
Figure 5: *Aspirations capabilities framework for conceptualising migratory agency*
Source: (de Haas, 2021)

In this capabilities-aspirations framework, migration is "conceptualised as a *function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within a given set of geographical opportunities structures*" (de Haas, 2021). Here, migration aspirations are a function of people's general life aspirations and perceived geographical opportunity structures, and migration capabilities are contingent on positive ('freedom to') and negative ('freedom from') liberties (p 17). De Haas has compared and equated Berlin's concepts of liberty – negative and positive (Berlin, 1969) – with Sen's concept of capabilities (Sen, 1999). In this way, positive liberty – the ability to take charge of one's own life and realise one's fundamental purpose – comes close to Sen's concept of capabilities as one's ability to enhance their substantive choices (de Haas, 2021). The intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of migration aspirations which Carling elaborated upon, apply here as well. Both individual agency and structure play a role in the migration process. They have been defined in the migration process as follows:

"*Agency reflects the limited but real ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world and, hence, to alter the structures that shape and constrain people's opportunities or freedoms. The structure can be defined as patterns of social relations, beliefs, and behaviour. Factors and institutions such as class, religion, gender, ethnicity, networks and markets as well as cultural belief systems all sustain inequalities and social hierarchies and limit the opportunities that people have – or perceive they have – and the economic, social and cultural resources which they can access – thus*

significantly constraining their freedom or agency as well as their ideas, knowledge and self-consciousness." (de Haas, 2021; p14)

Thus, there are structural factors that directly or indirectly have implications for individuals who are subjected to these factors differentially. These influence the youth coming from different social groups to perceive their opportunities (related to migration or other general opportunities) differently and envision their futures accordingly. In the context of the study area, gender and caste can be factors that influence youths' perceptions and real access to opportunities.

Further, the intrinsic dimension of migration aspiration is of special importance in this framework because people can derive satisfaction from having the potential access to mobility freedom irrespective of whether they use it or not. De Haas focuses on this aspect especially, as it goes against the functionalist approach of migration having purely instrumental value to achieve other means. According to him, the knowledge of freedom to move can be a part of life aspirations. Another important point flowing from the focus on the intrinsic value of migration aspiration is that it allows us to see how processes of social transformation and development shape migration itself (de Haas, 2010c). Economic, social, cultural, and political changes in a region can affect the tendency to migrate in two ways: with economic growth and improved living standard, more and more people can afford to migrate or the extent to which opportunities (that come with growth) allow people to lead the lives they value, at home itself. Thus, migration has not only instrumental value to achieve some goals but also intrinsic value in enhancing people's lives at home. The intrinsic value of migration is especially relevant in young people's lives as it relates to their desire to move for shorter or longer periods as well as to the intrinsic well-being derived from the awareness that they have the freedom to move (de Haas, 2021).

Another key element here is the 'feedback'. In de Haas' work, feedback refers to the dynamic and interactive relationship between migration and its determinants, outcomes, and social structures (de Haas, 2010c, 2010a, 2012). Feedback mechanisms highlight how migration itself can influence and reshape the factors that drive migration. For example, migration itself can influence the socio-economic conditions and structures in both origin and destination areas, subsequently impacting the decision-making of potential migrants. Additionally, the experiences of migrants, such as the accumulation of remittances and changes in social norms, can create feedback effects that further shape migration patterns. (de Haas, 2010b, 2010d, 2021). It is an interesting line of thought that connects to the migration impression on the youth in this study.

3.6 Consolidated conceptual framework for analysis

Since I want to study both higher education and career aspirations, migration aspirations as well as the influence of existing migration on aspirations formation, it was difficult to find a ready framework that brings these three distinct processes together. Therefore, I decided to study education aspirations through Faith Mkwananzi's conceptualisation of youth career aspirations and Arjun Appadurai's conceptualisation of capacity to aspire. The aspirations and migration nexus is studied through the perspective provided by Jorgan Carling's aspirations-ability framework and Hein de Haas' aspirations-capabilities framework. Thus, the consolidated framework through which I analyse the findings from data brings together the work done by Appadurai, Mkwananzi, Carling and de Haas that has been summarised in the previous sections. The analysis is organised into three chapters which focus distinctly on:

a. exploring what the aspirations of senior secondary school-attending youth in Almora are and how they are influenced by different factors in their environment, both individual and structural

b. how the youth's capacity to aspire been shaped

c. what the migration aspirations of youth are and how migration relates to their education, career aspirations and migration aspirations

This is done with the understanding to see how the educational and career aspirations are linked to the migration aspirations and how migration, in general, affects the perceived value of migration as well as the process of aspiring for better education and career. Figure 6 depicts the relationship that the study analyses in depth.
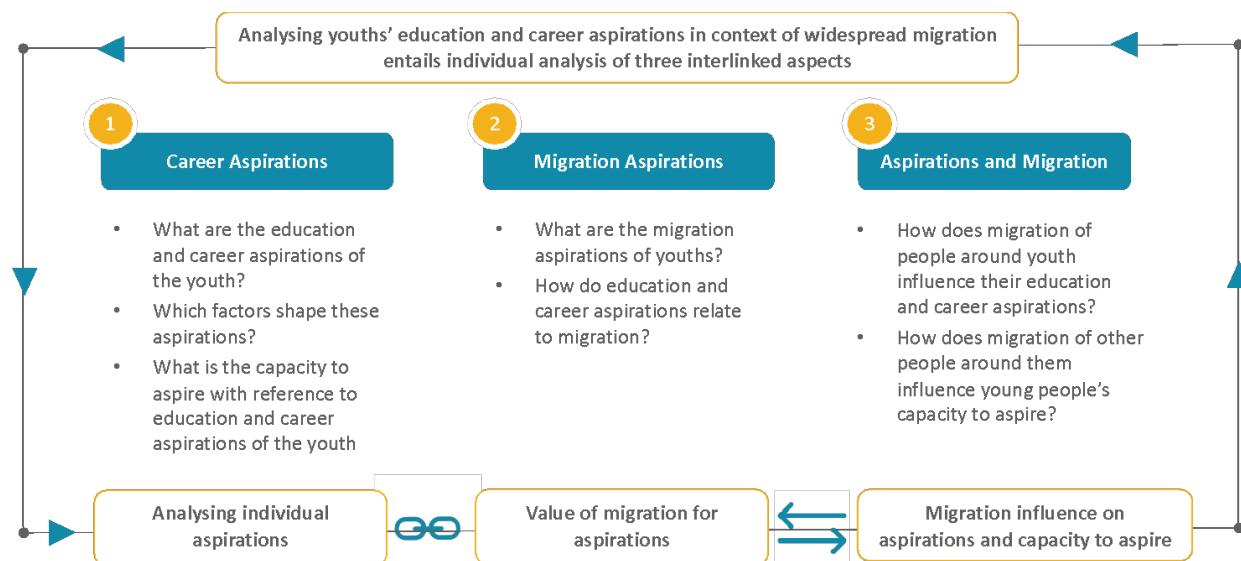
Figure 6: Organization of conceptual analysis framework
Source: Author

For analysis of data, I first use Faith Mkwananzi's conceptualisation of aspirations to analyse the aspirations of young people. The framework of individual agency and external factors shaping aspirations formation helps to identify different types of aspirations among youth from different backgrounds. Further, I gauge the youth's capacity to aspire underlying these aspirations and discern the factors that shape this capacity in the region. Appadurai's conceptualisation of the capacity to aspire and its relationship with culture forms the basis of this analysis. Then I analyse the aspirations in the context of migration from the state. Firstly, youth aspirations in relation to migration are analysed using Carling's framework on these concepts – analysing whether the migration has instrumental or intrinsic value for the youth. Finally, all the findings are brought together in understanding aspirations and migration in the context of the mountain geography through Hein de Haas's theorisation of migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities. In the context of this region where migration is an almost omnipresent phenomenon, this framework also entails analysing how migration in the region plays a factor in shaping the aspirations of the youth who themselves have not migrated from the villages. This entails looking into the 'structure' and the 'feedback' components of the framework. However, recognising the scope of this study, I do not dive equally deeply into analysing every element of Hein de Haas's framework. For instance, in analysing the feedback, I refrain from analysing the entirety of social changes happening because of rural to urban migration in the larger societal context of the research area. Instead, I only focus on the migration processes and feedback that relates to young people's lives and educational and career aspirations. In summary, the three conceptual aspects of the analysis in this study are: aspirations formation, capacity to aspire and the nexus between migrations and aspirations (Figure 7).

Aspirations formation
- Drawing from Faith Mkwananzi's work, the framework explores different types of aspirations expressed by youth
- Identifying and categorising aspirations and exploring the factors contributing to various types of aspirations for different categories of youth.

Capacity to aspire
- Assessing the underlying capacity to aspire among youth and understanding the factors that shape this capacity, using Appadurai's conceptualisation.
- Examining how culture influences the capacity to aspire among youth in the region.

Migrations and aspirations
- Using Hein de Haas's theory of migration: aspirations-capabilities framework to understand migration's influence on aspirations, especially in the context of the mountain geography.
- Integrating findings to explore how migration, even among those who haven't migrated, shapes youth aspirations in the region.

Figure 7: Summary of theoretical framework for analysis
Source: Author

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Research objective

The overarching objective of this study is to explore how young people can be enabled/ facilitated to access opportunities for self-development that eventually enable them to contribute to their mountain communities. Using Arjun Appadurai's work as a reference, the objective is to explore how the capacity to aspire can be enhanced among the mountain youth to reimagine the future of young people living here.

4.2 Central research question

How are educational and career aspirations and capacity to aspire shaped amongst the youth in the context of extensive migration in the rural Himalayan region of Uttarakhand?

4.2.1 Specific research questions

1. **What** are the educational and career aspirations of youth in senior secondary schools in the hill district of Almora, Uttarakhand?
2. **How** are these aspirations shaped by intersecting socio-economic factors around them?
3. **What role** does migration play in the aspiration formation of youth?

4.3 Approach to inquiry: mixed methods research

In planning a research study, it is fundamental to think about the philosophical worldview assumptions that the proposed research is based on, and then accordingly define the research design that is related to the worldview and the specific research methods that will best translate the approach into practice (Creswell & Creswell 2017). This process results in choosing the research approach. Research approaches are plans and procedures for research that span across all the steps involved in research, starting from broad assumptions to the details of data collection methods, and how data will be analysed and interpreted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the three conventional approaches to research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, each with its historical evolution, own fundamental philosophical assumptions, research strategies, and specific research methods applied in conducting these strategies. The first step in deciding the research approach comes from thinking about the larger philosophical idea that the intended research espouses. This required me to think about why I chose this topic for research.

My goal was to explore how the youth in Uttarakhand, amidst significant out-migration, can contribute to their communities, by understanding their aspirations and capacity to aspire, with a focus on leveraging migration for the holistic betterment of mountain communities. Guided by this broad, philosophical objective, I narrowed down the focus to on **what** are the current

educational and career aspirations of youth in this region, **why** these specific aspirations, **what** factors influence aspirations the most, **how** have these aspirations been formed, and finally, **how** does migration influence young people's envisioning of the future? My broad objective and guiding thought in this research are at a meeting point of transformative and pragmatic worldviews. Transformative worldview focuses on driving change through research, addressing an issue of oppression, and considers research to be a tool for being a voice of participants or groups who may be marginalised. A pragmatic philosophical worldview, on the other hand, guides the researcher to focus on the research problem and use all approaches available to understand it. Pragmatic researchers look at the 'what' and 'how' of the research based on the intended consequences of the research – what they want to accomplish with the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As I started with the questions of what the aspirations of the youth in Almora are, I also found it relevant to bring forth the issue of limited aspirational capacity along with the multi-layered reasons underlying the same. The nature of both the queries is different – one demands a count and description of aspirations of youth, while the other, an explanation for them. This led me to use mixed method techniques which involve collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to study the research problem to expand the scope of and deepen the insight from the research study (Sandelowski, 2000).

Mixed methods research or simply mixed research[14] is the third methodological paradigm alongside quantitative and qualitative research (Combs & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). It is the approach where the researcher combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). A mixed methods approach implies using the strength of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in such a synchronised manner that the interpretations are enriched by the integration of the two approaches. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) have identified five purposes for which the mixed methods approach is generally adopted, namely, triangulation (findings from both methods are compared), complementarity (results from one method enhance the results from the other), development (analysis of data from one method help develop the other method), initiation (contradictions that can reframe the research questions are identified), and expansion (both analyses help expand the scope of the study).

I focus on two of these purposes which have been the driving thoughts behind the mixed methods approach – development and complementarity. Development is the purpose whereby different methods are used sequentially and results from one method help inform or develop the other method (Greene et al., 1989). Complementarity, on the other hand, is when the results from one method are intended to enhance, illustrate or clarify results from the other (Greene &

---

[14] The terms 'mixed method research' and 'mixed research' have been used interchangeably in this study

McClintock, 1985; Rossman & Wilson, 1985 cited in Greene et al., 1989). Given the multifaceted nature of the inquiry, which includes dimensions of youth, aspirations, and migration within a specific geographic context, adopting a mixed methods approach allowed for the integration of these aspects, enabling sequential method development and integration of results, where quantitative findings provided background for qualitative insights. The mixed methods approach in this study allows for collecting diverse yet complementary information, providing a comprehensive understanding of youth aspirations and insights into their lives and surrounding contexts, thereby enriching their journey of aspiring.

4.4 Research design

In conducting mixed methods research, the researcher looks at how qualitative and quantitative strands relate to the other. Here, strand refers to a study that incorporates the basic process of conducting quantitative or qualitative research, including posing a question, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of results based on that data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). According to Kasecker, (2008), in deciding the design, the researcher has to make major decisions about the following aspects:

a) How do the quantitative and qualitative strands relate and interact with each other: do both strands proceed independently of each other or is their interaction between them in terms of one strand being designed based on results from another?
b) Allocating priority: is the design going to prioritise any one component or are they both equally important?
c) Timing of both strands: do the phases happen sequentially or concurrently or in a combination?
d) Where and how to mix the strands: does this happen at the analysis stage, interpretation stage, or all the while during data collection?

Based on the above-listed decision points, (Kasecker, 2008) also proposes six prototypes of mixed research designs: convergent parallel designs (with concurrent timing used to implement both strands), explanatory sequential (quant followed by qualitative phase), exploratory sequential (qualitative followed by quant phase), embedded design (qualitative strand added to quant and/or vice versa), transformative design (all phases take place within the transformative framework) and finally the multiphase design (combine sequential and concurrent strands) (Figure 8).
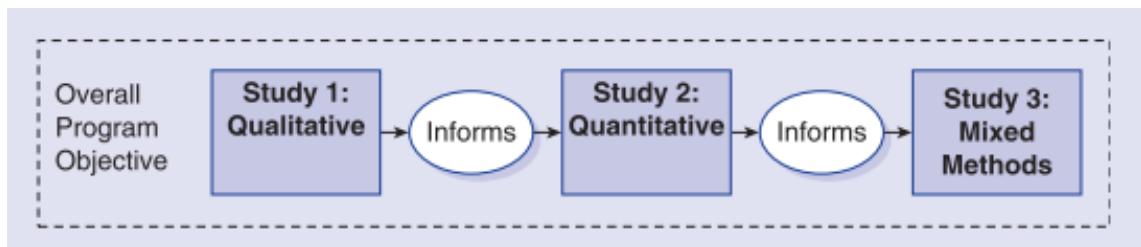
Figure 8: The multiphase design
Source: (Kasecker, 2008)

Considering how to enter the research field, a multiphase combination timing design was implemented with some modifications (Figure 9).
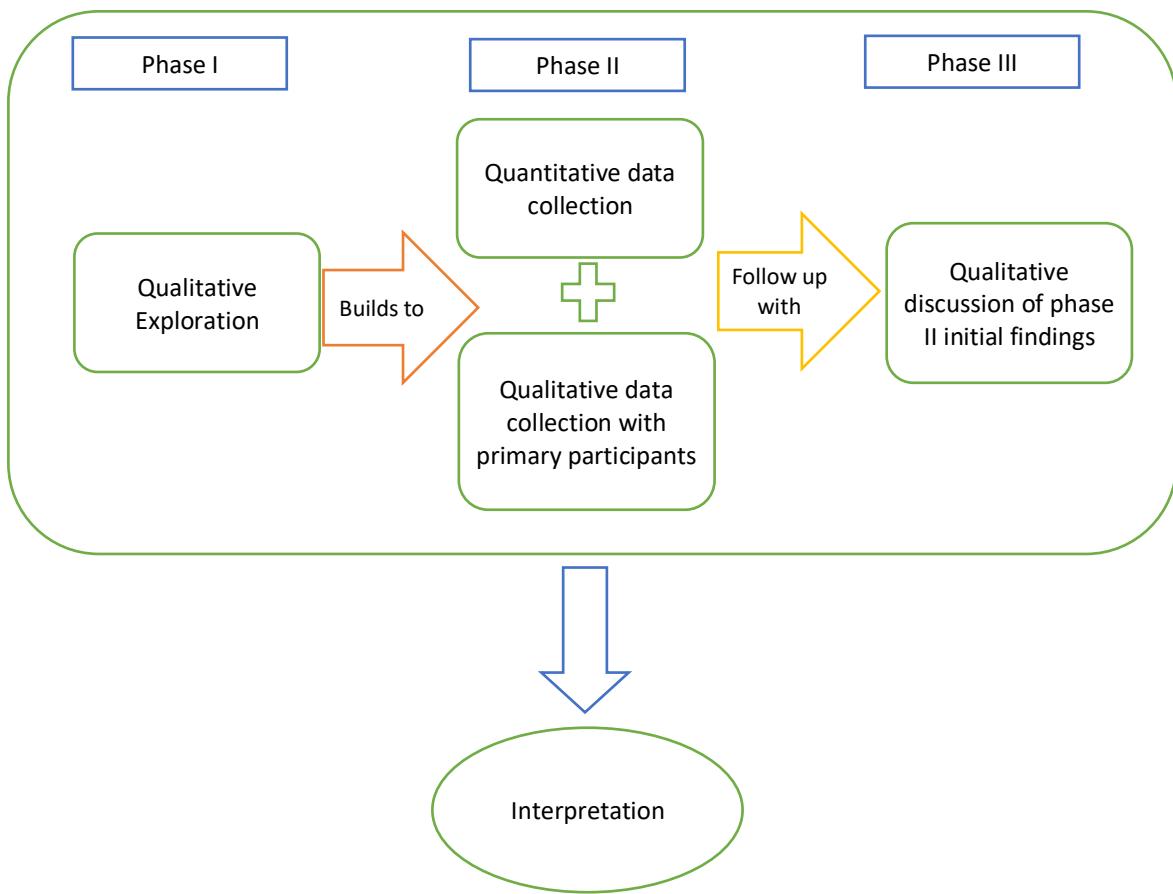
Figure 9: Modified Multiphase Mixed Research Design
Source: Author

Multiphase design involves sequential as well as a concurrent combination of two strands. This design was deemed best for the study because it has features of exploratory sequential design, where a qualitative phase precedes and informs the quantitative phase or vice versa (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), but also goes beyond the two sequential phases. It begins with a qualitative exploratory phase, followed by a concurrent quantitative and second qualitative phase. This approach allows for the creation of practical research instruments for both phases, eliminating irrelevant concepts and establishing a strong foundation for data collection. The design aims to understand youth issues, aspirations, and migration qualitatively, informing the development of tools for focus group discussions and interviews. Additionally, it includes a

57

phase to collect qualitative data in youth's family and village settings, exploring their social lives and understanding family and community influences outside school.

4.4.1 Multiphase mixed methods

Phase I: Qualitative exploration

The first phase of data collection was a qualitative exploratory phase where the development issues of Uttarakhand and youth were discussed with key informants and stakeholders from the state. These key informants came from government and non-government organisations or were individuals who are currently working or have in the past worked in the Himalayan region, particularly in rural Uttarakhand. I attended the '9th Sustainable Mountain Development Summit' in Shillong, Meghalaya where I had the opportunity to interview experts, academics, and policymakers from organizations such as the International Centre for Mountain Development (ICIMOD), The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mountain Children's Foundation, and Tata Trusts. I conducted an exploratory study in Dehradun, Uttarakhand's political capital, engaging with government officials and NGOs like Mountain Children's Foundation and Tata Trusts to obtain permissions and secure local cooperation for my research in Almora district. In Almora, engaging with organizations such as Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi, Chirag, Azim Premji Foundation, Aman, and Tata Trusts, provided valuable insights. Migration emerged as a common concern for these organizations.

Building rapport with community gatekeepers like retired school principals and teachers in Almora town facilitated access to interview community members across different social and economic strata. I initially discussed the broad research topic – Almora youth aspirations and village migration – with the key informants. Gradually, I narrowed the focus by consulting key figures in the education sector. Interviews with the Chief Education Officer and the Head of the Teachers' Training Institute in Almora revealed systemic issues in education, teacher recruitment challenges, and pedagogical concerns. Subsequent interviews with senior secondary school teachers provided insights into gaps in the education system, influencing student aspirations. Additionally, 15 Focus Group Discussions with 10-15 youth participants each explored career aspirations, social lives, views on the future, and migration influences.

Personal interviews with key informants, domain experts, and education stakeholders, and the FGDs with youth were recorded with a Dictaphone and transcribed for analysis. Informal interviews conducted during this phase were also audio recorded but not all were transcribed. I used my discretion to transcribe only those informal interactions that brought forward some new knowledge that had previously not been revealed in any other interview or the interactions that seemed representative of other similar interactions. Thus, out of 28 informal interviews, I transcribed 10 and the other 18 were analysed from the audio and research notebook.

Phase II: concurrent quantitative + qualitative

The exploratory phase findings were utilised to craft a survey questionnaire for senior secondary school students in grades 11th and 12th, focusing on various future-oriented aspects such as higher education plans, livelihood preferences, migration perceptions, and plans. In-depth interviews with students from diverse backgrounds, identified during Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), aimed to understand their aspirations and the influencing factors behind their choices. I actively participated in survey administration alongside research assistants, allowing for deeper inquiries into respondents' motivations. This phase also involved personal interviews with selected students, building trust for potential visits to their villages in the subsequent data collection phase. All interviews and FGDs were recorded and transcribed for the next phase of analysis.

Phase III: qualitative

The second concurrent phase was designed for in-depth qualitative data collection with parents, family members, and social actors influencing young people's lives with an aim to understand the depth and nature of these influences. The intention was to create case studies, delving into selected young individuals' lives and detailing the social factors shaping their aspirations. Unfortunately, this phase was disrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a nationwide lockdown in India from March to July 2020. Limited movement during the lockdown only allowed interviews with three families in the village of Manyagar. I attempted to conduct discussions with parents via phone calls, but faced challenges due to poor network connectivity and lack of familiarity that can be built by in-person interactions. Subsequent data collection in this phase was curtailed, with a resumption in activities only after the lockdown was lifted in July 2020.

4.4.3 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a part of a population for observation so that one can make estimates about the whole population (Thompson, 2012). While the relevance of sampling has most clearly been described in quantitative studies, where the sampling method directly impacts the reliability, validity, replicability, and generalisability of the study, the selection of an adequate and appropriate sample is also critical for qualitative research (Morse, 1991). In an attempt to bridge the gap between qualitative and quantitative approaches and to better integrate the two, Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) identify 24 sampling schemes that can be used by both qualitative and quantitative researchers. All sampling schemes fall into two categories: probability sampling also known as random sampling and non-probability sampling also

known as non-random sampling (A. J. Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The combinations of sampling for mixed research have been summarised in Figure 10

Qualitative Component(s)

	Random Sampling	Non-Random Sampling
Random Sampling	Rare Combination (Type 1)	Occasional Combination (Type 2)
Non-Random Sampling	Very Rare Combination (Type 3)	Frequent Combination (Type 4)

Quantitative Component(s)

Figure 10: Matrix Crossing Type of Sampling Scheme by Research Approach (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007)

Most mixed method research utilises the time-orientation dimension as the base – whether the qualitative and quantitative phases happened sequentially, one after the other, or concurrently at the same time in parallel (K. M. T. Collins et al., 2006; A. J. Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Among the 8 types of mixed methods designs identified by these authors, I adjudged multilevel sampling to fit the sequential design of my study, the best. Multilevel sampling is where data obtained from one phase (qual/quant) is used to develop the tools for another phase (qual/quant). Based on the nature of different research questions, the sequential nature of phases, and the specific objective of each phase, I opted for the Type 2 combination and multilevel samples – where non-random purposive sampling was involved for qualitative phase and random cluster sampling was used for quantitative survey phase. I discuss the process followed in both these phases in the following sections.

Qualitative sampling

For the first qualitative phase of data collection, I followed purposive snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability technique of sampling where one begins with a small population of known individuals and these initial participants then identify other participants for the study (Crossman, 2018). Snowball sampling has the distinct characteristics of networking and flexibility (Parker et al., 2020), which helped in gaining access to participants for this study in the geographically difficult and challenging area of research. Non-probability technique means that the sample was not random and chosen purposely, for having a certain quality that is relevant for a purpose in the research, in this case – individuals and organisation working in the Himalayan region in India.

At the outset of data collection, purposive snowball sampling facilitated connections with local stakeholders, researchers, and organizations focusing on mountain geographies. This approach proved effective in Almora, where snowball sampling allowed access to residents, NGO workers, and social activists referred by familiar contacts, fostering a more open dialogue. Initially broad to gather diverse perspectives, the sampling criteria evolved as I established myself locally. The focus shifted to individuals and organizations working in the hill districts of Uttarakhand, particularly those directly addressing youth, migration, education, and local livelihood generation. Subsequently, in a second sub-phase, the sampling narrowed to include those directly engaged with young people, such as educators, school administrators, individuals in the education department, and NGOs working with youth.

With the core group of participants of the study – youth in Almora district, the criteria were as follows:

a. The participant should be an inhabitant of the hill district of Almora
b. The participant should be attending one of the final two grades of schooling – 11th or 12th
c. The participant should not have migrated previously

Quantitative survey sample

The goal of sampling in survey research is to obtain a sample that is sufficient enough to represent the population of interest (Ponto, 2015). I calculated the survey sample size with PASS which stands for Power Analysis and Sample Size. It is a computer program for determining the sample size. With an infinite population assumption, at a 99 percent confidence interval (CI), the program calculated the sample size to be 651.[15] Here infinite population assumption means that the actual size of the target population – in this case all students who are attending the 11th and 12th grades in public senior secondary schools in Almora – is not known. Confidence interval means the range of values we observe in our sample and for which we can expect to find the value which accurately reflects the actual population from which the sample is drawn (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016).

Almora has a total of 1870 schools, with 264 classified as senior secondary schools (grades 11th and 12th). Unfortunately, specific data on the number of students, categorised by gender, in these grades was not shared by the district education department. I believe this data was not shared by the department because either it had not been updated for a long time or it was not considered appropriate to share this data. The department only shared data pertaining to the schools. Therefore, I only knew how many and which kind of schools were running in the

---

[15] Program calculations are in Appendix 1

district. Due to this limitation, I employed a cluster sampling approach for surveying students. The clusters were based on the type of schools (boys, girls, co-educational). Using simple random sampling, I selected 30 students from the final two grades of each school, with the schools being the primary sampling units. The list of senior secondary schools was obtained from the District Education Officer's office in the Department of Education, Almora, and a 2-stage cluster sampling strategy was implemented for selection. Sampling guidance from the UN for surveys indicates that for a richer and more representative and real sampling, one must have more clusters and optimally no less than 30 and no more than 50 participants from each cluster (Groves et al., 2011), I divided 651 sample size over 30 students each – 21 clusters which in this case are the schools. The 21 schools selected were 2 Boys' schools, 13 Co-educational and 6 girls' schools. Henceforth, 21 clusters were randomly selected, and then from each of these clusters (schools), 30 students attending classes 12th and 11th were surveyed. The process of random school selection was done with the statistical software package – STATA. Figure 11 shows the distribution of schools along different blocks of Almora. The altitude of school locations varies from 900 to 2000 m.
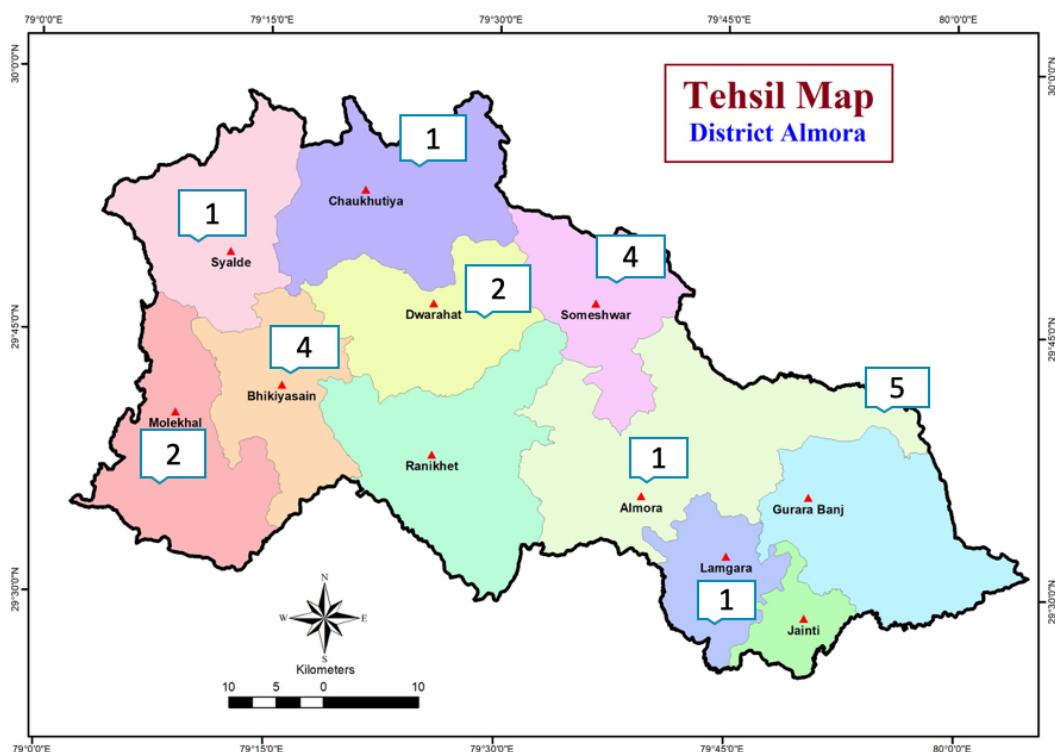
Figure 11: *Map of Almora district showing survey schools' distribution*
Source: Almora district administration; [16] modified by the author

In actual survey execution, an issue that came up was that some schools, mainly those that are in remote, higher altitude locations did not have a total of 30 students in 11th and 12th grade, combined. In these cases, all students in these two grades were surveyed. Thus, the actual

---

[16] Almora district administration; website: www.almora.nic

survey comprises a sample of 551 students from 21 schools. Given the limitations of time, financial and human resources required to conduct the survey in Almora with its mountain geography and extremely poor road and transport connectivity, changing the sampling to include any new schools was judged infeasible and thus I concluded the survey with these parameters.

4.4.4 Research methods

Research methods are techniques used to collect relevant data for answering the research questions (Williams, 2007). In this mixed methods study, the key research methods used are key informant interviews, in-depth personal interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and informal interviews. These methods helped gather different kinds of data that helped operationalise the key concepts this study is based on. Table 4 provides an overview of research methods used in the study.

Table 4: *Summary of research methods used*

Sub-research questions	Method Used	Participants	Concepts
What are the educational and career aspirations of youth in senior secondary schools in the hill district of Almora, Uttarakhand?	Survey	Senior secondary school students	Educational and career aspirations
How are these aspirations shaped by intersecting socio-economic factors around them?	• In-depth Personal Interviews • Focus Group Discussions • Key Informant Interviews • Informal Interviews	Domain experts, community gatekeepers, officials in district education department, regional and local NGO and civil society representatives, local entrepreneurs	Aspiration formation
What kind of aspirations are formed among youth and what is their underlying 'capacity of aspire'?	• In-depth Personal Interviews	Senior secondary school students, teachers, local school graduates, and college graduate youth	Types of aspirations Capacity to aspire

	● Focus Group Discussions		
What role does migration play in the aspiration formation of youth?	● In-depth Personal Interviews ● Focus Group Discussions ● Key Informant Interviews	Senior secondary school students, school teachers	Value of migration for aspirations Migration and Aspiration-Ability Migration influence on aspirations and capacity to aspire

Key informant interviews

Key informants are a select group of individuals who are likely to supply information, ideas, and insights into a particular subject. Key informant interviews are in-depth discussions with people who have special or expert knowledge and are generally conducted with diverse experts to gain a broad perspective on the topic of interest (Taylor & Blake, 2015). Alternatively, they are in-depth interviews with a select group of experts who are most knowledgeable about an issue and they (experts) are a proxy for their group or associates (Lavrakas, 2008).

Key informants in this research included individuals with experience of working in Almora, particularly in youth-related development issues such as education, employment, and entrepreneurship. These informants comprised school teachers, members of local civil society and non-governmental organizations, government officials, local activists, and journalists. The semi-structured interviews, guided by interview guides tailored to each participant's profession and expertise, covered various aspects of the research topic. A total of 17 key informant interviews were conducted. Appendices include interview guides for different participant categories.[17] Conducting key informant interviews with retired school teachers and administrators not only served the practical purpose of gathering valuable insights but also played a crucial role in building rapport and credibility in the research area. These individuals, recognised and held in high regard in the community, contributed to normalising my presence in Almora. Soon many people recognised me in public places such as markets and schools and knew that I was conducting research on migration and schools because they had seen me with Joshi 'sir'[18] or met me when I was talking with Mehta '*sahab*'[19]. This approach facilitated a

---

[17] The list of key informant interviews conducted is in Appendix 2

[18] One of my first and main contact persons in Almora was Mr Gireesh Joshi who is a retired principal from a government school in Almora. He is well known in the community as many of his students are settled in Almora and own local businesses or work in Almora town. He is fondly referred to as 'sir' by people in community even though he is no longer a teacher and students he taught are now much older with adult children of their own

[19] Mr Mehta was a retired officer from the Indian Forest Services who was a respected member of the Almora community. '*Sahab*' is a term used for a government official, generally a high-ranking officer. It is a remnant of

comprehensive understanding by engaging with a diverse range of people in Almora. All key informant interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for textual thematic analysis.

In-depth personal interviews

In-depth interviews are as the name suggests, a conversation designed to elicit depth on a topic of interest. According to Guest et al (2013), an in-depth interview is typically a one-on-one conversation that uses inductive probing to get to the depth of a matter and is conducted with the help of open-ended questions. This method is useful to further explore the topic of interest and descriptive analysis. It helps the researcher to get an initial sense of the subject, develop the vocabulary, discover the systems and processes, and most importantly, know their boundaries and figure out the topics and questions that will be important, going forward in the research (Guest et al., 2013). Using a semi-structured interview guide, I conducted in-depth interviews with teachers, young people, and residents of Almora (See the Appendices 3 and 4 for interview guides). The guide for young people and their family members allowed for a more conversational and organic exploration of social lives. Flexibility was maintained in these interviews compared to the more structured approach with teachers. A total of 12 interviews were conducted with teachers, while 10 in-depth interviews took place with young people (6 girls and 4 boys). Following the school survey, I initiated follow-up interviews with some youth in their villages, conducting two interviews with boys and their families before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the process. Additionally, two interviews were held with successful young entrepreneurs engaged in organic farming in the district. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for textual thematic analysis.

Focus group discussions

Focus groups are defined as group discussions conducted with the help of a facilitator, in which people from a target population discuss and share their perspectives, and views on a specific topic of interest (Taylor & Blake, 2015). 13 FGDs were conducted with the youth in 14 schools. Each group had 10-15 students depending on the enthusiasm and willingness of students to participate. In one school, I had to conduct two group discussions because many students wanted to participate and talk, whereas in other cases I had to forgo conducting an FGD because either the students were too rowdy or too shy and I did not want to force anyone to talk. Apart from this, one focus group discussion was conducted with some young people who were in Almora after having lived out of the district for education or employment or both. These included some of those youth who had tried to or had started their entrepreneurial career and failed. One focus group discussion was held with a local women's group. One group discussion was held with teachers in one of the schools and one during a teachers' training that

---

the British era when British officers were referred to as '*sahab*'. In modern day India, it has come to be a term of respect for someone who is superior in official hierarchy. Mr Mehta passed away in 2020 and his loss was mourned by Almora community and Uttarakhand

I attended in the Teachers' training institute in Almora. All the FGDs were recorded with Dictaphone and transcribed for textual thematic analysis.

Survey

Survey research refers to collecting information from a sample of individuals through their responses to a set of questions (Check & Schutt, 2011). Survey research can use quantitative research strategies, qualitative research strategies, or both (Ponto, 2015). Survey methods find great applicability in education research as it is an effective way of collecting data systematically from a broad spectrum of individuals and in education settings (Check & Schutt, 2011). In addition, they have the advantage of sample generalisability and help in "developing a representative picture of the attitudes and characteristics of a large population" (Check & Schutt, 2011, p. 160). I aimed to gather a broad understanding of youth's educational and career decisions across various religious, gender, caste, and economic categories. The survey method suited this purpose well, capturing demographic and socio-economic data such as family incomes, assets, caste, and religion, along with trends in education, career, and migration preferences. Primarily, the data from FGDs with the youth was used to design the questionnaire for the survey. Personal interviews and key informant insights, particularly on migration and career decisions, also shaped the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was designed on SurveyCTO, a data collection platform that enables researchers to collect data through an app that can be used across devices like tablets, smartphones, and computers/laptops. The smartphone application allows the survey enumerators/administrators to read the consent form to the survey participants and get their consent with their signature on the touch screen. Some vignettes of the interface of the application are depicted in Figure 12. Administered in groups of 15 students across six schools and 10 students in one school, the questionnaire underwent iterative refinement based on daily testing, addressing flaws in content, phrasing and sequencing of questions, options, and terminology. After initially testing the questionnaire with 100 students and making the changes according to the problems observed, the final version was uploaded to the survey server. I hired 5 research assistants (RA) for helping conduct the survey in 21 schools.

Figure 12: Screenshots of survey administered with data collection app - SurveyCTO

Informal interviews

Building familiarity in the local Almora community provided access to everyday interactions. On days without planned meetings, I engaged with people in public places like the local market, Lal Bazaar, conversing with shopkeepers and local business owners. These informal interactions, integral to daily life, generated valuable data, particularly in understanding the lives of women from different socio-economic classes through regular visits to a tailoring shop. These unstructured interviews contributed to a nuanced understanding of the local community's culture, social norms, and mindsets, offering context to participants' responses. With 24 documented informal interviews, content-rich insights were gained into social differentiation and intersecting factors influencing aspirations among different youth groups. All informal interviews were recorded with a Dictaphone, and audio thematic analysis was conducted in the first phase, with seven interviews transcribed for textual thematic analysis in the second phase.

4.5 Reflexivity in Research: An "Insider" researcher

Reflexivity is increasingly recognised as a crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge through qualitative research (Berger, 2015) as it has been established as one of the ways qualitative researchers ensure rigour and quality in their work (Teh & Lek, 2018). In its simplest understanding, reflexivity is researcher's awareness about their role in research, the way it is influenced by the object of the research enabling them to acknowledge the way they influence the research process as well as the research outcomes (Haynes, 2012). Dodgson (2019) explains the case for reflexivity succinctly. All qualitative research is contextual- it takes place within a specific time, place, and among people- and therefore the researcher must explain these elements and the contextual intersecting relationships between herself and the participants in great clarity for the benefit of the readers (Dodgson, 2019). Further, in qualitative research, who the researcher is, also impacts the findings of the study as the researcher is the research instrument (ibid.). Therefore, it is imperative for the researcher to explain the contextual intersecting relationships (race, socio-economic status, age for instance) between the participants and themselves to not only increase the credibility of the findings (Berger, 2015) but also to enhance the understanding of the work for the readers (Dodgson, 2019). This calls for researchers to reflect on their positionality in research. Positionality defines a person's social standing and representation as influenced by personal characteristics such as gender, age, level of education ethnicity, or even personality (Berger, 2015; England, 1994; Schiffer, 2020). Positionality describes a person's individual worldview as well as the position they adopt on a research process and its social, and political context (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Rowe, 2014). Researchers producing the research are located within a particular social, economic, and political context of society (Foote & Bartell, 2011). It influences how research is conducted and the research outcomes (Rowe, 2014).

In context of mathematics education research with emerging scholars who have particular interest in issues of equity and diversity, Foote and Bartell (2011) note that "life experiences impact the positionality we bring to our work- they inform the questions we ask, the data we choose to gather, and the interpretations we draw" (pp 63).

For me, reflexive thinking made me consciously think about why I even chose this particular topic for research and introspect on my own life experiences. It made me reflect on my positionality in the research generally and the implications of my positionality on the research stages of fieldwork and analysis and writing.

Why I chose this topic?

My research topic is deeply rooted in my own story. For something as demanding as doctoral research, our life experiences inevitably shape not only how we conduct our work but also what we choose to study and why. When one commits years to a single social issue, the topic often reflects something that has personally mattered. That is the lens through which I view my involvement in this research.

My family migrated from a remote village in Pauri district, Garhwal (Uttarakhand) to Delhi in search of better livelihoods. My parents completed only senior secondary school; college was never a perceived option. Their priority was survival – my father needed to earn and support his family, and my mother followed her father to the city when he secured a stable job. Both often say, "we didn't know anything," referring to the missed opportunities in education and career simply because no one guided them. The city felt intimidating, and unfamiliarity kept them bound to small but secure jobs. This is why they were determined to send their daughters to private English-medium schools, cutting corners to give us an education they themselves could not access.

Another defining aspect of their migration is that they view it as temporary. Though they've lived in Delhi for about 40 years, they still don't call it home. My father returns to his village twice a year, always telling people in Garhwali that he is "going home." The themes of not knowing and attachment to home have stayed with me throughout my life and my work in India's mountain regions.

It is often said that people from Uttarakhand keep "one foot in the mountains and one in Delhi." Growing up in a traditional *pahāṛī* household in the city, I understood this more deeply as I got older. When I moved to another city for my postgraduate studies, questions about where I was "really" from often left me unsettled. Saying I was from Delhi rarely satisfied people; many assumed I was from the Northeast or Nepal and called me *pahāṛī* based on my appearance. A batchmate from Uttarakhand once asked which region I belonged to – Garhwal or Kumaon – and when I replied "Delhi," she laughed and said, "That's typical *pahāṛīs*, one foot in Delhi

and one back in the mountains. But where are you *actually* from?" That moment made me reflect on my identity and how much of me was shaped by the mountains. Over time, I accepted that I was born and raised in Delhi but within a deeply *pahāṛī* household. This realisation helped me see how my parents' migration and their deep attachment with their "home" influenced my habits, values, and worldview. My master's thesis in rural Dehradun gave me my first chance to reconnect with the region, and my later work with the Integrated Mountain Initiative strengthened that connection. Together, these personal and professional experiences naturally led me to the research topic I have chosen to explore in depth.

Implications for fieldwork, analysis and writing

My personal and professional connection with Uttarakhand greatly shaped my fieldwork. Because my last name is common in the region, many administrative and everyday interactions became easier. People often assumed I was "one of them," which made them more open and supportive. Sometimes I was seen as a young person trying to give back to the mountains; other times, as just another researcher studying migration. In every case, I was treated as an insider.

Among young people too, my name, appearance, and understanding of Kumaoni helped create an immediate rapport. As a *pahāṛī* whose parents migrated for better opportunities and who chose Uttarakhand as the focus of my research, I fit the familiar narrative of someone who has progressed socially yet stayed connected to the hills. This gave me advantages: faster trust, easier access to homes, and comfort among parents once they learned where my family's village in Pauri Garhwal is.

This insider status was a form of privilege. I was aware that teachers sometimes presented me to students as a role model, and I had to be careful not to influence their genuine views, especially given their impressionable age.

Kim V.L. England in her paper titled 'Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research' (England, 1994) sharply remarks: "reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (pp 82). This captures what this research demanded of me. Writing this thesis required ongoing self-reflection. I was aware that my own experiences can easily colour how I interpret the data. Therefore, at every step I made a conscious effort to separate my story from the participants' stories. I had to keep reminding myself to explore views contrary to what my experience and observation in the past had been. I had to guard against confirmation bias and resist the pull of "expected" findings or the disappointment of not encountering them. Whenever I caught myself leaning toward the findings I expected because of my background, I paused and re-evaluated. It wasn't always easy, but it was essential for staying true to the integrity of the research.

Navigating caste identities

As a researcher exploring social factors that influence aspirations of young people, it was impossible to overlook the 'caste' factor. Caste continues to subtly – and sometimes openly – shape social interactions, access to opportunities, and community hierarchies in the study region. Therefore, I was aware that my identity as an 'upper caste' researcher might influence the participants' perception. Young people from Scheduled Castes or other marginalised groups may hesitate to speak openly about discrimination, aspirations they feel socially blocked from pursuing, or frustrations with local power structures. Because the research design involved group discussions, they may also not speak openly about their discriminatory experiences in front of their peers. They may offer socially acceptable answers instead of their real experiences, simply to avoid conflict or judgement. Then there is challenge of navigating caste-based power imbalance. In the remote schools where students were often sitting on floor for classes as well as group discussions and interviews, I conducted, I had to be constantly aware and active in rejecting any differential treatment I was offered by the school authorities. For instance, I made sure to sit where the students sat while talking to them and eat the meals that they ate for lunch in the school instead of meals that were offered by the teachers.

Further, it is not easy to address the caste question or influence in school premises because it is a socially sensitive issue and might invoke responses or emotions that I might not be equipped to handle. Another hinderance to focus deeply on caste was that I had received permission from the department of education in Almora to ask questions regarding education and career aspirations and delving too deeply into caste could have caused discontentment among authority figures especially because the issue of caste census is currently a politically relevant and sensitive one in India. With Uttarakhand's violent history with caste-based reservations during the Uttarakhand movement, I was extremely careful in approaching the caste influence in school premises. Therefore, though I took conscious effort to reach out to youth from marginalised caste backgrounds, address the caste influence in personal interviews, and keep a keen eye on their responses, their behaviour in group, and interaction with their classmates and me, I did not explore the role of caste in depth and limited the scope of research.

