

CHARTER OF THE HIGH HIMALAYAN FORUM

PREAMBLE

We, the peoples of the Himalayas and those interested in the region, determined to ensure the region its rightful place in global society and development attuned to its ecology and social fabric, have resolved to work for its appropriate development and for the benefit and happiness of its communities, and to represent the region at fora, local, national and international, to draw the requisite attention, support and resources.

We give this Charter to the body corporate that shall be called “High Himalaya Forum” (hereinafter referred to as “the Forum”), and shall serve as a forum for bringing together all stakeholders of the Himalayan region, provide a platform for raising Himalayan concerns & a network for solving them through collaborative action, and also serve as a medium for focusing policy & public attention on Himalayan issues, to guide us in our collective endeavour.

Key Himalayan Challenges: The Forum has been motivated by the development and conservation challenges of the Himalayan region, key among them enumerated as below:

- i. Most development programs are not tailor-made for the Himalayas. Being designed with the by far more populous plains regions in mind, the interventions and the program norms and regulations are frequently not suitable for the region.
- ii. The Himalayan region lacks a sufficient presence in policy space. Although significant in terms of resources and area, the Himalayan region still requires special attention and has tended to be a marginal player at national and international levels and lesser focus has been given to the development issues of the region.
- iii. Habitation in the Himalayas is scattered, the population is sparse and fragmented. Representation of Himalayan people in democratic processes is low due to demographic patterns that prevail and their voices far less heard in centres of decision making. Poor connectivity and the physical and communication barriers make it difficult for Himalayan people to agglomerate for their benefit.
- iv. Himalayan people are often non-participatory beneficiaries of the decisions that shape their lives. Policies are designed in distant capitals and there are few avenues to communicate the needs and expectations of Himalayan people to the State. Apart from the lack of micro-level inputs in policy framing, this leads to psychological distress among Himalayan people.
- v. The challenges of development in the Himalayan region are several. Although rich in resources, the region lacks adequate economic and infrastructural development and ranks low on several development indices. The unique social and ecological conditions of the Himalayas also need to be given due consideration for effective development.
- vi. The Himalayan region is extremely sensitive and fragile while also being rich and unique in its cultural and natural heritage. The issues regarding climate change are assuming greater importance than ever before. Development in the region needs to be reviewed in the context of conflicts with environmental concerns, and needs to tread an alternate path that includes a thrust on protection and rejuvenation of the area and its heritage, along with strategies to ensure progress.

- vii. In spite of the diverse developmental shortcomings in the area, the Himalayan region lacks adequate civil society action. Civil society organisations in the region are few and far between and often lack adequate capacity to intervene effectively.
- viii. The Himalayan region is little understood in areas beyond it and hence tends to be neglected in the mainstream thinking. Awareness of the region, its richness and its contribution, as well as its needs and problems, is inadequate, beyond the ranges.

1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 In its work, the High Himalaya Forum shall follow and uphold the core principles of: equality with equity for all human beings; sustainability of the environment; peace and quality of life for all creatures; freedom in expression with due sensitivity to fellow beings; participation in shaping one's life; responsibility for protecting the environment and the rights of the marginalised; responsibility for improving the lot of the disadvantaged, in peoples and regions.
- 1.2 In the work of the High Himalaya Forum, we shall draw on the guiding principles of various multilateral documents, declarations, conventions, covenants and treaties, some of which are enumerated below:
- 1.2.1 ***The UN Charter [1945]***,
○ *to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom*¹
- 1.2.2 ***The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [1948]***
○ Preamble: *Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world*
○ Article 19. *Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*
○ Article 27. (1) *Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.*
- 1.2.3 ***International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [1966]***²
○ Article 6. 2. *The steps to be taken by a State Party to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include technical and vocational guidance and training programs, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms to the individual.*
○ Article 15. 1. *The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone: (a) To take part in cultural life; (b) To enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications; (c) To benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.*
- 1.2.4 ***Agenda 21 in terms of [1992]***³
○ Section I: Social and Economic Dimensions -*Includes combating poverty, changing consumption patterns, population and demographic dynamics, promoting health, promoting sustainable settlement patterns and integrating environment and development into decision-making.*
○ Section II: Conservation and Management of Resources for Development *Includes atmospheric protection, combating deforestation, protecting fragile environments, conservation of biological diversity (biodiversity), and control of pollution.*
○ Section III: Strengthening the Role of Major Groups - *Includes the roles of children and youth, women, NGOs, local authorities, business and workers.*
○ Section IV: Means of Implementation -*Includes science, technology transfer, education, international institutions and mechanisms and financial mechanisms*
- 1.2.5 ***Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [2007]*** noting that:

