

## Protecting Mountains key to securing our future

To many people, the mountains are just an exciting physical feature in the landscape, something to simply look at and admire. However, mountains play a much bigger and important role to the survival of humanity.

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), about 12% of the world's population or about 890 million people lived in the mountains by the year 2000. Further still, over 50% or 3.7 billion people are directly or indirectly dependent on mountain resources.

Mountains cover 22% of the world's land surface and are home to some 915 million people, representing 13% of global population. Mountains also provide between 60 and 80 percent of the earth's freshwater. Yet, in spite of this global relevance, there is a dearth of data and information on the status of mountains and mountain peoples (FAO 2015).

For reference, please refer to <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5175e.pdf>

Most of the people who live in mountain areas, 625 million to be precise, live in developing and transition countries like Uganda. Mountains provide critical and indispensable goods and services to a significant proportion of humankind.

Another report by the FAO notes that up to 80% of the planet's fresh surface water comes from mountains. Mountains supply half of the global population with freshwater for domestic use and lowland irrigation in support of global food security and play an important role in the production of hydropower as a form of green energy. Mountains face the imminent threat of climate change. Climate change is a reality today, and some of the best evidence such as melting glaciers comes from mountain areas. Many scientists believe that the changes occurring in mountain ecosystems may provide an early glimpse of what could come to pass in lowland environments, and mountains thus act as early warning systems.

In tropical mountains for instance, the melting of glaciers as exemplified by the receding ice caps on Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya, Rwenzori Mountains, among others, provide a good evidence of how temperatures have been raising steadily over the years and the consequences on the communities in the areas surrounding these mountains are catastrophic.

In the southern Asia, about 1.3 billion people rely on freshwater obtained directly or indirectly from the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) mountain systems.

Furthermore, Mount Kilimanjaro provides water to millions of population in Arusha and Kilimanjaro regions and it is predicted the climate and land use change are going to jeopardize the mountain's capacity to keep providing this important service.

In the neighbouring Kenya, the vast underground lakes



and a large network of rivers originating from the Mount Kenya supply water to more than 2 million people in surrounding rural areas as well as to the approximately 3 million inhabitants of the nation's capital, Nairobi.

It also provides close to half the flow of water into the Tana River, which produces 50% of the hydropower generated in Kenya. All these water towers are being threatened by climate change which will put more strain both on urban water supply as well as agriculture and energy sectors.

Mountains are centres of cultural and biological diversity, sources of raw materials, and important tourist destinations. Despite these key goods and services they provide, mountains still remain among the ecosystems least documented, offering services least accounted for.

At the same time, many mountain regions are confronted with multiple risks and hazards, including widespread land degradation, inequitable land rights, resource grabs, and dire poverty.

Globally, approximately 40% of the mountain population in developing countries is vulnerable to food insecurity, and half are chronically hungry. The situation is exacerbated by global climatic, environmental and socioeconomic changes.

With uncertainties created by climate change, high population growth and land use change, urgent political actions are needed to enable environments at global and local levels and to facilitate the implementation of Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD) activities based on available knowledge and information while promoting investment in SMD.

In order to promote SMD in view of the considerable global challenges ahead, a program funded and led by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) named "Sustainable Mountain Development for Global

Change (SMD4GC)" was initiated with an objective to contribute to sustainable development in mountain regions under uncertain and changing climatic, environmental, and socioeconomic conditions.

The programme involves the establishment of SMD



policy instruments at different levels; and knowledge management to enable mountain stakeholders and communities to implement knowledge-based SMD activities. One of the activities of the SMD4GC Programme is to support different multi-stakeholder events to enhance policy dialogue as well as knowledge sharing.

The backbone of these events is the World Mountain Forum (WMF) – an outstanding platform for SMD. It is in this framework that, following the last WMF held in Cusco, Peru in 2014, a third WMF will take place in 2016 at Mbale, Eastern Uganda from 17th to 20th October 2016 under the main theme of "Mountains for our Future" and sub themes are: Mountains and Climate Change, Mountain Communities and Livelihoods,

Mountain Ecosystem Services, and Sustainable Mountain Agriculture.

The Forum brings together mountain stakeholders from around the globe, and will provide a platform for exchange, promotion of collaborative action and fostering political dialogue among different levels of society. The overall goal of the World Mountain Forum is to engage dialogue with articulated concrete actions and concerted efforts to address the plight of mountain ecosystems towards the SMD.

The forum will present an opportunity for mountain stakeholders to share lessons and experiences on past activities in sustainable mountain development and to discuss challenges and opportunities for SMD in the future referring to the recommendations from the last WMF 14 and conclusions of on-going international policy processes including climate change negotiation and new sustainable development goals.

The WMF 2016 outcomes are expected to inform the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and guide interventions in mountain areas at local, national and international levels. Furthermore, the WMF 2016 will offer an opportunity for mountain countries to discuss how to effectively implement the decisions from climate change negotiations and the post-2015 agenda for sustainable mountain development.

WMF 2016 will bring together over 300 stakeholders around the world and different High-level dignitaries are expected; for instance, H.E. Thomas Gass the Assistant Secretary General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and His Holiness Kyabgon Chetsang from India. H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the President of the Republic of Uganda is also expected to officiate at the opening of the Forum.

During the sessions, representatives from around the world will share experiences and discuss strategies for better integrated community development in mountain areas through effective participation of local people as a key to preventing further ecological imbalance, increase the productive base, share equitable benefits, sustainably improve the standard of living among the large rural population living in mountain ecosystems, and discuss how mountain-specific development policies should work.

The WMF 2016 is jointly organised by the Albertine Rift Conservation Society and the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Water and Environment with financial and technical support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

We are also grateful for the financial support from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety through the Eba global programme implemented by UNEP, UNDP and IUCN.

The forum is also technically supported by Sustainable Mountain Development for Global Change (SMD4GC) partners all over the world including CONDESAN from Latin America, ICIMOD from Asia, University of Central Asia, Department of Geography at Zurich University, The Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Berne, and the Fondation pour le Développement Durable des régions de Montagne (FDDM) and the Embassy of France in Uganda

Finally, the organizers of the WMF 2016 recognize with gratitude the contributions many other partners and SMD stakeholders who are supporting this event. These include the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and the East-African Community secretariat.



For more details please visit: Website: <http://wmf.mtnforum.org> @mtnforum #WMF\_2016

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