4.6 Challenges in data collection

Difficult physical access to data sites

Uttarakhand is notorious for the lack of access to transportation in the hilly areas. Public transport is practically absent in the state and even private transportation is not convenient and is quite expensive and risky. The extent of the problem can be understood by the fact that road

construction is the parameter of the development of villages in most parts of the state[20]. Accessing schools and key informants was challenging, requiring individual taxis, and often faced confusion due to inaccurate school data. Navigating non-functional schools in remote areas resulted in time-consuming hikes and safety concerns without nearby accommodations. Unreliable phone and internet networks further complicated coordination for interviews and FGDs, with delayed messages and calls due to sketchy mobile network coverage in rural areas. Having lived for short periods and worked in Uttarakhand before, I was always aware that conducting fieldwork in Uttarakhand would entail such challenges but experiencing them while conducting research on the aspirations of young people and looking into their everyday lives, shaped my understanding of the responses and the mindset of the youth much better.

COVID-19 pandemic-induced challenges in qualitative data collection

Data collection was affected by the onset of the Corona Virus Disease 19 (COVID-19) pandemic. On 24 March 2020, India implemented a nationwide lockdown among 1.3 billion Indians that lasted 68 days (Mave et al., 2022). This was one of the strictest and longest lockdowns in the world with the grounding of all public and private transportation, and movement across the country. All modes of public transportation were suspended and the movement of people outside of houses was banned, except for accessing essential services and for people providing these services. This brought my work to a halt in the last phase as this was the phase in which I planned to interview the families and people in communities of young people in their natural settings. I had initiated the process of meeting families and community members in two villages close to Almora before the lockdown measures were officially instituted. However, by this time COVID infections were already spreading in the cities and some migrants had also started returning to their villages following their good sense. This led to some fear and apprehension among local rural communities and when I approached them for this research, I was met with the same fear and apprehension. In one case, when I explained that my research is based at a university in Germany, one community member told me they were scared to talk because they had seen in the news that COVID was a big problem in Germany. Even after explaining that I had been living in Almora since November 2019, they remained suspicious. After this incident, I did not approach any more people from this village. Soon after, the lockdown measures were announced. During the lockdown, I tried interviewing family members of the school students who participated in the research interviews and surveys through phone but the phone network in the mountains remains sketchy and unreliable, especially with the rainy and stormy weather that they experience in the monsoon months. The quality of phone calls was not good and even when the network was good, the interviews were

[20] https://thewire.in/rights/uttarakhand-polls-concerns-of-hill-areas-find-no-mention-in-parties-development-agendas

short and awkward. The conversations didn't flow as naturally as they would have in a real face-to-face interaction. Phone interviews didn't allow for an organic, reliable connection. Considering the situation and after discussing these issues with my supervisor and advisor at ZEF, I dropped the idea of further data collection and focussed on consolidating and transcribing the data I had collected over the last few months.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Every research comes with ethical issues that a researcher needs to tend to but conducting research with children and young people especially raises complex and well-documented ethical issues and challenges (Graham et al., 2015). In addition to safeguarding the interests of children[21], there are issues concerning ensuring their active participation. Until relatively recently, children's research was mostly on children, rather than with or for children (Thomas & O'Kane, 2000). However, with the new sociology of childhood and the child rights discourse, children are viewed as social experts who are experts in their lives (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Fraser et al., 2004; Moran-Ellis, 2010). This means there has been a methodological shift to more participatory methodologies as well as an adaptation of more traditional approaches such as questionnaires (Punch, 2002 cited in Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). A similar shift has been noticed in research about young people – research which includes young people as participants rather than as objects of research (Loveridge, 2010). Even as the ZEF's ethical guidelines have in principle guided the major ethical contours of this research, I have reviewed the literature on ethical considerations to be considered while researching with children and young people beyond meeting the minimum of 'doing no harm' and try to make some parts of the research participatory. In the following sections, I address the various methodological and ethical considerations tackled in this study.

Access

Considering the research geography and the topic of research – educational and career aspirations – I gained access to young people in Almora through schools. Since schools are also an important component of the study, the first access to conduct research in schools was sought from the department of education in Almora. When it came to conducting group discussions and interviews with youth, one day was set aside just for making introductions where I talked about myself, explain the purpose of the research, explained where the idea of research came from, talked to them about my education and career journey, why I took up this

---

[21] According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a child is any person under the age of 18. Since all the youth participants in the research are below the age of 18, I consider the CRC to apply to them and use the words children and youth and young people interchangeably in this section.

particular research and what could be the most optimistic and most pessimistic outcomes of the research. 'Keeping things real' really worked well for both being honest about the process and breaking the ice with young people. This orientation day also helped in setting time frames for data collection processes.

Informed consent

All participants in the research were either read or given a written informed consent form explaining the purpose and process of the research and the potential use of the data. A written consent form was signed by all literate participants of the research. For illiterate participants, the consent was read and oral consent was obtained and recorded. For young people, a consent form was given to all the possible participants in writing on the day of the introductions. In this case, an additional informed assent form was given for parents to read and sign. These forms explained the purpose and process of the research and the potential use of the data. Young people were given the time to think about whether they would like to participate in the research. They were required to bring the form back signed only if they decided they wanted to participate.

Participatory tool setting and reflection

The research design ensured that the data collection was conducted in phases, where each phase inculcated inputs from previous phases. This applied to the development of tools for data collection as well. Each participant's input helped in the further development of tools. However, this process was especially important and required with youth. I tried to include youth in guiding the process of data collection as well as developing the tools for data collection. I conducted the first few FGDs with a basic FGD guide. However, I kept the development of tools open. After each FGD with the students, I undertook a small exercise where I asked the participants to reflect on the discussion and invited them:

1. to sum up the discussion in three points.
2. to propose three questions that I could ask in the next FGD in the next school that I visited.

This helped in three ways:

1. It consolidated participant thoughts for key takeaways in data analysis.
2. It revealed participant understanding of the purpose of the study.
3. It offered feedback for facilitator improvement in subsequent discussions.

Confidentiality

While migration from Uttarakhand has been extensively studied, this research has a unique focus on individual circumstances, grievances, and resentment towards specific authorities. Adult participants, accustomed to regional research, were generally unconcerned about revealing their identities. However, varying feelings, from apprehension to indifference, were

observed among youth, parents, and Almora residents. Recognising the prevalent negative views towards policymakers and authorities, all identifying details of participants were kept anonymous in consideration of potential presentations to policy and practice stakeholders. Pseudonyms were used for names, and specific institutional affiliations were hidden, with only location details retained to emphasise the role of geographical location in experiences and opinions. For instance, school names were replaced with XXX.

Participants returns

I consulted the youth about what could be an appropriate return for participation in the study. The most common responses were notebooks, pens, and sanitary napkins. I was cautioned against handing any money in return by most of the students. Female students especially warned me against it, as there was a chance some of the boys might use it to buy cigarettes. Therefore, stationary articles like notebooks or pens were given to the participants and in some cases, a set of books on youth career guidance or stories centred on young people were gifted to the school for a common reading collection.

4.8 Terminology on Caste categories

In this thesis, I use the terms Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and General/upper castes. While official policy documents in India often refer to the "General Category" or "Unreserved Category", I use the term 'General/upper castes' in analysis to denote this group. I make this choice for two reasons: first, using only the term general implies neutrality and universality, which ignores the historically privileged social positioning of these castes; second, the term "upper castes" is widely recognised in sociological literature as making explicit the hierarchical nature of caste relations and the privilege that the upper castes carry.

4.9 Data analysis

Conducting mixed methods research involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (A. Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2015). Mixed methods involve the analysis of more than one type of data and traditionally data analysis in mixed research entails analysing quantitative data with quantitative methods and qualitative data with qualitative methods (Creswell et al., 2003). The analysis of mixed methods within the same study is a difficult issue but all mixed methods designs have some common features such as the sequence in which data is collected and analysed (concurrent or sequential) and the way data and results are integrated (connected or compared) (Migiro & Magangi, 2011). It is also important to note that in mixed methods, data analysis can happen at any point in data collection (A. J. Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). In addition, different strategies and

frameworks for conducting mixed analysis have also been developed. Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2010) have used content analysis and reviewed mixed research articles in which authors have developed typologies for mixed analysis strategies and came up with 13 criteria used in these studies for creating mixed analysis typology. The authors further identify 5 criteria that are most often used in the mixed analysis. These are: a) the rationale or purpose of conducting mixed methods research, b) the number of data types to be analysed, c) the time sequence of mixed analysis, d) the priority of the analytical component, and e) the number of analytical phases (A. J. Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011). In deciding on analysis methods, I have thought about the criteria that are most relevant to my study. The purpose of the mixed research approach in this study was firstly, to develop both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection that have been informed by an exploratory qualitative round of data collection and secondly, to complement the qualitative findings with quantitative data. Further, two types of data have been collected through different methods of data collection. Survey data has generated quantitative data and qualitative data has been collected through focus group discussions and personal interviews. The primary rationale for mixed methods is development and complementarity. In consideration of these parameters, I have conducted a sequential mixed analysis of the data whereby quantitative and qualitative data analyses have been conducted in more than two phases and explained further on. For the complementarity purpose, both data sets have been linked, which means each data set has been analysed separately and results have been combined at the interpretive level of research (Sandelowski, 2000). A key issue here is integration which has been discussed in the next subsection. Once the data from both these phases was cleaned, transcribed, and organised, both were analysed separately in a sequential manner. Shortcomings of this kind of comparative analysis have been highlighted in the literature on research methods. However, given my personal ability, depth of knowledge, and the scope of a doctoral research project, I decided to link the data for analysis. Advanced methods of conducting mixed analysis with meta-frameworks developed especially for this purpose were deemed to require more time and effort than was possible in the time frame of conducting this research.

Qualitative data analysis

Broadly, qualitative data analysis at the very least involves organising the data (into codes) and distilling it into key ideas and concepts (themes) (Liebenberg et al., 2020). Analysis establishes the ideas that reflect the focus of research questions most accurately (Caudle, 2004; Liebenberg et al., 2020). There are numerous approaches to qualitative data analysis representing a range of epistemological, theoretical, and disciplinary perspectives but a good data analysis combines appropriate elements and techniques from across traditions (Guest et al., 2011). Considering the purpose of multiphase mixed research design – development and complementarity, I have utilised thematic analysis of the qualitative data in two phases.

Thematic analysis has been defined by Braun & Clarke, (2006) as the "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). They further clarify that it is rather a method than a methodology and offers a great deal of flexibility. This means that it is not tied to any particular epistemological or theoretical perspective (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). As such, thematic analysis can be descriptive, explanatory, and/or critical (Lochmiller, 2021). With a descriptive orientation, it summarises participants' reporting of their reality and aggregates it into an identifiable pattern and with an explanatory orientation, it can be used to infer meaning about experiences through the lens of a particular conceptual or theoretical framework (Lochmiller, 2021).

Doing thematic analysis

The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes – patterns in data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Six distinct steps have been outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in Figure 13.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Figure 13: Phases of thematic analysis
Source: Braun and Clarke (2006)

Even though there are different ways of conducting it, thematic analysis in essence includes three components: individual codes, categories, and themes (Lochmiller, 2021). I used up two A5 notebooks with diligent note-making of all the research methods used in the study along with the audio recording of the same. As the data collection progressed, I could identify some recurrent issues, and topics that came up in all interviews, FGDs, and informal interactions. Thus, as the data collection kept going forward, it became easier for me to make notes with the help of sections in interviews and FGD guides and allocate the information being supplied into different brackets. An example is in the images below (Figure 14) where data from interview notes in the research notebook have been coded (in green underlines with code) and themes have been boxed (in red/pink). On different pages, a green pen was used to mark quotes for codes, and a red or pink pen was used to mark themes emerging on the spot or reflecting on the day later.
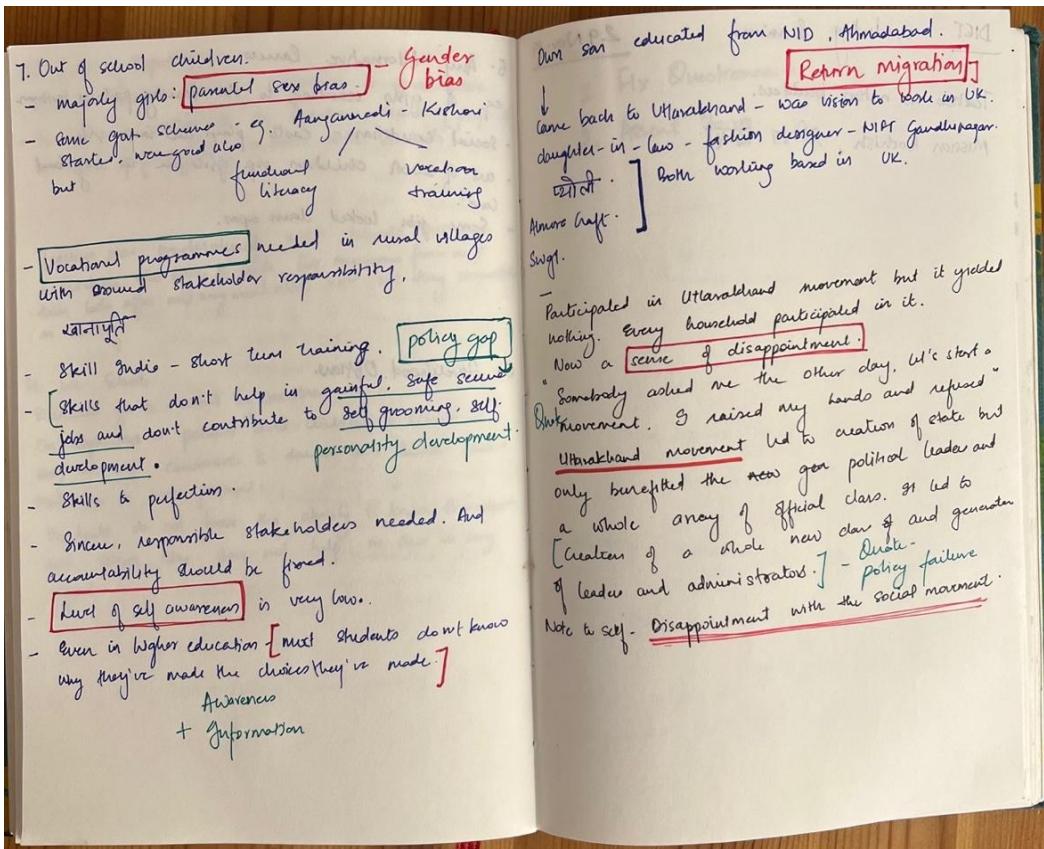
Figure 14: Research notebook coding and theme organisation

This already feeds into the second step of the process which is coding. Codes are short descriptive words or phrases that (a) mark a piece of data as having a significant relationship with the research questions and (b) identify data segments that belong to a particular group (Liebenberg et al., 2020). Here, I diverge into elaborating on the two phases of thematic analysis taken at two different points in the study. The first initial analysis of data from key informant interviews, FGDs with youth, teachers, adult youth, and informal interaction was undertaken in December-January 2019 while I was in Almora and the second more in-depth data analysis was undertaken after exiting the field, in Bonn. Both have been elaborated on in the following sections.

Qualitative analysis I: inductive thematic analysis

In analysing the data from the first exploratory qualitative phase, an inductive thematic analysis of audio data and the handwritten notes was conducted. Inductive TA means that the analysis is data-driven and the analyst produces codes that are reflective of the content of the data and free of preconceived theory (Byrne, 2022). In inductive TA, codes are 'open-ended' to best reflect the meaning of the content as communicated by the participants (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This initial inductive analysis was done with the purpose of 'development' of the research study. I conducted an audio thematic analysis with MS Excel whereby I listened to the

78

recordings from interviews and FGDs and kept noting the regularly repeated information in an excel sheet as simple codes such as 'village elders' comments', 'community people's opinions', 'neighbours' migration', 'job after school', 'aspiration for a college degree', 'family's permission', 'Army benefits', 'stable income', 'sense of duty to support family', 'migration apprehension',' 'sibling's migration', 'family values', 'women's role in family', 'responsibilities in house', etc. These were then grouped into broad categories under which tools for further data collection were created. Some categories identified were: Desire for higher education and limitations, channels of information, lack of role models, gender differences, culture of community, role of caste, role of school, role of migrant family members, migration's influence on youth, social network through migrants, perception of family member's migration, and so on. Another small step that helped in development of themes was the exercise of summarising the key points of discussion at the end of FGDs.

The tools were designed to capture these initial emerging themes in depth with the main participants of the research – the youth. All the codes generated from this phase were accumulated as a 'coding book' used as a reference in the next, more rigorous deductive TA. A coding book or coding manual in TA contains a full set of codes that the researcher chooses to apply to the data set. It is developed based on inductive codes grounded in the data as well as from previous research on the topic of study (Harper & Thompson, 2011).

Qualitative analysis II: deductive thematic analysis

In the second phase of thematic analysis, I examined data gathered from key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, informal interviews, focus group discussions, as well as personal notes and reflections recorded in the research logbook. This analysis employed a deductive approach, building on the broad themes established in the first phase of qualitative thematic analysis and informed by the theoretical framework conceptualised during the study's design. With predefined key themes, the qualitative data from both the exploratory and second phase underwent a comprehensive thematic analysis using Atlas.ti. Deductive thematic analysis is 'theory driven' and means that the coding is relative to a pre-existing theoretical framework or codebook (Byrne, 2022) which is generally how coding in this phase of analysis was done. The process started with me transcribing all the audio data into text after completing data collection. After completing the task of transcription, I delved into the coding process using the generated codebook, which included both existing and new codes. I followed a

deductive approach, conducting three scans for codes aligned with specific research questions, such as aspirations, influences, and decision-making.

Figure 15*: Screenshot showing transcription and assignment of coded in Atlas.ti*

For the second scan, I focused on identifying codes that captured the level of aspirations, ability to visualise the future, awareness of choices, personal circumstances, and structural barriers to aspirations. In the third scan, I specifically sought codes related to the migration phenomenon and its role in the lives of youth. This systematic scanning, aligned with a pre-conceptualised overview, proved effective in better organising the data. Subsequently, I moved on to generating themes, using research questions, theoretical foundations, and the initial phase's broad themes. The themes were refined, with some being merged as sub-themes under a broader category that encapsulated them.
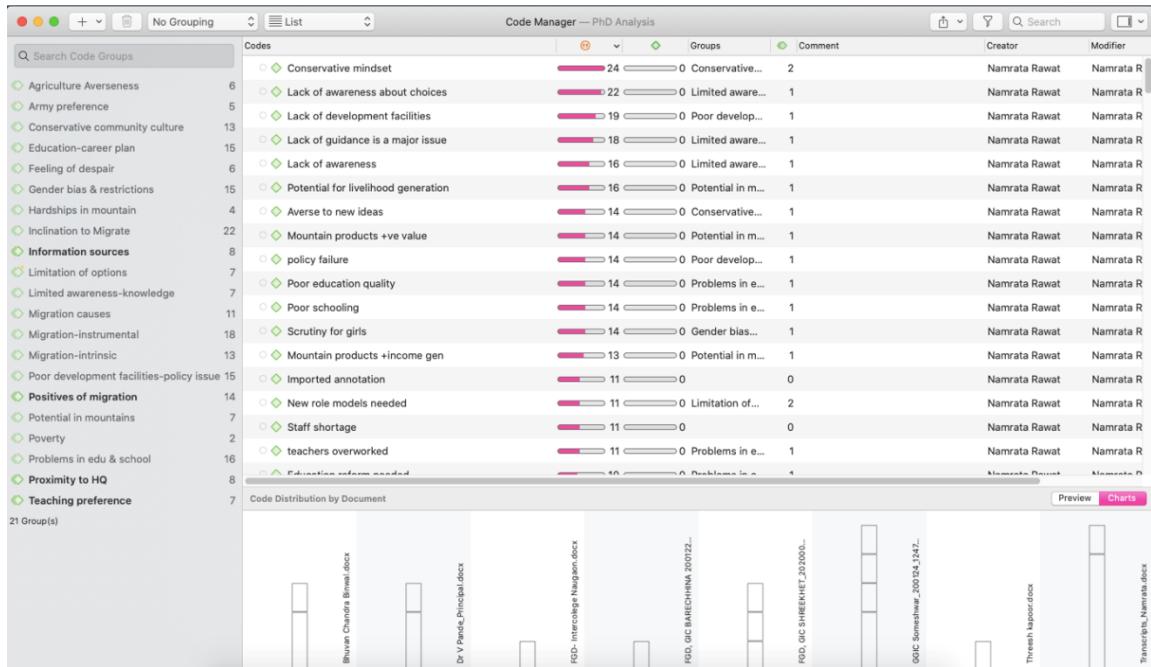
Figure 16*: Screenshot of Atlas.ti Code Manager*
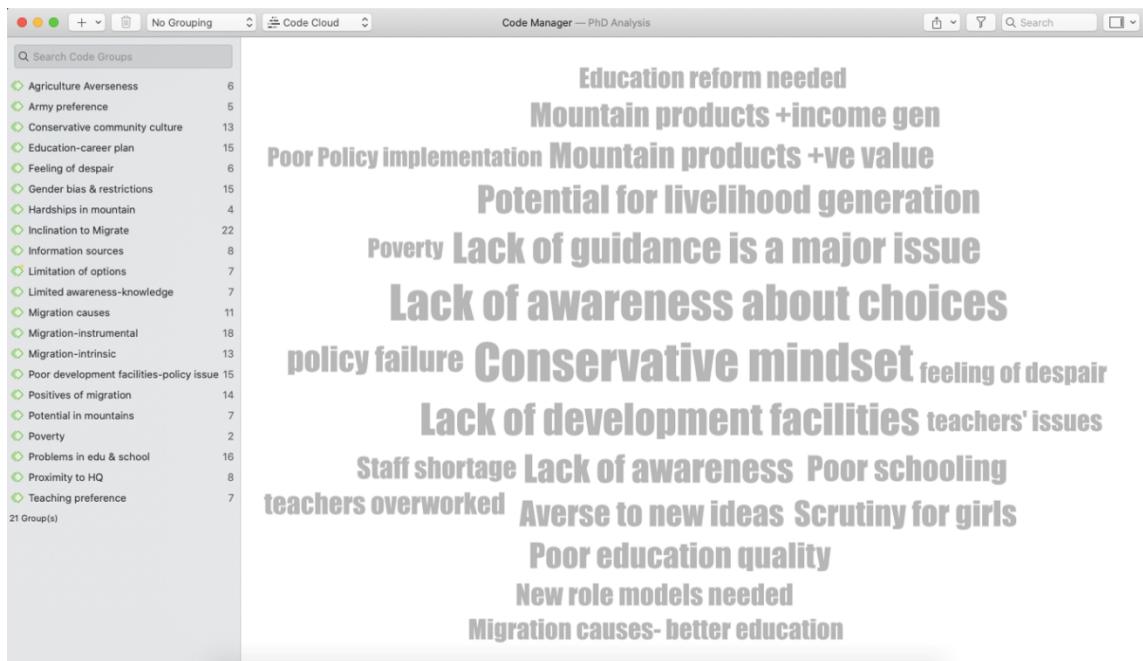
Figure 17*: Screenshot of Atlas.ti code manager in cloud view*

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data analysis methods can be descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, as the name itself suggests, are simply numerical and graphical techniques used to organise, present and analyse data (Fisher & Marshall, 2009). They are used on a sample to estimate the characteristics of a population and these characteristics are referred to as variables (Nick, 2007). While descriptive statistics describe the data, inferential statistics are used to

infer from a small sample group, generalisations which can be applied to the wider population (Marshall & Jonker, 2011). Inferential statistics explore the data for in-depth relationships between different variables to explore differences, to explore the nature and extent of the relationship between them, and to make predictions (Barnes & Lewin, 2005).

Quantitative data in the study was collected through the survey with the aim of (a) generating an overview of the key trends in higher education, career choices, and migration inclinations, and (b) analysing how different factors influence these choices, and how the socio-economic variable related to the future-oriented decisions.

For achieving objective (a), descriptive statistics have been used and measures of central tendency such as mean (which describes the average value of a variable) and measure of frequency such as mode (which describes the most frequent observation for any given variable) are calculated. These measures present a general overview of variables such as family incomes, most preferred education and career options after school, choices for higher education courses, preference for location and types of jobs, etc. These have been described vis-à-vis other variables such as gender and caste of the respondents.

Additionally, toward achieving objective (b) to gauge the effect of factors highlighted in qualitative data analysis, I undertook regression analysis of survey data. Regression analysis is a statistical tool for the investigation of relationships among variables (Sykes, 1993). It is a collection of statistical techniques that are a basis for drawing inferences about relationships among interrelated variables (Golberg & Cho, 2004). In fundamentals, regression analysis is used to predict the value of a variable based on the value of another variable or a list of variables. The variable you want to predict is called the dependent or response variable and the predictor or explanatory variables used to predict the other variable's value are called by different names such as the independent variables, covariates, factors, and regressors (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2006). An investigator collects underlying variables of interest and employs regression to quantitatively estimate the effect of predictor or causal variables on the dependent variable that they influence (Sykes, 1993). Regression analysis with a single explanatory variable is termed simple regression, while multiple regression is the technique that allows us to estimate the quantitative effect of various simultaneous influences on a single dependent variable (Allen, 2004). Further, research on education (especially higher education and by extension career) outcomes shows that there are two issues that most education researchers face. First is that education outcomes depend on an array of factors that interact with each other and second is that these outcomes themselves are dichotomous in nature, i.e. whether an individual goes for higher education or not, majors in a particular discipline or not (Cabrera, 1994). These two issues are relevant to this study also. The objective of the research study is also to know how aspirations are shaped (or affected) by various intersecting socio-

economic factors. Keeping the array of factors, multiple regression analysis was deemed to be the most appropriate quantitative technique to gauge the impact of these multiple factors present in the lives of youth. Secondly, the impact of these factors on higher education, career, and migration choices was assessed in terms of internal questions with dichotomous answers (yes or no as outcomes), such as 'will students from the lower income strata go for higher education' or 'do students from Scheduled Castes prefer to settle for Army recruitment' or 'are the girls from study area more or less likely to prefer to pursue job opportunities outside of their villages'. Therefore, after a careful review of studies which have sought to analyse similar higher education and career outcomes, logistic regression analysis was chosen as the appropriate statistical tool. Logistic regression is a commonly used statistical method in studies with dichotomous categorical dependent variables and it has increasingly been used in education research (Niu, 2020).

The logistic regression analysis was conducted to see the influence of the following independent, explanatory variables: caste, gender, income level of the family, migration experience in the family, access to assets like smartphone, television, computer or laptop, and agricultural land, and location/remoteness of the villages on the education, livelihood, and entailing migration choices of the youth. These are the recurring factors that were either directly identified by youth to be influential in their lives during qualitative discussions or later appeared to be influential in analysing these discussions. These are the independent or explanatory variables whose influence on different education-career choice outcomes and migration tendencies was examined using the regression analysis. Statistical software Stata was used for the quantitative analysis of survey data.

Data integration and chapter development
Data integration with mixed methods is the most important aspect of mixed research and a challenge of opting for mixed methods. There are different stages at which data can be integrated, depending on the objectives to be achieved by mixing the methods.

In this study, integration was done with the purpose of answering the research questions comprehensively. Quantitative analysis describes the socio-economic context and youth aspirations, while also assessing factors like family income, student gender, caste, and family migration's influence. Qualitative analysis complements survey findings, providing additional insight and explanation. Both data findings have been connected to answer the first two research questions:

1. What are the educational and career aspirations of youth in senior secondary schools in the hill district of Almora, Uttarakhand?

2. How are these aspirations shaped by intersecting socio-economic factors around them?

In this order, the first step was to analyse qualitative data to derive connections between some factors (gender, caste, and family income) and aspirations for higher education, livelihood, and migration in the future. These insights were then used to check if the same relevance is predicted by quantitative responses. Secondly, the recurrent descriptive trends from quantitative data have been compared and juxtaposed with the themes developed from the qualitative data to describe and explain the similarities and contradictions. This led to bringing forth and explaining the confusion among youth regarding their future. This helped in developing the first chapter which focuses on describing the educational and career aspirations of the youth reported in the survey and then entails an analysis of those aspirations by complementing the quantitative predictions with explanatory findings from qualitative data. This integration of quantitative and qualitative findings has been presented in Chapter 5 titled '*What do you want to be?*: **Youth educational and career aspirations in Almora**'. Henceforth, the quantitative data findings take a backgrounding role and the question of 'what' and 'how' became the focus in thematic analysis of qualitative data. This analysis results in Chapter 6 titled '*I don't know what to do*: **Aspiration Formation and Capacity to Aspire**' focuses on the types of aspirations that young people have formed and the accompanying capacity to aspire. Two separate readings and scanning of qualitative data were further undertaken to code and develop themes that answer the other third research question, namely: What role does migration play in forming and attaining these aspirations? These two distinct cycles of coding and thematic development were developed into the last analytical chapter '*What will I do here?*: **Migration and Aspirations**' examining the aspirations in relation to migration – this entails both – looking at how career aspirations might lead to migration aspiration and how migration as the background of young people's lives has implications for the capacity to aspire and the eventual aspirations.

Chapter 5: What do you want to be?
Youth Education and Career Aspirations

This study examines the educational and career aspirations of senior secondary school youth. It aims to understand their general aspirations and future orientation. The chapter analyses survey data to uncover the career and education choices of these youth. It explores the consciously recognised factors shaping their decisions, particularly regarding post-schooling careers. Simultaneously, qualitative insights from focus group discussions and personal interviews complement the findings on a more personal and contextual level, providing a deeper understanding of responses and reasoning. The chapter combines quantitative and qualitative analyses to offer an integrated perspective on aspirational choices and corresponding underlying reasons. Organized into four sections, the first section provides a socio-economic and demographic background on the youth participants, setting the context. The second section delves into immediate post-school plans, livelihood expectations, defining features of these expectations, and potential migration decisions linked to education and career choices. A brief third section follows on general life aspirations in the future, and the final section analyses factors influencing explicit aspiration decisions, combining survey data with insights from focus group discussions and personal interviews with youth and teachers.

5.1 Socio-economic background

The survey sample includes 551 senior secondary students from 21 schools across 8 blocks in Almora, Uttarakhand. Reflecting the state's Hindu majority, 548 students identified as Hindu and 3 as Muslim. Regarding caste composition, 65 percent are from the 'General' category (higher castes), 29 percent from Scheduled Castes (traditionally lower castes), and 7 percent from 'Other Backward Classes'. Most participants come from lower-income families, with 56 percent reporting a monthly family income below INR 10,000 and 33 percent between INR 10,000-20,000. In 79 percent of families, the father is the primary wage earner and head of the household, with occupations ranging from government employees and daily wage labourers to private company workers, agricultural workers, small business owners, and drivers (Table 5).

Table 5: Occupation of youth participants' parents

Primary Occupation	Father (%age)	Mother (%age)
Unemployed/Homemaker	1.45	17.97
Agriculture	16.52	66.42
Labour	20.33	1.63

Government Service	7.62	2.18
Private Service	24.14	3.81
Business/Self-Employed – Shop/Driving	18.15	1.27
Others	11.80	6.72

The primary occupation of mothers in these families is predominantly agricultural. It is important to note that Uttarakhand is characterised by significant feminisation of agriculture due to the absence of young men in hilly regions. Most agricultural activities are carried out by women in the households (Fischer-Kowalski & et al., 2014; Jatav et al., 2022). Despite this, most participants initially responded with 'nothing, she's just a housewife' or 'she stays at home, she doesn't do anything' when asked about their mother's occupation. This issue was identified during the pilot survey. During the actual survey, enumerators were instructed to confirm explicitly whether mothers participated in agriculture. Upon clarification that agricultural activities are considered productive work, 66 percent of participants acknowledged their mothers' engagement in agriculture, compared to only 16 percent who reported their fathers' involvement.

The next section focuses on young people's plans after finishing school, particularly regarding higher education and career aspirations. It explores the factors influencing these choices and how they impact the youth's decisions.

5.2 Education & career aspirations

Education and career planning are pathways to the lives individuals envision for themselves. These decisions are often seen as aspirational because they shape the future individuals strive toward. However, envisioning the future is an intangible and abstract concept, making it challenging for individuals to articulate and for researchers to study. This study explores educational and career aspirations and planning as indicators of general life aspirations, analysing the factors influencing decision-making regarding these aspirations. Additionally, data analysis reveals intriguing patterns between the young boys and girls who participated, highlighting gender as a significant factor in aspiration formation and expression.

5.2.1 Higher education aspirations

Education aspirations involve plans to pursue further education after graduating secondary school. This research also delved into why young people make particular choices and how these choices align with their career and life aspirations.

In Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students, open-ended questions were posed about their post-school plans. Responses varied from further education to employment in public institutions, like the Army, to entrepreneurship. The survey question was also open-ended to

capture a broad spectrum of aspirations. The most common response was to pursue a university degree, such as a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science, after school. This aspiration was notably higher among girls than boys. Of the 551 students surveyed, 176 girls (53 percent) aimed to enrol in an undergraduate degree program. In contrast, 56 percent of boys sought Army recruitment, and only 14 percent aimed to pursue a university degree. Figure 18 illustrates the most common post-school plans, with 38 percent aspiring to attend university and 30 percent aiming for Army recruitment. The popularity of the Indian Army as an employment choice in the hilly regions will be explored further in this section.
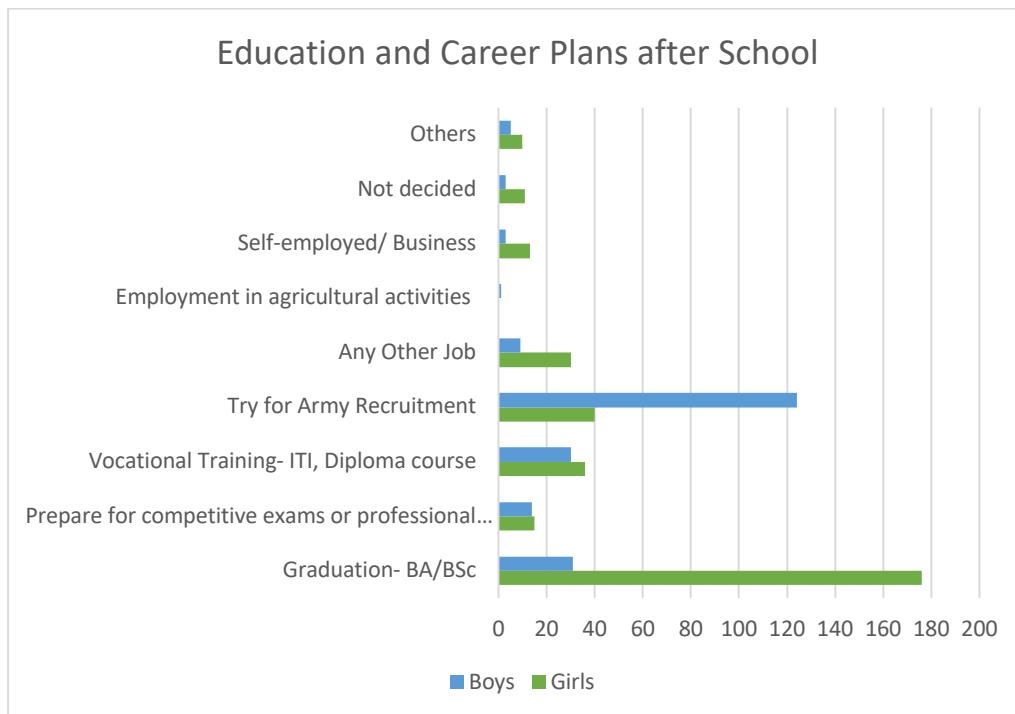
Figure 18: Immediate post-school plans among boys and girls

Beyond a university degree (B.A./B.Sc.) and Army recruitment, a small percentage (12 percent) of survey respondents sought vocational training from government-run skill development centres and diploma schools. Even fewer (5 percent) aimed to prepare for competitive exams for professional courses such as Chartered Accountancy or technical degrees in engineering or medicine. These exams are highly competitive in India, and students often attend additional classes at private coaching centres, and may take a gap year after graduating to prepare.

Responses varied regarding specific subjects for university study. Among those aiming for further education immediately after school, 35 percent planned to pursue streams within the Social sciences, such as political science, history, and geography. 13 percent were interested in language and literature, mainly Hindi literature, given that Hindi is the primary medium of instruction in Almora schools. Additionally, 12 percent intended to apply for nursing, and another 12 percent aspired to study Biological sciences.

5.2.2 Livelihood and employment aspirations

Another aspect of aspirations in this research relates to working life and livelihood. This includes potential careers and migration decisions related to those career paths, which were discussed with participants in the FGDs. These discussions were summarised in the survey, where the youth were asked about their future career aspirations. The results are presented in Figure 19.
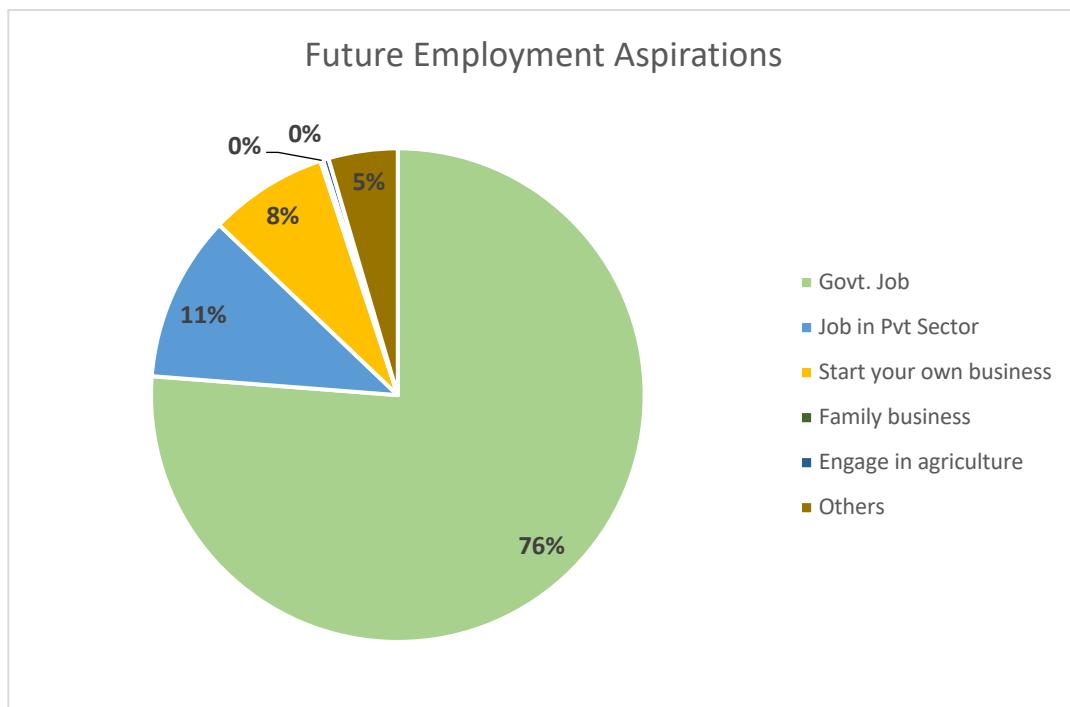
Figure 19: Career/Livelihood aspirations

When envisioning their future livelihoods, the vast majority of young people – 76 percent of the total participants – indicated a desire for a government job. This percentage is higher among boys (89 percent) than girls (67 percent). FGDs and interviews explored this choice further, revealing that the youth primarily think of government jobs as positions in the Army or teaching. Other desired roles included 'nurse in a government hospital' and 'job in a bank.' Teaching was mentioned only by girls, while the Army was primarily mentioned by boys, though 9 girls also expressed interest in joining the Army. Of the 203 participants in 15 FGDs, only one boy expressed an interest in becoming an Economics teacher. Boys generally equated a government job with a position in the Army, and no other options were mentioned in FGDs or personal interviews.

Furthermore, only about 11 percent of participants expressed interest in private sector jobs, and around 8 percent indicated a desire to start their own business. Despite 97 percent of the participants' families owning agricultural land and engaging in some form of agricultural activity, only 2 out of 551 students stated that they wanted to pursue a career in agriculture.

When asked about the factors important for their ideal job, the top attribute was income, followed by the status associated with the job. The third most important factor was proximity – respondents preferred to work within Uttarakhand and not far from home. Specifically, 74 percent of girls and 80 percent of boys wanted to find a job within the state. Among these, nearly 50 percent of boys and 31 percent of girls expressed a preference for moving to one of Uttarakhand's plain districts.

Three key aspects stand out in the discussion on livelihood expectations. Firstly, there is an overwhelming aspiration for government jobs. Secondly, there is a noticeable lack of interest in entrepreneurial ventures. Thirdly, despite a desire for productive engagement near their homes, there is a complete rejection of agriculture in any form. These aspects are explored in detail subsequently.

Government job aspiration

According to residents of Almora (from informal interviews), securing a 'permanent, government job' is the top priority and the most preferred occupation across Uttarakhand. One teacher explained that such jobs ensure stable and regular pay along with other benefits, and are seen as a proven way to lift families out of extreme poverty and reduce over-dependence on agriculture. (Interview with Shekhar Singh Banai[22], Principal, Government Inter College (GIC), XXX, Interview, 08.02.2020). With this mindset, joining the armed forces and teaching are the most popular and 'doable' options, as many before them have pursued these paths and achieved success. Of the surveyed boys, 56 percent state they will pursue Army recruitment after school. In group discussions, they assert this is something they *must* pursue. Among the 125 girls who participated in group discussions, 82 expressed an interest in teaching. The articulation of these choices often suggests that they are seen as convenient or last resort options. Boys frequently state they will 'obviously try for Army recruitment'. When asked why, nearly all respond that they want to "*serve the country*". Upon further probing, some mention the practical benefits such a job guarantees. Here is an instance from a boys' school in block Barechhina, one of the oldest schools in Almora:

"*Nobody wants to serve the country, it's about the pension! The Army is the only job with a pension. Plus, there are so many other lifetime benefits that last even after your service is over. It's just that and nothing else.*" (Subhash Mehra, 18, FGD, 08.02.2020)

As detailed in the Background chapter, Uttarakhand has a long-standing association with the armed forces, with a common saying that one person from every household in the state serves in the Indian Army. People in the state relate to this tradition with great pride. According to

---

[22] All participants' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms except where mentioned otherwise in the accompanying footnote

recent statistics by the Defence Ministry, Uttarakhand ranks as the second highest Indian state in terms of the number of people recruited into the Army per million residents[23].

Similarly, the way girls express their desire to pursue teaching as a career is also telling. None of the girls explicitly said, "I want to be a teacher." Instead, they responded with resignation, saying "*teaching kar lenge*", which translates to "can do teaching after all." This response often emerged after being prodded about their aspirations with the degree they want to obtain. When asked why they wanted to become teachers, only 11 out of 82 could provide concrete reasons. Six girls mentioned they liked their teachers and wanted to emulate them, while five others said they had a passion for a specific subject they wanted to teach. The rest did not have any clear motivation, with the most common reason being that their parents wished for them to "*try for teaching*". This response was consistent across the 21 schools surveyed and even in other schools visited during the research preparation phase.

When asked about the popularity of teaching among girls, teachers cited reasons such as teaching being a "stable" and increasingly "well-paying" job. Some teachers noted that recent pay commission reforms had significantly increased teachers' salaries in Uttarakhand. They also mentioned that parents approve of and encourage girls to apply for teaching exams because it is considered a career that offers a good work-life balance, allowing women to raise a family. In some villages, local success stories feature young girls who completed the degrees required for teaching, passed the entrance exam, secured a teaching position in a government school, found a good marriage match – generally another teacher or a person with a stable government job – and are now "doing well." One teacher explained this phenomenon in detail:

> "*People are inclined to join the Army in Uttarakhand because historically the Army has recruited people from here in large numbers. Now the numbers have gone down but then people saw that people who joined the Army got a stable income, and benefits which helped their families come out of poverty. That was the image that stuck with the people. And the army does change you, as any regular job would, but it did more, because now people saw that the boys who were sitting jobless at home and creating a ruckus, suddenly became responsible and the breadwinners for their families. So that made a big impact on people's minds, in general. And this is true for all of Uttarakhand. Now times have changed and there are many other options, but for kids in poor families who have little access to other information and resources, the Army is still the number one choice, because that's the one they immediately know about. A similar thing is happening with teaching now. Some girls cleared the entrance and they were hired. This was a wave in the last 10-15 years when the*

---

[23] Response to Lok Sabha question no. 2849 for answer on 11.03.2020 regarding 'recruitment in Army', Ministry of Defence, Government of India

education department finally decided to expand under the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan[24]' *and opened a school in every nook and cranny. Suddenly people saw that girls who cleared the exam immediately got postings and good salaries with permanent positions. That led to everyone trying to pursue teaching. So that's how it is. First, it was the Army, then teaching, and in between there was a phase of hotel management, and who knows, something else will come up."* (Dr. Vijay Pande, Principal, GIC XXX, Interview, 24.01.2020)

Lack of entrepreneurial aspirations

The finding that the youth are largely disinclined toward entrepreneurship contrasts sharply with the state's policy response to out-migration, which heavily emphasizes entrepreneurship as a solution. Despite financial incentives to promote and develop entrepreneurship, the response, especially from the youth, has been lukewarm (L. Sharma, 2014). Recent policies have promoted entrepreneurship as a solution for both unemployment and out-migration issues (NITI Aayog, 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Uttarakhand saw a massive return of migrants. The state responded by announcing a fund to help returning migrants set up small-scale ventures in their villages. However, like previous initiatives, this did not have a significant impact, as most returnees quickly went back to their places of work once the pandemic-related restrictions were eased.

