

Chapter 13: Sustainable Mountain Development A Word From the Task Manager (FAO)

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Chapter 13: Sustainable Mountain Development

A Word From the Task Manager (FAO)

Responsibility for coordinating and encouraging implementation of the various chapters of Agenda 21 was assigned to a number of international organizations by the Commission on Sustainable Development, the intergovernmental body established following UNCED that meets annually to monitor implementation of all 40 chapters of Agenda 21. The process of assigning this task was developed following the establishment of international institutional arrangements. In this regard, UNCED decided that "all specialized agencies of the United Nations system, related organizations and other relevant intergovernmental organizations within their respective fields of competence have an important role to play in the implementation of relevant parts of Agenda 21 and other decisions of the Conference. Their governing bodies may consider ways of strengthening and adjusting activities and programs in line with Agenda 21, in particular, regarding projects for promoting sustainable development. Furthermore, they may consider establishing special arrangements with donors and financial institutions for project implementation that may require additional resources." UN organizations also received a mandate to encourage the implementation of this and other chapters of Agenda 21. FAO for its part was given responsibility for the so-called land cluster, including chapters 10 (Integrated Approach to Planning and Management of Land Resources), 11 (Combating Deforestation), 13 (Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development), and 14 (Promoting Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development). While the responsibilities of the task manager have been specified, it was understood and strongly recommended that the implementation of Agenda 21 chapters be effected in a cooperative and consultative way. Chapter 13 benefited on the whole from a number of favorable aspects and conditions as

well as the support of stakeholders with outstanding competence in mountain issues. This has greatly facilitated the work of the task manager. Since March 1994, the implementation of this chapter has been greatly aided by an active and very productive group of mountain institutions and individuals as a result of various shared initiatives conducive to good cooperation. The establishment of the Mountain Forum (MF) in 1994 has improved communication and enhanced collaboration. MF is a global network of individuals and organizations concerned with mountain cultures, environments, and sustainable development.

Organizing for the task manager role

The implementation of the task manager role requires adequate resources, good organization, and a clear framework. Within FAO, the resources available for the watershed management and sustainable mountain development program, which is in charge of Chapter 13 task manager activities, were nearly doubled as of 1994. An interdepartmental working group on sustainable mountain development was set up, allowing an all-FAO appropriation of the task manager responsibilities and drawing from all the pertinent units of the organization.

In order to comply with recommendations for collaborative action and cooperation in the implementation of Agenda 21 outside FAO, it was necessary to establish a mechanism among sister organizations of the UN family and other major groups. This mechanism was put in place through the establishment of an ad hoc inter-agency group for Chapter 13 (known as the Interagency Group on Mountains), which first met in early 1994 and whose aim is to enhance cooperation and collaboration in mountain development and conservation. The group is made up of various UN agencies as well as a number of international nongovernmental organizations involved in mountain issues.

The inclusion and active participation of organizations from outside the UN system has provided the opportunity for a wide range of views and perspectives to be considered in the on-going implementation of Chapter 13, thus enabling a more balanced and equitable approach. The group has proven to be an effective means of ensuring close consultation and interaction among interested parties and a fully collaborative approach to implementation of the Mountain Agenda. Strengthening partnership, building capacity, and enhancing communication and information sharing have all been important aspects of FAO's work as task manager.

Delivering through reporting, coordination, and promotion of initiatives

One of the main roles of the Chapter 13 task manager is to report on progress in the implementation of sustainable mountain development. Reports are prepared at the request of the CSD. Task manager reports for Chapter 13 have so far been prepared on two occasions, for CSD3 in 1995 and CSD5 in 1997 (for the 5-year review of Agenda 21). Contributions were also made to CSD6 in 1998 when fresh water was a major topic of discussion. A report is also being prepared for CSD8, focusing on mountains in the context of integrated planning and management of land resources. These reports have been prepared by FAO in a fully collaborative manner that involves review and input from the more than 30 members of the Inter-agency Group on Mountains. Once finalized by FAO, task manager reports are sent to the UN in New York and are officially presented to the CSD as reports of the UN Secretary General. The task manager has also prepared a detailed overview report covering the period 1992–1997, attempting, in the same collaborative manner, to assess work carried out in the first 5 years after

UNCED. Reporting and coordination go hand in hand.

Initiatives concerned with promotion and encouragement have included a complete set of regional intergovernmental consultations on sustainable mountain development in Asia (1994), Latin America (1995), Africa (1996), and Europe (1996). These consultations have contributed to the identification and discussion of issues and the establishment of a number of important priority activities. A number of national, subregional, and regional meetings and NGO consultations were also supported, including the process of establishing and supporting regional nodes of the Mountain Forum.

Toward a climax of the Mountain Agenda: The International Year of Mountains

In November 1998, the UN General Assembly, with the overwhelming support of 130 countries, declared 2002 the International Year of Mountains. FAO, in addition to its task manager role for Chapter 13, has also been designated UN lead agency to coordinate observance of this year. This provides a unique opportunity to reinforce the long-term process begun at Rio of raising public awareness and ensuring adequate political, institutional, and financial commitments for concrete action on sustainable mountain development that will last far beyond the year 2002. A significant amount of FAO staff time and resources will be devoted to the preparation and observance of the International Year of Mountains, and the Interagency Group on Mountains will play an important role in providing advice and sharing responsibilities.

Further information on FAO's mountain program can be found on the worldwide web at www.FAO.ORG/forestry/for/forc/Mountain/default.stm.

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