

# A People's Manifesto for the Western Himalaya

April 2019

## An integrated model of ecological development for the Western Himalaya



Mountain regions need developmental solutions that build ecological resilience while addressing socio-economic challenges by involving the voluntary sector wherever possible

## Accessible and sustainable livelihoods relevant to the region



For livelihoods in the region to be meaningful, sustainable and 'climate-proofed', they need to be remunerative ecological livelihoods that are accessible to all and provide an alternative to unnecessary migration

## Community-led conservation of forests and wildlife



Effective wildlife and forest conservation requires policy and practice that recognises the rights of forest dwellers and makes community involvement in conservation a priority, ideally through responsible community ownership of forests

## Dispersed, environment sustaining and economically remunerative tourism



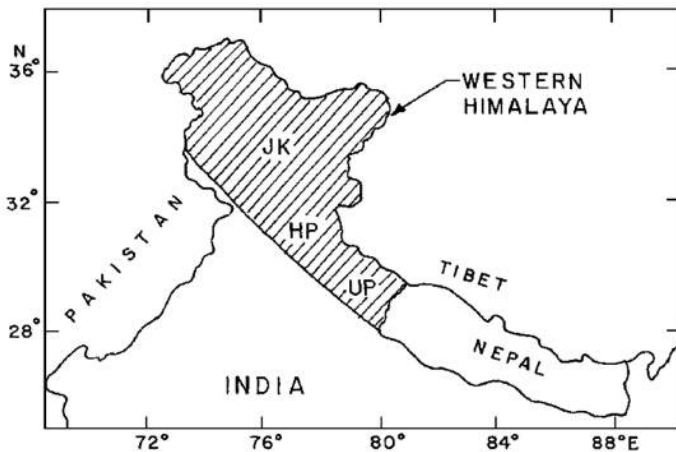
Dispersed, environment sustaining and economically remunerative tourism for the largest possible numbers - respectful of the region's carrying capacity - is the kind of tourism required in the Western Himalaya

## Waste management and civic engagement for tackling waste generation at source



Behavioural and attitude change related to consumption, production and management of waste is required to effectively mitigate the emerging problem of waste in the Western Himalaya

# A People's Manifesto for the Western Himalaya



The Western Himalayan region in India, which constitutes the three states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, is a unique landscape in terms of its geology, ecology and cultural heritage.

Mountain regions across the world face a similar set of challenges despite a rich natural resource base.

- inaccessibility / remoteness and fragility of ecosystems
- disenchantment with agriculture owing to prolonged neglect
- people migration (often male and large-scale, disparately affecting youth)
- heterogeneity of cultures and marginality based on gender and caste
- diversity based niches and human adaptation mechanisms
- higher vulnerability to climate change and a growing threat of natural disasters
- unsustainable tourism and its accompanying waste management issues

**The Himalayas face unprecedented climate impacts**, experiencing [warming at faster rates than any other region or mountain range](#).

Home to 2.95 crore people spread across the three states<sup>1</sup>, this region is a contiguous landscape (as apparent from the map above), even though it is not a culturally homogeneous region. However **this contiguous tri-state region needs a distinct mountain specific development model**, different from the prevailing development model for individual states or the plains.

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<sup>1</sup> As per 2011 census:

Jammu & Kashmir: 1.25 crores (12,541,302); Himachal Pradesh: 0.68 crores (6,864,602); Uttarakhand: 1.01 crores (10,086,292)  
TOTAL: 2.95 crores (29,492,196)

There is an urgent need for an integrated policy for the Western Himalayan region. This manifesto, put together by organisations and individuals that have been working extensively in the region, outlines a **region-specific strategy for inclusive, ecologically sound development that takes into account the fragility of the landscape.**

Simultaneously, efforts to preserve mountain ecosystems must take into account local community aspirations and integrate ecological and human resilience as well.

Mountain specificities require specific solutions for resilience building that address socio-economic and environmental challenges in the mountain setting.