Several factors deter youth from pursuing their entrepreneurial aspirations. A group of young people who attempted to set up businesses with government support shared that extreme red tape and bureaucracy made it nearly impossible to access the benefits of such schemes (Focus group discussion with older youth, 16 November 2019). Similarly, Kamlesh Bhatt – president of the Bar Association of Almora – wanted to build a homestay on his land, but couldn't obtain the necessary clearances and credit from the bank under a government scheme for three years, ultimately abandoning the plan.

"I am a lawyer! I know all the rules and paperwork and if I couldn't get my clearance and credit in three years, let me assure you, no common person can benefit from those schemes. They are for the relatives of people in power" (Kamlesh Mehra, Interview, 29.11.2019).

Hemant Bhandari – a successful entrepreneur from the region – highlighted that even if one can access credit and benefits for starting a business, the 'atmosphere' in rural mountain communities is not conducive for self-starters. Hemant started his business 'Himgiri Mushrooms' with help from an NGO that promotes small businesses in Uttarakhand. The NGO provided training, mentoring, and a small loan for mushroom cultivation. His wife, who is a

---

[24] Sarva Sikhsa Abhiyaan is the 'Education for All' campaign under the Right to Education of Indian Constitution which aimed at universalisation of primary education and made primary education free and compulsory for all

homemaker, supported him with her savings. Despite his wife's support, villagers were openly discouraging, and mocked him for '*getting involved with an NGO*'.

> "*I started at 35 after losing my job in Haldwani. I have two kids and then also people were openly mocking me for taking a risk. I almost didn't get into it, but then I thought it's only 10,000 rupees, it will be what it will be. I made it eventually, but it can't be easy for younger people in this environment to believe in themselves and think they'll also do something in the future. I didn't, when I was young… the whole thing is about government jobs.*" (Hemant Bhandari, Entrepreneur, Interview, 20.11.2019).

The cultural values of a community have a significant bearing on factors shaping the career aspirations of its youth (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Hui & Lent, 2018; Mau, 2000). These values prioritise certain career and life choices over others. Regarding the government's schemes for vocational training, skill development, and promoting small businesses, residents of Almora, older youth from villages, and teachers generally view rural communities in Uttarakhand as lacking a strong business culture, and as being risk averse. This preference for stable government jobs over starting a business is also due to the scarcity of successful entrepreneurs in the region who would serve as role models. The importance of role models and culture in forming aspirations will be discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on aspiration formation and the capacity to aspire.

Averseness to agriculture

Young people's preference to engage in agriculture declines with increase in formal education in traditionally agrarian communities (Schewel & Fransen, 2018). Agriculture in Uttarakhand is in a state of crisis. Low agricultural productivity has often been cited as one of the push factors and important reasons for migration (Jain, 2010; Kollmair & Hoermann, 2011; Nagalia, 2017; Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b). Coinciding with the results from the survey, it is true that the incidence of landlessness in hill districts is low, but the size of land holdings is small and fragmented. One-tenth of the land holdings in hill districts are 'landless', and half of the land holdings are between 0.25 to 0.5 hectares. The productivity of the land is abysmally low (Mamgain, 2004). Practising traditional hill agriculture on small and fragmented terraces is uneconomical (Jain, 2010).

Interactions with farmers in Almora reveal a widespread sentiment that agriculture is no longer viable for supporting a family. Many parents report declining yields and insufficient incomes over the past decade, a concern echoed by other research in the region. A comparative study on migration's impact in four Uttarakhand hill districts found that families see no future in agriculture, believing the land cannot generate enough income (Chauhan et al., 2003). Labour-intensive terrace farming does not yield adequate returns, and human-wildlife conflict,

particularly with monkeys and wild boars, has made farming more challenging. In recent years, it has caused considerable distress even for the progressive, non-subsistence, organic farmers (Interview, 2019). Parents express bitterness towards agriculture, stating "there's nothing left in agriculture." This reflects not only in the decline in monetary benefits, but also in the loss of respect for the occupation. They feel their hard work does not translate into income, and the dignity of farming has diminished. Consequently, parents are not supportive of their children taking up agriculture. As one father from Barechhina block stated:

> "*Not just us; ask anyone in the village, and nobody wants their children to go into agriculture. Our whole struggle is to have them do something else, so they don't have to suffer as we did. We had no choice but to farm. We grew up watching our parents and neighbours toil in the fields, so we thought that was our destiny. That's all we knew, so that's what we did. Our children are going to school so that they don't have to live our lives, so they don't have to toil in the sun like us. There's nothing left in agriculture. If the returns were good, maybe educated people could do better farming, but that's not the case. Hardly anything grows, and if it does, the monkeys destroy it… No, young people shouldn't waste their time farming.*" (Jagdeesh Mehra, Farmer, Interview, 09.03.2020)

Parents' negative sentiments towards taking up agriculture are also voiced by youth. On being asked why parents don't want their children to be engaged in any form of agriculture, Hema Bora, a 17-year-old girl, shared:

> "*Mummy-papa are always against agriculture. They say there's nothing in agriculture… they say you will lose all your time and youth in agriculture for nothing… Yes, they say you'll become dark, and age before time working in the fields, and you will get nothing.*" (Hema Bora, 17, FGD, 27.01.2020)

Negative experiences of farming families and the declining economic viability of agricultural activities do not paint a picture of an aspirational future in agriculture for the youth.

5.2.3 Migration for aspirations

Young people who participated in the research have not yet had the opportunity to migrate out of their native villages. For many, decisions regarding education and career will inevitably involve considering migration. In Uttarakhand, one-tenth of total out-migrants leave for better education, and another one-fifth migrate for improved economic prospects (Mamgain & Reddy, 2015b). Thus, participants were asked about migration decisions related to their education and career choices, specifically, where they would like to pursue degrees, diplomas, vocational courses, and work opportunities. The results of these choices are summarised in Figure 20. Most of the youth who wish to pursue a degree, diploma, or prepare for a competitive exam, prefer to do so within their district (62 percent) or state (25 percent). Only 10 percent of

these students want to go outside Uttarakhand. Preferences for the desired location are similar among both boys and girls. When considering future jobs, the pattern is similar: most youth prefer to stay within their district (38 percent) or state (38 percent).

Desired Location for Education and Livelihood

Location	Livelihood	Education
Don't know/ No answer	3%	3%
Other Country	2%	0%
Other State	19%	10%
Plains in Uttarakhand	38%	25%
Almora	38%	62%
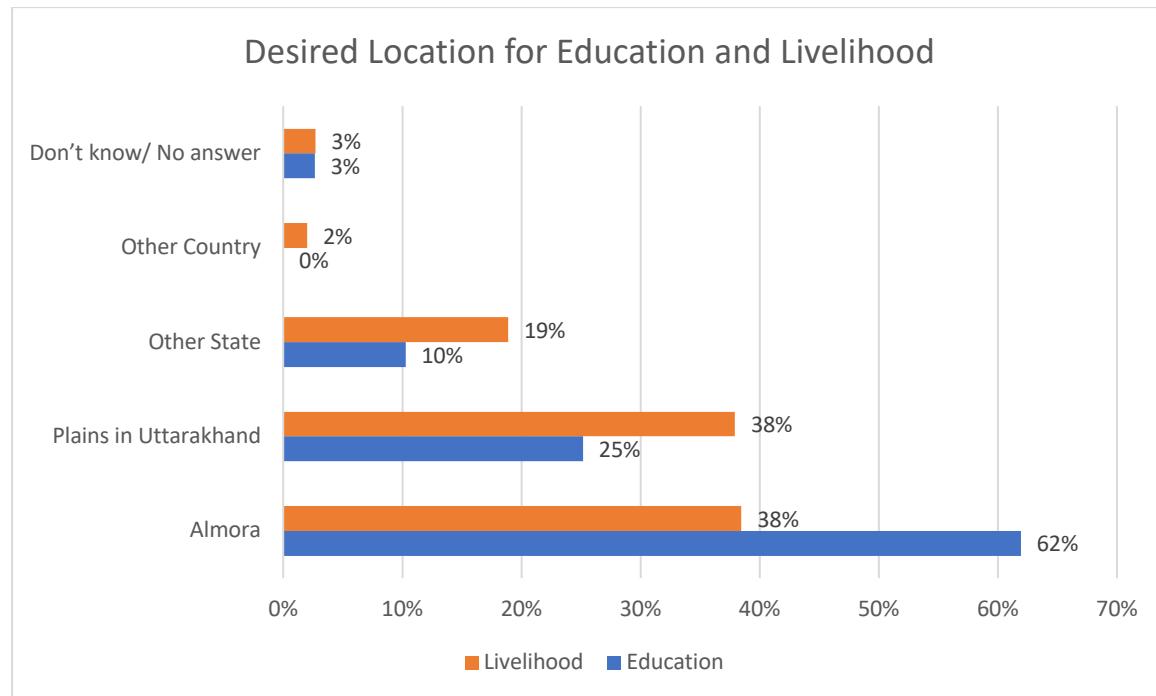
Figure 20: Preferred location for education and livelihood

So far, survey data suggests that many young people in Almora prefer to stay rather than migrate. However, in focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews, opinions differ significantly. In the 15 FGDs conducted in Almora with 125 girls and 78 boys, the issue of migration for higher education and livelihood was discussed in great depth. The young people who participated were vocal about the lack of opportunities in the mountains, and emphasized that migration opens new opportunities for them – for education, skill development and livelihood alike, which are not possible in the villages. 75 out of 78 boys indicated a strong inclination to migrate for higher education and better job prospects, particularly to cities outside their state. They cited the lack of local opportunities and the potential for higher earnings as key reasons, since these are not possible in the rural areas in Almora. The situation of employment in Uttarakhand remains poor. Most of the economic activity is concentrated in the plain districts of Dehradun, Haridwar, and Udham Singh Nagar. Per Capita Income in the hill districts of Bageshwar, Champawat, Tehri Garhwal, and Almora is half of that in Dehradun and Haridwar (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017).

Responses of girls were mixed and varied beyond employment opportunities. At first, many did not want to speak about this, but when prompted about their preferences for education or work opportunities, many expressed a desire to work outside their villages, specifically in cities. Unlike boys, girls indicated a preference for migrating to cities within Uttarakhand, particularly mentioning Dehradun (the state capital) and Haldwani (the city closest to Almora).

Some girls mentioned Delhi as an option, particularly those with family members already working there. Moving to Delhi was an option mentioned only by girls who stated that they have either their father or their brother working in Delhi.

Migration is prevalent in Uttarakhand. For some, migration occurs naturally when choosing career paths or pursuing studies in disciplines that are not available locally. For others, the desire to migrate shapes their career and life decisions. Given the cultural norm of migration in the region, many young people feel compelled to leave their villages to "make something of themselves," influencing their career aspirations. Youth often opt for careers that lead them to nearby cities or other states – a theme explored extensively in Chapter 7, which focuses on migration aspirations and how the culture of migration impacts young people.

In this chapter, it is intriguing to juxtapose survey responses regarding educational and career preferences with general expectations and aspirations for the future. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and personal interviews included segments exploring life aspirations "five years from now," aiming to understand youth aspirations, and the migration decisions tied to these aspirations. The following section elaborates on the diverse ways young people envision their futures.

5.3 General aspirations for life in the future

Education and livelihood aspirations represent a more tangible aspect of future considerations. Conversely, envisioning one's life and future is often elusive and challenging to explore. These personal aspirations may be unexplored or difficult to articulate for both researchers and participants alike. Teachers cautioned that extracting responses could be difficult, noting that many students may not have contemplated such matters, or may be uncertain even if they have. Some suggested preparing students beforehand or allowing time for reflection.

Their caution was justified. Initial attempts to discuss future aspirations yielded few tangible responses, as expected. However, through prolonged personal interviews, group discussions, and repeated field interactions, some youth gradually began to share glimpses of their aspirations. Initially hesitant, many needed encouragement to open up. As conversations deepened, it became clear that contemplating the future was daunting and unsettling for many youths, evoking feelings of confusion and hopelessness.

In a remote village, during a conversation with a youth named Kamal (further discussed in the next chapter on aspiration formation and capacity to aspire), he expressed resignation and hopelessness about his prospects – a sentiment echoed in lighter tones by other boys in different schools. They lamented the perceived lack of opportunities beyond military service and migration.

The findings also highlighted a distinct gender divide in how young people envision their futures and articulate their aspirations. In all the conversations with girls around this topic, two patterns stand out. Firstly, girls tended to frame their aspirations within what could be perceived as commendable or 'ideal aspirations'. These are aspirations to help their communities and 'do something' for their villages. For instance, on being asked 'where do you see yourself in five years?' Those who chose to respond at first responded with statements like, "*I want to open a school or become a teacher in my village, so that I can help people*". This and many other variants of the same sentiment point to the tendency towards repeating what is considered socially right and culturally appropriate. Qualitative analysis further reveals that girls generally view migration from mountainous regions less favourably than boys, believing in the importance of staying close to their hometowns to contribute to community development. These responses align with existing research on gender differences in career aspirations and outcomes, suggesting that girls may face greater challenges in achieving autonomy and independence from their families (Josselson, 1987 cited in Sax & Harper, 2007).

The second aspect of youth aspirations is reflected in discussions about aspects of their current lives they find dissatisfying, and their hopes for a different future. While these conversations elicited various responses, they primarily revolved around seeking freedom from the constraints and conservatism of village life, as well as desiring mobility and access to the amenities of the 'better and easier life' found in urban areas and cities. Most envision their future lives to be less challenging than their current rural mountain existence, anticipating swifter and safer access not only to opportunities for development, such as education and skill enhancement programs, but also to leisure activities. Below are excerpts from FGDs held at Government Girls Inter College in Someshwar block, and Inter College, Naugaon in Dwarahat block, where participants were prompted to envision their lives five years from now, and to articulate the differences they hoped for from their current situation.

> *"People gossip a lot in the village. That is what I do not like. It would be nice to live somewhere where people did not know you that well."* (Jyoti, 17*)*
>
> *"Girls have a lot less freedom as compared to boys in village…… I want to be able to go and enjoy things, even at night, go to see a film and meet friends..* (Asha, 18)
>
> *"I want to live somewhere where it's easy to travel and have opportunities to work and study at the same time"* (Babita, 17)
>
> *" I want to be able to be independent and help my parents but live on my own…… I also want to wear jeans like the ones you're wearing, they look nice. I can't wear them here."* (Sonia, 17)
> (FGD in a Girls School. 25.01.2020)

> *"I want to live somewhere we can also order food and clothes from Amazon.. It'll be so nice to get online delivery of things"* (Geeta Bisht, 17)
>
> *"Yeah!! And also be able to go and watch films with friends... in Delhi people can go out and meet with friends in big markets, there's street food shops, not expensive... here there's nothing to do after school, except household chores"* (Preeti Rawat, 16)
> (FGD in Girls' School, 12.02.2020)

In all the schools where FGDs were conducted, girls expressed frustration with gender bias and the restrictions imposed on them due to conservative norms. They resent the stricter scrutiny their lives face, compared to boys. Consequently, their aspirations for personal freedom revolve around expressing themselves freely and overcoming the limitations they currently experience in their daily lives. Key components of their aspirations include freedom of mobility and the ability to choose their clothing without constraints. Migration is seen as a pathway to achieving some of these freedoms to a certain extent.

Similarly, boys' aspirations for the future largely centre around leaving their villages by any means possible. Like the girls, many boys are unsure about their future goals, but are determined to 'get out' first and figure things out later. For some, earning money quickly is a priority, and they aim to achieve this as soon as possible. A few plan to move to cities for further studies and job opportunities, particularly those performing well academically. However, for most participants, migration itself is the aspiration, driven by a mindset of '*kuch bhi kar lenge*' ('we can or will do anything').

For most of the boys who participated in the FGDs, the vision for the future in five years revolves around being 'settled'. Elaborating on what that means, one boy explained it as:

> "*...being able to provide for the needs of the family, you know. Here sometimes, we run out of money, and it's painful to see our parents struggle to meet the monthly expenditures, waiting for the MGNREGA work to come. At least once I am in the city, I can get a job, any job. Some boys even find multiple jobs, and once you start getting money in hand, you can do anything, you just need to stick around in a job.*" (Bharat Arya, 17, Interview, 12.02.2020).

Thus, for boys, the ideal aspiration is to financially support their households and alleviate their families' economic struggles.

This gender divide in envisioning futures reflects the gender-based conditioning to which the youth are subjected. The responses of girls are largely consistent with the gender norms of traditional Indian society, where women are expected to be the carriers of "traditional values" (Chaudhuri, 2012 cited in Kohli, 2017). Even as they are educated, they are conditioned to be

better wives, homemakers, or caregivers (Kohli, 2017). Men on the other hand are conditioned to be the provider and this explains the emphasis to move out in order to be able to earn money. Further, analysing the census data on rural-to-urban migration in India, Bhagat (2017) states that most men report moving for employment while women report moving for marriage (60 percent) or household relocation (30 percent) instead of work-related reasons. Family-related migration – where men move for work and women typically follow after marriage or once the male migrants have settled in the new destination – has increased in India over the last two decades (R. Bhagat, 2017). In Uttarakhand, migration follows a similar pattern. Typically, young males migrate from villages to urban areas within the state or to other states, while the women remain behind to manage household responsibilities and farming. Once the men establish themselves in urban centres or cities, the women may eventually join them, often accompanied by their children.

5.4 Factors influencing aspirations

When asked about their motivations for pursuing specific education and career paths, participants offered varied responses. A section of the survey explored factors that young people consider when contemplating their career choices after finishing school. These factors were shared by school-going youth in focus group discussions as they discussed their post-school plans. Eleven factors were identified based on frequent reasons expressed by students. This section focuses on factors that young people can perceive and delineate in their economic and social lives. Participants were allowed to select multiple options.

The five most influential factors that youth consider when making decisions about education and careers include family (including parents and siblings), personal interests, their scores in 12th grade, the financial condition of their family, and peers or friends.

48 percent of the young people surveyed stated that they base their career decisions on their abilities and interests. 20 percent indicated that they are influenced by their grades in 12th class or performance in entrance exams for various courses. 17 percent noted that the choices of their friends also play a role in their decision-making process after school. 16 percent consider their family's financial ability to support them when making career decisions.

More than 50 percent of survey participants come from low-income households, with an average monthly income of less than INR 10,000. One-third of participants belong to households with incomes ranging between INR 10,000-20,000 per month.

Another significant influence on decision-making comes from slightly older young people who have gained 'worldly exposure' (FGDs). 31 percent of students surveyed indicated they would base their career decisions on advice from older siblings. Additionally, 27 percent of participants reported having a sibling who has already migrated from their village. Having a

migrant sibling is considered an asset for young people in school as they contemplate their future steps in multiple ways. This aspect is explored more deeply in Chapter 7, which delves into migration and its impact on the lives of young people.

In the following subsections, I elaborate on the primary factors that either constrain or encourage the aspirations of the youth. Through analysis of qualitative data, four key factors were identified as crucial in shaping aspirational goal setting: family support (including both parental encouragement and financial stability), gender dynamics, caste considerations, and proximity to district headquarters.

Family

Family plays an important role when it comes to making career-related decisions. Several studies point out the influence of family members (and especially parents) on the career aspirations and decisions of young people, in collectivist societies like India (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; S. Kumar, 2016; A. Ray et al., 2020; Sawitri et al., 2014; Sawitri & Creed, 2017). In this study too, family (and especially parents) are the most influential factor in making future-related career decisions. Nearly 56 percent of the participants consider their parents' opinions and want their approval in making any decision related to a career – starting from education to livelihood. This is not surprising, considering that the defining feature of Indian culture is collectivism, where an individual is an interdependent entity, and all major life decisions are made jointly with the close group (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Hofstede, 2011). The family then is extremely important, and wields a significant amount of influence on all life decisions – especially career decisions – in India. This influence cuts across the rural and urban divide, and even across different disciplines. For instance, in a study conducted among students entering an MBA programme, 'father' was listed as the most significant individual influence on their career choice (Agarwala, 2008).

In addition to interpersonal influence, the financial situation of families significantly shapes how young people set their aspirations, and which goals they ultimately pursue. The relationship between poverty and educational aspirations is intriguing because education is often viewed as the key to upward social mobility, yet it doesn't change the fact that poorer individuals have fewer resources to cover the costs of education (Flechtner, 2014). In India, socio-economic status can markedly influence career interests and aspirations (Arulmani et al., 2001). In the Himalayan context, the problem is further exacerbated by the geography, limited higher education institutions, and the additional costs of migration for education. Rural areas in Uttarakhand do not offer many options for pursuing higher education after school, which is one of the primary reasons for out-migration from villages (Jain, 2010; B. K. Joshi, 2016; Mamgain & Reddy, 2017; Pandey & Jha, 2012; Pathak et al., 2017; Sati, 2021; P. Sharma & Nayak, 2019). The situation in Almora is not too different. The 'Background' chapter explains

how there are limited options for continuing higher education after school, as there are only six government colleges/universities in Almora, with limited subject choices. These institutions are also spread throughout the district, making them inaccessible for everyone to attend as day scholars. This necessitates many students to consider relocating for higher education, which places additional financial strain on their already constrained rural households. Interviews and discussions with students also reveal that relocating from the village – whether for study or work – often requires a social network of migrant relatives or acquaintances settled in destination locations. Young people often adjust their career aspirations or choices based on the household's financial resources or the presence of social networks that can ensure their safety in the new environment. A student talked about how he wants to study political science in Delhi but it's not possible for him to move to Delhi because *"for one thing, it's expensive, plus I don't know anyone there, how will I do anything?"* and therefore decided to give up the idea and pursue a diploma course nearby. This was a recurrent theme recognised in the data: people do have an original aspiration to do or pursue something, but they often modify it according to their financial situation. This phenomenon of adjusting aspirations is the subject of exploration in Chapter 6. When the survey data was analysed for this theme, results from logistic regression were similar. Keeping all other factors constant, as the household income increases, the less likely it is that young people will pursue higher education within Almora, whereas youth from poorer households will limit their aspiration to study within the district[25]. This already restricts the aspirations for higher education for youth from the poorest households to limited options in Almora, which according to some of the teachers is not the right step in developing a career. One teacher explains the decision to go for any B.A./B.Sc. degree because of the limitation of money as follows:

> *"It doesn't lead to any success in their careers and only ensures that they have a degree in name, which perhaps can make them eligible to appear for exams that demand a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite. Other than that, these degrees from these colleges prepare them for nothing. For girls, it's just a way of keeping themselves busy while their parents look for a match for them."* (Kamala Rana, Teacher, Interview, 11.02.2020)

For some groups, there are additional influences beyond family income, and the envisioning of the future is further complicated beyond having family's support or access to enough financial resources. Gender and caste have an additional impact on educational and career aspirations.

Gender

When it comes to pursuing education and making financial investments for better quality education outside their villages, girls face additional disadvantages compared to boys in

---

[25] Results from regression analysis are attached in the Appendix Table 1

similarly economically placed families. Both survey data and thematic analysis confirm that, considering all other factors, girls are 23 percent more likely than boys to limit their aspiration to pursue higher education within Almora (see Appendix 9 for results from the regression analysis).

Personal interviews and FGDs with female participants reveal that it is particularly difficult for girls to 'go out' and study in good colleges 'outside'. When asked why, many girls would hang their heads and fall silent, passing shy glances and urging each other to speak. Eventually, one would say, "*Who's going to send girls out to study here?*" This sentiment was echoed in other discussions. Consequently, more girls than boys state that they want to study and work within their district. However, when asked about their future, the majority (87 percent) express a desire to live 'outside' Almora, seeking freedom of mobility, better educational and entertainment facilities, and liberation from conservative gender-based values.

This reveals a contradiction: while girls express a desire to study and work within Almora, their broader life aspirations lean towards migrating to urban areas for greater freedom and opportunities. In initial interactions, girls seem to view migration less positively than boys, believing people should stay close to their hometowns to support their communities. Conversely, most boys in FGDs and interviews clearly state their intention to leave their villages, whether for education, or to explore employment options.

There is a clear contradiction in the response between wanting to find work within Almora district in the future, and the aspirations of freedom from conservative culture. On analysing the qualitative data from FGDs and interviews, it also appears that in the first interaction, girls view migration from the mountains less positively than boys, and think that people should stay close to their hometowns and do something for their communities. On the other hand, most of the boys who participated in the FGDs, interviews, and informal discussions, were clear that they want to go out of the villages whether it is for education, or to just go out and explore their options for employment.

There are two aspects to consider here. Firstly, the responses about not wanting to move out align with research on gender differences in career aspirations and outputs. Girls experience more struggle in developing autonomy in separating from their parents (Josselson, 1987 cited in Sax & Harper, 2007). Specifically, in the context of an agricultural village in Uttarakhand, Gooch (2014) notes that girls also do not enjoy equal freedom as boys when it comes to movement, labour, or career development. She observes that even as they act as farm labour at home, girls (both from high and low castes) are not allowed to work on farms outside their families, move about freely outside of their villages, and go out to work even though they are as educated as the sons (Gooch, 2014). Further, as traditional gender roles have changed with migration, they have become more demanding in their expectations of women and the roles

they play in transformation during the migration process for families. As the previous section on 'aspirations about life in the future' also elaborates, migration from rural to urban areas, specifically in the case of Uttarakhand, starts with young male members of the family. In the time that it takes for them to settle in the cities and have their family move with them, women are left with additional responsibilities back home, especially in farming. The feminization of agriculture in Uttarakhand is now well-documented (Jatav et al., 2022; Mamgain, 2004; Mamgain & Reddy, 2017; Pattnaik et al., 2018). As migration trends have increased, the workload has shifted onto women – men leave, and women are left to care for the homesteads and family farms (G. Mehta, 1996). Agriculture is essential to economic survival, and because women do most of the farm work, the economic value of keeping a daughter has also increased (Gooch, 2014).

Parents also seem to have higher expectations of girls. Girls are perceived as hardworking and industrious, while boys are seen as careless and idle (Gooch, 2014). These roles and values appear to have been passed on to young girls, who unanimously agreed that they *must* work at home and help their parents with farm work, even if they do not always enjoy it. They also agreed that they assist their parents, particularly their mothers, because they cannot rely on the male family members. These men have either migrated or, if they remain in the village, cannot be trusted to help reliably (Personal Interviews, FGDs).

This value attachment also explains why girls are more inclined to stay close to home and 'do something for my people'. Many girls express a desire to work in a way that benefits their community, which is why professions like teaching and nursing are more popular among girls than boys. These roles are perceived as contributing to the betterment of village communities. Here are some of the reasons girls in the study cited for wanting to become teachers or nurses:

"*I want to teach because, you know, here we don't have good schools and good teachers. If I become a teacher, I would like to open a school for young people like me.*" (Smriti, 16, FGD, 15.01.2020)

"*… after doing the pharmacy course, I would want to open a pharmacy store in my village. People need it. We don't have any doctor and medicines when we need them the most.*" (Lata, 17, FGD, 07.01.2020)

"*If everyone gets educated and leaves, who will remain here? Our villages will be finished… I can open a tuition centre here and teach young people.*" (Araddhana, FGD, 18.02.2020)

Aspirations of wanting to contribute to society in some ways also align with studies that find that young people tend to set aspirations that are deemed gender appropriate (Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Kenkel & Gage, 1983). Such aspirations can also be reflective of social embeddedness, a feature of many south Asian rural societies, where individuals are bound to complex webs of social, hierarchical relationships (Del Franco, 2010, 2014; Kabeer, 2002).

This may be one reason why girls, while aspiring for themselves, also feel compelled to form aspirations that align with the well-being of their communities, thus gaining social approval. Furthermore, research indicates that rural youth often hold strong communal aspirations, preferring to reside closer to their families and communities (Hektner, 1994; Howley, 2006; Jaffee et al., 2019). Secondly, security is a significant concern for girls, and negative perceptions of cities as dangerous places for women undermine their confidence in pursuing individual migration aspirations (Grunawalt, 2012). This aligns with the negative views held by girls in rural Uttarakhand about people from cities or plains. While they may aspire to live in and experience city life, many girls described cities as 'dangerous,' 'noisy and polluted,' and city people as *'tez'* (literally translating as 'fast,' meaning clever) who might take advantage of them (FGDs). These generalised negative perceptions contribute to a fear of openly expressing a desire to migrate, instead manifesting as a latent wish for more freedom.

Caste

Caste[26] is an important social hierarchical concept in India. It influences a person's life in a multitude of ways, and has implications for every personal and social decision a person makes. The Background chapter provides a detailed explanation of the caste system in Indian society, so I will not repeat it here. It is still important to note that a person's caste dictates all significant aspects of a person's life (Boston & Nair-Reichert, 2003). Therefore, it was important to analyse the effect of caste as a factor, when it comes to something as social as well as personal as aspirations. In this case, however, caste does not seem to play a significant role in determining education choices after schooling. During discussions on caste, none of the participants reported it as influencing their decisions about the future.

Students did not report experiencing caste-based discrimination either in schools or in their villages, although they acknowledged that the concept of caste still exists. An important observation is that while students in Scheduled Caste categories did not report caste-based differences in their school lives, they tended to be shyer, less confident, and more hesitant in expressing their opinions, compared to their peers. Although not universal, this difference was particularly noticeable in remote schools and among girls.

Analysis of the survey data also suggests that the likelihood to aspire for higher education is similar across all caste groups. However, there appears to be a caste divide in the youth's aspirations for employment in the Army. Specifically, 71 percent of the youth aspiring to join the Army are from the General (upper) Caste, while only 23 percent are from the SC and 7 percent from the OBC groups. This contrast in aspirations for an Army career was also

---

[26] Articles 341 and 342 of the Indian Constitution include a list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (broadly constituting India's 'untouchable' castes) who were to receive positive discrimination in education and political representation

observed during the focus group discussions and personal interviews. On being asked why they wouldn't like to pursue Army recruitment, Mukul*, a 17-year-old from one of the Scheduled Castes, simply shrugged his shoulders and said, "*hamaara nahin hoga usmein aur mera interest bhi nahin hai.*" (I will not be able to make it into the Army, and I don't have an interest anyway). The response 'not being able to make it' was repeated by a few other participants from these caste groups too.

One perspective on this issue is the absence of Affirmative Action in Army recruitment, which may discourage students from Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) from applying. India grapples with significant inequalities in education, employment, and ethnicity (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). To address caste-based disparities, compensatory positive discrimination policies reserve 15 percent of seats in higher education institutions and state and central government jobs for Scheduled Castes (Bertrand et al., 2010; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). These policies, in place since India's adoption of its Constitution in 1950, are subject to polarised debate, but provide opportunities to those from marginalised backgrounds. The lack of such provisions in Army recruitment might dissuade youth from SC groups who may feel inadequately prepared for Army roles. This coincides with research that suggests that young Indian people from a lower socio-economic background tend to exhibit thinking patterns that reflect negative and unhelpful beliefs about themselves (Arulmani et al., 2001, 2003).

Another more optimistic explanation offered by some teachers and students is that students coming from marginalised backgrounds understand the importance of higher education, and do not want to settle for a poorly paid, low-ranking position in the Army. One student from the Scheduled Caste group, who was interviewed in depth, stated:

"*What will I do by joining the Army? I want to be a teacher of economics because I like economics, and I feel I can get other jobs also if I can study eco till the masters level. Joining the Army will restrict my life to just being a soldier. I want to experience other things that are there, outside. I would like to study something that I am good at. Sir* (his teacher) *also says that I can do well in it if I pursue it.*" (Ravi Arya, 17, Interview, 21.01.2020)

Dr. Vijay Pande, principal of one of the schools in the study, also explains:

"*People are recognising that education for them (Scheduled Castes) is more important than finding a low position in the Army where you will stay at the same level your entire life, and retire with a basic pension. That is okay for the upper caste people whose parents have already built houses for them, have some agricultural land, one sibling is in Delhi, one in Noida. For our students from SC, they usually don't have anyone in the cities. They also understand the importance of going out of the villages, learning the ways of the cities, and I encourage that. They should go out and experience those things, otherwise they will always*

remain shy and underconfident here." (Dr Vijay Pande, Principal, GIC XXX, Interview, 24.01.2020)

While Dr. Pande feels that the students from Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Caste groups should "*move out of their villages and explore the world*", the students from these groups do not express their desire to migrate openly. Survey data indicates that young people belonging to Scheduled Castes prefer finding livelihood in the future within the district of Almora. Students belonging to SC are 55 percent more likely to pursue employment within the district than students from General Castes (see Appendix 10 for the results from regression analysis). This reluctance to aspire to migrate out of the mountains may stem from less developed caste-based social networks, compared to those of General/upper Caste groups. Traditionally, the Brahmins (the upper caste priestly scholars) were more mobile as they travelled to perform priestly rituals, along with the Vaishyas (trading caste) who travelled to trade goods, and mobility among the agrarian working class (previously untouchables) has historically been low (R. Bhagat, 2017). Majority of migrants from Uttarakhand are unmarried young men who belong to socially and economically dominant caste groups like Brahmins and Rajputs (Jain, 2010). Thus, the tendency to migrate out for work remains high among General/upper Castes, and the critical benefits of caste membership, like informal social networks that facilitate economic and professional mobility, are non-existent for Scheduled Caste groups (Prasad et al., 2020). According to one principal interviewed in the study:

> *"These are also people who have no network in the plains, and hence have not been able to migrate. So, they remain here out of helplessness. The day they have some support to help them migrate, they will also go out without thinking twice."* (Surendera Dalakoti, Principal, GIC XXX, Interview, 18.02.2020)

Thus, it does not seem that caste has a significant effect on post-school career plans for education, but it does have a significant bearing on limiting young people's desire to migrate.

Accessibility

The premise of this study (detailed in the Introduction as well as the Background chapters) is that mountain regions are fragile and vulnerable due to their geographical and geological features, and the increasing pressures from climate change, economic changes, and changes in population and lifestyle (Bhadra & Khanal, 2002; Jain, 2010; Macchi & ICIMOD, 2010). This biophysical fragility directly impacts the socio-economic vulnerability of mountain people (Macchi & ICIMOD, 2010). Mountain communities face difficulties in accessing social services because of the difficult terrain and inadequate representation in governance (Kohler & Maselli, 2009). One of the constraining features that comprise these mountain specificities is accessibility, which captures the elements of distance and mobility (Pandey & Jha, 2012). Accessibility emerges as an extremely significant influence on the aspirations of youth in the

study. Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data highlights that the physical features of the villages, in terms of accessibility, have a significant bearing on the level and the nature of aspirations of young people. Before embarking on a discussion on the findings regarding access and aspirations, an overview of the physical features of the study area is in order.

Figure 21 shows the distribution of schools (number of schools in boxes) in different blocks of Almora which were part of this study.
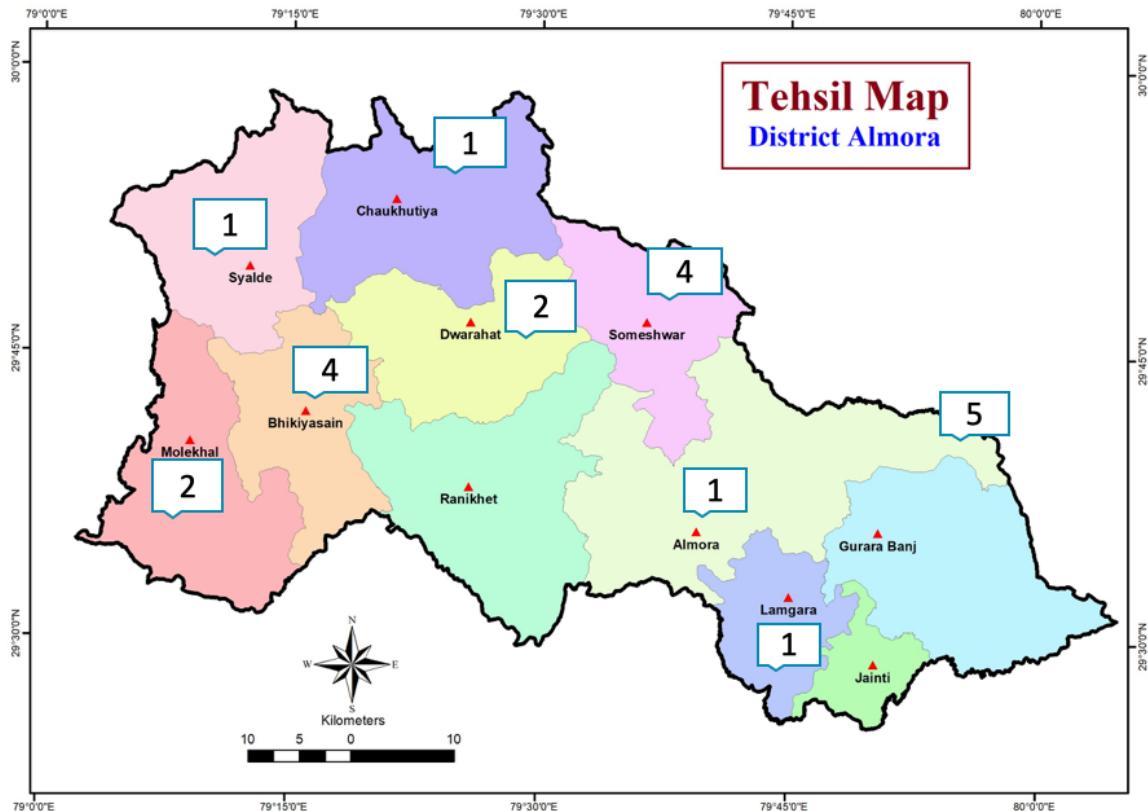
Figure 21*: Block-wise distribution of schools;Source: Almora.nic.in*
Source: Almora district administration; [27] modified by the author

Almora town (Almora on the map) is the district headquarter and centre of all administrative activity. Corresponding to Figure 21, Table 6 shows the average distance of the schools in each block, from the district headquarters.

---

[27] Almora district administration; website: www.almora.nic

Table 6: *Distance of school blocks from Almora district HQ*

Block	Average Distance from Almora HQ (in km)
Hawalbagh (on map as Almora)	24
Bhaisiyachhana (on map as Almora)	35
Takula	36
Lamgara	50
Dwarahat	53
Chaukhutiya	88
Bhikiyasain	100
Shadley	133

During the FGDs, a notable disparity emerged in the clarity of career and education plans among youth from different schools. Qualitative exploration revealed that youth attending schools farther from urban centres exhibited less awareness about their educational and career choices. Understanding this difference requires some background on the state of infrastructure in Uttarakhand, which has seen limited and uneven public development. This disparity is most evident in the underdeveloped infrastructure of hills compared to plains, particularly in electricity, roads, and irrigation (Mittal et al., 2008a). In Almora, infrastructure development is concentrated around the district headquarters, Almora town, where essential facilities such as education, healthcare, transportation, and communication are centralized. This accessibility benefits villages closer to the headquarters, while remote areas struggle with inadequate transportation and communication networks. Youth in high-altitude, remote villages have limited access to reliable media channels, and consequently, lack crucial information about higher education and career opportunities. Many are misinformed about their eligibility for higher education and suitable career paths. For instance, in some schools, students studying humanities expressed interest in engineering careers when asked about their career aspirations.

"*You will observe that the schools near the town or the road, the standard is a little better there. Since the students have exposure there, they visit Almora and have access to the internet.*" (Kamla Negi, Teacher, Government Girls Inter College (GGIC) XXX, Interview, 08.02.2020)

"*The Internet is a far cry, sometimes if one doesn't live close to the road, you don't even get network to receive or make calls. All these big talks of digital India are just talk... all in the air... politicians can get on a stage and blabber anything; the reality doesn't change with*

that. Today this is the reality, that most of these students do not have smart phones, and even if they do, once they're in their home, they will not get any network. It is unimaginable to you perhaps, but that's how it is here. Now imagine!" (Suresh Pant, Teacher, GIC XXX, Interview, 27.01.2020)

During data collection, I observed that the quality of teaching varies significantly with the accessibility of schools. Teachers in schools closer to Almora town were more engaged with their students, which was reflected in the students' active participation and confidence during discussions, in places like Takula, Bhaisiyachhina, and Hawalbagh. These students cited their teachers (*'sir or madam log'*) as their primary source of career advice, indicating proactive guidance from teachers in these schools. In contrast, students in more remote schools like Syaldey were less confident in their responses, requiring more effort to elicit participation. These schools are situated farther from towns and major roads. Additionally, teachers in these remote schools often expressed frustrations regarding their postings, far from their families for extended periods.

The Department of Education in the Government of Uttarakhand classifies areas of posting for teachers into categories: *durgam* (difficult to access, remote schools), and *sugam* (schools in easy-to-access areas). For schools falling in the 'difficult to access' category, it is not easy to find a qualified teacher willing to go to such remote areas, and thus they are often short on teaching staff. Teachers posted in remote areas face challenges with accessibility too. A principal posted in such a school narrated his challenges:

> *"I am living in staff quarters. Also, you can see I live alone here. Once the school is out you are all on your own. When I go home, I bring some rations, and "special" things with me, then once a week you go and stock on vegetables. If they run out or you can't have enough good vegetables, then you're restricted to eating dal. That's it. For shopping also, one has to go to XXX (*small town close by)…. This is the situation here… Posting was supposed to change after 3-5 years. I have been here for 10 years now. It's difficult staying away from family for so long…… Truth be told, my motivation has also gone down. I come from a long line of teachers. My parents were also teachers and that's what motivated me to be a teacher. My wife is also a teacher. When I started my teaching career, I wanted to do something. Now I feel helpless most of the time…. Those who butter up the right people can avoid getting posted in remote areas altogether.. Those of us who are principled, are made to suffer. I do not like thinking like my job is a punishment but with every passing day, it feels more and more like that"* (Sanajy Srivastava, Principal, GIC XXX, Interview, 18.02.2020)

Corruption in teacher recruitment and deployment has been a persistent issue in the Uttarakhand Department of Education. Despite established rules for posting and rotating

teachers, many are assigned to remote areas for prolonged periods, resulting in extended separations from their families, and challenging working conditions (Interviews with teachers, multiple sources). This situation significantly lowers the quality of life for teachers, and undermines their motivation. The lack of access to information, and the absence of motivated guiding teachers, further exacerbates the information and guidance gap for youth in these remote areas.

These findings from qualitative data were also corroborated by analysis of quantitative responses from the survey. Analysis of survey data also confirms that the further away from the district HQ a young person is, the lower their likelihood of pursuing any kind of higher education is[28]. Figure 22 depicts that the probability to pursue any form of higher education declines across gender and caste with an increase in distance from the district HQ in Almora town. This points to the influence of accessibility on the level of educational aspirations.
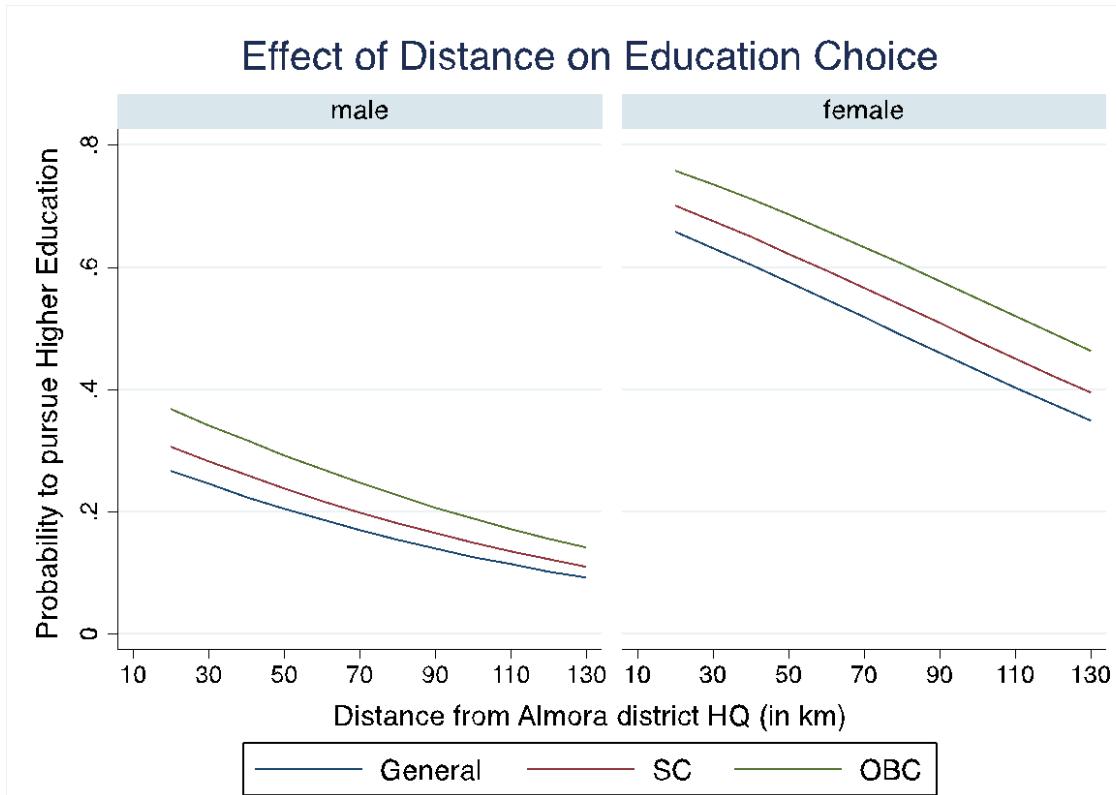
Figure 22: Probability of pursuing higher education with reference to distance from Almora HQ

Distance and accessibility have implications for migration too. The youth in villages farther from the district headquarters are more inclined to migrate out of Uttarakhand entirely, whereas those nearer are more likely to migrate within the district or state (Figure 23).

