

Children's Movement for Mountain Environment Conservation

by Aftab-ur-Rehman Rana

I would like to share my personal experience of starting an environmental education program with members of Mountain Forum. I started this program under the title of "National Children Mountain Conservation Meet" on the occasion of International Year of Mountains 2002 with a view to educate young people of my country about the unique mountain ecosystems by involving them in meaningful practical activities using mountains' environment as an open classroom. Under this program, each year 120 children are selected from all parts of Pakistan including Northern Areas and AJK to attend a 10-day environment education camp during the summer holidays. Forty to fifty children from remote areas and far-flung mountain valleys get full scholarships to participate in this program.

This educational program involves young children in an action-oriented form of learning about the natural environment and its related problems. During their ten days' expedition, they go on various mountain trails under the supervision of trained mountain wilderness guides and resource persons to have a first hand experience of the mountain environment. They learn about the unique plants, birds, insects and other animals. They meet local people and learn about their lifestyle and culture. Beside this they jointly work in smaller groups on some community projects such as cleanup of polluted mountain streams and alpine lakes, tree plantation on denuded mountain slopes, improving water channels, repairing walking trails etc. The other aspect of this activity is bringing children from different cultural and social backgrounds to one forum so that they can develop a spirit of national integration and resolve cultural differences.



Dr. Kishwar giving lecture on mountain flora (Gulraiz Ghor)

When these children go back to their homes, they are conscious enough to do something practical for the conservation and preservation of the natural environment by undertaking micro-level projects in their communities and schools. The children who attend this program are given the title of "Eco-Guards" which gives them confidence to play an

active role in their day-to-day life to create awareness about protection of the natural environment and its important role in our daily life.

So far six children meetings under this project have been held in different mountain areas of Pakistan and more than 700 young participants and 200 adult volunteer staff members from all over Pakistan including children from far-flung areas of Hunza, Gojal, Chitral in the north and Lasbela in the extreme south have participated in this program. It is now an annual event of Adventure Foundation Pakistan and is now supported by GEF-Small Grant Program of UNDP and some other co-sponsors.



Planting trees (Gulraiz Ghori)

I think this small initiative have set a good example by providing young people to go on a journey to get closer to Mother Nature and harbour the love that is due to her for all that Nature does for us in life. Just reading heavy books and memorizing difficult scientific or mathematics formulas by heart can not serve the purpose. The knowledge and skills children gain in this 10-day camp is far more than many years of class room studies.

If any one is interested to know more about this model or follow this concept, I will be more than happy to help.

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Adventure Foundation Pakistan is an open membership, non-commercial, private organization, registered under the social welfare ordinance. It is dedicated to the promotion of outdoor activities for the youth guided by the outward bound principles and concepts an action oriented educational system.