



THE HIMALAYAN CLEANUP 2023

5 YEARS OF RAISING OUR VOICES AGAINST PLASTIC POLLUTION.

5 YEARS OF DEMANDING PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY.

5 YEARS OF CLEANING UP THE MOUNTAINS.

5 YEARS OF SOLIDARITY AMONG MOUNTAIN PEOPLE.

5 YEARS OF SHOWING OUR LOVE FOR THE MOUNTAINS.



INTEGRATED
MOUNTAIN
INITIATIVE

ZeroWaste
HIMALAYA

CONTENT

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INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN INITIATIVE

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ZERO WASTE HIMALAYA

TADONG, GANGTOK, SIKKIM
LADENLA ROAD, DARJEELING

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REFLECT SWITCH DEMAND





BACKGROUND

The Himalayan Cleanup (THC) hosted by Zero Waste Himalaya (ZWH) and Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) was conceived to highlight the waste crisis in the Indian Himalayan Region. This was in response to the global call by India for World Environment Day, 2018 with #BeatPlasticPollution as the theme.

The results of the THC 2018 were presented at the World Environment Day event of MoEFCC, New Delhi. THC has continued and grown since its inception in 2018; influencing individuals and communities to go zero waste and informing institutions to address the waste crisis with a systemic lens.

THC has become an important part of IMI and ZWH work in highlighting the region specific challenges of waste management. The waste crisis in the Himalaya has been exacerbated with the rapidly changing production and consumption patterns along with increase in tourist footfalls. Even the most remote and far-fetched villages in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) do not remain immune to plastic pollution. Solid waste is predominantly dumped unsegregated in landfills, down the hills or streams and rivers and in many instances burnt. Collection of waste and linkages to recycling units is limited, thus most plastic ends up in the environment.



OBJECTIVES

THC recognises that cleanups are never a complete solution to the waste crisis, but it is surely a good place to start on a sustainable zero waste pathway at an individual as well as at an institutional level. The Himalayan Cleanup is a rallying point for voices from the mountains to be heard and align with ongoing national and global movements on waste.

THC is grounded on the principle that waste results from design flaws, and that producers taking responsibility for their products is extremely crucial to resolve the plastic waste crisis. So more than just cleaning up, THC aims at gathering granular data to demand for better systems, products and policies for the mountains.

THC is equally an exercise to look inwards, reflect on our own lifestyles and make sustainable choices. THC is a call to action to everyone to rise up against plastic pollution and make individual and institutional lifestyle changes while demanding for systemic changes too.

THC contributes to the much needed change in the waste narrative, challenge the notions of a clean, pristine Himalaya and advocate for systemic changes that goes beyond the bin, broom, burning and rolling down the hill

THC THEME

'Reflect, Switch and Demand' is the theme for THC conducted between 26 to 30 May each year that motivates participants to -



Reflect

on their waste footprint,



Switch

to adopt sustainable lifestyles to reduce their waste and



Demand

raise their collective voices against plastic pollution.

5 YEARS OF THC

THC has been undertaken across the mountain states of India with the participation of individuals, community-based, faith-based, civil society organisations, educational institutions, Government Departments and other stakeholders. These stewards choose a key site based on socio-ecological importance and undertake a cleanup with the active engagement of volunteers. THC has cleaned up important protected areas, tourism sites, wetlands, parks, villages, highways, school neighbourhoods, etc,