NITI Aayog, August 2018

We need to think about a pan-Himalayan strategy so that states can evolve common policies and not follow the race to the bottom. It is also clear that these strategies will have to be based on the region's natural resources

Sunita Narain, Down to Earth 2015

These **five priority focus areas** recommend an integrated framework for mountain-specific policies and actions/programmes.

Integrated model of ecological development for the Western Himalaya

Accessible and sustainable livelihoods relevant to the region

Community-led conservation of forests and wildlife

Himalaya-specific model of dispersed, sustainable and eco-sensitive tourism

Waste management and civic engagement for tackling waste generation at source

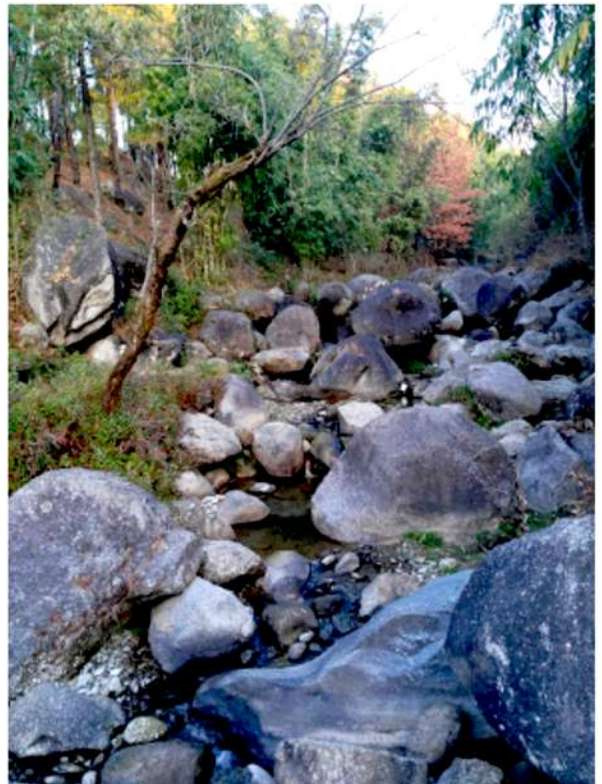
# 1) AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF ECOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE WESTERN HIMALAYA

Mountain regions need developmental solutions that build ecological resilience while addressing socio-economic challenges by involving the voluntary sector wherever possible.

The Himalayas helps shape the climate for India as well as the rest of South Asia. They also ensure the country's water security - Himalayan springs are a critical source for perennial rivers such as the Ganga, Indus and Brahmaputra. In fact, up to [90% of the water in the Ganga is dependent on springs and streams](#).

But as the world's youngest mountain range, they are also **one of the most fragile ecosystems on earth**, more prone to erosion, landslides and seismic activity.

Climate change has clear impacts on the hydrology of the region. In the long term, the Himalayas will see **erratic water availability**, with [periods of scarcity followed by devastating floods](#). Most of the water that is consumed in the Himalayan region comes from springs and this spring water supply in Himalayan villages is becoming increasingly uncertain due to the impact of climate change on precipitation patterns. At the same time, we can expect increasingly higher discharges in Himalayan rivers owing to glacial melting, and the accompanying risks of glacial lake outburst floods.



The desired development paradigm for the Western Himalaya must keep in mind both **ecological sustainability and equity**. Mountain development has to incorporate both mountain communities and its rich biodiversity while planning any developmental activities in the region.

Development projects in the mountain regions, such as hydro-power, road extensions and smart city projects need to address the **geomorphic condition of these fragile ecosystems**. A [number of studies](#) have shown that while climate change has played a



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substantial role in the growing incidence of natural disasters in the region, development projects that are unsuitable for mountain ecology amplify the risk for floods, displacement, and dispossession. In Uttarakhand, for instance, even the [Supreme Court recognised](#) that the consequences of the 2013 flash floods were exacerbated by hydropower projects in the state, which led to them temporarily prohibiting any further environmental or forest clearances for hydroelectric projects until a detailed study could be carried out.

