

Beyond the International Year of Mountains: A Preliminary Assessment by the FAO, the United Nations Lead Agency for IYM2002

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Beyond the International Year of Mountains: A Preliminary Assessment by the FAO, the United Nations Lead Agency for IYM2002



The United Nations (UN) declared 2002 as the International Year of Mountains to increase awareness of the global importance of mountain ecosystems and the challenges faced by mountain people. This unprecedented opportunity to address mountain issues and celebrate mountain culture evolved from the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, where mountains became the singular focus of Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development. The UN designated the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as task manager for coordinating the implementation of Chapter 13 and as lead agency for the International Year of Mountains.

When the International Year of Mountains 2002 was conceived, organizers agreed that it must, above all else, be a catalyst for long-term action to improve the well being of mountain people, protect mountain ecosystems, and encourage peace and stability in mountain regions. Now that the Year is over, it is time to consider key questions. What did the Year achieve? What challenges lie ahead? What are the next steps? The answers will determine the way ahead and, ultimately, when people look back in future decades, whether the International Year of Mountains is judged a catalyst for change.

FAO is assessing the results of the Year and will be preparing a report in 2003, with recommendations for future action, for the UN General Assembly and FAO's many

Key outcomes of the International Year of Mountains

Increased awareness

The International Year of Mountains has changed the way many people think about and relate to mountains. Thanks to a global awareness-raising campaign that has prompted countless special events and celebrations, newspaper articles and television reports, educational programs, and conferences—not to mention 9 major global events—many people around the world understand that:

- Mountains are crucial to all life on earth.
- Half of humanity depends on mountains as a source of fresh-water.
- The genetic diversity preserved in mountain ecosystems helps to ensure the world's future food security.
- The future of mountains and the people who call them home is threatened by armed conflict, global climate change, exploitative mining, unsustainable forestry, and agricultural practices, as well as by gender and ethnic inequality.

Countries engaged

The Year generated extensive national commitment to sustainable mountain development. Thanks to the efforts of the 77 national committees that led the observance of the International Year of Mountains, real change is now a priority in countries around the world. Many countries are in the process of, or are committed to, developing and implementing national strategic plans for the sustainable development of their mountains and participating in regional processes to protect mountain ranges.

Partnership strengthened

Through joint activities and information sharing, the Year consolidated and strengthened the partnership for sustainable mountain development that has evolved since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, a formal alliance of partners, the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions, was launched at the WSSD in South Africa and further consolidated at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in Kyrgyzstan. The Partnership is structured to ensure multistakeholder and long-term approaches and conceived as an evolving alliance with the flexibility to address the complexity, diversity, and magnitude of mountain issues.

partners. The report will not be available until mid-2003, but the follow-up to the Year cannot wait until then. The International Year of Mountains Coordination Unit at FAO offers the following preliminary insights for building on the momentum of 2002.

What has been achieved?

An interim assessment indicates that the Year has:

- Increased the accessibility, quantity, and quality of information on mountains and mountain people.

Countries with national committees, or similar mechanisms, observing the International Year of Mountains (77), as of December 2002

Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen.

International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountains: interested parties (59), as of December 2002

Countries (30): Afghanistan, Andorra, Austria, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, France, Georgia, Ghana, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Jordan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Monaco, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Switzerland, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, Venezuela.

Intergovernmental organizations (15): African Ministers Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), Asian Development Bank, FAO, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), International Potato Centre (CIP), Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations University (UNU), World Bank.

Major groups (14): Banff Centre for Mountain Culture, Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), Euromontana, European Observatory of Mountain Forests (EOMF), International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA), International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps (ISCAR), Mountain Forum, Tebtebba Foundation, The Mountain Institute, Unione Nazionale Comunità Comuni Enti Montani (UNCCEM), World Conservation Union (IUCN), World Economic Forum, World Mountain People Association, World Wildlife Fund International (WWF–International).

- Increased public awareness of the importance of mountains to the earth's fundamental life-sustaining systems, of the fragility of mountain ecosystems, of the consequences of their degradation, and of effective approaches to sustainable mountain development.
- Stimulated the establishment of 77 national committees for the observance of the International Year of Mountains and positioned them as mechanisms for developing national strategic plans and policies to achieve sustainable mountain development.
- Enhanced the understanding of the need for interdisciplinary research and information sharing about mountains and stimulated the development of a comprehensive, global research agenda on mountains that will support decision making and policy making.
- Increased awareness of the need to safeguard and build on the traditional knowledge of mountain people and to respect indigenous practices, expertise, and authorities.
- Increased demand by countries for programs and projects to achieve sustainable mountain development.
- Increased donor interest in and support for long-term investment in mountain ecosystems and communities.
- Broadened the diversity of organizations and individuals dedicated to sustainable mountain development and stimulated the development of new mountain initiatives and the integration of mountains into ongoing programs.
- Identified, through intensive international, regional, national, and community dialogue, gaps in knowledge, ways of working, and institutions.
- Strengthened and expanded the alliance of organizations that are

committed to mountains through the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions.

- Focused global commitment to and resources for sustainable mountain development on the Bishkek Mountain Platform.

What challenges lie ahead?

There are two major challenges to effective implementation of sustainable development in mountain regions.

Weak national capacity for sustainable mountain development

National action is essential because only countries have the authority to implement national strategies for sustainable mountain development, to enact enabling policies and laws, and to develop compensation mechanisms for environmental services and goods provided by mountain areas. At this time, many countries do not have the institutional environments, expertise, financial resources, information, and knowledge to plan, implement, and invest in sustainable mountain development. Concerted and sustained action is needed to build and strengthen their institutional and human capabilities to lead and undertake sustainable mountain development beyond 2002. Education, training, capacity building, technology development and transfer, institutional strengthening, and investment are required. The development of national strategies for the sustainable development of mountain areas is also important to ensure that all actions undertaken by a country are done within a multidisciplinary, multistakeholder, long-term framework.