2018

15000+ Volunteers

250+ sites

200+ organisations

2019

5000+ Volunteers

100+ sites

70+ organisations

2020

PANDEMIC

35+ Peer Educators trained

2021

350+ Volunteers

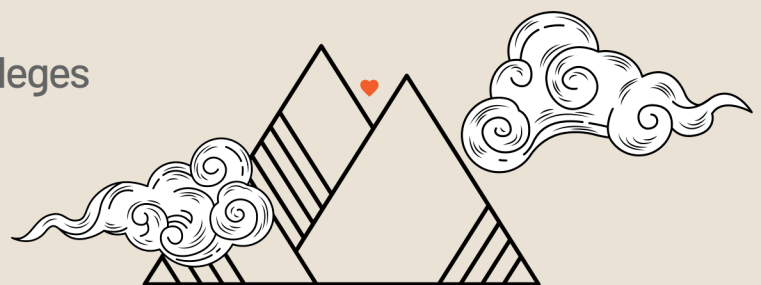
HOME BASED AUDITS

2022

5000+ Volunteers

150+ sites

49 organisations / 100+ Schools/Colleges



2023

11000+ Volunteers

350+ sites

300+ organisations / institutions

THE HIMALAYAN CLEANUP PROCESS

The Himalayan Cleanup is conducted between May 26 - 30 with a comprehensive waste and brand audit of the waste cleaned up using a uniform global protocol adapted to the Himalaya.

Volunteering organisations select a site for cleanup that is important (A popular tourist spot, a famous landmark, ecological areas, campuses), and register their cleanups using an online form. THC team organises online training on the waste and audit protocols for all the registered participants.

Volunteers clean up the site and the collected waste is brought to a common place for segregation and audit. Waste is sorted into various plastic types and other non biodegradables and every piece is counted by and the total weight is measured.

The plastic waste is further audited brand wise which quantifies and names the companies who are polluting the mountains and calls on them to take responsibility for their waste.

The data is noted down and entered using mobile - based app which collates all the data. The collated data is cleaned up and analysed.

THC is a zero waste event where no plastic waste is generated by the participants. THC is taken forward in coordination with the official waste management department as well as with informal waste workers so that post audit, the waste is taken for recycling or to the designated landfills.

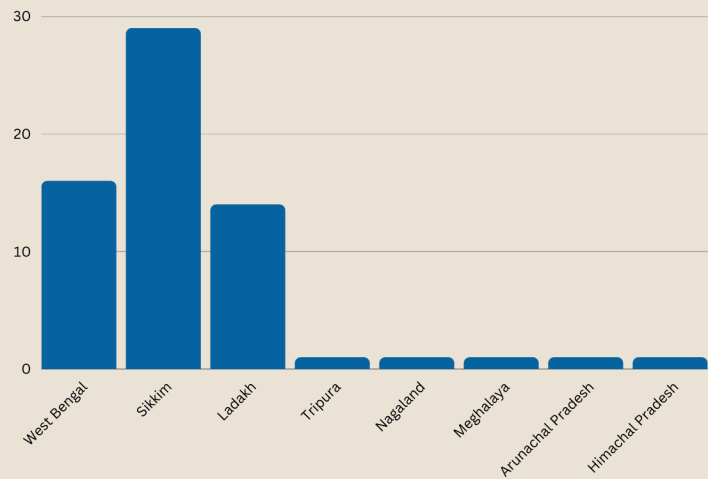


FINDINGS

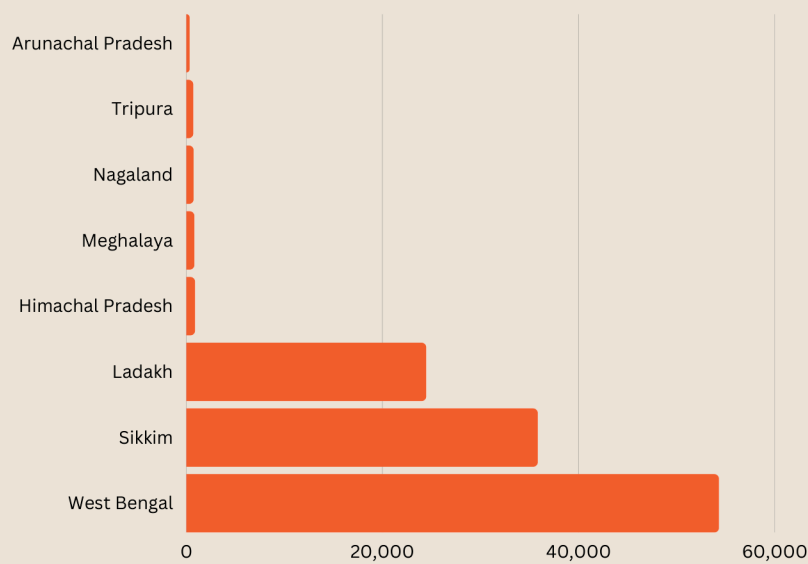
The Himalayan Cleanup 2023 was an effort of 11000 volunteers across 10 mountain states who cleaned up over 350 sites.

