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International Year of Mountains +5 and the Mountain Partnership



The Mountain Partnership—an evolving voluntary alliance of countries, intergovernmental organizations and major groups (civil society, NGOs, and the private sector) on 5 continents—was set up to provide a cohesive framework in which to enhance collaboration in the implementation of both Chapter 13 in Agenda 21 and the negotiated outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which called for on-ground action at the policy, program, and project levels.

Research

Work is underway within the context of the Mountain Partnership to develop a simple “research community information grid.” The analysis of surveys among members on “Who is who” in mountain research and “What future for mountain research?”—coordinated by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), a Mountain Partnership

member—will help to identify potential collaborative activities within the Mountain Partnership and to set up a consultative process linking donors, stakeholders, and researchers around key research issues to increase the likelihood of funding.

Biodiversity

During the International Year of Mountains (IYM2002), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) pledged to achieve a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010. An increasing number of collaborative activities on biodiversity relevant to the CBD have taken place within the framework of the Mountain Partnership, in relation to the Andes, Carpathians, Balkans, Caucasus, European Alps, and the Hindu Kush–Himalaya. The Cogne Declaration for International Mountain Parks Twinning Program is a landmark regional agreement between

significant mountain parks in Europe and Asia: it promises to serve as a model instrument for biodiversity management in these regions and beyond. Although the Programme involves the Gran Paradiso National Park and the Sagarmatha National Park as initial partners, the involvement of additional actors and international organizations will be welcomed so as to further strengthen cooperation, partnerships and impact at the regional and inter-regional levels. Importantly, the Cogne Declaration acknowledges that the Twinning Program will be further developed within the framework of the Mountain Partnership and will contribute to the development of its new Biodiversity Initiative.

Microfinance

Mountain people are among the poorest and most marginalized in the world. Microfinance can improve the livelihoods of poor

mountain communities, giving them the chance to earn more, build assets, and lessen their vulnerability to unexpected losses and external shocks. Collecting and sharing practices and approaches in microfinance can be important to identify potential future strategies and bring real change to mountain lives. This exchange of knowledge is at the core of the Mountain Partnership's Microfinance Activity, set up in response to members' interest in inclusive financial services and to evaluate the potential for developing microfinance services for mountain communities. The overall goal is to finalize project proposals for the development of microfinance services for mountain communities. Mountain Partnership member Soluciones Prácticas (ITDG), for example, has led an assessment of financial needs and services for small farmers in the coffee and dairy sector in the Cajamarca region in the northern Andes of Peru. It is hoped that this tool will soon be adapted to other mountain communities in other regions within the Mountain Partnership's activities.

Mountain products

There is increasing demand around the world for high-quality, high-value products. Even though many sought-after products and services come from mountain areas, mountain people rarely exploit the market potential and reap the benefits. Implemented by FAO in the context of the Mountain Partnership, the Mountain Products Program aims to improve the livelihoods of mountain communities by promoting enterprise development in mountain regions that is environmentally and socially responsible and based on local high-quality, high-value products. It brings together partners from different countries, UN agencies, IGOs, NGOs and the private sector to provide mountain people with the organization, market linkages, technology, and know-how that will enable them to partici-

pate in markets for these mountain products in the rapidly expanding urban centers of developing countries and for export to more industrialized countries.

Policies and laws

Good policies are among the most important determinants of successful and sustainable mountain development. The Project for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Mountain Regions (SARD-M project), a Mountain Partnership member, has facilitated the design, implementation, and evaluation of new policies for sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain regions, taking into consideration the essential linkages between mountain and lowland populations. Working with other Mountain Partnership members (the UNEP Vienna–Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and Euromontana), the Project has conducted policy assessments on the strengths and weaknesses of mountain SARD policies for the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians, particularly in Romania, the Slovak Republic, and Ukraine.

Local governance

The Role of Local Governance in Sustainable Development Conference (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 14–18 November 2005), organized by the Alliance of Central Asian Mountain Communities (AGOCA) and the Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP), promoted empowerment at the local level through enhanced cooperation among communities and institutions in the mountain regions of Central Asia, the Alps, the Caucasus, the Carpathians, and the Altai. A major outcome of this meeting was the drafting and adoption of the “Bishkek Resolution”—a document that sets out recommendations for strengthening the role of local (self-) governance through the future

exchange of experience among mountain regions, within the framework of the Mountain Partnership.

