

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON THE 'HIGH HIMALAYA FORUM'

*Finalization of Structure and Action Plan*

9<sup>th</sup> January 2010

Pragya Head Office

The meeting of the High Himalaya Forum (HHF) was a follow-up of item 5.1 of the Draft Charter of the HHF and in line with item 2.2 of the draft action plan; and feedback received after circulation of minutes. The objectives of the present meeting were to: 1) Finalize the Charter to the HHF; 2) The Annual Action Plan 2010; 3) Finalize sub-committees & sub-groups; 4) Nominate members for Executive Body and Sub-committees.

**Mr. Abhinaba Chakravarti**, (*Coordinator Programmes, Pragya*) introduced the participants present in person and over the telephone and Skype to the house. He recapitulated the journey of HHF and mentioned how the draft Charter was formulated with inputs on the previous Conclaves and was further modified according to feedback received from various participants. He said that these changes thus recommended and incorporated would be discussed in the meeting.

**Ms. Mashqura Fareedi** (*Pragya*) gave a brief introduction to the Charter and welcomed additional inputs from the participants to finalize the draft and to incorporate other suggestions. She explained that the Preamble to the Charter gives the context in which the HHF and its objectives are set. The primary objectives of the HHF include:

- *Policy support for the Himalayas* spanning area specific policies and programmes with a focus on and inclusion of the Himalayan developmental issues at the national and global levels.
- *Participation of the Himalayan people* in advocacy initiatives and establishment of a pressure group for the same.
- *Development of the Himalayan region* by addressing development challenges and needs and through appropriate development models.
- *Collaborative developmental process* through local endogenous action and stake building in the wider community with respect to protection and development of the Himalayan region.

Moving on to the Structure of the HHF, she explained how the D-HHF (District High Himalayan Forum) has been established at the District level, the A-HHF (Apex High Himalayan Forum) at the national level and soon, there would be a Regional Council at the international level. The Charter, she said, also outlines the composition and term of the Executive Committee and the membership of the HHF, which would span District-level members, Apex-level members, stakeholder interest groups and support networks at grassroots, regional and national levels.

Following the introduction, **Dr. Uppeandra Dhar** (*ex-Director of GBPIHED; NASI-senior scientist, Jamia Hamdard University*) guided the discussions forward.

### Discussion on the Charter

#### *Participants at Office*

**Mr. Sudipto Chatterjee** (*ICFRE, Dehradun; Group Coordinator, Biodiversity Group, Winrock International India*): Mr. Chatterjee began by thanking Pragya for incorporating suggestions that he had made earlier

to the Charter. He proposed elaborating point viii<sup>1</sup> of the Preamble and pointed out the fact that the phrase “beyond the ranges” could be misinterpreted. With reference to point vii<sup>2</sup> he pointed out that considering the fact that in Eastern Himalayas, the Village Councils still have a very strong hold over the use of forests and resources, it would not be appropriate to say that the Himalayas lack in civil society action. He also recommended an addition to the Charter acknowledging the existing (developmental) efforts being implemented across the country so we may draw learning from the same. In the same vein, he said that point i<sup>3</sup> of the Charter can be read as being a little too “harsh”, especially for persons who are already working for the Himalayas. Therefore, he recommended that the phrase “not tailor made” should be replaced with “development programs in the Himalayas needs to be strategized... needs to be more sensitive to the issues of the Himalayan region.”

**Prof. Subhadra Channa** (*Professor, Dept. of Anthropology, Delhi University*): Dr. Channa recommended further deliberation on point 1 of the Preamble regarding development programs not being Himalaya-specific. She submitted that most problems occur because of generalized development models to address very specific issues. She said that we should focus on indigenous technology and knowledge. People, she said, already know how to deal with most of the problems but the resources that they need are being depleted. Therefore, she said that some of these technologies and the resources, which supported these technologies, are not taken away from these people. This, she said, would help immensely.

### *Participants in Teleconference*

**Dr. Irshad A. Hamal** (*Rector, Jammu University, Bhardava Campus*): Dr. Hamal said that the developmental efforts of the HHF should not be restricted to areas only above 6,000 feet. He expressed his concern for the mid-Himalayan region, which he said requires conservation strategies considering the hydropower projects being implemented in the area. He also suggested advocating with the Government for inclusion of conservation and environmental programmes within NREGA. He suggested that the above points should be included in the Charter to the HHF. He later also said that water conservation should be one of the priority areas of the HHF.

