

## Rationale

Himalayas are the world's youngest mountain ranges, tectonically alive, and one of the most marginalized mountain regions of the world. Over the past few decades, the region has witnessed rapid and unplanned urbanization which has perturbed the hydrological regimes of Himalayan watersheds and reduced groundwater recharge. Moreover, urban centres are spewing out different types of waste which are adding up challenges for upkeeping the hills and habitations in the downstream.

Large tracts of the country's northern and north-eastern states situated in this region are majorly hills and some of India's fastest growing cities are situated in these states. This region also witnesses a significant footfall of tourists every year. Due to the complex geography, the infrastructure and development activities face significant challenges impacting carrying capacity. Further, the climate crisis has already made its mark visible, and the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report clearly states that the water cycle in the region is being affected, putting further pressure with regard to provision of essential services such as water and sanitation, on an already stressed Indian municipal system.

A growing economy like India, development and urbanisation in the himalayan region is inevitable, but it can be steered in a more sustainable manner. Thus, it is imperative that urban centers located in these areas learn from each other, and adopt planning practices that are inclusive and resilient with the ability to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

Against this backdrop, the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) in collaboration with the Bremen Overseas Research and Development (BORDA) South Asia, has conceptualized a forum for "Inclusive and Resilient Water and Sanitation in Hill Cities". The inception of the forum is timely when UN-SDG recognizes this decade as the 'Decade for Action' to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and an explicit reference to ***"Human rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment has been included in COP27 in 2022"***

The stage is now also set for on-the-ground action and the forum will play a prominent role in adopting Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of India's G20 presidency that is to be ***"inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented"***. This is also crucial as we gear up for Urban 20 (U20) that has water security and climate finance as core priorities.

## Purpose of the forum

The purpose of the 'Forum' is to bring the common voices of the states and cities of the Himalayan region together so as to act and accomplish the India's commitment to UN Sustainable Development Goals. This will enable states/cities to connect with experts through multi-disciplinary action research, knowledge & experience sharing and capacity building with the agenda of moving towards Citywide Inclusive and Resilient Sanitation.

## Potential members and participants

- State representatives
- Officials from Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)
- City's mayors

- Local NGOs, think tanks, research organizations and expert agencies with experience in working in the hilly regions
- National nodal training institutes
- Academic institutes
- Government and non-government agencies from other countries with experience in working in hills urban context.

### Constitutionalization of the forum

Moving towards constitution of this forum, the anchor institutions have carried out a series of consultation meetings with the potential stakeholders of this forum in the region; categorizing into steps shown in figure 1:

Furthermore, the 'forum has been envisaged as a state-driven platform where the member states/cities will discuss and determine the outline and functions of the forum; where states will nominate the priority cities to be taken on-board. This will include entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) along with the respective states and key institutions

to enable better cooperation and coordination. The platform can further include technical committees and working groups for better functioning. The involvement of the identified cities from all over India will be taken up in a phase-wise approach.

Following are the broad objectives of the forum's programme:-

- Formalization of the forum and setting out priorities with regard to ensuring 'Safe Water and Sanitation for All' in a hills state/city context. Constitution of a technical committee with nodal officials from each member state/city, working group and advisory group of the forum
- Development of white papers to advocate for issues and challenges relevant to hill context
- Develop an activity calendar in consultation with the member cities/states which would include knowledge sharing events, targeted research, training, technical and advisory support in priority areas.

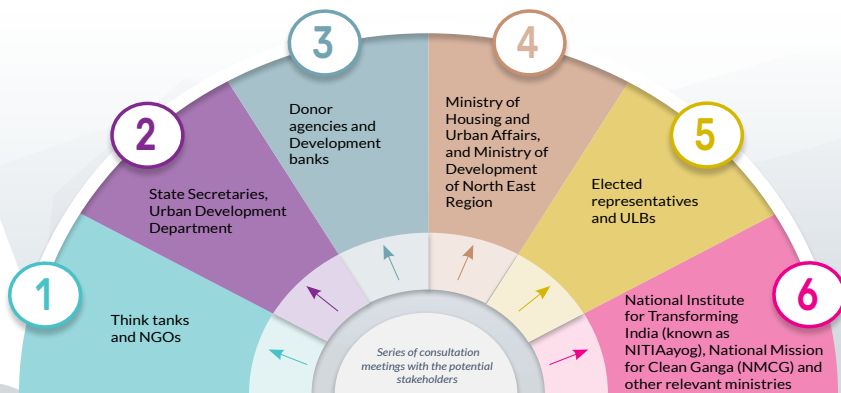
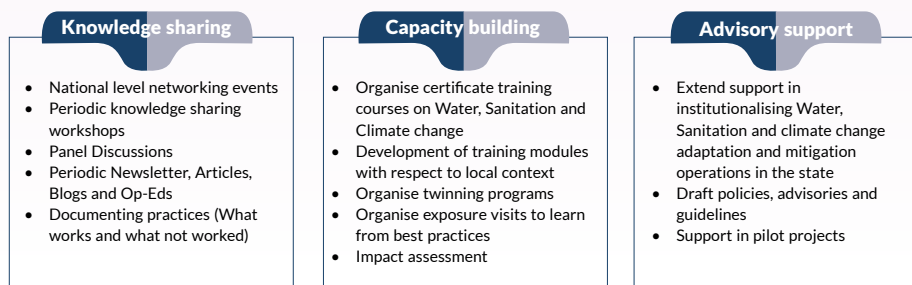


