



Impact of the COVID -19 lockdown on pastoralists of Himachal Pradesh

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Contents

| | |
|------------------|----|
| List of Acronyms | 7 |
| Introduction | 8 |
| Survey Method | 12 |
| Findings | 14 |
| Conclusion | 21 |
| Annexure I | 24 |
| Annexure II | 26 |

List of Acronyms

| | |
|----------|----------------------------------|
| HP | Himachal Pradesh |
| GoHP | Government of Himachal Pradesh |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease or 2019-nCoV |

Movement in the Time of COVID-19: Pastoralist Resurgence with State Support?

Cathleen Kaur ¹

Introduction

According to the 2011 Census, the population of Himachal Pradesh is 68,64,602, of which 3,92,126 (5.71%) belong to Scheduled Tribes (GoHP 2011). The tribal communities of the State include Gaddi, Gujjar, Kinnaura, Lahaula, and Pangwala — all of whom have a long history of practising nomadic pastoralism, with many still involved in the trade. There are other communities such as Kanet Thakur who are also nomadic shepherds but do not have Scheduled Tribes status under the Indian Constitution.

Gaddis, Kanets, and Kinnauras are goat and sheep herders from Chamba, Kangra, and Kinnaur, respectively. Goat and sheep herders are also present in Mandi and Kullu. Buffalo herding Gujjars are found primarily in Chamba, Kangra, Mandi, Shimla and Sirmaur. There are 100,000 families in Himachal, both shepherding and buffalo-herding who depend on a pastoral based economy. Twenty lakh sheep and goats and five lakh buffaloes in Himachal are managed by pastoral communities. Under normal circumstances, shepherds are able to make quite a good income through the sale of wool, particularly in the districts of Kangra and Chamba, as is reflected in the following graph.

The Gaddi and Kanet are more widespread across the state than the Kinnaura, who are found only in the district of Kinnaur. The Gaddi are found primarily in Chamba, with a smaller presence in Kangra. The Kanets are widespread in Kangra, Mandi, Kullu, Shimla and Sirmaur districts. Pastoralists undertake both inter and intra district migrations as

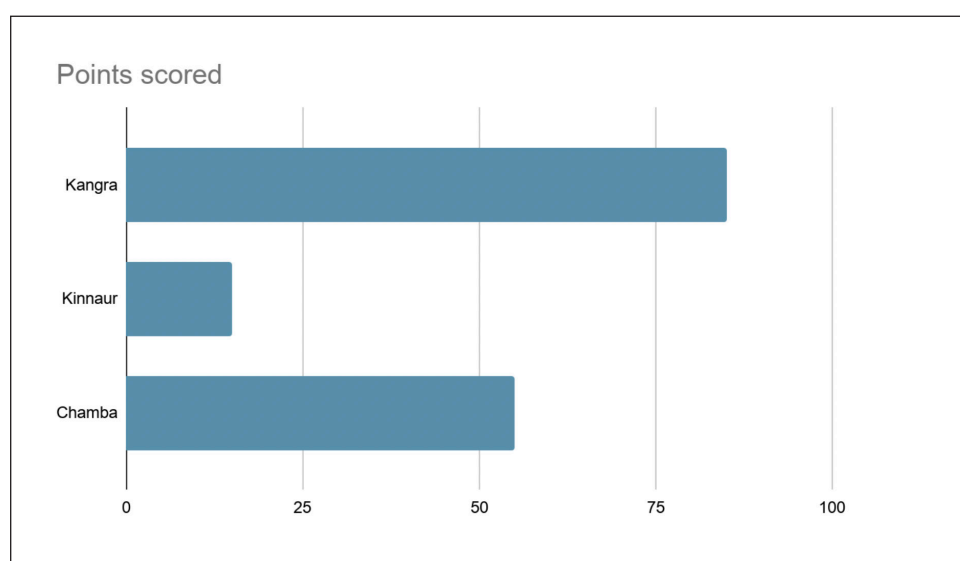


Figure 1: District wise representation of white wool prices

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well as more local -- within the village -- migrations in search of forage. Differences in migratory patterns are due to a number of factors such as herd size, availability of grazing permits given by the state forest department before the 1970s, and, in the case of buffalo-herders, the availability of cheaper fodder and better market in the nearby plains of Punjab and Haryana.

Gujjars are a buffalo-herding community found in the northern states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Followers of both Hindu as well as Muslim faith, the community is a major supplier of milk produced by their indigenous Gojri breed. In Himachal, Gujjars are dominantly located in Chamba, Mandi, Sirmour, Kangra and Shimla districts. They were classified as Scheduled Tribe in 1975. Gujjars are among the groups that practice inter-state migration, with households from Chamba camping in the nearby plains of Punjab during winters and those based in Sirmour and Shimla moving to Uttarakhand and vice-versa.

