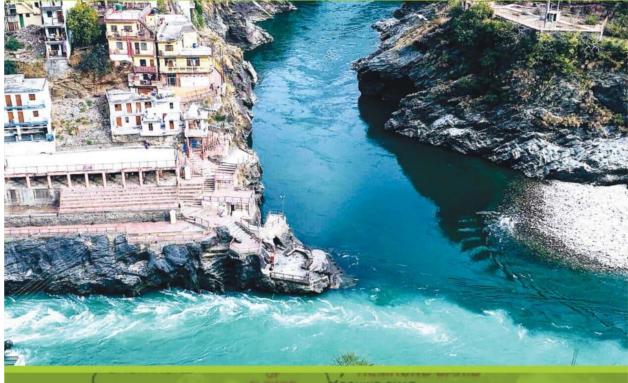
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

for CounterMEASURE ||

Plastic Waste Management On The Ganga Basin In Uttarakhand





Report

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on the Ganga Basin in Uttarakhand

for

The CounterMEASURE II Project of UNEP and its partner organizations

Under

A Small Scale Funding Agreement between UNEP and Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI)

Executed by

Sustainable Development Forum of Uttaranchal (SDFU)

Tuesday, November 16, 2021
Activity Centre
Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University (HNBGU)
Srinagar, District Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 Nagar Palika Office Uttarkashi, District Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand

Introduction

Being the land and abode of Gods, Uttarakhand has historically been a major destination for millions of pilgrims and nature lovers from India and elsewhere. In earlier times, due to limited means of transport and infrastructure facilities, the number of pilgrims was much less to the holy pilgrimage sites.

With the expansion of physical infrastructure, the number of tourists and pilgrims visiting the state has multiplied manifolds. As per the 2019-2020 Statistical Diary of the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Planning Department, Government of Uttarakhand 3.69 Crore (36.9 Million) pilgrims and tourists (nearly three times that of the state population) came to Uttarakhand in 2018 and many of them traveled to *Chardhams*, the famous shrines of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri located along the Ganga basin. This number is projected to reach 6.7 Crore (67 Million) by 2026 according to the Uttarakhand Economic Survey 2018-2019 Volume II.

With the steep rise in the number of visitors, the capability of eco-systems to sustain the human pressure is stretched beyond its limit. The state is already very fragile in terms of biophysical environment and prone to landslides, floods and other hazards. Unplanned growth of towns, hotels and other infrastructure particularly along the Chardham route i.e. within Ganga basin has made the situation grimmer.

One of the key concerns of this unplanned development is the state of Solid and Plastic Waste Management systems and practices. Incidentally, most towns in the state have never had a robust waste collection and management system. A much bigger area falls in the Ganga basin category and is dotted with restaurants, dhabas, dharamshalas, hotels and business establishments where tourists and pilgrims en-route to hills halt for overnight stays, take meals or snacks or simply rest on their trips.

In the absence of any concrete waste management systems and lack of awareness, the entire Ganga basin is rapidly getting engulfed by heaps of non-biodegradable waste leading to pollution of terrestrial as well as aquatic ecosystems. It is high time that the policy makers as well as the general public of the state wake up and take concrete actions to curb this alarming situation.

Background and Role of IMI and SDFU

Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) is a civil society led network platform with the mission to mainstream concerns of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) and its people in the development dialogue of India. It functions as a platform to integrate the knowledge and experiences of multiple stakeholders working across the IHR, and uses this to inform and influence the process of sustainable mountain development at the national and state levels.

IMI's key mission is to inform policy, integrate mountain knowledge and experience and finally generate action on ground.

The Sustainable Development Forum of Uttaranchal (SDFU) is the Uttarakhand chapter of IMI and functions as a collective forum for people from all walks of life who would like to contribute to the cause of mountains in Uttarakhand.

Several noted scholars, development professionals and subject experts amongst others have come together to establish SDFU in Uttarakhand. The Forum adopts a collaborative approach through its research, seminars and advocacy and works closely with the state government, academia and research organizations, civil society, media and others to fulfill its vision and mission.