All of this poses a massive threat to the lives and the livelihoods of Himalayan communities because of the increasing incidence of natural disasters and the collapse of agricultural and other natural resource-based livelihoods.

## Recommendations

- Mountains know no regional or political boundaries. Given the landscape effects of climate change, there is a need for **regional cooperation in the Western Himalayas**, within India as well as transboundary cooperation between India and other Himalayan countries such as Nepal and China.
- [Common frameworks for climate change adaptation](#) and assessment of vulnerability of Himalayan states, such as [those prepared recently](#) by the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) at Guwahati and Mandi in collaboration with Indian Institute of Science (Bangalore) with support from the Department of Science and Technology and the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) must be further supported and propagated.
- Hydropower development must be severely restricted to **minimise environmental and social costs**. The hydrological impacts of run-of-the-river projects needs to be recognised, instead of allowing the proliferation of dozens of such projects across



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- a river's length, as in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- **Early warning systems** are needed to safeguard communities from the consequences of flash floods, along with strict adherence to **construction safety norms along river banks**.
  - In the long-term, we need to move away from hydropower to **safer means of energy production, such as solar**.
  - Community-led or community-owned conservation and development of 'ecologically sensitive zones' in the Himalayas is needed to sustain the environment and ensure that local communities remain invested in the conservation process.
  - The region urgently needs a policy for integrated and participatory **springshed development** and **groundwater management** with a focus on hydrogeology to tackle the drying up of springs, which are a primary source of drinking water in the region. This needs to be done while making women a part of the decision making process using a bottom-up approach, as is already taking place in [some parts of the region](#).
  - While improving road access in the Western Himalaya can have benefits for remote communities, **road construction itself must be geologically safe**. Large scale road extensions or 'all-weather' roads built to promote tourism and usher in economic development must be viewed instead with a geology lens. The kind of indiscriminate clearing of both trees and destabilisation of mountain slopes that is being seen in such projects across the region is already leading to landslides, impacting water sources and burying productive agricultural fields.

**An example:** The all-weather Chardham Marg is an unmitigated environmental disaster

The All-weather Chardham Marg, which is having a significant negative impact on local livelihoods and is causing irreparable ecological damage, must be stopped and mitigation measures must be implemented in consultation with local community, civil society and scientists/engineers.

The Chardham Marg is an example of all that is flawed with large developmental projects in the Himalayas - no on-the-ground need assessment, lack of proper environmental impact assessment and complete flouting of environmental and construction norms.



## 2) ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS RELEVANT TO THE REGION



For livelihoods in the region to be meaningful, sustainable and ‘climate-proofed’, they need to be remunerative ecological livelihoods that are accessible to all and provide an alternative to unnecessary migration.

Himalayan communities have traditionally practised subsistence small-scale agriculture as a livelihood. Long years of government neglect have led to significant production decline. **Climate change and crop damage by wildlife have added to farmer’s woes.** With declining soil productivity and occasional crop failures, households are unable to meet their annual food requirements and seek alternate employment opportunities - primarily through migration and low-paying wage labour.

The link to the region’s natural resources becomes painfully apparent in more rural and remote regions, where the limited economic opportunities that are available are **inextricably linked to the natural resource base.** Even though livelihood avenues such



## 2) ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS RELEVANT TO THE REGION

as opening a small shop, computer centre or engaging in the tourism value chain are slowly becoming more common, these are still limited in scope.

### General recommendations

Agriculture in the region needs to be made **more remunerative, aspirational and sustainable again** through focused investment as well as policy and knowledge support. The relationships between agriculture, forests and wildlife, water and livestock also need to be addressed in an integrated manner.

Livelihood security - the availability of **multiple income-generating opportunities** which provide an alternative to unsustainable livelihoods or migration - must become the ideal to achieve when it comes to the economic growth of the region. Livelihoods for youth, in particular, must become a key focus to stem unnecessary migration from the region.

