

Network of networks



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Following the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 where the mountain agenda, more commonly known as Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, was adopted, it was felt that a forum - 'a federation of networks'

was needed to promote this agenda at the global, regional, national and local level. Thus the Mountain Forum (MF) was born in 1995 with financial support from the Swiss government as well as in-kind and moral support from mountain NGOs and champions. MF discussion provides a less inhibited and more creative forum for discussions but not necessarily for decisions.

MF is primarily an electronic and online network of networks that also increasingly relies on traditional strategies to generate and disseminate information on relevant mountain issues and facilitates networking amongst like-minded entities. It comprises of five regional nodes in six regions (Latin America, North America, Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Europe) under the coordination of the MF Secretariat, and guidance of MF board and of their respective hosting institutions. The forum has active members and subscribers including organisations and individuals interested in the following:

- Discussing mountain issues,
- Sharing lessons learnt,
- Testing project and programme ideas related to natural resource management and mountain poverty alleviation,
- Accessing funding information,
- Forming partnerships,
- Influencing policy,
- Advocating mountain people's rights and environmental justice,
- Informing others of upcoming mountain-focussed events,
- Contributing to ever growing MF online library, etc.

Use of ICT

MF (www.mtnforum.org) uses ICTs to promote discussions on environmental issues, thereby contributing toward ensuring environmental sustainability of fragile mountain ecosystems. These are supplemented by offline dialogues as well.

- **e-Discussion initiatives:** MF manages some 14 e-mail lists, which are either regional or thematic. While most lists deal with mountain cultures, environments and sustainable development, MF-Paramos deals exclusively with conserving high-altitude grasslands of the Andes, MF-TOPAS with developing standards for staff training in European protected areas, and MF-InSitu with in-situ conservation of germplasm.
- **e-Conferences:** MF, in coordination with its nodes, organises global or regional e-Conferences on critical and emerging mountain themes. InfoAndina, the Latin American node of MF, is credited with pioneering e-Conference on the Paramos, which not only fostered face-to-face collaborations afterward but also resulted in a creation of an unofficial Paramos Taskforce funded by International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

A sampling of environment-related themes covered by global e-Conferences co-organised by Mountain Forum and Mountain Institute are as follow:

- Mountain laws and policy: moving toward sustainable development and recognition of community-based property rights;
- Mountain people, forests and trees: linking local management and outside interests;
- Community-based mountain tourism: practices for linking conservation with enterprise;
- Investing in mountains: innovative mechanisms and promising examples for financing conservation and sustainable development.

Mountain Forum on global platform

It was in part due to MF members that the UN declared 2002 as the 'International Year of Mountains'. During the year, MF constituencies provided input into the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which also resulted in mountain-focussed Paragraph 42 of the 'Johannesburg Plan of Implementation', as well as to the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, out of which emerged the 'Bishkek Mountain Platform', both blueprints for future mountain development. After WSSD, MF organised a series of e-Consultations on the Mountain Partnership (MP), which was an outcome of the WSSD process. As



Credit: AR Sherpa, TMI

of July 2005, the MP, a very close partner of MF, has 123 members including 45 countries, 14 intergovernmental organisations and 64 major groups, and this number is poised to grow. Moreover, MF regularly does advocacy for its mountain constituencies and mountains with the UN Commission on Sustainable Development through one of its founding members-The Mountain Institute (TMI).

An example of support from MF members is evident from an appeal by the Eco-Tourism Society of Pakistan (ESP)-an organisational MF member. They warned that a million trees with average age of 400 years will be chopped down to make way, with serious consequences for those living downhill, as per the New Murree Hills Development Master Plan in Pakistan. Within a week, the MF AsiaPacific list witnessed a flurry of e-Discussions on this topic and solidarity came not just from Pakistan but from around the world. ■