Himachali pastoralism, like mountain pastoralism more generally, is premised on spending the summer and monsoon grazing pastures at high altitudes, while the winters are spent grazing forests in the Himalayan foothills.



Map 1: Herder migratory routes in Himachal Pradesh

Up to four months of the year are spent moving between these summer and winter grazing grounds, involving a north to south migration that covers the entire state. The migration can cover the length and breadth of the state, with some herders taking their animals deep into the district of Lahaul and Spiti during summer, and down to the Himachal-Punjab border in winter, a 200 km migration that involves crossing multiple districts, and, in some instances, state boundaries.

Pastoralists encounter a wide range of conditions during these migrations. There is no habitation in the summer pastures and as a result, there are few claimants to them other than the pastoralists and conservation agencies that seek to conserve these landscapes from a biodiversity perspective. These are extensive, wide-open landscapes. Individual sheep herders access these meadows based either on (i) long-standing, inherited grazing rights, whose legitimacy derives from customary rather than state-sanctioned authority; or (ii) seasonal negotiations with gram panchayats with controlling authority over these lands. Where the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department demarcates lands with a protected area status, the department's regulations become an additional element in shaping the terms of access.

The winter grazing lands have more complicated tenurial arrangements. These landscapes are populated by settled communities and pastoralists graze reserve or protected forests managed by the forest department or shamlats (village commons) under the control of gram panchayats. All of these areas are also grazed by livestock maintained by local communities. In the not very distant past, herders would pen their animals on farmers' fields, the animal droppings greatly valued as a source of manure. Farmers would pay for the service and/or provide rations. There is a diminishing penning of animals on fallow lands, as chemical fertilizers have become easily available. Also, improvements in irrigation have made double and triple cropping more common, thereby reducing the availability of fallow lands.

While on migration between the summer and winter pastures, herders graze their animals along roadsides, in village commons and in forest department lands. In general, forage availability becomes harder as herders head towards their winter grazing grounds and easier as they head towards their summer grazing grounds. This is a simple outcome of the higher human densities of population in the lower altitudes compared with the higher altitudes.

Until the 1970s, grazing permits were issued by the forest department. These were primarily for the winter grazing areas and while on transit between summer and winter grazing grounds. Although these are no longer issued, there is a tacit acceptance of herder rights to graze their animals during their bi-annual migrations and in the summer and winter grazing areas.

Much of the above holds true for both Gujjars and the various shepherd communities in Himachal Pradesh. There is one additional variation for the Gujjars based on the fact that, unlike goats and sheep, buffalo herds can, to a certain extent, be stall-fed. This results in the following:

a. A shorter migration period for the Gujjars which involves moving within the state for four months of the year, i.e. from the end of May to the end of September. During this time the herds move to the higher altitudes to access the nutritious alpine pastures. For the remaining eight months the herd is stall-fed with paddy straw brought in from Punjab.

b. The second form of migration involves buffalo-herders who move to Punjab for the winter migration. Their migration involves an additional 2-3 months of transit time for the to and fro movement between the summer and winter grazing areas. They rely on different landscapes for forage including forest lands, local fields owned by village dwellers, and various forms of wasteland. The 6-8 months of sustenance during winters is dependent on the market as well as locally acquired/grown fodder.



Image 1: While conducting an interview with a shepherd in Rajgundha valley, Chota Bhangal

Survey Method

This survey was designed to understand the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on pastoralists across the state. Both owners of herds as well as hired herders were interviewed. However, restrictions due to the lockdown led to restraints on physical movement, making outreach to communities challenging. Though the interviews were relatively evenly spread out, it was not possible to incorporate respondents from each district. Eventually, interviews were conducted with herders/helpers located in Kangra, Mandi, Kinnaur, Chamba, and Sirmaur districts. A questionnaire for this survey was designed based on the findings of a pilot study conducted by the Centre for Pastoralism in April 2020. The aim of this questionnaire was to collect data regarding the impact of the lockdown with reference to the following issues: (i) movement, (ii) access to markets, (iii) expenses and incomes, (iv) labour for herding, (v) veterinary care, (vi) ration availability, (vii) social stigma, and (viii) perceptions about COVID-19's impact on livelihoods (See Annexure II, for questionnaire).



