INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN INITIATIVE

Counter MEASURE FOR PLASTIC FREE RIVERS

Policy Brief for Plastic Waste Management in the Indian Himalayan Region

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The policy brief for improved Waste Management especially Plastic Waste Management in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) was drafted by Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) in partnership with UNEP's project "Promotion of Countermeasures against Marine Plastic Litter in Southeast Asia and India (CounterMEASUREII). The brief is the recognition of the fragility and socio-ecological importance of the IHR, the Himalayan waste crisis and the need for policy and action that is mountain sensitive.

This policy brief is based on guiding principles that focuses on closing the plastic tap; decentralised and people centric policy and action. It recommends the recognition of the importance of mountains and its fragility; reduction of waste; the eradication of single-use plastics; technology that is suitable for mountains and actualizing segregation at source with shared responsibility for waste amongst tourism stakeholders, religious and defence institutions. Investment in building capacity and leadership of stakeholders and implementing Extended Producer Responsibility that factors in mountain specificities as well as allocation of additional funds for mountain states.is stressed. Facilitation of inter-departmental, intersectoral coordination and adoption of a transboundary landscape approach in policy is recommended.

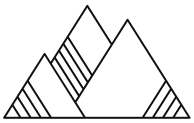
INTRODUCTION

Plastic is found on top of the highest mountains[1], air[2], deepest of trenches in the ocean, even inside human placenta[3], blood[4] and lungs[5]. It is[6] now well established that this problem of plastic pollution that the entire world is facing arises from the unsustainable and unnecessary production of plastics, much of which are being designed for single use. Few facts mentioned below from various studies is enough to drive home the point.

- Globally, 8300 million metric tons (Mt) of virgin plastics have been produced till 2017. As of 2015, approximately 6300 Mt of plastic waste had been generated, around 9% of which was recycled, 12% incinerated, and 79% had accumulated in landfills or the natural environment.[7]
- By 2050, the amount of plastic in seas and oceans across the world will weigh more than the fishes, says a headline-grabbing estimate by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.
- Half of the plastic ever manufactured has been produced in the past 15 years (What a Waste, World Bank 2018).[8]
- Half of all plastic produced is designed to be used only once — and then thrown away. (Our planet is drowning in plastic pollution—it's time for change – UNEP 2018).[9]

Given the magnitude and concern of the plastic pollution crisis, the narrative around plastic waste has evolved with increasing recognition for larger accountability in plastic production and managing plastic waste that rests on the manufacturers of plastics as well as recognising the limits to recycling. This is a clear shift from the responsibility being only on waste managers and consumers. The entire cycle of plastic production and disposal being directly linked to the climate crisis is also well acknowledged. With these paradigm shifts, it is imperative that waste management systems focus on reduction and move towards circular systems that encompass the full life cycle of plastics.

1. Microplastics found near Everest's peak, highest ever detected in the world. National Geographic Nov 2020
2. Airborne plastic pollution 'spiralling around the globe', study finds The Guardian April 2021
3. Mariana Trench: Deepest-ever sub dive finds plastic bag The BBC May 2019
4. Microplastics revealed in the placentas of unborn babies The Guardian Dec 2020
5. Microplastics Detected in Human Blood in New Study The Smithsonian March 2022
6. Detection of microplastics in human lung tissue using μFTIR spectroscopy ScienceDirect July 2022
7. Geyer R, Jambeck JR, Law KL. Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made. Sci Adv. 2017 Jul 19;3(7):e1700782. doi: 10.1126/sciadv.1700782. PMID: 28776036; PMCID: PMC5517107.
8. https://datatopics.worldbank.org/what-a-waste/tackling_increasing_plastic_waste.html
9. https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/our-planet-drowning-plastic-pollutio



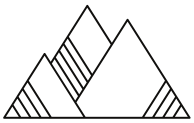
INDIAN HIMALAYA AND WASTE CRISIS

The states, union territories and hill districts of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) is home to one of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots provisioning invaluable ecosystem goods and services, supporting 50 million people and constituting about 16.2% of India's total geographical area. The Himalaya is the source of water for the Indo-Gangetic plains and this fragile socio-ecology is in the midst of a waste crisis, especially with regard to plastic waste.