Figure 1: Series of consultation meetings with the potential stakeholders

## Proposed structure of the forum



## Key activities envisaged



### First consultation meet

As the first step towards the constitution of this forum, NIUA-BORDA South Asia started conducting a series of consultation meets/ workshops with potential stakeholders to streamline the initiative of the forum.

The first consultation meeting was conducted with more than 40 WASH and Urban sector experts working in the Himalayan and North-Eastern region of India, on 14-15 July 2022 in Leh, Ladakh. The meeting was organised by NIUA in partnership with BORDA South Asia,



Figure 2: Photographs of the programme on first consultation meet in the Leh, Ladakh (PC: SCBP/2022)

in association with Directorate of Urban Local Bodies, Union Territory, Ladakh and Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG).

The aim of the meeting was to initiate a dialogue among practitioners, think tanks and academia working in the inclusive and climate resilient urban sanitation to:

- Understand the gaps and challenges in different hill regions with respect to sanitation, septage management and climate change
- Identify the roles and responsibilities that individual organizations can play within the forum
- Conceptualize and streamline the framework of the forum.

The meeting facilitated brainstorming among the participants with regards to the proposed forum's thematic areas of work, structure, functions, roles & responsibilities, operationalisation, and financial sustainability.

Following are the key outputs of the meeting:

- Realisation of the absence of urban forum in the hilly regions was collectively echoed. Emphasis was on creating a forum which is owned by the cities, has people's involvement, inclusive and sustainable in nature and provides technical know-how on infrastructure which impacts livelihood
- A successful networking event with interdisciplinary experts who presented their views and concerns on evident climate change impact in the water and sanitation sector in the hilly areas
- A network of around 25 participating organisations working in the Hills has been created
- Identify light house cities under this forum related to climate resilience and sanitation nexus; to generate evidence and amplify the learnings in other cities based on 'One size doesn't fit all' and 'what works where'.

## State visits for Hill Forum



Figure 3: Meetings with state secretaries and directors of key public departments (PC: SCBP/2022)

## Second consultation Meet

The second consultation meet was organised in partnership with the Urban Development Department, Government of Sikkim on 2nd December, 2022 in Gangtok, Sikkim to initiate a conversation between key decision makers from the 11 states and 1 Union Territory of Himalayan and North-East states of India.

In this round of the consultation meet, the voices of the hill state officials were collated to understand the ground realities, challenges and opportunities of the hill states. The meeting helped in discussing the common future and to generate ideas/ potential solutions that can help the hill states to achieve their common goal – “a better future for the hill cities of India through the lens of inclusivity and resilience”. Following are the key outputs of the meeting:

- Major challenges relating to water and sanitation in the hill regions were discussed
- All states agreed that lack of local hill context in national missions and policies need to be addressed on priority
- With a belief that the forum will create a bridge for the collective voice of the hilly

regions to reach the policy and decision makers at the centre, the states expressed their willingness to participate in the future deliverables of the forum by signing an Endorsement Certificate.

## Operations of the forum

The Secretariat at NIUA will manage and coordinate most of the activities of the Hill forum in the initial phase. Additionally, it is expected that the member states/cities shall provide the following support to help in smooth functioning of the forum:

- Nominate a nodal officer/s for communications and facilitation of all activities related to the hill cities forum
- Implement the activities decided by collective consensus of member states/cities and through the annual calendar
- Nominate relevant staff for the capacity building programmes
- Participate in the webinars and expert talks organized by the Secretariat
- Handholding support in creating Lighthouse Cities



Figure 4: Photographs of second consultation meetings in Sikkim (PC: SCBP/2022)