Map 2: District map of Himachal Pradesh. Highlighted districts indicate the study area. Map prepared using D-Maps.com, accessed via https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=8675&lang=en

| District | No. of respondents |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Kangra | 4 |
| Mandi | 5 |
| Chamba | 4 |
| Sirmaur | 1 |
| Kinnaur | 2 |
| Total | 16 |

Table 1:
District wise

| Community | No. of respondents |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| Gaddi | 4 |
| Kanet | 1 |
| Kinnaura | 2 |
| Gujjar | 9 |
| Total | 16 |

Table 2:
Community wise

We conducted interviews with herders in two phases – first in June and later in August. A total of 16 interviews were conducted, out of which seven were with shepherds and nine with either buffalo-herders themselves or flock owners. Two of these 16 interviews were informal conversations, hence do not feature in the quantified aspects of the study.

In June, the physical presence of herders in the upper reaches of Kangra made it possible to have a series of personal interactions. Shepherds who move to Bara Bhangal valley for their summer grazing and halt in and around Chota Bhangal right before crossing the Thamsar pass were available for interviews. Seven shepherds were interviewed in the Rajgundha valley of Kangra District and in the Padhar Subdivision of Mandi District. Respondents who undertook long-distance migration and were based out of far-flung districts such as Chamba, Kinnaur, and Mandi were interviewed telephonically.

Telephonic interviews were recorded consensually and transcribed. As is now well documented, the lockdown had a variety of impacts on different livelihood systems. Migrant labourers such as factory workers and construction workers all over the country undertook painstaking journeys to reach their villages to deal with hunger and the loss of employment. In Himachal, the state government took a proactive step when they exempted all herding communities and their flocks from being under lockdown. This is likely to have had a significant moderating impact with regard to how pastoralists experienced the lockdown.

² One respondent who belongs to the Gujjar community is a journalist actively involved in highlighting the community's plight through print media.

Findings

Table 3: Profile of respondents

| Community/Group | Aadhar card holders | Bank account holders | Herd size | Presence of sheep and goat | Travel beyond 10 Km from their native village in summers |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------------|--|
| Gaddis | 4/4 | 4/4 | 100-200* | 4/4 | 4/4 |
| Kanets | 1/1 | 1/1 | 150 | 1/1 | 1/1 |
| Kinnaura | 2/2 | 2/2 | 108, 600* | 2/2 | 2/2 |
| Gujjar | 9/9 | 9/9 | 3-50* | 1/9 | 9/9 |

*denotes highest and the lowest number of animals herd recorded in the sample size

Impact on movement

Though many herders undertake inter-district and inter-state migration to reach their grazing areas, the majority of respondents interviewed only crossed district boundaries in their bi-annual migration. The households that cross the inter-state boundary reported additional challenges linked to crossing state-borders, a phenomenon also reported in print media.

Among the Gujjars interviewed for this study, one highlighted the fact that he and his family were screened when they crossed into Himachal Pradesh (Chamba District) from Punjab. Another respondent said their summer grazing is in the Sirmour district but the route they take is via Uttarakhand (Bikas Nagar). Due to restrictions on inter-state movement, about 15-16 families didn't move to summer pastures and chose to spend the summer at their local winter residence. There was a divided response to the question of whether the lockdown had impacted their movement positively or negatively. Among shepherds, five respondents said their movement was impacted negatively and two reported it had been positive and one said it was not affected at all. The absence of traffic on the roads was cited as a major positive since it made movement much simpler and eliminated the problem of theft that all Himachali herders experience in normal times. The special permissions for the herder movement provided by the state government were widely seen as having played an important

role in minimising movement-related distress that herding communities in other states appear to have encountered. But there were still other problems that had to be dealt with. For instance, shepherds who had not sold the freshly shorn wool in the market had a tough time finding space to keep the wool; whereas for one respondent the anxiety of being able to enter his native village during upward movement was a source of worry.

