

MOUNTAINS CONNECT

JANUARY 2024 **NEWSLETTER**



PARVAT MANTHAN



IMI partnered with National Institute of Urban Affairs and BORDA to organise a workshop bringing together Mountain Urban Local Bodies to discuss WASH (water / sanitation / hygiene) in the Indian Himalayan Region. The event was held at the Indian Habitat Centre, New Delhi on December 4 -5, 2023.



Urban Local Bodies from various Indian Himalayan States and regions met as part of Parvat Manthan, an important dialogue platform for Manifestation of Clean and Sustainable Hills initiated by National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA).

The main objectives of the workshop was to assess the capacities of ULBs with regards to the 74th amendment, to understand the major bottlenecks and delineate future action towards holistic sanitation planning.

Mayors, Chairpersons and Councillors from ULBs and Autonomous Hill Councils from Shimla, Palampur, Ladakh, Gangtok, Darjeeling, Pasighat, Aizawl, Lunglei, and Tura participated in the two day's dialogue.

The inaugural session had the presence of NIUA Director, Ms. Debolina Kundu, President IMI, Mr. Ramesh Negi and Team Lead, (SCBP) Dr. Mahreen Mattoo.

Day 1

Panel discussion on capacity building and skills of urban local bodies - Chaired by Mr. Tikender Panwar, former Deputy Mayor of Shimla, spoke on the various issues and challenges as well placed questions for the house on sustainability and resilience of mountain cities. He stressed on the need to redefine what was urban in the mountain context, highlighting the challenges of imminent disasters mountains faced and the need for climate resilient infrastructure.

Mr. Matthew Idicula from Azim Premji University and Dr. Sandeep Thakur of NIUA presented the challenges reflecting on the challenges of the 74th amendment in terms of power devolution, and the difficulties of accessing central grants by ULBs amongst others.

The perspective of the geographical challenges in terms of access to water and waste management was shared by Mr. Roshan Rai from IMI advocating for adequate resource allocation for mountain ULBs, enabling capacities of the elected and the need to think of rural urban connect and transboundary landscapes in planning and implementation.

Elected representatives from the ULBs of Gangtok (Ms. Tshering - Dep. Mayor), Shimla (Mr. Chauhan, Mayor) and Pasighat (Ms. Okiam, Chief Councillor) reiterated the challenges faced by municipalities in terms of power devolution, and also that of funds and functionaries.

Field visit to the Moti Bagh colony, New Delhi Municipal Corporation was organised for the participants on decentralised waste and water management.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear Friends in the IMI network,

As the new GC took over the reins of IMI, the Himalaya was beset with major disasters that have gravely impacted people, livelihoods and the ecology. We usher in 2024 with a tribute to the affected people of the floods in Himachal and Sikkim.

As members of IMI, we renew our determination, especially towards efforts for the reduction of environmental disasters, which are now more frequent, due to past policies that were distant with limited participation of the Himalayan community in development strategy.

Hydropower and tourism have been promoted largely to enhance the economic potential of the Himalayan economy but there is now a dire need to have an introspection as to how far mountains can sustain the level of expansion. There are lessons to be learnt from the experiences of many countries that have balanced economic growth with social well being and conservation.

Disaster risk reduction and resilience building in the Indian Himalayan Region has been an important focus of IMI and this was taken forward at the 6th World Congress on Disaster in December 2023, at Dehradun where IMI curated the session 'DRR and Community Resilience Voices from the Grassroots'.

We would like to scale up our work on disasters in the Himalaya with a long term vision on policies that are sensitive to our Himalaya and with appropriate resources allocated.

We took a step forward in our Sustainable Mountain Cities thematic partnering with National Institute of Urban Affairs to take forward Parvat Manthan - Improving WASH Service Delivery in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) December 2023, New Delhi. IMI brought together Elected Representatives of ULBs and Autonomous Councils from IHR. The event brought in a new dimension of work with the Elected Representatives of IHR on water sanitation and hygiene which also aligns with our ongoing work on plastic pollution and extended producer responsibility.

As we step into a new year, let us all strive to work among our communities and strengthen their voices so that nature and our future is secure .