Background and Objectives of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):

In order to develop a workable model of plastic free Ganga basin and appropriate plastic pollution mitigation strategy, and as per the small scale grant agreement (SGA) signed between the UNEP and its partner organizations, the SDFU conducted two FGDs in Uttarakhand.

The key background and objective behind the FGD were to capture the diverse experiences, impressions and ideas of various stakeholder groups regarding the critical issue of plastic pollution in the Ganga Basin in Uttarakhand. It is with these goals in mind that two FGDS were conducted in Srinagar, District Pauri Garhwal and in the town of Uttarkashi in district Uttarkashi on November 16 and November 17, 2021 respectively. Key outcomes were shared during the recently held Mountain Legislator's Meet (MLM), a part of the Sustainable Development Mountain Summit X (SMDSX) in Darjeeling on November 20, 2021.

Prior to conducting the FGDs, SDFU had organized an Inception Meet in Dehradun on September 28, 2021. Government functionaries, community based organizations and experts associated with plastic waste management deliberated on the grave challenges due to unmanaged plastic waste in

Uttarakhand and in the Ganga Basin. This was followed up with a Stakeholder Mapping report from Uttarakhand that was completed during the month of October 2021. The FGDs have flown out of the above two initiatives and are in continuation of the above initiatives.

The choice of Srinagar and Uttarkashi as the venue for the two FGDs was a careful and well thought out decision. The mighty Ganga flows out of the Gaumukh glacier in district Uttarkashi and winds its way down to the plain region in Uttarakhand and beyond. It is known as the Bhagirathi before it merges with the Alaknanda river in the holy town of Devprayag, located approximately 70 Kilometres from Rishikesh on the Rishikesh-Badrinath highway. It is at Devprayag on the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers, the two headstreams that the Ganga takes its shape and flows further down on its course.

The Bhagirathi river originates from Gaumukh Glacier and flows about 193 kms before merging with Alaknanda to form river Ganga at Devprayag. It lies in the Garhwal region with a basin area of about 6,921 square km. The headwaters of Bhagirathi river are formed at Gaumukh, perched at an elevation of 3,892 metres above sea level, at the foot of Gangotri glacier and Khatling glaciers in the Garhwal Himalayas. Various tributaries joining Bhagirathi are Kedar Ganga at Gangotri, Jadh Ganga at Bhaironghati, Kakora Gad and Jalandhari Gad near Harsil, Siyan Gad near Jhala, Asi Ganga near Uttarkashi and Bhilangna river near Old Tehri.

The river Alaknanda rises at the confluence of Satopanth and Bhagirathi Kharak glacier in Uttarakhand and meets the Sarasvati river tributary at Mana, India, 21 km from Tibet. Three kilometres below Mana the Alaknanda flows past the Hindu pilgrimage centre of Badrinath. It further meets the river Bhagirathi at Devprayag and continues as river Ganga. It lies in Garhwal region of Uttarakhand and is 195 kms long. The basin area is about 10,882 sq km.

Several rivers in the Garhwal region merge with the Alaknanda at places called prayag or 'holy confluence of rivers'. Various tributaries joining river Alaknanda are:

- 1. Dhauliganga river at Vishnuprayag
- 2. Nandakini river at Nandaprayag
- 3. Pindar river at Karnaprayag
- 4. Mandakini river at Rudraprayag, and finally it meets
- 5. Bhagirathi river at Devprayag

Uttarkashi and Srinagar are the two biggest towns on the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers. Uttarkashi is the district headquarter while Srinagar is the biggest hill town in the entire state of Uttarakhand. Srinagar is the hub of education and houses the Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University (HNBGU). Srinagar is slated to become the first Nagar Nigam in the hill region in Uttarakhand. Currently, the eight (8) Nagar Nigams of Uttarakhand are all cities in the plain region of the state viz. Dehradun, Haridwar, Roorkee, Rishikesh, Kotdwar, Haldwani, Kashipur and Rudrapur.