The waste and brand audit data comes from 64 sites from across 8 mountain states cleaning up 75 sites.

Sikkim had highest numbers of cleanup sites as THC was officially taken up by Education and Rural Development Department. Darjeeling and Kalimpong, West Bengal had the highest amount of waste cleaned up.



Data received for cleanup sites per state



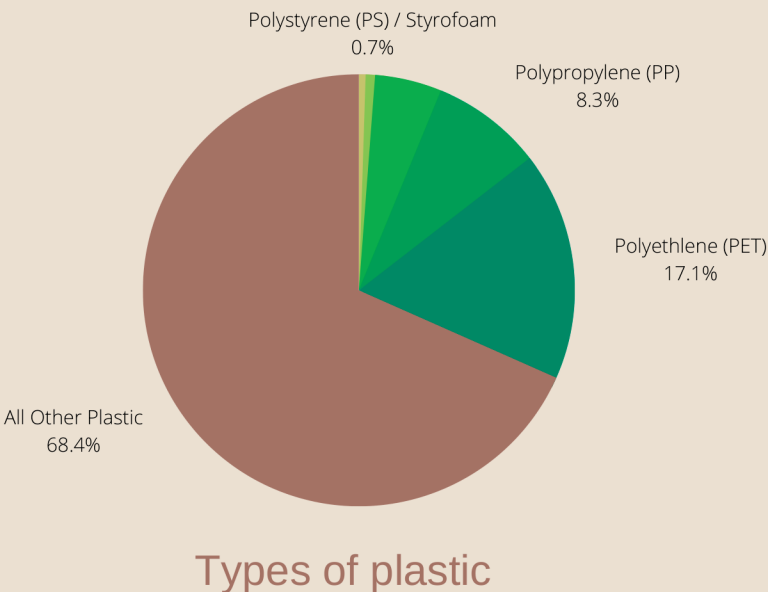
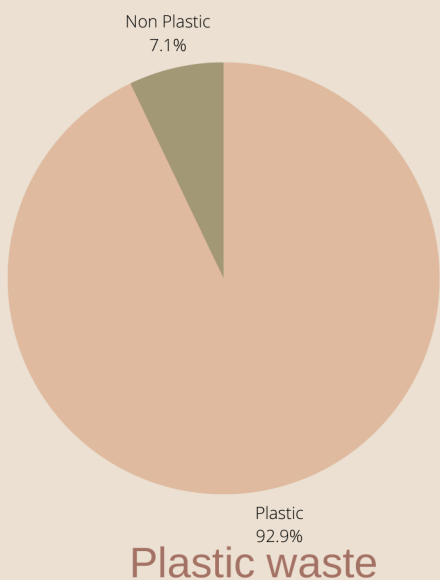
Waste picked up per state



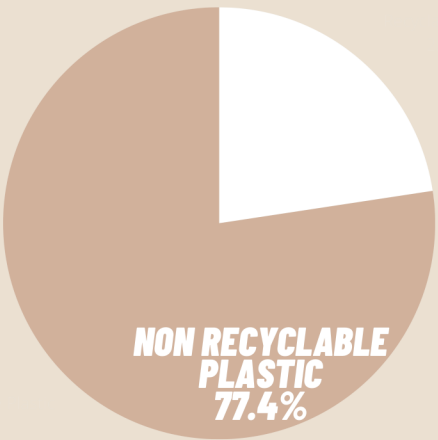
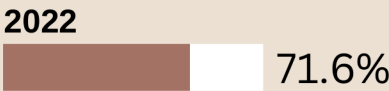
PLASTIC WASTE- TYPES AND NUMBERS

117908
Total waste picked up

109520
Total plastic waste



NON RECYCLABLE PLASTIC



22.6% of plastic waste collected was recyclable (PET 17.3%/ HDPE.5% / LDPE 5.1%). Mountains have several limits for collection, transport and linkages thus even recyclables such as PET bottles end up littering the mountains.

