



DA and DIT signs MoU to set up the Centre of Excellence in the Western Himalayas

Development Alternatives Group and the **Dehradun Institute of Technology University** have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a strategic partnership towards setting up the **Centre of Excellence for Resilient Human Settlements in the Western Himalayas**. The MoU was signed by **N Ravi Shanker** (Retd. IAS), Chancellor of DIT University and **Dr. Ashok Khosla**, Chairman of the DA Group in the presence of **Dr. Debapriya Dutta**, Head, Science for Equity Empowerment and Development (SEED) Division and Head, State S&T Programme (SSTP) Department of Science and Technology through a Virtual Signing Ceremony on 12 July 2021. The Centre of Excellence has been conceptualised as a strategic partnership between the university and DA to address key issues endemic to the Western Himalayan region. The Centre will build on the complementary strengths of the two institutions and work together to share and communicate knowledge, build networks and partnerships, and advocate for public strategies and programmes to meet the objectives.

The primary objective of the Centre of Excellence is to build knowledge and disseminate it for the purpose of ecological and economic resilience of people and fragile human settlements of the Western Himalayas.

The secondary and supportive objectives of the Centre are to:

- Conduct research and assessment studies on various facets of the human settlements system in the western Himalayan region in order to build new knowledge and collate existing knowledge and communicate the research findings to relevant strategic stakeholders in order to promote resilient and sustainable development of the region.
- Build capacities of students, young professionals, and officers of the public sector and civil society from different disciplines through training and exposure to a comprehensive understanding of sustainability issues keeping the Global SDGs as the meta-framework and local resilience as the outcome driver for development of the fragile mountain ecosystem.
- Become a local catalyst for piloting innovative technology, use of material, putting participatory processes in place, facilitating partnerships for action learning specifically from other regions and contextualising for the region through action research initiatives.

This initiative is born out of the post project processes under the Technology Interventions for Mountain Ecosystem - Livelihood Enhancement through Action Research & Networking programme (TIME LEARN) of the DST SEED Division, under which Development Alternatives recently led and delivered the project: **“Delivery of Eco-Friendly Multi-Hazard Resistant Construction Technologies and Habitat Solutions in Mountain States, Focus - Uttarakhand”**. Subsequently, discussions to strategically re-orient the programme were undertaken through a series of webinars in 2020 called the **“Science-Setu”**. These looked at building networks and associations - with community - government academic and industry stakeholders to mainstream the technology solutions for larger public acceptance and access and a policy and market eco-system to facilitate this process.

This Centre of Excellence has been envisaged as an open partnership platform with DIT-U and DA as the initiators and welcoming other organisations in the region to contribute to studies, action research, capacity building, network strengthening policy advocacy for Science – Society engagement and mainstreaming appropriate habitat technologies in the region. The Centre’s focus on human settlements resilience will bring in its scope, not just construction technologies, but also aspects of sustainable land and landscape development, water and energy systems and livelihoods associated with and for human settlements development. It will engage with different sectors such as rural development, tourism, urban development, waste management, WASH, etc to promote green construction technologies, technology-based livelihoods, Social - Ecological Systems (SES) studies and policy support for climate and disaster resilience.