Process, Partnerships and Participation:

The two FGDs were conducted with the support of Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University which is the sole Central Government University in Uttarakhand. An associate organization of the HNBGU, Sristhi Samajik Sangathan, an Uttarkashi based civil society organization, was also involved in hosting the FGD in Uttarkashi. We would like to place on record the support extended by Dr. Prabhakar Badoni, Director, Pauri Campus, HNBGU who spearheaded the two programs and extended able support to SDFU in the conduct of the FGDs. Mr. Anoop Nautiyal, Member travelled to Srinagar and Uttarkashi on behalf of SDFU. He was accompanied by Mr. Pyare Lal and Mr. Praveen Upreti, both volunteers associated with the SDFU.

As stated above, the key background and objective behind the FGD were to first hand capture the diverse experiences, impressions and ideas of various stakeholder groups. These include elected representatives (urban and rural both), village representatives, Vyapar Mandal (local business forum) functionaries, faith leaders, community based organizations (NGOs), government officials, academicians, school owners and teachers, resort operators, senior citizens, college going students, youth artists and other participants.

The two FGDs were well attended with 42 and 39 people in attendance in Srinagar and Uttarkashi respectively (total 81). Women and youth participation was high and adequate opportunities were provided to all to express views, share experiences and suggest a way ahead. The overall excitement levels during the FGD participation were very high and it was clearly apparent that there is a pent up, people centric demand for improved plastic and waste management systems and structures. This is a positive observation. UNEP, IMI and SDFU have a great opportunity to build on this momentum while supporting authorities and citizen groups in coming up with sustainable plastic waste management efforts in the Ganga Basin in Uttarakhand.

SoFGDs: Contextualizing the 8 (Eight) Pillars

In order to develop a workable model of plastic free Ganga basin and appropriate plastic pollution mitigation strategy, and as per the small scale grant agreement (SGA) signed between the UNEP and its partner organizations, the FGDs were based on the 8 (eight) pillar FGD framework developed by UNEP and TERI. These are the foundational pillars under which FGDS were required to be held to capture aspects of plastic waste management prevalent in the local, regional landscape.

The social pillar is meant to examine the forces that influence the social behaviour towards sustainable consumption, waste generation and its management through awareness generation, source segregation, informal sector integration and others. It was not a surprise to notice that the vast majority of inputs that came from the 80 plus participants across all age groups in Srinagar and Uttarkashi were a part of the first, social pillar.

The policy, rules and regulation and implementation pillars largely look at government support in terms of the existing policies and their implementation. This pillar attracted quite a few inputs during the two FGDs given the engagement of most participants with government organizations and their functionaries.

The institutional framework pillar that relates to role and responsibilities led to invigorating conversations with particular reference to the role of Nagar Palikas in Srinagar and Uttarkashi. While it is true that the town based Nagar Palika is the key local institution responsible for waste management, the participants were unaware about the role and responsibilities of other institutions like the Urban Development Directorate and/or the State Pollution Control Board.

The economic and financing instruments pillar encouraged several participants to come up with ideas on establishing linkages of waste with wealth, entrepreneurship and self-employment.

The research and data pillar is to look at the component of research to strengthen plastic waste management. Not surprisingly, there was quite a bit of interest in this component in Srinagar due to the academic and research flavour of several participants.

Given the highly localized nature of the FGDs, the other remaining pillars of international cooperation and technology did not elicit any specific responses from the participants.

FGD: Participant Voices

The participants were encouraged to make comments during the course of the discussions. Their key inputs were documented and have been organized to present the overall picture that emerged from the two FGDs. The comments have been further segregated based on the FGD foundational pillars.