The waste crisis 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 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.

The Himalayan Cleanup from 2018 to 2021 and the National Productivity Council of India's waste and brand audit shows an increasing amount of plastic waste, especially non-recyclables, in the IHR. The Himalayan Cleanup 2018/19 across the 12 IHR states found that 95% percent of waste collected was plastic, predominantly single use plastics: Multi Layered Plastics highest in numbers (62.67%), Single use utensils - 17.19%, PET Bottles 9.10%, other plastic items 5.09% and Tetrapak, 3.32% made up the plastic trash. This shows the changing waste profile and a large volume of the waste (MLP) having no solutions. Home-based waste audits in 2021 showed 63% to be food packaging of which 72% was multi-layered plastics. 2022 waste audit results showed 92.7% of trash cleaned up was plastic with 72% of waste cleaned up was non recyclable plastic. 82% of the trash came from food and drinks packaging followed by personal care in 2022. This shows the changing waste profile and the link to changing food habits. Changing food trends are, therefore, not only resulting in ill health with increasing consumption of nutrition deficient packaged food with excess sugar and salt, but also the problematic plastic packaging leading to the waste crisis in the mountains.

There is a need to contextualise the legal framework of Waste Management Rules to be sensitive, acknowledge and respond to the specific issues and challenges of the mountains. Appropriate and adequate resource allocation and support that is reflective of the rich biodiversity, ecological sensitivity and fragility of the Indian Himalayan Region besides specific geographical challenges is needed to address the Himalayan waste crisis.



KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Mountain states face severe lack of resources and infrastructure in solid waste management and this is compounded by the higher cost of retrieval and disposal of waste. This is not reflected in waste management policies and resource allocation.

Gaps in Policy to practise

Policies that were laid out with clear timelines in mind have seen poor implementation on the ground. These gaps have been taken cognizance of by the National Green Tribunal that has given guidelines to the states for complying with the rules with strict timelines.

- Very few states and local bodies have made model bye laws and operationalised SWM and PWM Rules.
- All the states have resorted to bans and prohibition of certain types of plastics, with varying degrees of success.
- The national single use plastic ban 2022 has not been converted into action and in many instances diluted the state bans eg: complete ban of plastic bags by the states whereas the national SUP ban allows bags beyond 120 microns and 60GSM.
- Mixed waste is a norm that reaches landfill. Mountain states have an acute lack of land suitable for landfills and indiscriminate dumping of mixed waste is highly unsustainable and toxic.
- Due to lack of land available for landfills, many states in the IHR have resorted to using river banks as waste dumping sites and for landfills.
- Open burning of waste of all kinds, categorically prohibited by an NGT order of 2016 and state laws, is carried out across all mountain states.
- Interdepartmental convergence through the formation of State Level Advisory Bodies, have gaps in the formation and regular functioning.
- Extended producer responsibility 2022 for plastic waste management has had no success in the mountains due to its lack of mountain sensitivity.

Limitations of Departments and Local bodies

Stakeholder Mapping consultations and focus group discussions eluded that the policy framework has provided Local bodies with huge roles and responsibilities that is not commensurate with changing waste profiles, knowledge, information and adequate resources. Devolution of power and empowered decisions are larger issues not addressed.

Limited inclusion of traditional bodies in waste management

Traditional bodies in the IHR especially in the North Eastern states of India play an important mandated role in society which has not been adequately acknowledged and leveraged for solid waste management.

Limited inclusion of tourism, forest department, religious bodies, and defence
IHR has significant waste volumes generated by or in the jurisdiction of tourism, religious bodies, defence and forest departments who are yet to be proactively included in the waste management planning and implementation processes.

Limited involvement and role of civil societies and informal waste workers
Civil societies and informal waste workers representation in the Policy Framework is limited to one membership in the State Advisory Committee.

Data Gaps
There are large data gaps on quantum and quality of waste generated in the IHR states. Broad stroke data of waste generation in states are available, but granular understanding is lacking which is necessary for evidence based waste management.