---

[28] Results from regression analysis are attached in the Appendix 11 Table 3
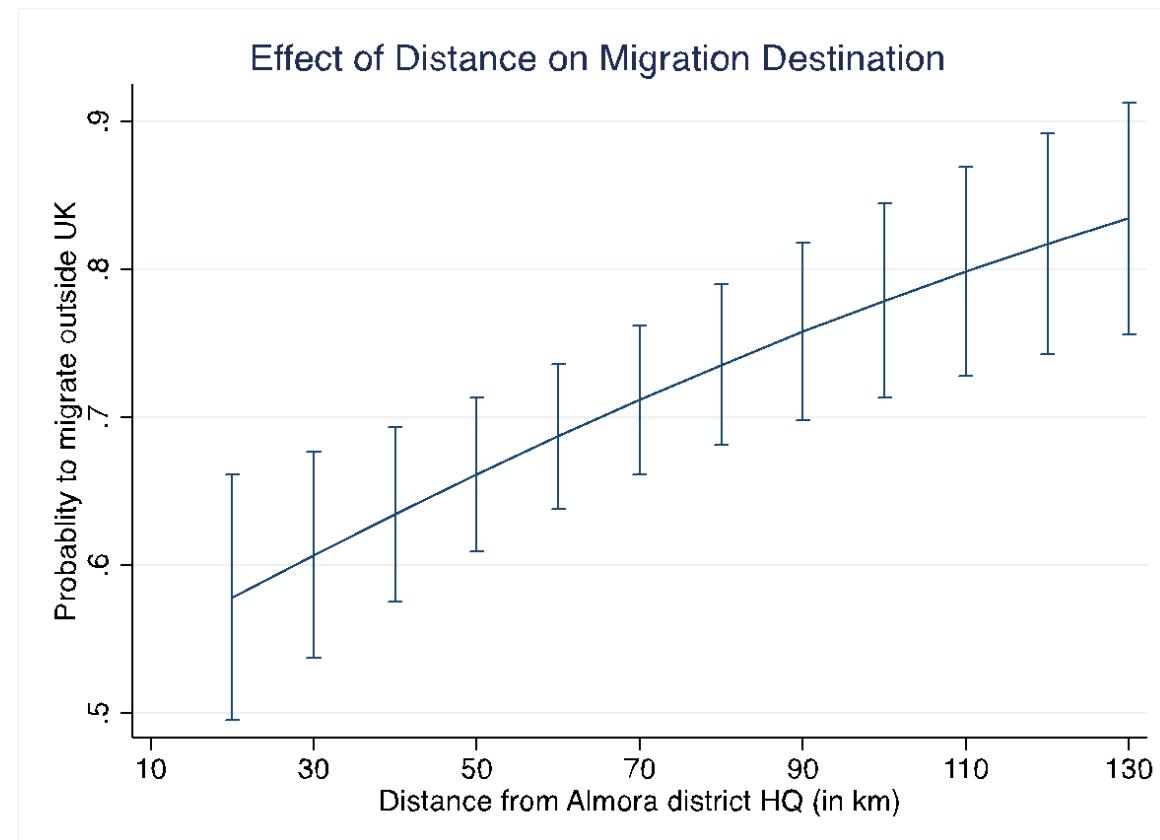
Figure 23*: Probability of migrating outside Uttarakhand with reference to distance from Almora district HQ*

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the educational and career aspirations of the youth in the district of Almora. Although the primary focus is on exploring the more tangible aspects of career and livelihood, the chapter also attempts to describe the general view of the future that youth envision for themselves. Through the survey, the plans and preferences for higher education and livelihood choices are determined. Simultaneously, personal interviews and group discussions with the youth concentrate on their lives, their idea of a good life, how they perceive their current situation, their hopes for themselves, and how they envision their future lives. The aim is to describe concrete post-school choices, and to gain a general sense of the future that young people envision for themselves, especially considering migration as the prevalent path after completing their education. Using regression analysis of survey data and thematic analysis of qualitative data, this chapter highlights the factors that influence aspirations.

There is a clear gender divide when it comes to post-school plans, with boys preferring to find a job in the Indian Army as opposed to studying further, which most girls want to do. In general, the preference to find a government job is universal in the study, and so is the preference to study and find livelihoods within Almora, or at least the state of Uttarakhand. However, the youth do not seem to be extremely optimistic about accomplishing this, and therefore, in qualitative analysis, it is distinctly clear that most of them want to migrate in search of better opportunities. Family income and gender play a key role in determining their plans for higher education. Caste does not seem to play a role in the pursuance of higher education. However, it does seem to deter youth from Scheduled Castes and Tribes from aspiring for migration for education and livelihood, more than their peers from General/upper Castes.

Accessibility emerges as the greatest influence on aspirations for higher education, across gender and caste groups. Poor accessibility, in terms of poorly developed education and communication infrastructure, restricts the aspiration for higher education for students in areas far away from the district headquarters. Lack of access to information media, and lack of proper guidance in schools add to other factors such as poor financial situation and gendered roles, in shaping the aspiration towards education.

The next chapter on 'Aspiration Formation and Capacity to Aspire' follows the aspirations of a few selected cases, and analyses the types of aspirations that they have, following Mkwananzi's (2018) work on aspirations of migrant youth in disadvantaged contexts, and the different individual and structural factors that produce these types of aspirations. Further, it also comments on the capacity to aspire that underlies the different types of aspirations found in the study area.

Chapter 6: *I don't know what to do*: Aspiration Formation and Capacity to Aspire

The previous chapter outlines the immediate educational and career aspirations of school-attending youth. It provides insights into trends but falls short in explaining the formation and shaping of such aspirations. The survey data, which captured aspiration trends related to education and livelihood choices, lacks depth in unravelling why certain choices prevail in the youth's perceptions of fulfilling their general life aspirations. In contrast, qualitative data from personal interviews, focus group discussions, and informal interactions, offer a more profound understanding of youth aspirations and their meta-capacity to aspire. This chapter, primarily drawing on qualitative insights, delves into the formation of aspirations, exploring their types, and the conditions that shape them. Utilising personal interviews and focus group discussions, it examines aspirations through the lens of Faith Mkwananzi's work on migrant youth's aspirations for higher education in disadvantaged contexts, while also scrutinising structural factors constraining the capacity to aspire among the diligent youth population.

6.1 Beyond expressed aspirations

With 38 percent aspiring for undergraduate degrees and 30 percent for army recruitment, a deeper look is needed to understand the factors driving these contrasting yet prevalent educational aspirations. Personal interviews and discussions in groups provide interesting background and help in developing a layered understanding of the education and career plans enumerated in the survey. Even as 38 percent of the youth surveyed state that they would like to pursue higher education through a B.A./B.Sc. degree, the responses in personal interviews and FGDs reveal that many do not have a concrete idea about how their plan to pursue a particular degree relates to a specific career aspiration. Often, this lack of clarity stems from uncertain interests and a limited vision of future career paths.

Among those who want to pursue higher education, 85 percent are girls. Personal conversations with girls reveal that the choice to apply for a B.A./B.Sc. is one of convenience more than a decision driven by a strong career aspiration. While 70 percent of girls from the 15 FGDs expressed interest in applying for a bachelor's degree, they couldn't answer why. Their motivations often stemmed from a lack of alternative options, or social pressure to follow a traditional path. For some (17 percent), pursuing a bachelor's degree was seen as a safe choice as it could lead to a Bachelor of Education degree and eligibility for teaching exams in the future. Those who say they will apply for a degree in pharmacy explain that their family members – either parents or siblings – have told them that the degree has 'good scope' for opening a pharmacy in the village. Girls who want to pursue B.Sc. in Nursing also give similar explanations for their education choices. Thus, most of the young girls who want to pursue

higher education are not clear about the purpose for which they want to earn that degree. FGD discussions revealed limited articulation and reasoning for specific career goals, prompting a closer look at the nature of these higher education aspirations.

Just as with girls' educational choices, boys' interest in Army recruitment doesn't always stem from a long-held dream. For many, it's a path chosen due to limited options or a perceived lack of more viable career aspirations.

> "*Everybody is going to try for the Army, what else will we do? That's the thing we know about and can prepare for… there are not many other options here in the mountains.*" (Ashok Rawat[29], 17, Interview, 11.01.2020)

> "*I don't know, I will try for Army recruitment, what else to do? The problem is I don't know much about anything else. Nor does anyone else. You will see when they talk to you. Pretty much nobody knows what they want to do or what they can do. The Army option also comes up because that's the only thing that we have seen. We have to say something to you when you ask what we will do, so most of us will say Army whereas the truth is most people will be loitering around the villages after school for at least a year or two. After that one or two will be able to clear the Army recruitment, the rest will still be loitering till their father will borrow some money from here and there and open a shop for them and then they will get married and that's it. Those who have siblings or relatives in Delhi will try their luck there. Some relatives will get them a job in some factory or hotel and they will live there forever. As for the rest, their life will pass by just like that. That is the truth. You can't do anything more here.*" (Sateesh, 17, Interview, 10.02.2020)

> "*These boys and girls will have only two choices – Army, teaching, and now some of them are getting into nursing, that's all they know and that's all they've seen.*" (Rekha Tiwari, Teacher, Interview, 18.02.2020)

Teacher interviews in the study corroborate and reinforce this view. They acknowledge that historically, the Army has consistently been the most accessible and successful career path for youth due to a lack of readily available alternatives. As a result, military service has become the default aspiration that youth harbour, often without a thorough exploration of other options (Interviews with Teachers, multiple).

Personal interviews with youth participants reveal how their aspirations are shaped by their diverse personal backgrounds, social contexts, and life circumstances. In the next sections, I analyse the aspiration formation among four young students who participated in the research. First, I explain the aspirations and life situations of these four students, and then look at their

---

[29] All participants' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms except where mentioned otherwise in the accompanying footnote

individual and social structural circumstances to understand how an interplay of the two influences their individual aspirations. All four students initially participated in FGDs, and then I followed up on their personal stories through personal interviews. In two cases, I followed up their interviews with a visit to their village, and conducted interviews and discussions with their family and neighbours. These students were chosen for their diverse life circumstances, social environments, and varying abilities to envision and articulate their future aspirations. This allows for a nuanced understanding of how life circumstances and the capacity to aspire interact in different circumstances.

6.2 Stories of aspiration

"I don't know what to do": Poonam's aspirations

The first encounter is with Poonam who lives in a small village called Masod in Salt, in the Syaldey Block of Almora, which is 134 km away from Almora district headquarters[30]. Reaching here took 4 hours by road, and once the road ends, it takes another 1.5 hours to hike up the hill to reach Masod. It was not an easy place to reach. The school that Poonam attends is in a dilapidated condition, without any electricity. There are only 54 students in the entire school in classes 6th to 12th. The 3 teachers who teach in the school were incredibly surprised to see me and the RAs in the school, even though the visit was planned. The principal of the school later told me that he didn't think anyone would come because the school is so remote and difficult to access. '*You would get lost and give up, we thought'*, they admitted to me. Here is a glimpse of my interaction with Poonam.

"...I will apply for B.A. Hindi.

Why do you want to study Hindi and not anything else?

Because I have heard it's easy. I know Hindi. I can do that. What else can I do? All my friends will also be applying for B.A. Hindi only. I am not sure how I will fill out the form but when everyone applies, I will also apply with them.

What do you want to become after studying Hindi in college?

I don't know. What can one do after studying Hindi?

You tell me, you are the one who wants to study Hindi.

---

[30] A map of Almora district and distance of blocks from Almora HQ has been provided in previous chapter 5 on page

Because Hindi is easy! Rest is too difficult. I like to think I can also study something that will get me a job in an office, but I don't know what to do about that. I just want to go to Delhi to my mother.

Your mother is in Delhi?

Yes, I live here (in the village) with my grandparents. My mother lives in Delhi.

What does she do there?

She works in a garments' factory. She stitches clothes. I have two sisters; one is younger and one is older than me. They live in Delhi with my mother. My elder sister started working in the factory with my mother. She completed her 12th here. The younger one doesn't do anything now. She was studying in the 9th class here in school with me, but then she kept falling sick. So, mummy took her to Delhi with her. We were having problems looking after her. She doesn't go to school there yet, but maybe she will start next year. She left the 9th class halfway through. My father passed away a long time ago. Must be 10 years now. He was sick for a long time and never recovered. She (mother) sends money, and we can manage here. My grandparents are quite old but three of us can manage the house. Mummy often says she will call me to Delhi soon, but someone needs to be here with my grandparents also.

What does your family say about your education?

Nothing. Mostly they are supportive. Mummy told me if I can get admission to a college, she will manage to pay fees somehow, but I don't know what else to do other than apply for B.A.. I don't know what to do. What else is there to do? The more I think about it, the more I feel I just want to go to Delhi and work with her. Then at least I can help mummy and we will have more money to take care of things. (Poonam Mehra, 17, 14.02.2020, Village Masod, Salt, Block Syaldey)

"*I thought of being a lawyer but it's too difficult*": Kamal's aspirations

Kamal is from a village called Bheta which is at an altitude of 1430m, in Lamgara block, and 54 km away from Almora district headquarters. It is also a difficult location to reach because access to Bheta by road ends about 5 km away from the village, and one has to hike on foot to reach.

"I don't know, I used to think I wanted to be a lawyer when I was in 9th class, but then I realised it's very difficult to become a lawyer. I asked one of the older guys from our village. He moved out to Chandigarh a few years back and works in a sugar factory there. I asked him about what is needed for studying law. He asked someone else and told me about it. There's an entrance [exam] and you have to fill the forms with fees and all, and the biggest of all [challenges] is that you need to know English. There's one entire section on English

comprehension. How am I going to learn enough English to give an exam? By the time I learn English, it'll be too late… then I thought about it." (Kamal Dhoni, 18, Interview, 12.02.2020)

Kamal studies Humanities in grade 12 at Government Inter College, Basantpur. This school offers classes from grades 6 to 12 and faces a severe shortage of teachers. With 154 students enrolled, there are only 5 teachers responsible for teaching all subjects to the seven grades. Only 2 of these teachers are qualified to teach the 11th and 12th grades. However, due to the lack of other qualified staff, the remaining 3 teachers also teach these grades. The school has only one section for Humanities, and does not offer any sections for Commerce and Science. Located in a remote area, the school is not easily accessible by road. The school principal explains that the nearest exam centre is in a nearby small village-town called Jainti, which is 60 km away from the school. Students have to walk almost 20 km back and forth to write exams there because the school is located in an area not entirely connected by road. For people in this area, Jainti is the closest small town. During data collection, Kamal's school stood out, having some of the worst conditions observed. One of the walls has caved in, and the roof has collapsed, rendering the entire structure too unstable for studying inside. Consequently, all classes are being conducted outside on the ground, with all the students sitting on the ground. The principal informed me that this is one of the schools classified as *durgam* (difficult to reach) and low on priority for the education department, with everything-from structural repairs to deployment of teachers. His attitude also seemed to be that of a person who didn't care too much about his duties. The students who participated in the FGD didn't seem to be well-informed about what they wanted to do and what their options after school were. Many of them seemed seriously misinformed. For instance, some girls expressed their interest in applying for tests like engineering and nursing, which require a science background, while they are studying humanities in school. This is the background of Kamal's schooling. He belongs to the Scheduled Caste group. His family consists of his parents, both of whom work on their farm, and one elder sister who stopped studying after completing her schooling. She wanted to go to college but could not go to I town to fill out the application form in time. She also did not secure good marks in her 12th grade. The financial situation of the family is poor. The main occupation of the family is farming. Kamal's parents sometimes get jobs as manual laborers for public works with the Government of I's national employment guarantee scheme. Their monthly income is less than 10,000 rupees. When asked about who helps him make decisions related to education and career and where he gets information about these, Kamal simply replied, "*nobody in particular as such*" and that he gets information from "*just from here and there*". The family is one of the few families in the village with no migrant family members.

A *jawaan* AND a *kisaan*, why not?: Karan's story

Karan lives in a village called Maniyagar, which is only 15 km away from Almora town. His father runs a grocery shop by the main road running between his village and I town, and their house is also by the road. He is the youngest of 4 children, with two elder sisters and one elder brother. His eldest sister is a graduate who studied in the Almora campus of Nainital University, and is now married. His second sister is a postgraduate from Nainital University and worked for three years with Seva Nidhi, an NGO, where she was part of a project on women's empowerment and livelihood. Now she is preparing for entrance exams for government jobs. Karan's elder brother is pursuing his M.A. in Sociology in Haldwani. His father completed his schooling, while his mother only studied till 8th grade. The parents both kept repeating that they have supported their children in whatever they wanted to do, and will do the same with Karan. They also keep reiterating that they don't have the knowledge and information to guide any of them, but rely on teachers in the school to give them some guidance.

Karan is one of the three participants in the research who want to join the Army through the National Defence Academy (NDA), which is the joint defence training institute of the Indian Armed Forces. NDA trains cadets to become officers in one of the three services of the Indian armed forces – Army, Navy, and Air Force. The cadets graduate with a B.Sc. in Computer Science.

> "… *I got to know about NDA from an elder brother from the village. He works in an IT company in I. He told me that there is tremendous hard work in being a soldier and the perks are negligible. It's better to work a little harder towards a better life as an Army officer and NDA offers that. Then my brother also told me the same when I discussed it with him, that I should prepare for NDA entrance. He also told me that it's difficult to make it through the test, but then, I think anything that has a good outcome is difficult. That's what everyone here says about anything good anyhow, that it's difficult. That's how they say JEE entrance also is. My parents said, 'do whatever it takes, we are with you.' My sister helps me in preparation. I watch videos for preparation on her phone also. My brother also! Whenever he comes home from Haldwani, he brings a lot of study and practice material from bookshops and coaching centres there. He also downloads many videos on the entrance exam and interview preparation on his phone before coming to the village. I watch videos to improve my English and talking style. That matters a lot. Personality… My siblings are the most supportive. Sometimes, I feel down and think maybe I can't do it, but then my siblings remind me that I can, I must just keep trying. They also say it's okay if I don't get in one attempt, I must be ready to fail and try again. They are very supportive and are encouraging me to dream higher all the time.*" (Karan Joshi, 17, Interview, 22.01.2020)

On being asked about opportunities for young people in the mountains, Karan is quick to say agriculture, which is surprising since almost all the students surveyed and in FGDs explicitly

expressed their averseness towards agriculture. He says mountains have unique climate and geography which are good for both farming and tourism, but not the usual 'open a hotel and let anyone come' kind of tourism. Instead, he talks about farm stays where people can come and experience farming with local people and live as locals do. This would make them understand the problems of mountains better as well. Maybe Uttarakhand politicians should come and live with us for a week, and they would see our lives and our problems, he says. Would he be interested in agriculture? "*Of course! That's my plan. Once I retire from the Army or even before, once I accumulate enough money, I will get some people to work on our land, so that we can supply fresh organic produce to cities like Dehradun. Why would anyone leave so much land? After all, both a jawaan[31] and a kisaan is equally important for the country*". That's his plan in the long run.

"Maybe I can?": Sangeeta's story

Sangeeta is a student of Commerce at Government Inter College (GIC) XXX, a co-educational school located in the very fertile Someshwar valley of Almora. She is unusually conversational for girls her age in Almora villages. Generally, all the girls that I have encountered during this research are more introverted, and not quite open to talking in the first meeting. There are some exceptions, of course, and Sangeeta is one of them. She comes from a nearby village, where she lives with her grandmother, mother, and younger sisters. Her father works as a peon in a lawyer's office in Delhi – a job he has held for the last 15 years. She is the middle of three sisters. Her elder sister works with a newspaper in Noida, an industrial town in the National Capital Region. Her sister completed her bachelor's degree in Hindi from Almora, but couldn't initially find a job in Almora or Delhi. Through someone he knew in his workplace, her father found her a job as a typist in Delhi, but she was not happy and did not want to do that for long. At the advice of one of her father's colleagues, she pursued a diploma in journalism through distance learning, while also working as a typist. She eventually landed a job in a Hindi daily, and now lives with her father in a small, rented house in Delhi. When asked about what she wants to do after school, Sangeeta is quick to reply that she wants to become a lawyer. She hears about the work they do in her father's office and likes it, and thinks she would like to do something similar herself. I cajoled her about how she will go about it, and she replied with flair – "*pehle toh English theek karni padegi, phir CLAT doongi*" (first, I will have to improve my English, and then appear for CLAT (Common Law Aptitude Test), which is the national entrance exam for qualifying for studying law in a university in India). Sangeeta is confident that she will be able to do it, but wants to learn English first, which she plans to go to Delhi for

---

[31] Jawan means a soldier and Kisan means a farmer in Hindi. *Jai jawan, jai kisan* is a popular slogan given by the second prime minister of India in 1965 during the time India was fighting a war with Pakistan while going through food shortage. This slogan, which was given to enthuse soldiers fighting at the borders and farmers to produce more food grains, and has stood the tests of time and remains popular in Indian public and political speak

after finishing school, and to prepare for the CLAT. She says her father is very happy that she wants to study Law and was the one who suggested it as an option. Her father encourages all of them to do something. "*Kucch toh karo"* (You must do something) he says constantly, she says. Her younger sister is only in 6th grade right now and she already has the thought that she must learn English. Sangeeta agrees and feels it is quite important, while encouraging her sister to learn more English at home. "*English ke bina toh kuch nahin hoga na. Matlab kaam toh chal sakta hai lekin English aani chahiye."* (Nothing is possible without English! I mean one can, of course, make do without it, but one must know English for a good career.) She is smart enough to summarise. Sangeeta's father is quite supportive of his daughters' dreams. His unwavering support shines through in the small loans he's secured, both from a fellow Uttarakhandis' collective in Delhi, and from his colleagues who hold him in high regard after years of dedicated service. Sangeeta says she wants to have her own law firm eventually, and do something for the farmers in her village also. "*Itni saari cheezein hain yahaan jo shahar mein supply kar sakte hain, but logon ko tez hona padega… contract bana ke kaam kar sakte hain na kal ko."* (There are so many possibilities with agriculture here, so much produce that can be supplied from here to people in the cities, but people here will have to become sharper… for example, we should have proper legal contracts made and then supply things with that.) "Maybe you can do it one day" I tell her and she smiles and says "*Maybe I can*" with a shy shoulder shrug.

6.3. Types of aspirations

Mkwananzi (2018) has studied higher education aspirations of marginalised young migrants in South Africa, conceptualising these aspirations as arising at the intersection of varying degrees of agency of young persons, and the influence of structural factors surrounding them. Agency varies from low to high, and structural factors can have a positive or negative bearing on the aspirations formed.

Frustrated aspirations

Aspirations forming at the intersecting continua of negative external and internal influences are frustrated aspirations (Mkwananzi, 2018). Low levels of individual agency and negative influences of external social and structural conditions make way for frustrated aspirations, which is how Poonam's aspirations can be described.

Poonam shows significant lack of clarity regarding her continued education after school and her career aspirations. Her career goals remain largely vague, expressed as a desire to have an 'office job'. Similarly, her thoughts regarding further education are limited to pursuing a bachelor's degree in Hindi. This choice appears to be driven by social conformity and not out of a personal interest. Poonam perceives a bachelor's degree as a means of maintaining peer

support and guidance within her social circle, while pursuing this higher education pathway. Notably, she doesn't know the purpose of pursuing this degree, or its utility in relation to fulfilling her vague aspiration of an 'office job'. At the same time, she is also conscious about her lack of access to any other opportunities and resources to reach this goal, which leaves her frustrated. Ultimately, this lack of access leads her to consider going to Delhi and joining her mother in working as a factory worker.

Her aspiration for higher education and the last resort to *'just go to Delhi'* both stem from negative external influences and a low level of individual agency, representing negative internal influences. The negative social and structural conditions she faces – lack of exposure and access to information, and living conditions under poverty – hinder her understanding of how to achieve her goals. She has low confidence in her ability to determine a career path. Having endured the personal tragedy of losing her father at a young age, and not having a parent living with her, further diminishes her self-assurance. Moreover, she feels a sense of responsibility to care for her grandparents in lieu of her mother, who she perceives as working hard enough to provide for the family. She feels compelled to help the family. These negative external influences and negative internal influences come together to produce what has been termed frustrated aspirations by Mkwananzi (2018). Frustrated aspirations happen when low agency is accompanied by negative structural influences in such a way that opportunities seem impossible (Mkwananzi, 2018). For Poonam, both the educational aspiration as well as the alternative to work in a factory after school, are frustrated aspirations and not aspirations formed under positive conditions.

Resigned aspirations

In situations where positive external structures exist but individual agency or internal factors are not so positive, a person is faced with a situation where they might not feel confident to follow their 'first instinct' aspiration, and rather opt for aspirations that they think are more compatible with their situation. Such aspirations are resigned aspirations, shaped as a result of the resignation of original aspirations.

Kamal's original aspiration is to study and become a lawyer. However, eventually, he expresses the futility of pursuing this career aspiration, and instead settles on a more 'realistic' aspiration of joining the Army.

In Kamal's situation, the external influences are more positive than Poonam's. Unlike Poonam, Kamal had access to information about pursuing a legal career. However, he faced significant barriers: he lives in a remote village in Almora, attends a school with inadequate teachers, and studies in Hindi. Additionally, no one in his family has migrated. The only information he received about studying law came from a villager who could not provide further guidance. The

contradiction between the 'real' desire and the finally 'expressed' choices points to such expressed aspirations about career and education being resigned aspirations, of youth facing multiple forms of disadvantage (Mkwananzi, 2018).

The author also cites Duflo (2012) to explain that low agency can also stem from the anticipation of failure, leading individuals to hold back their effort. This fear is evident in Kamal, who is discouraged from learning English for the law entrance exam because he feels it's too late for him to become a lawyer. Consequently, he shifts his focus to preparing for Army recruitment, where he believes he has a better chance of success, and where the barriers preventing him from studying law do not apply. Thus, he resigns his aspirations in favor of a more achievable goal, knowing others who have succeeded in this path.

However, there are exceptions in the study, exemplified by Sangeeta and Karan, who are outstanding students with well-developed ideas about their educational and career aspirations.

Powerful aspirations

Youth like Karan and Sangeeta have powerful aspirations – aspirations that can be placed at the intersection of positive external influences and high levels of agency. For both Karan and Sangeeta, high individual agency and relatively positive external factors facilitate the development of powerful aspirations.

Karan benefits from more favourable personal and family circumstances compared to Poonam and Kamal. He has better access to learning resources, facilitated by improved internet connectivity, thanks to his brother who studies in a city. All three of his elder siblings are university graduates, and his sister, who lives with him, has work experience with Seva Nidhi, a prominent NGO in Uttarakhand. Karan also lives close to Almora town, providing him with more convenient access to resources and opportunities. His family's economic condition is better than many others in the study, with both his father and sister contributing to the household income. Motivated to change his life, Karan is undeterred by the challenges of pursuing 'good' opportunities, aiming to achieve his goals regardless of local discouragement. This combination of positive external factors and high individual agency enables Karan to pursue a valued career.

To add to the understanding of such aspirations, Mkwananzi (2018) adds that a reference to positive social-structural influences does not mean that the available conditions make it naturally easy for the youth to form such aspirations. Instead, it means that despite the existing conditions, the youth may choose to see potential in other generally challenging environments, and pursue the goal that they value.

Karan is not alone in his ambitions. Among the 30 students from his batch who participated in the survey, and the 12 who joined the focus group discussions, the external constraints they

face are similar. Most of the boys are from the same upper caste group and come from poor backgrounds. Despite facing the same challenges as his classmates, Karan stands out in his determination to pursue a meaningful career. Personal factors, such as a relatively higher level of education in his family, help offset the negative social and structural influences. Being the youngest in a family of university graduates means that Karan gets better guidance and opportunities to study further.

Similarly, Sangeeta and her peers face similar external advantages and constraints, sharing socio-economic backgrounds and level of schooling. However, Sangeeta benefits from the presence of a father, who is a migrant in the city of New Delhi and is extremely supportive of his daughter's potential. She receives information about different career opportunities from her father and her elder sister, who is a college graduate and lives in the city. Both her father and sister share information they gather from living in the city, with Sangeeta. Her father's job as a peon in a lawyer's office introduced her to the legal profession, highlighting the importance of such connections. This exposure has helped her realise her interest in a legal career, understanding its relevance to her surroundings and the opportunities it presents. As a result, she has developed the aspiration to be a lawyer.

A common factor in the powerful aspirations of Karan and Sangeeta is the presence of a family member who has migrated to the city and acts as a channel for exposure to career opportunities. This migration facilitates the flow of valuable information from urban areas, where the family member can observe a broader range of career options and the pathways to pursue them. Such exposure and information are not readily available in the rural villages of the mountains. Like Karan, Sangeeta benefits from an older sibling who is more educated than their parents, and who supports and assists her in exploring her options. The influence of migration on aspirations will be discussed in the next chapter.

Powerful aspirations like those of Karan and Sangeeta are exceptions among the youth in Almora villages. Both have clear, concrete ideas about their education and career, knowing the higher education pathways they will pursue, the livelihoods these will lead to, and how to achieve their aspirations. This clarity reflects their ability to envision how certain pathways increase the likelihood of attaining specific goals. They are more aware than their peers of the necessary actions to reach milestones, and the potential obstacles that could hinder their success. Their capacity to imagine and plan their future sets them apart from most other youths in this study.

This highlights the importance of the ability to imagine and visualise aspirations and the steps needed to fulfil them. However, this ability is rare in this study. Apart from a few exceptions, like Karan and Sangeeta, most students lack powerful aspirations. Many have either resigned

their original ambitions for more 'realistic' goals, like Kamal, or feel frustrated and helpless due to their limited understanding of what they want to do or how to achieve it, like Poonam.

Poonam and Kamal's experiences are not unique in this study. During the course of field research, several other young people expressed either a lack of knowledge regarding how to achieve the career they aspire to, or, an awareness of the education and career pathways they desire yet feel unable to attain, regardless of their efforts. Here are two young people's accounts about their options and situation:

"I don't know, I will try for army recruitment, what else to do? The problem is I don't know much about anything else. Nor does anyone else. You will see when they talk to you. Pretty much nobody knows what they want to do or what can they do. Army option also comes up because that's what everyone here does and we have to say something to you when you ask what we will do, so most of us will say army whereas the truth is most people will be loitering around the villages after school for at least a year or two. After that one or two will be able to clear the army recruitment, the rest will still be loitering till their father will borrow some money from here and there and open a shop for them and then they will get married and that's it. Those who have siblings or relatives in Delhi will try their luck there. Some relatives will set them a job in some factory or hotel and they will live there forever. As for rest, their life will pass by just like that. That is the truth. You can't do anything more here" (Sateesh Bora, 17, Interview, 10.02.2020)

"We don't know much. We hear about a few things from parents and siblings. Sometimes sir tells us some things about career, what all we can do but we don't know how to do those things…..some girls are smart, their parents can help them, like Sangeeta- her father stays in Delhi. He is a little educated also. She will be able to study more. She wants to be a lawyer. I think she will be able to do it… My parents say they will support us but I don't know what can I ask them to support me for…. maybe I can try for teaching after all"* (Kavita Rawat, 17, Interview, 13.02.2020)

Interviews and focus group discussions with the youth reveal that for most, aspirations for public service jobs or careers in the Army are resigned aspirations. Many lack knowledge of their educational and career options, and even when they are aware, their understanding of how to achieve these goals is severely limited. Their ability to discern their abilities, desires, potential, limitations, and options, is restricted. The two excerpts above, from personal interviews with two students who candidly shared their views, are representative of how most interviews and discussions with young people ultimately progress. With a lot of prodding on

'why, how and what if' in discussion on 'trying for *bharti*[32]' and '*will do teaching*' and other similar responses, the responses often culminate into "*humein zyaada kuch pata bhi nahin hai, dekhenge kya kar sakte hain*", which, roughly translated, means 'we don't know much, we'll see whatever figures out'; or, "*aur kar bhi kya sakte hain yahaan*", which means "what else can one do here?". Such phrases and statements are frequently reiterated by young people in discussions and interviews across the 21 schools. These indicate the youth's confusion and lack of clarity about understanding their own selves, their potential, and their confidence in knowing what they could achieve in their lives. For some, it reflects an inability to perceive the pathways for building their envisioned future. However, for most, it signifies a difficulty in translating their aspirations into action. This prompts us to question why young people have a limited view of their aspirations, and what impedes their ability to envision their futures with clarity and confidence. Thus, we now engage in a discussion on how such constrained aspirations are shaped, which also involves examining their capacity to aspire.

6.4 Aspiration formation

At this point, it would do well to recall how different structural conditions and individual agency produce different types of aspirations among youth faced with disadvantage. Faith Mkwananzi (2020) conceptualises four different types of career and education aspirations amongst youth in the context – "marginalisation, vulnerability and disadvantage experienced by the youth", along the continua of positive external influences (social and structural conditions) and low levels of agency (internal influences) – and these operate in the space of 'the Aspirations Window'. The four types of aspirations are: resigned, powerful, persistent, and frustrated aspirations. Resigned aspirations arise from the intersection of positive external influences and low individual agency, while powerful aspirations result from positive interaction between positive structural conditions and high levels of individual agency. Powerful aspirations are clear, positive, and happen when the individual pursues what they value in their lives. Persistent aspirations occur when individuals exercise agency, but social and structural factors impede their realization. Lastly, frustrated aspirations stem from low agency coupled with negative external factors, characterized by low motivation, a lack of hope, and stringent structural conditions.

Two concepts – individual agency and structure – are the foundational factors that influence aspiration formation the most. Also relevant here is the concept of the Aspirations Window, defined as an individual's cognitive world – a zone of similarly placed individuals from whom the individual draws what could be a feasible set of aspirations (D. Ray, 2006). The aspirations

---

[32] *bharti* means recruitment in jobs, especially at lower levels, the term is used for jobs in factories. *Bharti* in Uttarakhand specifically means Army recruitment at the lowest level

formed are within the limits of this window, and therefore, it is imperative to look at the aspirations window of the youth first before analysing the agency and structure. Structural factors are the foundation of the capacity to aspire, and these are discussed later with a discussion on their influence on this meta capacity.

6.4.1 Aspirations window

The Aspirations Window is "formed from an individual's cognitive world, her zone of 'similar', 'attainable' individuals" (Ray, 2002, p. 1). This means that we are more likely to form our aspirations by observing those who we see around us, those who are similar to us. These are the people who influence our aspirations.

"*Individuals who populate my window are the individuals who determine my aspirations.*" (Ray, 2002, p. 2)

Two key features highlighted by Ray are particularly relevant to this study. First, individuals derive their aspirations from the lives, achievements, or ideals of those within their aspirations window – those with whom they can make comparisons, simply because "that's just the way people are." (Ray, 2002, p. 2). Secondly, and significantly relevant for this study, is the issue of who is available to be observed.

With this understanding, when we examine the aspirations window of youth living in villages of Almora district, it provides more clarity on why young people in the study have expressed a preference for a few, limited, education and career futures. The previous chapter enumerates that the most desired career aspiration among youth is to gain public service employment, specifically teaching positions or enlistment in the Indian Army.

This aspirations window is characterised by a limited range of opportunities and successes. Due to limited livelihood options in the region, individuals often choose career paths that offer a higher likelihood of stable income for their families. This sometimes means foregoing further education and applying for direct recruitment in institutions like the Indian Army that do not require youth to have more than a basic school education.

Interviews with multiple groups of participants – teachers, non-government organization workers, and residents of Almora town – reveal that when considering post-schooling future, higher education, and career options, the youth have limited choices. The most common paths for graduating youth are either to attend college and obtain a standard B.A. degree, later contemplating teaching positions, or to attempt direct enlistment in the Army. They also note that a degree is not pursued as a means to any particular career end. Most students do it because they don't know what else to do, and do not want to sit idly at home.

"A degree from these colleges (colleges in Almora) *is useless. Most days college doesn't function, both students and teachers are busy with politics and other nonsense issues. Children close to Almora can still go to the college and mark their attendance. How will the rest go? They have no option, they might enrol for distance learning. You know the result of that… Have you ever in your life met a graduate of Almora campus doing anything anywhere? The best possible case for these degrees is that later you might meet the eligibility for some government job exam."* (Teacher, FGD, 27.01.2020)

The common success stories in villages are of people who have been able to secure entry-level public-sector or government jobs. These are generally people getting recruited as teachers, clerks, or Army soldiers. These are also culturally accepted and dictated pathways for young people (Interviews with teachers, Multiple).

Teaching especially is a preferred and popular plan among girls because of social and family approval for this career choice. There's considerable research on the feminisation of the teaching profession because of reasons embedded in economic development, urbanisation, the position of women in society, cultural understanding of masculinity, and the value of children and childcare (Drudy, 2008). The two key aspects underpinning this feminisation of teaching are the interface between gender, labour, and economics, and the dialogue between the issues of masculinity and femininity in society (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012). According to Drudy (2008), the process of feminisation of teaching is a 'cumulative historical social process' which involves 'subtle patterns of socialisation' (p.312). Previously, studies have also found out how occupational aspirations of boys and girls tend to be reflective of the gender stereotypes – girls wanting to be nurses and teachers, boys opting for more skilled trades (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008; Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Kenkel & Gage, 1983).

In Uttarakhand, like the rest of India, teaching is considered a profession well suited for girls because the work timings are more compatible with other 'womanly' roles, such as being the primary caregiver and homemaker. Additionally, recent reforms in the education department have considerably hiked the pay scales for teachers, making this profession even more attractive (Interviews with teachers and parents). Teaching as a career option remains more popular with girls than with boys.

The Indian Army is the preferred career choice among boys, with 56 percent of the boys surveyed stating this as their priority after finishing schooling. Joining the Army is held in high esteem among boys. As detailed in the background and history chapter, the Indian Army is an established and influential presence in the state, and recruitment to the Army has been a tradition among rural youth. Thus, young boys have grown up watching other young men from their villages harbouring and fulfilling the aspiration to join the Army. This makes this aspiration seem real and feasible for them.

Further, these are the role models or comparable individuals who are accessible for observation in the villages. These young soldiers frequently return to their villages during annual holidays from their duties, allowing younger boys in school to observe the changes they have undergone. Young people witness these soldiers achieving success both in terms of their improved financial circumstances and their overall demeanour, which are enhanced by Army training and service. Many boys stated in group discussions and personal interviews that '*being in the Army just transforms you*'. Similarly, girls who have successfully cleared teaching exams and secured teaching positions are highly respected by everyone in the community. These young women return to their villages during school summer vacations. They have been able to support their parents and younger siblings in attending college, and later find suitable matches for marriage in the cities (Interviews with teachers, multiple sources). The narrative of someone who grew up and studied in a village school, eventually securing a permanent government job, holds immense influence in rural mountain communities. Moreover, the admiration that such young soldiers and women teachers garner from others in the village further enhances the appeal of such achievements. Young people serving as soldiers and teachers are seen as making significant contributions to the community, and continue to be highly esteemed in rural areas (Interviews with teachers, youth, multiple sources). Hence, these visible examples of upwardly mobile individuals populate the aspirations window of youth, and shape their ambitions.

On one hand, these limited choices result from the repeated success of the same options by different generations of youth, which is what makes them popular among the youth in the current study. On the other hand, there is substantial resistance to new options by the community in which the youth are socialized, which deters them from pursuing choices that have not been taken up by the previous generation of youth. The lack of encouragement and support for any other types of aspirations also makes it difficult for people to explore different paths. For instance, Karan asked me not to disclose the fact that he's preparing for NDA to anybody else in his village. He explained that the environment of the village is not conducive to young people trying new things. They will not react positively to the fact that he's dreaming of NDA, which nobody from their village or nearby villages has ever done. He fears they would mock him, and that would affect him. According to him, the village environment is not very open and encouraging towards people who want to pursue something different with their lives. He states,

> "*People here are scared of dreaming of anything, and then they do not like anyone else also trying to dream and do something different. That's why the reactions are always negative. If they know I am trying to clear the NDA exam, they will mock me, and if I can't clear it in one attempt, they will make it so clear to my face that I made a mistake by trying. This would affect me badly even though I know I shouldn't care. Such thinking breaks the will of young people.*" (Karan Joshi, 17, Interview, 22.01.2020)

This thought is also reiterated with anguish by Mukti Datta[33], who is one of the first and few female entrepreneurs from Almora, when she notes:

> "*Nobody here wanted their sons and daughters to take any risks or think of anything new, they all wanted them to be the next BD Pandeys…government job. That used to be the 'pahāṛī sapna'[34] (dream) when I set out of Panchachuli, and sadly it still is the dream. Nothing has changed!*" (Mukti Datta, Entrepreneur, Interview, 06.06.2020)

Thus, the 'resistance to try new things' which seems to be embedded in the culture of village communities, also limits young people's vision of future careers to these few repeated pathways that are seen to be 'respected and approved' in their community. Detailed discussion on the capacity to aspire, later in the chapter, also explores the influence of community and culture on the capacity to aspire.

Finally, another significant element in the aspirations window of youth in Almora is the aspiration for migration. This pathway holds immense influence in the aspirations window. Initially, this aspiration may appear as 'moving out' to attain higher education or to seek 'better jobs in the city'. However, upon deeper exploration, it emerges as a powerful aspiration in its own right. Nonetheless, youth seem hesitant to openly declare migration as their aspiration, and it only becomes apparent during personal interactions. The previous chapter on aspirations and migration choices also highlights that the internal desire of youth to 'move out' and pursue opportunities is at odds with their outward expressions of seeking livelihoods within the mountains. In this chapter, I focus solely on educational and career aspirations, reserving the discussion on the interconnectedness of aspiration and migration for the next chapter.

The youth's aspirations windows, with limited educational and career choices, in rural Almora shape youth aspirations, often leading to resigned aspirations towards public service. These restricted opportunities reflect a broader challenge faced by youth in navigating personal potential and pathways to a fulfilling future. This brings us to a detailed discussion on their capacity to aspire.

6.4.2 Capacity to Aspire

"*Thinking about future-oriented goals requires at least a basic level of capability in relation to being able to anticipate and imagine the future and exercise practical reason.*" (Hart, 2016: p. 327).

---

[33] Mukti Datta (original name) is an entrepreneur & founder of Panchachuli Women Weavers, a for profit collective for local articles hand knitted by local Uttarakhand women
[34] Hindi word '*pahāṛī*' is the adjective for '*pahāṛ*' – mountain and also refers to someone who is from the mountains. The Hindi word '*sapna*' means dream. Thus, the phrase '*pahāṛī sapna*' means mountain people's dream

Hart's observation about the ability to think about future, juxtaposed with the comments made by a senior resident of Almora town about young people's inability to think of aspirations or about future beyond certain limits, bring us to the important discussion on this capability that Hart mentions – this ability to envision future. This ability has been the focus of Arjun Appadurai's work on how culture acts as a capacity, and can be strengthened to help poor contest and alter the conditions of poverty (Appadurai, 2004). In this defining work, he explains that aspirations are formed 'in interaction, and in the thick of social life' (p. 69), and that they are part of some kind of 'system of ideas' that exists within a 'larger map of local ideas and beliefs' (p. 69). They are culturally located. In any society, the ability or opportunity to read the map of its norms to explore the future realistically, allows a person or a group of persons to develop knowledge about combinations of aspirational nodes and pathways. It is this ability that can be interpreted as the capacity to aspire. Appadurai describes the capacity to aspire as the ability to read a 'map of journey into the future' (Appadurai, 2004, p. 76). This means the Capacity to aspire contains the actual know-how, developed by own experiences and those of other actors' immediate social environment, that is necessary to achieve one's aspirations (Laube, 2015). It is a 'navigational capacity which is nurtured by the possibility of real-world conjectures and refutations' and it thrives on 'practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation' (Appadurai, 2004, p. 79). In the context of high education aspirations, Bok (2010) also states that students' capacity to aspire is influenced by their experience, as well as reading and successfully following their map of aspirations, in combination with their confidence to explore unmapped possibilities.

The older participants in the research – teachers, NGO workers, residents of Almora, and parents of young people, recurrently expressed that the youth in the mountains do not know how to aspire. '*Unko pata hi nahi hai sochna kya hai'*, meaning 'they simply don't know how to think' (about the future). According to them, the youth don't have the ability to aspire, and it is not possible to have this ability as long as they stay in the mountains. Their environment (*maahaul*) doesn't enable them to think beyond their daily lives, even more so for girls than boys. On being asked about opportunities and challenges that youth in the districts face, one of the residents of Almora town stated:

> "*They don't have the ability to see the future for themselves. They can't express themselves properly. But if they are trained or guided, they can be very good followers. They are capable of doing anything… Our people can be very good servants, like the colonial times, but they can't be self-employed or entrepreneurs. We just cannot think beyond government jobs. That is the bitter reality of our state and our youth today.*" (Ramesh Pant, 53, Local business owner, 10.12.2019)

This resident was sympathetic to the challenges of young people, and made this observation with reference to policies in the state, not taking into consideration young people's personal development. Similarly, the teachers in school, who spend the majority of their working time with these young people, were also concerned about the lack of confidence in thinking about the future.

> "*They don't have any aspirations. Now you will go and ask, you'll see they don't know anything. They'll just say anything to you because you're taking an interest, you're asking, and what can they say after all about what they want to do or be. They'll mention teaching, joining the Army, or nursing as their aspiration, because that's all they know. One or two students might know what they want to do and how to do it, because they might have some relatives in the cities who can guide them a little. The rest of the others have no clue. They come to school because it provides a routine. Otherwise, they don't think too much (about their lives) nor do they have the capacity to think. And it's not their fault. The environment here is such that no child can think or do anything for themselves.*" (Ramesh Pant, Principal, GIC XXX, Interview, 18.02.2020)

This excerpt is from an intense and emotional conversation with a senior secondary school principal, during which he discussed the shortcomings of the school education system and the social environment of the young people in remote mountain villages. The sentiments expressed here align closely with those shared by multiple teachers, parents, and residents of Almora, who participated in the research. It reflects a prevailing sentiment around the belief that aspirations cannot thrive in the mountains. The older participants in the research hold the strong belief that young people in Almora lack aspirations because they do not know '*HOW to aspire*'. Here, I disagree with their view that the youth are incapable of aspiring. Appadurai's work, which serves as the theoretical foundation for this chapter, notes that it is not that individuals from poorer backgrounds cannot aspire; rather, poverty restricts the circumstances under which they can pursue aspirations (Appadurai, 2004). In other words, poverty minimises the opportunities for experimenting and understanding the connection between different aspirations and the paths leading to them.

