

>> SYNTHESIZE MOUNTAINS OF KNOWLEDGE <<

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

The Himalayas, the highest mountain range of the world, encompass five countries: India, Bhutan, China, Nepal, and Pakistan. India Himalayan Region (IHR) covers approximately 16 percent of the total Indian territory. The Himalayas act as the natural boundary and play a significant role in influencing its climate. IHR spreads over 10 federal states and Union Territories (UT), namely Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and hill regions of 2 states, Assam and West Bengal. IHR is rich in biodiversity and provides ecosystem services to the downstream population. It sustains three major river systems: Ganga, Indus, and Brahmaputra which sustain the Indian population. At the same time, the region faces many environmental threats including climate change, disasters, and extreme weather events, making it an ecologically vulnerable and fragile region. Despite its significance for the country, the Himalayas have remained at the borderline of Indian policy-making which has resulted in making the region more vulnerable. The country follows a sectoral approach towards the region and lacks mountain-specific policies. It has laws, acts, and policies based on different sectors including water, forest, and wildlife. These policies/acts/laws have been participatory in nature owing to the principle of decentralisation. Environmental threats including globalisation and climate change in the mountain ecosystems were first recognised in the National Environment Policy, 2006. In 2008, the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) was adopted. It was the first policy to have the mountain focus through the inclusion of the National Mission for Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystems (NMSHE) as one of the eight missions. Given the complexity of the region, it is imperative for India to have more mountain-specific policies to address distinct territorial challenges of IHR. The study looks at assessing the existing policies in the region, in particular, the NMSHE, and proposes better governance strategies for sustaining the Himalayan region.