**Dr. Nayan Sharma** (*Professor, IIT Roorkee, Brahma-Twinn Research Team*): Dr. Sharma suggested developing some cost-effective mitigation technologies for cloudbursts and floods in the Himalayan region. In context of the increasing drinking water crunch, which would increase in the next 2-3 decades due to climate change, he suggested adoption of simple technology to address the issue. He questioned if the technology for the purpose developed by IIT Roorkee could be pilot tested. Dr. Dhar affirmed that there was a requirement for water conservation technology to be implemented across the Himalayas. Dr. Sharma said that he would be able to provide the same free of cost.

In context of climate change, Dr. Sharma suggested including Himalaya-specific adaptive measures in the Charter.

**Dr. K. K. Singh** (*Scientist-D, Biodiversity Conservation & Management, GBPIHED, Sikkim Campus*): Dr. Singh stressed on the importance of NREGA in the Himalayan region and also proposed encouraging indigenous technologies. In the context of climate change, he expressed his concern for Sikkim and said that there is lack of information with regard to adaptation measures. He spoke of a commercial crop conservational programme that has been launched to address the decline in productivity of commercial crops such as ginger and cardamom, while almost 80% of the farmers in Sikkim are

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<sup>1</sup> (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.

<sup>2</sup> (vii.) In spite of the severe developmental shortcomings in the area, the Himalayan region lacks adequate civil society action. Civil society organizations in the region are few and far between and often lack adequate capacity to intervene effectively.

<sup>3</sup> (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 are frequently not suitable for the region.

dependant on commercial farming. He laid emphasis on conservation-oriented program giving special attention to the endangered species like *Rhododendrons*, and cited an example of a conservation program that is in operation in rural areas of Sikkim wherein endangered species are given special attention. He also spoke about the difficulty in traveling in hilly regions of Sikkim and indicated the need for more manpower in the region. Dr. Singh also felt that capacity building should be carried out at the grassroots level and extended the support of his institute for the same.

**Dr. A. R. Nautiyal** (*Professor, High Altitude Plant Physiology Research Centre, Uttarakhand*): Dr. Nautiyal stressed on the need for conservation of water resources. He pointed out that the technology in practice for the hydropower projects and road construction degrade the mountain environment and destabilize the entire ecosystem. Commenting on the importance of the tourism industry for the economic betterment of mountain people, Dr. Nautiyal suggested developing a complete environment-friendly package on the entire Tourism industry.

**Mr. Chetan Singh** (*Retd. Commandant, SSB / Convener, D-HHF, Lahaul*): Mr. Singh called the attention of the house towards climate change. He said that the age-old traditions of cultivation are changing because of climate change. He laid stress on preparing the general masses for the changes in technology (in the case of irrigation etc.) that they might have to adopt to cope with changes in the climate. He also said that the community must be educated about the causes, effects and solutions of global warming through magazines, pamphlets, seminars, workshops etc. He stressed the need to define factors of climate change as being: population growth, growth of vehicles and their emission, deforestation, hydro-power projects and factories and plantations. He said that although we cannot put a halt to the development process, we could ensure that the same process does not harm natural habitat.

He also affirmed various points mentioned in the Objectives of the HHF and stressed that preservation of culture and activities like diversification of crops are essential in the present context of development and climate change.

He also spoke about the snow-harvesting and plantation program in Lahaul, which is already in operation. Dr. Dhar suggested sharing a film on the above conservation activities with the HHF.

**Mr. S. D. Namgyal** (*Principal, Govt. Senior Secondary School, Leh / Convener, D-HHF, Leh*): Mr. Namgyal said that it would be necessary to ensure funds for carrying out the Forum's activities. He also said that there is a need to clarify and finalize the key functions of the Sub-Committee members and the frequency of the meetings etc.

Commenting on the efficacy of existing development interventions, he said that the Resource Centers<sup>4</sup> could be upgraded for improved functioning. He also suggested holding competitions among school children to develop interest and foster brainstorming in them on current environmental issues.

Mr. Namgyal said that the HHF membership should consist of a diverse mix of people including intellectuals, local persons, community leaders etc. This would ensure effective implementation of action points and surfacing of "real issues".

Mr. Namgyal later also added that though infrastructural development has been selected as one of the focal areas of the HHF, it would be necessary to ensure sustainability of activities towards this end. He suggested that experts in the field should be approached to educate other members on the same.

## **Nomination of Conveners/Co-conveners of the Executive Body**

Dr. Dhar's name was proposed for the Convenor of the HHF by Ms. Gargi Banerji, seconded by Mr. Sudipto Chatterjee, and unanimously accepted by all present [physically or in tele conference mode]. Dr. Dhar then proposed the name of Dr. Anil P. Joshi as co-convenor; Prof. Subhadra Channa formally seconded the nomination and this was unanimously endorsed by all present.

