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Sustainable Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region : NITI Aayog

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Preface

- Mountains cover around 27% of the Earth's land surface and contribute to the sustenance and wellbeing of 720 million people living in the mountains and billions more living downstream.
- Yet mountains are under threat from climate change, land degradation, overexploitation, and natural disasters, with potentially far-reaching and devastating consequences, both for mountain communities and downstream populations.
- The challenge is to **identify new and sustainable opportunities** that can bring benefits to both highland and lowland communities and help to eradicate poverty without contributing to the degradation of fragile mountain ecosystems (**FAO, 2018**).
- With a similar set of threats in the **Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)** and its adjoining landscapes, existing **non-climatic issues** are becoming complex as multi-faceted problems such as **human wildlife conflicts, water insecurity** due to drying of natural springs, **land degradation** and resultant socio-demographic changes (out-migration), and **environmental problems** such as solid waste and air pollution are pertinent.
- As **climate change has affected the Himalayan region**, warning signals in the form of shrinking glaciers, increasing temperatures, water scarcity, changing monsoonal patterns, and frequency of severe disasters are obvious.
- **The IHR extends** from the Indus River in the west to the Brahmaputra River in the east. The mountain ranges and river basins share trans-boundary connectedness. Six countries in the **Hindu Kush Himalayan region** share borders with India.
- For the IHR, **'Tourism'** has existed for a very long time. Apart from **pilgrimage tourism, "modern" tourism** in the IHR region, which is represented by mass tourism, largely limited to sightseeing and visiting major tourism hubs, is also putting severe stress on the ecology and ecosystem services of the Himalaya as well as on local social structures.
- While tourism is one of the main development sectors for the Himalaya and can be

the engine that drives future development in the region, this will only be possible if it is developed and implemented following **principles of sustainability**.

- This report “**Sustainable Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region**” lays out an **action-oriented path** for the development of sustainable tourism in the Himalaya, which can enhance economic and livelihood opportunities while maintaining the ecology and cultural values of the region.

Background

Tourism in Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)

- In the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) tourism has experienced continued growth and increasing diversification over the last few decades. It is expected to grow at an **average annual rate of 7.9% from 2013 to 2023**.
- For local mountain people, tourism means valuable economic and business opportunities and jobs, and for state governments and private entrepreneurs it brings revenues and profits.
- In the **11th Five-Year Plan** of India’s Planning Commission: “Tourism is the largest service industry in the country”. Its importance lies in being an instrument for **economic development and employment generation, particularly in remote and backward areas (e.g. in IHR)**.
- Moreover, the **12th Five-Year Plan** clearly recognizes **pro-poor tourism for inclusive growth**.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), mountain specific tourism is directly included as a target in Goals 8 and 12:
 - **Goal 8** on the promotion of “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth”, Target 8.9(By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products)
 - **Goal 12** aimed to “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”, Target 12.b(Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism which creates jobs, promotes local culture and products)
- **On 7 April 2017, NITI Aayog**, in association with some key national institutions and ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), set up an Action Agenda for “**Sustainable Development of Mountains of Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)**”, in which “**Sustainable Tourism in IHR**” was selected as one of the key themes.

Tourism Sector Trends and Development Paradigms

Tourism in the IHR has shown a persistent upward trend over many decades despite several natural disasters and political unrest.

Various initiatives taken by the Government to promote tourism

- **e-Visa** facility under three categories – Tourist, Medical and Business – for the citizens of 163 countries
- **Global Media Campaign** for 2017-18 on various international TV channels
- **'The Heritage Trail'** to promote the World Heritage Sites in India
- Celebration of **'Paryatan Parv'** with three components, namely **'Dekho Apna Desh'** to encourage Indians to visit their own country, **'Tourism for All'** with tourism events at sites across all states in the country, and **'Tourism and Governance'** with interactive sessions and workshops with stakeholders on varied themes.
- Under the **Swadesh Darshan scheme**, among 15 thematic circuits, a few are closely related to IHR such as the **North-East (NE) India Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, and Spiritual Circuit.**
- 'National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (**PRASHAD**) launched by the MoT with the objective of holistic development of identified pilgrimage destinations in 2017. Only three mountain states figured in planned budget (i.e. J&K, WB and Uttarakhand).

Contribution of tourism to the state economy

Trade, hotels, and restaurants are considered as contributing factors Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). As per data from RBI tourism has been contributing more than 10% to the GDP in states such as Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Tripura, Assam, and Meghalaya. The lowest contributions are in states like Arunachal Pradesh (3-4%), Sikkim (2-3%) and Nagaland (3-4%).