Regional cooperation

In Europe, both the Carpathian Convention and the Alpine Convention provide frameworks for cooperation and multi-sectoral policy coordination, a platform for joint strategies for sustainable development, and a forum for dialogue between all stakeholders. Inter-regional mountain cooperation between both these conventions was furthered within the context of the Mountain Partnership at the 9th Alpine Conference (Alpbach, Austria, 6–9 November 2006). The meeting's adopted Memorandum of Cooperation aims to strengthen cooperation in fields of common interest and provide a durable basis of collaboration between the secretariats of both Conventions in such specific areas of collaboration as spatial planning, air pollution control, waste management, cultural heritage, environmental assessment, monitoring, and early warning. This Memorandum has permanent validity and underscores that the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and UNEP Vienna–Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention—both members of the Mountain Partnership—will intensify their collaboration within the framework of the Mountain Partnership. Since 2004, members of the Partnership have explored opportunities to develop a collaborative mechanism for countries in the South Eastern Europe or Balkan region that would be similar to those already existing for the Alpine and Carpathian regions.

Decentralized cooperation

There is growing interest among Mountain Partnership members in information about decentralized models of development, and indeed there is great potential to develop

alliances between local authorities in the developed and developing world within the framework of the Partnership. As a first step, Mountain Partnership members are exploring decentralized cooperation in the European context. A collaborative activity between the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and members—the SARD-M Project, FAO (through its Decentralized Cooperation Programme), the Unione Nazionale Comuni Comunità Enti Montani (UNCCEM), Euromontana, and the Association Européenne des Elus de Montagne (AEM)—is building and strengthening cooperation for sustainable mountain development between

local authorities in mountain regions of Europe and those in developing countries.

Renewed efforts

As we approach the 5-year mark since the International Year of Mountains, significant progress is evident on some fronts in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of tackling poverty, food insecurity, and environmental degradation in mountain areas, but far too many mountain communities and environments remain vulnerable and at risk. Through better networking and communication technologies, new and innovative

approaches to sustainable mountain development are being more widely shared; both successful and not-so-successful experiences are informing mountain communities as they engage in new development activities. At the same time, threats such as global warming and its consequences are providing new challenges that require urgent attention and significant efforts—political, financial, and organizational.

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Learning from the Mountain Voices Web Site



The Mountain Voices web site (www.mountainvoices.org) presents interviews with over 300 people who live in mountain regions around the world. Their testimonies offer personal perspectives on change and development.

In May 2006, the Oral Testimony Programme at Panos London invited registered users of the site to participate in a survey. The aim was to understand more about the use and value of individual voices in the development debate, and specifically how the testimonies have been used and by whom. A total of 179 individuals participated. Two-thirds had made use of the testimonies in their work, and many provided examples.

Using the testimonies

The testimonies have been used at all educational levels—including for the development of educational materials—and have generated a variety of academic research and publications. Individuals doing com-

munity and development work have used the testimonies in workshops and publications, and as background material for project planning. The testimonies have also been used in journalism and creative media (theater, literature, and television drama). One television series in South Africa draws from the Lesotho collection and reaches an audience of some 15 million people.

Challenges

Respondents also identified a number of limitations or challenges to using oral testimony, including the frustration of working with a static data set, translation and language issues, and the time required to read long transcripts.

Strengths

Nevertheless respondents strongly endorsed the value of oral testimony, for a variety of reasons: it provides additional understanding and knowledge on complex issues and situations; its direct and personal nature raises awareness and brings develop-

ment topics alive, particularly for young people; it is a means for communities to document their history; it strengthens voices of marginalized individuals and communities; and it can be a more democratic way of collecting information from people than other methods of data collection.

Respondents encouraged Panos to publish testimonies in as many formats as possible, including print, in order to reach the widest audience. In future, Panos will experiment with audio and visual options for online presentation, but will continue to produce print as well as web-based material. The survey also demonstrated the wide-ranging and continuing interest in mountain development issues. For more information, please visit www.panos.org.uk/oraltestimony/mountainresources.

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