

To,

Dated: 06.08.2023

Smt. Droupadi Murmu,  
Hon'ble President of India.

**Representation regarding July Flood disaster in Himachal Pradesh**

Respected Madam,

We are social and environmental activists advocating for ecologically and geo-physically sensitive development practices in the Himalayan regions since decades. We have worked all our life for social and environmental issues in Himachal and Himalayas and writing to share our experiences about the ongoing situation in the state.

The devastation caused by the floods across Himachal Pradesh this July, particularly during 8-11 July, was unprecedented. While the Himalayan rivers have a history of floods, the scale and intensity of this year's disaster, particularly in Beas River Basin, raise several questions for development activities and related planning in the state. Major observations after closely monitoring the on-ground situation in this respect is as follows:

- Although week-long continuous rains were usual in the past also, the volume of muck and debris carried in floodwaters this year was major impact enhancing factor. When such a large volume of water flows along with the debris and muck, it gains significant destructive power, causing severe devastation, and overflow into populated area beyond normal flood-limits due to raising of riverbed. This muck has been majorly dumped during the construction activities of NHAI Kiratpur-Manali Four Lane and other hillside link roads under state government, along with hydel projects spread across the river basins. The dumping of such high volume of muck downhill into the rivers, along with cutting of hills, is being carried out unscientifically without proper management of dumping sites and without proper geographical consideration to expedite the pace of project construction.
- The process of road-construction is completely inimical to the nature of Indian Himalayas. Especially the current method of vertical hill cutting along several stretches during road widening, has increased landslides, thus, leading longer delays in traffic movement and enhanced threat to commuters. Not only the unscientific method of road construction above unstable riverbeds but also the width of road currently undertaken by NHAI in this terrain is questionable. Even the existing norms of the Indian Roads Congress is not being followed.
- A major issue is the unscheduled release of large volumes of water suddenly from the dams, that too without timely intimation to downstream communities. On the contrary, before the monsoons, the reservoirs should have been kept partially empty to provide cushion for excess inflow of water. But this was not done and also not practised in general. Consequently, the touted purpose of the dams, as flood control, is rendered merely a hoax. And even areas where floodwater never reached before construction of dams, are also experiencing loss and damage. Overall dam safety provisions were not followed, there was lack of internal communication among dam agencies and timely public alert mechanisms were not in place. As several dams and power projects are focused on profits, the dam operations are often designed to suit the power generation rather than overall health of the river system and risks to the people.
- There are rampant legal and illegal encroachments of riverside area by government, commercial players and general public for infrastructure development. New residential construction is occurring without technical consideration and in hazard prone areas. Even several houses and other buildings, particularly recently built, are crumbling down due to slides and subsidence after this flood event. This, not only leads to loss of public and private property but also puts lives of people in danger.
- Riverbed mining for sand, stone and grit across the Beas River valley is additionally leading to change in river course. This has also contributed to increased impact during the flood.
- Such large number of infrastructure projects across river valleys has led to large scale deforestation, which is become a contributing factor for soil erosion and landslides.
- There is increasing trend for loss of public money in disasters, with much lesser preparedness among all sections of society. Even local communities are suffering heavy losses in horticulture and tourism sector,

upon which the state's vast population relies for their livelihood. Community based disaster planning and precautionary principle in infrastructure development planning remains missing from overall picture.

- Our rivers valleys of Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej are being exploited beyond their carrying capacities for various multipurpose projects. Even many large-scale hydro projects are proposed in the extremely fragile Chandra-Bhaga Basin of Chenab and upper Sutlej Basin. No scientific precautions are being undertaken during their construction, subsequently posing a continuous disaster risk in this fragile geology.

We have been consistently requesting various governments for policy and governance measures to exercise utmost caution in developmental activities due to the delicate nature of the Himalayan environment. Although, there has been various positive development in such direction but it has kept away from on-ground realities. One such instance is the 1992 report of the special expert group formed by the Planning Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. S. J. Qasim, which presented certain guidelines for development in the Himalayas. Even the recommendations of the 2009 Avay Shukla Committee, appointed by the hon' High Court of Himachal Pradesh, have also not been effectively implemented. The ill-practises in current development policies and governance are highlighted during July floods, and all scale of governments can take important lesson for planning future trajectory.

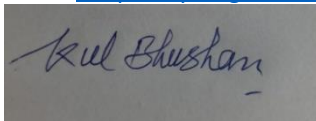
Himalayas as young mountain range is fragile, ecologically sensitive, seismologically active, geomorphologically complex and have high socio-cultural diversity. Himalayan developmental discourse should incorporate these specificities and the policies should be framed within this framework. Therefore, we expect from Central and State Governments to adopt development policies that take into account the vulnerability and richness of the Himalayan region. Please encourage the government to formulate and implement policies that carefully consider the fragile nature of the Himalayas while selecting development activities and adopt appropriate technologies (at contextually suitable scales) and alternatives to ensure sustainable development in the region.

**We would like to demand for the appointment of a Task Force (comprising technical experts and environmentalists) and Inquiry Commission to be headed by sitting High Court Judge, to assess and verify the causes, and set accountability of the concerned agencies and authorities. Moreover, direction need to be given to all stakeholders for time bound corrective action and establish processes for verification of the same, so the current mistakes are not repeated in future. Overall, this will help create a nature-friendly path of development in the Himalayas, thus, enabling them to provide ecosystem services for the entire nation.**

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Kulbhusan Upmanyu, vill Kamla, P.O. Gharnota,  
District Chamba, HP – 176207 Contact: 7876885970,  
Email: [kbupmanyu@gmail.com](mailto:kbupmanyu@gmail.com)



Guman Singh, village Khundan, P.O. Banjar, District  
Kullu, Himachal Pradesh – 175123 Contact:  
8219728607, Email: [gumanhna@gmail.com](mailto:gumanhna@gmail.com)

