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The Future of the Third Pole and the Eastern Himalaya

REIMAGINING LAND: FROM DEGRADATION TO REGENERATION

Host Institution: Gauhati University

I. Rationale and Context

The Eastern Himalaya stands at a crucial ecological and social turning point. Assam, as a core part of this region, is witnessing significant landscape degradation, from shrinking forest cover and eroding wetlands to the rapid spread of unplanned urban infrastructure and waste-laden terrains. Over 9.5% of Assam's green cover has been lost since 2000, leading to fragmented habitats, declining biodiversity, and deepening vulnerability of rural and peri-urban communities.

Traditional land-use practices are being displaced by extractive development, while the systems that govern land rights, restoration, and planning remain disconnected. To move from fragmentation to integration, from degradation to regeneration, we must adopt a holistic vision of land - not as a static asset, but as a living, breathing system that underpins both ecological security and economic resilience.

In this context, Gauhati University, in collaboration with the Balipara Foundation, will host the 13th EHNF on *Reimagining Land* through sustainable land management systems. This session aims to reframe land as a platform for regeneration, by restoring its ecological functions, reconnecting it with community stewardship, and reimagining it through climate-smart and inclusive planning.

II. Focus Areas of the Session

This session will bring together ecologists, planners, community leaders, policymakers, waste innovators, and academia to co-create integrated frameworks for land regeneration in the Eastern Himalayas.

Key Discussion Points:

1. Drylands and Degraded Forests

- Regenerating degraded forests through agroforestry and bamboo ecosystems
- FRA implementation and community forest management models
- Transitioning from shifting cultivation to climate-resilient agriculture

2. Lands for Species

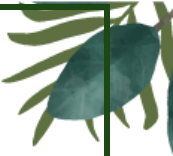
- Securing biodiversity corridors and restoring fragmented habitats
- Land-sharing and coexistence strategies near protected areas
- Community-conserved reserves and participatory habitat mapping

3. Asian Elephants & Habitat Restoration

- Reconnecting elephant corridors across fragmented landscapes in Northeast
- Habitat enrichment through native fodder species
 - Mitigating human-elephant conflict through landscape-level planning and buffer zone restoration

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- Case examples from Udalguri, Kartik Chapori, Sonitpur, and the Kaziranga–Karbi Anglong landscape

3. Wetlands as Living Systems

- Reviving urban and rural wetlands as natural infrastructure (e.g., Deepor Beel, Loktak Lake and Rudrasagar)
- Wetlands for flood control and biodiversity refuges
- Traditional stewardship and water governance frameworks

4. Landfills and Waste Landscapes

- Ecological reimagining of landfills and dump sites (e.g., Boragaon)
- Phytoremediation, composting, and decentralised waste models
- Transforming waste zones into circular economy hubs

5. Human Lands and Landscapes

- Peri-urban greenbelts and multifunctional land use
- Integrating sacred groves, home gardens, and parks into ecological planning
- Building climate-resilient infrastructure using native species

III. Outcomes & Collaboration Opportunities

This session will catalyze action on the following:

1. Integrated Land Regeneration Framework - Aligning science, policy, and community knowledge for cross-sectoral sustainable land management.
2. Mapping Degraded Landscapes Science and Innovation - Collaborative research using GIS and local mapping to identify regeneration zones
3. Restoration and Greening Pilots - Launch of peri-urban and wetland regeneration pilots in key ecological hotspots. (Case story presentations on RAMSAR sites of Northeast)
4. Waste-Land Reclamation Collaboratives - Building multi-stakeholder projects to convert waste-dominated landscapes into green assets
5. Capacity Building for Land Stewards - Training youth, SHGs, and local governance bodies in land restoration and ecological design

IV. Participation Audience

- Government & Policy Institutions: Departments of Environment, Forest, Urban Development, Rural Affairs, and Disaster Management
- Academic & Research Institutions: Gauhati University, NE-SAC, IIFM, Tezpur University, IIT Guwahati, BSI, ZSI
- Civil Society & Indigenous Networks: Forest rights groups, tribal institutions, JFMCs, youth conservation collectives
- Urban Planners & Waste Innovators: Circular economy startups, composting enterprises, city planners
- Development and Financial Institutions: GIZ, UNDP, SDC, NABARD, World Bank, CSR partners supporting landscape regeneration

V. Venue & Engagement at Gauhati University

As one of Assam's premier academic and ecological research institutions, Gauhati University will host this pivotal session on land regeneration. The university's legacy of environmental leadership, combined with its extensive student and researcher base, makes it an ideal site for curating dialogue, innovation, and collaboration that can scale restoration efforts across the Eastern Himalayas.





VI. Proposed Format

- Opening Keynote: *A Vision for Restoring the Living Landscape of the Eastern Himalayas*
- Panel Discussions: Sustainable land management, biodiversity, and integrated regeneration models
- Workshops: Participatory planning, and waste-to-green transitions
- Case Presentations: Forest and wetland regeneration successes, waste landscape transformation
- Community Showcase: Traditional land stewardship stories, agroforestry models, and ecological design from local communities.

