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## Community-led migration strategies: A comparative study of rural to urban migration from three nomadic pastoral communities in Ladakh, northern India

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### Abstract

The Changpa nomads of Ladakh are unique as one of India's only fully nomadic pastoral populations. In recent years however, increasing numbers have chosen to leave their traditional livelihood, herding sheep, goats and yak in the high-altitude Indo-Tibetan border region, to settle in the district capital. This paper is based on a study of the migration of Changpa to Ladakh's rapidly urbanizing capital, Leh. Data from a survey of migrant households and in-depth interviews conducted in three nomadic pastoral communities shed light on the complex, heterogeneous nature of population mobility. The data reveal the communities to be characterised by distinct forms of mobility (large-scale, permanent out-migration from one community, seasonal circulation from the second, and low-level traditional forms of out-migration from the third). Rather than detailing the macroeconomic changes that have influenced the rate of rural-urban migration, this paper seeks to identify some of the socio-cultural factors that underlie the community-level differences in out-migration. It is argued that the variation in migration from the three communities is not indicative of a progressive decline of nomadic pastoralism in Ladakh. The nomadic communities are facing substantial pressure from external socio-economic change and migration to the urban area is seen as a strategy for survival and security optimisation. However, the extent to which the communities utilize this strategy is influenced by locally specific normative and regulatory factors.

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