Social Pillar:

- 1. The issue of plastic waste management is a grave issue.
- 2. Plastics are dangerous for the Himalayas and whatever is dangerous for the Himalayas is dangerous for the nation.
- 3. Devbhoomi Uttarakhand is land of Gods. There is a need to emotionally connect people with their roots for anti plastic movements.
- 4. Segregation is the key and the solution. Segregation should start in our towns.
- 5. There is a need for greater awareness regarding plastic waste particularly plastic bags and namkeen, biscuit packets. (MLP).
- 6. Periodic appeals should be made to people to support the anti plastic movement
- 7. People need to be self aware and take individual responsibilities.
- 8. We are taking rallies and engaging in campaigns, but are often not following ourselves.
- 9. Most people are not listening to appeals to use fabric bags.
- 10. All waste is ultimately flowing in the Ganga river.
- 11. Animals eating plastic packaged packets at waste dump sites is cruel and inhuman for them.
- 12. Awareness has limited utility (only one comment of this nature example people have stopped wearing masks in spite of massive awareness).
- 13. Many organizations have come to clean Gangotri but there has been limited impact since they lack long term perspective.
- 14. Focus on change should be through the mother.
- 15. Educate children at a young age.
- 16. There is a need to involve local influencers while launching awareness campaigns.

Social Pillar Recap and SDFU Observations: The situation is ripe for initiating long-term and impactful awareness sessions in the Ganga Basin. Most participants highlighted the need for greater awareness and outreach amongst citizens. Given the youthful character of Uttarakhand; it is suggested that targeted campaigns be initiated at school, college and university levels. Social media can play a big role in awareness campaigns while talks, training programs and capacity building efforts can be directed towards authorities and bulk waste generators.

Policies, Rules and Regulations and Implementation Pillar:

- 17. Government should enforce regulations that prohibit manufacturing of plastic packaged products.
- 18. Government policies exist but their implementation is weak and irregular.
- 19. Governments and administrative authorities need to do more on the plastic waste management front.
- 20. Bans have had limited impact.
- 21. It is wrong to only penalize business owners and shopkeepers for using plastic bags.
- 22. Tourists and people should be discouraged from getting plastic from Rishikesh onwards (stop the flow of plastic from entry points).
- 23. Why would the corporations listen to concerned citizen voices?
- 24. Plastic waste reduction and similar initiatives should be a part of the education curriculum.

Policies, Rules and Regulations and Implementation Pillar Recap and SDFU Observation: Policy implementation is lax and citizens don't have the confidence that the various policies, rules and regulations in place are able to achieve their stated objectives. Integration of various government departments in the Ganga Basin, sustained capacity building and dedicated hand holding could be the mechanisms to ensure launch of new policies while improving the implementation of existing rules and regulations. Many participants were of the view that the source of plastic pollution should be halted at the source i.e at the manufacturing stage itself.

Institutional Framework Pillar:

- 25. The existing institutions of Nagar Palikas are weak and need strengthening.
- 26. No space is available and no land is available for waste management.
- 27. People, businesses, safai karamcharis and Nagar Palika are at loggerheads and in a non supportive mode (Uttarkashi)
- 28. Government and administrative authorities need to do more.
- 29. Segregation is not taking place, people give mixed waste to the Palika.
- 30. It is difficult for the Nagar Palika to segregate mixed waste.
- 31. Even if few people segregate, Nagar Palika mixes it.
- 32. Dustbins distributed by Nagar Palika for segregation are being used for storing dal-chawal (lentils-rice) by people.
- 33. Many citizens refuse to pay monthly fees for waste collection.
- 34. Where to dump the waste is a big challenge
- 35. All waste is finally flowing into the Ganga river.
- 36. There is a need to revitalize Village Health & Sanitation Committees.

Institutional Framework Pillar Recap and SDFU Observation: Uttarakhand needs one small town success story, one Ganga basin hill town model that can be showcased for other towns like the much touted Indore or Surat model of waste management. The basics are lacking, land availability is limited/unavailable, segregation is not taking place and the various stakeholders are at loggerheads. Adoption of one town like Srinagar for a period of three years and then showcasing that turnaround for other Ganga towns is a potential solution.

