

## **The FAO and Mountain Partnership Engagement With Mountains**

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# The FAO and Mountain Partnership Engagement With Mountains



*With its mandate to work on natural resource management; food security; and livelihoods; and its attention to the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has played a leading role in sustainable mountain development for many years. In 1992, the FAO was appointed Task Manager for Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 (Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development) and acted as the lead agency for the International Year of Mountains in 2002. The FAO hosts the global Secretariat of the Mountain Partnership and, from 2003 onward, has also been mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to lead observance of the International Mountain Day, every year on 11 December. Over time, the FAO has progressively built up a conceptual and operational framework that links sustainable mountain development to forest hydrology and watershed and risk management. This Platform Statement provides an update on the FAO's regular program on sustainable mountain development, watershed management, and forest hydrology, which includes normative work, a strong field program, and support to international processes. Further, it summarizes the latest achievements of the Mountain Partnership.*

## Normative work

In close collaboration with its member countries, the FAO contributes to the advancement of concepts and approaches related to forest hydrology, watershed management, and sustainable mountain development. In particular, the FAO acts as an international forum with the aim of bringing together different actors and sectors, such as government agencies, research institutions,

nongovernmental organizations, etc. Experiences, findings, and recommendations that result from this consultative and analytical process are tested and validated at the national policy and field level, thus feeding a continuous learning mechanism. The results are disseminated in the form of policy briefs, technical manuals for field practitioners, and papers that present the state of the art on particular issues. Current examples are an illustrated publication entitled "Why invest in sustainable mountain development?" and a document that summarizes the outcomes of forests and water events held between 2008 and 2010. Both papers will be published in 2011.

## Three examples from the field program

### Tajikistan

On behalf of the World Bank, the FAO implemented a watershed project in the Dangara District (Thoirsu Watershed) of Southern Tajikistan. The project lasted from 2006 until early 2010 and came up with a number of interesting results: more than 400 subprojects related to water management, forestry, livestock, pasture management, soil conservation, etc., were implemented in the villages of the Thoirsu Watershed. All proposals were prioritized by the communities themselves and showed an impressive richness in terms of themes, approaches, and innovative ideas. Bottom-up institutional mechanisms (community interest groups, municipality development committees) were established, and people realized that they can implement their ideas on their own; experiences that they have not had in the past. The watershed project in Dangara attracted significant attention and received an award from

the World Bank. Based on previous positive experiences in other parts of the country as well, the FAO aims to continue its successful collaboration with Tajikistan in the field of sustainable mountain development and watershed management.

### West Africa

In July 2009, implementation of the Fouta Djallon Highlands (FDH) Integrated Natural Resources Management Project, which is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), was begun. Eight West African countries (Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone) are participating in this 10-year project, which is jointly implemented by the FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the African Union. To improve the livelihoods of rural populations that live in countries directly or indirectly connected to the FDHs, the project aims to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of FDH's natural resources. Across this mountain ecosystem (Figure 1), 29 pilot sites have been selected to test and pilot approaches for the conservation and more efficient use of natural resources. Furthermore, to improve the economic situation of the local population, small enterprises will be developed for the promotion of mountain-specific products. The 8 participating countries and the African Union are in the process of negotiating a regional framework agreement for the sharing and improved management of natural resources. A regional observatory is being established for the long-term monitoring of resources and the socioeconomic situation of the people of the Fouta Djallon region. All project activities are accompanied by an extended capacity-building program. It is expected that project experiences will be upscaled and

**FIGURE 1** The FDHs in Guinea. (Photo by Thomas Hofer)



institutionalized across the whole region.

### **Ecuador**

The FAO is strongly engaged in watershed management and sustainable mountain development activities in Ecuador. Four projects are currently under implementation: (1) an FAO-funded project on the “management of high mountain areas for sustainable development” in the Cotopaxi Region, (2) a Spanish-funded project on “poverty alleviation and combating desertification through collaborative watershed management,” which is being implemented in the Membrillo Watershed in the Pacific Coastal Ranges, (3) a GEF-funded project on the “management of Chimborazo’s natural resources,” which is being implemented in 5 watersheds in the Andean ranges of Chimborazo Province, and (4) an interdisciplinary Finnish-funded forestry project that works at the national level and has a strong watershed management component. The combination of these projects, which work at different administrative levels and scales, in different field realities of the country, and with different sets of stakeholders

and partners, offers a unique opportunity to promote a harmonized approach to sustainable mountain development, to create national capacities, to support institutional development, and, finally, to provide evidence-based policy advice.

### **International processes**

The FAO supports the international community in processes that aim to address cross-cutting issues of particular concern. Topics related to forests and water interactions, and their implications for watershed management, sustainable mountain development, and mitigation and adaptation to climate change, have gained momentum in recent years. In May 2009, the FAO participated in a workshop on forests and water organized by FOREST EUROPE and partners in Antalya, Turkey; a total of 4 forests and water and/or watershed management events were organized at the XIII World Forestry Congress that was held in October 2009 in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and, in April 2010, a forests and water session was held during the 35th session of the European Forestry Commission in Lisbon, Portugal.

During the 20th Committee on Forestry, held in October 2010 at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, a plenary session on forests and water in the context of climate change was organized by the FAO. The outcomes of these sessions, recommendations for forests and water policy-makers and technicians, and a practical forests and water agenda will be presented in the synthesis document being prepared by the FAO.

