

# **Sustainable Mountain Ecosystems**

**Philippines' Challenge for the 21st Century**

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# Global Network for Sustainable Mountain Development

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**he Asia Pacific Mountain Network (APMN) and the Mountain Forum (MF) are electronic networks for sustainable mountain development at the regional as well as global levels. The APMN was launched in November 1995 as a follow-up to SUDEMAA (Sustainable Development of Fragile Mountain Areas of Asia) Call to Action—which calls upon countries in Asia to give mountains priority on their sustainable development agendas.

The Mountain Forum, on the other hand, became operational in January 1996 in response to the demand by the international development and conservation community who shared the common view that the unique value of mountain cultures and ecosystems merit special attention and consideration. Those championing mountains received major international affirmation when the 1992 Earth Summit (the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development/UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil endorsed Agenda 21, which included a Chapter specifically on mountains entitled “Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development”.

This Chapter was, however, drafted late in the UNCED process and could not

benefit from the full participation of NGOs and people working in the world’s remote mountainous regions. The mountain community, therefore, felt a strong need to come together to build consensus toward concerted action on a Mountain Agenda, and in a series of international, regional and intergovernmental consultations following the Earth Summit, the global mountain community began to organize to form a network for action, which eventually led to the launching of the Mountain Forum.

This paper presents the Mountain Forum and the Asia Pacific Mountain Network as a global network for sustainable mountain development.

## MOUNTAIN FORUM

**Mission** The Mountain Forum, as noted above, is an outcome of the global mountain communities’ concern for sustainable mountain development. Its overall mission is to be “*a global network for mutual support and the exchange of ideas, experiences and information to empower participants to raise mountain issues on local, national, regional, and international agenda and to promote policies and actions for equitable and ecologically sustainable mountain*

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intergovernmental levels.

The Mountain Forum operates in an open, democratic, decentralized, transparent, participatory, and flexible manner.

It is an innovative and integrative bridge between diverse non-governmental, governmental, intergovernmental, scientific, and private sector organizations and individual people working for, or interested in mountain cultures, environments and sustainable development.

**Goals** In upholding its objective of sustainable mountain development the Mountain Forum has two specific goals. These are:

**Information sharing and mutual support** Through improved communications and information exchange, the Mountain Forum seeks to empower and enrich all members by creating and strengthening mechanisms for critical dialogue.

The critical dialogue may entail exchange of both successful and unsuccessful experiences as well as of lessons learned, on monitoring, evaluating and assessing impacts.

While facilitating critical dialogue, the Mountain Forum aims to provide a forum for discussing emerging tools and technologies and their applications.

Among other things, the Mountain Forum also aims to assist members in influencing regional mountain agenda at the local, national and

**Advocacy** Beside information sharing and mutual support, advocacy of mountain issues is another major goal of the Mountain Forum. Mountain Forum participants and network managers are encouraged to promote and raise the awareness of mountain issues at local, national, regional and global levels. Mountain Forum envisions that successful advocacy should result in raising mountain issues on the agenda of national decision-makers, donor agencies and international organizations. Some of the activities that Mountain Forum coordinators and members have been working toward mountain advocacy are: facilitating dialogue and improved communications between mountain communities and national decision-makers; convening local, national and regional workshops and task forces around relevant mountain issues; informing national decision-makers via these workshops, briefings and media coverage; encouraging the formation of a mountain lobby that involves stakeholders and decision-makers; and planning and implementing activities that relate directly to the Earth Summit's Agenda 21.

**Mode of Operation** The structure of the Mountain Forum consists of a Governing Council that meets every two years, a Secretariat that rotates every two years between various focal points or nodes of the Mountain Forum, a Global Information Server Node (GISN) where all computer networking operations are centralized, and Regional Nodes.



The Mountain Institute (TMI), West Virginia, USA, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, Nepal, and International Potato Centre (CIP), Lima, Peru, constitute a tripartite management and governance committee of the Mountain Forum. ICIMOD is serving as the convenor of the Secretariat for the period January 1998 to December 1999.