Potential repercussion

Barring Sikkim, all mountain states show slightly **decreasing contribution of tourism to GSDP of the state.** To some extent this may be related to fresh impetus given by central government to **multi-sectoral investments in the NER** (North Eastern Regions). It is also evident that contribution to GSDP does not necessarily become the basis for priority investments in this sector. With this it can also be assumed that tourism promotion is largely in the hands of private sector as tourists still come and are served.

Building the waste argument

With upward trends in tourist numbers to the IHR, have direct or indirect causes and effects such as pollution, overexploitation of natural resources, food insecurity, ill planned urbanization, traffic congestion, loss of indigenous culture, natural disasters, and so on.

As per the available data (2009-2012) IHR states are accumulating 22,372 metric tonnes (MT) of municipal solid waste per day. It is logical that these figures for 2017 have increased substantially given that the number of tourists to the IHR has gone up by a huge margin and

waste collection, segregation, disposal and recycling are not organized.

Good practices and examples:

- **"Waste Warriors"** in Dharamsala Town, which need to be backed up with a meticulous plan to up-scale and out-scale.
- Sikkim is a model state for promoting ecotourism products and infrastructure, solid waste management concepts and capacity building efforts but is hugely challenged by the emerging and threatening aspects of mass tourism, human-wildlife conflict, landslides, and climate change induced fires.

Condition of forests as key elements of landscape aesthetics

- Forest area loss in IHR states is a matter of concern as most tourist/pilgrim sites are located within or near to forest lands.
- **Inappropriate forms of tourism development** may add to deforestation. For instance, tourism in Uttarakhand has the highest contribution to its state GDP but conversely, the state **lost 268 sq.km of forest in a span of two years**.
- Forest cover shrinkage in Northeast India is common and, to a great extent, related to the practice of shifting cultivation.
- While **positive changes** have been reported from J&K (450 sq.km), West Bengal (23 sq.km) and Manipur (4 sq.km) is mostly due to **afforestation efforts**, often monocultures, while natural forest cover and dense canopy forest (with higher value) is decreasing.
- **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** in the matter of *Sher Singh Vs State of HP (2014)* regarded **tourism impacts** on major tourist destinations in north-western Himalaya such as **loss of good forest cover**, mounting solid waste, forest fires.
- The recent ISFR (INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT) 2017 not only repeats the scenario of forest cover loss in most of the IHR states but also shows that **forest cover loss is more severe** (e.g. Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Meghalaya). The loss of forest cover is related to **shifting cultivation practices** and now also increasingly to development investments in the NE region.

Environmental performance index (EPI) 2014

In 2014, at the global level, **India ranked very low at 155 among 178 countries**. Hence, it can be concluded that **even if states have the best formulated and inclusive policies and programmes**, their application and results on the ground counts.

World Bank survey 2015, "Ease of doing Business and Environmental Compliance"

None of the IHR states figured in the top 10. This indicates that the environment for tourism business is not necessarily favourable in the IHR and that despite the fragility of the IHR landscape, environmental compliance may have been compromised.

Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme (HIMAP, 2018, forthcoming), coordinated by ICIMOD

- Evidence-based actions to reduce disaster risk, to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to adopt good governance, are central to ensuring prosperity in the HKH (Hindu Kush Himalaya).
- The participatory visioning process identified collaboration among state and non-state actors as crucial for prosperity in the HKH in 2080.

Analysis of Supporting Policies and Plans

Brundtland Commission report (1987)

In sustainable development discourse, **Sustainable tourism** has been widely debated as a **panacea** to mass tourism and environmental degradation

The Rio Earth Summit (1992) added another chapter to sustainability by binding agreements on **biological diversity, climate change, and combating desertification**.

To understand the extent to which these 12 Himalayan states are able to address sustainable tourism practices, twelve core areas (from a draft **UNESCO Checklist for Sustainable Tourism Strategy**) were assessed:

(1) Disaster Management (2) Pollution Control (3) Visitor Control (4) Tourist Traffic Management (5) Crisis Management (6) Waste Management (7) Natural Resource and Ecology Management (8) Quality Standard/Control Mechanism (9) Tourism Enterprise Development Governance (10) Energy (11) Gender, and (12) Marketing and Branding.