Economic & Financing Instruments Pillar:

- 37. Waste is income and employment.
- 38. It is important to establish income generation linkages with waste.
- 39. It is important to exhibit that garbage is employment and there are entrepreneurial opportunities in the domain of waste management.
- 40. There is a need for financial incentives.

Economic & Financing Instruments Pillar and SDFU Observation: The awareness and capacity building campaigns and programs can be tailored to indicate the above linkages of waste and wealth. Cost effective waste

management infrastructure that is suitable for the landscape and populations for the Ganga Basin towns can be identified. Subsidized investments in such infrastructure involving local entrepreneurs can be a win, win solution for all.

Research & Data Pillar:

- 41. It can't be business as usual anymore.
- 42. There should be access to funds for people and institutions who want to work in the area of plastic waste management.
- 43. There is a need to develop a holistic perspective regarding plastic waste while integrating education, research, science and training.
- 44. There is a need for new and fresh solutions to reduce plastic waste.
- 45. Local alternatives need to be identified and promoted (mallu ka patey, bamboo products, leaf plates, agro composite products from chir pine needles etc).
- 46. It is extremely important to look at substitutes when we are looking at minimizing plastic waste.
- 47. There is a lack of alternatives. Such alternatives based on local resources need to be developed.
- 48. Industry should push actively for new materials and new chemicals.

Research & Data Pillar and SDFU Observation: Dehradun has an abundance of Central Govt. institutions. There are innumerable universities and colleges in the state. This ecosystem is fertile to encourage research in the domain of plastic waste management. Till date, there have been no noticeable efforts by any startups, students or academicians to look for solutions in the domain of plastic waste management; either in science or in the rich culture and natural environment of the state. With the right kind of support, research based initiatives can be encouraged.

Recommendations:

Many of the recommendations for a robust, efficient and sustainable plastic waste management system in the Ganga basin in Uttarakhand stem out from the extensive Focus Group Discussions and are listed in the above SDFU observations. In each of the pillars that were discussed, there are possibilities for both action and improvements. Today; even with a lot of good intentions a lot of work is taking place in silos. What is then needed is an anchoring role and an anchoring institution that can weave together and bring all players on one single, unified platform.

Uttarakhand, given the special significance that it holds for millions across the country and across the world offers immense opportunities to put together a plastic waste management model that can be a template for other regions to follow. Uttarakhand is a unique land given its wide geographical diversity with mountains, glaciers, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, rivers, forests, valleys, hillside villages, towns and bustling cities in the plains. Its economic character and social fabric with tourism, education, environmentalism, spirituality and nationalism (for instance, thousands are in the armed and paramilitary forces) makes Uttarakhand a dynamic state that is on the go. Yet, with all its promises and potential, plastic waste and its management remain a mammoth challenge. It is thus important to evaluate recommendations in Uttarakhand from the holistic lens of the Ganga basin

- 1. Segregation is the basis for any waste management program, policy and/or practice. Segregation levels remain abysmally low in Uttarakhand. One of the first steps is to ensure that communities, businesses and authorities deeply and clearly understand their duties and responsibilities. Each stakeholder in the state has a role to play, each role as important as the other. Until the time we don't enforce, and then start practicing segregation as a habit; our efforts at plastic waste management will remain patchy. Thus, segregation should be the holy grail around which Uttarakhand needs to build its strong and sustainable edifice of plastic waste management.
- 2. Uttarakhand needs to have citizen and tourist friendly infrastructure. A lot of the work has to happen around both the hardware as well as the software of plastic waste. We have examples to observe, to get inspired from. The nation-wide Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has done wonders with both building toilets and facilitating behaviour change. It has widely preached and practiced nudge theory. Similar efforts at creating suitable infrastructure and then creating a *jan-andolan*, a people's movement is the need of the hour.
- 3. The state and the Ganga basin need adequate resources to implement solutions. Often, resources are scarce and unavailable. This can be partly offset by introducing the concept of "polluter pays principle" at an individual level by introducing "eco cess" for tourists and pilgrims. The entire process needs to be simple, easy to implement and free of loopholes to plug leakages. An eco-cess of this nature will empower state authorities to embark on ambitious programs of plastic waste management. It can provide them much needed resources that can then be deployed to make their regions plastic free.