¹ *From the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations*

² *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, G.A. res. 2200.A (XXI), 21 U.N.GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force Jan. 3, 1976.*

³ *Adopted at 1992 Earth Summit (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro.*

○ *The Declaration does not represent solely the viewpoint of the United Nations, nor does it represent solely the viewpoint of the Indigenous Peoples. It is a Declaration which sets the framework for the future. It is a tool for peace and justice, based upon mutual recognition and mutual respect.*⁴

- 1.3 In the work of the High Himalaya Forum, we shall also draw on the guiding principles of various national documents, policies, frameworks and programs, of the countries in which the forum shall have a presence, including the national constitution, laws and plans of the said countries.

⁴ *Les Malezer, Chair of the International Indigenous Peoples' Caucus – at the adoption by the UN General Assembly in Sept 2007*

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 **Policy support for the Himalayas:** The Forum shall work towards ensuring special consideration of Himalayan communities during policy formulation.
 - 2.1.1 *Area-specific policies & programs:* The High Himalaya Forum aims to enlighten policy makers on mountain specificities and differences within the region as well, and promote the framing of area specific policies and programs that address Himalayan issues in an appropriate and adequate manner.
 - 2.1.2 *Focus and inclusion at national regional & global level:* The High Himalaya Forum seeks to focus policy attention on the Himalayan region at national, regional and global levels. Through its efforts it shall seek to elicit recognition of the Himalayan region as a distinctive region with a unique socio-ecological context and specific development issues.
- 2.2 **Participation of Himalayan peoples:** The Forum shall strive to ensure wide and effective participation of Himalayan communities in policy-making.
 - 2.2.1 *Pressure-group for advocacy:* The High Himalaya Forum aims to function as a pressure group that can help reach the voices of Himalayan communities to the policymakers, and draw the required policy support through effective communication and adequate group strength.
 - 2.2.2 *Inclusion of local communities:* The High Himalaya Forum shall seek to provide opportunities to Himalayan communities for participation in advocacy for Himalayan policies, and elicit their views and input these into policy framing processes as well as those for managing program implementation.
- 2.3 **Development of Himalayan region:** The Forum shall seek to improve the social & economic well-being of the communities and facilitate appropriate development for the Himalayan region.
 - 2.3.1 *Addressing development challenges and needs:* The High Himalaya Forum aims to promote the development of the Himalayan region and address the needs of Himalayan communities through policy advocacy, information dissemination, capacity building, and other necessary interventions.
 - 2.3.2 *Appropriate development models:* The High Himalaya Forum seeks to ensure that development in the Himalayan region is sustainable and appropriate, balancing ecological and human concerns, inducing and supporting such development with knowledge creation and sharing and required advocacy.
- 2.4 **Collaborative development process:** The Forum shall aim to institute a positive, collaborative process for sustainable development in the Himalayas.
 - 2.4.1 *Local, endogenous action:* The High Himalaya Forum aims to galvanise civil society in the region, and facilitate enhanced and effective development interventions by the sector, enabling civil society organisations with information, solidarity and support.
 - 2.4.2 *Stake-building in the wider community:* The High Himalaya Forum aims to raise awareness of the Himalayan region at national and international levels, facilitate its integration and due importance in the mainstream, and promote the wider community beyond the Himalayas to engage in the protection and development of the region.