Assessment of tourism in IHR based on above 12 parameters:

- In most of IHR states, **these parameters are marginally addressed** (or not at all) in policy/plan documents.
- Barring Sikkim in NER, only western Himalayan states have elaborate and inclusive policy and plan documents.
- Similarly, the tourism policies of **Nagaland and West Bengal have very marginal reference to the above indicators**.
- It also appears that **forest policies of IHR states are sector centric** and do not have aspects relating to a crosscutting set of policies and plans.
- Commonly, **industrial policy is lacking content that supports linkages with other sectoral policies** and plans in all IHR states.
- It is encouraging to see that **waste management, marketing, and branding and tourism enterprise development (governance) are largely represented**.

IHR State policies match-up with sustainable tourism indicator (UNWTO) areas

United Nations World Tourism Organization (**UNWTO**) published '**Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations: A Guidebook**' with **13 key sustainable tourism indicators**.

(1) Wellbeing of host communities, (2) Sustaining cultural assets, (3) Community participation in tourism, (4) Tourist satisfaction, (5) Health and safety, (6) Capturing economic benefits from tourism, (7) Protection of valuable natural assets, (8) Managing scarce natural resources, (9) Limiting impacts of tourism activities, (10) Controlling tourist activities and levels, (11) Destination planning and control, (12) Designing products and services, (13) Sustainability of tourism operations and services.

Assessments related to policies and plans of IHR states

- **Only West Bengal is lagging behind** in some principles such as in sustaining cultural assets, tourist satisfaction, and sustainability of tourism operations and services.
- It is reiterated that climate change brings a common factor to challenges that states are trying to meet for evolving and sustaining good practices of tourism.
- IHR has a typical **bio-physical context (e.g. fragility, marginality, and inaccessibility)**, it is also clear that there are cross-border contexts such as upstream-downstream linkages of cultures, ecosystem services, trade and markets, and services sector.

Opportunities and paradigms of the tourism sector

- **India ranks 15th in the world in terms of International Tourism Receipts**, with a share of 1.62%. India registered 8.03 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2015, an annual growth of 4.5% over the previous year.
- It is the **third highest foreign exchange earner**, after gems, jewellery, and garments (Economic Survey of India, 2018).
- India aims to create **100 million jobs through tourism** and attract **40 million foreign tourists annually in the next five years** (Union Minister K J Alphons on 23 October 2017). **At present, 14.4 million international tourists** visit India annually.
- However, in the IHR, due to **environmental fragility** (e.g. ban on green felling) tourism is not necessarily an investment friendly for the private sector.

Govt. initiative for promotion of tourism

- **Tax Incentives:** An investment-linked deduction under Section 35 AD of the Income Tax Act is in place for establishing new hotels in the 2-star category and above across India. **100% deduction on investment of capital nature** excludes land.
- **State Incentives:** Incentives offered by state governments include **subsidized land cost**, relaxation in stamp duty, exemption on sale/lease of land, **power tariff incentives, concessional rate of interest on loans**, investment subsidies/tax

incentives, backward areas subsidies and special incentive packages for mega projects; Incentives are provided for setting up projects in special areas – the North-east, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

- **Incentives from the Ministry of Tourism:** Assistance in large revenue-generating projects; Support to **Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in infrastructure development** such as **viability gap funding**; Schemes for capacity building of service provider.
- A **mobile application called ‘Swachh Paryatan’** was launched in 2016, which lets citizens report any **hygiene issues at various tourist destinations** across the country.
- The Ministry of Tourism launched the **24x7 Toll Free Multi-Lingual Tourist Helpline** in 12 languages in 2016 and it can be accessed on toll free numbers.

Trans-boundary Tourism Aspects

- **Improving living standards** in the IHR and its neighbouring countries, traditional trans-boundary pilgrimages (e.g. Kailash in Tibet, Muktinath in Nepal, Char Dham in Uttarakhand, India) are now **witnessing continuous and increasing** flow of tourists from neighbouring countries.
- Hence IHR has a clear trans-boundary and strong inter-state context as visitors and tourism actors (South Asia) are coming from beyond the borders, with **different understanding of standards of responsible tourism** and awareness of **delicate socio ecological and cultural contexts and sensitivities**.
- IHR sites are significant for their trans-boundary protected areas connect (e.g. **Askot-ANCA** on the Indo-Nepal border of the Kailash and **Kangchenjunga landscapes** between India, Nepal, and Bhutan with 19 protected areas).
- Planning for tourist destinations as **“Cross-border Circuits in IHR”** is attractive and managing such cross-border tourism is an emerging field.