Limitations to Extended Producer Responsibility engagement in the mountains
Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) with a strong focus on the mountains is missing till date. Barring Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, no other state has any form of EPR being implemented. Even in these states, organisations involved in EPR are faced with a huge challenge of cost. ULB and PRI have limited awareness and knowledge to leverage EPR. EPR fails to recognise problematic waste like MLP that have no solutions and recyclability.

Focus on unsustainable solutions that are detrimental for mountain states
Across the IHR, there is a blanket policy push for capital intensive technologies without any prior testing and planning about the effectiveness, feasibility, toxicity and maintenance of such solutions. The promotion of waste to energy, incineration, mechanised composting, plastic roads, pyrolysis, bio-plastics have grave environmental implications in the fragile socio-ecology of the mountains as well as economic non viability that is not carefully examined before promotion.

Transboundary, interstate and interdepartmental convergence
Interdepartmental convergence and co-ordination for mainstreaming waste management is largely missing in the IHR. Interstate and across international boundary coordination and co-operation across the IHR is equally absent.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IHR

1. SINGLE USE PLASTIC ERADICATION IN THE HIMALAYAN STATES

The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change notified on 12th August 2021 (Plastic Waste Management Rules), to prohibit identified single-use plastic items , having low utility and high littering potentials, by the year 2022 which needs to be fast tracked in the IHR.

1.1 Review of process of SUP identification for phase out for the mountains

For the mountains, more items of SUPs would need to be included in the phase out list, some of which are listed below for states to consider.

- All Flex Banners.
- Bottled water: All packaged drinking water below 2 litres should be banned by all mountain states as an important first step. Larger bottles have some reuse value and also have higher chances of being recycled.
- Plastic used in agriculture.
- Online sales packaging material.

1.2 Strengthening of existing bans with robust monitoring mechanisms

A blanket ban on all single use plastic bags (without microns and GSM allowances) and including biodegradable/ compostable ones should be the norm as the rationale of the bag ban is to stop its unnecessary use as well as plastic bags having high environmental impact.

Bans must also be backed by measures to provide affordable alternatives to plastic bags such as reusable carry bags with appropriate financial outlays for SHGs.

1.3 Incentivizing businesses / hotels / restaurants for reuse / refill systems

- SOPs for Zero Single Use Plastic businesses / hotels / restaurants to be developed and made mandatory to be followed. SOPs should aim to remove SUPs such as bottled water, plastic cutlery, toiletries (shampoo/ soap), food packing, etc.
- Incentive mechanisms institutionalised for establishments that follow Zero SUP practices through certifications, publicity and tax benefits.
- Disincentivise use and throw through penalties and fines for defaulters.
- Pay As You Throw (PAYT): Waste collection fee that is proportionate to the total quantity of waste being disposed.
- Waste generators incentivized to segregate, treat and dispose-off waste at source, leaving a smaller amount to be handed over to the municipal system.

1.4 Creation of enabling environment for reuse, refill systems and bring your own

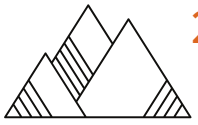
- Reducing plastic water bottles.
- Provision of accessible and clean drinking water through water filters, water ATMs at prominent location, all government offices and institutions with clear and catchy signage .
- Encourage use of refillable water bottles which can also be used as tourism souvenirs.
- All government offices, institutions and events to be bottled water free.

1.5 Support for reusables as alternatives to plastics

Investments in research and design for alternatives to plastics to be prioritised that include use of local available materials through SHGs, MSME schemes and Missions like the Bamboo Mission.

1.6. Promoting local, healthy, and unpackaged food to reduce plastic pollution from packaged food items

- Reduce plastic packaging waste by promotion of traditional and local food that are unpackaged through the integration of programmes like the Mid-day Meals in schools; implementing the Food Safety and Standards (Safe Food and healthy diets for School Children) Regulations, 2020 of restricting junk food in educational institutions. Eat right campaign (FSSAI 2018), Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display Regulations, 2020 Front of label packaging enforced for consumer awareness and reduced consumption.
- Policy for Government Institutions, religious institutions, tourism destinations and sites to serve local unpackaged food during events.



