ICSSR-NWO Social Science Collaboration grant research project

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Synopsis:

*Markets, Ethics and Agency: Changing Land Utilization and Social Transformation in the Uplands of Northeast India* explores the strategies employed by upland farmers of Northeast India who are deepening their engagement with markets and the state. Given the substantial commitments of the Indian state towards the Northeast and its growing importance for commercial activities such as mining, the region is rapidly developing in terms of infrastructure and connectivity. Increasingly, the upland areas are becoming integrated with regional, national and even international markets. These expanding networks of trade demand that upland cultivators reformulate their ethics of exchange, including morally charged notions such as ‘trust’, ‘profit’ and ‘greed’. The adoption of new crops has triggered the privatization of land, challenging inalienable communal ownership. Yet, people seem to attach great value to land as a shared resource, and they make great efforts to maintain collectively managed land as well. This continuing land attachment is also made explicit in political claims, as voiced by the many ethno-nationalist movements that are active in the uplands. Conducting in-depth multidisciplinary and empirical research into the so far neglected agency of upland farmers and their complex and changing relationship with markets and the state, we expect to gain important new insights into how upland communities modernize.