As a consequence of large-scale male and youth migration, there is a disproportionate burden on women farmers and a growing 'feminisation' of agricultural labour in the region. This needs to be addressed by creating an enabling environment for women farmers, through institutional mechanisms, market linkage support and skilling for basic agro-processing at the farm level with a focus on women farmers.

**Ecological livelihoods** derived from the region's rich natural resources base and biodiversity, such as horticulture, medicinal plants, non-timber forest produce or ecotourism-related initiatives can provide a diversity of livelihood options in a changing climate. **This will also help communities value and protect the ecosystems they live in.**





## 2) ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS RELEVANT TO THE REGION

### Specific recommendations

- Focus on **traditional and climate-resilient crops** that are more remunerative and suited to the region in order to make agriculture viable again. 'Grow local, eat local' can be a handy motto to promote among the farming community and otherwise. Niche products that can be marketed at a premium can be focused upon instead of the surplus production of grains. Some Himalayan communities are already beginning to move back to traditional crops in order to deal with climate change.
- Improve understanding of **youth aspirations and expectations**, in order to support or design livelihoods that are viable and accessible for them. This can help reduce migration to nearby towns and cities in search of jobs and careers.
- Promote the **diversification of livelihoods** through horticulture, floriculture and dairy-based enterprises to protect them from external shocks and stressors.
- Explore, study and scale up other sustainable economic activities that enhance livelihoods without destroying local culture or ecology. Support the kinds of activities which are being **piloted on small scales** by various community-based organisations across the region.
- Revive **traditional irrigation systems** and further the practices of organic, biodiverse agriculture and agro-ecology. Provide knowledge dissemination and support for practices being adopted by farmers in the region, such as the System of Crop Intensification (SCI).
- Support the growth of **self-employment and entrepreneurship as a viable livelihood choice** to address the lack of job prospects and create local jobs in the region.
- **Up-skill landless and marginal landholders** for off-farm and non-farm activities; in an evolving agro-livelihoods climate, education and skill development become critical. Voluntary organisations with experience can play a critical role as knowledge partners in this process.



### 3) COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION OF FORESTS AND WILDLIFE

Effective wildlife and forest conservation requires policy and practice that recognises the rights of forest dwellers and makes community involvement in conservation a priority, ideally through responsible community ownership of forests.

Forests and wildlife conservation in India is largely governed by five key pieces of forest legislation<sup>2</sup>. With the exception of the Forest Rights Act (2006) - which sought to ensure the rights of forest dwellers - current laws enacted by the Centre and the State **largely exclude forest dwellers and local communities from decision making** on protection of forests and wildlife.

The current approach has led to:

- \* Widespread dissatisfaction and a lack of ownership of local communities and forest dwellers required for forest protection and wildlife conservation
- \* Alienation of the Indian Forest Service, tasked with protection of forest and wildlife, from people (urban and rural communities as well as forest dwellers).
- \* Significant increase in human-wildlife conflicts, which are being addressed in a piecemeal fashion without involvement of the local communities and forest dwellers.
- \* Proliferation of free-ranging dogs which are attacking and depleting the population of wild herbivores all across the Western Himalaya



#### General recommendations

We would like to propose that decision making for forest and wildlife conservation should be **people-led** and should **incentivise conservation of natural resources and wildlife**. Development projects should not be conceptualised without a requisite need assessment first, and if they are implemented, the environmental impact assessment process should be given due respect. Community involvement in Protected Area management is a must for it to succeed.

<sup>2</sup> Wildlife Protection Act (1972), Indian Forest Act (1927), Forest Conservation Act (1980), Biological Diversity Act (1980) and the Forest Rights Act (2006)