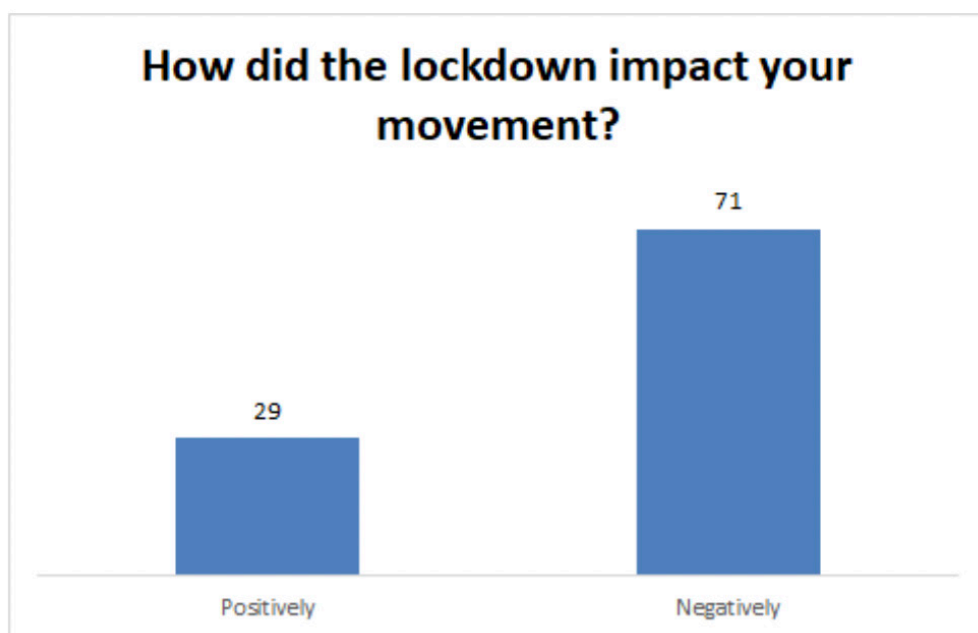


Figure 2: Herder responses w.r.t. impact of the lockdown on movement (percentage-wise)

All nine buffalo-herders said their movement was impacted negatively due to the lockdown. Be it arranging dry fodder from nearby states of Punjab or Haryana or finding local markets for milk and other dairy products, their business had run into losses.

Accessing forage during the lockdown

Himachal Pradesh has 66.52% of its land covered under the category of forest area (Government of Uttarakhand 2019, 92). These include reserved, protected, and unclassed forests. Therefore, a great deal of pastoralist grazing takes place on forest lands. All shepherds reported that their forage sites include forest lands and privately owned lands. Some forest lands include lands that were earlier used for grazing but are now declared as part of protected areas. These sites are often a point of conflict between graziers and the forest department. For the Gujjars, a large part of their fodder comes from either agricultural lands, if they own any, or from market sources. During the lockdown, constraints on automobile

traffic led to a shortage of dry fodder for buffalo herds. While five buffalo-herders indicated that fodder was difficult to source due to the lockdown, two reported that they source fodder locally and that the lockdown did not affect them negatively on this point. One respondent indicated he does not need to buy fodder, owing to the small size of his flock, while another reported that his animals are kept with relatives in Punjab because his village lacks access to a road, and hence he is unable to buy forage for his herd. Since shepherds do not need to buy fodder, this issue was not a concern for them.

Impact on sale of animal products

Livestock:

Just like their movement for forage, the sale of livestock follows a pattern that is in tandem with the grazing cycle. Shepherds sell a big chunk of their additional animals twice every year, once in March-April and again, more significantly, in October – when they are descending from the nutritious high pastures. In the case of shepherds, the timing of the lockdown worked in their favour. Some shepherds said they had already sold their flock before the lockdown was announced. But the certainty of access to high-quality forage in the alpine pastures greatly reduces the pressure of selling animals in March/April, the period of the lockdown. Had the lockdown been in October/November it is likely that it would have had a major impact on household cash flows. Meat prices in Himachal Pradesh remained stable during the lockdown, insulating herders from the kind of fluctuations observed in other parts of the country. Shepherds did not record any dip in prices for meat, which remained rather static during the initial phase of the lockdown. There are, however, variations in the prices at which meat was sold across districts in the State. A respondent from Kinnaur said he sold his animals in Lahaul-Spiti during the summer months since meat there was selling at Rs. 600/kg. By comparison, the selling price for meat was about Rs. 400 to 450 per kg in Kinnaur, Chamba, and Kangra. Both prices are similar to the prices obtained in 2019. Interestingly, post COVID-19 prices for a pair of fully grown goats or sheep in Kangra district was recorded at Rs. 18,000 whereas it was Rs. 14,000-18,000 previously.

Even though pastoralism allows a certain flexibility and risk containment through altering herd size, three shepherds reported losses in terms of the livestock market. Two others said that they did not get fair prices for the animals they were forced to sell due to fractured limbs or disease.

The bulk of the Gujjar respondents indicated that the market for the sale of buffaloes remained largely unaffected by the lockdown. Out of the nine buffalo herders interviewed, five respondents said they did not sell any buffaloes since there were no buyers for their animals. One respondent said the usual time when people bought livestock was over by the time the lockdown began. Another respondent said agents had come into their

village to facilitate trade in buffaloes. Two of them reported having small herd sizes (not more than five), and so they had no interest in selling animals.

