

## **Raise the Flag for Mountains: Enhancing Policy Dialogue and Knowledge Sharing through the World Mountain Forum Series**

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# Raise the Flag for Mountains: Enhancing Policy Dialogue and Knowledge Sharing through the World Mountain Forum Series



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC**

*As a mountain country, Switzerland has an intrinsic interest and a proven track record in sustainable mountain development (SMD). Many Swiss stakeholders, including the federal and cantonal administrations, universities, and nongovernmental organizations, actively contribute to global SMD in many ways. Switzerland, with its extensive operational experience in mountainous countries around the world, has been one of the driving forces promoting policy dialogue and knowledge management among different actors to support SMD on various levels. This is reflected in its support for the United Nations' Agenda 21 and the recent Agenda 2030. Still, after close to 25 years of global policy engagement, the voice of the mountains has not yet gained sufficient momentum and needs further strengthening.*

## **The World Mountain Forum series: Enhancing sustainable mountain development**

Mountains are key contexts for sustainable development because of the indispensable goods and services they provide. Still, they are among the most disadvantaged regions in the world, with some of the highest poverty rates and greatest ecological vulnerability to global climatic, environmental, and socioeconomic change (Kohler et al 2014). The increasing pressures faced by mountain people and resources are at the root of unsustainable land management practices, including land abandonment, thus endangering the provision of key mountain services.

Despite the important goods and services they provide, mountains remain among the least documented

and recognized ecosystems. At the same time, many mountain regions are confronted with multiple risks and hazards, further exacerbated by widespread land degradation, inequitable land rights, resource grabs, and dire poverty. Globally, approximately 40% of mountain populations in developing countries are vulnerable to food insecurity, and roughly 50% are chronically hungry (Romeo et al 2015). With uncertainties created by climate change, population growth, and land use change, urgent political actions are needed to create enabling environments at local to global levels and to facilitate the implementation of sustainable mountain development (SMD) activities based on available knowledge and information while promoting investment in SMD (Wymann von Dach et al 2016).

To promote SMD under current and future global challenges, a program funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), named Sustainable Mountain Development for Global Change (SMD4GC), was initiated in 2013 to contribute to sustainable development in mountain regions under uncertain and changing climatic, environmental, and socioeconomic conditions. The program follows SDC's long-term commitment to the SMD agenda and involves the establishment of policy instruments at different levels, as well as well-performing knowledge management systems to enable mountain stakeholders and communities to implement knowledge-based SMD (Wehrli 2014).

Among other activities, the SMD4GC program supports

multistakeholder events that enhance policy dialogue and knowledge sharing. The backbone of these events is a series of global conferences, known as World Mountain Forums (WMFs), which provide an outstanding platform for promoting SMD by interlinking high-level policy-makers and decision-makers with leading mountain scientists from around the world.

## **Lucerne, Switzerland, 2011**

The first such event took place on 11–12 October 2011 in Lucerne, Switzerland. The Lucerne World Mountain Conference was co-organized by SDC and the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development, within the framework of the international Mountain Partnership and with additional support from individual Mountain Partnership members and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The conference presented regional and global experiences in mountain development since the 1992 Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and identified challenges and opportunities for global SMD. Among the themes discussed were the role of the green economy in mountains, institutional frameworks for sustainable development and poverty alleviation in mountains, the importance of mountains to the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, and a plan of action to secure renewed political commitment for SMD (Mountain Partnership 2011). The Lucerne conference contributed to the inclusion of SMD issues in the official Rio+20 outcome document,

**FIGURE 1** At the WMF in 2014 in Cusco, Peru, policy- and decision-makers, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and scientists met with the aim of informing upcoming global initiatives. (Photo courtesy of CONDESAN)



*The Future We Want* (United Nations General Assembly 2012), and produced a series of publications on SMD (these can be found on the conference website, which is in the list at the end of this article).

#### **Cusco, Peru, 2014**

The second WMF took place in Cuzco, Peru, on 22–24 May 2014 (Figure 1). It gathered more than 200 participants and provided a platform to promote SMD, with sessions on 4 key topics: climate change, family farming, mountain communities, and mountain cities. The WMF 2014 showcased and discussed local, regional, and global experiences in mountain development and identified opportunities and challenges for global SMD. Its outcomes informed other global initiatives, including Agenda 21 (United Nations 1993) and Agenda

2030, the post-2015 development agenda (United Nations General Assembly 2015), in which mountains are included in 3 targets (6.6, 15.1, and 15.4). It also informed the climate negotiations at the 20th session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, where more than 80,000 people visited the public exhibits, which included a mountain pavilion.

#### **Mbale, Uganda, 2016**

The third WMF is planned for 17–20 October 2016 in Mbale, Uganda, close to Mount Elgon. It will again bring together mountain stakeholders from around the globe and provide a platform for exchange, promotion of collaborative action, and political dialogue among different levels of society to contribute to the overall goal of the

series: namely, to engage in dialogue to articulate concrete actions and concerted efforts to address the plight of mountain ecosystems and promote SMD.

The WMF 2016 will present an opportunity for mountain stakeholders to share lessons and experiences on past SMD activities and to discuss future challenges and opportunities, referring to the recommendations from the WMF 2014 and conclusions of ongoing international policy processes, including the United Nations' Agenda 2030 (United Nations General Assembly 2015) and the new Paris Agreement on Climate Change and its implementation (UNFCCC 2015).

The WMF 2016 outcomes are expected to inform the implementation of Agenda 2030 and guide interventions in mountain areas at local, national, and

international levels. It will offer an opportunity for mountain countries to discuss how to effectively implement the decisions resulting from negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The main theme will be “Mountains for our Future,” with the following subthemes:

- Mountains and climate change;
- Mountain communities and livelihoods;
- Mountain ecosystem services; and
- Sustainable mountain agriculture.

The WMF 2016 will be followed by the General Assembly of the Mountain Partnership, which will also take place in Mbale on 21–22 October 2016. Websites for all 3 WMFs are listed after the references.

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