The Multilayered Scourge

THC 2023 showed that 77.4 % of all plastic collected was non-recyclable, mainly, multilayered plastics and tetrapak. This is indicative of the what the mountains are facing, flooded with non- recyclable plastics, that have no solutions. These problematic plastics are not collected by any waste pickers and scrap dealers and are found littering mountain landscapes, choking waterways and filling up landfill sites.

The scourge for waste managers, these kinds of plastics (MLPs) are the main reason why mountains are burdened with a huge waste crisis. Where mountains are struggling even with collecting and linking recyclable plastics for processing, these multilayered plastics prove even more challenging having no solutions and value for collection.



Single use plastics

India promulgated the single use plastic ban from 1 July 2022, and THC 2023 found that banned items made 2.3% of plastic waste collected which shows gaps in the implementation of the ban. There is however a decline in the single use plastics that was collected when compared to 2022.



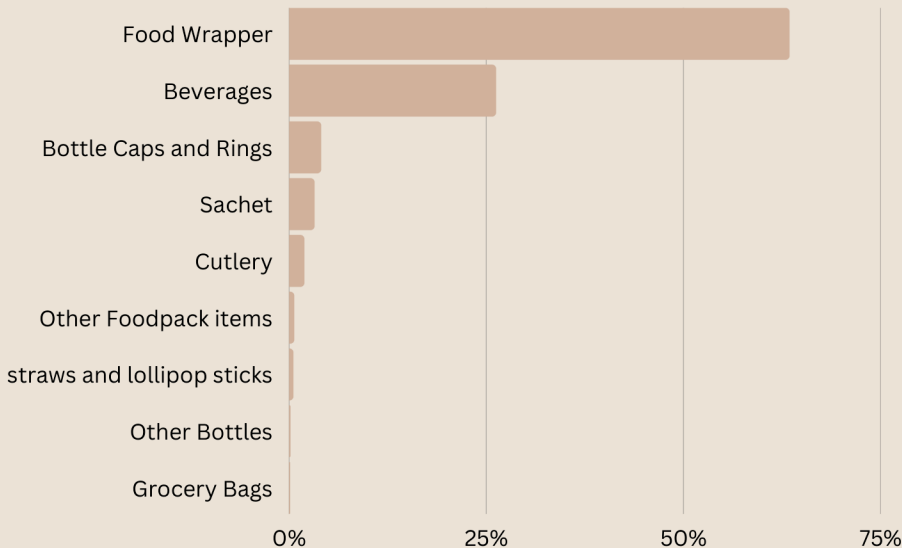
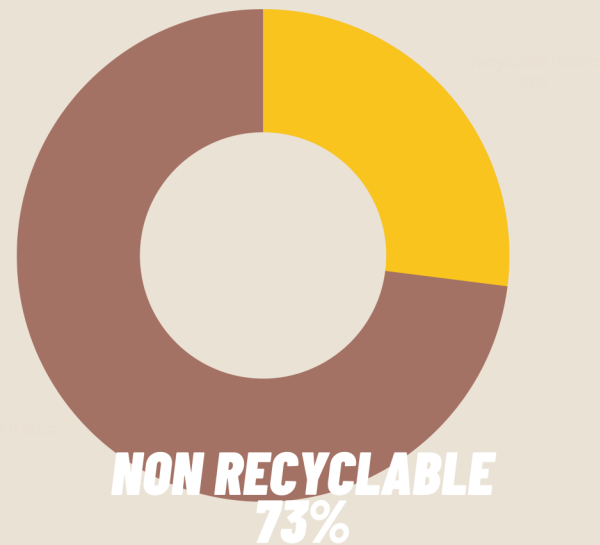
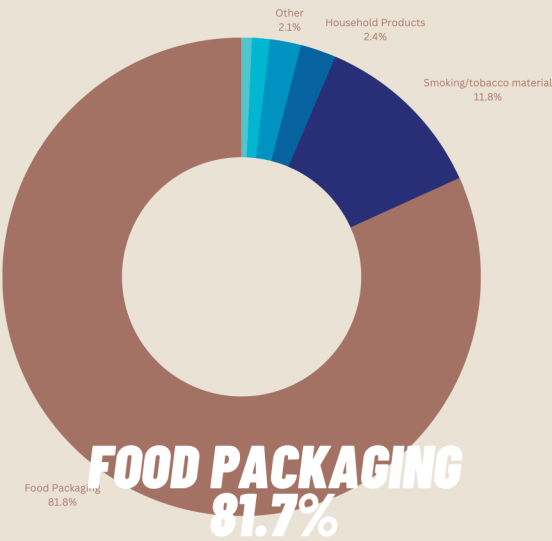
WASTE AND FOOD INTERSECT