Wool:

Wool is used for making garments such as Dhuru and other woollen products like shawls, mufflers, coats for personal use, and possibly for the tourist market. The worst impact of lockdown on shepherds was the disruption of the shearing services normally provided on a cost-sharing basis by the Himachal Pradesh State Wool Federation. Shearers were initially not allowed to travel and most herders experienced difficulties owing to the non-availability of shearers provided by the federation (who use mechanical shears). Many herders were forced to shear their animals manually, as done traditionally. This is a labour-intensive, time-consuming, and more expensive process than using state-provided shearers.

Respondents in Chamba reported a lack of shearers and the use of traditional methods during the lockdown. One respondent in Chamba said he always prefers to shear his sheep by himself because he otherwise has to wait a long time for the normal mechanical shearing. In Kinnaur, respondents spoke of a total absence of mechanical sheep-shearing service and a forced reliance on traditional methods of shearing. Shepherds from Kangra recorded significant reliance on mechanical shearing generally, but only two could access it before the lockdown. The market for wool in Kinnaur is nearly absent, for the wool shorn is used for household consumption regardless of COVID-19 outcomes.

Out of the nine shepherds interviewed, six said their wool was lying in their winter areas of grazing since there were no buyers available due to the lockdown. Two Kinnaura shepherds indicated their wool is used in making home-based woollen products and one herder from Chamba said he sold his wool to the local merchants.

Milk and Milk products:

The lockdown had a fairly catastrophic impact on the sale of milk by buffalo-herders. All respondents recorded absolutely no sale of milk during the first two to three weeks of lockdown because the market was shut. Two respondents reported that they were forced to spill their milk in the nearby water sources because people in their villages also refused to consume their milk.

Even five months after the lockdown, milk prices were half the normal prices. The same was the case with milk by-products such as paneer (soft cheese). Gujjars in both Mandi and Chamba reported facing a similar problem.

Labour requirement:

Both shepherds and buffalo-herders reported they need additional labour. For every 80-100 head of small ruminants, there is a need for at least one hired labour (or pahal). Eight out of nine shepherds said they needed at least one pahal to help with the herd. The requirement of additional labour is particularly important during the downward (winter) migration owing to the need to deal with challenges of increased vehicular traffic, preventing animals from crossing into agriculture fields, and countering the risk of theft. Two herders said they were stranded at home while their hired labour was with the flock. One herder from Chamba said an e-pass was being issued by the local administration to enable shepherds to join their flocks.

Women's participation in herding is going down with them staying put in the house and the men moving with the flocks. Two respondents said their wives join them in winter grazing due to higher labour requirements in plains. One respondent, when asked the reason for the diminishing participation of women in herding, attributed it to better road transportation and connectivity that now makes it easier for shepherds to reach their flock, so women's participation does not remain as crucial as before, though he did not rule out safety as another concern which compels them to keep women back at their native households.

Veterinary services:

In Himachal Pradesh, communities depend on public health services due to insignificant private enterprises in the sector. Shepherds depend on such services for both vaccination against common diseases and dipping (a practice to dip sheep and goats in fungicides and other disinfectants to eliminate common fungal diseases). Owing to proactive steps taken by the government, partially in response to advocacy undertaken by the Himachal Ghumantu Pashupalak Mahasabha, both dipping and vaccination continued smoothly despite the lockdown. Buffalo herders access local veterinary centres for a free consultation, though most medicines are usually out of stock at centres and therefore need to be arranged from private pharmacies.

On the whole, the lockdown did not appear to have had a particularly negative impact on the Gujjars from a veterinary standpoint. The only difficulty they experienced was with regard to their exotic breeds of cows, with one respondent saying he could not procure samples for artificial insemination.

In procuring ration:

All herders either restock their food supplies from local shops or have stock coming in from home if they are camping close to home. None of the respondents reported difficulty in procuring ration supplies but some mentioned the initial difficulty in accessing ration shops. The Himachal

Pradesh government, like all other state governments, notified different timings for the procurement of ration and other essential supplies. Timings varied by district. In Kangra, a four-hour window between 7 and 11 am was notified. For some herders, getting ration in the initial two weeks of the lockdown proved to be the most difficult period since their grazing-related movements often clashed with timings notified by the state. One respondent in Palampur recounted that he and his fellow herders ran out of food twice and had to rely on their social networks in local villages to manage supplies. He expressed the period as an extremely trying time for him. For most shepherds these difficulties ended by May, as by that time they had reached the mid-point of their annual migrations, many of whom are residents of this middle zone. Accessing services and ration became much simpler once they were closer to home.

