



Briefing Note of the Meeting of the Mountain Focus Group



Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
in collaboration with the Mountain Partnership and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2011 - ONLINE AT [HTTP://WWW.IISD.CA/YIMB/UNCSO/MFGM/](http://www.iisd.ca/yimb/uncsd/mfgm/)

BRIEFING NOTE OF THE MEETING OF THE MOUNTAIN FOCUS GROUP: 14 DECEMBER 2011

The meeting of the Mountain Focus Group convened in New York, US, at the Permanent Mission of Italy to the UN, on 14 December 2011. It was organized by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat (MPS), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Missions of Italy and Switzerland to the UN, and sought to forge a common understanding on including mountain development in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20) preparatory process and the Conference itself. The meeting followed up on a similar event in May 2011, and will be followed by a key meeting in the UNCSD preparatory process: the Second Intersessional Meeting (15-16 December 2011).

The meeting focused on the outcomes from the Lucerne World Mountain Conference and its potential input to the UNCSD, the latest developments in the UNCSD preparatory process and ensuring the proper inclusion of mountain issues, and the role of the MPS leading up to the UNCSD in June 2012. Topics addressed included the need to communicate both the challenges and benefits of mountains, approaches for outreach on mountain issues, potential partnerships, and the sustainable development of mountains as a cross-cutting issue.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MOUNTAIN PARTNERSHIP

Mountains provide crucial ecosystem goods and services, but their ecosystems are particularly fragile and merit special attention. The international community recognized these relationships in Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, which was adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Rio Earth Summit). The International Year of Mountains was celebrated in 2002.

The Mountain Partnership is a Type 2 outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. It has become a global alliance of more than 180 members, including 50 governments, 16 intergovernmental organizations, and 115 Major Group members, and was established in part through efforts of the Mountain Focus Group (MFG), which is an informal group of mountain countries that meets regularly in New York, usually on the margins of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), and aims to promote sustainable mountain development (SMD) around the world. The Mountain Partnership Secretariat (MPS) is housed at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO).

In May 2011, Switzerland and Italy convened a meeting of the MFG within the framework of the Mountain Partnership, during the 19th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable

Development (CSD), with the goal of renewing political attention on fragile mountain ecosystems, specifically highlighting the cause of mountains within two processes: the UNCSD; and the next CSD cycle, which is scheduled to include a focus on mountains.

The Lucerne World Mountain Conference took place from 11-12 October 2011, in Lucerne, Switzerland. Organized under the auspices of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the MPS, the Conference adopted a Call for Action, including for adapting and developing mountain governance to avoid poverty, food insecurity and social exclusion.

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE MOUNTAIN FOCUS GROUP

Opening the meeting on 14 December 2011, Antonio Bernardini, Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy and Co-Chair of the MFG, noted the current “crucial moment” for preparing for the UNCSD. Thomas Guerber, Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland and MFG Co-Chair, added that the UNCSD process could serve as a platform for the interface between the mountain agenda and development. He noted the objective of the meeting: to reach a common understanding on supporting the Rio+20 process to that end. Participants at the meeting heard three presentations and engaged in a discussion on the presentations and the UNCSD preparatory process.

PROCESS, PARTNERS AND OUTPUTS: REPORT OF LUCERNE WORLD MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE

The first presentation was on the Lucerne World Mountain Conference, which had been organized by the MPS. Madhav Karki, Deputy Director General of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and MPS Chair, said the Lucerne Call for Action was taken a step further with the holding of the first “Mountain Day,” during the Durban Climate Change Conference, on 4 December 2011. Karki expressed the hope that the Call for Action also would feed into Rio+20.

A key message from Lucerne was that mountains are the “water towers of the world,” he said, as well as a global destination for tourism. The Conference also had addressed new drivers of mountain challenges, such as climate change, globalization, urbanization, migration and information and communication technologies (ICT), and included presentations of the 10 regional assessments conducted by regional partners and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The reports had revealed cases where mountain issues coincided with the two themes of the UNCSD, such as hydropower as an example of green economy.

The *Briefing Note of the Meeting of the Mountain Focus Group* is a publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), publishers of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*. This issue was written and edited by Faye Leone. The Editor is Lynn Wagner, Ph.D. <lynn@iisd.org>. Specific funding for coverage of this meeting has been provided by the Mountain Partnership and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The opinions expressed in the *Briefing Note* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IISD or other donors. Excerpts from the *Briefing Note* may be used in non-commercial publications with appropriate academic citation. For more information, including requests to provide reporting services, contact the Director of IISD Reporting Services at <kimo@iisd.org>, +1-646-536-7556 or 300 East 56th St., 11D, New York, New York 10022, USA.

