

Learning from the Mountain Voices Web Site

Authors: Warrington, Siobhan, and White, Jessica

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alliances between local authorities in the developed and developing world within the framework of the Partnership. As a first step, Mountain Partnership members are exploring decentralized cooperation in the European context. A collaborative activity between the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and members—the SARD-M Project, FAO (through its Decentralized Cooperation Programme), the Unione Nazionale Comuni Comunità Enti Montani (UNCCEM), Euromontana, and the Association Européenne des Elus de Montagne (AEM)—is building and strengthening cooperation for sustainable mountain development between

local authorities in mountain regions of Europe and those in developing countries.

Renewed efforts

As we approach the 5-year mark since the International Year of Mountains, significant progress is evident on some fronts in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of tackling poverty, food insecurity, and environmental degradation in mountain areas, but far too many mountain communities and environments remain vulnerable and at risk. Through better networking and communication technologies, new and innovative

approaches to sustainable mountain development are being more widely shared; both successful and not-so-successful experiences are informing mountain communities as they engage in new development activities. At the same time, threats such as global warming and its consequences are providing new challenges that require urgent attention and significant efforts—political, financial, and organizational.

Jane Ross

Communications Officer, Mountain Partnership Secretariat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy.
E-mail: jane.ross@fao.org
Web site: www.mountainpartnership.org

Learning from the Mountain Voices Web Site



The Mountain Voices web site (www.mountainvoices.org) presents interviews with over 300 people who live in mountain regions around the world. Their testimonies offer personal perspectives on change and development.

In May 2006, the Oral Testimony Programme at Panos London invited registered users of the site to participate in a survey. The aim was to understand more about the use and value of individual voices in the development debate, and specifically how the testimonies have been used and by whom. A total of 179 individuals participated. Two-thirds had made use of the testimonies in their work, and many provided examples.

Using the testimonies

The testimonies have been used at all educational levels—including for the development of educational materials—and have generated a variety of academic research and publications. Individuals doing com-

munity and development work have used the testimonies in workshops and publications, and as background material for project planning. The testimonies have also been used in journalism and creative media (theater, literature, and television drama). One television series in South Africa draws from the Lesotho collection and reaches an audience of some 15 million people.

Challenges

Respondents also identified a number of limitations or challenges to using oral testimony, including the frustration of working with a static data set, translation and language issues, and the time required to read long transcripts.

Strengths

Nevertheless respondents strongly endorsed the value of oral testimony, for a variety of reasons: it provides additional understanding and knowledge on complex issues and situations; its direct and personal nature raises awareness and brings develop-

ment topics alive, particularly for young people; it is a means for communities to document their history; it strengthens voices of marginalized individuals and communities; and it can be a more democratic way of collecting information from people than other methods of data collection.

Respondents encouraged Panos to publish testimonies in as many formats as possible, including print, in order to reach the widest audience. In future, Panos will experiment with audio and visual options for online presentation, but will continue to produce print as well as web-based material. The survey also demonstrated the wide-ranging and continuing interest in mountain development issues. For more information, please visit www.panos.org.uk/oraltestimony/mountainresources.

Siobhan Warrington and Jessica White

Oral Testimony Programme, Panos London, 9 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD, United Kingdom.
E-mails: Siobhan.Warrington@panos.org.uk; Jessica.White@panos.org.uk
Web site: www.mountainvoices.org