

UPES and SETU Aayog Join Hands to Launch Public Law and Policy Lab

Dehradun, 2 June, 2025: The UPES School of Law today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Institute for Empowering and Transforming Uttarakhand (SETU Aayog), Government of Uttarakhand, marking the formal launch of the Public Law and Policy Lab (PLPL) at UPES School of Law.

The MoU was signed by Mr. Rajshekhar Joshi, Vice Chairman of SETU Aayog, and Dr. Ram Sharma, Vice Chancellor, UPES. The Public Law and Policy Lab is envisioned as an interdisciplinary platform committed to advancing evidence-based policymaking and grassroots-oriented legal interventions to address key governance and rights-based challenges in the state. Present at the occasion were Dr. Shikha Dimri, Associate Dean (Research), Mr. Ashutosh Tripathi, Assistant Dean (Outreach) and Mr. Gautam Kumar, Assistant Professor from UPES, along with Dr. Bhavna Shinde, Advisor to SETU Aayog, who have all played instrumental roles in shaping this initiative. Dr. Abhishek Sinha, Dean, School of Law, UPES, played a pivotal role in conceptualising and supporting the establishment of the Lab.

As a strategic collaboration aligned with the vision of a *Vikasit and Sashakt Uttarakhand*, the Lab will work with SETU Aayog on a diverse range of thematic areas. These include strengthening Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for rural public service delivery such as health and education and accelerating income generation through the establishment of Rural Smart Village Centres. It will also focus on creating safe and inclusive urban spaces for women through improved infrastructure and participatory frameworks.

The Lab will engage in enhancing the role of women in disaster preparedness and mitigation, while also promoting gender-based legal awareness among students, educational institutions, government departments, villages and panchayats particularly in relation to POSH, PWDVA and POCSO along with the three new criminal codes, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA). The partnership will support the development of women-led homestays as part of safer and sustainable eco-tourism efforts and will invest in building leadership capacities among women in governance to strengthen vibrant village models through collective action.

Dr. Ram Sharma, PhD, Vice-Chancellor of UPES, stated: "Launching this Policy and Law Lab in collaboration with the SETU Aayog is a positive step towards enhancing public participation in policy-making. Our academic community will wholeheartedly work towards promoting justice and equality in society."

Speaking at the inauguration, Mr. **Raj Shekhar Joshi**, Honourable Vice-Chairperson of the SETU Aayog, said: "The aim of the SETU Aayog is to ensure that gender equality in Uttarakhand is not just an ideal but is reflected as inclusive development on the ground, reaching even the remotest areas of the state. We can achieve this goal only by connecting various stakeholders, students, policy-makers, and communities. Through the establishment of this center and the design of six key projects, we are laying the foundation for inclusive development where students, communities, and policy-makers together bring about sustainable change."

This collaboration marks a significant milestone in institutional partnership between academia and government, reaffirming the role of legal education in shaping inclusive, field-responsive public policy for Uttarakhand. The PLPL is set to become a catalyst for innovative research, community-centric advocacy, and impactful public engagement across the state.