

# Mountain Forum Annual Report



2023 - 2024

## **Introduction to Mountain Forum Himalayas (MFH)**

Established in 1997, Mountain Forum Himalayas (MFH) has emerged as a visionary force dedicated to addressing the complex challenges faced by the Northern Himalayan region and its communities. With a steadfast commitment to uplifting the impoverished and marginalized, MFH fosters sustainable livelihoods, champions the fight against climate change, and fortifies the resilience of communities exposed to natural and man-made disasters. Its emphasis on empowering women and bolstering local self-governance underscores its holistic approach to regional development.

Over the years, MFH has grown into a dynamic organization, diversifying its initiatives from grassroots developmental work to specialized interventions such as emergency response and anti-human trafficking measures. It has played a crucial role in facilitating dialogue with government bodies on critical issues like climate change and disaster risk reduction while building robust alliances with like-minded organizations to amplify its impact.

A hallmark of MFH's efforts is the formation of the Mountain Collective, a multi-stakeholder platform uniting over 100 civil society organizations, 17 mass-based people's organizations, and 30 individual experts from Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. This powerful network acts as a cohesive force to address pressing issues affecting mountain communities, driving collective action to combat the climate crisis and advance social and gender justice.

MFH has been instrumental in shaping regional policy frameworks, including drafting Himachal Pradesh's state disaster management policy, establishing GO-NGO coordination committees for disaster response, and advocating for the effective implementation of Panchayati Raj policies. Its contributions to the State Climate Change Plan and grassroots poverty alleviation strategies exemplify its policy advocacy and implementation expertise.

With an ambitious vision to extend its presence across the Hindu Kush region, MFH aims to consolidate its efforts in disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation, and biodiversity conservation within the Indian Himalayas. It seeks to expand its operations from Jammu and Kashmir in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast, eventually extending its impact to Nepal and Bhutan.

MFH's collaborative efforts are bolstered by its network of partner organizations across Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, fostering capacity development and institutional strengthening at both micro and macro levels. Through its focus on grassroots engagement, MFH has effectively mobilized community-based organizations (CBOs), self-help groups (SHGs), Mahila Mandals, and youth groups, promoting people-centered development. By nurturing young leadership and integrating traditional mountain knowledge with modern conservation practices, MFH underscores the immense potential of Himalayan communities to transcend poverty and achieve sustainable development.

The organization's accomplishments include establishing Disaster Management Resource Centres, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and adopting a research-driven approach to water conservation and climate change. These initiatives not only strengthen MFH's credibility but also showcase its unwavering dedication to fostering a resilient and sustainable future for the

### **Vision**

Mountain Forum Himalayas envisions a safe and prosperous society where every section of the society can live a quality life along with economic, social and cultural development and restoration of the ecosystem.

### **Mission**

The Mountain Forum Himalayas is dedicated to advancing the rights and well-being of marginalized communities, including economically weaker sections, Dalits, women—particularly single women—and individuals with disabilities. Our mission is to foster sustainable livelihoods through the equitable use of local resources and the promotion of nature-based solutions for biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation.

We strive to strengthen resilience and sustainability in mountain regions by coordinating with government bodies and organizations for effective disaster risk reduction, relief, rescue, and rehabilitation efforts. We advocate for the integration of sustainable technologies, including artificial intelligence, to support climate-resilient and local-based initiatives.

Our platform unites voluntary organizations, people's groups, and village-level institutions to address critical issues such as environmental protection, livelihood enhancement, disaster

management, health, and education. We are committed to ensuring gender equality and inclusivity by promoting the participation of women and gender minorities in all levels of decision-making and operations.

Through good governance, enhanced information systems, and accessible resources, we aim to eliminate social and economic inequalities and encourage ongoing efforts towards sustainable development and resilience in the Himalayan region.

## **GOAL**

Assure the means of sustainable mountain development in Northern Part of Indian sub-continent in the Himalayan region.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To work towards the reduction of Himalayan vulnerability.
2. To develop the cadre of rural youth with the potential knowledge, information and skill for risk reduction in the Himalayan region, we can talk of Natural Resources management, climate change adaptations, etc. so that they can act as resource persons during idle time for their Panchayats.
3. To ensure the decrease in loss of lives, livelihood support and biodiversity for poor, underprivileged and the marginalized.
4. To ensure the effective governance system through pro-poor development policies.
5. To develop the leadership in women for effective participation in the governance system. To sensitize and create awareness among the masses about the impact of climate change in the lives of the people. When we visit our different partners we will propose steps for increasing women participation and leadership development also.

## **Key Strategies**

**Capacity and Perspective Building-** Perspective and capacity building with interventions at sensitization, information dissemination, awareness and skill building of POs, local institutions, CBOs, networks, forums and federations of CBOs, NGOs, Panchayats and individuals are important strength for MFH to strengthen collective efforts at micro and macro level thereby facilitating pro-poor changes at different levels. We orient them on the issues.

**Networking, Alliance Building & Policy Influencing-** Networking and alliance building as a key strategy of focus will be strengthened to have large participation of different individual or institutions, networks, etc for undertaking advocacy and for influencing policy at different levels thereby enhancing MFH's reach and effectiveness in its work area.

**Research, Documentation & Publication-** Research, Documentation and sharing of learning will be strengthened to harness people's opinion and capacities to facilitate policy influencing work, promote people-centered advocacy and strengthen overall empowerment process. Information will be disseminated both at micro and macro level through "Resource Centers" (Information Centers) established by MFH.

**Issue Based Intervention-** MFH will key watch on emerging development issues, which are likely to affect people's life in the Himalayan region at a large scale. MFH will intervene accordingly to deal with the matter with collective effort of all stakeholders.