The Mountain Institute serves as the permanent Global Information Server Node for the Mountain Forum and, to date, regional nodes have been established in Latin America (at the International Potato Centre in Lima) and Asia and the Pacific (at ICIMOD in Kathmandu). Establishment of regional nodes in Africa, North America and Europe is at an advanced stage of development.

**Progress to Date** The first two years (January 1996- December 1997) of Mountain

Forum's operation led to a number of achievements. Some of the more significant achievements are: a Mountain Forum (MF) global node and information server node was established in USA and regional nodes in Asia/Pacific and Latin America; steps, consultations and studies were undertaken to establish regional nodes in Africa, Europe and North America; a MF membership recruitment campaign was launched resulting in approximately 500 registered members world wide, to date; a MF Web page was designed, posted and updated regularly on the World Wide Web; a MF Global Discussion List which facilitated the sharing, exchange and dissemination of information on sustainable mountain development globally was launched;

interactive information services were provided to members and other clients world wide; organized, focused, global and regional (Latin America) electronic conferences on "Investing in Mountains", "Mountain Policy and Law", and "High Altitude Bleaklands and Tablelands in the Andes" were conducted; and a pilot issue of the MF Bulletin was published and distributed globally to members.

**Mountain Forum Global Evaluation** In August 1997, a Mountain Forum evaluation

questionnaire was sent to 416 registered MF members to determine the usefulness of the Mountain Forum during its first phase of operation, and to gather input from members to help guide its future. By late October, 139 individuals (33%) had responded to the questionnaire and their responses helped in developing the priorities for the Mountain Forum's next phase of operations (1998-1999). Surveys such as these are critical to the smooth functioning of MF as an entirely member-driven "network of networks".

In summary, the results of the evaluation revealed that a little over 80% of the evaluation survey respondents found the MF to be either "highly useful/effective" or "useful/effective". There were no respondents who rated the MF "not useful/effective". Fifty-six of the respondents indicated that MF has improved their access to mountain specific information and 46% felt that it had broadened their knowledge of mountain issues. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents said that they had shared information or ideas from the MF with other colleagues.

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### ASIA PACIFIC MOUNTAIN NETWORK (APMN)

It should be understood at the outset that the APMN was launched as a separate, regional network, but after the launch of the global network, Mountain Forum, it was integrated into the Mountain Forum to serve as its Asia and the Pacific Regional Node.

**Objectives of the APMN** The main objective of APMN is to provide an informal forum for the exchange of information and sharing of knowledge affecting sustainable development of mountain areas among professionals, development workers, and policy makers in Asia and the Pacific. It also seeks to sensitize donor agencies about the critical need for and possible options regarding development in mountain areas.

To fulfill these objectives, the APMN publishes biannual bulletins covering events and activities in the region, expands existing databases on mountain areas to include information on the region; facilitates exchange and study visits among individuals and organizations of different mountain areas, and organizes regional meetings on critical issues.

**Mode of Operation** The regional Secretariat of the APMN is located in Kathmandu, Nepal at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which administers and coordinates the network.

Six sub-regional APMN focal points have been established in Australasia Pacific, North Central Asia, Southeast

Asia, West Asia, Southeast Asia and the Hindu Kush-Himalayas to facilitate sub-regional networking. Most sub-regional focal point coordinators are associated with academic and research institutions and facilitate networking in their respective sub-regions.

#### **Progress to Date (November 1995 – February 1998)**

Beside establishing the six sub-regional focal points noted above, APMN has been publishing a biannual "APMN Bulletin" over the past two years. It has created and posted the Asia Pacific Page (<http://www.south-aisia.com/icimod/AP.htm>) on the World Wide Web. Likewise, it has organized regional consultations, study tours and exchange visits. Furthermore, it has facilitated regional networking of the Mountain Forum, and it has contributed regularly to the Mountain Forum discussion list.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Both the Mountain Forum and the Asia Pacific Mountain Network endeavour to share and disseminate information on sustainable mountain development. The network has been successful in creating a forum for exchanging information and for sharing resources. It has also gone a long way in raising awareness of mountain issues and advocating a Mountain Agenda.

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