Social Stigma:

Herders experienced social stigma in different ways. One respondent said he was confronted by locals while moving but they became less aggressive after a dialogue with him. Another said that he was stopped by residents from his own village from entering his house. Another herder (though she is not part of this respondent cohort) was stopped by people in her village to graze her flock in grazing areas around her house. Others recorded stigma in terms of people's conduct while going to the market for ration or to charge their phones. Another shepherd said people in Lahaul Spiti objected to them using village roads while crossing over to their pastures.

Among buffalo-herders, a major section said they were subjected to public scrutiny and stigma both while finding camping sites and in transit. In Chamba, they had to show special permissions by the local panchayat representatives, despite orders from the district administration. This stigma also translated into altered social conduct and market transactions. People refused to buy milk from the herders despite the fact that those very same herders had been supplying milk in the local markets for more than two decades. In Sirmaur, in the Gujjar deras near the Yamuna, there were localised incidents of verbal conflicts among the Gujjars and residents of the area. Some of this is likely to have been a direct outcome of the Gujjar Muslim identity.

COVID-19 Negative Certificate:

None of the respondents reported being asked for a COVID-19 negative certificate by authorities but some groups did get special permissions from the local panchayat pradhan of the sub-divisional magistrate to avoid any escalation of conflict within the community.

Pastoralism versus other employments during lockdown:

This section gives us some understanding of pastoralists' perception

of their livelihood vis-à-vis other occupations during the lockdown. Shepherds had a resilient take on their migratory profession with most of them saying other groups such as farmers, shopkeepers, and the labour class were worst hit by the pandemic. This resilience also comes from acknowledging various ecological, social, and political factors that they continually navigate while maintaining this profession.

Danny, a hired labour from Kinnaur said "...If you talk about COVID-19, our lives are impacted only a bit or rather not impacted at all because we suffer regardless of COVID-19... we are a 24x7 patrol party... Hume 24 ghante duty karni hai, apna chugaan dhoondna hai (we have to be on vigil 24x7, look for forage for our animals..."

Suresh Kumar, from Gunehar, Bir acknowledged the resilience of this mobile lifestyle vis-à-vis other professions but had additional insights to share, "Farmers, labour class - all have been impacted. At least those who have left herding could be sitting at homes in comfort. We are here, waiting to cross Thamsar. It's true they are jobless, but our jobs aren't easier either. It is a very tough life..."

Hopes and Fears:

For shepherds, the most important concern was to be able to move to their winter grazing sites without any obstruction. Having special permission from the government proved beneficial to them but they feared that if the lockdown were to continue they might face severe hostility from local communities in their winter bases.

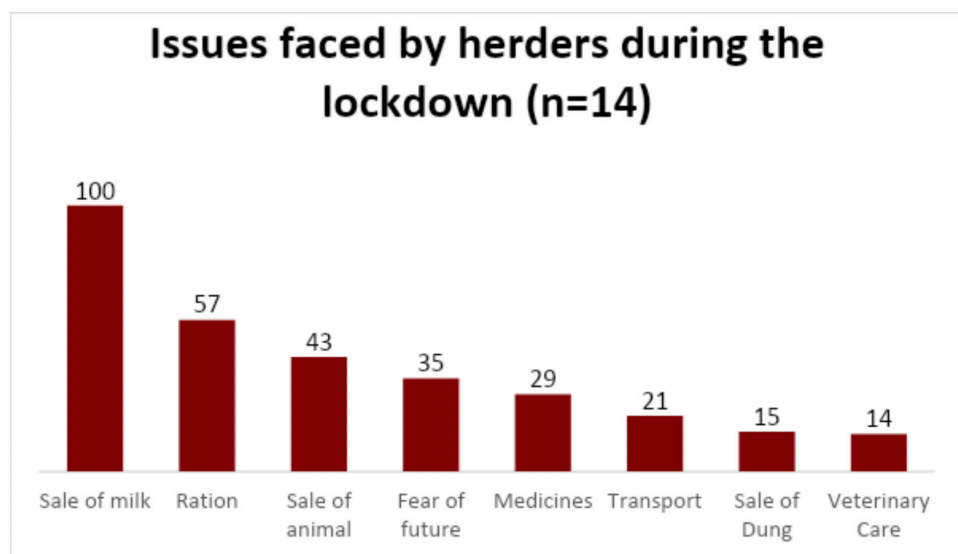


Figure 3: Issues faced by respondents due to COVID-19 (percentage-wise)

Conclusion

On the whole, it can be said that the lockdown impacted pastoralists' income levels, access to ration supplies, and to some extent, their movement and access to fodder. During the initial stages of the lockdown, they faced most difficulty in accessing rations. The sudden shutting down of markets and erratic timings of the state ration shops made procuring rations extremely difficult in the first two weeks of the lockdown. Eventually, however, the herders were able to adapt to the situation. The only aspect in which pastoralists faced limited difficulties was with regard to accessing veterinary care services. Proactive measures taken by the state government played a key role in making vaccination services available throughout the period, which was a relief, particularly to the shepherds.