### 3) COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION OF FORESTS AND WILDLIFE

#### Specific recommendations

- \* Involve local communities and forest dwellers in **ground-up decision-making**.
- \* Ensure that proper need assessment and impact assessment of large developmental projects in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region is undertaken. Impacted communities should be involved in the decision-making process from the very beginning,
- \* Revive and strengthen **community-based institutions** such as Van Panchayats, Management committees of Conservation, Community Reserves and Community Conserved Areas and make them more effective. Currently, most of these bodies are effectively controlled and managed by the Forest Departments, with limited involvement and empowerment of local communities.
- \* Mitigate **human-wildlife conflict using science-based decision-making** and involving local communities in seeking solutions to the conflicts.
- \* Incentivise conservation by making local communities and forest dwellers **owners or partners in ecologically and economically sustainable ecotourism**. Involve local communities in habitat restoration and conservation of highly threatened species like the Snow Leopard, Black-necked Crane and Hangul Deer.
- \* Incentivise the establishment of small community-controlled nature reserves to promote wildlife tourism. Move away from the model of mega/charismatic-fauna linked wildlife tourism to lesser-known fauna and flora linked-ecotourism.
- \* Need for the Forest Department to make long-term, science-based decision making for all **conservation action by co-opting researchers and communities** to solve conservation issues.
- \* **Transfer ownership of private forest lands and princely states' forests** attached to the Forest Department post Independence to local communities, to be governed as Gram Vans.
- \* Ensure **Forest Rights Act (2006) is implemented** in its intended spirit in all regions, by involving forest dwelling communities.
- \* Establish special veterinary centres across the region to spay/neuter free-ranging dogs, and have a comprehensive plan to deal with wet waste at military and tourist camps, which become breeding hubs for free-ranging dogs.



## 4) Dispersed, environment sustaining and economically remunerative tourism benefiting local communities

Dispersed, environment sustaining and economically remunerative tourism for the largest possible numbers – respectful of the region’s carrying capacity – is the kind of tourism required in the Western Himalaya

Tourism in all forms (nature-linked, adventure, religious, rural, etc) provides significant livelihoods in pockets of the Western Himalayas. Given the fragile ecology of the West Himalayan region, we propose that going forward, sustainable or responsible ecotourism be promoted in the Western Himalayan region - recommended by the [NITI Aayog \(August 2018\)](#), with benefits accruing in an equitable manner to local communities.

### General recommendations

Ecotourism should be the only form of tourism adopted in the Western Himalayas. Mass tourism to eco-sensitive areas should be discouraged to ensure less pressure on natural resources of the area.

With the support the relevant state government departments, local communities from all three Western Himalayan states will prepare **rules and regulations to minimize environmental impact** in consultation with other stakeholders such as tourism practitioners and non-profit organisations. These will include regulations to minimise waste, assess and regulate carrying capacity for tourism in the region.



## 4) Dispersed, environment sustaining and economically remunerative tourism benefiting local communities

### Specific recommendations

- \* Promotion of **low environmental impact facilities** such as rural homestays must be encouraged. Construction of large facilities to promote tourism must be minimised.
- \* The focus of ecotourism will be to ensure a positive experience for visitors and local people. A long-term awareness campaign should be held advocating ecotourism in the Western Himalaya, so that **local communities practise responsible tourism of their own volition**.
- \* **Community-based ecotourism** will be recognized and promoted which:
  - sustains the well being of local people
  - incentivises conservation of local natural resources by local people.
  - promotes community owned and managed ventures (ban/restriction on outside ownership) to boost local economy.
- \* Given the significant biodiversity of the Western Himalayas, **lesser-known fauna and flora linked tourism** will be supported in Protected Areas and outside Protected Areas such as bird and butterfly watching.
- \* Inclusion of sustainable tourism modules in school curriculum, so that children develop travel ethics early on in life.
- \* Destination development of 20 selected locations as **demonstration projects for ecotourism** will be executed with partnership of local communities, ecotourism practitioners and non-profit organisations.
- \* **Community involvement in management of Protected Areas** will be supported, by involvement as tour guides and activities such as afforestation, soil conservation and resource-enhancing activities.



## 5) TACKLING WASTE GENERATION AT SOURCE AND MANAGING IT BY INCLUDING ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Behavioural and attitude change related to consumption, production and management of waste is required to effectively mitigate the emerging problem of waste in the Western Himalaya



All across the country, outdated waste management systems are struggling to keep up with the rising populations and consumption. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan's launch in 2014 highlighted basic issues, and policies emerged with slow momentum. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), as well, had issued suggestions in compliance with a 2015 order by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on an action plan for municipal solid waste management (SWM).

