



CPF Collaborative Partnership on Forests

Press Announcement New information on mountain ecosystems highlights need for investment, adaptation and resilience

14 December 2011...Rome, Italy – As the world celebrated UN International Mountain Day on 11 December, new information released by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), a global mechanism of 14 international organizations, institutions and secretariats, called for greater investment in fragile mountain ecosystems and attention to adaptation issues. Individual members of the CPF have recently held meetings and launched publications discussing the importance of forest mountain ecosystems, including *Why invest in sustainable mountain development?*, a booklet for policymakers produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Mountain ecosystems: Providing a wealth of environmental services

“*Why invest in sustainable mountain development?* does not target the converted, but those policy and decision makers who are not familiar with mountain ecosystems and are responsible for allocating financial resources”, noted Thomas Hofer, a Senior Forestry Officer in the FAO Forestry Department. “The document highlights the strategic importance of mountain ecosystems in the search for solutions on key global challenges such as climate change, water, hazards and biodiversity conservation as well as for finding a balance between socio-economic development and environmental protection. The publication calls for a prominent place of sustainable mountain development in the international negotiations and agenda, particularly in the process leading up to Rio+20”.

This publication is particularly valuable as countries search for ways to transition to a green economy, a key theme of Rio+20. Mountains regions are known to provide key environmental services such as freshwater, biodiversity conservation and hydropower to more than half of humanity. The publication notes that countries must tap into these environmental services offered by mountain regions in order to realize this transition and move towards more sustainable development.

The publication calls for more investment in sustainable mountain development as a global priority, both for the sake of the environment as well as for mountain dwelling communities. For instance, the publication notes that in East Africa, Mount Kenya is the only source of freshwater for more than seven million people. The long-term provision of freshwater from this source is under increasing threat, however, particularly due to climate change, and this will have serious implications for the people that depend on mountains for water resources.

“Forests in mountains are vital for agriculture, biodiversity, freshwater, and people. Through the International Forest Heroes programme we have encountered the story of Shigeatsu Hatakeyama - a fisherman in Miyagi Prefecture, Japan who has been planting trees in mountains for the past twenty years. Hatakeyama runs his oyster cultivation business, in Kesenuma Bay a beautiful harbor surrounded by mountains, where the Okawa River flows into the Pacific Ocean. He realized the positive role of forests in maintaining clean water for his



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oyster beds, and created the "Mori wa Umi no Koibito" (Forests are Lovers of the Sea) Campaign. Everyday heroes like Shigeatsu Hatakeyama remind us that we live in an interconnected landscape, which must be addressed through cross-sectoral and cross-institutional policies for sustainable development", says Jan McAlpine, Director of the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat.

Climate change adaptation given special attention as threats loom in mountain regions

The 'Strategic Initiative for Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Development in Mountain Regions' carried out by the FAO-hosted Mountain Partnership Secretariat (MPS) with support from the World Bank, brought together experts, policy makers, scientists and government delegates in Latin America (Chile), Central Asia (Tajikistan) and Africa (Uganda). Participants discussed adaptation options in mountain ecosystems and opportunities for better alliances and cooperation amongst countries. Together, they made concrete recommendations in response to challenges posed by climate change. In particular, the MPS gave increasing attention to mountain communities in Africa during the meeting held in Uganda jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). As a result, one of the priorities identified in Uganda was the need to start building a regional agenda for promoting sustainable mountain development in Africa. The three meetings also identified a number of key issues towards developing capacity in mountain communities and highlighting the close highlands-lowlands relationship on the international agenda, including at Rio+20.

"Mountain ecosystems are a crucial ecological infrastructure for food security, water regulation, energy generation and as such play an important role for sustainable development and human well being especially in a changing climate", acknowledged Mario Boccucci, Chief of UNEP's Terrestrial Ecosystems Unit. Additionally, Musonda Mumba, UNEP's focal point for the Ecosystem Based Adaptation (EBA) Flagship noted "UNEP's current mountain agenda focuses on using the EBA which focuses on use of biodiversity and ecosystem services as part of an integral and overall adaptation strategy to help people adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change". Mumba further added that "while ecosystem degradation increased vulnerabilities in these ecosystems, climate change would worsen the situation. EBA options are therefore seen as having the potential to build on existing practices, traditional knowledge and institutions and therefore helping people increase their adaptive capacities".

Ensuring mountains are not left high and dry

Without improved awareness, however, mountains ecosystems will continue to be an overlooked recipient of finance. *Highlands and Drylands - Mountains, a source of resilience in arid regions*, a recently launched publication of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), FAO, the MPS and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), emphasizes the need for investment particularly in mountains in dryland areas to sustain these fragile environments.

The publication calls attention to a number of actions that can be undertaken in the short and long term to address drylands, including: the importance of engaging all concerned stakeholders to fill information gaps; including climate change adaptation into all governmental sectoral policies; further devolving power to local community groups in mountain areas; giving special consideration to groups such as women and the young unemployed when considering how to enact socio-economic progress; and improving national and international research programmes to improve knowledge about the economic value of goods and services in mountains in dryland areas. Dryland issues were also highlighted at the Forest Day 5 'Discussion Forum' held in Durban, South Africa, on 4 December 2011.



“Dryland mountains are among the world's treasures most invisible to policymakers. They are crucial sources of water supply for the communities living in their lowland areas, serving some of the world’s poorest populations, contributing to the resilience of the arid regions. Dryland mountains also provide vital ecosystem services for the global community. Yet, the sustenance of these functions has become increasingly uncertain due to the growing threat of climate change and unsustainable forms of land use, including mining and tourism. Increased economic and political support is needed to safeguard them”, said Dr. Sergio Zelaya, Coordinator for Policy for Advocacy on Global Issues and Platforms at the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

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Note to Editors:

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) is a voluntary arrangement of 14 international organizations and secretariats with substantial programs on forests. The CPF's mission is to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forest and strengthen long-term political commitment to this end.

CPF members:

Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD Secretariat)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Global Environment Facility (GEF Secretariat)

International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO)

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD Secretariat)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF Secretariat)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC Secretariat)

World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)

World Bank (World Bank)



Links of interest

[Climate Change: Impacts, Adaptation and Development in Mountain Regions](#)

Video:

[Climate change impacts, adaptation and development in mountain regions: key issues in Central Asia](#)



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