

Abstract

Field survey was conducted during 2014 to study the vulnerability of rural communities to environmental changes in mid-hills of Himachal Pradesh in India. Integrated vulnerability analysis approach was employed based on indices constructed from carefully selected indicators for exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity. The household was selected as the main unit of analysis because major decisions about adaptation to environment-induced stresses and livelihood processes are taken at that level. The indicators were weighted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Those which got the highest weights included historical changes in climate (1.00), share of non natural resources based income (0.98) and physical assets (0.74) among the indicators of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity, respectively. Inter-block analysis of the vulnerability index indicated that households located away from district headquarters have higher levels of biophysical and socio-economic vulnerabilities compared to those near the district headquarters, due to higher reliance on natural resources which are now being impacted by ongoing environmental changes. Policy measures and development efforts should therefore aim towards addressing the high biophysical and socio-economic vulnerabilities of the rural communities of the mountain of Himachal Pradesh and more emphasis should be laid on the enhancement of their adaptive capacity.