

## HIGH HIMALAYA FORUM - *The Beginning*

### *The Vision for HHF*

The high altitude Himalayan region is unique in many ways - in its climate, topography, its culture, heritage, and vegetation. This uniqueness implies that many conventional development technologies that work in the ecologically and culturally different plains of India are not as effective in this region, although its rich traditional knowledge comprises many sustainable and appropriate solutions to its unique problems and constraints. The remoteness and the limited accessibility of this region have also meant however, that the understanding of the region, its needs and problems, is limited among those outside the region.

Recognizing these shortcomings, the High Himalaya Forum was launched in 2008 to empower the Himalayan communities for active democracy, strengthening participatory management and governance at the local level, and facilitate people's advocacy for development action; ensure a continual flow of information to the high Himalayan mountain community, and provide a platform for interaction between the Himalayan people with the world beyond-the-Himalayas.

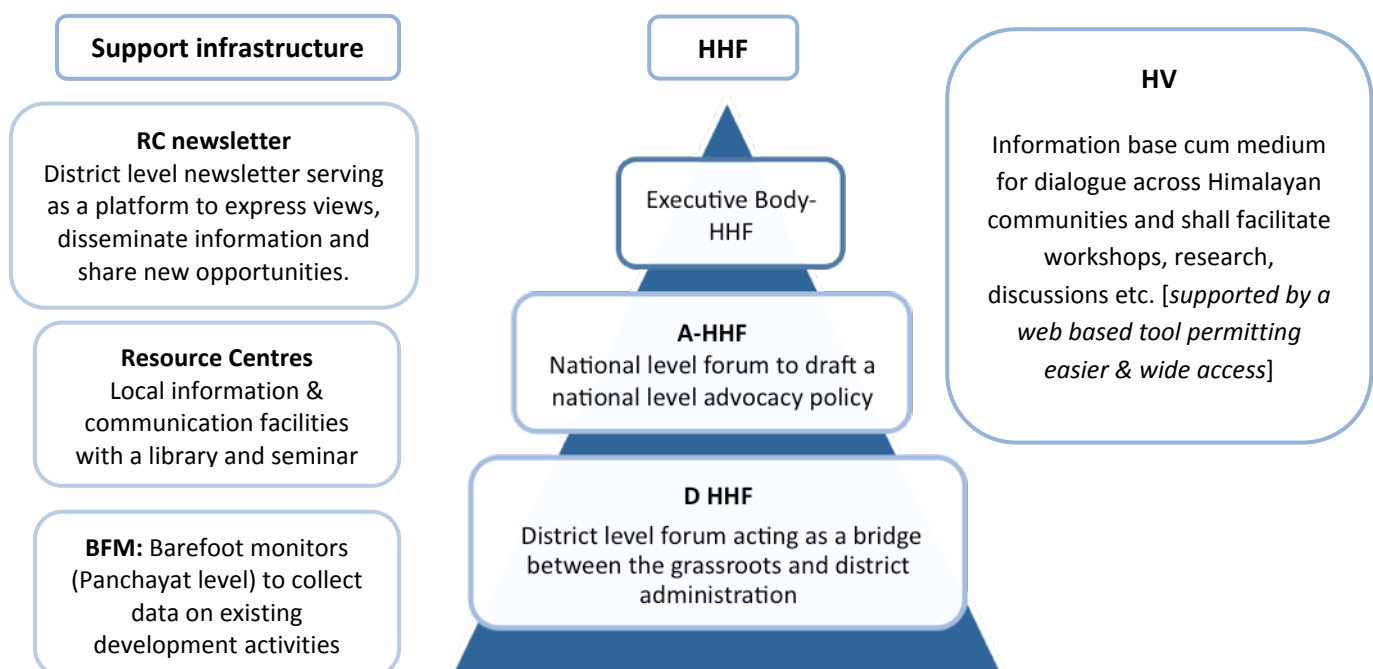
### *Purpose of the HHF:*

The **High Himalaya Forum** is a multi-stakeholder and multi-layered forum for the Himalayan region. The forum will serve as a platform for raising Himalayan concerns and linking up for solving them through collaborative action and appropriate support. It is also a medium for focussing policy and public attention on Himalayan issues, building wider public awareness and helping policymakers understand and address the needs of communities in the High Altitude Himalayas, towards improving the quality of Himalayan life. The forum has a wide membership and participation base with representation from the administration at the district, state and national levels. The HHF is intended to establish a constructive, collaborative development dialogue process through advocacy.

The objectives of the forum are to:

1. **Ensure special consideration** of Himalayan communities while policies are made and ensure wider participation of Himalayan communities in policy-making.
2. **Improve social and economic wellbeing of the communities and facilitate an appropriate development** for the Himalayan region.

### *Structure:*



Recognizing the barriers to interaction & communication in the region, the forum will be multilayered: a network of Himalayan communities & local agents of development at regional level, and a multi-dimensional network of all stakeholders and interest groups at national level.

The HHHF has a network of local/district level HHHF nodes. The local HHHF is a network of community members and local agents of development. These District-HHHFs (D-HHHF) have the aims of advocacy for positive policies, and sharing of information for enabling effective development action. They also promote the social inclusion and capacity building of the members. There are currently 12 D-HHHFs in 12 Himalayan districts in India. More are being constituted.

At the national level, the forum is 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 HHHF Nodes, the national body, called the Apex-HHHF (A-HHHF) comprises secondary stakeholders of the Himalayan region, such as researchers, development workers, academicians.