The restrictions on inter-state movement imposed by the lockdown disrupted the usual patterns of migration of those pastoralists who usually move across states to access their forage pastures. The restrictions forced the herders to stay back at their winter pastures even during summers. Accessing fodder from market sources too became a difficult exercise during the lockdown. The buffalo herders especially had to face many problems which ranged from difficulties in procuring dry fodder, disruptions in usual migratory routes, to accessing local markets where they could sell their produce. However, several respondents also reported that the lack of traffic eased their movement whilst they moved within the state.

With regard to their income, the sectors where the pastoralists felt the biggest shock were in the sale of milk and wool products. For the shepherds, wool shearing was a major problem as the shearers provided by the Himachal Pradesh Wool Shearers Federation were unable to visit the shepherds due to the movement restrictions. This became a problem because these individuals use mechanical shearers, but in their absence, the herders had to resort to manual shearing. Adding to their difficulty was the lack of transportation as they could not carry the wool to the local markets. As a result, they ended up suffering losses. The buffalo herders on the other hand had a difficult time selling their milk, especially during the initial stages of the lockdown. A few herders were

A few herders were even forced to throw their milk due to the unavailability of buyers. Prices of milk and milk products also saw a reduction of nearly 50%

For the Gujjars, given that they are Muslims, the discrimination hit them like a double-whammy. Besides causing anxiety, the stigma impacted their incomes as people refused to buy milk from them.

even forced to throw their milk due to the unavailability of buyers. Prices of milk and milk products also saw a reduction of nearly 50%, which continued to prevail even five months after the lockdown was imposed. The impact on the sale of animals however was limited as the drop in prices was not as drastic as was witnessed in milk prices.

In addition to inducing financial stress, the lockdown also caused social distress and anxiety for the herders. This is because of the different forms of stigma that pastoralists experienced during the period. Not only did they face difficulties in entering villages due to restrictions imposed by the villagers, one respondent reported that he was not permitted to enter his own house by the villagers who saw him as an outsider and a potential carrier of COVID-19! Herders also faced discrimination while they visited local markets for charging phones or procuring ration. For the Gujjars, given that they are Muslims, the discrimination hit them like a double-whammy. Besides causing anxiety, the stigma impacted their incomes as people refused to buy milk from them. The most disturbing aspect of this situation was that these were people to whom the Gujjars had been selling their milk for more than two decades. The extent of anxiety caused by the social stigma is reflected in the fact that when asked about fears for the future, the biggest cause of worry was that of not being allowed access to their winter pastures by the villagers.

Despite the many difficulties that pastoralists faced during the lockdown, they continued to display a sense of commitment towards their pastoralist lifestyle. This commitment was reflected brightly in the resilience they showed while finding alternative migratory routes and pastures. This resilience however should not be taken for granted, as the pastoralists continue to remain one of the most marginal and vulnerable sections of the state.

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Annexure I

Summary of findings from a telephonic survey undertaken by CfP in April 2020

1. Restrictions on movement

Pastoralist migrations were halted by state governments either temporarily or for the entire year, on the assumption that all movements held the potential for transmission of the virus, and hence represented a threat to communities that pastoralists interacted with. In some instances, pastoral communities were able to convince governments to permit them to continue with their migrations. Others, such as the Van Gujjars of Uttarakhand were banned from moving to their summer pastures for the entire year, and were forced to either stall feed their buffaloes or find alternative grazing arrangements within the lower altitudes. Either option resulted in higher costs but also significantly reduced animal productivity. The Himachal government was particularly proactive in supporting pastoralist movement, because for the most part herders travel alone and tend to spend time in relative isolation, reducing the likelihood of viral transmission.

b). Accessing markets:

Pastoralist communities across states spoke of the difficulties of accessing milk, meat and feed markets, all closed due to the national lockdown. Some surplus milk was being converted into ghee and buttermilk, but as the weather warmed, even these products needed to be disposed of to avoid spoilage. The closure of meat markets had implications for immediate cash flows but did not represent the loss of a crop, such as may have been experienced by milk-selling pastoralists or by farmers with perishable, fresh produce.

c) Shortage of Labour:

