

Initiative 2: Himalayan Young Researchers' Forum

Connecting Researchers to bring Transformation in Research Culture across Himalaya

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Background

The Himalaya, on account of its vastness, complexity and spatio-temporal variability, holds a special position among global mountains and represents a unique system for research and development. However, remoteness, difficult terrain, lack of resources and infrastructure have greatly hampered the extent and quality of research in the region. Especially, in recent years when opportunities for laboratory-based researches have increased in mainland India, a continuous decline in the number of motivated and sincere field researchers is causing a grave concern in the region.¹ In this context, it is also pertinent to take note of IPCC (2007) report which states this region to be a 'white spot' – read as data-deficient region.²

The workshop on "Mountain Specific Research in the Context of Himalaya", jointly organized by G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment & Development (GBPIHED),

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and Indian National Science Academy (INSA) during 19–20 November 2013, after extensive deliberations on possibilities for promoting research culture in the Himalaya, among others, recommended: (i) for devising strong incentive mechanisms to overcome the dearth of dedicated researchers to pursue research in the region, and (ii) the need for establishing networks to strengthen inter- and multi-disciplinarity to foster quality research. Subsequently, a strong need for motivating and mentoring young researchers in the Himalaya was also flagged during the workshop "Unlocking Potential of Youth in Context of Changing Climate in the Indian Himalayan Region" (28–30 April 2014), organized by Central Himalayan Environment Association (CHEA) wherein GBPIHED acted as a knowledge partner.

Considering the above and realizing that motivated and dedicated young researchers can alter the scenario, GBPIHED as a nodal Research & Development organization for Indian

Box 1

Scientists who attain a PhD are rightly proud — they have gained entry to an academic elite. But it is not as elite as it once was. The number of science doctorates earned each year grew by nearly 40% between 1998 and 2008, to some 34,000, in countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)...

...In 2004, India produced around 5,900 science, technology and engineering PhDs, a figure that has now grown to some 8,900 a year. This is still a fraction of the number from China and the United States, and the country wants many more, to match the explosive growth of its economy and population. The government is making major investments in research and higher education... The hope is that up to 20,000 PhDs will graduate each year by 2020...

Excerpts from the report by David Cyranoski, Natasha Gilbert, Heidi Ledford, Anjali Nayar and Mohammed Yahia in *Nature* Vol. 472 (2011).

¹ Negi GCS, Rawal RS, Sharma S, Kumar K & Dhyani PP (2014). Need for strengthening mountain specific research. *Current Science* 106(5):659–661.

² IPCC (2007). Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change, Assessment Report 4.

Himalayan Region (IHR) has made a humble beginning by way of starting a New Initiative "**Himalayan Young Researchers' Forum**".

The Forum

Under above initiative, among others, the Institute would attempt to institutionalize a mechanism of active and sustained interaction amongst young researchers of different Himalayan States by organizing the Himalayan Young Researchers' Forum each year as a prelude to Institute's annual day event.

The Himalayan Young Researchers' Forum (Him-YRF) intends to offer a platform for dialogue and reflections amongst budding researchers in the region. It also attempts to provide an environment to freely discuss research topics and methodologies, share and develop ideas, learn from each other and obtain guidance from experts - the mentors. The forum aims to bring together researchers from across the Himalaya and from diverse disciplines to discuss their work, gain insight into new research approaches from other disciplines, and also identify synergies for partnership building and future collaborations.

The objectives

Broad objectives of the forum include the following:

- To ensure engagement of young researchers towards establishing inter-disciplinary dialogue
- To motivate and inspire researchers to pursue quality research through mentoring and skill building opportunities
- To develop a well-informed and enlightened constituency of stakeholders to act as future research leaders

The Outcomes

The envisaged outcomes of this forum include:

- **Development of a functional network of Himalayan Young Researchers** that promotes synergy and facilitates exchange of information and knowledge amongst researchers who are currently pursuing studies in isolation.
- **Establishment of effective linkages between Mentors and Young Researchers** that promotes interaction and helps in exploring skill building opportunities for the Young Researchers.
- **Synthesis of the knowledge base of researchers on the multiple subject areas** to (i) analyse trends of ongoing research and identification of gaps and priorities; (ii) contribute towards understanding response patterns of Himalayan bio-physical and socio-cultural systems towards changing scenario; (ii) provide inputs for working out best possible options for natural resource management and livelihood promotion; and (iii) find possible solutions to ensure sustainability of ecosystems and improve quality of human life in the region.

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