The assessments had led to some recommendations, including that: mountain governance should be adapted for the unique characteristics of mountains; the international community must facilitate access to resources and benefit sharing for mountain communities; mountain people must be involved in decision making processes; and the private sector should be met with enabling conditions and incentives for investment in sustainable development of mountain areas. Karki also emphasized that mountains represent globally important ecosystems, and that the poverty of mountain peoples is a global concern.

STATUS AND FORTHCOMING STEPS OF THE RIO+20 PROCESS

The second presentation, from Paolo Soprano, Vice-Chair of the Bureau for the Preparatory Process of the UNCSD, provided an update on the UNCSD process, including from the Bureau's meeting held earlier that day. He said the submissions to the UNCSD compilation document testify to the increasing interest in and importance of mountain ecosystems and their sustainable development.

On the calendar of the preparatory process, Soprano announced that the Group of 77 and China (G-77/China) has proposed postponing the presentation of the zero draft of the UNCSD Outcome Document from mid-January to early February 2012, to allow more time for its preparation.

On the substance of preparatory discussions, he noted that States' views on the Conference outcome are very different, and said the Bureau was guided by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution mandating the Conference. He also said Major Groups had requested more direct involvement in negotiations, and that their interventions may occur throughout the list of speakers rather than at the end. In addition, a digital method had been proposed to allow civil society members to comment on each version of the negotiating text, which could be uploaded to a website as it is released to negotiators.

On next steps in the process, he suggested that under the green economy theme, the role of partnerships could be further supported, in order to gain specific contributions from the private sector, which will be the key actor in modifying the fundamental aspects of the economy. He also suggested that mountains should be considered a cross-cutting issue, given mountain communities' role in protecting ecosystems and the role of mountain environments.

A participant noted that both the opportunities of mountains (such as their benefits for those downstream, their biodiversity, and their ecosystem services) and their challenges should be reflected at Rio+20. On the options for the format of the outcome document recently presented by the Bureau, Acharya said a framework for action will be very critical.

THE MOUNTAIN PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Olman Serrano, MPS, gave the third presentation, titled "The Mountain Partnership in Action," which outlined recent activities of the Partnership and its focus ahead of the UNCSD. Serrano noted that submissions to the UNCSD Compilation Document

mentioned mountains 2,728 times. He suggested that the next task should be to encourage countries that benefit from mountain resources to join the mountain process. Serrano expressed the hope that the meeting would offer guidance on whether this effort would be supported, and on the overall role of the MPS leading up to the UNCSD.

DISCUSSION

During the discussion session, the MFG Co-Chairs said that the exact needs for adding mountain-related language to the outcome document could be determined after reviewing the zero draft. They also said they would reach out to the Group for their guidance at that time, including regarding the possible need to bring additional stakeholders on board.

One participant highlighted the UNGA Second Committee's adoption by consensus of a resolution on sustainable mountain development, noted that the draft was co-sponsored by 60 States, and expressed appreciation for the support shown.

Another participant summarized the Group's objective as getting "more space" devoted to mountain concerns in the outcome document, and suggested that a coherent political message could be beneficial, like the approach used successfully by proponents of "blue economy."

On outreach, another participant said mountains had impeded his country's economic development, especially in terms of infrastructure. He suggested that the Group should consider the implications of mountains for the country as a whole, in addition to the development of mountains themselves, and said this could assist with outreach to developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

On partnerships, a participant highlighted that, of the 12 percent of the world's population living in mountain regions, most are poor and most are indigenous. She said partnerships should include indigenous peoples, and stressed that public-private partnerships are not the only or most important type of partnership.

A speaker noted that the true value of mountain resources for downstream countries has not yet been internalized in the UNCSD process. In addition to the number of occurrences in the text, it is also important to capture the cross-cutting role of mountains in major themes of the Conference, such as poverty reduction, food security, disaster reduction and green economy.

CLOSING REMARKS

Summarizing the discussion, Ambassador Bernardini underscored three points raised by participants. First, there is a need for more outreach in the context of Rio+20 preparations, especially around the reasons that sustainable development of mountains is important. Second, there is a need to focus not just on mountains' importance, but also their challenges, including climate change and economic and social development. Third, the strength of this issue is "in our hands." Successful outreach and advocacy would depend not on the size of the mountain population, but on the capacity of delegates to explain the issue and ensure it receives the proper relevance in the UNCSD agenda.