Ramesh Negi
President, IMI



Key bottlenecks to WASH service delivery session was chaired by Mr. Deepak Sanan, with panelists Ms. Akila Sivasdas, Mr. Santanu and Ms. Priyadarshinee Shrestha. The challenges highlighted were of misplaced priority on asset creation and not towards service delivery and capacities; focus on technological solutions only and lack of support for long term behavioural change; limits of extended producer responsibility implementation where the current framework does not enforce producers to focus on mountain regions.

Elected representatives from ULBs of Darjeeling (Mr. Thakuri - Chair), Leh (Mr. Namgyal - Chair) and Aizawl (Mr. Lalrinawma - Vice Chair) municipalities spoke about the issue of water access from an increasing tourism, population growth and climate change perspective. The need for municipalities to make byelaws on water conservation and waste management as well as adequate resource allocation was also highlighted by the elected.

A session focusing on climate change impacts on urban service delivery was also organised as part of the workshop which had speakers Dr. Rajan Kotru from IMI and Ms. Vaishnavi from NIUA.



In his address, the CEC of LAHDC, Adv. Tashi Gyalson expressed his gratitude to NIUA, BORDA and IMI and endorsed the objectives of Parvat Manthan, mentioning that the important work of ULB strengthening must continue into the future for sustainable mountain cities. In his summary address, President IMI, Mr. Ramesh Negi reiterated the importance of enhancing ULB allocations in the 16th Finance Commission and the need of providing funds, functions and functionaries to ULBs.

IMI UPDATES

PRESIDENT IMI ON 'CITY SENSE'

Mr. Ramesh Negi was invited on the show 'City Sense' hosted by Mr. Tikender Panwar to discuss on the various issues of mountain cities. A slew of challenges that Himalayan towns face - water scarcity, rampant plastic pollution and crippling traffic jams were highlighted with the emphasis for the need to re-evaluate



development pathways and for localised solutions with financial models tailored to address these unique issues.

The need for a compensation mechanism for the Himalayan states as a means of recognizing and protecting their vital forest resources was also highlighted.

[LINK FOR FULL VIDEO](#)

Partner's Corner

6th RST Forum organised by SDFU in Dehradun

6th RST Forum was organised on International Mountain Day by Sustainable Development Forum Uttarakhand remembering the contributions made by the late Dr RS Tolia. The theme was "Innovative Livelihoods in Rural Uttarakhand: Best Practices & Way Ahead" and taken forward with support from Himmatnagar Society, Doon Library & Research Centre and State Bank of India. The RST Lecture was delivered by Dr. BK Joshi (Founder Doon Library & Research Centre, Former VC Kumaon University and Councillor SDFU) highlighting the need for people-centric and local resources based development, factoring in the climate impacts that mountains faced.

The event had the presence of senior State Government Officials, members from civil societies, practitioners, and local community.

The workshop aimed to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders to discuss the best practices on rural innovative livelihood, measuring the last two decades in rural livelihoods and reimagining Uttarakhand – its challenges and way ahead.



International Mountain Day organised by DHI in Kalimpong

Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative organised a commemorative event – 'Lest we forget: The Teesta Disaster' to foreground the lived experiences of people along the Teesta river impacted by the October 4 disaster. Elected representatives of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, PRI members, DDMA, CSOs and students participated in the event.

Affected community representatives from the disaster area shared their experiences of the disaster and highlighted the urgent actions for rehabilitation that was needed.



Mr. Praful Rao, President DHI / SavetheHills presented on the background of the disaster, highlighting the various action points such as the need of an expert committee to look into the impacts of the floods from a long term, transboundary and multi-disciplinary perspective, and focus on building community resilience in the flood affected areas while continuing with the recovery and reconstruction process. The recommendations were endorsed through a signature campaign by all participants. DHI has shared the recommendations with all the relevant authorities. The recommendations can be accessed [here](#).

An exhibition showcasing the photo documentation done by [SavetheHills](#) was also displayed as part of the event. [READ MORE](#)

IMI AT WCDM

IMI curated the session 'Voices from Grassroots' at the 6th World Congress on Disaster Management held at Dehradun from November 28 to December 1, 2023. The session brought together champions of best practices, development practitioners, scientists, and NGO members from various communities providing an important platform for community voices that was reflected in the Dehra Dun deceleration

IMI members were led by President, Ramesh Negi along with Dr. Rajan Kotru, Dr. Jigmet Takpa and Dr. GS Rawat.