3. THE STRUCTURE

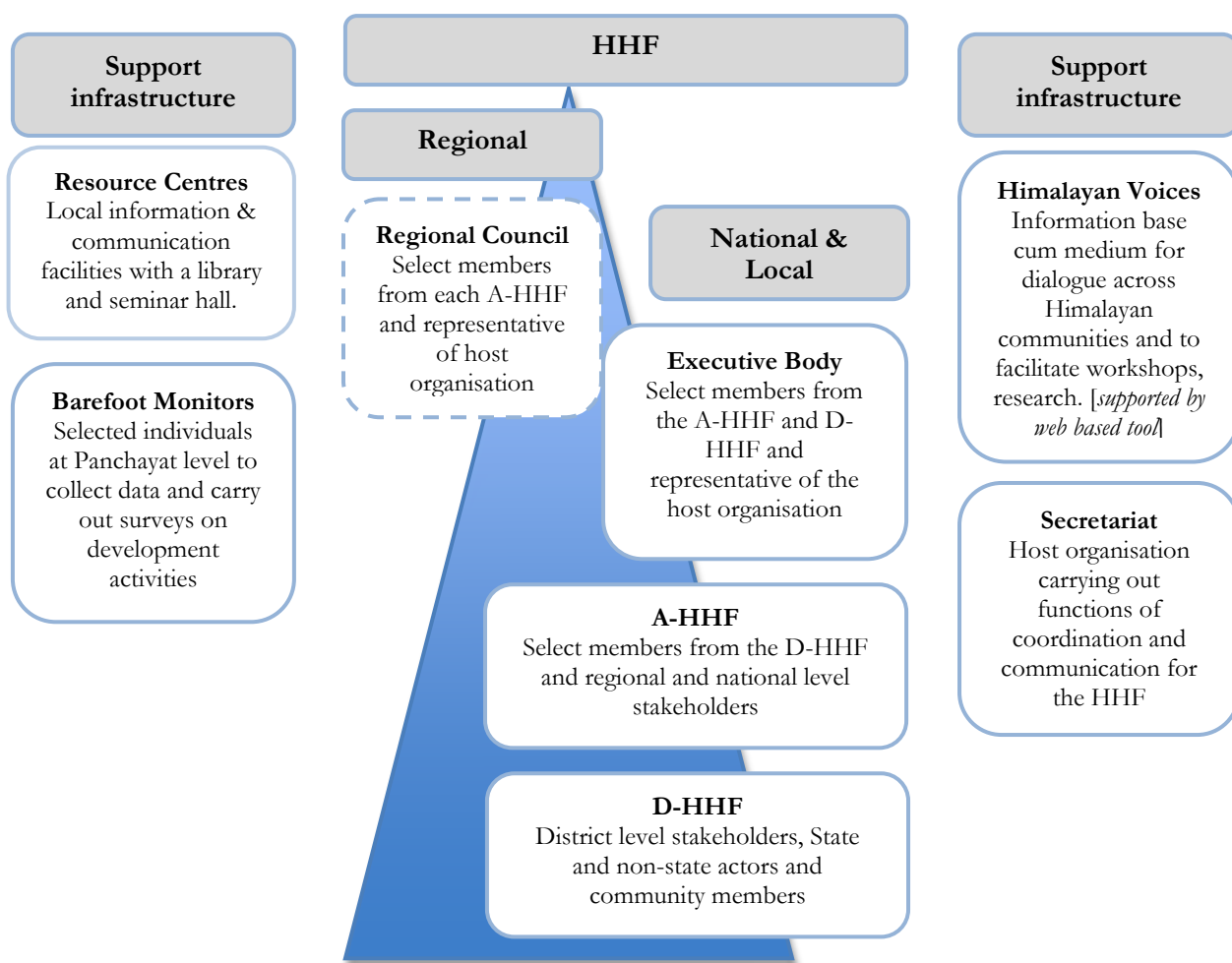
- 3.1 **Levels and organs:** Recognising the barriers to interaction & communication in the region, the forum shall be multilayered; with a network of Himalayan communities & agents of development at local level, and a multi-dimensional network of all stakeholders and interest groups at national, as well as at the regional level. [*refer diagram below*]
- 3.1.1 **Local nodes and apex structure:** The forum shall comprise forums at the district [District-HHF: D-HHF] and national (apex) level [Apex-HHF: A-HHF]. The D-HHF's, one in each Himalayan district would consist of stakeholders from the particular district, including individuals and representatives of State and non-state bodies. The A-HHF would consist of 2 members from each of the D-HHF's, and members from national level stakeholders, including institutions and individuals.
- 3.1.2 **Regional integration:** The forum shall be designed to comprise multiple country-level fora, one in each Himalayan nation or any country that the Himalaya range passes through. The structure above (3.1.1.) shall be replicated for each country-level forum. The country-level fora would be loosely integrated at the Himalaya Region level for a regional stance and collaboration in international advocacy.
- 3.1.3 **Executive Body(ies):** Each D-HHF shall have an executive body with a minimum of a Convener and Co-convener. In each country in the Himalaya region, the HHF shall have an executive body with a minimum of a Convener, a Co-convener, 2 members from A-HHF and 3 representatives of the D-HHFs in that country democratically selected by the forum and body of members [min 7]. Depending on the scenarios that evolve over time the A-HHF may decide to increase the size of the executive body as per its functional requirements to a maximum of 11 members. This body shall be the formal body for matters relating to HHF. Any dispute shall be resolved through arbitration as decided by the A-HHF. The A-HHF may appoint an arbitrator for this purpose, with the consent of the parties affected by the dispute. The regional structure for the HHF shall be a Regional Council comprising three nominated representatives from each A-HHF and a representative of the host organization for the Regional Secretariat.
- 3.1.4 **Secretariats:** Each country-level forum shall have a Secretariat that would be operated by and from the premises of a host organization. A representative of the Secretariat, and thus the host organization, shall have a place in the Executive Body. The regional (multi-country) activities of the forum shall rest with an Regional Secretariat operated by and from the premises of Pragya in India.
- 3.2 **Membership:** Membership of the High Himalaya Forum shall enable degrees of engagement and participation at various levels. Direct membership of the forum shall be by introduction and invitation alone. Participation at forum events and however shall be open to all stakeholders and interest group members of the Himalayan region.
- 3.2.1 **District level members:** The D-HHF shall be a local node of the HHF in each Himalayan district, and as such a network of community members and local agents of development, comprising the State departments and local authorities, as well as civil society representatives from district level CBO's & CSO's.
- 3.2.2 **Apex level members:** At the national level, the forum shall be a multidimensional network of all stakeholders involved/ interested in the well-being of Himalayan communities - socially, economically or environmentally - for purposes of dialogue and support. Apart from the