Analysing the data, it becomes evident that there is a high degree of confusion among youth regarding their futures and the actions they plan to undertake. However, this does not imply that youth lack the ability to aspire, or that they have no aspirations, as some older participants from Almora oversimplify and suggest. Young people do have ideas about the lives they envision for themselves, and understand the steps they need to take to achieve their goals. However, executing these actions proves challenging due to their individual circumstances, and the lack of adequate development infrastructure and supportive culture in their environment. Their environment impedes their ability to bridge the gap between their future

visions and the immediate actions required to realise them. Therefore, I examined the data to identify the factors that hinder youth from aspiring and compel them to either resign or modify their educational and career aspirations

What forces young people to restrict, resign, modify, or give up their aspirations, thereby giving the impression that they don't know how to aspire? Participants in the research attribute the poor capacity to aspire to different factors, and talk about how the "*maahaul*" in the region is not conducive to developing any aspirations. Interviews are replete with statements like – '*yahaan wo maahaul hi nahin hai'* or '*the environment here is not conducive for aspiring'* when talking about aspirations, or the lack thereof, in the region. *Maahaul*. This Urdu word, commonly used in India, roughly translates to 'ambience' or 'atmosphere' in English. Indians often use the word 'environment' to convey the same meaning. It is frequently used to describe the overall sense of a situation produced by several intersecting factors. As a native Hindi speaker, when I thought about how I use this word, I was surprised at how relevant this word is for my research study. I typically use it to describe the situation or condition of a particular place (such as Delhi) or spot (like my home), not in terms of any specific factor (such as financial, social, or geographical), but rather as a general combination of various factors. Thus, this word encompasses all intersecting elements, and refers to the reality or state produced by their amalgamation at a particular point in time. In this research, I argue that the word '*maahaul*' aptly describes the disadvantaged reality faced by the people living in the rural mountain villages. This reality is a result of the intersection of family-level factors, socio-cultural norms and practices in conservative rural communities, and the developmental disadvantages caused by years of poor governance, policy gaps and political instability in the state. Another key point is that, even though individual and family factors contribute to the social reality in which youth's capacity to aspire is developed, these factors only mitigate or aggravate the impact of structural factors. These individual and family factors are themselves largely influenced by these broader structural factors. Therefore, I argue that this 'environment' or '*maahaul*' is a function of external structural factors which apply to all the participants, irrespective of their individual situations. Poverty is the main factor that impedes the capacity to aspire. In the specific context of Uttarakhand, it is also necessary to discuss the state of development infrastructure. Furthermore, as highlighted by the youth themselves, and in line with the concept of the capacity to aspire, a discussion on culture is also warranted.

6.5 "*Yahaan maahaul hi nahin hai waisa*": the structural factors

"It's not like the cities here. Here everything is a hundred times more difficult… These children work a hundred times harder and achieve a hundred times less than children in the cities… Life is very hard for them, that's why I tell them to not feel discouraged. Their 50 percent is equal to 95 percent marks in Delhi… For children to achieve anything remotely

like children in cities is equal to moving these mountains itself. Mark my words." (*Dr Arvind Dhyani,* Principal, GGIC XXX, Interview, 15.02.2020)

"*Children, of course, learn from the society they live in, from their surroundings. They develop with it and within it. Now here the environment is different.*" (FGD with teachers, Government Inter College, XXX, Block Baisiyachhana, 27.01.2020)

Discussions with Dr. Pande and other teachers (in the interviews and FGD cited here) highlight the importance of factors in young people's surroundings that are beyond their personal control. Despite personal situations, conversations with various participants point to external, structural factors that restrict the capacity to aspire, and thereby limit the aspirations of young people. These pervasive factors, present in the mountainous geography of Almora and to a large extent in Uttarakhand, can be generally analysed.

Teachers, who interact with youth regularly and bear significant responsibility in supporting them to achieve their aspirations, identify some of the factors contributing to the social lives of youth. According to them, poverty, and lack of education and awareness among parents in villages, are the primary reasons behind the lack of aspirations in youth. They believe that young people primarily develop their aspirations within their families, where they learn about their life goals. However, teachers express sympathy towards parents' limitations, and attribute their circumstances to broader developmental challenges beyond their control. Therefore, while guiding youth to the best of their abilities, teachers must also be cautious not to introduce aspirations that may be financially untenable for families, and could lead to disappointment among young people.

"*What CAN they do? It's not their fault also, the situation here is such. They have limited means and money, they can't tell their children what to do, because they are poor, uneducated, and unaware. They wish their children well but their hands are also tied.*" (Ramesh Joshi, Principal, GGIC XXX, Interview, 22.01.2020)

For the majority of people living in the rural areas of Uttarakhand, life is not easy. Teachers describe in detail how the state of governance in Uttarakhand has generally kept rural areas at a severe disadvantage. The absence of proper healthcare, education, and livelihood infrastructure in the villages has consistently kept the quality of life low for the people. Livelihood options, apart from agriculture, are negligible. Further, the digital infrastructure, often purported to be the great equaliser, is poorly developed in the mountains. This obstructs youth from accessing relevant information, which they cannot receive at home or in school.

Poverty & limited maps of aspirations

"*Poverty is many things, all of them bad*" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 184).

Research in multiple domains links poverty with low levels of aspirations (P. Dalton et al., 2010; Flechtner, 2014; Heifetz & Minelli, 2015; Ibrahim, 2011; Lybbert & Wydick, 2018; Serneels & Dercon, 2021). Poverty is one of the major factors that limit the aspirations of people and leads them to be stuck in what has come to be known as the poverty trap (P. S. Dalton et al., 2016; Heifetz & Minelli, 2006; D. Ray, 2001, 2006). Ray (2002) most prominently put forward that poverty is the partial result and partially the cause of aspiration failures. Appadurai (2004) explains that the capacity to aspire is not evenly distributed in society. Developing this capacity involves acquiring the ability to decipher the maps that connect actions with aspirational outcomes, which individuals gain through their own experiences, or by observing the experiences of those around them. Affluent groups can accumulate such experiences more frequently and easily than poorer ones (Appadurai, 2004).

The economic condition of families in rural areas of Almora, like the rest of Uttarakhand, is poor. Survey results indicate that most of the youths in the study come from the lower economic strata of the region. 56 percent of survey participants belong to low-income families, with a monthly family income of less than INR 10,000, while 33 percent have monthly family incomes between INR 10,000-20,000 (for details of households' incomes, see Appendix 13, Table 1). Families rely on small, fragmented subsistence agriculture, and either daily wage labour (also facilitated by MGNREGA) or small shops, to earn their living (Survey data). In some cases, this income is supplemented by remittances from migrant family members. However, even then, the incomes are low, limiting their ability to consider choices beyond this income.

The impact of poverty is further exacerbated by the low level of education in the family. Youth report that parents are the primary influence on all education and career-related choices (Survey data). Most parents and chief wage earners (85 percent) in the study have not received formal education beyond school (For details of parent' education, see Appendix 13, Table 2). Interviews with parents who have not migrated out of villages reveal that all information regarding education at home comes from migrant neighbours who sometimes visit the villages. This limits the relevant information they can provide their children, often leaving them to rely on school teachers for guidance.

Several teachers pointed out that poor economic situations and the inability to actively help students at home hinder young people's ability to develop aspirations beyond their limited means. The impact of poverty can also be seen with analysis of survey data, which reveals that the lower income students are more inclined to stay within the district and the state to pursue any form of higher education, even though higher education options within the district are extremely limited and not even accessible for everyone (see Appendix 9 for the results from regression analysis). The importance of access has been discussed in the previous chapter,

which explains that education is centred in the Almora district headquarters. The logical corollary of poor access to limited education institutions is revealed in survey responses too. Regression analysis with survey data discloses that respondents closer to Almora town are more inclined to continue some form of higher education after school, while the further the students are from Almora town, the less inclined they are to continue education of any kind (see Appendix 11). Such findings are alarming because as Walker & Mkwananzi (2015)'s study on challenges faced by marginalised young people in accessing higher education shows – lack of access to higher education can result in aspiration failure, and perpetuate systemic poverty.

Further, several participants in the study repeat the view '*unhone kuch aur dekha hi nahin hai, toh unhe kuch aur pata bhi nahin hai'* which means that 'they haven't seen anything else around them in their communities, so they don't know anything else (other than the limited career aspirations)'. This brings us to a discussion on the community's stock of experiences or ability to read navigation maps for developing and realising aspirations.

> "*These boys and girls will have only two choices – Army, teaching, and now some of them are getting into nursing, that's all they know because that's all they've seen.*" (Ganga Ram, Principal, GIC XXX, Interview, 10.02.2020)

One acquires the knowledge of *'doing something'* by observing the actors in their social environment. They develop the ability to map out pathways to various successful outcomes by witnessing others around them achieve them. For students to develop their capacity to aspire, their families, other people in their local communities, and those they encounter in their daily lives, must have experience navigating particular fields and pathways (Bok, 2010). There must be a repository of experiences around them so that they can understand the different combinations of possible actions, and the outcomes associated with those actions, by observing the actions of other people around them. This can be termed as the navigation map of aspirations, which provides the cognitive layout of opportunities, along with the possible pathways to them. However, as Appadurai (2004) states, this navigation map only emerges within a social environment where more and more people engage in various activities and share that knowledge with others. People from more affluent and powerful groups often have more experience reading such maps, and the anthropologist argues that "they share this knowledge with one another more routinely" (p. 69). Capacity to aspire ultimately is this navigational capacity (Appadurai, 2004)

The more diverse the education and career options in a community, and the more 'know-how' shared, the more the community will progress and diversify in terms of the careers that individuals pursue.

The previous section highlights how youth career aspirations are limited to a few repeated options. Young people like Sangeeta and Karan, who have access to broader career maps from their migrant families, envision futures beyond 'Army and teaching'. This pattern is also observed among other students with migrant family members. One of the two girls in a sample of nearly 200 students expressed the aspiration to become a doctor. Her father and brother work in a factory in Delhi, and her brother suggested she prepare for the medical entrance exam after she excelled in the 10th grade. Other youths without such individual support observe limited choices made by those around them, setting the foundation for their aspirations. Consequently, their aspirations are confined to what they have seen others achieve.

Some participants do not even have migrant family members who can supply the stories of possibilities, and their collection of cognitive navigational pathways is extremely limited. This limitation restricts their observation to these few career pathways in villages, which they also adopt. Alternative career options do not appear viable or feasible due to poverty and lack of knowledge and confidence to pursue them.

This discussion on poverty and limitations in career and livelihood choices is incomplete without discussing the broader development context of the mountain areas of Uttarakhand in which such conditions have been created and sustained.

Development disability in the region

Poverty and lack of diverse education and livelihood options in Uttarakhand restrict the capacity to aspire for youth in rural villages. This environment is shaped by the broader macro context in which these families live. The impoverished socio-economic conditions of the families in this research result from the poor state of development in the rural areas of Uttarakhand. When the state gained political identity in 2000, there was hope for development to align with the specific needs of mountain regions (B. K. Joshi, 2016; Maithani, 2016). However, the successive governments neglected the mountainous character and adopted the conventional model of development followed in the rest of the country (Chopra, 2014). The idea of development got restricted to road construction which, in retrospect, functioned to facilitate out-migration. "*Sadak bani bas logon ko baahar le jane ke liye.*" (The road was built only to take people out) is something that one hears often in the region. Uttarakhand's governments pushed roads, dams, tunnels, bridges, and mining, into the most fragile areas of the state (Chopra, 2014). 20 years after the formation of Uttarakhand to facilitate and expedite the development of the rural mountain villages, little has changed for the people living in the rural villages. The living conditions in the rural villages are extremely poor. Most households are dependent on agriculture and labour migration remittances (Jain, 2010; Mamgain & Reddy, 2017). Health facilities are poorly developed, especially in villages that are rural and away

from towns (Chopra, 2014; Dhasmana & Dhoundiyal, 2008). Experiencing illness in the mountains and needing medical attention is often accompanied by feelings of helplessness, as expressed in multiple interviews with locals of Almora. It has been noted that poor health facilities are a major push factor for out-migration from mountain regions (Tolia, 2012). The state's education infrastructure has only advanced to the extent of constructing numerous school buildings, without enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Widespread poverty constrains efforts to enhance quality of life. Villagers, NGO workers, and teachers, commonly acknowledge that households with migrants have generally succeeded in lifting themselves out of poverty (Interviews with parents, key informants). Consequently, it's unsurprising that most young boys participating in the FGDs expressed a desire to migrate, often without a concrete plan. Despite the age of digital connectivity, rural areas still face significant challenges with basic mobile network and internet access. Network coverage diminishes once off the main roads, traversing the mountain slopes, and internet reliability remains inconsistent beyond the perimeter of Almora town. Given the backdrop of poverty and inadequate development facilities, the responsibility for fostering an environment conducive to nurturing aspirations does not solely rest with families. The overall state of development infrastructure in rural areas of Almora profoundly impacts every aspect of daily life. Rather than facilitating access to resources that aid in developing capacity to aspire, it impedes such development for young people.

Focusing on the youth and their aspirations, certain areas of development infrastructure are particularly relevant, such as access to information and education. Access to relevant information and high-quality education is crucial for creating an environment where young people can gain meaningful knowledge and explore the world. The youth themselves highlight this aspect when discussing their vision for a future where they can access good internet to explore all possible information and opportunities for self-improvement.

Although almost all households have access to television, it is worth noting that there is no evidence suggesting that media exposure through TV influences aspirations related to education and career. This could be partly because TV is primarily viewed as an entertainment medium, and with outdated programming, it is becoming irrelevant to the younger generation. In India, all information dissemination, communication, and administrative processes regarding education and job applications, are conducted through the internet. However, internet access is not universal and often presents challenges. Most youths reported accessing the internet for "serious matters," such as filling out job applications or college admission forms, primarily by going to internet cafes in Almora town. Relatives and siblings in cities, towns, and urban areas keep young people informed about openings, and then the young students, generally in groups, go to Almora town and apply with the help of internet cafe owners.

The importance of the education system in supporting young people to aspire has been unanimously emphasised by every category of participant in the research, particularly by educators with a clear view of how the system fails the youth. As documented in the 'Background and History' chapter, and discussed in depth in the last chapter on aspirations, the school education in rural areas of Uttarakhand is inadequate to support youth in making decisions about the future. Schools remain understaffed and ill-equipped to guide students regarding higher education and career decisions.

Community culture

The key point that Appadurai (2004) makes in his work is the link between culture and the future. Aspirations are part of the future-oriented capacities of people, and he emphasises the link between culture and the capacity to aspire, and how both influence each other and can influence the future. He states that aspirations are part of the "wider ethical and metaphysical ideas that derive from larger cultural norms" so that aspirations develop socially, and are part of the larger system's ideas about good life (Appadurai, 2013, p. 187). Capacity to Aspire itself is a collective cultural capacity. He explains, in the context of poverty reduction and development, that for any real change to take place for a community, its culture must provide the ground for future-looking aspirations. It is the cultural rituals that build cultural consensus, and for any effort for future looking development to take place, it is these cultural rituals that have to provide the space for change to take place (Appadurai, 2004). In the context of aspirations for higher education aspirations, Bok (2010) also states that students' capacity to aspire is influenced by their experience, as well as reading and successfully following their map of aspirations, in combination with their confidence to explore unmapped possibilities. Previous sections have focused on how development disadvantages, resulting in poverty and having a low stock of experiences in the community, limit the capacity to aspire. For this collective community to develop, youth need the confidence to explore new education and career opportunities in the region. The key question to ask here is: where does this confidence to explore unmapped possibilities come from?

In a review of literature on youth aspirations and their determinants, Jennifer Leavy & Sally Smith (2010) cite research that states that social influence on youth aspirations tends to be stronger in rural areas, because of smaller community size, and relative isolation. Further, there's also research in place to suggest that this influence is stronger in communities that are more isolated, with limitations in access to education facilities, and this dissuades young people from pursuing new opportunities and experiences (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996 cited in Leavy & Smith, 2010). This influence becomes evident when girls discuss what they dislike about village life. In all focus group discussions and personal interviews, a common theme of resentment against their community's cultural norms and thinking emerged. Nearly all the

students who are part of group discussions explained the community's attitude towards themselves in words that translate into 'close minded', 'restrictive', 'conservative', 'jealous', 'resistant to change', 'old', and 'out of date'. This sentiment is particularly strong among youths wanting to explore new opportunities. Entrepreneurship, for instance, is not encouraged and is sometimes actively discouraged by village elders. In contrast, professions like 'teaching' and 'nursing' for girls are valued in the community. When asked about the reason why many girls want to become teachers, a retired principal from Almora explained:

> *"... Teaching seems safe, secure... Several girls from the area got teaching jobs... Also, pay scales have been revised, so in the future, it's easier to find a public servant boy for marriage, and future in-laws become agreeable... Parents think they are supportive (of aspirations) but to be supportive, you have to act also when the time comes to support the children, which doesn't happen. They are supportive in theory, only if the child goes for options that they think are good, safe options... If anyhow a parent takes a risk and sends their girls to study, god forbid the girls fail, they will not let them live in peace. The problem with mountains is that the people are living in the past."* (Umesh Joshi, Retired Principal, 07.12.2019)

Similarly, when both boys and girls were asked to elaborate about the community's attitude towards youth who do not want to become teachers or join the Army and want to try new career opportunities, they commented on how such aspirations are not encouraged by older people in the community.

> *"They will name all the people who tried to start a business and failed, along with the names of their last seven generations, and taunt you – you think you are the first genius to think of starting a business?"* (Arjun Bisht, 17, FGD, 08.02. 2020)

> *"Girls who fought with families and went out were named and shamed all over the place. They are so old, people in the village, and still they said such bad things about them. Just because they did not understand what they were doing. Now when the same girls come back home, smarter, with good jobs, their mouths are shut... Behind their backs, they still talk sometimes."* (Neha Joshi, 17, FGD, 24.01.2020)

From these interactions with the youth, it is evident that the culture in the mountain communities doesn't provide appropriate conditions for young people to explore aspirations and options outside of those that have been traditionally observed and approved by the community. A harmful consequence of this kind of culture is that it instils fear of failure in youth, and prevents them from trying anything new. For example, in Karan's case, he is also scared of the comments and mocking from the community he might face if he does not succeed in getting into the NDA, because his aspiration will be deemed 'too high', and he will be mocked for even thinking he could succeed in doing something that nobody else from his

village has attempted before. Several others also shared in private conversations that they have some "backup plan" if they cannot succeed in Army exams, but were hesitant to share these openly as they felt it would lead to mockery.

This fear prevents young people from sharing useful information, limiting peer-to-peer guidance. Consequently, instead of motivating each other to pursue new and rewarding opportunities, similarly placed youth remain fearful of failure and new attempts.

For young people, conservative outlooks in their village communities, which frown upon new options, push them further into confusion about their lives, and limit their capacity to think and make new connections. This is particularly difficult for girls who are subject to much harsher scrutiny from their village communities. Their agency to aspire and act outside of these oft repeated and approved choices is severely restricted. The cultural obstruction to aspirations and the capacity to aspire was passionately and resentfully put forth by an outspoken girl in one of the group discussions:

> "…elders here frown upon anyone doing anything that seems new to them. They will start making gossips about anyone doing anything new whether it's someone trying to start a business, or a new course that they don't know about, they have something to say about everything. Whether it's jealousy or their fear of doing something new, doesn't matter. What it does is break the morale of the person trying to do something! They don't understand that if one person from the village succeeds in doing something, it helps many others, indirectly. If someone from our village could become a lawyer or doctor, we'd also feel that it can be done but no! That never happens because here the environment is such that no one can do anything……. Even your own parents who are willing to support will come under their influence at some point and start putting pressure on you" (Kavita, 17, Interview, 20.01.2020)

6.6 Conclusion

Young people are restricted into aspiring within a limited set of education and career pathways that they have had the opportunity to observe around them. Their aspirations window is populated by 'more of the same' career pathways which are also valued by the community.

Poor quality of education and support available at both home and schools (which stem from infrastructural gaps in policies regarding education and livelihoods in the region), and the absence of options of good quality and affordable pathways for higher education or vocational skills, force the majority of them to modify their aspirations to something that is more 'doable'. Further, several aspects of culture restrict youth from expressing and realising their aspirational

thoughts that digress from the culturally set, repeated, and approved pathways. Interaction with many older participants, and especially the youth themselves, indicate how the culture in their community has a bearing on their aspirations, and also, to some extent, on their ability to imagine the type of life they would like. Aspirations and capacity to aspire are future looking and oriented towards change. Even more importantly, they are socially embedded. This is where the role and influence of community culture on the capacity to aspire is fundamentally rooted.

I argue that despite the challenges in their environment, the youth do possess the capacity to aspire. However, it is structural limitations, such as poor quality of education, cultural restrictions, and lack of options in their surroundings, that hinder them from converting this capacity into concrete choices. This perpetuates the cycle of confusion and frustration among youth, is leading to the breaking of mental morale, and undermines the confidence to discover and follow new educational and career aspirations that differ from the norms of the community and region.

There is a strong common element in the powerful aspirations of some youth – the presence of a migrant family member who essentially shares the experience gathered in the cities. This facet of the migration-aspirations relationship is analysed in the next chapter (Chapter 7: Migration and Aspirations), where migration and its impact on aspirations and aspiration setting will be discussed in depth.

Chapter 7: What CAN we do here?: Migration and Aspirations

This chapter delves into the aspirations of youth in relation to migration from the state, employing Carling's framework to discern whether migration holds instrumental or intrinsic value for them. Drawing insights from preceding chapters, the analysis integrates findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of aspirations and migration within the mountainous geography, employing Hein de Haas' migration theorization as a guiding framework. In the prevalent migration landscape of the region, the framework explores how migration shapes the aspirations of youth who have not migrated. While survey data provides a broad overview, the chapter primarily relies on qualitative insights from focus group discussions and personal interviews with school-going youth. Structurally, the chapter initially explores aspirations for migration and the perceived value of migration for the youth. It subsequently analyses migration's influence through the lens of de Haas' aspirations and capabilities framework, illuminating how widespread migration from the mountains impacts the aspirations and capabilities of non-migrating youth. This approach considers both migration and non-migration as viable outcomes, irrespective of their future migration decisions.

7.1 What are the migration aspirations: intrinsic or instrumental?

Migration inclination

The initial research aimed to explore the interest among young people in migrating from their villages after completing their schooling. While definitive migration decisions will be made later in their lives, the research sought to gauge their interest in higher education and employment opportunities, which are central to the study. These interests were used as proxies to understand potential future migration inclinations. The survey included questions about their preferred destinations for higher education and where they desire to work in the future. Chapter 5, which discusses higher education and career aspirations, elaborates on these aspirations and the potential migration decisions associated with them. The findings from Chapter 5 regarding migration inclinations for education and career decisions are summarised in Figure 24 (next page).
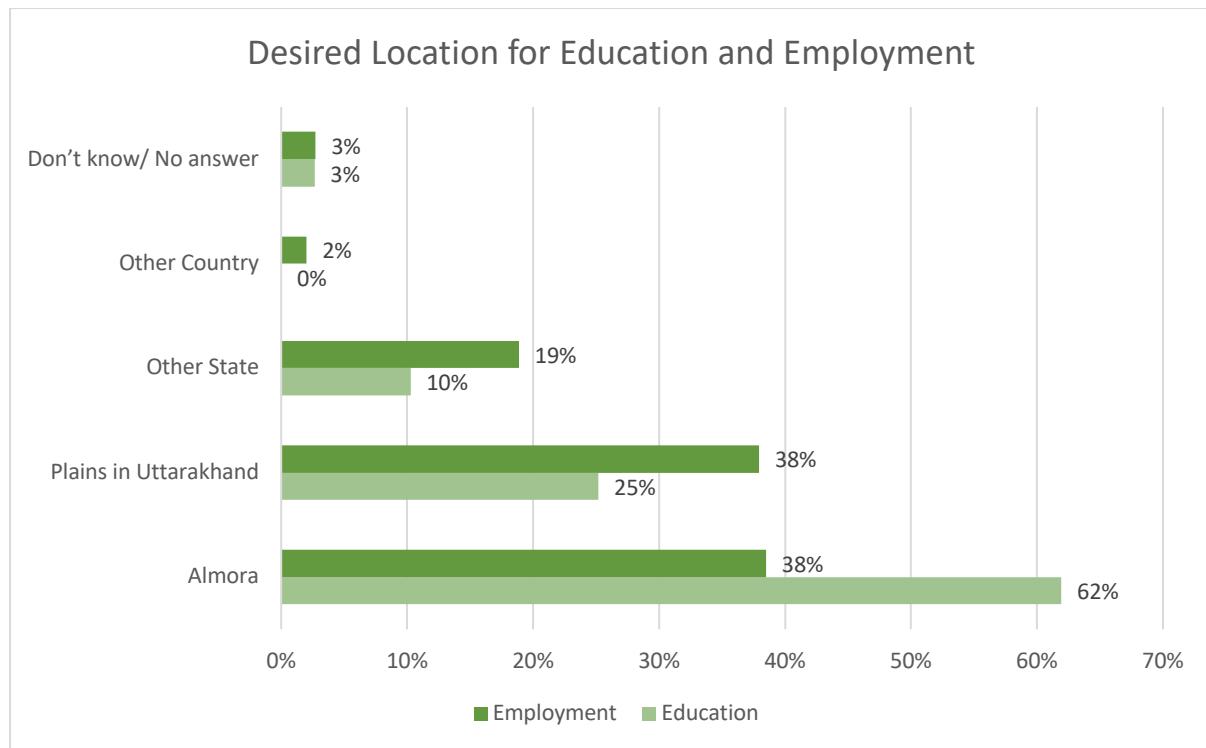
Figure 24*: Preferred location for education and future livelihood/employment*

The results from questions about these two life choices indicate that the majority of young people are reluctant to migrate outside their district (Almora) or their state (Uttarakhand). Among those who want to pursue higher education after school, 62 percent prefer to do so within the district. Similarly, 38 percent of the youth would like to find productive employment within their district. The inclination to migrate is towards the plains area within the state. One-quarter of the youth intend to move to one of the three plain districts for education, and 38 percent would like to find work in these districts in the future. The inclination to migrate outside the state for education is relatively low, with only 10 percent of the students surveyed intending to move outside Uttarakhand for higher education. However, the inclination to find work outside the state is higher, with 19 percent of young people wanting to find employment outside Uttarakhand.

These responses indicate that the inclination to migrate from the mountains to the plains is higher for future employment than immediately after schooling. There are two explanations for the reluctance to move immediately after schooling. Firstly, most students who want to pursue higher education after school are girls (85 percent). Among the boys who participated, 56 percent do not want to apply for higher education and instead aim to join Army recruitment drives. Secondly, most of the youth come from low socio-economic backgrounds, which makes the aspiration to study far from home difficult to realise. Therefore, they limit their aspirations to within their district.

Thinking about the future in terms of work and livelihood allows relatively more freedom in aspiring to migrate out of the mountain villages. This is reflected in the responses, with 57 percent of young people expressing a desire to work either in the plain districts or outside of Uttarakhand. In focus group discussions, when asked about migration in the future, 87 percent of the youth who participated said they could see themselves migrating to the plains in Uttarakhand (65 percent) or to another state (35 percent) in the next five years. Education and employment are commonly cited reasons for migration from Uttarakhand. (Bhandari & Reddy, 2015; Grunawalt, 2012; Mamgain & Reddy, 2015a). In group discussions with youth, their reasons varied from 'in search of better opportunities' to 'just like that, what will we do here'. These are discussed in more detail in the next sections.

Survey responses highlight the instrumental value of migration for the youth in Almora, as participants indicated their inclination to migrate to pursue education and employment opportunities. However, this provides limited insight into whether migration holds intrinsic value and how young people relate to the migration processes around them. On the other hand, qualitative data analysis paints an interesting picture of young people's relationship with the phenomenon of migration and the entire process of migrating. In focus group discussions, where the young people richly discussed and debated this issue, many facets of their thinking are revealed, indicating the complexity of their relationship with migration. Two distinct themes emerge from the analysis of qualitative data:

a.   Inability to express migration aspirations confidently
b.   Value of Migration

7.1.1 Inability to express migration aspirations confidently

Survey responses regarding moving for education or employment (Figure 24) show a moderate inclination to migrate. However, in personal interactions, youth are more candid about their aspirations to leave their villages. In focus group discussions and interviews, these aspirations are often initially understated, particularly by girls. In-depth conversations reveal two conflicting desires: the wish to study and work close to home in the mountains and the notions of a better life associated with towns and cities.

In one discussion with a group of girls, almost all initially expressed a preference for finding employment in their villages and doubted the benefits of migration. However, when asked to envision their lives in five to ten years, they all described a desire to live in towns and cities.

FGD in Girls Inter College, 15.02.2020

Facilitator: *What do you want to do for jobs in life later, after you finish your education?... Where do you see yourselves working in the future?*

Girl 1: *We would like to do something here only... In our villages. I would like to do something for my people, my village… If I can teach here.*

Girl 2: *I want to be a nurse so that I can help people in my area, nobody wants to come here and we don't get any medical care.*

Girl 3: *I don't know, it'll be best if something can be figured out here, close to home… Nobody wants to move away.*

Facilitator: *Why do you say that, nobody wants to move away? You don't want to move away?*

Girl 3: *Because if everyone leaves what will remain of our areas? People anyhow are leaving, leaving their old parents and their lands behind. If we also leave, then who will remain?*

Facilitator: *Do you all feel this way? That one should not move out?*

Girl 4: *Migration is not the solution for anything. People moving think it will solve all their problems but it does not. Half of them are living on rents, washing dishes in hotels, and here they would have never even lifted their dishes. What is the point of moving and living with four people in one room?*

Girl 5: *Boys go out because they don't have anything to do here. So by going out they feel like they have done something but I don't think that's the case. Most of the time, people leave because they have nothing else to do. Not like they do anything outside also. I don't think all people should leave. If everyone leaves, what will be left of our villages?*

Girl 2: *One should not leave, that is true, but then what can people do also here? There is no college, no facility here.*

Later in the same discussion

Facilitator: *Where will you be in five-ten years? Where will we meet?... Think about what would have changed in your lives by then, what would be different? Or if given a chance, what would you change in your life?*

Girl 2: *I would want to live somewhere where I can go to college and also have all the facilities that I don't have now.*

Facilitator: *Other facilities, such as?*

Girl 2: *Such as – I want to learn computer, I want to go to computer class after college. I want to go to watch films with my friends and hang out in the markets.*

Girl 6: *I also want that. I would also want to do a course and a part-time job somewhere on the side. Work in an office, for example.*

Girl 1: *It would be nice to have these facilities, yes. Like having friends and going out in the evening. Watching a film in a hall would be nice.*

Facilitator: *So, everyone wants to watch a film in the hall?*

Girl 7: *It's more than watching a film. We also want to have the comfort that other people have. To be able to work and study and learn more things. Here, we come to school and then go home to work in the kitchen or farms. Nothing else we can do here. It will be good to live somewhere where we also have different options, to work and also to enjoy ourselves.*

Facilitator*: But do you realise that this means you will have to migrate somewhere?*

Girl 7: *Yes, if the need be then we will do that, move away. I will. What else to do then?*

Initially, nearly all the girls expressed a desire to find employment in their villages and stay in the mountains. However, their visions of the future more closely resemble life in the plains and cities than in mountain villages. They aspire to better facilities for skill development, economic prosperity, and personal growth, which are available in more connected and industrialised areas. These aspirations for a 'good life' offer more freedom in decision-making, day-to-day living, and opportunities for employment and self-improvement, which can only be achieved through migration.

At the same time, they feel attached to their homes and want to be seen as the 'good ones' who are not opportunistic and do not abandon their villages. Their ideal of studying and finding livelihoods close to home often conflicts with their desire to escape the limitations of village life. Only when prompted to consider the steps needed to achieve their future visions do they acknowledge migration is essential. These life aspirations are detailed in Chapter 5 and are not repeated here. Instead, I will explore the reasons for their conflicted relationship with migration aspirations.

One reason young people feel shy or underconfident in expressing their desire to migrate is the negative perception of migration and modernity perpetuated by elders in the villages. Teachers and social activists explain that these perceptions are embedded in a social and political narrative that views migration as problematic. In mountain communities, this narrative portrays migrants as abandoning their villages. Dr Ghidiyal, professor of education in Kumaon university explains:

> *"Kids find small jobs in restaurants as waiters and cooking assistants. These jobs are considered menial and beneath respectable terms by older people living in the villages. They can often be heard chastising the young people for moving out of the villages. Because many young people find employment in the hotels and restaurants in cities, older people use the term 'bhaande manjaana' (washing dishes) in a derogatory manner to criticise their decision."* (Dr. Ajeta P Ghidiyal*, Professor, Kumaon University, Interview, 27.11.2019)

A large proportion of migrants from Uttarakhand find employment in "petty jobs like domestic servants, cooks, wash boys, room boys, waiters, peons, messengers, drivers, etc., helpers in informal manufacturing and service units" (Mamgain, 2003; p273). In a review of the literature on out-migration from this region, Tumbe (2012) remarks that migration from the region is viewed rather negatively. The migration of young men is often portrayed in a negative light and it's not uncommon to hear comments like, '*these individuals would prefer washing strangers' plates rather than working on their land in the village*' (heard in multiple informal discussions with the community). During the data collection for this research study, such sentiments were commonly expressed by older individuals when describing young people who work in hotels and restaurants in the cities, leaving their families and farms behind. Some express this sentiment with sadness, recognising that young people do not have many other choices.

> *"The perception about migration is changing but not completely. People still seem to be divided between the unwillingness to leave villages and the necessity to migrate for better access to their life goals. Older people do not understand or identify with young people's ideas of life so they casually bracket it as laziness or fascination for city life. It's difficult for them to understand that for young people, life is completely different from what it was for them"* (Dr. Arvind Dhyani, Principal, GGIC XXX, Interview, 15.02.2020)

Discussion with Padamshree awardee[35] Dr. Lalit Pande who is the founder of Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi[36] and an eminent social activist from the area, reveals more critical aspects of traditional thinking that inhibit young people from clearly expressing their migration aspirations. According to him, patriarchal ideas of keeping women at home and the unnecessary glorification of the 'good old past' are two main reasons why youth in the area often feel apprehensive and even ashamed about expressing their desire to leave the mountains in pursuit of better opportunities. This also relates to the ideas of looking at migrating young men as being lazy who shy away from working hard on their agricultural lands and would rather 'serve' others in the city, which are, by and large, voiced only by the older people (mainly men) in the community.

The data from focus group discussions and personal interviews with youth also indicates that girls tend to perceive migration negatively whereas boys view it more positively. Proceedings from an FGD conducted in a co-educational school show this difference.

---

[35] Padma Shri, also spelled Padma Shree, is the fourth-highest civilian award of the Republic of India

[36] Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi Paryavaran Shiksha Sansthan (USNPSS) more popularly known as Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi, founded in 1967, is one of the oldest public charitable trust in Uttarakhand

> *Girl 1: "It would be the best thing to find a job in our district only. That way you can stay close to the family also na? Going so far away from home also makes things difficult. Finding a house and all living alone…… In the end, if there is no other option then of course, I will move but better to have a job that doesn't separate you from your home.*
>
> *Boy 1: There are no jobs in the mountains. What can you do here?*
>
> *Girl 2: You can try your hand at farming or even start your own business, you can try to do something instead of running out*
>
> *Boy 1: How do you do anything here? You tell me one person who has started their business or is doing farming and doing well in their life. You give me one name*
>
> *Boy 2: Yes! All this is good to say, that I want to work in my village but the reality is different. If there was work here, our brothers and sisters before us would not have moved away*
>
> *Boy 3: It's easy for girls to say they do not want to move because they know they will get married to someone living in the plains. We have to decide for ourselves. Most of us will migrate because there are jobs and money in the plains."*
>
> (FGD in Co-ed school, 25.01.2020)

While some girls expressed disdain for individuals who leave their villages, families, and especially elderly parents behind to struggle in cities with menial jobs, boys in the same groups justified such struggles by highlighting the financial advantages. They emphasised that migrants can earn more money and support their families back home. The boys often expressed the sentiment, "*Kuch toh kar sakte hain, yahaan toh kuch nahin ho sakta*" meaning "One can at least do something; here nothing is possible."

In contrast, when discussing migrants' lives in cities, girls were less positive about their situation. One of the young girls states:

> *"In general, I don't think people going out are successful when they migrate. They leave from here with all the airs and think making money is easy but when they go out reality hits. People who are from well-off families are able to study good courses and make a life for themselves but many, whose parents can't support them, end up working in hotels, and washing dishes. When they come back they try to show how well they are doing but they know how they struggle. They don't want their parents to worry, so they show their parents that they are well and they want to help parents with some money, of course."* (Poonam Bhandari, 16, Interview, 13.02.2020)

These conflicting ideas can also be attributed to the 'fear of the unknown' and negative perceptions of cities. In personal conversations, girls express a desire to live in cities where

amenities are close by and there is more freedom to '*move about, wear what you like and do as you like*'. However, they also express apprehension about the fast-paced and self-centred culture of cities. Some are nervous about moving far away from home due to the lack of family or community support in case something goes wrong. The following excerpts from group discussions and personal interviews reflect these negative perceptions about towns and cities in the plains as voiced by girls in different schools:

> *"In plains when we meet new people, you don't tend to trust them easily, but in mountains when you meet new people, we tend to trust them immediately."* (Girl, FGD, 24.01.2020)

> *"If something happens, people in cities don't care. One doesn't even know what's happening in the house next door and even if they know something wrong is happening in the house next door, they don't care. Here in villages, you can go to someone and ask for help or they will hear of your misery and come to help on their own. This doesn't happen in plains. People shy away from meeting you in the eye thinking you might ask them for help*" (Girl, FGD, 11.02.2020)

> *"There are many people who are just waiting to take advantage of you. Here everyone knows everyone. So, people don't do anything bad because they know the whole village will know about it and hold them accountable for their misbehaviour. In cities, people will cheat their own parents*" (Girl, FGD, 08.02.2020)

These views also stem from the general narrative of *pahāṛī* vs *maidānī* people deeply ingrained in the psychology of mountain communities, where they consider themselves to be naive and people from the plains and cities are thought to be smarter, cleverer, and self-centred. The term "*tej/tez*" is often used to describe city people – those living in the plains – in interviews and group discussions. Contextually translated, the word means "fast" and denotes someone who is clever and can take advantage of others. This recurring apprehension about living in the plains bothers girls more than boys.

A third reason relates to the perceived feasibility of realising migration aspirations. In interviews with teachers and youth, it became evident that migration is perceived as more feasible for some groups than others. Boys are generally more open about their limited options in villages and their desire to move away from the mountains to cities, even if they are uncertain about their prospects there. Participants in group discussions expressed the belief that moving allows them to explore different opportunities, with confidence that something will work out.

This capacity to take risks is more readily expressed by boys, who are encouraged to take such risks more than girls. As a girl in one of the FGDs stated – '*girls have to justify every single thing they are doing whereas boys can do whatever they want and people don't question them as much*' (FGD, 19.02.2020).

Lastly, one can also think of conflicted or hesitant attitudes towards harbouring migration aspirations from the lens of attachment to their villages or communities. This is especially relevant in context of rural forest located communities. Research with rural forested communities in the United States of America indicates that while lack of higher education and employment prospects in such communities can increase out-migration, individual connection to the local natural environment and community keep the youth attached to their community (Bernsen et al., 2022). In particular, connection with the local natural environment is an important factor for youth to remain in their rural communities (McLaughlin et al., 2014). This holds true for youth in Almora also, most of whom listed 'clean environment', 'beautiful mountains', 'pure air and water' as the 'good things' about their life in their villages and simultaneously expressed distaste for the 'dirty, diseased and polluted' environment of the cities (FGDs with youth, multiple). This is an important factor to consider as not everyone might value migration as highly as they value their lives in the mountains. According to de Haas also, the freedom of mobility also means freedom to stay (de Haas, 2021).

7.1.2 Value of migration

Does migration help youth meet certain aspirations or is migration itself an aspiration for them?

> "*When a person wishes to migrate, it could either be because migration has intrinsic value, or because migration is an instrument for achieving another objective. If the latter is the case, migration has instrumental value. The objectives that migration helps achieve are, of course, often linked to a person's broader aspirations in life*" (Carling, 2016, p. 2)

In this research study, the focus is on youth who have not yet migrated and will make these decisions soon. Therefore, the value of migration is analysed in terms of what the youth perceive it to offer – what they expect from migration. The data on migration has been thematically grouped into two strands, echoing Carling's categories of migration value.

The first strand relates to young people's expectations based on observing others who have migrated. These are the perceived benefits of migration that youth see within their communities. The second strand recognises that for some youth, migration holds intrinsic value and is an integral part of their aspirations for the future. There is a notable gender difference: girls are more likely to view migration as valuable for practical reasons, influenced by migrants who return home to their families, while boys are more inclined to aspire to migration for its own sake.

Does migration meet aspirations?

These discussions lead us to a critical question: does migration help young people meet their aspirations? In this study, we focus on understanding what young people – who themselves have not yet migrated – think about migration as a pathway to achieving their aspirations.

About 60 percent of the surveyed youth have at least one family member who has migrated from the village. For 68 percent, this includes an immediate close family member such as a father (22 percent) or sibling (44 percent), and in rare cases, a mother (0.91 percent) who has migrated from the village. Additionally, nearly all participants know someone from their village who has migrated, even if not a family member.

Many participants who have observed family or community members go through the migration process view their experiences positively. The majority of young participants in the survey perceive their family members' or community members' migration experiences as successful, whether for education (77 percent) or livelihood (75 percent).

Combining survey data with qualitative insights from group discussions and formal and informal interviews provides a nuanced understanding of how youth perceive the value of migration, extending beyond monetary and lifestyle benefits. For instance, in group discussions, youth express that those who migrate for education are seen as more successful compared to those migrating for livelihood. They believe these individuals can not only achieve their own aspirations but also set aspirational goals for others. Such migrants are admired for taking risks, borrowing money to finance their education in cities, and later securing 'good jobs'. This achievement, especially in obtaining white-collar private jobs, is highly valued and seen as successful in villages.

While migrants pursuing better livelihoods are considered less successful in achieving their aspirations, the perception among girls towards those migrating for livelihood is not as positive as towards those migrating for education. Nevertheless, migration in general is perceived by youth as a successful strategy for achieving life goals.

This discussion leads to an exploration of what specific goals migration helps achieve and the value that young people attribute to it. The following section explores this aspect based on data collected from focus group discussions and personal interviews with youth.

Financial independence and productive engagement of time
When asked about what migration helps achieve, young people consistently highlighted financial independence as the primary goal across different groups. They perceive that migrating allows individuals to achieve financial independence by quickly finding successive jobs, no matter how small.

Linked to financial independence is the desire to remain productively engaged. Equally important to earning money is the aspiration to be "doing something, anything!" – a sentiment frequently echoed by boys in discussions. For young people, particularly after completing their schooling or college degrees, remaining in villages often means languishing without productive employment opportunities. Therefore, those with some form of employment are seen as actively engaging with life compared to their peers who wait for employment opportunities or public service recruitment announcements. Here are accounts of two boys who are wary of being perceived as wasting time:

> *".......the truth is most people will be loitering around the villages after school for at least a year or two. After that one or two will be able to clear the army recruitment, the rest will still be loitering till their father will borrow some money from here and there and open a shop for them and then they will get married and that's it. Those who have siblings or relatives in Delhi will try their luck there. Some relatives will get them a job in some factory or hotel and they will live there forever. As for rest, their life will pass by just like that. That is the truth. You can't do anything more here."* (Sateesh Mehra, 17, Interview, 10.02.2020)

> *"You don't know how people start looking at you and treating you. They say we support young people in our village but in reality, they will make you feel like a failure if you are in front of their eyes for too long. Then the person also feels like I should take a risk and go out, where there is a possibility of doing something, getting some money, instead of sitting here, waiting for recruitment announcement. Recruitment also takes a year. Sometimes, the paper gets leaked, and sometimes exam date is postponed. It's not easy than just sitting here and waiting. That's why people migrate. It's more respectful than sitting here and doing nothing"* (Kunal Bora, 17, Interview, 18.02.2020)

Joblessness and lack of productive engagement is an issue not only among the youth in mountains but all of north India; the unemployed educated young men report to doing nothing but passing time – doing "timepass" (Jeffrey, 2010: p465; Jeffrey, Jeffery, & Jeffery, 2005). Jeffrey (2010) has studied this phenomenon with unemployed young educated men in Western Uttar Pradesh (an area adjoining Uttarakhand also), where he observes how these young men from the lower middle-class report, they "did nothing" (p470), complain of an "overabundance of time" (p470) and spend their days "passing time" (p470). Further the feeling of waiting and surplus time is exacerbated by the feeling of being left behind (Jeffrey & Young, 2012). I also observed this mindset about the future among boys in the research. They are concerned about their prospects after finishing school, fearing a lack of structure in their lives. Many anticipate

that while they prepare and wait for Army and other public service recruitments, they will have no choice but to pass time in villages. There is also a fear among many boys of being labelled as "*naalayak*" (good-for-nothing) if they remain idle for too long under the watchful eyes of parents and village elders. Therefore, migration appeals to most of them as the obvious next step towards pursuing something productive. This sentiment is consistently shared among boys across all schools where group discussions and interviews were conducted.

Better educational aspirations

In addition to financial benefits and productive engagement, another aspiration that youth perceive migration helps achieve is access to good quality education. This emerges as a significant achievement of migration in discussions with youth in this research. The ability to access better education is seen as a key goal facilitated by migration. Literature also supports this, indicating that migration enables families to enrol their children in better schools and colleges in cities, which is a primary motivation for migration from the state (Awasthi, 2017; IABT & Udhyam, 2019; B. Joshi, 2018; Nagalia, 2017; Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b). As discussed in previous chapters, the public education system in the state has faced challenges, contributing to a lack of aspirational capacity among youth in the region. While some private schools have emerged in Almora town, they cater mostly to families who can afford private education, often those with migrant backgrounds. In rural areas of Almora, private education remains inaccessible. Private schools operating beyond district headquarters face similar challenges as public schools: a shortage of qualified teachers willing to reside in remote areas and inadequate infrastructure (FGD with teachers, 27.01.2020, GIC XXX, Block Bhaisiyachhana). Despite the higher cost of education in cities, young people believe that once families migrate, they find ways to manage and afford good education for their children. Phrases like "*sab ho hi jata hai*" (everything figures out) or "*sab kar hi lete hain manage kisi tarah se*" (everyone manages, somehow) reflect youth perceptions that even those who are not highly educated or skilled can improve their lives through migration to cities.