The waste and food intersect also emerged clearly from the THC 2023 data. Packaged food and drinks making an alarming 81.7% of all plastic waste collected.

This intersection has become extremely apparent looking at data since THC was conceptualised in 2018. There has been a steady increase every year in food packaging cleaned up and it is an indication of the junk and processed food culture that is overtaking the diverse local food cultures of the Himalaya. These foods low in nutritional value and high in salt, sugar and fat contribute to the fast growing non-communicable diseases in the Himalaya.

Even before the packaging is trashed, it is already a threat to the well-being of communities.

73% of food packaging was non-recyclable multilayered plastics, showing how a change in eating habits is contributing to the waste crisis.



Break up of food packaging

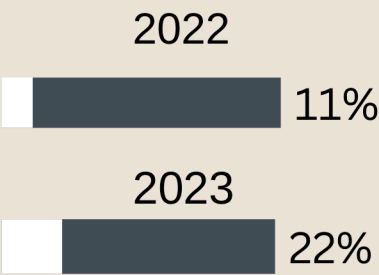
THE STING SURGE

THC 2023 data has recorded a huge surge in ‘Sting’, an energy drink from 11% in 2022 to 22% this year. There are other variants of the drink, but Sting reigns supreme. It is particularly frightening, given the warning label on the product that it is “not recommended for children, pregnant or lactating mothers”. Most often it is children who are consuming the product as it is sold to them despite the label.

The jump shows how popular the drink has become and throws additional challenges to the well-being of communities and children besides the waste issue.

A large section of the THC 2023 was taken forward by educational institutions within the neighbourhood of their institutions which shows what students including primary school students in the IHR are eating plastic packaged food and drinks on a regular basis.

The example of ‘Sting’, shows the need for stronger front of label packaging policies that warn consumers of the dangers of these products as well as regulating their active portrayal in the media with targeted advertisements without sufficient warning of its content.





IDENTIFYING TOP POLLUTERS

For far too long, the burden of cleaning up has been seen as a responsibility of consumers and waste managers alone, while the actual producers of waste - the companies have shirked theirs. It is now imperative that companies take responsibility for their waste and design out waste at a systemic level as well as make arrangements for managing it immediately. The Himalayan Cleanup has been naming the companies that are the top polluters of the mountains. This is the narrative shift required to redress the Himalayan waste crisis whereby the plastic tap is closed.

The promulgation of the Extended Producer Responsibility, 2022 (EPR) under the Plastic Waste Management Rules brought about an important narrative shift of including producers of waste and addressing waste beyond the end of the pipeline management issue only. But, for mountain landscapes there are gaps that do not acknowledge the importance, fragility and challenges of the mountain socio-ecological systems, reducing its implementation to a negligible amount in the IHR.