Building on Cultural Paradigm

No other mountain range anywhere in world has affected the life of people and shaped the destiny of a nation as the Himalayas have with respect to India. Apart from its physical grandeur and natural splendour, and prime heritage values of culture, aesthetic beauty and sacredness, these mountains are **Asia’s Water Towers** and also known as the **“Third Pole”**.

However, there are some key concerns in the IHR:

- **Socio-demographic disincentives:** Lack of sustained economic opportunities, adoption of generic development paradigm (e.g. such as for plains of India) and inadequate outreach to local communities has brought enormous disincentives and resulted in migration of youth and men manifested in the **“Ghost Villages of**

Uttarakhand and predominantly **women headed households**. This has further eroded the cultural and social fabric of collectivism in the mountains.

- **Stewardship degradation:** Adoption of management concepts including for tourism and technologies (for road and infrastructure, construction) that are appropriate for plains has led to degradation of ecosystem services and problems such as **human-wildlife conflicts, forest fires, drying of springs** and land degradation through waste accumulation.
- **Security and national sovereignty:** As the natural and cultural legacy is fast deteriorating, **depopulation from border and remote areas to greener pastures in the urban centres is bringing a sense of social demographic alienation** with the rest of the population of 60 million. Thus sensitiveness of situation is visible in the borders as Illegal trade, wildlife trafficking etc. is increasing and cross-border connect to cultural linkages is further leading to **inter-country polarization**.
- **Synergy deficits:** As mentioned earlier, **development investments and interventions** made in IHR are **not harmonized or synchronised** so there is a lack of convergence among a host of planning and implementing institutions and networks which often leads to unsustainable models of tourism development.

Given the above scenario of IHR, sustaining the natural and cultural legacy of IHR is a massive challenge, Govt is pursuing following initiatives:

- Inclusion of **ancient knowledge and wisdom** in providing tourism services, **Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA)**, an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Culture channelizes work on the Folk and Tribal Performing Arts and Puppetry traditions of the country by organising national level festivals in various parts of the country.
- Showcasing of **festivals, folk and tribal performing art traditions** of various states of the country on the lines of cultural exchange as consolidated also by the **“Ek Bharat Shreshth Bharat”** initiative is an innovative way to add heritage value to tourism in IHR.

Best Practices

‘Making Tourism More Sustainable’ guidelines by the WTO (WTO & UNEP, 2005):

- Sustainable tourism is tourism that takes **full account of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts**, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. It is not a special form of tourism; rather, all forms of tourism may strive to be more sustainable.
- **Make optimal use of environmental resources** that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biodiversity.
- **Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities**, conserve their built

and living cultural heritage and traditional values; and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations; providing **socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed**; including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities; and contributing to poverty alleviation.

The UNEP report, **'Tourism in the Green Economy'** (WTO & UNEP, 2012):

- It makes an economic case for **investing in the greening of tourism** and provides guidance on how to mobilize such investments.
- It highlights the challenges of the growth of tourism including the sector's contribution to, **global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, excessive water consumption** compared with residential water use, **discharge of untreated water**, the generation of waste, the damage to local terrestrial and marine biodiversity and the threats to the survival of local cultures, built heritage and traditions.

TERI and Metroeconomica (2013)

It suggests introduction of a special **tourist tax**. It is collecting a modest tax in the form of a **service fee for the provision of high quality environmental services to visitors**.

Recommended Sustainability Needs in IHR

Global Sustainable Tourism Council

- **(For a Destination)**
 - **Sustainable destination strategy:** It considers environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health, and safety, and aesthetic issues; and was developed with public participation.
 - **Destination management:** It defines responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural issues.
 - **Monitoring:** The destination has a system to monitor, publicly report, and respond to environmental, economic, social, cultural, tourism, and human rights issues.
 - **Tourism seasonality management:** The destination dedicates resources to mitigate seasonal variability of tourism by identifying year-round tourism opportunities.
 - **Climate change adaptation:** It identifies risks and opportunities associated with climate change and encourage climate change adaptation strategies.
 - **Property acquisitions:** Laws and regulations regarding property acquisitions exist, are enforced, comply with communal and indigenous rights, ensure public

consultation, and do not authorize resettlement without prior informed consent and/or reasonable compensation.