Lifestyle and skill development aspirations

Some aspirations that migration helps to fulfill are straightforward and easily identified, while others appeal to young people on a more subtle level. One such aspiration is the desire to live in a place with digital connectivity and easier physical mobility, which stands out as a significant appeal of migration that is often lacking in the daily lives of youth in the mountains. Towns and cities in the plains offer easier access to basic services such as health and education, which is particularly attractive to families with young children or elderly parents considering migration. However, for the younger generation, migration holds appeal beyond basic amenities.

Young people are exposed to urban life through the experiences of villagers or relatives who have migrated, as well as through social media, which showcases the more connected and comfortable lifestyle enjoyed by city youth. They aspire for similar lifestyles and recognise the benefits of being in a place where transport, education, and healthcare infrastructure are more developed and accessible.

Youth discuss how regular transport connections to educational and skill development institutions can significantly impact their ability to acquire employable skills. Both boys and girls express this opinion, though girls emphasise the importance of safety, as many parents are reluctant to send their daughters far for education or skill development due to safety concerns. This creates a paradox where towns and cities, often perceived as unsafe by traditional standards, become safer options for accessing education and opportunities for self-development, aligning with the broader aspiration of improving quality of life. For both boys and girls, the aspiration to live in a '*place that has a cinema, online delivery, coaching institutes, and job opportunities*' is an important one (FGD, GIC XXX, 13.02.2020, Block Someshwar). It goes beyond what elderly people in the villages term 'modernisation aspirations' in a trivialising manner.

It is true that towns and cities with their promise of 'modernity' do hold an attraction for the young. In their study of youth from the north eastern states in the Indian Himalayan Region, Smith and Gergan (2015) also find that due to limited local employment opportunities, Himalayan youth have turned to education, especially education outside their home regions, as the most effective way to secure access to modern lifestyles. Another study on youth from Darjeeling, concludes that Himalayan youth, aware that their geographical location hinders access to employment and modern lifestyles, link their aspirations to migration, especially to metropolitan cities (Brown et al., 2017).

However, the youth's aspiration to migrate to such places goes beyond the allure of 'modernity'. Participants in migration discussions demonstrate a keen awareness of the significant developmental shortcomings in their current settings, which are often beyond their control. They see migrating to urban towns or cities as a means to address these gaps. Here are the five most frequently mentioned purposes that youth groups identified migration as helping to achieve: accessing good quality higher education, pursuing part-time study and work opportunities, learning English, acquiring computer skills, and preparing for entrance exams through coaching sessions (FGDs, multiple).

Thus, migration represents an aspiration for a lifestyle that also facilitates opportunities for self-exploration and development. It's not just about watching movies in a cinema hall, although such leisure activities are among the many things that the migration enables and are desired by young people. Their aspirations extend much further. For girls, migration is also

about seeking freedom and mobility. In personal interviews, female participants expressed a desire to experience being 'out at night', enrol in evening classes while working part-time for financial stability and independence. Similarly, migration helps fulfil the aspiration to live independently from the rigid, conservative ideals of village life. For girls, it's about being able to wear 'smart clothes' without fear of judgement, and escaping the small-minded opinions prevalent in their close-knit communities without facing unnecessary challenges in their own lives.

Personality and behavioural change aspirations

Young people in schools also recognise numerous individual-specific benefits of migration observed among migrants in their families and social circles. These benefits primarily relate to personality and behavioural changes in younger migrants. Many explain that migration has helped individuals become 'smart', which extends beyond material gains. These changes involve personal growth and adaptation to the more complex social environments of larger towns and cities. Cities thus provide an environment conducive to self-development. These behavioural changes are aspirational for many young people discussing migration. They aspire to adopt qualities such as being 'smart', 'assertive', 'respectful', 'helpful', 'mild-tempered', or 'sober'. They also express a desire to learn to 'not care about negative opinions' – qualities they believe their siblings or younger relatives have developed after migrating from villages. An excerpt from a discussion with a girls' group highlights these observed qualities that young people aspire to emulate.

> *"Girl 1: …..you can make out the change in them. Somehow, they become smart once they move out*
>
> *Interviewer: What do you mean by 'smart'?*
>
> *Girl 1: You know, they talk better somehow, they even dress better…*
>
> *Girl 2: I think they even look better!*
>
> *Interviewer: Look better? How?*
>
> *Girl 2: Like they know what kind of clothes to wear for what occasion, dress smartly so people like them more*
>
> *Girl 1: I think it's more about social sense. They learn that in the city with more people there. They know how to put their point forward in a smart way that everyone pays them more attention or understands them better*
>
> *Girl 3: Once you have lived outside, you also get more respect from the village people. Village people might say ulta-seedha* (critical things) *behind their backs but to their faces, they always act more respectfully than they do with other boys or girls who have stayed back in the village*
>
> *Girl 1: My brother was here for so long. Everyone used to criticise him for wasting his time and not getting through any government job exams. He was always fighting with my parents, sitting idly home. When he went to Delhi, he was living with my mama (mother's brother) for a year looking for a job. Now he is working in a factory. When he comes back now, he is completely changed. I don't know how much money he makes but he is politer and more respectful towards my parents and me also. He is telling me to study better and come to Delhi with him to learn computers. I think he learnt how to behave better in social situations in the city where you can't show this kind of attitude to anyone*
>
> *Girl 2: Living in the city does make a difference to a person, tameez toh aa hi jati hai (one learns manner/etiquettes at the very least)*
>
> (FGD, 05.02.2020)

In other focus group discussions also, while enumerating the benefits of migration, participants did agree that several personal benefits come from '*living outside and learning the ways of the world*' that they think are simply not possible if people do not migrate. These benefits are admired and considered aspirational by youth, in that they would also like to imbibe these qualities in their own personal selves. ICIMOD's study on labour migration and remittances conducted in three hill districts of Uttarakhand also reports that "significant improvements were observed in personalities, self-confidence, awareness, and knowledge" of young return

migrants, and they (migrants) were found to have a positive impact on village youth (Jain, 2010; p26).

Another relationship between aspirations and migration is the one in which youth consider the migration experience itself as an aspiration. These aspirations are more prevalent among boys who participated in the discussions and interviews. I elaborate on these in the following section.

Is migration an aspiration? promise of possibilities

Aspirations are culturally defined (Appadurai, 2013; D. Ray, 2006). People look to their socially comparable peers' aspirations – their "aspirations window" – to shape their own aspirations. In a social context where migration is common, young people often look forward to migration as something they want to do. Through discussions and interactions, when youths are probed further about their specific intentions, many eventually conclude that they would like to migrate in the near future. While they may not be clear about the exact purpose of migration, they are certain about the act itself. When asked what they plan to do after migrating, many respond with *"kuch toh kar hi lenge"*, meaning "they will manage to do something once they are out", highlighting the allure of migration. Migration is aspirational for the young because it promises them possibilities – opportunities for a way of life and choices that are not available in remote mountain villages. In discussing the role of aspirations in migration, Carling (2016) describes how migration can hold intrinsic value where the desire to be somewhere else is what drives a person's aspirations for migration. This desire to be 'out' is strongly noted in young male participants in the study.

Moreover, in offering better possibilities, migration also provides a sense of freedom to youth. Dissatisfaction with the constraints of living in mountainous rural areas motivates their aspirations for migration to take shape. They see migration as a certain future event because when they consider alternatives, they confront the same limitations that have restricted their opportunities for development in the first place. The discussions with youth are replete with the following phrases and statements:

'*yahaan kya rakha hai*' (what is that we have here?); counted 7 times
'*hum kya hi karenge yahaan*' (what CAN we do here?); counted 8 times
'*yahaan kuch nahin ho sakta*' (nothing is possible here); counted 8 times
'*baahar to jana hi hai, aur kya karna hai'* (we HAVE to migrate out, what else will we do); counted 9 times

On one hand, these Hindi phrases convey young people's acute sense of despair, hopelessness, and disappointment with their current situation and their vision of the future in rural mountain villages. On the other hand, they acknowledge that living in plains and cities can provide access to better job opportunities, educational options, healthcare facilities, and digital connectivity. Even girls who are hesitant about cities and their fast-paced culture recognise that migration

offers a chance to explore possibilities that are simply unavailable in the confines of their own villages (from multiple group discussions). Youth are keenly aware of the practical advantages of living in the plains. Some mention increased opportunities for part-time jobs while studying, opportunities to learn English and computer skills, and access to online shopping and services. Others highlight the freedom from judgment and conservative ideals that migration can potentially enable, to some extent.

Lastly, regarding aspirations and migration, we must recognise that a culture of migration has become entrenched in Uttarakhand, where migration is pervasive in rural areas of the state and is a decision woven into everyday life (Cohen, 2004). Migration is fundamentally woven into the social lives of young people in Almora as well. It plays an influential role in indicating the parameters of a good life or success in life. This sentiment suggests that to accomplish something in life, one must venture elsewhere and gain wisdom about the world. The migration experience is also considered an important part of the lives of young people and one of the 'rites of passage' in many contexts (Castle & Diarra, 2003; Monsutti, 2007; Ungruhe, 2010). Youth migration is considered an experience that enhances life chances through exposure to diverse places, accumulation of capital, and opportunity for self-reflection (F. L. Collins, 2018). Further, young migrants are often looked upon as symbols of success (Ungruhe, 2010). This is a more relevant factor of success for boys than for girls because it also aligns with the gender roles which condition boys to aspire to become financial contributors to their families. Most of the boys who participated in the discussions believe that migrating is not only important but '*essential for building character*', '*learning about life*', and '*becoming successful or something in life*'.

"*Without migration one remains taalaab ka mendhak*" (means a frog in a pond). (Ramesh Pant, 17, Interview, 22.01.2020)

Such aspirations are what Carling and Schewel have termed as migration aspiration – the conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration (Carling & Schewel, 2018). Such conviction speaks to migration's intrinsic value as freedom and coincides with Sen's idea of development as freedom where real development is one which enables a person to live the life that they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). In this context, migration holds promises for a life better than one that young people can lead in villages, the one they feel they want to live. Youth feel like they *should* undergo migration experience because that itself will mean something – being able to undertake the process itself is a milestone that can generate a sense of well-being and empowerment (de Haas, 2021)

7.2 Who can aspire to migrate: the structure

In this research, while many youths perceive value in migration and aspire to migrate in the future, not everyone who desires or is willing to migrate can do so. Migration encompasses physical, social, and economic dimensions of one's life and society. For instance, research based on the Young Lives Project survey in Ethiopia, India, and Vietnam reveals that the preference for remaining and not migrating is particularly pronounced among youth from resource-poor households, rural settings, and women. (Schewel & Fransen, 2022). In the context of migration from Almora, achieving migration aspirations requires both positive freedoms, such as access to financial resources, social networks, and knowledge about migration processes, and negative liberties, such as freedom from gender and caste-based disadvantages. Chapter 5 already highlights how the aspiration to move out for pursuing both education and work is significantly less common among girls and youth from poorer and SC households.

Migrants from hill regions rely on social networks and informal channels to seek information about jobs and other recommendations (Mamgain & Reddy, 2017a), and these social networks tend to be caste-based. As a teacher who participated in the research noted, individuals from upper castes and better socio-economic conditions will find it easier to migrate because they not only have relatively better access to resources in their current locations but also possess stronger social networks in potential destination areas. While social networks are expanding and becoming more generalised with increased migration, they still largely revolve around caste identities. Historically, educated individuals from upper castes had better opportunities to secure clerical and administrative positions in cities like New Delhi, facilitating their migration. Over time, more individuals from Scheduled Castes (SC) are also finding migration opportunities, though their migration rates tend to be lower compared to upper castes. This qualitative finding is corroborated by quantitative analysis of survey data. I analysed responses regarding the inclination to migrate for career opportunities and family migration patterns in relation to the participants' castes to identify any migration patterns influenced by caste. Analysis of the responses for moving also indicates that youth from SC households are less likely to want to work outside of the state (See Appendix 9 Table 1). Additionally, the study found that the remoter a village is (i.e., the farther it is from the town of Almora), the lower the migration rates are among Scheduled Castes. Consequently, young people from Scheduled Castes showed a lower inclination to migrate during group discussions.

Migration is difficult for young girls too. Teachers point out that despite academic brilliance and aspirations to attend college, the majority of girls realistically face barriers to migrating independently. This gender bias in access to education expenditure in Indian society exists widely (Datta & Kingdon, 2021). Gender bias in rural India exists in the form of lower

expenditure on enabling girls' access to education (Datta & Kingdon, 2021; Kingdon, 2005). A preference for sons still exists in India (Emran et al., 2020). Girls in India are groomed for marriage and parents prefer to invest in boys' education (Vecchio & Roy, 1998). Teachers involved in the research note that girls rarely migrate for the purpose of pursuing education. Such migration typically occurs only when a parent, usually the father, is already residing in the city and can afford to support the child's living and educational expenses. This situation is more common among families with secure jobs and a more progressive mindset, similar to Sangeeta's case, where her desire to study in Delhi was highlighted in previous chapters. Generally, the priority is given to boys to migrate and pursue education in urban areas. Another avenue for girls to migrate is by clearing government job exams like the 'Teachers' Eligibility Test' and securing a posting outside of their villages. This appears to be one of the very few pathways available for girls to migrate, as indicated in focus group discussions and interviews with teachers.

Additionally, the migration process for young people, including boys, often hinges on having a relative or family friend already established in the destination location. If the family already knows someone who has migrated, whether from their immediate or extended family, young people may find it easier to relocate to the city. Having a familiar contact ensures they have a safe place to stay during their initial days, addressing both economic and safety concerns, particularly for those venturing out of their villages for the first time.

Even when young boys migrate for the first time, parents express concerns about their safety and security, considering them inexperienced in navigating city life. It is implied that they would need support to understand the 'ways of the city' before they can proceed with their studies or job searches. Existing migrants and their families, often from the same caste, act as surrogate families, providing the initial support needed to acclimate to the new environment. Additionally, there is the advantage of not needing to immediately spend a significant amount of money on accommodation, although participants mention that they always contribute financially to the family, typically upon securing employment.

These existing migrants are part of a broader network originating from neighbouring villages or districts in Uttarakhand. This network facilitates access to a larger pool of opportunities, enhancing the prospects of finding employment opportunities that are frequently shared within this network. The emergence of internet-based communication methods, particularly WhatsApp, has further streamlined the sharing of opportunities among migrant networks, keeping the *'pahāṛī'* networks well-connected and active. It is evident that without such existing support in the destination, migration would not be feasible for young people. Quantitative analysis of survey responses regarding preferred locations for career opportunities and family members' migration patterns also indicates that young people are more inclined to aspire to

migrate outside Uttarakhand (in search of employment) if they have a family member who has already migrated out of the state (see Appendix 12 for the results from regression analysis)

Caste-based social networks, gender, and the migration of a family member are factors that significantly impact a young person's ability to realise migration aspirations. Among these factors, the migration of a family member has a profound influence on young people's lives and aspirations, extending beyond their own potential to migrate. This theme emerged strongly when analysing their perspectives on migration in their surroundings. It is a critical factor shaping youth aspirations and plays a role in expanding their capacity to aspire. The final section of this chapter explores this theme in detail.

7.3 Impact of migration on aspirations & capabilities: feedback

Most families in Uttarakhand witness the out-migration of at least one family member. According to a report on out-migration from hill regions of Uttarakhand by the National Institute of Rural Development, 88 percent of households in Pauri Garhwal, Almora, and other hill districts have experienced at least one person migrating for employment (Mamgain & Reddy, 2015a). Therefore, migration has become a permanent backdrop in the lives and society of the hill districts. It impacts not only for those who migrate but also for those left behind and the communities. In constructing a migration framework based on aspirations and capabilities, de Haas (2021) also conceptualises migration as an intrinsic part of the social processes that shape migration and, to some extent, are also affected by migration. In this framework the migration influence can work in the form of feedback in two ways: through the supply of capitals: financial, human, and social resources and second through the supply of images, ideas, and knowledge. This feedback in the form of capitals and exposure to knowledge, information, and images impacts people's general life aspirations as well as more specific migration aspirations (de Haas, 2021). One way of looking at migration feedback in this theory is the cumulative causation (D. Massey, 1990) whereby migration leads to more migration as once a critical number of migrants have settled in destinations, social networks of migrants and non-migrants become self-sufficient and the migration process becomes self-perpetuating (Castles et al., 2014; de Haas, 2010c; D. Massey, 1990). There are feedback mechanisms that explain why and how migration processes become self-perpetuating, leading to the development of migrants' networks and migration systems (Bakewell et al., 2016; de Haas, 2010c; Fawcett, 1989; D. S. Massey & Zenteno, 1999). The impact of migration through contextual feedback mechanisms has been brilliantly elaborated in Migration Systems theory (Mabogunje, 1970). These studies have focused on the role of migrants and migration in sending/origin places only, with the aim of understanding subsequent patterns of movement. They do not consider other changes that occur because of migration in the sending communities, changes that may not be explicitly related to increased migration from the communities. However, the appeal of the

aspirations-capabilities framework for this research lies in its conceptualisation of non-migration as part of mobility. It emphasises the role of migration in influencing the structure and agency, and through them, the aspirations and capabilities that ultimately empower a person to decide if they want to move or not. In this context, I utilise this framework to argue that migration in the family and community positively contributes to the agency and aspirations of youth, and their capacity to aspire, regardless of the final mobility outcome.

Family migration experience and its impact on aspirations, and capacity to aspire

Nearly 60 percent of the participants have at least one family member who has migrated from the village. For almost 68 percent of participants, it is an immediate close family member – father (22 percent) or sibling (44 percent) – while in a very small number of cases (0.91 percent), it is the mother who has migrated. For about 28 percent of participants, it is someone in the extended family – an uncle, aunt, or cousin – who has migrated. In rural Uttarakhand, where joint families or multiple families share the same household, this constitutes close family migration.

Most participants' family members have migrated out of the state (67 percent) or to other plain districts of Uttarakhand (14 percent). Additionally, 17 percent have moved to other hill districts, and a small percentage (1.21 percent) has migrated outside the country. The main reasons for migration from the families of participants are livelihood (77 percent) and education (20 percent).

The migration of a family member significantly influences young people's lives in various ways within this research context. Participants with an immediate family member who has migrated often have better access to information not only about career options but also about personal life improvements. They frequently receive guidance on their career paths and exhibit more confidence in articulating their aspirations and plans, particularly when the migrant family member is an elder sibling.

In some cases documented in the research, the migration of an elder sibling has specifically helped girls set more aspirational career goals than their peers and develop plans to achieve them. I elaborate on one such case here.

Why become a nurse, why not a doctor?
Meenakshi is a 12th grade science student at GGIC XXX. Her family originally hails from a village 15 km away from the town of Bhikiyasain where the school is located. This school is recognised as a model school, developed as such by the Department of Education, renowned for its quality of teaching and academic results. These schools are generally situated in towns and are not accessible to youth living far away from urban areas, presenting an issue for Meenakshi. Her elder brother migrated to Delhi about 5 years ago on the advice of a relative

already residing in Delhi. He had completed his school education at their village school and moved to Almora, where he enrolled in college. However, he could not complete his degree due to the high cost of living in Almora without a steady job. After spending two years back in the village, he migrated to Delhi and has since been working in an IT company as an office boy. He has also been pursuing a B.A. in Political Science from a distance-learning university, with plans to enrol in evening law classes later.

After Meenakshi scored 89 percent in her 10th board exams, her brother suggested that she opt to study science and prepare for the Pre-Medical Test, the entrance exam for an MBBS degree in India. Since the school in their village did not offer a science stream for 11th and 12th grade, he persuaded their parents to rent a room in town, allowing her to attend the model school where she could receive a better education. Meenakshi shares that her brother convinced her that she is bright and can achieve success if she applies herself. Initially, she had only considered applying for a Nursing course after school, but her brother advised her that she could even become a doctor if she put in some more effort.

"He told me that I will have to study for the Nursing exam also and that if I study just a little more, I can clear the MBBS entrance also. He encouraged me. My parents were reluctant to move to the town. They said why should we live on rent when we have our own house in the village, but he argued with them and convinced them to move… He helps with the rent and brings me preparation material. He even got us a smartphone and data. I use it to watch videos for preparation… I think I can do it." (Meenakshi, 17, GGIC XXX, 17.02.2020)

When I discussed her goal to be a doctor with her teachers, I came to know that her decision to prepare for the medical entrance exam has inspired four other girls to prepare for the same.

> *"Meenakshi is very bright but underconfident, like many children here. They are hardworking but often doubt their capabilities. Her family told us she wants to be a doctor, which made us very happy because it's difficult for these kids to aspire without family support. Meenakshi has our full support, as we want them to succeed. When one girl succeeds, it inspires others. A few years ago, a girl completed her M.A. in agriculture and cleared exams for the agricultural department, which encouraged other girls to apply for B.Sc. in Agriculture. She now guides our students, and more girls confidently say they want to become doctors. It's a positive change; otherwise, kids are usually scared to think beyond teaching and nursing."* (Dr Anita Bose, Principal, GGIC XXX, Interview, 17.02.2020)

In discussing Meenakshi's aspirations, Dr. Bose highlighted additional examples of girls who have set and achieved high aspirations beyond the usual career paths such as teaching and nursing, which has had a positive impact on other girls in their schools. Dr. Bose explained that they actively invite such successful girls to share their experiences with others at the school, as this encourages students to consider a wider range of career options. She emphasised how

successful role models from similar backgrounds inspire other girls, and how girls like Meenakshi, who receive support and encouragement – often from migrant family members – can motivate their peers to pursue higher aspirations. Thus, Meenakshi's case demonstrates a positive ripple effect, influencing others beyond her own aspirations.

There are other youths who shared similar stories of support from an elder sibling who migrated to cities in search of small jobs, despite having no education beyond schooling. The previous chapter on types of aspirations also relates two stories of powerful aspirations among youth with migrant family members. These migrants not only provide support for their relatives' aspirations but also encourage the formation of seemingly unachievable goals, such as becoming a doctor, a high-ranking Army officer, or a lawyer. Such powerful aspirations are observed only among youth with a close migrant family member in this research study.

The majority of teachers interviewed for the study also observe that the migration of family members has a positive impact on their families, particularly on the personal situations of the young people. The teachers notice subtle differences between students who have family members living outside the village and those who do not.

> *"Children are good if they get the exposure and right guidance"* (Teacher, FGD, 11.01.2020)

> "*Only one or two percent* (of the students) *know the direction in which they want to take after school. But not the others. Others come* (to schools) *only because of the routine… The one percent also have some direction because their father or brother is in the city and can guide them, others who don't have anyone outside to help them, remain underconfident and unsure of what to do"* (Naresh Chandra Tamta, Principal, GIC XXX, Interview, 25.01.2020)

> "*People with migrant family members certainly have more options in terms of at least thinking about choices. What they do or don't do later is another matter altogether but yes, at least they know of some more options for career and how to pursue them. So, they have some options and don't feel helpless like others"* (Narendra Singh, Teacher, GIC XXX, Interview, 21.01.2020)

> *"First of all, the financial situation improves, right? And with that itself comes a lot of confidence and sense of security. Risk taking is another benefit"* (Mahendra Bhandari, Teacher, GIC XXX, Interview, 18.02.2020)

Teachers across different school blocks consistently emphasised the positive impact of family members' migration, highlighting its multifaceted benefits. Notably, the financial support provided by migrant family members plays a crucial role in supporting the education of young individuals in the village. However, the impact extends beyond monetary contributions. Teachers observed that migrant family members contribute to a broader mindset shift among

students, enabling them to consider educational and career possibilities beyond the limited options available in rural areas.

The migration experience serves as an invaluable source of knowledge and inspiration, offering insights into urban life and fostering the development of new aspirations that go beyond mere migration. Furthermore, teachers highlighted that this influence is particularly significant for girls, instilling a belief in them that they can also achieve something significant and encouraging them to aspire for more. The knowledge and experiences shared by migrant family members act as a catalyst, expanding the horizon of educational and career choices for the youth.

Importantly, this positive influence is depicted as independent of the actual migration of the influenced youth, positioning it as a crucial factor in nurturing the capacity to aspire within the region. It helps the youth develop the capacity to aspire and map out their goals, which may or may not involve migration in the long run. While there is already evidence in the ICIMOD case study on Uttarakhand (Jain, 2010) that migrants support other youth in migration, and encourage higher education, and knowledge of English and computers among youth, I argue that the positive influence of migrants can be seen as independent of migration of youth they influence. Rather than limiting the positive influence of an enabler of further migration, it can be seen as a much more important factor enabling the development of the capacity to aspire in this region. Such migration influence can be considered a part of the social change in de Haas' work (de Haas, 2010c, 2010b, 2021)

7.4 Conclusion

Migration is a pervasive and omnipresent aspect of life in rural Almora villages, representing a common household and family experience. It stands as one of the most significant processes and phenomena that young people observe and experience to varying degrees. When a close family member is a migrant, the experience with the migration process becomes more intimate and active compared to when the migrant is a member of the community but not immediate family. In such a context where migration is a prominent and definitive phenomenon in the backdrop of their lives, young people develop a multi-faceted relationship with it.

This relationship manifests in their perception of migrants' lives and experiences, their visualization of the connection between their general life aspirations and migration, and most actively, in their migration aspirations. The aspiration to migrate appears to be the most visible and obvious solution for achieving aspirations – both tangible and explicit, as well as hidden and tacit – that the youth harbour. It is expressed by most of the youth, whether directly or indirectly. While migration is a more straightforward aspiration for boys, girls express it through their desire to move outside for better education and job opportunities. For girls,

migration needs to serve as a means to certain ends; it needs to have instrumental value. In contrast, for boys, migration carries intrinsic value, driving their migration aspirations.

One major aspect of migration's value lies in offering hope and promising possibilities to youth. It instils confidence in them that they will be able to achieve something if they can migrate. This kind of confidence is not evident in their discussions about the future within their villages. Migration from villages requires capabilities that depend on structural factors such as caste-based networks and gender-based freedoms. Considering the historical trends of migration, freedom, and gender norms in traditional rural Indian societies, youth from lower castes and girls will have fewer opportunities to exert their migratory agency.

Furthermore, a significant finding in analysing the relationship between migration and aspirations, is how the experience and exposure brought in by migrants expand the general understanding of achieving different educational and career aspirations among youth. This expansion of navigation pathways and sharing among youth can lead to a general rise in the capacity to aspire in rural communities, which may or may not lead to migration.

The focus of the research is to explore the influence of migration from the region on the lives, education, and career aspirations of youth. It seems that migration from the region does positively help youth expand their view of possibilities beyond the limited choices they have observed around them. Simultaneously, the changes that young people notice in other young adults who have migrated from their villages also influence them to view the migration experience more positively and shape their personal aspirations accordingly.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Guided by the main objective to find out how educational and career aspirations and capacity to aspire are shaped amongst the youth in context of extensive migration in rural Himalayan region of Uttarakhand in India, the thesis set out to answer the following specific questions:

1. **What** are the educational and career aspirations of youth in senior secondary schools in the hill district of Almora, Uttarakhand?
2. **How** are these aspirations shaped by intersecting socio-economic factors around them?
3. What **role** does migration play in the aspiration formation of youth?

The focus of this research was to explore the outlook towards the future and current capacity to aspire among young people in the hill district of Almora, amidst significant out-migration from the region. Special attention was given to their aspirations related to higher education and career paths. This emphasis stemmed from two main factors:

1. Traditional views on migration from this region often adopt a narrow push-pull perspective, focusing primarily on income differentials. This perspective overlooks the aspirations of young people who have grown up in the hills but choose to migrate.
2. Informal discussions about migration among young people often depict them as unwilling to embrace rural mountain life and agriculture. Instead, they are portrayed as seeking low-paid menial jobs in cities, opting for what is perceived as an easier lifestyle.

Therefore, this research aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the interaction between aspirations and migration from a geographically unique region. A multi-phase mixed research design was adopted to study young people's aspirations and their interaction with the migration phenomenon in their surroundings. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods enabled the study to capture the essence and scope of youth aspirations, as well as to understand why and how certain types of aspirations have become more prevalent in the study area. Furthermore, it allowed for an in-depth investigation into how migration from this area influences the formation of aspirations among youth, extending beyond the pursuit of better income.

Research findings: discussion and implication

The research begins by focusing on aspirations and aspirational capacity, then explores how migration interacts with these aspects in the lives of youth. It also analyses factors influencing their thinking and decision-making about the future. The study establishes that in rural mountain communities, the capacity to aspire among youth is constrained by several structural factors that are challenging to overcome. These include:

    a. Limited career counselling and guidance in schools.

b. Lack of parental advice on education and career decisions.

c. Restricted access to information technology despite the digital age.

d. Scarce availability of higher education institutions.

e. Cultural values that discourage risk-taking and innovation.

These limitations often compel young people to either modify their aspirations or abandon them altogether. Moreover, cultural norms that discourage setting high aspirations or trying new ideas further hinder the development of aspirational capacity among youth in the region. Girls, youth from marginalised castes, and those from poorer households face specific disadvantages in aspiring for higher education and employment. They are more likely to restrict their aspirations to opportunities within the district of Almora, where options for education and employment are severely limited.

Migration forms an essential backdrop against which aspiration formation takes place, contributing significantly to the aspirations of youth. These processes – aspiration formation and migration – are interconnected in a way that mutually influences each other. The research highlights that migration plays a pivotal role in shaping aspirations because it opens up possibilities that are difficult for youth to envision within their local context alone.

Studies indicate that migrants can serve as positive influences by assisting other young individuals in navigating the migration process. By exploring the intersection of aspirations and migration, I argue that migration not only facilitates further migration but also positively impacts aspirations in broader ways. When individuals close to young people in schools migrate, they introduce new ideas and experiences, expanding the range of possibilities within their social circles. This exposure instils confidence in youth to explore new options and aspire towards different paths.

Migration influence: development policy and practice

The discourse surrounding migration from Uttarakhand, both in political circles and policy discussions, has often framed it as a problem at worst and a challenge at best. Over the years, state elections have been fought with promises to address the issue of migration, yet comparatively less attention has been devoted to considering how migration could be leveraged for development, particularly in circumstances where creating alternatives to migration appears to be a daunting and protracted endeavour.

Building upon the insights drawn from this research study, one can conceptualise migration as a process that enhances migrants' exposure, skills, and experience, and devise strategies to utilise these attributes within the state. A significant policy emphasis aimed at mitigating migration from Uttarakhand has centred on skill development and the promotion of entrepreneurship and small to medium enterprises in the mountainous regions. (NITI Aayog,

2018). Lack of entrepreneurship infrastructure has been cited as one of the reasons for underdevelopment of hill districts (Jain, 2010). At its essence, such an approach is targeted at the youth in the state. A recent positive development in this regard occurred with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic-induced lockdown resulted in the closure of business establishments, leading to permanent job losses or temporary suspensions of employment for migrants in both formal and informal sectors in the cities. Consequently, there was a significant influx of migrants returning to their villages in the mountains.

The government of Uttarakhand expressed its intention to retain the returning migrants with skills within the state. A plan was devised to conduct a skills and aspirations survey, following which migrants possessing appropriate skills would be offered financial and technical support to start small and medium enterprises in their local areas. However, before this plan could be fully implemented, the lockdown was lifted, and return migrants gradually returned to the cities. Although this plan did not achieve its intended goals, it represents a positive step toward recognising the value that migration and migrants can contribute to the state's development when provided with support.

Therefore, policy efforts can be directed towards attracting appropriately skilled and experienced migrants and providing them with conducive environments to apply their skills and experiences in the local contexts of Uttarakhand.

Another significant aspect is that youth have an attachment with their villages and communities. Research also shows that there is tendency among rural youth to prefer living in their home communities if they perceive they can find viable career opportunities within (Demi et al., 2009). Youth from Almora also reflect this sentiment. They generally prefer to find meaningful employment and a good quality of life within the mountain state. However, their observation of people, year after year, failing to achieve this has led them to believe that it is simply not possible to have good employment and a good life in the mountains. This perception makes migration seem like the only alternative. Migration offers them opportunities for financial gains as well as education, skill development, and personal growth. Nevertheless, there exists a bond with their homes that the youth acknowledge and want to retain. Development policy must actively offer alternatives to youth within the state, as there is a willingness among them to stay if enough and appropriate opportunities are available.

Some youth who demonstrate powerful aspirations are also aware of the economic value of the mountains, mountain resources, and the services that they offer. Such youth can foresee a time in the future when they want to return to the mountains and leverage the mountain resources to generate self-employment and livelihoods for others in the villages. Additionally, there are already examples of young entrepreneurs who have stayed back and return migrants who have established successful business ventures based on mountain resources. These self-employment

projects vary from the promotion of local tourism to agricultural mountain product value chains.

Such youth can serve as role models that the younger generation needs to observe more often in their surroundings. Witnessing the possibility of options other than migration is crucial for them in the daily course of their lives. These entrepreneurs are often supported by NGOs, which can facilitate regular interaction between potential migrants and potential entrepreneurs, as well as other successful local entrepreneurs. This interaction can provide a diversity of role models for youth. Sharing knowledge and experience between such individuals and school-going youth can help the latter imagine more than the limited career options that they observe in their communities and make more informed decisions about their careers.

At the same time there are also older youth who have tried to stay back in villages and self-start similar projects and have given up because of both lack of community support and challenges in accessing government granted support measures which are plagued with red-tape and excessive bureaucracy. As important as successful projects are, there are more lessons in analysing the failures to establish a policy environment that enables youth to operationalise their aspirations in this direction.

Additionally, it is important to note that entrepreneurship is not the panacea for all challenges facing youth in Uttarakhand. The value of migrants can extend beyond their entrepreneurial potential. The study contributes to understanding how migrants help youth in villages expand the scope of their aspirations. When migrants share their knowledge, experiences, and observations with youth in their villages, they broaden the youth's imagination regarding different education and career options.

Furthermore, the study reveals that migrants from within the family, such as an elder sibling, or from neighbouring households, also play a significant role as guiding figures in young people's lives. In this way, they complement or compensate for the lack of such guidance in schools and families. Migrants working in cities are also considered inspirational figures by young people back home. The experiences of such migrants, who come from similar contexts and have achieved higher education and career milestones, should be leveraged as a resource for much-needed mentoring and guidance for the youth in Almora, regardless of their migration outcomes in the future.

This can be facilitated by local schools or NGOs, ensuring that even if the youth decide to migrate, they migrate well equipped with knowledge that they can utilise to better pursue their aspirations in their destination.

Aspirations and education: implications for development policy and practice

The aspirations of youth are severely limited from the outset with regards to acquiring higher education. Good quality education stands as the first and most crucial step in advancing one's prospects in life, yet youth in Almora's public schools face disadvantages in this regard. The research identifies two significant barriers to benefiting from this fundamental avenue of development: a lack of relevant information for making informed decisions and physical challenges in accessing higher education institutions.

Schools in the research area lack the infrastructure to provide access to information about higher education and career opportunities. None of the schools in the study have guidance counsellors or any means for students to access information online through computers. While teachers strive to guide students, the acute shortage of teaching staff leaves them overburdened. The only consistent source of relevant information identified in the study is returning migrants who can offer information in a personal capacity. Apart from this, there is no stable and reliable source of guidance and information for youth.

The schooling system must acknowledge the necessity for such facilities for students who suffer from this information deficit and are uncertain about their options. Access to information – especially digital access in current times – is a prerequisite for progress in life, and youth in Almora, deprived of this access, face a disadvantage from the very outset of their lives.

The second, even more basic barrier is the difficulty in accessing higher education institutions. In the study area, most higher education institutions are centred in Almora district HQ, making them physically inaccessible for most of the youth who do not live within a reasonable distance. This research underscores how the aspiration to pursue any form of higher education diminishes across all caste groups and genders with increasing distance from the district HQ. While the quality of education available in the district HQ is also debatable, this research refrains from exploring this issue as accessibility to any higher education institute is an even more urgent and fundamental challenge that needs to be addressed.

It is at this juncture that policy willingness is put to the test: Is access to higher education a fundamental right for all youth? The public education system in Almora, and perhaps the entirety of Uttarakhand, requires significant reforms for the benefit of its youth. Teacher concerns are numerous and must be addressed to improve the quality of teaching and the schooling experience of youth. The purpose of schooling cannot merely be the passage of time. A serious overhaul of schooling is necessary, one that closely attends to the needs of today's youth and equips them with the knowledge and capabilities they need to confidently set and pursue their aspirations.

Aspirations and culture: implications for development policy and practice

The research reflects on the capacity to aspire vis-à-vis educational and career aspirations among youth. This meta-capacity is an important part of the culture as it is a collective cultural capacity (Appadurai, 2004). The research also explores the cultural values prevalent in mountain communities that hinder youth from aspiring or exploring their true potential. It identifies barriers to taking risks and exploring new pathways deeply entrenched in the community's culture. The typical rural community values, reflecting those of conventional Indian society, discourage youth from pursuing unconventional career paths. Social influence of this nature tends to be more pronounced in remote mountain communities due to physical isolation and limited access to quality higher education services. This holds especially true for girls, who face additional restrictions and unfair scrutiny in their daily lives. These constraints and judgments often lead many girls to view migration as a preferable alternative.

Given these findings, it would not be unjust to conclude that any effort to enhance the aspirational capacity of youth or assist them in setting and achieving their aspirations in any society must consider the cultural context of that society.

Any change within a community must originate from within itself. Culturally rooted change stands as the primary prerequisite for sustainable, long-term development within a community, ensuring that the values of change are genuinely embraced by the people for whom the change is intended to benefit. Appadurai (2004) illustrates the case of slum dwellers advocating for their right to housing in urban Mumbai, where the poor developed and collectively exercised their capacity to aspire. Perhaps, the significance of culture in the context of aspirations is most succinctly summarised when he states that "culture is a dialogue between aspirations and sedimented traditions" (p. 28). Therefore, culture assumes utmost relevance in establishing and negotiating the limits of aspiration and plays a crucial role in the community's capacity to aspire.

An important takeaway for development policy and practice is to address cultural elements within communities that impede the development of the capacity to aspire and discourage youth from expressing and realising their true potential. Education and schooling can play pivotal roles in this direction, as educators hold significant positions beyond schools as respected figures in communities. More fundamentally, the purpose of education should be to challenge cultural values that are restrictive or regressive. Therefore, the education and schooling system must play vital roles in addressing cultural elements that hinder the aspirations of youth, especially girls. Similarly, policies aimed at youth should also consider cultural attitudes toward risk-taking, unconventional choices, and departure from traditional gender roles.

Both development efforts and policy measures must recognise culture as the most important and influential factor in determining the success or failure of all endeavours directed at youth development.

Contributions of the study

The findings of this study are intended to resonate with academics, policymakers, development practitioners, and the general populace of Uttarakhand and beyond who are interested in issues concerning youth, migration, and mountainous regions. It sheds light on the structural disadvantages faced by youth from mountainous areas when it comes to envisioning and pursuing their futures.

The study offers empirical evidence on the status of educational and career aspirations among mountain youth, their capacity to aspire, and the factors impeding their development and application of this collective cultural capacity. It deepens our understanding of the aspirations and challenges encountered by youth in specific geographical regions, particularly those grappling with mountainous landscapes. It underscores the need for policy and development initiatives to acknowledge the unique challenges confronted by youth in such locales. While debates surrounding young people's educational access and aspirations are ongoing globally, the geographic focus of this research will contribute fresh insights to the literature on this subject.

The study conceptually integrates insights from various domains to analyse the interplay between aspirations and migration within a specific context. This approach recognises that both concepts transcend disciplinary boundaries and can be adapted to the nuances of the context under study.

Methodologically, the study employs a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This approach ensures thorough coverage of topics while also permitting the generalization of certain findings. Moreover, the study embraces participatory research methodology with youth participants, enabling them to continuously refine research tools as data collection progresses and granting them final authority in determining key insights from each session. This participatory approach ensures that tool development and data collection are inclusive and that the most pertinent insights are captured and reported based on the judgment of young participants.

Limitations

While one endeavours to develop a research project holistically, flaws in implementation inevitably arise due to oversight or factors beyond the researcher's control. Research projects implemented in mountainous geographies face additional challenges compared to typical

research endeavours. This resulted in some gaps that may require further exploration through subsequent research efforts. I outline these limitations as follows:

1. Absence of village-based qualitative data collection: The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns compelled me to curtail the study's scope. Unfortunately, I couldn't conduct the final phase of immersive qualitative data collection in villages, involving parents, family members, and other social actors. Therefore, methodically, the study misses out on perspectives of influential actors in young people's personal and social lives.

2. Scope of the study limited in depth exploration of intersectional dynamics: A limitation of this study lies in its broad geographical scope, which was chosen to provide a general understanding of educational and career aspirations. Since the study started with an aim to generate a generalised view of the aspirations of the youth in the study region, the research fails to generate deeper intersectional insights on highly relevant issues of the region like caste, gender, and family income in a fully integrated manner. Absence of studying the processes involved in their daily lives has led to partial insights into youth's aspirations

3. Focus on limited aspects of aspiration: educational and career aspirations form only a limited part of life aspirations. Migration processes relate to broader aspects of life than education and career. However, this study limits itself to analysing only educational and career aspirations and their relationship with migration processes. This was a decision made keeping in mind the ease of data collection and ethical issues in approaching education and career issues within the school system. This limited the scope for exploring the deeper personal and social aspects of aspirations.

Further research ideas

Stemming from analysis of the limitations of the research and observing the interplay of multiple issues that underlie the aspirations of youth and for the limited capacity to aspire among the youth, there are several interesting topics that warrant further research. Some of the threads of inquiry directly related to this study and some which have indirect influence on the research topic for further research are listed here:

1. This study identifies factors such as gender, family income level, and caste that influence not only the final manifested aspirations but also the process of aspiration formation among youth. Additionally, the limitations imposed by mountain geographies further shape these aspirations and their formation processes. Consequently, both the aspirations formed, and the aspiration formation process are influenced by multiple factors operating simultaneously. Recognising the significant impact of the complexity of such influences, I acknowledge that an in-depth intersectional analysis of these factors will greatly enhance our understanding not only of aspiration formation but also of the lives of young people in

disadvantaged positions in rural mountain geographies and communities. Studying the interaction of these factors with each other would also aid in understanding and prioritising development interventions aimed at empowering youth from different backgrounds subject to different social realities and factors of disadvantage.

2. Aspirations are born and embedded in the social life and findings from this study also indicate how family as well as the community culture are decisive in confining or broadening the scope of an individual's aspirations, it is imperative that an in-depth enquiry be made into the values, daily practices, and interactions of young people in their real-life setting. Their interactions with people around them, family members, village elderly, peers and migrants who occasionally come home can reveal much more about how aspiration formation happens and how the aspirations setting is negotiated with others and with self. In general, the roles and identities of young people in their communities in the changing social landscapes of mountain communities needs to be studied more deeply. The lives of young girls, especially, demands a more nuanced inquiry.

3. Similarly, it would be interesting to study the aspiration setting or negotiation process and career trajectories of youth across caste groups. This should be done with a focus on processes through which youth from marginalised castes derive information and even inspiration and to see the mechanisms through which they put this information to use and exercise their choices especially with respect to migration for furthering their chances.

4. Because my objective was to generate a general sense of what educational and career aspirations are, I chose a wider geographical area to conduct the project. A smaller case study of a school or a particular village could bring a more nuanced understanding of culture and aspirations forth. In a similar context, the importance of role models could be explored with further, case specific in-depth research. This can be done by examining cases of people who have followed unconventional career paths and its effect on other younger people in their community – the mushroom farmer in this research for example or any other return migrant farmers. This would also bring into light the need for development of agriculture as an aspirational pathway

5. Lastly, the education and schooling system merit intensive research. Uttarakhand education system and daily process of schooling need to be examined through critical research with the aim of making recommendations for concrete changes. This includes aspects of access, quality of teaching and subject curriculum as well as the pedagogy. In addition, the lives and issues of teachers also deserve special focus in mountain geographies. The mental health of educators living in remote destinations, away from their families for prolonged periods of time should be observed in highest concern

Final remarks

As migration remains the most apparent option in Uttarakhand, offering 'something rather than nothing', youth will persist in considering it unless they perceive suitable opportunities emerging in their villages or nearby. The pursuit of better education and employment stands out as primary reasons for the migration of youth from Uttarakhand. (Hoffmann et al., 2019; Rural Development and Migration Commission, 2018b).

While conducting this research and writing this thesis, I have grappled with the question of migration: is migration truly a challenge? Through my engagement with this topic, I have gained much clearer insight than when I initially embarked on this project. I do not perceive migration as a problem or challenge that demands resolution, particularly when considering the disadvantaged context from which young people in Uttarakhand are migrating. Migration presents an opportunity for youth to improve their prospects in life, offering the chance to gain new knowledge and experiences that are simply unattainable while remaining in the rural villages of the hill districts. However, I also believe that migration should be a choice-driven, purposeful, and informed decision. Distress-driven migration, undertaken unwillingly due to the absence of alternatives, is perhaps the true challenge of migration in the study area. Not everyone may desire to migrate. There exists a strong desire among youth to be able to contribute while remaining close to their homes. However, the options and opportunities for such youth are scarce. It is here that policy and research attention are warranted. I summarise here two points that concerned me when I began this research.

The first point concerns the apathy of policymaking in Uttarakhand, including the research sites. Despite extensive attention and discussion on the migration of young people from the state, there has been no concerted effort to improve their lives within the state. If the data from the research is any indication, the youth suffer due to factors beyond their control. The general lack of improvement in the lives of people living in the mountains is a significant issue in a state that was established to enhance their livelihoods. Moreover, it is concerning that the youth, who represent the future of the mountains, cannot see opportunities for themselves there. Policymaking must move beyond surface-level concerns about migration and genuinely explore ways to enable youth's access to development facilities – such as good quality school education that exposes them to new ideas, access to higher education, and opportunities for self-development – that empower them to explore their potential and the potential that the mountain geography offers. In summary, systematic efforts must be made to address the structural deficiencies that inhibit the capacity to aspire among youth and their aspirations.