In some instances, herders had returned home in February to attend to family functions or to help with cultivation. Post the imposition of restrictions, these herders were unable to move to where their herds were, resulting in a significant shortage of labour in managing the herds. Many herders also reported instances of hired labour choosing to return to home, owing to the limited information available on the pandemic and the associated desire to be close to home during this period of uncertainty.

d) Shearing sheep:

Sheep need to be sheared just before the onset of summer, and this is generally undertaken by shearers not necessarily part of the herding community. When sheep are not shorn, ahead of the summer heat,

there are heightened levels of sickness within the herd. Owing to the lockdown, shearers were simply unable to travel to where the sheep were located. While the Himachal government was ultimately able to facilitate shearer travel to the herds, in most States shearing operations were badly impacted. Many herders spoke of the likely impact of the lockdown and its aftermath on the import of wool and on the export of woollen carpets and durries.

e) Obtaining ration

Pastoralists on the move normally obtain ration from village kirana shops or from shops in small towns. Pastoralists across the country spoke of the fact that villagers, normally welcoming, were wary of potential transmission of COVID and were often unwilling to have transient pastoralists enter the village. In instances where the state was providing ration, pastoralists tended to miss out since they were on the outskirts of villages or were grazing their animals at some distance from human habitation.

f) Social Stigma:

Pastoralists from various parts of the country reported that they experienced a great deal of social stigma on account of their religion or their nomadic lifestyle. Gujjars in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh and from the Rishikesh/Haridwar areas in Uttarakhand faced ostracism as minorities and had difficulty in selling milk and in embarking on their annual migrations. In both instances, there were rumours to the effect that their milk carried the coronavirus and so customers should not buy their milk. Pastoralist mobility in itself has been causing social stigma for many decades and reports from across the country indicate this was accentuated throughout the lockdown.

g) Pastoralism, Resilience and COVID-19:

Several pastoralists mentioned that they may have experienced fewer negatives resulting from the lockdown than many other with rural livelihoods. This is likely linked to the fact that pastoral communities have historically needed to adapt to climatic, political and other changes. Pastoralist adaptability may have played a role in mitigating to some degree the various issues listed above.

Annexure II

Questionnaire to understand how pastoralists have fared under COVID-19

Code (State letters, followed by 1st three letters of Community name, followed by serial number of interview, in two digits – e.g. GUJRAB01)

Interviewers name

Date

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| a. Name | b. M/F |
| c. Community | d. Phone # |
| 1. Home Location | 2. Current Location |
| 3. Aadhaar Card Y/N | 4. Bank account Y/N |
| 5. Migratory Y/N | 6. Owner/helper? |
| 7. Are you with the herd Y/N | 8. What animals do you manage? |
| 9. Herd size | 10. Were you on migration during LckDn Y/N |

On each of the following please describe your normal practice and how this is affected because of the COVID epidemic:

A. Obtaining forage/water

1. What is your normal pattern of migration at this time? Do you cross district or state boundaries?
2. Has your movement been interrupted this year? Positively/Negatively?
3. Where have you obtained forage and water this year (village commons, Forest Department land, Protected Area, cultivated land, purchased, others?)
4. Do you normally purchase fodder? Were you able to do so this year?

B. Revenues/Expenditures

1. During lockdown have you had difficulty in the following:
 - a) Sale of milk and milk products
 - b) Sale of animals
 - c) Sale of wool
 - i) Difficulties with shearing?
 - ii) Getting wool to markets?
 - d) Penning
2. Has COVID/lockdown caused a fluctuation in the rates you receive for produce?

3. Where have these expenses changed (medicines, food, water, transport, alcohol, labour)?

4. Has COVID had an impact on your earnings?

A bit, Medium, A lot

C. Labour

1. What is the normal labour requirement? How much of this is hired labour?

2. What is the situation during lockdown? (could not come, had to leave, stranded?)

D. Veterinary care

1. What are the normal veterinary services that you access? Health camps, doctors, medicines, vaccinations?

2. Are these services available during lockdown?

E. General Questions (Rations, health care, places to stay, social stigma)

1. Where do you normally get your rations while on migration?

2. What difficulties have you encountered because of the lockdown?

3. What state or other support has been available to ensure you have adequate ration?

4. Were you required to carry a Coronavirus free certificate? Where were you required to show such a certificate? Did you need permission to move?

5. Have you experienced difficulties in finding places to camp during the lockdown?

6. Have you experienced social stigma? Please elaborate?

F. Open-ended

1. During COVID have you been better off or worse off than other rural communities (agriculture, settled livestock keepers)... Can you compare your situation with others from your community who have moved out of herding?

2. What are your hopes and fears with regard to the next 6-12 months?

3. Do you have anything to add?

G. Additional Comments by interviewer



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