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FAO's Work in Mountains: Building the Road to Recovery for Mountain Peoples



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**

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The COVID-19 crisis has added urgency to an already difficult situation in mountains. Mountain communities are highly dependent on agriculture, tourism, and remittances for their survival, and their vulnerabilities to a range of challenges—including climate change, poverty, and food insecurity—have been exacerbated by the pandemic. This has increased their vulnerability to poverty and hunger. The aftershocks of COVID-19 deepen concern as to whether the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved. The Mountain Partnership is the only United Nations alliance of partners dedicated to improving the lives of mountain peoples and protecting mountain environments. Its secretariat is hosted at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It is working to improve opportunities for mountain peoples in the 2030 Agenda spirit of leaving no one behind.

Leading the way for sustainable mountain development

Within the United Nations (UN) system, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has played a leading role in sustainable mountain development since 1992, when it was appointed task manager for Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 (UNCED 1992). It also acted as the lead agency for the International Year of Mountains in 2002. In 2003, FAO was mandated by the UN General Assembly to lead the annual observance of International Mountain Day (Figure 1) on 11 December.

Because of its mandate as lead agency for mountains, FAO hosts the Mountain Partnership Secretariat (MPS), currently funded by the Ministry of Agriculture of Andorra, the Italian Development Cooperation, the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture, and FAO. Field programs are supported by the Italian Development Cooperation and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries of Japan.

The MPS serves members through advocacy, capacity development, communication, and joint initiatives. Since it was founded in 2002, the Mountain Partnership (MP) has steadily grown to include over 430 members in 96 countries,

across governments, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society.

Highlighting solutions in mountains

MP members promote the prioritization of mountains on national, regional, and global agendas by building synergies with key UN and international processes. As part of the process toward the UN Food Systems Summit, the MP highlighted the relevance of sustainable food systems in mountains as development drivers. With the Centre for Development and Environment (MPS and Tribaldos 2021), it developed an information sheet and hosted an independent dialogue and a parallel session during the presummit meeting. Several MP members brought forward solutions for advancing action and recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in mountains through sustainable food systems. Proposals included enabling access to services and education to create alternative livelihood options and youth engagement, building equitable and sustainable value chains for mountain producers, and strengthening and maintaining traditional knowledge, including agroecology approaches.

In the lead-up to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the MPS developed a policy brief calling on the parties to the CBD to ensure that mountains are explicitly included in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and in all CBD processes (MPS 2021). The brief promotes the identification, development, and inclusion of indicators specifically related to and important for safeguarding mountain biodiversity and mountain communities. These include the mountain green cover index (FAO nd) and the indicators presented in the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) document *Indicators for Elevating Mountains in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework 2.0* (UNEP et al 2020).

During an MP side event of the 2021 High-level Political Forum, the MPS launched its new publication *Mountain Farming Systems – Seeds for the Future* (Romeo et al 2021). This presents a collection of case studies by MP members from around the world, highlighting experiences of agroecological mountain farming systems and showcasing their potential to

FIGURE 1 Winning photo of the 2020 International Mountain Day photo contest on mountain biodiversity. (Photo by Jaime Venegas)



help revitalize rural areas and lift mountain peoples out of poverty and hunger while protecting fragile mountain environments for the future. The publication was supported by the Italian Development Cooperation and the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture.

Improving livelihoods in mountains

The MP Products (MPP) Initiative (Figure 2) promotes sustainable food systems, agrobiodiversity conservation, and strengthening of value chains in mountain regions. To date, around 10,000 farmers—6000 of whom are women—have benefited from technical and marketing support. In addition, the labeling scheme has helped some mountain producers to increase their selling price by up to 25%.

In 2020, a new joint initiative aimed at enhancing agrifood value chains to increase the resilience of mountain communities was officially launched. Involving the MPS, the UN Development Programme Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme, and Slow Food International, the partnership offers a mix of financial and technical support to mountain producers. Projects focusing on women, youth, or indigenous peoples are being prioritized, and the first call for proposals targets Guatemala, Lesotho, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Rwanda.

A project funded by the government of Japan aims to build capacities in a risk-based watershed management approach while developing sustainable agricultural value chains to improve local livelihoods. Activities for the Enhancing Community Resilience to Climate Change in Mountain Watersheds project will be implemented in Peru and the Philippines, with lessons learned disseminated to other mountain areas.

FIGURE 2 The MPP Initiative supported a collaboration between mountain women artisans in Kyrgyzstan and fashion designer Stella Jean for Milan Fashion Week 2021. (Photo by FAO/Mirbek Kadralliev)



Building evidence on mountain communities' vulnerability

A study launched by the MPS, FAO, and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in December 2020 found that the number of mountain peoples vulnerable to food insecurity in developing countries increased from 243 million to almost 350 million between 2000 and 2017. The report *Vulnerability of Mountain Peoples to Food Insecurity: Updated Data and Analysis of Drivers* (Romeo et al 2020) highlighted that more than 90% of the world's 1.1 billion mountain dwellers lived in developing countries in 2017. This included 648 million living in rural areas, where most people lived below the poverty line; and about 346 million rural mountain people—more than 1 in 2—faced the threat of food insecurity.

Increasing resilience in mountains through capacity development

The annual International Programme on Research and Training on Sustainable Management of Mountain Areas (IPROMO)—jointly organized by the MPS at FAO; the University of Turin, Italy; and the University of Tuscia, Italy, with the high patronage of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs—has been training midlevel government officials and employees of nongovernmental organizations on the key challenges and opportunities for sustainable mountain development since 2008. The course was held online for the first time in 2020 and again in 2021 because of COVID-19 restrictions. In 2021, a Spanish edition, *IPROMO Latinoamericano*, was launched, organized by the Consortium for Sustainable Development of the Andean Ecoregion and the MPS.

Since 2018, the GROW summer school, Agrobiodiversity in a Changing Climate, has focused on the importance of mountain agrobiodiversity. GROW is organized by the MPS, Sapienza University of Rome's Department of Environmental Biology, the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture, and the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research, with technical support provided by FAO and lectures given by NaturaSì, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM - Organics International), and Slow Food.

In collaboration with IFOAM - Organics International, the MPS held online training sessions on implementing participatory guarantee system initiatives for MPP producers in Latin America between July 2020 and January 2021.

Outlook

The vulnerabilities of mountain peoples, the potential of sustainable mountain food systems as development drivers, and the importance of mountain ecosystem services mean that including mountains in the UN Decade of Action is vital to achieving the 2030 Agenda. The MPS supports sustainable development in mountain regions through advocacy for mountain issues by building synergies with key international processes, developing mountain-specific tools and solutions, and promoting country-specific activities and investments. The MPS continues to foster multistakeholder members' engagement, strengthening knowledge and skills and promoting campaigns for wide engagement that highlight why mountains matter.

WEBSITES

Curso IPROMO LATINOAMERICANO 2021—Gestión Sostenible de Socio-Ecosistemas en los Andes: <https://ipromolatinoamericano.condesan.org/>
GROW Summer School—Agrobiodiversity in a Changing Climate: <http://www.fao.org/mountain-partnership/our-work/capacitydevelopment/summer-school-agrobiodiversity-in-a-changing-climate/en/>
International Mountain Day: <http://www.fao.org/international-mountain-day/>
IPROMO: <http://www.fao.org/mountain-partnership/our-work/capacitydevelopment/ipromo/en/>
Mountain Partnership Products Initiative: <http://www.fao.org/mountain-partnership/our-work/regionalcooperation/climate-change-and-mountain-forests/mountain-partnership-products-initiative/en/>

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