

The FAO Mountain Mandate



The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the guiding principle for FAO's multi-disciplinary work in forestry, agriculture, and fisheries, including technical cooperation projects at the national and regional levels. FAO's work in mountains contributes directly to tackling the MDGs, particularly those reducing extreme poverty and hunger (#1) and ensuring environmental sustainability (#7).

The growing demand for water, forests, and soils, the consequences of global climate change, growth in tourism, and the pressures of industry and agriculture in a world of increased globalization are just some of the challenges facing the sustainable development of mountain regions. FAO is meeting these challenges in many ways around the world.

This focus on mountains is an integral part of FAO's responsibility as the UN specialized agency devoted to raising levels of nutrition, improving agriculture productivity, and alleviating poverty and hunger. It also supports the role that FAO has played as Task Manager of Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable mountain development that arose out of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

The scope of FAO's work in mountains is broad and extensive. Across its technical departments and its decentralized offices, FAO is addressing the needs of mountain people and mountain environments through its normative work, field programs, direct country support, and contribution to global partnerships and international processes.

Normative work

FAO's mountain program creates new concepts and approaches and generates and disseminates knowledge and information through a variety of means. The Organization produces studies to enhance understanding of various ecological, economic, and

social processes, and develops and tests new technical guidelines, best practices, and methodologies and tools.

In 2002, for example, FAO launched a comprehensive inter-regional review of current watershed management practices and experiences. The review involved more than 80 institutions and over 300 professionals worldwide; it resulted in a desk study, 4 regional workshops, and an inter-regional conference. This wealth of material produced during the review process was further analyzed and synthesized in the recently published volume entitled *The New Generation of Watershed Management Programmes and Projects*. In a special thematic study entitled *Forests and Water*, produced in the context of the global FAO Forest Resources Assessment 2005, current knowledge and thinking about the interrelationships between forests and water is presented. FAO also develops training material aimed at capacity-building for different levels of users, ranging from policymakers to local communities. Indeed, enhanced capacity, at both the local and national levels, is an important goal of the normative program and an integral part of the approach to sustainable resource management and development in upland areas.

Strong in-house cooperation among relevant FAO units is another important feature of the mountain program. In particular, the Organization is:

- Investigating vulnerability, food insecurity, and malnutrition in mountain areas;
- Documenting case studies of best practices in sustainable mountain development;
- Charting the emerging trends of mountain legislation at the national level and assisting countries to improve policies and laws affecting mountains;
- Assessing and improving the policy environment for sustainable agriculture and rural development in

mountain regions (SARD-M);

- Strengthening communication and research networks by building a mountain module in the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS) to link global environmental and socioeconomic data for mountain ecosystems;
- Highlighting the importance of inland capture fisheries and aquaculture to raise incomes and nutritional levels in mountain areas; and
- Encouraging the protection and promotion of high-quality mountain products to improve the lives and livelihood opportunities of local communities.

Field program

In the context of its field program, FAO assists countries in tackling mountain issues through capacity-building, institutional strengthening, and various project activities. The field projects are implemented within the framework of the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP), or are funded through other financial mechanisms such as Trust Funds and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

As of September 2006, projects were already underway or completed in Armenia, Cuba, Tajikistan, North Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, and in 8 countries of the Fouta Djallon Highlands (West Africa), while other projects were under development in Turkey and Cameroon. The objectives of these projects are very diverse and reflect the specific priorities of the requesting countries:

- Integrated and participatory watershed management (Tajikistan and North Korea);
- Formulation of a comprehensive national strategy for sustainable mountain development (Armenia);
- Institutional capacity-building in small-scale enterprise development in mountain regions to improve the income opportunities of mountain people (Kyrgyzstan);
- Strengthening the existing program

of sustainable mountain development through extension and capacity-building in modern technologies related to agriculture and forestry in mountain areas (Cuba);

- Integrated natural resource management (Fouta Djallon).

Direct country support

FAO acted as the lead coordinating agency for the International Year of Mountains in 2002. Together with governments, and partners such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations University (UNU) and other relevant organizations of the United Nations system and NGOs, FAO took crucial steps in increasing awareness of the importance of mountains to life on Earth on political agendas. During 2002, FAO supported the development of 78 national committees in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East and North Africa, and North America, to initiate concrete action. That action continues today. Many of these national committees are evolving into permanent bodies and are developing national strategic plans, creating fair policies and laws, and implementing sustainable mountain development on the ground.

At the close of the International Year of Mountains, the UN General Assembly designated 11 December (from 2003 onwards) as 'International Mountain Day.' This special UN day serves to highlight the global importance of mountain ecosystems and to promote ongoing attention to the unique needs of mountain communities. FAO is mandated to lead observance of International Mountain Day and has produced a series of communication tools to promote observance at the national level on specific themes: *Mountains: Source of Freshwater* (2003), *Peace: Key to Sustainable Moun-*

tain Development (2004), *Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Alleviation in Mountain Areas* (2005), and *Managing Biodiversity in Mountain Areas: Enhancing Food Security and Livelihoods* (2006).

Contribution to global partnerships and international processes

FAO is a founding member of the Mountain Partnership—a voluntary global alliance of countries and organizations committed to improving the lives of mountain people and protecting mountain environments around the world. Launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 by FAO, UNEP, and the Government of Switzerland, the Mountain Partnership taps the wealth of resources, knowledge, and expertise of its members to support positive change in mountain areas. By September 2006, a total of 137 members had joined the Mountain Partnership: 47 countries, 14 intergovernmental organizations, and 76 major groups (civil society, NGOs, and the private sector).

FAO is bringing its wide range of technical experience and expertise to the Mountain Partnership, both as a member and as the host of the Secretariat that supports it. This Mountain Partnership Secretariat—financed through contributions from the governments of Italy and Switzerland—acts as a central reference point for information exchange, networking, and liaison for Mountain Partnership members, and connects them by disseminating knowledge about effective models, good practices, and existing mechanisms, agreements, and frameworks that could be adapted to suit specific national and regional conditions.

In addition to the Mountain Partnership, FAO also enhances cooperation in mountain development by contributing to global mechanisms, conventions, processes, and initiatives that increase knowledge and conserve mountain ecosystems, such as

the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI), the International Consortium on Landslides, and the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment Program (GMBA).

FAO provides the secretariat for the Working Party on the Management of Mountain Watersheds of the European Forestry Commission. This Working Party, which meets every 2 years, brings together member countries of the European Forestry Commission, in order to exchange information on water policies and watershed and risk management practices, to fill knowledge gaps, and to follow up on progress made.

Finally, FAO has close collaboration with a number of key institutions working in sustainable mountain development, ranging from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to the United Nations University (UNU), the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), and the Mountain Forum (MF).

For further information about FAO's multidisciplinary focus on mountain development, see:

FAO Sustainable Management of Mountains web site: http://www.fao.org/mnts/index_en.asp

Mountain Partnership web site:

www.mountainpartnership.org

FAO Mountain Development and Watershed Management web site:

www.fao.org/forestry/mountains (*under revision*, new version will be on-line early 2007)

Thomas Hofer

Forestry Officer (Sustainable Mountain Development), Forestry Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy.
Thomas.Hofer@fao.org

Jane Ross

Communications Officer, Mountain Partnership Secretariat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy.
Jane.Ross@fao.org