The lack of appropriate resources and targets allocated for the mountains has meant that even in mountain spaces where it is being implemented, it has not been effective and successfully. Thus, at an intermediary level, naming the top polluters of the Himalaya demands of them to take forward the EPR responsibility with specific focus in the IHR.

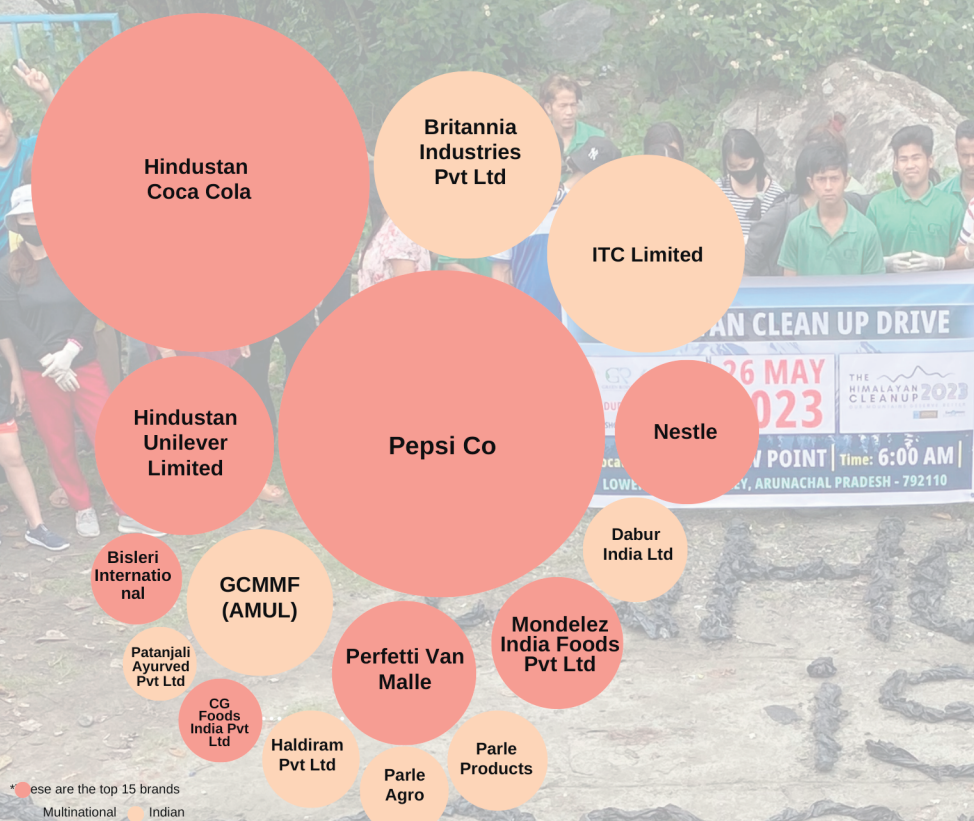
BRAND AUDIT RESULTS, THC 2023

1	 PEPSICO	6	
2		7	
3	Parlé	8	TEJ RAM DHARAM PAL PVT. LTD.
4		9	
5		10	GCMMF

THC 2023 BRAND AUDIT REVEALED, STARTING FROM HIGHEST IN NUMBER, THE PLASTIC WASTE CLEANED UP WERE FROM:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. PepsiCo India; | 11. Hindustan Unilever Ltd.; |
| 2. Perfetti Van Melle; | 12. Britannia Industries Ltd.; |
| 3. Parle; | 13. Trimurti Fragrances; |
| 4. CG Foods India Pvt. Ltd.; | 14. Guptaji Food Products; |
| 5. ITC, | 15. Vadilal Enterprises; |
| 6. Hindustan Coca Cola; | 16. Dabur India Ltd; |
| 7. Nestle; | 17. Zeenat Ice Cream, |
| 8. Tej Ram Dharam Pal Pvt. Ltd.; | 18. Paras Surti Product Pvt Ltd., |
| 9. Mondelez India Food Pvt. Ltd.; | 19. Godfrey Phillips, |
| 10. GCMMF(Amul); | 20. Haldiram's Snacks Pvt. Ltd.. |

The Himalayan Cleanup, 2018 Brand Audit Results



The Himalayan Cleanup, 2021 Brand Audit Results



WAY FORWARD

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY FRAMEWORK TO BE MADE IMPLEMENTABLE IN THE MOUNTAIN STATES.