Convenors and Co-Convenors of the Local HHF Nodes, the national body comprises secondary stakeholders of the Himalayan region, such as researchers, development workers, academicians.

3.2.3 *Stakeholder and interest group participants:* The group would comprise of members of Himalayan communities, Government representatives, CBOs & CSOs, research institutes/universities & other interest groups.

3.2.4 *Support network at the grassroots:* The D-HHF shall be supported by a cadre of barefoot monitors (BFM) who shall provide necessary data inputs.

3.2.5 *Support network at the regional and national levels:* Linkages shall be built with identified institutions at the national and regional levels that can significantly promote and facilitate the work of the forum and contribute to or aid it in its various requirements.



3.3 The term of Convenor and Co-Convenor, and membership of the Executive Body shall be for a period of three years. Two months prior to the conclusion of the term, selection/re-selection processes shall be conducted by the Secretariat, and an effective transitioning facilitated subsequently.

3.4 The forum shall be supported and aided in dispensing its functions by existing resource centres in the Himalayan region as well as Himalayan Voices and periodic district newsletters and national bulletins.

- 3.5 The structure is not designed to be restrictive and would evolve over time as the forum gains in experience; scenarios involving regional representation, the need for an advisory council and other necessary changes are expected to take place.
- 3.6 The HHF shall be registered as a secular, not for profit entity, each country-level forum recognised under the statutory ambit of the particular country, and shall conduct its business in English and/or the national language of the particular country.
- 3.7 The HHF shall accept gifts and grants from state and non-state agencies enabling it to fulfil its objectives without impacting its philosophy.