2. ACTUALISE SEGREGATION AT SOURCE AND DECENTRALISED MANAGEMENT

Segregation at source is a fundamental building block for managing waste and it has been made mandatory under the SWM Rules of 2016. Segregation at source implementation remains poor in most of the mountain states.

2.1 Strengthen Institutional mechanisms for decentralised waste management

i) Empowered Ward Level Committees for SWM constituted at every ward (urban and rural) within the ambit of the ward committees having specific focus of actualising the waste management plan at the ward level.
ii) Constitution of State Level Advisory Bodies (SLAB) and District Level Monitoring Committees (DLMC) with more representation from civil society as per SWM Rules, 2016
iii) Empowering leadership of local authority Leading by example - The Ward level leaders, elected representatives, traditional body leaders etc should be enabled and resourced to showcase leadership by example in implementing the plan for waste management.

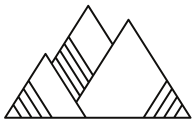
2.2 Decentralised Infrastructure and planning for plastic waste management

- Decentralised management of waste promoted through knowledge building, incentives, taxation support and policies.
- Segregation at source strengthened and supported by efficient segregated collection and transport systems with scaled user fees. Timely, door to door collection systems must be designed sensitive to the mountains and local context with graded user fee structure.
- Local resource recovery centres for storage of dry recyclable waste promoted and supported with community participation and linked with rag pickers and the recycling value chain for different types of recyclable items.

- Use of simple and appropriate technology for facilitating segregation, packaging and recycling of dry waste such as balers, shredders, small rotary conveyor belts at the resource recovery, plastic waste management units needs to be financially supported.
- Decentralised composting/bio-methanation/animal feed with no biodegradables to landfills must be made a policy in the IHR. Research and support for a choice of composting techniques at household and community level.needs to be financed and disseminated.
- Strengthening of market and market linkages for segregated waste.

2.3 Dedicated and appropriate education and awareness campaigns

- Develop a targeted and effective information and education curriculum / campaign that is contextualised to local socio-ecology.
- Undertake sustained awareness and education campaigns through volunteerism, peer education, inclusion of traditional organisations, clubs, religious groups and women's groups.
- Schools and educational institutions engaged for the Segregation Programme
- Brand ambassadors: Taking the support of brand ambassadors as influencers to encourage people to segregate and reduce their waste.
- Convergence mechanisms.
- Leverage faith based organisations and traditional bodies for effective waste education.
- Intersect waste education through the Departments of Health, Education, Tourism, DRR, Youth, Sports, NCC, NSS, Culture departments.



3. INVESTING IN BUILDING CAPACITIES / LEADERSHIP

Capacity of key personnel, critical understanding of waste and technical knowhow along with community mobilisation and awareness is one of the most important factors to drive waste management. Knowledge and capacity building of the ULBs, PRIs and waste managers must be undertaken on a continual basis.

3.1 Institutionalise and integrate capacity building of waste managers in existing training programmes

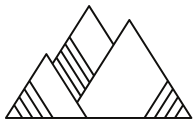
- State Institute for Rural Development, Swachh Bharat Missions and other existing capacity building institutions mainstream waste management in all training programmes with regularly updated curriculum.
- Leaders of traditional institutions have contextualised and regular capacity building programmes on waste management.

3.2 Building a strong volunteer base for waste management through Peer Educator programmes

- Design and initiate Peer Educator programmes at local level for engaging volunteers.
- CBOs/ NGOs members trained to create a pool of knowledgeable leaders who provide exemplary waste management leadership and action on an everyday level.

3.3 Encourage/ Support local entrepreneurs in the area of waste management

- Urgent prioritisation by Departments engaged in Skill Development through a dedicated cell to look at entrepreneurship for waste management.
- Training and capacity building programmes for nurturing waste entrepreneurs and small businesses based on waste on a range of green services related to waste management.
- Convergence with existing programmes such as Green Skill Development Programme
- Financial incentives provided to waste entrepreneurs through existing schemes and programmes.



4. STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL CAPACITY OF LOCAL BODIES

Lack of adequate finances for Local Bodies is cited as the top challenge for implementing proper waste management

4.1 Institutionalising and Improving mechanisms for garbage fee collection

- Waste management services should not be provided free of cost, thus a user collection fee must be charged.
- Local bodies should institutionalise this collection of service tax for waste collection through systematic processes as well as through the involvement of local organisations and individuals.