### **Focus Area**

Forum identified few core areas for its work, after a careful analysis of ground situation which needed action and interaction through intensive work.

- ❖ Climate Change
- ❖ Disaster Management- Disaster Risk Reduction, Emergency Relief, Recovery, and Rehabilitation
- ❖ Sustainable and climate resilient Livelihood
- ❖ Community Skilling, Resilient Technology, and Enterprise Building
- ❖ Gender Mainstreaming

### **Activities of Mountain Forum Himalayas (MFH)**

Mountain Forum Himalayas (MFH) has played an instrumental role in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Himalayan communities. Its initiatives span five thematic areas, reflecting a deep commitment to fostering resilience, sustainability, and equity in the region. The detailed description of its activities highlights the organization's extensive efforts to uplift marginalized communities, enhance disaster preparedness, and promote sustainable development.

## **1. Institutional Strengthening**

MFH prioritizes building a robust organizational framework that enhances its internal structures and operations to effectively address the dynamic challenges of the Himalayan region.

- **Vision Building Exercise:**

Held in May 2023 in Dehradun, this pivotal workshop brought together stakeholders to reassess MFH's mission, vision, and strategic goals. The exercise was conducted in light of evolving socio-political and environmental contexts, including government policy changes and new challenges faced by voluntary organizations. Participants collaboratively evaluated MFH's past successes and identified strategies to foster community resilience and adaptive governance. The recalibrated vision emphasizes accountability, inclusivity, and grassroots empowerment, setting the stage for future-focused initiatives.



- **Capacity Development Initiatives:**

Through continuous training programs and workshops, MFH enhances the skills and capabilities of its staff, partner organizations, and community-based entities, ensuring a more responsive and efficient approach to its mission.

## **2. Policy and People-Centered Advocacy**

MFH advocates for policies and practices that center around the needs and aspirations of Himalayan communities, particularly marginalized groups. Its advocacy efforts emphasize inclusivity and grassroots participation.

### **Gender Equality and Justice Campaigns:**

- *At National Inter College, Nand Prayag*, MFH engaged schoolchildren in discussions about gender discrimination and its societal impacts. Through visual aids, interactive sessions, and a collective pledge, the campaign inspired young minds to become advocates for gender equality.



- **Water Conservation in Chidiyali Village:**

In collaboration with organizations such as HIMCON and Uttarakhand Jan Jagriti Samiti, MFH undertook efforts to restore traditional water sources like spring sheds and Khals in

Chidiyali village. These initiatives addressed a decade-long water crisis and involved community-driven activities like tree planting to ensure the sustainability of water resources. Villagers actively participated, demonstrating a renewed commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability.



### **3. Resource Support for Combating Himalayan Disasters**

Recognizing the vulnerability of Himalayan communities to natural disasters, MFH has developed comprehensive programs to enhance disaster preparedness and mitigation.

- **School Safety Programmes:**

In October 2023, MFH conducted disaster preparedness programs across schools in Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, coinciding with National Disaster Reduction Day. The initiative included risk assessments, safety audits, and the formation of School Disaster Management Committees (SDMCs). Students and teachers participated in mock drills, first-aid training, and hazard mapping activities. The program empowered over 8,000 students and 1,000 teachers, fostering a culture of disaster resilience in educational institutions.





- **Support for Flash Flood Survivors:**

MFH collaborated with community-based organizations (CBOs) and voluntary organizations (VOs) to provide emergency relief to flash flood survivors in Shimla, Kangra, and Kullu districts of Himachal Pradesh, as well as Uttarkashi and Tehri Garhwal districts of Uttarakhand. Aid included shelter homes, food supplies, and livelihood opportunities to support long-term recovery.

- **Climate-Resilient Livelihoods Campaign:**

A widespread awareness campaign in Uttarakhand engaged over 1,500 farmers in workshops and field demonstrations. The campaign provided practical knowledge about sustainable agricultural practices, water conservation, and disaster risk reduction, helping farmers adapt to climate change while ensuring economic stability.

#### **4. Child Protection and Combating Human Trafficking**

MFH addresses critical issues of child labor and human trafficking, especially in vulnerable border regions.

##### **Prevention of Child Labor and Trafficking in Banwasa:**

In November 2023, MFH partnered with Aapar to conduct a cross-border event on preventing child exploitation and trafficking. This program brought together stakeholders from India and Nepal to discuss alarming trends and formulate solutions. Discussions emphasized the importance of public awareness, government accountability, and cross-border collaboration. Stakeholders highlighted actionable insights, such as scheduling future events on holidays to maximize participation and using inclusive language for broader reach.

##### **Community Engagement for Child Protection:**

MFH consistently engages local communities in dialogues and awareness campaigns to strengthen surveillance and capacity-building efforts, ensuring the safety and rights of children.

#### **5. Mountain Livelihood Development**

Sustainable livelihoods are central to MFH's efforts in addressing poverty and ensuring community resilience.

- **Climate Change Awareness Competitions:**

At a school in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, MFH organized poster-writing competitions to educate students about the impacts of climate change and inspire them to adopt sustainable practices.

- **Training for Sustainable Livelihoods:**

MFH's campaigns across multiple districts in Uttarakhand trained farmers in climate-resilient practices, such as water resource management and eco-friendly agricultural techniques. These efforts contributed to a significant shift towards environmentally conscious and economically viable livelihoods.



6. **Quarterly AGM Meetings:**

Through regular meetings, MFH evaluated and implemented livelihood programs in collaboration with government bodies, NGOs, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. These programs focus on disaster-affected communities, offering holistic support and rebuilding opportunities.