4. THE FUNCTIONS

- 4.1 The forum shall ensure the best possible utilisation of the support facilities to achieve the objectives enumerated and as such the overall functions of the forum shall, inter alia, consist of the following broad elements: research, documentation, and knowledge building; awareness and engagement in Himalayan communities and among the wider public; networking, dialogues and advocacy for Himalaya-specific policies and development; local development action and capacity building.
- 4.2 **Research, Documentation and Knowledge Building:** The forum shall undertake Himalaya-specific research, documentation, and knowledge building towards facilitating appropriate development of the region.
- 4.2.1 *Database of research and interventions for wider sharing and replication:* The HHF shall develop a comprehensive database on the Himalayan region. All available data, research outputs including grey literature, and success stories, shall be accessed through the support of the members and presented in a web portal and would help increase the outreach of the benefits.
- 4.2.2 *Development of standards and Good Practices:* Efforts shall be focused on identifying and/or developing standards and good management practices specifically for the Himalayan region, through the collaborative efforts of HHF members. These would be on a variety of development aspects/sectors in the Himalayan region, as identified by members from time to time.
- 4.2.3 *Field/action research, technology development and policy studies:* Collaborations shall be facilitated for research on issues identified by members as requiring in-depth study, and technology development shall be promoted and facilitated on technology gaps in the Himalayas, duly supported by the different nodes. A program of citizen science shall be developed and implemented to generate information towards aiding further research on the Himalayan region.
- 4.2.4 *Documentation of local knowledge:* Documentation of Himalayan ecology, anthropology and traditional knowledge shall be undertaken by HHF members and Himalayan communities, towards the preservation of such knowledge, and dissemination of the outputs shall be aided by the HHF.
- 4.3 **Awareness Creation:** The HHF shall create awareness and engagement in Himalayan communities and among the wider public for the Himalayas.
- 4.3.1 *Awareness generation in Himalayan communities:* Awareness generation modules shall be developed for various Himalayan stakeholders. These would educate Himalayan communities on issues and potential solutions, and promote local action. Information shall also be disseminated on existing policies and laws and available programs and schemes.
- 4.3.2 *Awareness generation in wider public:* Awareness modules shall be developed for the wider public to educate them on the Himalayan region and its value and concerns. HHF shall compile information about the resources, culture, traditions, problems & aspirations of Himalayan communities and these would be disseminated through schools and universities, civil society and the State. Periodic events/campaigns shall be conducted to draw the spotlight on the Himalayas.
- 4.3.3 *Engagement of stakeholders through resource centres and publications:* A deeper engagement with the region shall be catalysed among stakeholders of the Himalayan region. Resource centres and publications in the Himalayan region and those outside it, with a focus on the Himalayas, shall be promoted. The said centres and concerned publishers/authors shall be provided requisite

support to enhance the quality, reach and effectiveness of these awareness tools. There shall be a thrust on eliciting participation from women and youth.

4.4 **Networking, Dialogues and Advocacy:** The HHF shall facilitate networking, dialogues and advocacy for Himalaya-specific policies and development.

4.4.1 *Data and information generation for advocacy:* The HHF shall strive to feed in available information on the region to the State and ensure informed policy and program design, with regional specificity, and further disaggregation at local levels. It shall facilitate baseline surveys and ensure ongoing data generation through a barefoot cadre in Himalayan districts, in order to address the data deficiency on the region, and aid area-specificity in development policy and practice.

4.4.2 *Focused study and information dissemination on sustainability issues:* Development projects in the Himalayan region shall be evaluated for their potential development as well as, undesirable, impacts, if any. This would involve accessing community feedback and/or conducting focused studies through member collaborations on the benefits and sustainability aspects of development projects. The findings shall be disseminated to state and non-state actors of development, towards facilitating advocacy for development that ensures ecological sustainability and cultural integrity.

4.4.3 *Advocacy interactions for area-specific development policies:* The HHF shall conduct stakeholder roundtables and labs at regional and national levels to analyse policy needs and help devise suitable schemes. Before any new flagship program is launched, the HHF shall conduct a public hearing, followed by a feedback session to policymakers providing area-specific inputs. Periodically face-to-face's shall be held with district, and national officials, as well as regionally, in order to discuss development issues and associated needs for policies/programs.

4.4.4 *Program feedback and enlightening policymakers:* Flagship projects/programs shall be evaluated, both from design and implementation perspective, and grassroots level feedback elicited. Presentations for policymakers shall seek to communicate this feedback and make them aware of current status as well as improvement needs.

4.4.5 *Institutional networking for research and development:* The HHF shall draw together various research, technology and development institutions, both state and non-state, that are working for the Himalayan region and/or have the capacity to contribute to its development. E-interactions and networking shall facilitate sharing and exchange of notes at all levels, feelings of solidarity for a common cause, and collaborative initiatives as well.

4.4.6 *Development dialogues:* HHF shall strive to educate, catalyse and guide state and non-state agents of development for appropriate development action in the Himalayas. It shall conduct meetings on a regular basis at district, national and regional levels, for multi-stakeholder dialogue and deliberation on specific issues. There shall be a specific focus on women, children, persons with disabilities and special needs, and an attempt to eliminate inequities and related issues in whatever form and context in which they may occur.

4.5 **Capacity Building and Local Action:** The forum shall undertake capacity building and facilitate local development action in the Himalayan region.