4.2 Operationalising Extended Producer Responsibility for leveraging financial support to Local Bodies

- Specific capacity building and handholding programme for local bodies to enable them to access Extended Producer Responsibility.
- EPR made more mountain sensitive.

5. INVEST IN RELIABLE DATA GENERATION ON WASTE

Data gaps on the waste scenario across the mountain states is a serious limitation. Data tends to be urban biased. Systematic collection of information on waste volumes, waste types and characteristics and recycled waste is largely lacking which is an impediment to proper planning for waste management.

5.1 Mandatory waste audit to be conducted at dumping sites/ landfills by local bodies in collaboration with relevant authorities

- Coordination between ULBs / PRI and SPCBs for designing and institutionalising the process of regular data gathering on waste profile at landfill site for evidence based waste management plans.

5.2 Waste audit at source by households / bulk generators

- Piloting of initiative for citizens to take part in voluntary household waste audits
- Policies to make bulk generators undertake waste audits.

5.3 Waste audit linked to cleanups

- SPCBs to design an SOP for cleanups with waste and brand audits and make it widely publicised for volunteers engaging in cleanup activity. Encourage cleanups and waste audits through certifications.

5.4 Develop an online app-based system for data capture

- To simplify and encourage the process of data capture on waste volumes and waste profile, an online system could be developed.
- It should be user friendly, mobile app based and simple to understand. Besides data collection, citizens should be able to address their problems by contacting officials in charge in every ward/zone.
- This waste audit can be strengthened with brand audits too that will indicate the most polluting brands and the data would leverage extended producer responsibility.

5.5 Declaration of plastic products from manufacturers and distributors

- SPCBs to institutionalise the process of gathering data from manufacturers and distributors in the state for understanding the plastic waste volume that is entering the state.

6. SPECIFIC FOCUS ON WASTE GENERATED BY PILGRIMAGE AND TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND DEFENCE ESTABLISHMENTS

The Indian Himalayan Region is home to popular tourist destinations and pilgrimage sites. With a large portion bounded by international borders, the IHR also has many defence establishments. These attributes bring about specific waste issues in and around religious and tourism sites and defence establishments that are in many instances in remote and difficult terrain.

6.1 Specific SOPs for Religious boards and Defence establishments

- SOPs must be made mandatory to be framed by religious boards / defence establishments to take responsibility and manage their waste.
- SOP should include steps to reduction; replace SUPs with reusables; linkage with recycling chains; promotion of local food systems.

6.2 Management of waste generated in tourism destinations

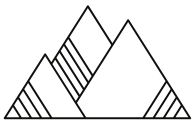
- The Tourism Department must take responsibility for developing a waste management plan for every tourist destination and provide necessary infrastructure support with clearly stated TOR for all stakeholders.
- The waste management plan must follow the hierarchy of waste reduction, segregation, material recovery and linkage to waste management systems of the region with shared responsibility of the process.
    - Provision of adequate dustbins to cover all tourist spots must be made with a sustainable system of regular collection of waste from these bins.
    - Travel and trade associations should be tasked with the duty of monitoring the waste management plans and taking action against members transgressing the rules.
- Deterrent action such as fines for littering must be prominently displayed in high traffic areas as well as tourists encouraged to be participatory stakeholders
- To avoid littering along highways, all tourist vehicles must carry reusable garbage bags along with training of taxi drivers.

6.3 Specific focus on trekking routes and protected areas

- In trekking destinations, especially in ecologically fragile and protected areas, Forest and Tourism Departments should follow the “take in take out” principle to establish a mandatory check-in check-out system for trekkers of what is taken in and brought out with strict penalties for defaulters who have left their waste behind.
- Permit issuing authorities, the Forest & Tourism Department of the State must have standard instructions issued to trekkers for taking responsibility for their waste.
- Trekking agencies and associations must communicate to their clients the rules and ensure that it is followed.