- **Crisis and emergency management:** The destination has a crisis and emergency response plan that is appropriate to the destination.
- **Protection of sensitive environments:** The destination has a system to monitor the environmental impact of tourism, conserve habitats, species, and ecosystems, and prevent the introduction of invasive species
- **Solid waste reduction:** The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to reduce, reuse, and recycle solid waste.
- **(For Hotels and Tour Operators)**
 - **Legal compliance:** The organization is in compliance with all applicable local, national and international legislation and regulations including, among others, health, safety, labour and environmental aspects.
 - **Impact & Integrity:** The integrity of archaeological, cultural heritage and sacred sites has been preserved.
 - **Cultural interactions:** The organization follows international and national good practice and locally agreed guidance for the management and promotion of visits to indigenous communities and culturally or historically sensitive sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and maximize local benefits and visitor fulfilment.
 - **Exploitation and harassment:** The organization has implemented a policy against commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation or harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women, minorities and other vulnerable groups.

The adapted aims for sustainable tourism and associated actions in the IHR region

- **Economic viability:** To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to sustain prosperity and deliver benefits in the long term.
- **Local prosperity:** To maximize the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
- **Employment quality and social equity:** To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including standardized skill and entrepreneurship development, the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, disability or in other ways.
- **Visitor fulfilment:** To provide a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, disability or in other ways.
- **Community wellbeing:** To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.

- **Cultural richness, integration and mutual understanding:** To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of host communities. Respect for, and understanding of, cultural diversity between nations and peoples is a key principle of sustainable development.
- **Physical integrity:** To maintain and enhance the quality of IHR, both rural and remote, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment. It includes Carrying Capacity Management, Infrastructure, Resource Consumption, Eco-labelling, and Waste Management.
- **Mountain biological diversity:** In relation to visual impacts, most attention in the past has been paid to the quality of rural landscapes and how they affect, and are affected by, tourism. However, there should be equal concern for the integrity and aesthetic quality of built as well as natural environments in rural and urban areas.
- **Resource efficiency:** To minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.
- **Environmental purity:** To minimize the pollution of air, water and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.
- **Standards and monitoring and evaluation:** To design and implement eco-labelling standards and monitor these for measuring changes and performance to initiative timely corrective policy and practice actions.

Actions for Impacts

Action agenda for states:

- **Institutions and processes:** Create separate divisions within tourism departments to look after the key aspects of tourism and related information viz. capacity building, marketing and promotion including product development, standards, certification and guidelines.
- **Capacity building:** Design and deliver an IHR specific Awareness and sensitization package of different actors and sectors, including all key service providers and producers and unleash this information through a proactive media campaign and existing travel related websites and tourism information centres.
- **Research/science and technology:** A detailed survey of tourists should be carried out in the near future to elicit visitor perceptions on what services they are looking for and identify the gap areas. Promote new opportunities and technologies to widen the spectrum of entrepreneurship and associated skills.
- **Finance and market:** Market/State instruments for entrepreneurship and start-ups (e.g. adventure tourism, sports equipment, waste management technologies) must be encouraged by facilitating access to credit and low interest loans.
- **Planning, implementation, and monitoring:** All IHR states must link their tourism related plans and investments according to envisaged state growth models that integrate targeted private sector investments. A system to monitor and publicly report

visitor satisfaction.

- **Policy and regulations:** All key services providers must be made to follow international and national good practices and locally agreed guidance for the management and promotion of visits to indigenous communities and culturally or historically sensitive sites in order to minimize adverse impacts and maximize local benefits and visitor fulfilment.

Summing-up

Summary

- Based on the key principles outlined for sustainable tourism by World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), numerous actions have been proposed and the **implementation of actions could contribute to sustainable tourism in the IHR.**
- It requires **improved access to existing national and state funding streams** so that actions are implemented in a timely manner.
- **Enabling conditions** are to be created for the business sector to invest in conservation and in inclusive tourism business with local stakeholders as key partners.
- The **existing institutional and governance** landscape in IHR needs **to be updated** and oriented to the possibilities for developing IHR in the long term.
- **Capacity development programmes** is needed that **not only mentors future policymakers** and practitioners from public and private sector but also **enables local economic and entrepreneurship avenues** through sustainable tourism.
- If the list of **actions suggested here are incorporated into the current tourism development plans** and implemented, there is likelihood that they will contribute to conservation and development of IHR landscapes and improve the **wellbeing of people.**
- **The implementation strategy should be IHR state specific** and must be based on business plans that clearly relate to eco-labelling parameters, investment plans, and monitoring and evaluation.
- It is crucial that **climate change mitigation and adaptation actions are reflected in state and national policies** and strategic plans and investments for sustainable tourism in the IHR.