The FAO will host the Second World Landslide Forum “Putting Science into Practice,” which is organized by the International Consortium on Landslides and its partners. The event will be held in October 2011 at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, and is expected to attract approximately 500 participants, including high-level decision-makers.

Together with Slovak partners, the FAO organized the 27th Session of the European Forest Commission (EFC) Working Party on the Management of Mountain Watersheds in Štrbské Pleso, Slovak Republic, in April 2010. During the meeting, the FAO presented a proposal to review the Working Party and to enlarge its mandate to include

forests and water issues that go beyond mountain watersheds. The FAO, in collaboration with the governments of member countries, EFC and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Timber Committee, will implement this review in the course of 2011.

Both the FAO and the global Mountain Partnership Secretariat were actively involved in the second Perth Mountain Conference held in Scotland in September 2010. The main objective of this conference was to review progress in research related to global change in mountain regions over the last 5 years since the first Perth Conference. The increase in attention to mountain research since 2005, as evidenced in the number of papers and diversity of topics presented during the conference, was very impressive. In the future, effective communication of these research results to policy-makers will be essential. The Mountain Research Initiative will play a key role in this important process.

### The Mountain Partnership

The Mountain Partnership is an international, voluntary alliance of partners dedicated to improving the lives of mountain people and protecting their environment around the world. An official United Nations partnership, it was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. It now has more than 170 members, which comprise governments, civil society, and intergovernmental organizations. Its Secretariat continues to be supported financially by the governments of Italy and Switzerland, and its structure consists of central and decentralized hubs. The Central Hub is hosted by the FAO in Rome, whereas the decentralized hubs are hosted by the University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan, the Consortium for the Sustainable Development of the Andean Ecoregion in Peru, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

(ICIMOD) in Nepal. The Secretariat also includes the Environmental Reference Centre, which is hosted by the United Nations Environment Programme in Vienna and is responsible for ensuring attention to environmental concerns.

Since March 2010, the funding institutions and hosting organizations of the Mountain Partnership Secretariat have joined forces to create the Mountain Partnership Consortium, a strategic and operational alliance that serves to add value to the activities of each partner while promoting synergies, knowledge exchange, and joint collaboration in the Mountain Partnership context.

Among the initiatives promoted to benefit the members of the Mountain Partnership is the International Programme on Research and Training on Sustainable Management of Mountain Areas (IPROMO), which was conceived and designed in 2008 by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and the University of Turin, Italy. The IPROMO was created as a response to Mountain Partnership members who had expressed their concern about the limited availability of courses on mountain issues and the serious need to build capacity in mountain countries. The target audience includes technicians, planners, and decision makers from mountain regions of the world, in particular, developing countries. Every year, a 2-week course is organized on issues related to mountain development, such as climate change in 2008, economic opportunities in 2009, and mountain biodiversity in 2010.

The Mountain Partnership–FAO, together with ICIMOD, is also implementing a World Bank project to support climate change adaptation processes in mountains. These efforts are providing technical support to the process initiated by the Government of Nepal, with the Mountain Alliance Initiative for Climate Change Adaptation in

Mountain regions to create a more effective mountain political lobby in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations.

With the support of the Central Asia hub of the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, the CAMP Forum 2010 took place last November in Kazakhstan, with the aim of sharing and discussing regional-, national-, and community-level efforts to cope with changing climate by providing a platform for shared learning and discussion of the challenges and opportunities for adapting to changes. The forum was complemented by a 25-minute documentary that captured challenges related to climate change and local level adaptation practices in 3 Central Asian countries (including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan).

As part of the Mountain Products Programme, implemented by the FAO in the context of the Mountain Partnership to increase the income and livelihoods of mountain communities through improved production and marketing of local quality products, the Partnership is supporting a project in the Anti-Atlas Mountains of southern Morocco to promote and develop the production of high-quality saffron. The project has carried out a thorough analysis of the entire saffron value chain in Morocco, which should lead to a much greater contribution of saffron to local incomes and development efforts in southern Morocco as well as eventually at the national level.

Development plans to adapt to climate change and promote sustainable mountain development are being developed within the small pilot project in the Cotopaxi area (Ecuador), as mentioned above. Local mountain communities have organized themselves and have requested support to introduce organic agriculture and llama breeding, improved irrigation schemes, and new marketing



**FIGURE 2** A market for organic mountain products in Ecuador. (Photo by Thomas Hofer)



strategies for their products (Figure 2). The Mountain Partnership Secretariat will promote the sharing of the results at national and regional level with a view to adapting and replicating these schemes in other Andean areas.

In addition, through the organization of mountain-related presentations at high-level United Nations events and Conference of the Parties, conferences, websites, and publications, the Mountain Partnership Secretariat is disseminating lessons learned and best practices as well as communicating the activities of members and mechanisms that can contribute to Sustainable Mountain Development. It also aims to promote the global mountain agenda, especially in view of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development: Rio+20.

## Outlook

The FAO is experiencing an increase in the number of requests for technical assistance and policy advice related to sustainable mountain development, watershed management, and forest hydrology. This shows the growing concern for mountain issues recently demonstrated by the public as well as the private sector. A concerted effort is needed to make sure that mountain issues play a prominent role on the agenda of Rio+20. The coincidence of Rio+20 with the 10-year anniversary of the International Year of Mountains provides an apt occasion to seize the momentum and give mountains the voice they deserve.

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

- Forests and water website: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/forestsandwater/en/>
- Mountain Partnership website: <http://www.mountainpartnership.org/default.asp>
- International Mountain Day website: <http://www.fao.org/mnts/home3/en/>

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