6.4 Imposition of tourism fee/cess for waste management in ecologically fragile and high tourist traffic areas

- The imposition of an environmental tax/conservation fee in ecologically sensitive and high tourist traffic areas and using such fees to cover waste management at the collection locale and IEC costs should be explored by the local authorities.
- Undertake regular sensitisation and awareness generation amongst tourists, tourism service providers, pilgrims, defence personnel and administrators of pilgrimage sites and forward posts.



7. IMPLEMENTING EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY IN THE MOUNTAINS

The Extended Producers Responsibility (EPR) (Under Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 amended 2022) is an important component to address the growing plastic waste pollution. It has to be implemented across the Indian Himalayan Region with urgency and mountain sensitivity.

7.1 Extended Producer Responsibility more mountain specific and sensitive

- Set clearly defined targets for EPR in the mountains considering the socio-ecological importance and fragility.
- Pricing and other financial considerations under EPR must cover the higher cost of intervention in the mountains.
- PIBOs are incentivised to implement EPR in the mountains through specialised weightage.

7.2 Expanding the scope of EPR

- Strengthen EPR implementation for online shopping and include food takeaways in the ambit.
- Piloting of reuse and refill systems for popular products and packaging that reduces the use of plastics within the ambit of EPR.

7.3 Incentivise EPR for time bound action on eliminating multi-layered plastics

- EPR must stress on targeted and time bound redesigning out problematic plastic like multi layered plastics and sachets. This can be further promoted through incentives and tax benefits.

8. PROMOTION OF TECHNOLOGY SUITED FOR THE MOUNTAINS

The response to the waste crisis in the Indian Himalayan Region has resulted in the push and search of unsustainable solutions that are toxic and polluting; a waste of precious resources; and investment in technology that does not address the root cause of the waste crisis. The IHR is littered with monuments of false technological solutions and stakeholder consultations and FGDs were vocal for the need of the recognition of the fragile and important socio-ecology of the IHR with a focus on technology that is sustainable and suitable for the mountains.

- Comprehensive diversity of systemic technological solutions promoted and supported for the IHR
- Burning and incineration of waste not promoted in the IHR from the perspective of the fragile socio-ecology of the IHR, toxicity, waste of resources and climate action.
- Plastic road laying should be highly discouraged in the IHR.
- Policy to include bio / compostable plastics in the list of SUPs to be phased out.

9. LANDSCAPE APPROACH FOR COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION FOR WASTE MANAGEMENT

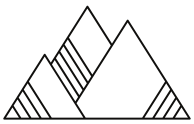
Convergence and coordination is extremely critical in mainstreaming waste management. Various departments and CSOs can easily include and should include waste management in their own institutions and interventions. The Indian Himalayan Region cuts across over 13 States and Union Territories of India as well as International boundaries; interstate and international collaboration and convergence will greatly enhance waste management systems.

9.1 Inter-departmental convergence for waste management

- Strengthening existing bodies via convergence and cooperation, regular dialogue and co-creating interdepartmental action plans that can be chaired by the Swachh Bharat Mission. State-wide SOPs, mandates and resources for waste management within all departments must be created and supported.
- At the state level, SLAB could be explicitly mandated to promote convergence and co-operation as an inter departmental high-powered committee on waste management with clear functions and powers to enable inter-departmental actions.

9.2 Creation of inter-state committees, regional hubs and collectives of neighbouring countries

- Interstate committees under Swachh Bharat Mission for waste management can be created that meet regular and delineate interstate action plans.
- International committees of neighbouring countries like SAARC with focused action on reducing plastic pollution through cooperation must be set up. These efforts of cooperation must also include extended producer responsibility.