4.5.1 *Share available technologies and information:* The HHF shall play a major role in identifying, accessing, sharing and disseminating available technologies for the Himalayas. Know-how and information available with various research institutions and development agencies, of benefit to the Himalayan people, shall be shared through the medium of the local forum nodes.

- 4.5.2 ***Training and knowledge sharing for capacity building:*** The HHF shall facilitate capacity building of development actors for the Himalayan region as well as of Himalayan communities themselves. Training needs shall be identified and communicated to institutes/organisations that can undertake capacity building, and periodic interactions shall be conducted to facilitate knowledge sharing.
- 4.5.3 ***Catalyse local development action:*** The forum shall conduct periodic district meetings to crystallise development needs and facilitate addressing them, helping to converge local efforts and resources into value-adding interventions. Attention shall be focused on stretching resources that exist and expanding resource availability with active support of state and non-state agencies.
- 4.5.4 ***Program information and implementation facilitation:*** The forum shall actively engage in sharing with the community the various schemes and programs announced from time to time by the international, regional, national and state level agencies and provide necessary handholding and facilitation measures to assist rollout.

5. THE METHODS

5.1 **HHF Conclaves:** The HHF Conclaves would be mechanisms for sharing, assessing, and planning for advocacy for the Himalayan region.

5.1.1 *Periodicity and participation:* Annual HHF Conclaves shall be held at the national level in each country with an HHF in place. The National Conclaves would have the participation of members from districts as well as the apex fora. By rotation, one of the annual country-level conclaves would also be a Regional Conclave and have international representation. Quarterly Conclaves will be conducted at the local level with all HHF members and select invitees from the district.

5.1.2 *Conclave agenda/output:* The HHF Conclaves would prioritise the issues to be taken up for action at the respective levels during the ensuing period, along with the specific actions to be carried out for addressing these issues. Each conclave shall bring out a Plan of Action for the coming period that would spell out the focal issues, the HHF stance, the key responsibility holders and stakeholders to be involved.

5.2 **Core processes by actors/organs:** Additionally, the specific functions of each of the actors of the various levels of the forum shall consist of elements that, when taken in their totality provide synergistic solutions that are need based and help improve the quality of life within the communities:

5.2.1 *Barefoot monitoring at the grassroots:* A cadre of Barefoot Monitors in each district shall monitor existing development initiatives (welfare services and implementation of schemes) as well as needs and issues through quarterly and annually filled questionnaires. The feedback thus generated shall be proactively shared with the related members of the decentralized government structures that exist, and submitted to the local HHF nodes for action.

5.2.2 *Development analysis & action in the districts:* At quarterly “development analysis & action” meetings in the districts, the D-HHF shall deliberate on the development issues in the district, identify areas requiring attention and advocacy, review information on the progress made on carrying out plans and accessing rights and benefits, and draft advocacy plan. The D-HHF shall present the recommendations to the local administration and decentralized government structures that exist, and carry out other actions as determined during the ensuing quarter.

5.2.3 *Feedback and advocacy at the apex:* The A-HHF in each country shall deliberate upon the methods of finding solutions to the existing policy gaps and filling the lacunae in the implementation of specific conservation and development programs, and formulate an advocacy plan at the national level. At the Annual Conclaves, two priority issues requiring action and advocacy, shall be identified. The A-HHF shall thereafter undertake face-to-face discussions with relevant policy-makers to discuss issues and recommendations pertaining to the identified priority issues and other developmental activities.

5.2.4 *Advocacy at the regional level:* The Annual Conclaves shall also involve deliberations for regional level needs for policies and resources, and draw out suitable strategies for regional collaboration and advocacy.

5.3 **Sub-Committees and Sub-Groups:** The forum in each country shall have Sub-Committees and sub-groups, as follows:

5.3.1 *Sub-Committees:* The Sub-Committees would ensure focus on key functions of the forum and priority issues based on annual action plans. The Sub-Committees, their structure, functions,

procedures, and quorum shall be as decided by the HHF Executive Body, in line with priorities and exigencies from year to year.

- 5.3.2 ***Sub-Groups:*** The forum shall provide for members to align themselves to such sub-groups as the member decides. The sub-groups shall function as loose knit resource base within the forum. Members may be aligned to one or more groups of their choice and shall undertake specific activities for advocacy, awareness-raising, knowledge-building, and other functions of the forum with respect to the subject of the concerned sub-group.