- 4. "Vocal for Local" is the mantra that resonates loudly across India. This philosophy can be adopted and adapted for the issue of plastic waste management in the Ganga basin in Uttarakhand. Given the size, scale and costs associated with transportation of plastic waste from the upper Himalayan Region to towns like Rishikesh and Haridwar, and then onwards to other regions; it would be prudent to look at local collection, local value addition and local use. For instance, making products like tiles using MLP could be a localised solution. This will not only generate local employment but will also reduce the carbon footprint associated with transporting humongous amounts of plastic waste.
- 5. "UNEP Uttarakhand Plastic Yodha" UNEP could consider recognizing one Uttarakhand Plastic Yodha on an annual basis. The Plastic Yodha would be a brand ambassador, a spokesperson for UNEP for its various initiatives to reduce single use plastic in Uttarakhand. IMI and SDFU would be delighted to partner with UNEP for this community recognition effort that is bound to create positive impact and generate awareness amongst the masses.

We would like to share the recent example of UNDP and the Centre for Public Policy and Good Governance, Government of Uttarakhand. The two have jointly launched the "SDG Uttarakhand Goalkeeper Award 2021". The award aims to identify and recognize the remarkable initiatives of various individuals and organizations in Uttarakhand and declare them as "SDG Goalkeepers". It's goal is to create awareness, facilitate innovations and promote innovative practices as solutions for the development of the state in line with the SDG principles.

The efforts of Ms Jyotsna Sitling, an IFS Officer makes for an inspiring, local story. It is initiatives such as these that could qualify for the "UNEP Uttarakhand Plastic Yodha" award. If Ms Sitling had not taken the initiatives to engage deeply with local communities at the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve in district Chamoli in Uttarakhand as the Director of the Reserve in the start of 2002, an entire mountain region would have been left to deteriorate into a plastic garbage dump.

Ms Sitling noticed quite early that the breathtaking region full of trails was stinking with plastic waste. She decided to start vigorous campaigns by involving the local community. She called for a garbage collection initiative by the community and they responded by collecting 15 truckloads of garbage weighing up to 50 tonnes. The entire lot was sent for recycling and the valley started getting rid of its pollutants.

Ms Sitling took various efforts like regulating the unorganized shops that were major sources of plastic pollution, establishing ECO Development Committees of the local stakeholders and implemented eco fees systems. Such local initiatives involving the communities and ushering in societal transformation need amplification in the current context. UNEP may consider conceptualising and supporting some such initiatives in the Ganga Basin. IMI and SDFU will be more than pleased to extend support for such efforts.

Focus Group Discussion On

"Plastic Waste Management on the Ganga basin in Uttarakhand"

CounterMEASURE II - UNEP

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Focus Group Discussion On "Plastic Waste Management on the Ganga Basin in Uttarakhand"

CounterMEASURE-2, UNEP 16 November, 2021

HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar, Uttarakhand

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Focus Group Discussion On "Plastic Waste Management on the Ganga basin in Uttarakhand"

CounterMEASURE II - UNEP

Uttarkashi, District Uttarkashi Uttarakhand 17 November, 2021

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Focus Group Discussion
On
"Plastic Waste Management on the Ganga Basin in Uttarakhand"

CounterMEASURE-2, UNEP 17 November, 2021

Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand

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Uttarkashi, District Uttarkashi 17 November, 2021

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Srinagar Focus Group Discussion Photos 16 November, 2021













Uttarkashi Focus Group Discussion Photos 17 November, 2021









Shri Ramesh Semwal, Chairman, Uttarkashi Nagar Palika and Smt Sudha Gupta, former Chairwoman, Uttarkashi Nagar Palika addressing the FGD



Shri Ramesh Semwal, Chairman, Uttarkashi Nagar Palika at the UNEP IMI SDFU FGD