However, central policies lack a focus at smaller ward and village levels. A lack of decentralised implementation, inconsistent monitoring, and poor enforcement makes core challenges harder to overcome - especially on behavioural change - in this region.

### General recommendations

Successful waste management begins at the waste's source - the people who generate it. Hence, the need to tackle first the issue of waste generation at source, then followed by improvements in waste management systems and processes.

Even though MoHUA (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs) guidelines say that the *"segregation of waste at source is key to the success of all the options and technologies available"*, if people do not become aware of what to do or how to do it, the first step itself becomes the weakest chain in the link.

### Specific recommendations

- \* Raise public awareness on the basic tenets of waste management and inform people of their **individual civic responsibilities towards their generated waste**, rather than dismiss it as the government's concern.



## 5) TACKLING WASTE GENERATION AT SOURCE AND MANAGING IT BY INCLUDING ALL STAKEHOLDERS



- \* Hold community-level **waste management trainings** for adults and similar learning activities in schools for children.
- \* Ban plastic water-bottles and styrofoam cups/plates in all government offices, institutes, civil society organizations and religious centres where large number of pilgrims congregate. However, put **alternatives in place before the moratorium**.
- \* Engage in **direct action with local community involvement**. Despite all awareness-raising efforts, the need to transform already unclean public spaces still exists. The impact of cleaning up or beautifying spaces is highest when those who are most affected by the waste's presence - such as the people who live nearby - are included in the action and can begin to feel a sense of local ownership.
- \* Strengthen **long-term partnerships between civic societies and government bodies**. Central policies can be implemented locally in efficient and accountable ways, suitable for each community's context. By doing this, we can have innovative, incentivised, inclusive, integrated, informative approaches that are supported by both local community and policy partners.





This **People's Manifesto for the Western Himalayas** emerged out of discussions at the Western Himalayan Vikalp Sangam, organised at the Tara Retreat Campus of Jagori, Himachal Pradesh from 11th to 14th November 2018.

The second in the series of the Western Himalayan Sangams, this Sangam was co-hosted by Jagori Rural, People's Science Institute, Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust, Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO), Sambhaavnaa, MOOL Sustainability & Research Centre, Titli Trust, Maati Collective, SADED, School for Rural Development and Environment, and Kalpavriksh.



For more information, please have a look at [this report documenting the discussions at this Sangam](#).

Inspired by the [national-level People's Manifesto for a Just, Equitable, and Sustainable India](#), this regional manifesto hopes to raise awareness about the specific issues that are common across the Western Himalayan landscape, and calls for a regional focus to mountain development in the three states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.

This manifesto is being sent to political parties in relation to the upcoming national elections, but it is not meant only for this purpose; it is also for use on other forums, including state/local elections, advocacy with governments at various levels, and providing a context for our own work including reviewing our own commitments and ways of working.

Please use, circulate, and publicise this manifesto as you think is appropriate. Additional endorsements are also most welcome - please send them directly to political parties, and copy/contact the following members of the **Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam Core Group**:

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*The Vikalp Sangam process is a platform to bring together movements, groups and individuals working on just, equitable and sustainable pathways to human and ecological well-being. It rejects the current model of development and the structures of inequality and injustice underlying it, and searches for alternatives in practice and vision. Over 50 movements and organisations around the country are involved. For more: <http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/>*



# ENDORISING MEMBERS FOR THIS MANIFESTO

## Organisations

Beej Bachao Andolan (Uttarakhand)  
Himalaya Bachao Samiti (Himachal Pradesh)  
Shunya (Himachal Pradesh)



Jagori Rural (Himachal Pradesh)



Kalpavriksh (Maharashtra)



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Titli Trust (Uttarakhand)



CORD Sidhbari (Himachal Pradesh)



Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (Ladakh)



Waste Warriors (Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh)



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