The second point pertains to how the migration of young people is approached in research and discussed in development practice. Instead of limiting research on migration to push and pull causation factors, the discourse should shift towards a rights-based exploration of the

underlying issues. This implies focusing not only on the causes of migration but also on facilitating informed migration among youth if they choose to migrate. NGOs are engaged in development work aimed at creating opportunities as alternatives to migration, and successful local entrepreneurs and agricultural innovators are leveraging mountain resources to generate income and employment in Uttarakhand. These successes need to be showcased to the emerging generation of youth who are entering adulthood and require new role models. There is an urgent need to change the narrative on migration and focus on new-age alternatives that align with young people's aspirations.

The youth from mountainous regions cannot be expected to remain where they are when development facilities and better life opportunities do not reach them. Mountain youth are hardworking and resilient. Their daily lives involve extensive physical labour, as many must traverse long distances over hilly terrain to reach schools and then contribute to household chores, especially during agricultural sowing and harvest seasons. Life is considerably more challenging for young people in the mountains compared to plain areas. Moreover, girls' lives are even more demanding, as they must assist with agricultural and household tasks. The primary employment opportunity in the agricultural sector often does not yield outputs commensurate with the arduous labour it requires. Therefore, it is not surprising that many young people migrate to cities in search of better incomes. Establishing a life for themselves in the mountains is akin to moving mountains – it is a formidable task. Without serious and sincere development measures focused on their future, it would be unjust to consider their migration a problem and expect them to forego the opportunities that migration appears to offer.

References

FAO and IFAD (2019). *United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028. Global Action Plan*. FAO and IFAD Rome.

Agarwala, T. (2008). Factors influencing career choice of management students in India. *Career Development International*, *13*(4), 362–376. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810880844

AISHE. (2017). All india survey on higher education 2011-12 (provisional) government of india. http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2011-12P_1.pdf

Akosah-Twumasi, P., Emeto, T. I., Lindsay, D., Tsey, K., & Malau-Aduli, B. S. (2018). A Systematic Review of Factors That Influence Youths Career Choices- the Role of Culture. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 3). https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/feduc.2018.00058

Allen, M. P. (2004). *Understanding regression analysis*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Ambedkar, B. R. (2014). *Annihilation of caste: The annotated critical edition*. Verso Books.

Appadurai, A. (2004). The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition. *Culture and Public Action: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on Development Policy. Stanford University Press: Palo Alto, California*, 59–84.

Appadurai, A. (2013). *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. Verso. https://books.google.de/books?id=1g6jtgAACAAJ

Arulmani, G., van Laar, D., & Easton, S. (2003). The Influence of Career Beliefs and Socio-Economic Status on the Career Decision-Making of High School Students in India. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, *3*(3), 193–204. https://doi.org/10.1023/b:ijvo.0000006599.92116.0a

Arulmani, G., Van Laar, D., & Easton, S. (2001). Career planning orientation of disadvantaged high school boys: A study of socioeconomic and social cognitive variables. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, *27*(1–2), 7–17.

Aslany, M., Carling, J., Mjelva, M. B., & Sommerfelt, T. (2021). Systematic review of determinants of migration aspirations. *QuantMig Project Deliverable D2.2.*, *870299*. https://www.quantmig.eu/res/files/QuantMig D22 2021-01-29.pdf

Atkinson, E. T. (1882). *The Himalayan districts of the North-Western provinces of India*. North Western Province and Oudh Government Press.

Atkinson, E. T. (1974). *Kumaun hills: Its history, geography and anthropology with reference to Garhwal and Nepal*. Cosmo Publications.

Awasthi, I. C. (2017). Migration Patterns in Hill Economy of Uttarakhand. *The Indian Economic Journal*, *57*(4), 84–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019466220100406

Bachmann, F., Maharjan, A., Thieme, S., Fleiner, R., & Wymann von Dach, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Migration and - Sustainable Mountain Development: Turning Challenges into Opportunities*. Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, with Bern Open Publishing (BOP).

Baker, W., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., & Taggart, B. (2014). Aspirations, education and inequality in England: insights from the Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project. *Oxford Review of*

Education, *40*(5), 525–542. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.953921

Bakewell, O., Kubal, A., & Pereira, S. (2016). Introduction: Feedback in migration processes. In *Beyond Networks* (pp. 1–17). Springer.

Balsera, M. R. (2014). *Young migrants' aspirations, expectations and perspectives of well-being investigated using biographical narratives, the capability approach and intersectionality*.

Barnes, S., & Lewin, C. (2005). An introduction to inferential statistics: Testing for differences and relationships. *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, 226–235.

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *15*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

Berlin, I. (1969). *Four essays on liberty*.

Bernard, T., Taffesse, A. S., & Dercon, S. (2008). Aspirations failure and well-being outcomes in Ethiopia: Towards an empirical exploration. *Improving Institutions for Growth Workshop, Oxford, UK, March*, *21*.

Bernsen, N. R., Crandall, M. S., Leahy, J. E., Abrams, J. B., & Colocousis, C. R. (2022). Do rural youth want to stay rural? Influences on residential aspirations of youth in forest-located communities. *Community Development*, *53*(5), 566–584. https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2021.1998170

Bertrand, M., Hanna, R., & Mullainathan, S. (2010). Affirmative action in education: Evidence from engineering college admissions in India. *Journal of Public Economics*, *94*(1–2), 16–29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2009.11.003

Berzin, S. C. (2010). Educational aspirations among low-income youths: Examining multiple conceptual models. *Children & Schools*, *32*(2), 112–124.

Béteille, A. (1996). VARNA AND JATI. *Sociological Bulletin*, *45*(1), 15–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920050208

Bhadra, & Khanal. (2002). *Poverty in Mountain Areas of the Hindu Kush Himalayas*. http://lib.icimod.org/record/7438/files/attachment_54.pdf#page=80

Bhagat, R. (2017). Migration, Gender and Right to the City. *Economic & Political Weekly*, *LII*(32), 35–40.

Bhagat, R. B. (2010). Internal migration in India: Are the underprivileged migrating more? *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, *25*(1), 27–45. https://doi.org/10.18356/b748277d-en

Bhandari, G., & Reddy, B. V. (2015). Impact of out-migration on agriculture and women work load: An economic analysis of hilly regions of Uttarakhand India. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *70*(902-2016–68381), 396–404.

Blackhurst, A. E., & Auger, R. W. (2008). Precursors to the Gender Gap in College Enrollment: Children's Aspirations and Expectations for Their Futures. *Professional School Counseling*, *11*(3), 2156759X0801100. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759x0801100301

Bok, J. (2010). The capacity to aspire to higher education: "It's like making them do a play without a script." *Critical Studies in Education*, *51*(2), 163–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508481003731042

Bose, A. (2000). Demography of Himalayan Villages. *Economic and Political Weekly*,

35(27), 2361–2363.

Boston, T., & Nair-Reichert, U. (2003). Affirmative Action: Perspectives from the United States, India and Brazil. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, *27*(1), 3–14. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/affirmative-action-perspectives-united-states/docview/200343087/se-2?accountid=14618

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bredtmann, J., Martínez Flores, F., & Otten, S. (2019). Remittances and the brain drain: Evidence from microdata for Sub-Saharan Africa. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *55*(7), 1455–1476.

Brown, T., Scrase, T. J., & Ganguly-Scrase, R. (2017). Globalised dreams, local constraints: migration and youth aspirations in an Indian regional town. *Children's Geographies*, *15*(5), 531–544. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2016.1274948

Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality and Quantity*, *56*(3), 1391–1412. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y

Byun, S. Y., Meece, J. L., Irvin, M. J., & Hutchins, B. C. (2012). The Role of Social Capital in Educational Aspirations of Rural Youth*. *Rural Sociology*, *77*(3), 355–379. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.2012.00086.x

Cabrera, A. F. (1994). Logistic regression analysis in higher education: An applied perspective. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, *10*(814), 225–256.

Campbell, L. A., & McKendrick, J. H. (2017). Beyond aspirations: Deploying the capability approach to tackle the under-representation in higher education of young people from deprived communities. *Studies in Continuing Education*, *39*(2), 120–137.

Carling, J. (2002). Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: Theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *28*(1), 5–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830120103912

Carling, J. (2016). The role of aspirations in migration. *Paper Presented at Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, September*, 23–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2012.07.006

Carling, J., & Collins, F. (2018). *Aspiration , desire and drivers of migration Aspiration , desire and drivers of migration. 9451.* https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134

Carling, J., & Schewel, K. (2018). Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(6), 945–963. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384146

Castle, S., & Diarra, A. (2003). *The international migration of young Malians: tradition, necessity or rite of passage*. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine London.

Castles, S. (2017). *Migration, citizenship and identity: Selected essays*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Castles, S., De Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). *Age of Migration: International Population Movement in the Morden World*.

Caudle, S. L. (2004). Qualitative data analysis. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, *2*(1), 417–438.

Census of India. (2011). Census of India 2011. In *Rural urban distribution of population, provisional population total. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.*

Chatterjee, S., & Hadi, A. S. (2006). *Regression analysis by example.* John Wiley & Sons.

Chaudhuri, M. (2012). Indian" Modernity" and" Tradition": A gender analysis. *Polish Sociological Review, 178*(2), 281–293.

Chauhan, T. S., Gopalakrishnan, S., & Selvaraj, M. S. (2003). *Fleeing the Hills : The Impact of Migration on India ' s Mountain Areas. 2008,* 1–17.

Check, J., & Schutt, R. K. (2011). *Research methods in education.* Sage Publications.

Chopra, R. (2014). *Uttarakhand: Development and Ecological Sustainability.* www.oxfamindia.org

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners. *Successful Qualitative Research,* 1–400.

Cohen, J. H. (2004). *The culture of migration in southern Mexico.* University of Texas Press.

Collins, F. L. (2018). Keeping Bodies Moving: Hope, Disruption and the Possibilities of Youth Migration. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 39*(6), 626–641. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2018.1533536

Collins, K. M. T., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Jiao, Q. G. (2006). Prevalence of mixed-methods sampling designs in social science research. *Evaluation and Research in Education, 19*(2), 83–101. https://doi.org/10.2167/eri421.0

Combs, J. P., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2010). Describing and Illustrating Data Analysis in Mixed Research. *International Journal of Education, 2*(2), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v2i2.526

Commonwealth Secretariat. (2012). Women and the Teaching Profession: Exploring the Feminisation Debate. *Gender & Development, 20*(2), 379–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2012.687230

Conradie, I., & Robeyns, I. (2013). Aspirations and Human Development Interventions. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 14*(4), 559–580. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2013.827637

Copestake, J., & Camfield, L. (2010). Measuring multidimensional aspiration gaps: A means to understanding cultural aspects of poverty. *Development Policy Review, 28*(5), 617–633.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Sage publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Research Designs.* Sage publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research, 209,* 240.

Crivello, G. (2011). 'Becoming somebody': youth transitions through education and migration in Peru. *Journal of Youth Studies, 14*(4), 395–411. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2010.538043

Crossman, A. (2018). Understanding purposive sampling: An overview of the method and its applications. *Retrieved April*, *1*, 2019.

Czaika, M., & Vothknecht, M. (2012). Migration as Cause and Consequence of Aspirations. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, *July 2012*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2130624

Czaika, M., & Vothknecht, M. (2014). Migration and aspirations-are migrants trapped on a hedonic treadmill? *IZA Journal of Migration*, *3*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-9039-3-1

Daehnhardt, M. (2019). *Migration, Development and Social Change in the Himalayas: An ethnographic village study*. Routledge.

Dalton, P., Ghosal, S., & Mani, A. (2010). Poverty and aspirations failure: A theoretical framework. *CESifo, Ludwig-Maximilians University*, *35*.

Dalton, P. S., Ghosal, S., & Mani, A. (2016). Poverty and Aspirations Failure. *Economic Journal*, *126*(590), 165–188. https://doi.org/10.1111/ecoj.12210

Datta, S., & Kingdon, G. G. (2021). Gender Bias in Intra-Household Allocation of Education in India: Has it Fallen Over Time? *SSRN Electronic Journal*, *12671*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3468619

Davis, K. (1951). *The population of India and Pakistan*.

De Haas, H. (2010a). Migration and development: A theoretical perspective. *International Migration Review*, *44*(1), 227–264.

De Haas, H. (2010b). *Migration transitions: a theoretical and empirical inquiry into the developmental drivers of international migration*. 72.

De Haas, H. (2010c). The internal dynamics of migration processes: A theoretical inquiry. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *36*(10), 1587–1617. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.489361

De Haas, H. (2010d). The internal dynamics of migration processes: A theoretical inquiry. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *36*(10), 1587–1617.

De Haas, H. (2011). The determinants of international migration. Conceptualising policy, origin and destination effects. *IMI Working Papers*, *32*, 1–35.

De Haas, H. (2012). The migration and development pendulum: A critical view on research and policy. *International Migration*, *50*(3), 8–25.

De Haas, H. (2014). *Migration theory: Quo vadis?*

De Haas, H. (2021). A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4

De Haas, H., Miller, M. J., & Castles, S. (2019). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. Red Globe Press.

Del Franco, N. (2010). Aspirations and self-hood: Exploring the meaning of higher secondary education for girl college students in rural Bangladesh. *Compare*, *40*(2), 147–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920903546005

Del Franco, N. (2014). *Negotiating adolescence in rural Bangladesh: a journey through school, love and marriage*. Zubaan.

Demi, M. A., McLaughlin, D. K., & Snyder, A. R. (2009). Rural Youth Residential Preferences: Understanding the Youth Development-Community Development Nexus.

Community Development, *40*(4), 311–330. https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330903279606

Department of Planning Government of Uttarakhand. (2018). *Uttarakhand Human Development Report.* http://des.uk.gov.in/files/uttarakhand_human_development_report_.pdf

DePoy, E., & Gitlin, L. N. (2016). *Chapter 20 - Statistical Analysis for Experimental-Type Designs* (E. DePoy & L. N. B. T.-I. to R. (Fifth E. Gitlin (Eds.); pp. 282–310). Mosby. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-26171-5.00020-3

Desai, S., & Kulkarni, V. (2008). Changing educational inequalities in India in the context of affirmative action. *Demography*, *45*(2), 245–270. https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.0.0001

Deshingkar, P., & Akter, S. (2009). Migration and Human Development in India. *Human Development*.

Deshingkar, P., & Grimm, S. (2005). *Internal migration and development: A global perspective*. United Nations.

Deshingkar, P., & Start, D. (2003). Seasonal Migration for Livelihoods in India: Coping, Accumulation and Exclusion Migrating out of Poverty View project Livelihood Options in South Asia-ODI View project. *Development*, *August*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252028464

Deshpande, M. S. (2010). *History of the Indian caste system and its impact on India today*.

Dhasmana, R. P., & Dhoundiyal, L. V. (2008). *Uttarakahnd: Need for a Comprehensive Eco-Strategy*.

Directorate of Economics and Statistics Government of Uttarakhand. (2022). *Uttarakhand at a Glance 2020-21*.

Directorate of Economics and Statistics Uttarakhand. (2024). *Uttarakhand at a Glance* (p. 1).

Dodgson, J. E. (2019). Reflexivity in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, *35*(2), 220–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334419830990

Drudy, S. (2008). Gender balance/gender bias: the teaching profession and the impact of feminisation. *Gender and Education*, *20*(4), 309–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250802190156

Dube, M. P. (1995). REGIONALISM IN INDIA: SOME CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UTTARAKHAND MOVEMENT. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, *56*(1/4), 85–97. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41855728

Duflo, E. (2012). Human values and the design of the fight against poverty. *Tanner Lectures*, *May 2012*.

Egdell, V., & McQuaid, R. (2016). Supporting disadvantaged young people into work: Insights from the capability approach. *Social Policy & Administration*, *50*(1), 1–18.

Emran, M. S., Jiang, H., & Shilpi, F. (2020). Gender Bias and Intergenerational Educational Mobility: Theory and Evidence from China and India. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3555501

England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *Professional Geographer*, *46*(1), 80–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00080.x

Erikkson, M., Xu, J., Shrestha, A., & Sandström, K. (2009). The changing Himalayas-impact

of climate change on water resources and livelihoods in the Greater Himalaya. *Special Report*.

Fargas-Malet, M., McSherry, D., Larkin, E., & Robinson, C. (2010). Research with children: Methodological issues and innovative techniques. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *8*(2), 175–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X09345412

Fawcett, J. T. (1989). Networks, linkages, and migration systems. *International Migration Review*, *23*(3), 671–680.

Fischer-Kowalski, M., & Et.al. (2014). *Ester Boserup's Legacy on Sustainability | Human-Environment Interactions*.

Fisher, M. J., & Marshall, A. P. (2009). Understanding descriptive statistics. *Australian Critical Care*, *22*(2), 93–97. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aucc.2008.11.003

Flechtner, S. (2014). Aspiration traps: When poverty stifles hope. *Inequality in Focus*, *2*(4), 1–4.

Foote, M. Q., & Bartell, T. G. (2011). Pathways to equity in mathematics education: How life experiences impact researcher positionality. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, *78*(1), 45–68. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10649-011-9309-2

Fraser, S., Lewis, V., Ding, S., Kellett, M., & Robinson, C. (2004). *Doing research with children and young people*. Sage.

Furlong, A., & Biggart, A. (1999). Framing 'Choices': a longitudinal study of occupational aspirations among 13-to 16-year-olds. *Journal of Education and Work*, *12*(1), 21–35.

Gnanadev, N., & Soundari, M. H. (2017). A Study on the Rural Dalit Women Entrepreneurs in Almora District of Uttarakhand State. *Czech & Slovak Social Work/Sociální Práce/Sociálna Práca*, *17*(1).

Goghari, V. M., & Kusi, M. (2023). An introduction to the basic elements of the caste system of India. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*(December), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1210577

Golberg, M. A., & Cho, H. A. (2004). *Introduction to regression analysis*. WIT press.

Gooch, P. (2014). Daughters of the hills: Gendered agricultural production, modernisation, and declining child sex ratios in the Indian central Himalayas. In *Ester Boserup's Legacy on Sustainability* (pp. 159–173). Springer, Dordrecht.

Gore, O., & Walker, M. (2020). Conceptualising (dis) advantage in South African higher education: A capability approach perspective. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, *8*(2).

Government of Uttarakhand. (2019). *Statistical Diary Uttarakhand 2017-18, Directorate of Economics and Statistics*.

Government of Uttarakhand. (2021). *State Report-Uttarakhand Skill Gap Study* (Issue December).

Government of Uttarakhand. (2023). *Basic Education Data 2020-21*. Samagra Shiksha. https://ssa.uk.gov.in/files/Basic-Education-Data2021-22_xlsx.pdf

Graham, A., Powell, M. A., & Taylor, N. (2015). Ethical Research Involving Children: Encouraging Reflexive Engagement in Research with Children and Young People. *Children and Society*, *29*(5), 331–343. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12089

Greene, J. C., Caracelli, V. J., & Graham, W. F. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *11*(3), 255–274.

Greene, J., & McClintock, C. (1985). Triangulation in evaluation: Design and analysis issues. *Evaluation Review*, *9*(5), 523–545.

Groves, R. M., Fowler Jr, F. J., Couper, M. P., Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2011). *Survey methodology*. John Wiley & Sons. http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ctow8zWdyFgC&oi=fnd&pg=PR15&dq=Survey+Methodology&ots=fegH9y0iTf&sig=_8FXtJtTUJyhvSevw3cgduGkp4M

Grunawalt, P. (2012). Why are Cities the Only Place for Dreams? Outmigration of Youths From Rural Uttarakhand. *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. Paper 1297*, 1–49.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2011). *Applied thematic analysis*. sage publications.

Guest, G., Namey, E. E., & Mitchell, M. L. (2013). *Collecting qualitative data: A field manual for applied research*. Sage.

Guha, R. (2000). *The unquiet woods: ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya*. Univ of California Press.

Gutman, L., & Akerman, R. (2008). *Determinants of aspirations (wider benefits of learning research report no. 27)*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1541614/1/Gutman2008Determinants.pdf

Haynes, K. (2012). Reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*, 72–89.

Haq, R., & Ojha, A. K. (2010). Affirmative action in India: caste-based reservations. In *International Handbook on Diversity Management at Work*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Harper, D., & Thompson, A. R. (2011). Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy: A Guide for Students and Practitioners. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy: A Guide for Students and Practitioners*. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249

Hart, C. S. (2004). *A study of students' perceptions of their aspirations and needs in relation to Aimhigher widening participation policy*. MPhil Thesis. University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

Hart, C. S. (2011). *Aspirations re-examined: a capability approach to widening participation in higher education*. University of Cambridge.

Hart, C. S. (2012). The capability approach and education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *42*(3), 275–282. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2012.706393

Hart, C. S. (2016). How Do Aspirations Matter? *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, *17*(3), 324–341. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2016.1199540

Heifetz, A., & Minelli, E. (2006). *Aspiration traps*. *March*, 1–15.

Heifetz, A., & Minelli, E. (2015). Aspiration traps. *The BE Journal of Theoretical Economics*, *15*(2), 125–142.

Hektner, J. (1994). *When Moving Up Implies Moving Out : This research is part of a larger*

ongoing study of Youth and Social Development funded by the Alfred P . Sloan Foundation . I wish to thank the.

Hoermann, B., & Kollmair, M. (2009a). *Labour migration and remittances in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region.* International Centre for Integrated Mountain Kathmandu.

Hoermann, B., & Kollmair, M. (2009b). *Labour Migration and Remittances in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region.*

Hoffmann, E. M., Konerding, V., Nautiyal, S., & Buerkert, A. (2019). Is the push-pull paradigm useful to explain rural-urban migration? A case study in Uttarakhand, India. *PLOS ONE*, *14*(4), e0214511. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214511

Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. Online readings in psychology and culture 2, 1 (2011). *Dx. Doi. Org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014.*

Howard, K. A. S., Carlstrom, A. H., Katz, A. D., Chew, A. Y., Ray, G. C., Laine, L., & Caulum, D. (2011). Career aspirations of youth: Untangling race/ethnicity, SES, and gender. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *79*(1), 98–109.

Howley, C. W. (2006). Remote possibilities: Rural children's educational aspirations. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *81*(2), 62–80.

Huddleston, B., Ataman, E., Salvo, S. P. De, Zanetti, M., Bloise, M., Bel, J., Franceschini, G., & D'Ostiani, L. F. (2003). Towards a Gis-Based Analysis of Mountain. *Environment and Natural Resources Working Paper No. 10*, *10*, 4.

Hui, K., & Lent, R. W. (2018). The roles of family, culture, and social cognitive variables in the career interests and goals of Asian American college students. In *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (Vol. 65, Issue 1, pp. 98–109). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000235

Huijsmans, R., Ambarwati, A., Chazali, C., & Vijayabaskar, M. (2021). Farming, Gender and Aspirations Across Young People's Life Course: Attempting to Keep Things Open While Becoming a Farmer. *European Journal of Development Research*, *33*(1), 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00302-y

Huijsmans, R., Ansell, N., & Froerer, P. (2021). Introduction: Development, Young People, and the Social Production of Aspirations. *European Journal of Development Research*, *33*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00337-1

IABT, & Udhyam. (2019). *Aspirations of Youth in Uttarakhand* (Issue September).

Ibrahim, S. (2011). Poverty, aspirations and wellbeing: afraid to aspire and unable to reach a better life-voices from Egypt Creating and sharing knowledge to help end poverty. *Brooks World Poverty Institute*, *January*, 1–23. www.manchester.ac.uk/bwpi

IMI. (2014). *Policymakers' Dialogue on Compensating Mountain States* (R. S. Tolia (Ed.)). Indian Mountain Initiative; Centre for Public Policy, School of Social Sciences, Doon University.

Institute for Human Development. (2018). *Human Development Report of the State of Uttarakhand.* https://doi.org/10.1016/s1352-0237(01)00307-0

Jaffee, E. M., Tucker, C. J., Van Gundy, K. T., Sharp, E. H., & Rebellon, C. (2019). *Northern New Hampshire Youth in a Changing Rural Economy: A Ten-Year Perspective.*

Jain, A. (2010). Labour Migration and Remittances in Uttarakhand. *Icimod.*

Jatav, M., Sen, S., & Jajoria, D. (2022). Environmental distress, out-migration and changing

gender roles: A case study of rural Uttarakhand, India. In *Gender, Unpaid Work and Care in India* (pp. 121–146). Routledge India.

Jeffrey, C. (2010). Timepass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India. *American Ethnologist*, *37*(3), 465–481.

Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P., & Jeffery, R. (2005). When schooling fails: Young men, education and low–caste politics in rural north India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *39*(1), 1–38.

Jeffrey, C., & Young, S. (2012). Waiting for change: youth, caste and politics in India. *Economy and Society*, *41*(4), 638–661. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2011.635435

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher*, *33*(7), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014

Joshi, B. (2018). Recent trends of rural out-migration and its socio-economic and environmental impacts in Uttarakhand Himalaya. *Journal of Urban and Regional Studies on Contemporary India*, *4*(2), 1–14. http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/hindas/index.html

Joshi, B. K. (2016). Some Reflections. In R. S. Tolia (Ed.), *Uttarakhand: 15 Years of Development* (pp. 9–20). Centre for Public Policy.

Josselson, R. (1987). *Finding herself: Pathways to identity development in women.* Jossey-Bass.

Kabeer, N. (2002). *The power to choose: Bangladeshi women and labor market decisions in London and Dhaka*. Verso.

Kandari, P. (2013). Migration Pattern and the increasing Participation of Females in the Economy of Hill Rural Areas: A Study of Pauri district in Uttarakhand. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science*, *17*(5), 27–33. https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-1752733

Kar, S. (2007). Inclusive growth in hilly regions: priorities for the Uttarakhand economy. *Institute of Economic Growth Working Paper*.

Kasecker, T. (2008). *Síntese biológica do Parque Nacional da Amazônia: subsídios para revisão do Plano de Manejo*. 60. https://doi.org/1412927927

Kenkel, W. F., & Gage, B. A. (1983). The restricted and gender-typed occupational aspirations of young women: Can they be modified? *Family Relations*, 129–138.

Khan, A. H., Arya, D., & Kumar, R. (2016). *Major Causes of Migration from Hills to Plain: A Case Study of Almora District, Kumaun Himalaya*.

King, R. (2012). Geography and migration studies: Retrospect and prospect. *Population, Space and Place*, *18*(2), 134–153.

Kingdon, G. G. (2005). Where has all the bias gone? Detecting gender bias in the intrahousehold allocation of educational expenditure. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *53*(2), 409–451.

Kohler, T., & Maselli, D. (2009). *Mountains and climate change. From understanding to action*. Geographica Bernensia.

Kohli, A. (2017). *Female education changes and continuation of gender roles in Urban India*.

Kollmair, M., & Hoermann, B. (2011). Labour migration in the Himalayas: opportunities and challenges. *Sustainable Mountain Development*, *59*(59), 3–8.

Koskimaki, L. (2017). Youth Futures and a Masculine Development Ethos in the Regional Story of Uttarakhand. *Journal of South Asian Development*, *12*(2), 136–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973174117711339

Kumar, A. (2018). *Complexity of varna and jāti: a relook at the Indian caste system*.

Kumar, S. (2016). Parental Influence on Career Choice Traditionalism among College Students in Selected Cities in Ethiopia. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, *3*(3), 23–30. https://doi.org/10.17220/ijpes.2016.03.003

Laube, W. (2015). *Changing aspirations, cultural models of success, and social mobility in northern Ghana*. ZEF Working Paper Series.

Lavrakas, P. (2008). *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947 NV - 0

Leavy, J., & Smith, S. (2010). Future Farmers: Youth Aspirations, Expectations and Life Choices. *Future Agricultures Discussion Paper*, *13*(June), 1–15. www.future-agricultures.org

Liebenberg, L., Jamal, A., & Ikeda, J. (2020). Extending Youth Voices in a Participatory Thematic Analysis Approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *19*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920934614

Lochmiller, C. R. (2021). Conducting thematic analysis with qualitative data. *Qualitative Report*, *26*(6), 2029–2044. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5008

Loveridge, J. (2010). Involving young people in research in secondary school settings. In *Involving Children and Young People in Research in Educational Settings*.

Lusome, R., & Bhagat, R. B. (2001). *Migration and Workforce Participation in the Himalayan States*.

Lybbert, T. J., & Wydick, B. (2018). Poverty, aspirations, and the economics of hope. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *66*(4), 709–753.

Mabogunje, A. L. (1970). Systems approach to a theory of rural-urban migration. *Geographical Analysis*, *2*(1), 1–18.

Macchi, M. (2010). Mountains of the world: Ecosystem Services in a Time of Global and Climate Change. *ICIMOD, Kathmandu*.

Macchi, M., & ICIMOD. (2010). Mountains of the World- Ecosystem Services in a Time of Global and Climate Change. *Icimod*.

Madarasova Geckova, A., Tavel, P., van Dijk, J. P., Abel, T., & Reijneveld, S. A. (2010). Factors associated with educational aspirations among adolescents: cues to counteract socioeconomic differences? *BMC Public Health*, *10*, 1–9.

Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, *9*(3), 3351–3364. http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/335

Maithani, B. P. (1996). Towards sustainable hill area development. *Himalaya: Man, Nature and Culture*, *16*(2), 4–7.

Maithani, B. P. (2016). Contradictions in Development Performance. In R. S. Tolia (Ed.),

Uttarakhand: 15 Years of Development (pp. 20–27). Centre for Public Policy.

Mamgain, R. P. (2003). Out-migration among rural households in Uttaranchal: Magnitude and characteristics. *Labour and Development*, *9*(2), 259–287.

Mamgain, R. P. (2004). Employment, migration and livelihoods in the Hill Economy of Uttaranchal. *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*, *7326*.

Mamgain, R. P. (2007). Growth, Poverty and Employment in Uttarakhand. *Institute for Human Development*, *Working Paper No. 39*, 1–17. http://www.ihdindia.org/%5C/Working Ppaers/2010-2005/pdf files/39- RP Mamgain.pdf

Mamgain, R. P., & Reddy, D. (2015a). *Outmigration from Hill Region of Uttarakhand: Issues and Policy Options*.

Mamgain, R. P., & Reddy, D. N. (2015b). *Outmigration from Hill Region of Uttarakhand: Magnitude, Challenges and Policy Options*.

Mamgain, R. P., & Reddy, D. N. (2017). Out-migration from the Hill Region of Uttarakhand: Magnitude, Challenges, and Policy Options. In D. N. Reddy & K. Sarap (Eds.), *Rural Labour Mobility in Times of Structural Transformation: Dynamics and Perspectives from Asian Economies* (pp. 209–235). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5628-4_10

Marshall, G., & Jonker, L. (2011). An introduction to inferential statistics: A review and practical guide. *Radiography*, *17*(1), e1–e6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.radi.2009.12.006

Massey, D. (1990). *1990: Social structure, household strategies, and the cumulative causation of migration. Population Index 56, 3-26.*

Massey, D. S., & Zenteno, R. M. (1999). The dynamics of mass migration. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *96*(9), 5328–5335. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.96.9.5328

Mau, W.-C. (2000). Cultural Differences in Career Decision-Making Styles and Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *57*(3), 365–378. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1745

Mave, V., Shaikh, A., Monteiro, J. M., Bogam, P., Pujari, B. S., & Gupte, N. (2022). Association of national and regional lockdowns with COVID-19 infection rates in Pune, India. *Scientific Reports*, *12*(1), 10446. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-14674-0

Mawdsley, E. (1997). Nonsecessionist regionalism in India: The Uttarakhand separate State movement. *Environment and Planning A*, *29*(12), 2217–2235. https://doi.org/10.1068/a292217

Mawdsley, E. (1998a). A New Himalayan State in India : Popular Perceptions of Regionalism, Politics, and Development. *Mountain Research and Development*, *19*(2), 101–112.

Mawdsley, E. (1998b). After chipko: From environment to region in Uttaranchal. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *25*(4), 36–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066159808438683

McLaughlin, D. K., Shoff, C. M., & Demi, M. A. (2014). Influence of perceptions of current and future community on residential aspirations of rural youth. *Rural Sociology*, *79*(4), 453–477.

Mehta, G. (1996). *Uttarakhand, prospects of development*. Indus Publishing.

Mehta, M., Yumnam, R., & Pande, A. (n.d.). *Narratives of inter-generational change from rural Uttarakhand, India*.

Migiro, S. O., & Magangi, B. a. (2011). Mixed methods : A review of literature and the future of the new research paradigm. *African Journal of Business Management*, *5*(10), 3757–3764. https://doi.org/10.5897/AJBM09.082

Mishra, D. K. (2016). *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*. Sage publications.

Mittal, S., Tripathi, G., & Sethi, D. (2008a). *Development strategy for the hill districts of Uttarakhand*. working Paper.

Mittal, S., Tripathi, G., & Sethi, D. (2008b). Development Strategy for the Hill Districts of Uttarakhand. In *Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations* (Issue 217). https://doi.org/http://hdl.handle.net/10419/176235

Mkwananzi, F. (2018). *Higher Education, Youth and Migration in Contexts of Disadvantage: Understanding Aspirations and Capabilities*. Springer.

Moller, J. (2000). Anti-reservation protests and the Uttarakhand pro-autonomy movement: Caste and regional identities in the Indian Himalayas. *South Asia Research*, *20*(2), 147–169.

Monsutti, A. (2007). Migration as a rite of passage: Young Afghans building masculinity and adulthood in Iran. *Iranian Studies*, *40*(2), 167–185.

Moran-Ellis, J. (2010). Reflections on the sociology of childhood in the UK. *Current Sociology*, *58*(2), 186–205. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392109354241

Morse, J. M. (1991). Strategies for sampling. *Qualitative Nursing Research: A Contemporary Dialogue*, *127*, 145.

Munshi, K., & Rosenzweig, M. (2009). Why is Mobility in India so Low? Social Insurance, Inequality, and Growth. In *NBER Working Paper Series* (Vol. 2009, Issue 75). https://doi.org/10.3386/w14850

Naafs, S., & Skelton, T. (2018). 'Youthful futures? Aspirations, education and employment in Asia.' *Children's Geographies*, *16*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2018.1402164

Nagalia, S. (2017). Out Migration From Uttarakhand Hills: Magnitude and Causes. *International Journal of Innovative Social Science & Humanities ResearchOnline)*, *4*(2), 2349–1876.

National Achievement Survey 2017. (2017). *Uttarakhand State Learning Report*.

Nautiyal, A. (2003). Women and development in the Garhwal Himalayas. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, *9*(4), 93–113.

Negi, N., Tamang, R., Pande, V., Sharma, A., Shah, A., Reddy, A. G., Vishnupriya, S., Singh, L., Chaubey, G., & Thangaraj, K. (2016). The paternal ancestry of Uttarakhand does not imitate the classical caste system of India. *Journal of Human Genetics*, *61*(2), 167–172. https://doi.org/10.1038/jhg.2015.121

Nick, T. G. (2007). Descriptive statistics. *Methods in Molecular Biology (Clifton, N.J.)*, *404*, 33–52. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-59745-530-5_3

NITI Aayog. (2018). *Report of Working Group IV Strengthening Skill and Entrepreneurship Landscape in Indian Himalayan Region*.

Niu, L. (2020). A review of the application of logistic regression in educational research: common issues, implications, and suggestions. *Educational Review*, *72*(1), 41–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1483892

NSDC. (2013). *District wise skill gap study for the state of Uttarakhand, National Skill Development Corporation*.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). Women's capabilities and social justice. *Journal of Human Development*, *1*(2), 219–247.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2005). *Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice. I Amartya Sens work and ideas: A gender perspective, red. B. Agarwal, J. Humphries & I. Robeyns*. London: Routledge.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2016). Introduction: Aspiration and the Capabilities List. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, *17*(3), 301–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2016.1200789

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Collins, K. M. T. (2007). A typology of mixed methods sampling designs in social science research. *Qualitative Report*, *12*(2), 281–316.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Combs, J. P. (2011). Data Analysis in Mixed Research: A Primer. *International Journal of Education*, *3*(1), 13. https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v3i1.618

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2007). Sampling Designs in Qualitative Research: Making the Sampling Process More Public. *The Qualitative Report*, *12*(2), 19–20.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Teddlie, C. (2003). A framework for analyzing data in mixed methods research. *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*, *2*(1), 397–430.

Onwuegbuzie, A., & Leech, N. (2015). Linking Research Questions to Mixed Methods Data Analysis Procedures 1. *The Qualitative Report*, *11*(3), 474–498. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2006.1663

Oyserman, D., & Markus, H. R. (1990). Possible selves and delinquency. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *59*(1), 112.

Page, J., & Plaza, S. (2006). Migration remittances and development: A review of global evidence. *Journal of African Economies*, *15*(suppl_2), 245–336.

Pande, V. (2013). *Stratification in Kumaun circa 1815-1930*.

Pandey, R. (2021). Male out-migration from the Himalaya: Implications in gender roles and household food (in) security in the Kaligandaki Basin, Nepal. *Migration and Development*, *10*(3), 313–341.

Pandey, R., & Dasgupta, P. (2014). *Developmental Disability Index for Hill States of India* (2014–134).

Pandey, R., & Jha, S. K. (2012). Climate vulnerability index - measure of climate change vulnerability to communities: A case of rural Lower Himalaya, India. *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*, *17*(5), 487–506. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11027-011-9338-2

Paranjpye, V. (1988). *Evaluating the Tehri dam*. Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage.

Parker, C., Scott, S., & Geddes, A. (2020). SAGE Research Methods Foundations. In *SAGE Research Methods Foundations* (Issue 2019). SAGE Publications Ltd.

https://methods.sagepub.com/foundations

Pathak, S. (1999). Beyond an Autonomous State Background and Preliminary Analysis of Uttarakhand Movement. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1999, Vol. 60, Diamond Jubilee* (Vol. 60, pp. 893–907). Indian History Congress.

Pathak, S., Pant, L., & Maharjan, A. (2017). *De-Population Trends , Patterns and Effects in Uttarakhand , India-A Gateway to Kailash Mansarovar*. 46. http://lib.icimod.org/record/32787/files/icimodWP_22_017.pdf

Pattnaik, I., Lahiri-Dutt, K., Lockie, S., & Pritchard, B. (2018). The feminization of agriculture or the feminization of agrarian distress? Tracking the trajectory of women in agriculture in India. *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, *23*(1), 138–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/13547860.2017.1394569

Pillalamarri, A. (2022). The future of reservations in India. *The Diplomat*.

Planning Commission Government of India. (2010). *Report of the Task Force to look into problems of hill states and hill areas and to suggest ways to ensure that these states and areas do not suffer in any way because of their peculiarities.*

Planning Commission Government of India. (2013). *Report of the Committee to study development in hill states arising from management of forest lands with special focus on creation of infrastructure, livelihood and human development.*

Ponto, J. (2015). Understanding and Evaluating Survey Research. *Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology*, *6*(2), 168–171. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4601897/pdf/jadp-06-168.pdf

Pradhan, Q. (2007). Empire in the Hills: The Making of Hill Stations in Colonial India. *Studies in History*, *23*(1), 33–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/025764300602300102

Prasad, A., O'Brien, L. T., & E. Smith Sockbeson, C. (2020). Caste at work: study of factors influencing attitudes toward affirmative action in India. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, *39*(6), 597–616. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-12-2018-0223

Pratham. (2018). *ASER 2018 Uttarakhand*.

Punch, S. (2002). Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, *9*(3), 321–341.

Quaglia, R. J., & Cobb, C. D. (1996). Toward a Theory of Student Aspirations. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *12*(3), 127–132.

Quisumbing, A., & McNiven, S. (2020). Moving forward, looking back: The impact of migration and remittances on assets, consumption, and credit constraints in the rural Philippines. In *Migration, Transfers and Economic Decision Making among Agricultural Households* (pp. 91–113). Routledge.

Quisumbing, A. R., & McNiven, S. (2005). *Migration and the rural-urban continuum: evidence from the rural Philippines*.

Ramaiah, A. (1992). Identifying other backward classes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1203–1207.

Rawat, P. (2017). *Population exodus in Pauri Garhwal : Out-migration raising questions on existence of hilly state Uttarakhand*. *2*(5), 654–664.

Ray, A., Bala, P. K., Dasgupta, S. A., & Srivastava, A. (2020). Understanding the factors influencing career choices in India: from the students' perspectives. *International*

Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management, *20*(2), 175–193.

Ray, D. (2001). Notes on Aspirations and the Poor. *Unpublished Manuscript*, 1–11.

Ray, D. (2006). Aspirations, poverty, and economic change. Understanding poverty. *Undestranding Poverty*, *June*, 409–421.

Rossman, G. B., & Wilson, B. L. (1985). Numbers and words: Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in a single large-scale evaluation study. *Evaluation Review*, *9*(5), 627–643.

Rowe, W. E. (2014). Positionality. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*, *628*, 627–628.

Rural Development and Migration Commission. (2018a). *Recommendations for Strengthening Socio-Economic Development in Rural Areas of Pauri Garhwal for Mitigating Out Migration*.

Rural Development and Migration Commission, U. (2018b). *Interim Report on the Status of Migration in Gram Panchayats of Uttarakhand*.

Rural Development and Migration Commission Uttarakhand. (2019). *Analysis of Schemes and Programmes in the Rural Development Sector and Recommendations for Strengthening the Rural Socio-Economy in Order To Mitigate Out-Migration*.

Rural Development and Migration Commission Uttarakhand. (2020). *Analysis of Liveliood Sources of Return Migrants due to COVID-19 Pandemic and Recommendations*.

Sahoo, S. (2017). Caste. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 1–7.

Sana, A. (1993). THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *13*(3/4), 1–76. https://doi.org/10.1108/eb013170

Sandelowski, M. (2000). Focus on research methods: Combining qualitative and quantitative sampling, data collection, and analysis techniques in mixed-method studies. *Research in Nursing and Health*, *23*(3), 246–255. https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240x(200006)23:3<246::aid-nur9>3.0.co;2-h

Sati, V. P. (2021). Out-migration in Uttarakhand Himalaya: Its types, reasons, and consequences. *Migration Letters*, *18*(3), 281–295. https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v18i3.957

Sawitri, D. R., & Creed, P. A. (2017). Collectivism and perceived congruence with parents as antecedents to career aspirations: A social cognitive perspective. *Journal of Career Development*, *44*(6), 530–543.

Sawitri, D. R., Creed, P. A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2014). Parental influences and adolescent career behaviours in a collectivist cultural setting. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, *14*(2), 161–180.

Sax, L. J., & Harper, C. E. (2007). Origins of the gender gap: Pre-college and college influences on differences between men and women. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*(6), 669–694.

Saxena, K. B. (2004). Report on prevention of atrocities against scheduled castes. *New Delhi: National Human Rights Commission*.

Schewel, K., & Fransen, S. (2018). Formal education and migration aspirations in Ethiopia. *Population and Development Review*, *44*(3), 555.

Schewel, K., & Fransen, S. (2022). Who prefers to stay? voluntary immobility among youth in Ethiopia, India, and Vietnam. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *48*(19), 4457–4484. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2092085

Schiffer, A. (2020). Issues of Power and Representation: Adapting Positionality and Reflexivity in Community-Based Design. *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, *39*(2), 418–429. https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12291

Scrase, T. J., Rutten, M., Ganguly-Scrase, R., & Brown, T. (2015). Beyond the Metropolis - Regional Globalisation and Town Development in India: An Introduction. *South Asia: Journal of South Asia Studies*, *38*(2), 216–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.1031459

Selvam, S. G. (2008). Capabilities Approach to Youth Rights in East Africa. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *12*(2), 205–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642980801899659

Semwal, R., Tewari, A., Negi, G. C. S., Thadani, R., & Phartiyal, P. (2007). Valuation of ecosystem services and forest governance: a scoping study from Uttarakhand. *LEAD India, New Delhi*, 112.

Sen, A. (1985). *Commodities and Capabilities*. North-Holland. http://www.amazon.com/Commodities-Capabilities-Amartya-Sen/dp/0195650387/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1310679705&sr=1-1

Sen, A. (1995). *Inequality reexamined*. Harvard University Press.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Alfred Knopf. http://www.amazon.com/Development-as-Freedom-Amartya-Sen/dp/0385720270/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1310743622&sr=1-1

Serneels, P., & Dercon, S. (2021). Aspirations, poverty, and education. Evidence from India. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *57*(1), 163–183.

Sethi, D. (2008). Development Strategy for the Hill Districts of Uttarakhand Surabhi Mittal Gaurav Tripathi. *Ratio*, *217*.

Sharma, L. (2014). Impact of family capital & social capital on youth entrepreneurship-a study of Uttarakhand state, India. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, *4*(1), 14. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-014-0014-3

Sharma, P., & Nayak, S. (2019). The Dynamics and Status of Feminisation in Indian Agriculture. *Journal of Rural Development*, *38*(2), 363. https://doi.org/10.25175/jrd/2019/v38/i2/146773

Sharma, S., Joshi, R., Joshi, R., Rawal, S. R., & Dhyani, P. P. (2015). Progression in Developmental Planning for the Indian Himalayan Region. In *G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development*.

Siddique, O., & Durr-e-Nayab. (2020). Aspirations and Behaviour: Future in the Mindset The Link between Aspiration Failure and the Poverty Trap. *PIDE-Working Papers*, *13*, 1–19. https://ideas.repec.org/p/pid/wpaper/202013.html

Siddiqui, T., Bhagat, R. B., Banerjee, S., Liu, C., Sijapati, B., Memon, R., Thinley, P., Ito, M., Nemat, O., & Arif, G. M. (2019a). Migration in the Hindu Kush Himalaya: Drivers, consequences, and governance. *The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment: Mountains, Climate Change, Sustainability and People*, 517–544.

