
Initiative 5: Himalayan Peoples' Representatives Meet

Policy advocacy on sustainable development of the Indian Himalayan Region

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Background

The Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), home of over 48 million people (Census 2011), has been recognized as a national priority and attracted global attention mostly due to its diversity and fragility of ecosystem which makes it vulnerable to anthropogenic and climate changes. This mountain system is vital for ensuring ecological security of the country. Furthermore, the spectacular natural landscapes in the region attract many philosophers, thinkers, and artists from all over the globe and provide avenues for flourishing tourism as one of the livelihood opportunities for inhabitants.

IHR, which occupies only 16.3% of the total geographical area of the country, holds 32.3% of the total forest cover, with nearly 45% of the good forest cover.

Recognizing diversity and uniqueness of the region, the country realized special planning needs for the development of IHR; hence, Planning Commission of India initiated "**Special Area Development Programme**" in the 6th Five Year Plan (1980-85) of the country (Box 1). Further, strengthening the regional needs and national objectives, the 7th Five Year Plan (1985-1990) identified basic tasks with a developmental perspective for the hilly region of the country (Box 2). The report of this working group states that the focus of the planning process should be on: (i) *complementarity of the hill and plain within the regional and the national frame, and (ii) integrated view of **ecological, economic and sociological aspects** of hill area development with **common man** as the central figure.* The report further emphasized that **the whole strategy should centre round the active participation of the people in fulfilment of basic needs.**

In the subsequent years, various committees [e.g., National Committees on (i) the Development of Backward Areas, (ii) Development of North-Eastern Region, (iii) Transforming the North-east, (iv) Development in Hill States Arising from Management of Forest Lands with special focus on creation of Infrastructure, Livelihood and Human Development, etc.], and Task Forces [e.g., (i) Development of Jammu & Kashmir – Growth-generating initiatives, (ii) The mountain ecosystems - Environment and Forest Sector, (iii) 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, etc.] were constituted.

Box 1

In spite of various developmental programmes, certain geographical areas present some very special ecological and socio-cultural features, which unless specifically taken into account do not permit the present planning process and the schemes developed within it, to be of major assistance to them. The Hill Areas of the country belong to this category.

6th Five Year Plan (1980-85)

Also, keeping in view the multiplex web of social, ecological and developmental needs of the IHR, Ministry of Environment & Forests (Govt of India) took an initiative of establishing a National Institute, **G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development** (GBPIHED) in the year 1988 with a dedicated mandate of sustainable development of the IHR. Besides taking in-depth research and development studies on IHR, mandate of the Institute also includes strengthening the local knowledge of the environment and contributes to strengthen regional scientific relevance through interactive networking. More recently, to understand complex processes affecting the Himalayan Ecosystem "**National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem**" has been launched under National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). In spite of such several programmes, still the same developmental challenges remain reflecting a

missing link connecting policy and practice. In this context, it has been realized that there is need to evolve new paradigm to advocate for and restore balance between social, economic and ecological imperatives of the IHR. With this rationale, GBPIHED aims to initiate, at every 2-3 years, a common dialogue between peoples' representatives (Members of Parliament) from the Himalayan region.

The objectives

- To provide a common platform to promote a systematic dialogue amongst Peoples' Representatives (Members of Parliament representing Indian Himalayan Region) at every 2–3 years for comprehensive understanding of the issues of the IHR.
- To seek guidance and advice on pertinent regional environmental and developmental issues to conduct/promote research for policy inputs.
- To enable favourable environment through policy advocacy at national level for sustainable development of the IHR.

The outcomes

The envisaged outcomes of this initiative are to provide: (i) a platform for sharing views, ideas, information to promote the cause of development of the IHR and (ii) knowledge base and inputs for policy interventions on issues of environment and development. This continuous process will provide a forum to the Peoples' Representatives to discuss and analyse regional environmental and developmental issues in coherence with national priorities and commitments assisted by the Institute through policy briefs and other research outputs.

Box 2

Identified basic tasks for the hilly region of the country –

(i) attainment of self-sufficiency in food, (ii) viable solution to the problem of shifting cultivation, (iii) ecological and environmental protection, (iv) reduction in infrastructural bottlenecks, (v) development of suitable small, village and cottage industries and generation of productive employment and (vi) manpower development. Though the States and Union Territories of the region have certain common features, each has also its own distinctive characteristics. It was emphasized that their particular ethos will be kept in view while drawing up specific plans, projects and schemes.

7th Five Year Plan (1985-90)