- Amendment of EPR framework bringing in mountain specificities and targets
- Recognition of mountain challenges - higher costs, difficulty in collection, remoteness, ecological fragility
- Capacity building of Local Bodies
- Pilot EPR programmes for mountains
- Designing out waste to be made integral to EPR, phasing out multilayered plastics for the mountains.

RECLAIMING FOOD SPACES



- Awareness campaigns to reclaim food cultures of the mountains
- Policies to restrict the advertising of unhealthy processed food.
- Campaign for energy drinks regulations
- Junk food regulation - implementing FSSAI guidelines. for schools
- Front of label packaging with easy to understand warnings for informed consumer choices

SOLUTIONS BEYOND DUSTBINS- SYSTEMIC CHANGES



- Promote Decentralised / localised management for waste.
- Review of existing waste management systems in the mountains.
- Strengthening of Single Use Plastic bans. Expand the definition of single use plastic
- Investments in long term and consistent awareness campaigns
- Investments in pilots for decentralised solutions

TESTIMONIALS



Khrolhiweu Tsühah (Awi)
Chizami Students' Union, Nagaland

THE LAST FIVE YEARS HAVE TAUGHT US THAT THE WASTE CRISIS IS REAL, PARTICULARLY IN THE MOUNTAINS AND IS ACCELERATING RAPIDLY. THERE IS NO BETTER TIME THAN NOW TO ACT INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY WHICH CAN BE TAKEN FORWARD THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

THC HAS ALSO ENABLED OUR CHILDREN TO LOOK AT THE FOOD WE EAT AND WE HAVE STOPPED JUNK FOOD IN OUR SCHOOL. CHILDREN ARE VERY COURAGEOUS AND THEY TAKE BACK THESE HABITS HOME AND INFLUENCE THEIR FAMILY



Shivangi Hamal
Camelia School, Darjeeling



Shashank Prabhu
Waste Warriors, Uttarakhand

POLICIES ARE NOT SENSITIVE TO THE HIMALAYAN REGION. EVEN IN VERY REMOTE LOCATION, PANGI IN HIMACHAL, WHICH GETS CUT OFF FOR SOME PARTS OF THE YEAR, YOU WITH STILL FIND STING, LAYS, MOUNTAIN DEW THERE, BUT, THE COST TO RECOVER EVEN WITHIN EPR REGIME DOES NOT REFLECT THE CHALLENGE OF THE TERRAIN

WE HAVE BEEN CLEANING UP EVERY YEAR, AND THE AMOUNT OF WASTE COLLECTED IS PHENOMENAL. MULITLAYERED PACKAGING IS THE MOST PROBLEMATIC. WE NEED SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS TO RESOLVE THE PLASTIC CRISIS.



RP Gurung
ECOSS/ ZWH, Sikkim

CONCLUSION

The journey of The Himalayan Cleanup for the past 5 years has brought countless people across the mountains to rally for a common cause. It is an indication of how deep the plastic crisis in the mountains run and that mountain peoples are looking for solutions.

The unabated onslaught of plastic in the Himalaya calls for urgent and emergent response to the crisis. It calls on individual action to reduce waste and move to mindful consumption, intersecting issues of food and nutrition security. But, focus also has to shift from only individual action to more systemic solutions.

Waste management is a challenging task in the mountains and this needs to be acknowledged with adequate resource allocation and mountain sensitive policies. It has to go beyond end of the pipeline management issue and to look at complete production and consumption cycles.

THC calls on companies to stop polluting the Himalaya and extend their responsibility to manage their waste at an intermediary level. Ultimately, plastic waste has to be designed out of the system that requires targeted action.

Our Mountains Deserve Better!







ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Himalayan Cleanup team is immensely grateful to the countless organisations and departments across mountain states who partner with the campaign. We are grateful that you are with us on this journey. Thank you for understanding the need to do the cleanup, sticking with the tedious audit processes, and mainly, believing in the power of solidarity and volunteerism among mountain peoples.

We would like to express our gratitude to the many educational institutions, the dedicated teachers who lead the students, and spread the learning beyond THC into their everyday lives. This special love that you show for the mountains is indeed heartwarming and a blessing.

For THC 2023, we are grateful to Sikkim's Education Department and Rural Development Department who officially took on THC, bringing in participation from all corners of the state. We must also mention the IMI State Chapters who have been supportive of the campaign throughout.

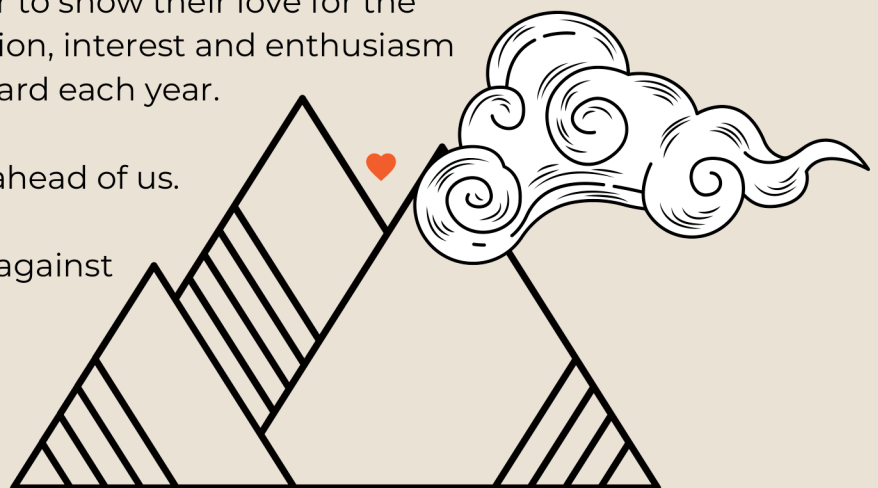
We would like to acknowledge very gratefully the support from European Outdoor Conservation Association and WWF- India. It was their initial support and belief in this idea that gave us the courage to make THC an annual event. Break Free From Plastic and GAIA have been our allies and partners at a global level, from whom we draw much energy and knowledge. Thank You.

THC acknowledges all the individual stewards of the mountains who respond to the call every year to show their love for the mountains. It is your motivation, interest and enthusiasm that keeps THC moving forward each year.

We still have a long journey ahead of us.

Let's keep raising our voices against plastic pollution.

TEAM THC, 2023





THE HIMALAYAN CLEANUP

A JOURNEY TOWARDS ZERO WASTE!

At an **INDIVIDUAL** level, I pledge to understand how my everyday lifestyle matters, and how my actions are contributing to the problem of waste.



I will reflect on my lifestyle choices and choose to reduce the use of unnecessary plastics in my life.

At a **COMMUNITY** level, we the people of the Indian Himalaya pledge to take strong measures to free our mountains from the burden of plastic waste.



We pledge to beat plastic pollution by eradicating single use plastics from everyday use and evolving sustainable waste management strategies and practices.

As **MOUNTAIN PEOPLE**, we demand for policies that support design systems which are circular in nature.

We strongly advocate for polluting companies to be responsible for the plastic trash they are leaving behind in our mountains.



Having made these changes in our personal lives, we will strive to influence our families, friends and peers.

We remain deeply connected and forever **PROUD OF OUR MOUNTAINS.**



#BEATPLASTICPOLLUTION

“

WE DON'T NEED A HANDFUL OF
PEOPLE DOING ZERO WASTE
PERFECTLY, WE NEED MILLIONS OF
PEOPLE DOING IT IMPERFECTLY.

Anne Marie Bonneau

”

WWW.THEHIMALAYANCLEANUP.IN