Siddiqui, T., Bhagat, R. B., Banerjee, S., Liu, C., Sijapati, B., Memon, R., Thinley, P., Ito,

M., Nemat, O., & Arif, G. M. (2019b). The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment. In *The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92288-1

Sier, W. (2021). The Price of Aspirations: Education migrants' pursuit of higher education in Hubei province, China. *The European Journal of Development Research*, *33*(1), 16–34.

Singh, S. B. (2015). Women as milieu managers in integrated watershed management: Perspectives from the hilly areas of Uttarakhand. *Space and Culture, India*, *2*(4), 71–79. https://doi.org/10.20896/saci.v2i4.130

Smith, S. H., & Gergan, M. (2015). The diaspora within: Himalayan youth, education-driven migration, and future aspirations in India. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *33*(1), 119–135. https://doi.org/10.1068/d13152p

Sonesson, M., & Messerli, M. (2002). The Abisko Agenda: Research for Mountain Area Developement. *Ambio*.

Srinivas, M. N. (1956). A note on Sanskritization and Westernization. *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, *15*(4), 481–496.

Srinivas, M. N. (1984). Some reflections on the nature of caste hierarchy. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *18*(2), 151–167.

Srivastava, R. (2011). Internal migration in India. *Human Development in India*.

Srivastava, R., & Sasikumar, S. K. (2003). An overview of migration in India, its impacts and key issues. *Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia*, 22–24.

Stephenson, J. (1998). The concept of capability and its importance in higher education. *Capability and Quality in Higher Education*, 1–13.

Sykes, A. O. (1993). *An introduction to regression analysis*.

Taylor, G. A., & Blake, B. J. (2015). Key informant interviews and focus groups. *), Nursing Research Using Data Analysis: Qualitative Designs and Methods in Nursing*, 153–165.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Sage.

Teh, Y. Y., & Lek, E. (2018). Culture and reflexivity: Systemic journeys with a British Chinese family. *Journal of Family Therapy*, *40*(4), 520–536.

The World Bank. (2005). *World development report 2006: Equity and development*. The World Bank.

Thomas, N., & O'Kane, C. (2000). Discovering what children think: Connections between research and practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, *30*(6), 819–835.

Thompson, S. K. (2012). *Sampling* (Vol. 755). John Wiley & Sons.

Tiwari, P. C. (2000). Land-use changes in Himalaya and their impact on the plains ecosystem: need for sustainable land use. *Land Use Policy*, *17*(2), 101–111.

Tiwari, P. C., & Joshi, B. (2015). Climate change and rural out-migration in Himalaya. *Change and Adaptation in Socio-Ecological Systems*, *2*(1).

Tolia, R. S. (2012). *A Planning Framework for the Mountains States of India*.

Tumbe, C. (2012). Migration persistence across twentieth century India. *Migration and*

Development, *1*(1), 87–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2012.716225

Tumbe, C. (2018). *India Moving*. Penguin India.

UN. (2014). *Definition of youth* (Issue 2009). http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf

Ungruhe, C. (2010). Symbols of success: Youth, peer pressure and the role of adulthood among juvenile male return migrants in Ghana. *Childhood*, *17*(2), 259–271.

Vecchio, N., & Roy, K. C. (1998). *Poverty, female-headed households, and sustainable economic development.* Greenwood Press Inc.

Walker, M. (2003). Framing social justice in education: What does the 'capabilities' approach offer? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *51*(2), 168–187.

Walker, M., & Mkwananzi, F. (2015). Challenges in accessing higher education: A case study of marginalised young people in one South African informal settlement. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *40*, 40–49.

Walker, M., & Unterhalter, E. (2007). The capability approach: Its potential for work in education. In *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (pp. 1–18). Springer.

Walkington, H., Dyer, S., Solem, M., Haigh, M., & Waddington, S. (2018). A capabilities approach to higher education: geocapabilities and implications for geography curricula. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *42*(1), 7–24.

Wang, D., Hagedorn, A. D., & McLaughlin, D. K. (2021). Patterns of educational, occupational, and residential aspirations of rural youth: the role of family, school, and community. *Rural Sociology*, *86*(2), 177–203.

White, B. (2021). Human Capital Theory and the Defectology of Aspirations in Policy Research on Rural Youth. *European Journal of Development Research*, *33*(1), 54–70. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00300-0

Whitehead, A., Hashim, I. M., & Iversen, V. (2005). Child migration, child agency and intergenerational relations in Africa and South Asia. *International Conference, Childhoods: Children and Youth in Emerging and Transforming Societies, Oslo, Norway*, *29*.

Williams, C. (2007). Research methods. *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, *5*(3).

World Bank. (2017a). *Uttarakhand- Jobs*. 1–5.

World Bank. (2017b). *Uttarakhand: Poverty, Growth & Inequality*. 1–5.

Wymann von Dach, S., Romeo, R., Vita, A., Wurzinger, M., & Kohler, T. (2013). *Mountain farming is family farming: a contribution from mountain areas to the International Year of Family Farming 2014*. FAO.

Yadav, A., Sharma, G., & Gangwar, R. (2018). Determining factors for migration in Uttarakhand. *International Journal of Agricultural Science and Research (IJASR) ISSN (P)*, 57–2250.

Yang, D. (2008). International migration, remittances and household investment: Evidence from Philippine migrants' exchange rate shocks. *The Economic Journal*, *118*(528), 591–630.

Ye, J., & Pan, L. (2016). *Concepts and realities of family farming in Asia and the Pacific*. Working paper.

Zerjal, T., Pandya, A., Thangaraj, K., Ling, E. Y. S., Kearley, J., Bertoneri, S., Paracchini, S., Singh, L., & Tyler-Smith, C. (2007). Y-chromosomal insights into the genetic impact of the caste system in India. *Human Genetics*, *121*(1), 137–144. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00439-006-0282-2

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Sample Calculation

Survey sample calculated with the PASS sample size software developed by NCSS LLC
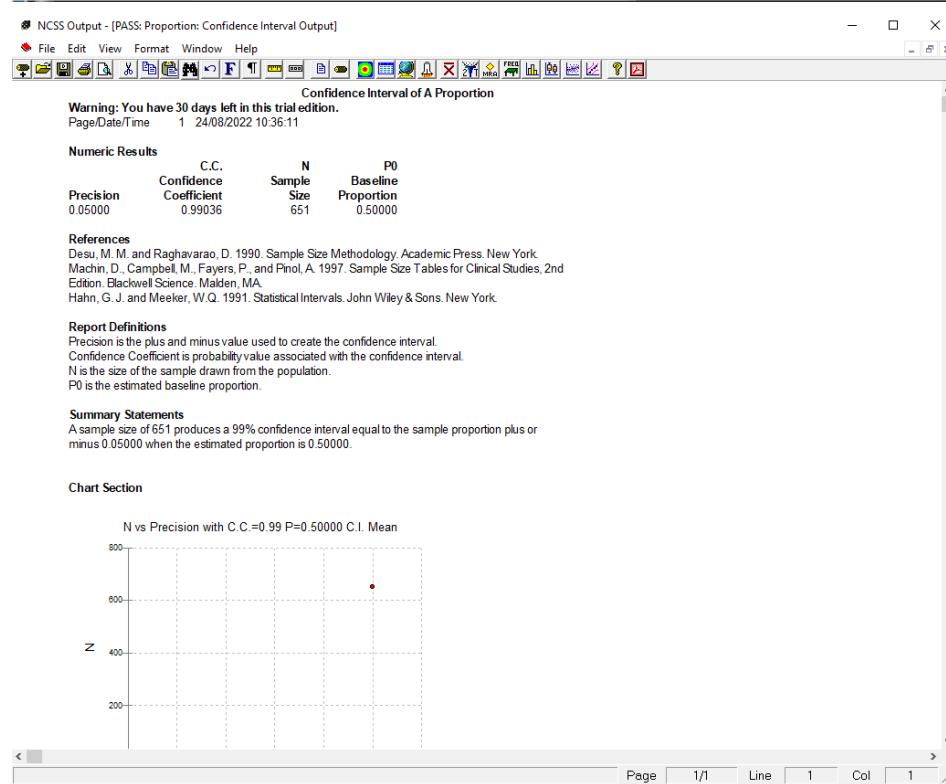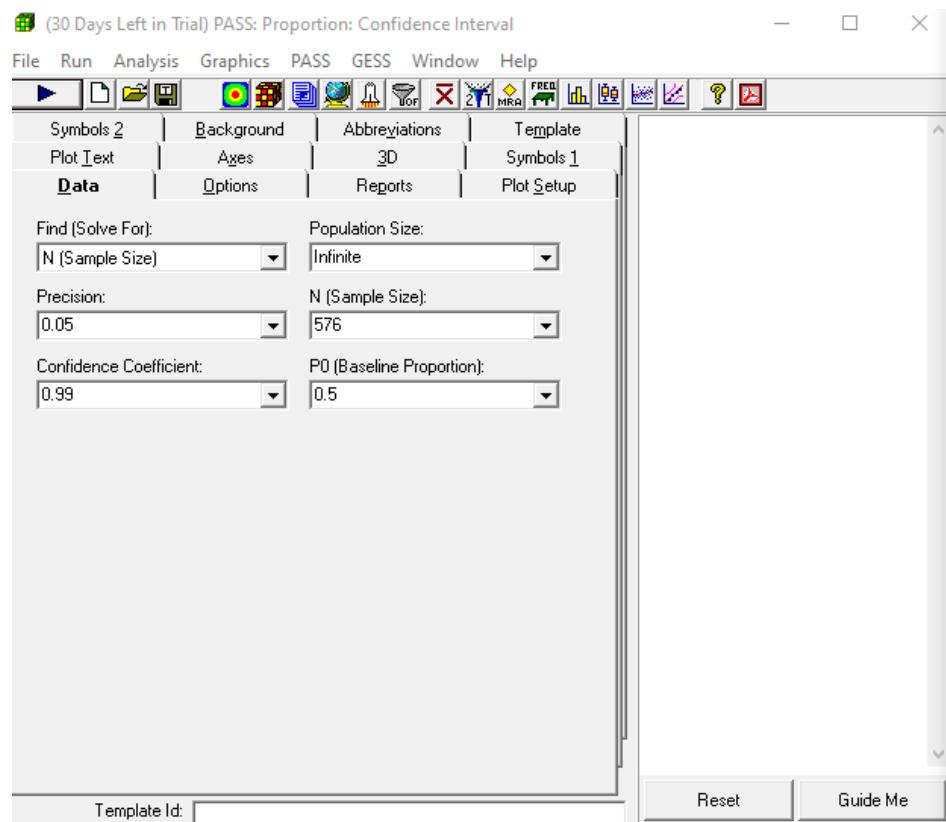
Appendix 2: List of Key informant interviews

1. Chief Education Officer of the Almora district

2. Head of the District Institute of Education and Training[37] (DIET),

3. Head of Department, Education at Almora campus of the Nainital University,

4. President, Integrated Mountain Initiative & Secretary Integrated Mountain Initiative[38]

5. A senior retired officer of the Indian Forest Services[39]

6. District Coordinator, Azim Premji Foundation[40]

7. Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation

8. Director, Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi, President, Mountain Children's Foundation[41]

9. Senior Team Leader, Education Outreach Programme, CHIRAG NGO[42],

10. Bureau Chief, Almora, Dainik Jagran[43]

11. President of the Almora Bar Association

12. Former Chairperson of Uttarakhand Gramin Bank[44]

13. Editor, Shakti Magazine[45]

14. Former manager of the Tata Uttarakhand Programme[46]

15. Former chairperson of the Almora Municipal Corporation

Two retired school principals

---

[37] District Institute for Education and Training (DIET) are district-level educational institutes which have been established in each district of India by the Indian government as centres of guidance for educational institutes and schools of a district. They also work as a platform for research and experimental work in education

[38] Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) is a civil society led network platform with the mission to mainstream concerns of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) and its people in the development dialogue of India; description sourced from mountaininitiative.in

[39] Indian Forest Services is a branch of administrative services in India

[40] Azim Premji Foundation (founded 2001) is a not-for profit organisation that has been working since 2000 with the elementary education system in rural government schools; https://azimpremjifoundation.org/

[41] Mountain Children's Foundation (founded 2002) is an NGO that works on children and youth participation in communities in Uttarakhand; https://mcfglobal.ngo/

[42] CHIRAG (founded 1986) is a rural development organization based in the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand in India working closely with communities on health, education, natural resource management and livelihoods; http://chirag.org/

[43] Dainik Jagran is most widely read Hindi daily newspaper in India

[44] Rural Development Bank in Uttarakhand

[45] Shakti is a national magazine that began publication in Almora in 1818

[46] Tata Uttarakhand Programme is a livelihoods and education project by Tata Group

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Key Informants

'Youth Aspirations and Migration Choices in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India'
Centre for Development Research, University of Bonn
Bonn, Germany

Researcher/Interviewer:
Date: **Time:**
Location:
Participant's Name: **Participant Code:**
Designation:
Contact Details:

S. No.	Questions/Topics

1.   Development Policies in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand was created with the promise of more mountain centred policies and actions? How far has that premise been realised?

What would you say about the development policies in the state with respect to people's lives and livelihoods? Specifically, with respect to the huge migration influence?

Do you think they address the ground reality and needs of people?

Do you think there is a sense of disappointment in people as there was a huge people's movement for statehood and then after it happened, people are migrating more than ever?

State policies on development post statehood have focussed on infrastructure development- How well-planned are these?

2.   On migration trends from Uttarakhand

Livelihood is the main reason cited- migration is highest among people in the ages between 25-35, migration for education is a significantly low number: What is happening before that age?

Is there an aspiration failure taking place that's resulting in migration?

Can something be done in years between when an individual gets educated and migrates

Comment on migration policy efforts of the state- there has been much talk in every election- what has been done in terms of action on ground?

Is it unrealistically idealistic to think about generating local livelihoods? Would people migrate nevertheless?

Can migration stories be turned around? Emphasis on reverse migration and its benefits being highlighted by state and some media.

3   **On Mountain Community and Aspirations**

How have the people and their lives changed over the years?

What would you say about the aspirations of youth in the region today?

What are the factors that drive young people in making decisions about future?

What are main challenges that youth face while planning their career and lives?

What could be done to help them plan better?

4.   **About your work and experience in the region**

(This section contains a long list of questions that are different for each key informant depending on the type of organisation affiliation- government or non-government, and the sector- livelihood, entrepreneurship, education, disaster risk reduction)

Could you please talk a little about your organisation, your work and your personal role in the organisation? How did you start your work here?

What has been your experience in starting this livelihood, community centric intervention? What have been your challenges in working with and engaging communities here in this particular area?

What is the level of youth engagement in interventions/community participation in general?

How did you come up with the idea of developing entrepreneurship in the state through your NGO? Your role in the organisation?

What are challenges of developing entrepreneurship in this region? Comment on policy and administration support?

As an NGO working to improve the quality of education in the state, what are the gaps in education and schooling system that need to be addressed urgently?

How well does the schooling here support the young people in thinking about their futures?

5   **Future of mountain people and migration**

Where is Uttarakhand headed? How do you foresee the future of pahad and pahāṛīs (mountains and mountain people)?

Appendix 4: Interview Guide for Teachers

'Youth Aspirations and Migration Choices in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India'
Centre for Development Research, University of Bonn
Bonn, Germany

Researcher/Interviewer: Namrata Rawat

Date: **Time:**
School:
Participant's Name: **Participant Code:**
Designation:
Contact Details:

S. No.	Questions/Topics
1.	**Development and Education Policies in Uttarakhand**
	Uttarakhand was created with the promise of more mountain centred policies and actions? How far has that premise been realised?
	State policies on development post statehood have focussed on infrastructure development- How well-planned are these?
	Do you think there is a sense of disappointment in people as there was a huge people's movement for statehood and then after it happened, people are migrating more than ever?
	What would you say about the education policies in the state with respect to young people's lives?
	How do they address the aspirations of youth? Specifically, with respect to the huge migration influence?
	Do you think they make youth aspirational?
2.	**Comment on migration trends from the mountains. Reasons? Policy gap in identifying**
	Livelihood is the main reason cited- migration is highest among people in the ages between 25-35, migration for education is a significantly low number: What is happening before that age?
	Is there an aspiration failure taking place that's resulting in migration?
	Can something be done in years when an individual gets educated and migrates especially for students who are not academically bright?
	Comment on migration policy efforts of the state- there has been much talk in every election- what has been done in terms of action on ground?

3   **On this Community and Aspirations**

What would you say about the aspirations of youth in the region? Of young women, boys?

How have the aspirations of people in general changed over the years?

What do you think your students plan to do after finishing schooling?

What are the popular career/livelihood options students follow after finishing their school education? Why are these options popular?

What are the factors that influence students the most while making these decisions?

What are main challenges that students face while planning their career and lives?

What could be done to help them plan better?

4.   **About your work as an educator**

How long have you been teaching in this region?

What has been your observation of young motivated people and migration choices?

And what about students who are not academically performing?

Teachers and teaching system are easily criticised in this region and blamed for everything

What are your challenges as an educator in this region now and the ones that you foresee see in your work here going forward?

What needs to change for teachers to do their jobs better?

5   **About future of migration**

Is it unrealistically idealistic to think about generating local livelihoods?

Would people migrate nevertheless?

Can migration stories be turned around? Emphasis on reverse migration and its benefits being highlighted by state and some media

Appendix 5: FGD Guide

'Youth Aspirations and Migration Choices in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India'
Centre for Development Research, University of Bonn
Bonn, Germany

Researcher/Facilitator:
Group Discussion Guide with Students
Date: **Time:**
School:
No. of Participants:

Questions	**Facilitators' Remarks**

After school plans
What do you want to do after finishing school? Why?

Who is helping or guiding you to make this choice?
What do you want to become/What do you want to do after finishing your education?

Career Guidance
Who guides you in your plans relating to your education and career?
How about support from school?
Family and friends?

Migration from Uttarakhand
What are the possible causes for rapid outmigration of people from Uttarakhand? / Why do you think more and more young people are migrating from mountain villages?

Follow up:
Do you think there are enough opportunities available for a person to achieve decent quality of life in the mountain villages? For example?
Do you think young people would like to live in mountains if there were enough education and livelihood opportunities? Why/ Why not?
If there is something that needs to be changed for young people to stay in mountains, then what would it be?
Where do you want to live when you start working? Why?

About migrants
Let's talk about people who have actually migrated from villages.
Do you personally know anyone who's migrated from your village?
Why did they move? Do they come back? How often? If not, why?

Have you noticed any differences in people who migrated? What kind of changes?

Do you like the changes? Why? Why not?

Life in villages
Which aspects of your life in your village do you like/dislike?

What would you like to change?

Do you think youth can solve the problems in their communities?

If given you could fix the problems of your village, what would be the problems that you would take up on priority, can we list these?

Media
Do you use any social media? How much?
What about TV?
Do you think it influences young people's behaviour and their thinking?

Only for girls' groups
What should be the right age for girls to marry these days?

Follow up:
Do you know of any unmarried girls who are working in the villages?
What are they doing?
Have you thought of doing the same? Why?

Do you know of any unmarried girls who have migrated from villages?

Follow up:
What are they doing?
What do you think their life is like? Is it better than it was here when they were in village?
Do you think migrating can help girls achieve their dreams?

Conclusion
Can you tell me 3 main points from our discussion that I should note down and MUST highlight in my report?

Feedback
I will conduct the same discussion in (xxx school in xxx) next week.
What else can I ask the next group that I missed today? Are there any other questions that I can ask?
How can I make the discussion better?

It is optional to fill this contact info sheet. All columns are optional. You can write a made-up name also, fill only columns that you like and leave others blank. If you want to fill your information, please also indicate if I can contact you or not by putting a yes (Y) or no (N) against your phone number.

S. No.	Name	Class	Age	Contact no	Y or N	Email
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						

Appendix 6: Survey Questionnaire

'Youth Aspirations and Migration Choices in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India'
Centre for Development Research, University of Bonn
Bonn, Germany

Survey on education and career aspirations among students in Almora, Uttarakhand

Field	Question	Answer
consent *(required)*	1. Do you want to participate in this survey?	1 Yes 2 No
Consent Yes		
geo2	Please record the GPS location *GPS coordinates can only be collected when outside.*	
Signature	Please sign here	
image_respondent	Please click a photo of the respondent	
Block *(required)*	R1. Select the survey block	1 Bhaisiyachhana 2 Bhikiyasain 3 Chaukhutiya 4 Dwarahat 5 Hawalbagh 6 Lamgara 7 Syaldey 8 Takula
Bhaisiyachhana *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Pandeytoli 2 Dalakot 3 Dhaulchina 4 Naugaon
Bhikiyasain *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Pali 2 Bhikiyasain 3 Thiroli 4 Kedar
Chaukhutiya *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Ganai
Dwarahat *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Daina 2 Ubhyari
Hawalbagh *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Darimkhola 2 Chauna
Lamgara *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Badiyar Rait 2 Badiyar Bisht
Syaldey *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Paithana 2 Bharsoli 3 Masod 4 Jaspur
Takula *(required)*	R2. Select survey village	1 Bhakuna 2 Padoliya 3 Bhanarath 4 Ladyura 5 Simalta 6 Manan 7 Dhaulara 8 Dhaun-sunar
DISE_Code *(required)*	R3. Mention the DISE Code	
School_Name	R3.a. Please select the School Name	1 G.G.I.C. Barechhina 2 G.I.C. Barechhina 3 G.I.C. Nagarkhan

			Shri Maa
		4	Anandmayi G.I.C. Dhaulchhina
		5	G.I.C. Naugaon Reethagarh
		6	G.I.C. Chaunaliya
		7	G.G.I.C. Bhikyasain
		8	G.I.C. Pali
		9	G.I.C. Binoli State
		10	G.G.I.C. Chaukhutia
		11	G.I.C. SHREEKHET
		12	G.G.H.S. UBHYARI
		13	G.G.I.C. Daulaghat
		14	G.I.C. Basantpur
		15	G.I.C. Syalde
		16	G.G.I.C. Bharsoli
		17	G.I.C. Agaspur
		18	G.I.C. Bhakuna
		19	G.I.C. Manan
		20	G.G.I.C. Someshwar
		21	G.I.C. Salounj
School_Type	R4. Select the school type	1	Boys
		2	Girls
		3	Coed
SS_Number	R5. Mention the Students Serial Number		
Student_Name *(required)*	P1. What is your name?		
Gender *(required)*	P2. Code the gender of the respondent	1	Female
		2	Male
Age	P2.1. What is your age?		
Grade *(required)*	P3. In which grade do you study?	1	11
		2	12
Religion *(required)*	P4. Which religion do you follow?	1	Hinduism
		2	Islam
		3	Christianity
		4	Buddhism
		5	Sikhism
		6	Nonreligious
		98	Others
		97	No answer
Caste *(required)*	P5. What is your caste?	1	GEN
		2	SC
		3	ST
		4	OBC
		97	No answer
Head *(required)*	P6. Who is the head of your family?	1	Father
		2	Mother
		3	Sibling (Brother/Sister)
		98	Others
CWE *(required)*	P7. Who is the Chief Wage Earner (CWE) in your family? *CWE: The person who contributes the most to the household expenses*	1	Father (in-law)
		2	Mother (in-law)
		3	Brother/Sister (in-law)
		4	Other Relatives
		98	Others
Edu_CWE *(required)*	P8. What is the highest qualification of the Chief Wage Earner?	1	Illiterate
		2	Less than Standard 8
		3	Standard 8 pass
		4	Standard 10 pass
		5	Standard 12 pass

		6	ITI/PTC/ vocational course
		7	Bachelors
		8	Masters & above
		9	Not Applicable
Edu_Father	P9. What is the highest qualification of your Father?	1	Illiterate
		2	Less than Standard 8
		3	Standard 8 pass
		4	Standard 10 pass
		5	Standard 12 pass
		6	ITI/PTC/ vocational course
		7	Bachelors
		8	Masters & above
		9	Not Applicable
Edu_Mother *(required)*	P10. What is the highest qualification of your Mother?	1	Illiterate
		2	Less than Standard 8
		3	Standard 8 pass
		4	Standard 10 pass
		5	Standard 12 pass
		6	ITI/PTC/ vocational course
		7	Bachelors
		8	Masters & above
		9	Not Applicable
HH_Income *(required)*	P11. What is the average monthly income of your household? *Please ask the respondent to include all the sources of income*	1	<=10,000
		2	10,001 - 20,000
		3	20,001 - 30,000
		4	30,001 - 40,000
		5	40,001 - 50,000
PO_Father *(required)*	P12. What is the primary occupation of your father?	1	Unemployed/ Homemaker
		2	Agriculture
		3	Labour
		4	Government. Service
		5	Pvt Service
		6	Business/self-employed-Shop/Driving
		98	Others
PO_Mother *(required)*	P13. What is the primary occupation of your mother?	1	Unemployed/ Homemaker
		2	Agriculture
		3	Labour
		4	Government. Service
		5	Pvt Service
		6	Business/self-employed-Shop/Driving
		98	Others
Consent Yes > Do you have the following assets at home?			
dummy	Assets	1	Yes
		2	No
Asset_a	a. Electricity Connection	1	Yes
		2	No
Asset_b	b. Celing Fan	1	Yes
		2	No
Asset_c	c. LPG Stove	1	Yes
		2	No
Asset_d	d. Two wheeler	1	Yes

		2	No
▪ Asset_e	e. Colour TV	1	Yes
		2	No
▪ Asset_f	f. Refrigerator	1	Yes
		2	No
▪ Asset_g	g. Washing Machine	1	Yes
		2	No
▪ Asset_h	h. Personal Computer/ Laptop	1	Yes
		2	No
▪ Asset_i	i. Car/Jeep/Van	1	Yes
		2	No
▪ Asset_j	j. Air Conditioner	1	Yes
		2	No
▪ Asset_k	j. Agricultural land	1	Yes
		2	No
▪ Education_Stream *(required)*	A1. Which subject are you studying?	1 2 3 98	Science Commerce Humanities/ Arts Others
▪ Tenth_Score *(required)*	A2. How much did you score in class X?	1 2 3 4 98	A (81-100%) B (61-80%) C (41-60%) D (33-40%) E (0-33%)
▪ Education_Persual *(required)*	A4. What do you want to do after completing your schooling?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 98	Graduation- BA/BSc Prepare for competitive exams or professional courses (CA, Engineering, Architecture, MBBS etc.) Vocational Training- ITI, Diploma course Try for Army Recruitment Any Other Job Employment in agricultural activities Self-employed/ Business Not decided Others
▪ Graduation_Plans *(required)*	A5. What do you plan to study in your graduation after completing class XII?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Agriculture and Natural Sciences- Physics, Chemistry, Earth science Nursing, Pharmacy Other Biological and Life Sciences- Biology, Environment Business Computer and Information Sciences Education Hotel Management Law Mathematics Language- Hindi/English Literature

		11 Psychology
		12 Public Administration
		13 Social Sciences and History- Geopgraphy, Pol Sc., Economics
		14 Undecided
		98 Others (Please Specify)
Migration_Destination_Others	Please specify the other	
University_Choice (required)	A6. In which university/ institute/ college do you wish to pursue this course?	1 Institution in district
		2 Institution in state
		3 Institution outside state
		4 Institution outside country
		99 Don't know/ No answer
Prepration (required)	A7. Are you doing any prepration for it?	1 Yes currently
		2 Yes, next year
		3 No
Education_Factors (required)	I1. Based on which factors are you making the decision to study this particular course or pursue this job after school?	1 Parents
		2 Siblings
		3 Peers/Friends
		4 Your ability/interest
		5 Teachers
		6 Your own ambitions
		7 Grades in 12th Std/Entrance Exams
		8 Perception of people in Community
		9 Resources/Economic Condition of Family Employment
		10 Opportunities after finishing education
		98 Others
Education_Factors_Others	Please specify the other	
Career_Counselling (required)	I2. Where are you getting information about career planning from?	1 Parents
		2 Siblings
		3 Teachers
		4 Other Relatives
		5 School Friends
		6 Professionals - Counsellor etc
		7 Internet - other than social media
		8 Social Media (facebook, instagram, twitter)
		9 People in your community/village
		10 People who have migrated from community/village
		98 Others
Career_Counselling_Others	Please specify the other	
Future_Earnings (required)	A8. What do you want to do for earning a living in future?	1 Government. Job
		2 Job in Pvt Sector
		3 Start your own business
		4 Family business

		5	Engage in agriculture
		98	Others
Future_Earnings_Others	Please specify the other		
Workplace_Destination *(required)*	A9. Where do you want to live for work in future?	1	Within district
		2	Within State
		3	Outside State
		4	Outside the country
		99	Don't know/ No answer
Livelihood_Factors *(required)*	I3. Which factors would you consider important while making a decision about livelihood in future?	1	Income
		2	Image/Status attached with Job
		3	Want to Work in Uttarakhand
		4	Want to work in Plains/Cities
		5	Kind of work you do
		6	Impact of your work on others/Ability to help others
		98	Others
Livelihood_Factors_Others	Please specify the other		
Sector_Employment *(required)*	A10. In your opinion, which sector employs maximum people in Uttarakhand?	1	Agricultural
		2	Unorganised
		3	Private services
		4	Government services
		5	Tourism
		98	Others
Sector_Employment_Others	Please specify the other		
ifemployed *(required)*	A11. Do you see yourself being employed in this sector in the future?	1	Yes
		2	No
Community_Choices *(required)*	A12. Do you think what people in community or your village think about your career decisions is important to you?	1	Yes
		2	No
Education_Success *(required)*	I4. Do you think people who migrated from your community/village for education were succeesful	1	Yes
		2	No
Livelihood_Success *(required)*	I5. Do you think people who migrated from your community/village for livelihoods were succeesful	1	Yes
		2	No
Migration_Status *(required)*	M1. Has anyone in your family migrated before? *Ask this information for the closest member if there are more than one*	1	Yes
		2	No
Migration_Relation *(required)*	M2. How are they (people who have migrated) related to you?	1	Father
		2	Mother
		3	Sibling
		4	Cousins
		5	Uncle/ aunt
		6	Other relatives
		98	Others
Migration_Reason *(required)*	M3. What was the purpose of migration?	1	Education
		2	Livelihood
		3	Health
		4	Infrastructure
		5	Marriage
		98	Others
Migration_Destination *(required)*	M4. Where have they migrated?	1	To other plain districts of Uttarakhand
		2	To other hill districts of Uttarakhand
		98	To other states
		3	To other country

Migration_Others	Which state?	
Livelihood_Reason *(required)*	M5. What were the reasons behind livelihood migration?	1 Decline in agricultural productivity 2 Damage to agricultural yield by wild animals 3 Influenced by others 4 No jobs matching educational qualifications/ skills 5 Low income opportunities 98 Others
Migrated_Education *(required)*	M6. What was their level of education?	1 Illiterate 2 Less than Standard 8 3 Standard 8 pass 4 Standard 10 pass 5 Standard 12 pass 6 ITI/PTC/ vocational course 7 Bachelors 8 Masters & above 9 Not Applicable
Livelihood_Opportunities *(required)*	M7. What are they doing for their livelihoods there?	1 Domestic Help 2 Unorganised sector 3 Hotel/ restaraunts 4 Private job 5 Government job 6 Petty shop 98 Others
Education_Level *(required)*	M8. What is the level of education they are pursuing?	1 Higher Secondary 2 Graduate (General) 3 Post-graduate 4 Mphil/ PhD
Educational_Field *(required)*	M9. What is the field of study?	1 STEM 2 Humanities/ Social Science 3 Commerce 4 Vocational Skill Training 98 Others
Phone_Asset *(required)*	S1. Do you have a mobile phone?	1 Yes, personal 2 Yes, but not personal 3 No
Phone_Time *(required)*	S2. On an average, how much time do you spend using phone?	1 < 1 hour 2 1-2 hours 3 2-3 hours 4 >3 hours
Phone_Use *(required)*	S3. What do you use it for?	1 Social Media (facebook, instagram, twitter) 2 General Information 3 Watching videos (youtube etc.) 4 Studies 98 Others

Appendix 7: Interview Guide for youth

Note about tool administration

212

This interview is being conducted with a participant who was part of Focus Group Discussion with their peers and was asked for time to conduct a personal interview before hand. Therefore, some basic familiarity is already been built with the interviewee. The tool is a basic structure to guide the interaction and the administration is modified for each participant on the basis of pre-existing knowledge about their responses to key questions.

'Youth Aspirations and Migration Choices in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India'
Centre for Development Research, University of Bonn
Bonn, Germany

Researcher: Namrata Rawat

Date: **Time:**
Location:
Participant's Name: **Participant Code:**
Designation:
Contact Details:

Note to Self:

1. Brief participant about the study and self again, about the purpose of the day's activity
2. Ask for permission for the interview to be recorded, audio will only be heard by be or someone I trust to transcribe it and will only be used to write the research report. Make sure to reiterate that their original names or village names will be used, nobody will know who supplied which information

S. No.	Questions/Topics

1.   **Let's begin by talking a little about ourselves, you know me, tell me about you**
What do like to study? What do you like to do in your free time? About your life in general? What about your family? Who all are there? What do they do? Ask about level of education and family's migration history

2.   **About chosen education and career pathway**
You know I am trying to find out about young people's education aspirations, about what they want to do in life? Would you be able to help me with that? You told me you want to pursue…/do … (info noted from FGD conducted previously). Let's talk about that

Why do you want to pursue this? Why this and not something else?
From where did you learn about this option? / Who told you about this option first? / Who helped you make this decision?
What are the requirements of this particular course/other option?
Who's helping you to accomplish this goal? / Who will help you apply for this course/job?
Is your family supportive of your plans? / With whom do you talk about these things the most? How about school and school teachers? Can you talk to them?

What if this doesn't figure out? Do you also have alternative plan?
What do you think friends will do after school? Do you talk to each other about this?

3 **Village community and environment**
Many of the students mentioned that they feel the people in their village do not support young people doing new things, what do you think about it? How are things in your village? In your family?
Some young people told me not to tell about their career plan to anyone else in their village because they might talk about her/him if she/he doesn't succeed? Why do you think that is the case? Have you ever faced any problem or a situation like this in your village? What are the main challenges in village?

4. **Migration**
You know we have a migration issue in Uttarakhand, we talked about it in the FGD also. What do you think about it? Why do you think young people are migrating out of their villages?
What is your plan for your life? Where do you think you will be in five years?

If migrating
What will you do there (planned destination)?
How will you make the transition? Do you know someone there? Who will help you move?
Why do you think this move will help you?

If not migrating (if not clear already)
Why do you think you will not be moving?

5 **Future Orientation**
Where will I meet you 5 years from now? Walk me through your future, what's happening there, what will you be doing at that time/there

Appendix 8: Consent Form

'यूथ एस्पिरेशंस एंड माइग्रेशन चॉइसेज इन द हिल रीजन ऑफ उत्तराखंड, इंडिया'
अध्ययन में भाग लेने के लिए सहमति प्रपत्र
Consent form for participation in research study titled
'Youth Aspirations and Migration Choices in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India'

शोधकर्ता: : नम्रता रावत
Researcher: Namrata Rawat

गतिविधि का संवाहक (Conductor of activity):

यह (This is a):

सर्वे (Survey)	☐
फोकस ग्रुप डिस्कशन (एफजीडी) (Focus Group Discussion(FGD))	☐
इंटरव्यू (Interview)	☐

भाग लेने वाले का नाम (Participant Name):
(यदि आप प्रदान करना चाहते हैं) (If you want to provide)
दिनांक (Date):
समय (Time):
स्थान (Location):

महोदया / महोदय,
Dear Madam/Sir,

मैं नम्रता रावत हूं। मैं सेंटर फॉर डेवलपमेंट रिसर्च (जेडईएफ), बॉन विश्वविद्यालय, जर्मनी में एक जूनियर शोधकर्ता/डॉक्टोरल डिग्री उम्मीदवार हूं। मैं 'यूथ एस्पिरेशंस एंड माइग्रेशन चॉइसेज इन द हिल रीजन ऑफ उत्तराखंड, इंडिया' पर अपना पीएचडी डिग्री शोध कर रहा हूं। इस शोध का मुख्य उद्देश्य उत्तराखंड के पहाड़ी क्षेत्रों में माध्यमिक विद्यालय के युवाओं की आकांक्षाओं, भविष्य की योजनाओं और प्रवास के निर्णयों को समझना है। मैं इस विषय के बारे में जानकारी प्राप्त करने और समझने के लिए यह सर्वेक्षण/एफजीडी/साक्षात्कार आयोजित कर रहा हूं।

I am Namrata Rawat. I am a Junior Researcher/Doctoral degree candidate at the Centre for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn, Germany. I am conducting my PhD degree research on 'Youth Aspirations and Migration Choices in the Hill Region of Uttarakhand, India'. The main objective of this research is to understand the aspirations, future plans and migration decisions of secondary school youth in hill regions of Uttarakhand. I am conducting this Survey/FGD/Interview to obtain information and understand about this topic.

आपके द्वारा प्रदान की जाने वाली जानकारी को गोपनीय माना जाएगा। नाम और किसी भी प्रकार का व्यक्तिगत विवरण किसी के सामने प्रकट नहीं किया जाएगा और इसे संख्यात्मक कोड से बदल दिया जाएगा। क्लिक की गई तस्वीरें एकत्रित की जा रही जानकारी का एक हिस्सा हैं। इनका उपयोग किसी व्यावसायिक उद्देश्य के लिए नहीं किया जाएगा। विस्तृत रिपोर्ट बनाने के लिए विभिन्न स्रोतों से सभी सूचनाओं को एक साथ रखा जाएगा और उनका विश्लेषण किया जाएगा। रिपोर्ट में उत्पादित परिणामों का उपयोग केवल उन शोध

उद्देश्यों के लिए किया जाएगा जो विषय और क्षेत्र के लिए प्रासंगिक हैं। परिणाम आपके और अन्य प्रतिभागियों के साथ या तो व्यक्तिगत रूप से या ईमेल के माध्यम से और स्थानीय एनजीओ द्वारा प्रस्तुति के माध्यम से साझा किए जाएंगे।

(The information that you provide will be treated as confidential. The names and any kind of personal details will not be revealed to anyone and will be replaced with numerical codes. The pictures clicked are a part of information being collected. They will not be used for any commercial purposes. All information from different sources will be put together and analysed to make a detailed report. The results produced in the report will be used only for research purposes that are relevant for the subject and the region. The results will be shared with you and other participants either in person or through emails and presentation by local NGO.)

क्या आप इस सर्वेक्षण/एफजीडी/साक्षात्कार में भाग लेने के लिए सहमत हैं?
Do you agree to participate in this Survey/FGD/Interview?

हाँ (Yes) _____
नहीं (No) _____

भाग न लेने का कोई कारण?
Any reason for not participating?
_____

क्या आप इस FGD/साक्षात्कार को रिकॉर्ड करने के लिए सहमत हैं?
(रिकॉर्डिंग केवल इसलिए है कि इसे बाद में पाठ में परिवर्तित किया जा सके और विश्लेषण के लिए बेहतर हो)
Do you agree to recording this FGD/Interview?
(Recording is only so that it can be converted to text later and is better for analysis)
हाँ (Yes) _____
नहीं (No) _____

क्या आप शैक्षणिक अनुसंधान के लिए अपनी तस्वीरों का उपयोग करने के लिए सहमत हैं?
Do you agree to use of your photos for academic research?
हाँ (Yes) _____
नहीं (No) _____

कोई भी टिप्पणी और सुझाव जिसे आप जोड़ना चाहते हैं:
Any comments and suggestion that you want to add:
_____
_____

हस्ताक्षर (Signature):

Appendix 9: Regression analysis: Factors influencing aspiration to pursue higher education within district

	Higher Education in Almora
Education Factors	Predicted prob.
Caste	
Scheduled Caste	0.028
	(0.049)
Gender	
Female	**0.233*****
	(0.045)
HH Income (INR)	
10,001 - 20,000	**-0.116****
	(0.046)
20,001 - 30,000	**-0.152****
	(0.076)
30,001 - 40,000	-0.044
	(0.196)
40,001 - 50,000	-0.141
	(0.124)
Distance from Almora HQ	**-0.003*****
	(0.001)
Score in 10th Grade	
61-80%	0.072
	(0.111)
41-60%	0.004
	(0.110)
33-40%	0.045
	(0.159)
0-33%	-
Education of Chief Wage Earner	
Less than Standard 8	-0.204
	(0.149)
Standard 8 pass	-0.214
	(0.141)
Standard 10 pass	-0.201
	(0.139)
Standard 12 pass	-0.199
	(0.141)
ITI/PTC/ vocational course	-0.173

	(0.210)
Bachelors	-0.369**
	(0.149)
Masters & above	-0.241
	(0.197)
Access to Phone	
Yes, but not personal	-0.004
	(0.056)
No, Phone Access	0.128*
	(0.066)
Access to TV	0.091*
	(0.051)
Access to Computer/Laptop	0.049
	(0.086)
Family Agricultural Land	0.014
	(0.139)
Migration of Family Member	-0.003
	(0.044)
Observations	542

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

NOTE: All predictors at their mean value

Appendix 10: Regression analysis: Factors influencing aspiration to pursue employment within district

	Work in Almora
Work Factors	Predicted prob.
Caste	
Scheduled Caste	**0.552***
	(0.211)
Gender	
Female	0.315
	(0.219)
HH Income (INR)	
10,001 - 20,000	-0.202
	(0.204)
20,001 - 30,000	-0.514
	(0.393)
30,001 - 40,000	-0.732
	(0.916)
40,001 - 50,000	-0.750
	(0.694)
Distance from Almora district	-0.002
	(0.003)
Score in 10th Grade	
61-80%	0.243
	(0.518)
41-60%	0.505
	(0.513)
33-40%	0.206
	(0.713)
0-33%	-
Education of Chief Wage Earner	
Less than Standard 8	-0.041
	(0.598)
Standard 8 pass	0.057
	(0.555)
Standard 10 pass	-0.121
	(0.550)
Standard 12 pass	-0.003

	(0.555)
ITI/PTC/ vocational course	-0.391
	(0.879)
Bachelors	0.022
	(0.664)
Masters & above	0.931
	(0.829)
Access to Phone	
Yes, but not personal	0.265
	(0.247)
No, Phone Access	0.176
	(0.275)
Access to TV	0.022
	(0.240)
Access to Computer/Laptop	0.091
	(0.362)
Family Agricultural Land	0.407
	(0.628)
Migration of Family Member	-0.118
	(0.191)
Constant	-1.507
	(0.973)
Observations	542

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

NOTE: All predictors at their mean value

Appendix 11: Impact of distance from Almora town HQ on aspiration to pursue higher education

	Higher Education Aspirations
Factors for Higher Education	Predicted prob.
Caste	
Scheduled Caste	0.214
	(0.239)
Other Backward Caste	0.523
	(0.415)
Gender	
Female	1.845***
	(0.258)
HH Income (INR)	
10,001 - 20,000	-0.274
	(0.228)
20,001 - 30,000	0.457
	(0.424)
30,001 - 40,000	1.449
	(0.996)
40,001 - 50,000	0.209
	(0.699)
Distance from Almora district	**-0.013***
	(0.003)
Score in 10th Grade	
61-80%	-0.932*
	(0.558)
41-60%	-1.714***
	(0.553)
33-40%	-1.401*
	(0.768)
0-33%	-
Education of Chief Wage Earner	
Less than Standard 8	0.399
	(0.668)
Standard 8 pass	0.089
	(0.618)
Standard 10 pass	0.249
	(0.605)
Standard 12 pass	0.755
	(0.613)
ITI/PTC/ vocational course	1.057
	(0.967)
Bachelors	-0.028
	(0.734)

Masters & above	2.225**
	(1.034)
Access to Phone	
Yes, but not personal	-0.150
	(0.279)
No, Phone Access	0.134
	(0.311)
Access to TV	0.256
	(0.270)
Access to Computer/Laptop	-0.214
	(0.388)
Family Agricultural Land	-0.483
	(0.650)
Migration of Family Member	-0.095
	(0.213)
Constant	0.488
	(1.034)
Observations	542

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
NOTE: All predictors at their mean value

Appendix 12: Regression analysis: Factors influencing aspiration to pursue employment outside Uttarakhand state

Factors for employment aspirations outside the state	Work Outside Uttarakhand
	Predicted prob.
Caste	
Scheduled Caste	-0.084**
	(0.038)
Gender	
Female	0.052
	(0.042)
HH Income (INR)	
10,001 - 20,000	0.022
	(0.041)
20,001 - 30,000	-0.073
	(0.062)
30,001 - 40,000	0.154
	(0.210)
40,001 - 50,000	-0.054
	(0.105)
Migration of Family Member	0.075**
	(0.036)
Distance from Almora district	0.000
	(0.001)
Score in 10th Grade	
61-80%	-0.101
	(0.116)
41-60%	-0.113
	(0.115)
33-40%	0.008
	(0.163)
0-33%	-
Education of Chief Wage Earner	
Less than Standard 8	-0.093
	(0.144)
Standard 8 pass	-0.062
	(0.135)

Standard 10 pass	-0.064
	(0.134)
Standard 12 pass	-0.124
	(0.133)
ITI/PTC/ vocational course	-0.245*
	(0.140)
Bachelors	-0.161
	(0.143)
Masters & above	-
Access to Phone	
Yes, but not personal	-0.018
	(0.049)
No Phone Access	-0.048
	(0.053)
Access to TV	0.111***
	(0.040)
Access to Computer/Laptop	-0.002
	(0.068)
Family Agricultural Land	0.062
	(0.100)
Observations	516

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

NOTE: All predictors at their mean value

Appendix 13: HH Incomes and Parents' Education level

Table 1: Monthly HH income of survey participants

HH Income	%age (n=551)
<=10,000	56
10,001 - 20,000	33
20,001 - 30,000	7
30,001 - 40,000	1
40,001 - 50,000	2

Table 2: Highest education qualification of parents

Parent's Education	Father	Mother
	%age (n=551)	
Illiterate	2	13
Less than Standard 8	7	28
Standard 8 pass	21	24
Standard 10 pass	31	16
Standard 12 pass	25	6
Total	**86%**	**87%**
ITI/PTC/ vocational course	1	0
Bachelors	3	2
Masters & above	1	0
Not Applicable	8	11