10. ALLOCATE APPROPRIATE FUNDING FOR MOUNTAIN STATES

The geophysical characteristics of the IHR make waste management all the more challenging and an expensive affair. This calls for sensitive waste management policies with appropriate and adequate resource allocation and support that is considerate of and reflective of the rich biodiversity, ecological sensitivity and fragility of the Indian Himalayan

- Waste Management Policies have appropriate mountain sensitivity and resource allocation.
- Swachh Bharat Mission to have a mountain division with earmarked mountain specific resource allocation.
- SMART Cities have a mountain smart cities mountain division with clearly defined mountain parameters.
- Make allocation of funds under EPR mandatory for PIBOs in mountain states

DARJEELING DECLARATION ON PLASTIC WASTE AT THE MOUNTAIN LEGISLATORS' MEET, 2021

We, the representatives and former representatives of various elected bodies of the Himalayan States, Union Territories and districts of India, having heard, discussed and
deliberated on several important issues of the Indian Himalayan Region, especially on
the pathways for plastic waste management in the region, collectively do hereby:

1. **Acknowledge** that there is an urgent need for bringing about stringent policies and legislation against Single Use Plastics due to the fragile Himalayan ecosystem and resolve to commit to the vision of a Zero Waste Himalaya.

1. **Support** the Central government's call to eliminate Single Use Plastics and take measures for eradicating SUPs in the Indian Himalayan Region by urging our state governments, Union Territory administrations, district councils, traditional institutions and other civic bodies for sustained cooperation and collaboration in a serious fight against plastic pollution.

1. **Advocate** for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to be made feasible to the mountain states by addressing the specificities of mountain economy and bringing in commitment from the industry.

1. **Facilitate** and support the contextualisation of all waste management rules to be sensitive and acknowledge the regional specific issues and challenges of mountain/hill states.

1. **Engage** relevant stakeholders to take proactive steps to explore solutions for a sustainable tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region which is possible only with arrest of the existing waste crisis and reducing plastic pollution in the region.

Placed on record at the Mountain Legislators' Meet 2021 held in Darjeeling on 20th November 2021.

LEH DECLARATION
MOUNTAIN LEGISLATORS' MEET - 2022
LEH, LADAKH "EPR: POLICY TO PRACTISE"

The Elected Representatives of the States, Union Territories, Autonomous Councils and Districts of the Indian Himalayan Region at the Mountain Legislators' Meet (MLM) 11 October 2022 as part of the Sustainable Development Summit XI, Leh 10 to 12 October 2022 recognise and acknowledge that Extended Producer Responsibility, 2021 under the Plastic Waste Management Rules (amended 2022) is a much needed narrative change in addressing the waste crisis in the Himalaya, the nation and the planet. It is responsive to the plastic pollution crisis and recognition of the materiality of plastic that does not go away with limits to recycling as a comprehensive solution.
Solutions to the plastic crisis need urgent focus more at the source - where plastic is being produced, rather than at the manager and consumer level or post disposal. There is an urgent need for extended producer responsibility to redress the Himalayan Waste Crisis.

We the elected representatives at the Mountain Legislators' Meet, 11 October 2022, Leh build on the MLM Darjeeling Declaration 11 November 2021 and hereby

1. Acknowledge the need to redress the Himalayan Waste Crisis in an urgent manner with circular economy lens.
2. Support the Union Government's call for Single Use Plastic ban and expand it to be contextual to the fragility of the Indian Himalayan Region.
3. Advocate for Extended Producer Responsibility that is mountain sensitive
4. Explicitly create EPR targets for the States, UTs, Autonomous Councils and Districts in the Indian Himalayan Region.
5. Special financial resources allocation from the PIBOs that take into account the geographical challenges and costs of implementing EPR the States, UTs, Autonomous Councils and Districts in the Indian Himalayan Region.
6. Create networks of collection, storage and transportation systems that cover all regions of the Himalayan States and UTs which includes urban, rural, forest and remote tourism and defense sites.
7. Call on the most polluting companies to implement EPR in the States, UTs, Autonomous Councils and Districts in the Indian Himalayan Region.
8. Promote reduction and refill systems that design out plastic waste from the system.
9. States, UTs, Autonomous Councils and Districts in the Indian Himalayan Region. are empowered, strengthened and capacities built to implement EPR in the Indian Himalaya that include representation at the National Committees for EPR.
10. Invest in research and design that remove non-recyclable plastics like Multi-Layered Plastic.
11. Converge waste interventions with - Promotion of local food systems and the Eat Right Campaign that includes properly and easily understood front of package labeling & Educational processes, institutions and mid-day meals.

Placed on record at the Mountain Legislators' Meet 2022 held in Leh on 11th October 2022.

INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN INITIATIVE, 2023
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