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<sup>4</sup> Resource Centres are 'centres of learning' and transferring information and knowledge in the rural areas. Pragya has used Resource Centres in areas across high altitude Himalayas fulfilling multiple functions of a library, centre for holding vocational training courses, a node for discussions, education and awareness building on pertinent issues etc. The Resource Centres at the District headquarters have documentaries, books, magazines, journals and computerized databases.

## Discussion on the Sub-committees and the Action Plan

Two sets of sub-committees based on a) function and b) issues was put up for discussion [attached as Annex 1] and unanimously agreed by all present.

Dr. Dhar stated that the criteria for selection of sub-committee members would be their willingness to participate and their proficiency in the given thematic area. Discussing the ways forward, Dr. Dhar proposed that following the finalization of sub-committee members and submission of all relevant research material to the members, the literature could be interpreted to put it in perspective such that it is in accordance with the thematic areas. Execution of existing research should be carried out subsequent to analysis. A time period of ten days was unanimously set for freezing the sub-committees. It was also decided that the minutes of the meeting would be circulated to all the sub-committee members and they would be requested to send research material relating to their field of concern to the HHF. Dr. Dhar stressed that the list was not final and open to more names. He stated that the one name for each thematic sub-committee would be nominated from grassroots. Mr. Namgyal felt that getting local people in the picture would actually help surface the real issues. He emphasized that the HHF should be a diverse group, a combination of science and society with participation of scientists, academia and community representatives. He suggested that the Executive Committee should meet again to firm up the Action Plan. Dr. Channa suggested that the sub-committees must coordinate with each other; each one should make its review paper and share it with others for further inputs.

**Ms. Gargi Banerji** (*Director, Pragya*) said that with this meeting, we could declare a formal launch of the HHF. She proposed that moving beyond the focus on the Charter, the current need is to draw focus on action points. The first action to be completed by the A-HHF would be finalization of sub-committees and the first output would be review papers on the issues prioritized. Referring to and in agreement with Dr. Dhar's earlier comment on requirement of templates for data generation on the field, she said that formulation of review papers could follow after preparation of the templates. She suggested that these templates and papers would need to be completed by March. She also stressed on the requirement to detail out this Action Plan for the sub-committees to get started on the same. She pointed out that since the forum is in its initial stage, every step would lead to the next and it would only gradually evolve.

Addressing the issue of funds that would need to be raised for activities of the HHF, Ms. Banerji extended Pragya's support in determining the fund raising methods to be adopted. She accepted the suggestions to widen the network and rope in more members for fundraising. She also pointed out possibilities of discussions with MoEF, MoRD and others to elicit funding from them. She said that adequate time would be required for the forum to be recognized and for potential funders to get accustomed to the Forum's objectives and process. She further pointed out that while the fiscal resources required are critical, accessing those resources would be a lot easier as we go on. Ms. Banerji added that the baseline review papers would synthesize what is available and what needs to be done and this would also set the direction for taking the Action Plan ahead.

Mr. Sudipto Chatterjee added the need for a Programme Document at this stage of the HHF when it is on the verge of a "take off" which would spell out the focus, the organizational structure and most importantly, the reasons for prioritization of focal issues (Climate Change and Infrastructural Development for the first year). Agreeing with Ms. Banerji's suggestion on baseline review papers, he said that these would reveal the gap areas and what needs to be done. This, he said, would set the tone for the activities ahead.

All the members present affirmed that the minutes of the meeting, consultations and decisions taken would have to be circulated so that inputs from all quarters can be synergized and brought together. Dr. Dhar recommended that other organizations and actors, who have not been involved till now, should be approached for their contributions and input. He stressed on the need to make the HHF's

presence felt at the level of the Government and its various departments. Ms. Banerji requested all the members to join the effort of expanding the High Himalaya Forum by facilitating inclusion of other relevant members into the Network.

### **Nomination of Sub-committee Members**

It was decided that a minimum of three members would be nominated for each Sub Committee, of which at least one would be from the districts. Dr. Channa and Mr. Chatterjee volunteered to be part of the sub committees and all gratefully acknowledged this. Various other names were suggested [listed in Annex 1]. Dr. Dhar requested the Secretariat to write to all those whose names were suggested for seeking consent prior to finalization.

### **Closing**

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks by Ms. Banerji to all participants for their enthusiasm and commitment to the cause of the Himalayan communities and their desire to take the action plan forward.