Limited capacity to share information and coordinate action

Support is needed for the International Partnership for Sustainable

UN General Assembly Draft Resolution on the International Year of Mountains

The following draft resolution was agreed to during informal negotiations at the UN and received formal agreement by the Second Committee. It was adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 2002 as A/RES/57/245. The final version of the Resolution was not available when this article went to press. –Ed.

Fifty-seventh session, Second Committee, Agenda item 86, December 2002.

Sustainable development and international economic cooperation

Andorra, Argentina, Bhutan, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Peru, South Africa, and Switzerland: draft resolution

International Year of Mountains 2002 (Agreed)

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 53/24 of 10 November 1998, in which it proclaimed 2002 as the International Year of Mountains. (Agreed)

Recalling also its resolution 55/189 of 20 December 2000. (Agreed)

Recognizing chapter 13 of Agenda 21 and all relevant paragraphs of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted by the WSSD, in particular paragraph 42 thereof, as the overall policy frameworks for sustainable mountain development. (Agreed)

Noting the voluntary International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions, launched during the WSSD with the committed support of 29 countries, 16 intergovernmental organizations, and 16 organizations from the major groups, as an important approach to addressing the various interrelated dimensions of sustainable mountain development. (Agreed)

Taking note of the Bishkek Mountain Platform, the outcome document of the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit, held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, from 28 October 2002 to 1 November 2002, which was the concluding event of the International Year of Mountains. (Agreed)

1. Takes note of the interim report transmitted by the Secretary-General on the International Year of Mountains 2002. (Agreed)
2. Welcomes the success achieved during the International Year of Mountains, during which numerous activities and initiatives were undertaken at all levels, including major international meetings held in Bhutan, Canada, Ecuador, Germany, India, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Peru, and Switzerland, which catalyzed a strengthened interest for sustainable development and poverty eradication in mountain regions. (Agreed)
3. Recommends that the experience gained during the International Year of Mountains be valued in the context of an appropriate follow-up. (Agreed)
4. Notes with appreciation the effective role played by governments, as well as major groups, academic institutions, and international organizations and agencies in the activities related to the International Year of Mountains, including the establishment of 74 national committees. (Agreed)
5. Also notes with appreciation the work undertaken by the FAO as the lead agency for the International Year of Mountains, as well as the valuable contributions made by UNEP, UNU, UNESCO, UNDP, and the United Nations Children's Fund. (Agreed)

6. Encourages governments, the UN system, the international financial institutions, the Global Environment Facility, within its mandate, and all relevant stakeholders from civil society organizations and the private sector to provide support, including through voluntary financial contributions, to local, national, and international programs and projects resulting from the International Year of Mountains. (Agreed)
7. Invites the international community and other relevant partners to consider joining the voluntary International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions. (Agreed)
8. Notes that all stakeholders in the voluntary International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions have initiated a consultative process, with a view to determining the best options for further assisting stakeholders in the implementation of the Partnership, including, inter alia, through the consideration of the offer made by FAO to host a secretariat financed through voluntary contributions. (Agreed)
9. Encourages all relevant entities of the UN system, within their respective mandates, to continue their constructive collaboration in the context of the follow-up to the International Year of Mountains, taking into account the interagency group on mountains and the need for further involvement of the UN system, in particular FAO, UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, UNU, and UNICEF, international financial institutions, and other relevant international organizations, consistent with the mandates of the Bishkek Mountain Platform. (Agreed)
10. Decides to designate 11 December as International Mountain Day, as from 11 December 2003, and encourages the international community to organize on this day events at all levels to highlight the importance of sustainable mountain development. (Agreed).
11. Requests the Secretary-General to [EU/US—delete *submit*] to the General Assembly at its 58th session [EU/US—delete *a report*] on the achievements of the International Year of Mountains, under the subitem entitled “Sustainable mountain development” of the item entitled “Environment and sustainable development.” (Pending)

Development in Mountain Regions, an alliance of governments, UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and research institutions. This alliance is committed to working together to achieve the mountain-specific goals of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. These goals, detailed in paragraph 40 of the WSSD’s Plan of Implementation, focus on reducing poverty in mountain communities and protecting the world’s fragile mountain ecosystems from climate change, environmental degradation, and other threats to the earth’s freshwater systems and bio-

diversity. The Partnership has the potential to make lasting improvements in mountain environments and communities. However, to do so, it needs to be supported with improved coordination, information sharing, communication, monitoring, and evaluation. Support is also needed for subregional and regional initiatives that enable countries to work together on the development and conservation of transboundary mountain ranges.

Next steps

To address the major challenges and maintain and build on the cur-

rent momentum for sustainable mountain development, FAO will work with its partners to:

- Build and strengthen countries’ institutional and human capabilities to lead and undertake sustainable mountain development far beyond 2002.
- Support countries in the development and implementation of national strategies for the sustainable development of mountains and appropriate policies and laws.
- Support the development of concepts and initiatives to address regional and thematic issues and concerns.
- Strengthen the information and knowledge base on mountain sustainable development and access by all participants in sustainable mountain development.
- Establish a secretariat to support the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions.
- Contribute its ongoing work in the mountains of the world to agriculture, forestry, fisheries, rural development, and alleviating hunger and chronic malnutrition.

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