Community representatives who participated in the session as panelists were Ms. Liyum Ete/ Dr. Bharat Bhushan Bhatt from Arunachal Pradesh, Dr. Sayed Mustafa Kamal from Leh, Mr. Anil Sharma, Ms. Safina Baig and Mr. Manoj Pandita from J&K, Dr. Laldinpuia and Ms. Lalremruati from Mizoram, Ms. Mayalmit Lepcha from Sikkim, Mr. Rajendra Singh Bisht, Mr. Yogendar Garbiyal, Mr. Bhawan Rana, Shri Manoj Semwal, Ms. Malika Viridi, Dr. Naveen Chandra Joshi and Shri Devi Prasad Thapliyal from Uttarakhand, Mr. Hishe Negi and Sh. Rajendra P. Tewari from Himachal Pradesh, Dr. Naresh Kumar Choudhary from Haridwar.

International Mountain Day organised by DISA, Tripura



A seminar was organized by DISA on 11th December 2023 to mark the International Mountain Day 2023 celebrated in collaboration with Forest Dept and FRCLE ICFRE Tripura Centre. The role of mountain was discussed at length and area of action points also explained to the participants.

MOUNTAIN MATTERS!



NDMA emphasise s post disaster needs assessment t for Sikkim

NDMA team emphasised the importance of Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) for recovery, reconstruction, and rehabilitation in Sikkim and for preparation of a comprehensive report.

The NDMA team interacted with the Chief Minister of Sikkim along with the State Disaster Management Authority to discuss on further steps.

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UN Chief appeals for action on Himalaya at COP28

UN chief Antonio Guterres on Saturday said the ongoing annual climate talks here must respond to the needs of vulnerable mountain countries that need urgent help.

He emphasised that nearly a third of Nepal's ice had vanished in just over 30 years, and it was directly linked to greenhouse gas pollution that heats up the planet.

[READ MORE](#)



Trash increases with tourists as Atal Tunnel opens in Himachal

In a stark revelation, "Tourists Leaving Trail of Garbage" in the serene Lahaul-Spiti region of Himachal Pradesh has set off alarm bells over the precarious future of this once-pristine Himalayan haven.

The newly opened Atal Tunnel Rohtang has unleashed an unprecedented surge in tourist arrivals, resulting in a disheartening display of environmental negligence as huge amounts of trash accumulates..

[READ MORE](#)

Member's corner

Mr. Praful Rao was invited to share his views local TV channel - Kalimpong TV to discuss on the Teesta Disaster of October.

[WATCH HERE](#)

Mr. Anoop Nautiyal discussed on NDTV the many challenges of waste in the Indian Himalayan Region.

[WATCH HERE](#)

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Meet A member

Mr. Praful Rao



Praful Rao is a retired Indian Air Force officer and over the past 17 years, he has dedicated his time to disaster management and raising awareness about landslides in the Darjeeling Sikkim Himalaya through his organisation Save The Hills.

He is also a keen photographer and has used his art to narrate about disasters in the mountains.

IMI ASSOCIATION

Praful Rao was part of the first SMDS 2011 in Nainital and was a GC member of IMI. He has been the President of Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative since its inception.

He has been a prominent champion in highlighting disasters in the Himalaya at the regional and national level including at IMI through the SMDS Nagaland and Uttarakhand with DRR thematics.

CURRENT AFFILIATION

He spearheads Savethehills, documenting landslides and disasters in the region. His blog, [SaveTheHills](#) has over 5.5 Lakh hits and is read all over the world. It has the most comprehensive coverage including a report and recommendations of the recent Teesta Disaster.

He is associated with NIDM, NDMA and WB SDMA as well as academic conclaves talking about landslides and the multi-hazard nature of the Himalaya. Through Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative, he has been presenting the case of disasters in the Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalaya at multiple platforms.

The past 7 years he has administered the group 'Hazard Alerts or HA' on WhatsApp that provides information on disaster and weather related alerts in the Himalaya. The group is now a crowd sourced information and knowledge source in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya with a diverse group of members from the grass roots, government officials, academics and civil society.

CHALLENGES

The limited response, policy sensitivity and resource allocation to disaster in the Himalaya. The lack of urgency and criticality as well as mainstreaming of the disaster discourse in development action in the Himalaya.

FUTURE PLANS

Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative has just gotten registered, and we are hopeful that through the strength of our members and associates, we are able to gain more ground in the future, while continuing with our regular events such as Call of the Mountains on May 30 and International Mountain Day.

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