HHHF Levels and Members:

- D-HHHFs – Each D-HHHF comprises development actors at the district level including social workers, representatives of civil society organisations, local researchers, Panchayat members, and community members. A Convener and a Co-Convener will manage the affairs of each D-HHHF.
- A-HHHF – The A-HHHF would comprise of representatives from among the secondary stakeholders at regional and national level, and representatives of the D-HHHF.

### *Processes for establishment:*

#### **Pre-launch formative period:**

1. Phase I (2007): Introductory and envisioning meetings for the HHHF were conducted at the grassroots and district level. Key development actors at the local level were identified- panchayat office-bearers, local NGOs, government officials, community partners at the grassroots and the district level. Trainings on rights and governance were given to panchayat officials and on governance and participation to district officials. Local information and communication facilities, in the form of resource centers, were established across the area.
2. Phase II (2008): Launch meetings of the HHHF were conducted at the district level with participation from potential state and non-state members in the district. Conveners and co-conveners were nominated by the members across Himalayan districts to coordinate the HHHF functions of the Regional Chapters and to represent their respective regions at the national level.

<i>Phase I (2007)</i>	<i>Phase II (2008)</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trainings conducted for panchayat and district officials.</li> <li>2. Facilitation of barefoot monitoring services (BMS) through Barefoot Monitor (BFM).</li> <li>3. Compilation of annual survey report on welfare services across the Himalayan region.</li> <li>4. Awareness building on HHHF at district level.</li> <li>5. Development of the local information and communication facilities- resource centers.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identification of potential members for HHHF at local, regional and national level</li> <li>2. One to one meetings with State and non-state actors at all levels.</li> <li>3. Workshops for idea-generation at district level.</li> <li>4. Launch meeting for D-HHHFs conducted at district level.</li> <li>5. Regular Barefoot Monitoring and periodic face-to-face interaction with ZPs and district administration on “analysis &amp; future action”.</li> </ol>

#### **Launch:**

In October 2008, the HHHF was launched in the national capital through a one-day workshop. The event was inaugurated by Member of Parliament, Dr. Karan Singh, and was attended by 40 members of Himalayan community from 12 districts in India, and over 30 representatives from civil society organisations, and academic

and research institutions. Representatives from national and state ministries and international organizations also came in to guide the participants to shape the HHF Agenda. The launch enabled the sharing of developmental experiences and discussion and recognition of key policy needs for the target communities.

### Processes during the 1<sup>st</sup> year:

1. Monthly & annual BMS: The Barefoot Monitoring System (BMS) carried out across a total of 54 Panchayats across the Himalayan states covers welfare services in sectors like education, health, electricity, disaster relief, livelihoods, agriculture, information and communication services, leisure facilities and democratic structure. BFM surveys have been carried out in several Panchayats across HAH area as depicted in the table. Trainings were conducted for the BFMs to regularly visit, monitor and document the existing development initiatives and refresher-training sessions were also carried out.

Region	Area	Panchayats
Western Himalayas	Kargil	Lankarchey, Choksar, Kanoor, Baroo and Stongdey
	Leh	Hanuthang, Takmachik, Skurubuchan, Ney, Stakna, Hemiya, Hargam, Chamsen, Erath
	Lahaul	Sansha, Sissu, Kardang, Ghoshal, Barbog, Darcha, Chimret, Karpas, Jhalma, Tingrat, Khanagsar
	Kinnaur	Yulla, Labrang, Giabong, Asrang, Chitkul and Nigulsarai
Central Himalayas	Uttarkashi	Jhala, Purali, Mukhuwa and Dharali
	Pithoragarh	Karki, Bora and Rathi
	Chamoli	Jhelam, Karchi, Tolma and Bhallagaon
Eastern Himalayas	Tawang	Kitkhar, Maidung, Shakyur, Namstering, Sakpret, Shakti, Khamba, Nykmadung, Sangti and Shyro
	West Sikkim	Yangteng, Chunbung, Serdung, Lungik and Hee

2. Quarterly D-HHF meetings: Along with the monitoring reports on the quality of existing welfare services filled by the BFMs, the D-HHF carried out meetings last year aimed at informing the Zila Parishad and aid it to discuss the issues with the district administration. The D-HHF members have been empowered through training on rights and civil society mechanisms. The information gathered is deliberated on in periodic D-HHF meetings and utilized for feedback at Zila Parishad meetings. A system of fact-based advocacy and targeted development planning has thus been initiated in the districts. The D-HHF also monitor the supporting infrastructure, acting either as the managing body of infrastructure like the RC newsletter or playing the role of an advisory body.

### *Early impacts*

- In Tawang, healthy interactions amongst the Zila Parishad and D-HHF have led to the inclusion of a representative from the forum in all future ZP meetings.
- The initiative has seen participation from NGOs like Yuva Arunachal, Environment Protection Group, Global Human Rights Organization and Human Rights First.
- Representatives of the health department at the district level agreed to consider the feedback regarding gaps in implementation of the NHRM and existing medical infrastructure.
- In Joshimath, D-HHF members were invited to visit the education department to discuss various issues by the coordinator of the SSA.
- In Kargil district, a group of village heads or 'Goba' interacted with the Chief Medical Officer and discussed the existing health issues.
- In Kinnaur, villagers of village Yulla, initiated the process of applying for establishment of public toilets to the health and sanitation department.