

The Mountain Partnership—Two Years Later

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The Mountain Partnership— Two Years Later



Current situation

The International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions, or the “Mountain Partnership”, is now just over 2 years old. Since it was launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002, this voluntary alliance of countries, civil society groups and intergovernmental organizations has defined its structure in terms of both governance and membership criteria. In 2004, its members have also begun to develop specific plans and programmes for working together in areas of shared interest. The Mountain Partnership will hold its Second Global Meeting of Members in Cusco, Peru in late October in an effort to move even further along the path of becoming a more operational and action-oriented body.

By October 2004, 43 countries, 14 intergovernmental organizations and 50 major group organizations (eg civil society and private sector) had already joined the Mountain Partnership and the numbers are growing. Since 2003, an interim Partnership Secretariat has been hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with financial support from the governments of Italy and Switzerland and the direct involvement of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). With the continued financial and institutional support from these partners, this facilitating body will become a more permanent Secretariat in 2005 and will continue to provide important information, networking and related services to members, in close collaboration with the Mountain Forum.

Making the Mountain Partnership work— Partnership initiatives

The dynamic core of the Mountain Partnership is its “Partnership Initiatives,” which are based on thematic or geographic areas of interest. These are guided by the recommendations of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and reflect those areas in which members of the Mountain Partnership have expressed a desire or need for closer collaboration. A first set of initiatives has been defined, covering specific themes—including policy and law, sustainable livelihoods, watershed management, research, gender, education, sustainable agriculture, and rural development in mountains (SARD-M)—and different geographic areas such as the Andes, East Africa, Central Asia, Europe and the Hindu Kush Himalaya.

These particular initiatives were launched only as a first set of collaborative areas of work. As the Partnership is demand-driven, focusing on the interests and requirements of its members, additional thematic and regional initiatives have already been proposed by members to address other concerns and issues related to sustainable mountain development. As a result, a variety of new areas for collaboration on themes such as biodiversity, culture, poverty, indigenous knowledge and conflict in mountains are expected to develop in the near future.

During 2004 several of the existing initiatives have made significant progress in becoming

more operational. A number of workshops have been organized in which leading members of each initiative have met to define priority areas for collaborative action and determine the specific activities in which members wish to be engaged. The results of these workshops provide a framework for each initiative and are shared with other interested members. They will be the basis for discussions at the next gathering of Mountain Partnership members in late October.

Cusco—the Second Global Meeting of the Mountain Partnership

The Cusco Conference, to be held 28–29 October 2004, will be the second opportunity for all members of the Mountain Partnership to meet face-to-face. Whereas the First Global Meeting of Members of the Mountain Partnership, held in Merano, Italy in October 2003, had a strong political focus and served to consolidate members’ commitments and engagement, the Cusco Conference has been designed to achieve more practical results by devoting much of the 2 days to discussion of the Partnership Initiatives. Breakaway sessions on each of the 12 existing initiatives will allow individual members to take stock of progress made to date and chart the way forward to define specific activities to be undertaken, their timing, members’ individual roles and responsibilities, resource requirements, and other related operational matters.

Evening round table sessions will allow informal discussion on a variety of themes, focusing on practical tools and methods to support members and their efforts to improve conditions in mountain regions. The sessions will include ideas such as using broadband technologies to improve communications in mountains, debt relief for sustainable mountain development, micro-finance for mountain communities, and legal instruments for mountain regions such as the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions.

A “Cusco Plan of Action” will be an important output of the conference. It was the subject of intense discussion by many Partnership members through an electronic consultation organized and moderated by the Mountain Forum through CONDESAN-InfoAndina and the International Potato Center (CIP), which is responsible for organizing the Cusco Conference. The e-consultation was held in order to provide an open and participatory platform for members to provide input to the drafting process and to ensure that the final Plan of Action approved in Cusco has fully considered the views of members.

Future of the Mountain Partnership

The Mountain Partnership faces a critical transition period as it moves into its third year of existence. The process of shifting from a level of political commitment to involvement and action in concrete activities is clearly underway, as members increasingly engage in new collaborative efforts that add

Mountain Partnership in action

Mountain Coffee—an example of the Mountain Partnership working in Kenya

A project within the framework of the Sustainable Livelihoods initiative of the Mountain Partnership is helping to generate income and stabilize the livelihoods of Kenyan coffee farmers. Dean's Beans Organic Coffee Company, a member of the Mountain Partnership, will work to develop organic coffee production with small-scale farmers in the highlands of Kenya and provide a high-end market in the U.S. for the growers. Fair trade practices will be used to ensure a good price for the growers who, through this pilot project involving the Kenyan Government, will be able to bypass the normal state controlled auction system and sell their product directly to importers like Dean's Beans. Fair trade practices guarantee 60% advance payment of the cost of production, making a considerable difference to the financial risks involved at household and community levels. And moving to organic farming means eliminating some of the dangerous pesticides used in Kenya and many other developing countries. “Organic coffee still represents a very small percentage of the country's overall production”, says Justus Kiago of the Kenyan Ministry of Cooperative Development and Marketing. “It could definitely offer protection against crashes in world prices and help smallholders to differentiate their production and find niche markets.”

Although this recently launched project is small in scale—the fair trade label still only accounting for a small share of the global market—the project could provide valuable lessons and an important model for other regions.

value to what they are already doing in mountain development. The main challenge for the Mountain Partnership will be to demonstrate that it is making a positive contribution to improved and more innovative collaboration among its many members. But the real test will be the extent to which the Partnership is achieving visible changes on the ground in mountain communities throughout the world as a result of this new collaboration. Ultimately, the govern-

ments and organizations which have joined the Mountain Partnership, supported by its Secretariat, will determine just how successful this new alliance really is.

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