

Promoting Sustainable Mountain Development in Africa: The Role of Mountain Forum and African Mountain Forum

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Introduction

Mountain ecosystems are extremely fragile, but provide tremendous ecological services to the planet. They are a source of nearly half of the world's freshwater resources and shelter a quarter of the world's forest and much of the world's biodiversity. They are also a rich source of diversity of cultures and inspiration, and further provide adventure destination for people.

However, mountain people are marginalized politically, economically, socially and geographically, and remain disproportionately poor. It is for these reasons that special attention and resources must be directed to mountain ecosystems.

Mountain Forum

Mountain Forum is an electronic global network of individuals and organizations concerned with the wellbeing of mountain people, their environments and cultures, and sustainable mountain development. It was created as a follow-up of the recommendations of Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit of 1992.

Mountain Forum's mission is to promote national, regional and global action towards equitable and ecologically sustainable mountain development and conservation through information sharing, mutual support and advocacy. Its objectives are to bring lessons and experiences of mountain people into policy discussions at national and international levels, improve their livelihoods, and promote conservation of mountain environments and cultures.

Mountain Forum is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation with in-kind and moral support from mountain NGOs, eminent personalities supporting the Mountain Agenda.

Membership

Members of the Mountain Forum are from over 130 countries and include activists, administrators, artists, businessmen, community leaders, filmmakers, entrepreneurs, journalists, policy makers, project managers, researchers, students and teachers, amongst others. It also includes hundreds of organisations including local NGOs, international NGOs, universities, research institutions, government institutions and intergovernmental organizations concerned with sustainable mountain development. Membership of Mountain Forum is free.

Main issues addressed by MF

The principal activities of Mountain Forum are information sharing, mutual support and awareness raising. Mountain Forum uses modern and traditional communications to facilitate networking and capacity building of those involved in mountain communities and sustainable development of mountain areas globally to enable mountain people improve their livelihoods and environments. It also encourages advocacy of sustainable mountain development by sharing experiences and lessons on sustainable mountain development and mechanisms for critical dialogue on issues that affect their lives.

Among others, it seeks to address issues related to poverty, health, eco-tourism, environment, economic opportunities, trans-boundary projects and mountaineering. It also seeks to place mountain issues on the agendas of local and national decision makers, donor agencies and international organizations. These functions are performed with the support of researchers, civil society and government agencies.

Resources and Services

Mountain Forum provides access to a range of resources and services, free of cost to all users, through its secretariat in Kathmandu, Nepal and the regional nodes in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin-America and North America. These resources and services provide communication tools and platforms for an effective exchange of information, knowledge, ideas and experiences at local, regional and global levels to empower, create and strengthen its members.

a) Membership Database

The membership database contains information, which helps members to build both institutional and individual links with each other and find opportunities to strengthen each other. Contact information for members as well as their regions of interest and subjects, are published in the searchable, online database which serves as a highly effective networking tool. The database can be searched to find individual members or organisations by name, geographical location, area of expertise and interest.

b) Mountain Library

The online library was established with members contributing academic articles, abstracts, features, reports, theses, bibliographic references, web resources, etc. It has a collection of materials on sustainable mountain development issues in an electronic form and features over 2,400 articles. Its unique characteristic is that it is user-friendly and is organized to enable efficient knowledge storage and retrieval. Topics include climate changes in mountain regions, water policy issues, desertification, invasive alien species and watershed management in highlands. Most of the information is provided in English, French and Spanish.

c) Online Conferences

Mountain Forum has operated thematic electronic conferences using specialized discussion lists to share in-depth information and experiences, identify lessons learned and promising strategies and build relationships, support and capacity. It has provided e-conferences to organisations at both global and regional levels for several organizations such as Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), Mountain Partnership (MP), the Mountain Institute and the Centre for International Environmental Law.

E-conferences have covered topics ranging from mountain forests, spirituality and water policy, engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders ranging from university students to UN agencies. They catalyse community and grassroots levels, support mountain agenda advocacy and provide recommendations and case study summaries useful to field practitioners, policy and decision-makers.

Over the years, Mountain Forum has operated e-conferences which include:

- Rosenberg International Forum on Water Policy, Canada, sponsored by Bell Foundation, July 31 – August 28, 2006;

- Mountain to Mountain Cooperation: Sustainable Use of Biodiversity, including Genetic Resources in the Andes and Himalayas, June 12 – 30, 2006;
- Mountain Forum: The Next Ten Years, April 20 – 31, 2006; and
- Biodiversity Conservation in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya (HKH) Organization and Priorities of the SARD-M initiative of the Mountain Partnership

d) Training and Technical Support

Mountain Forum provides training and technical support such as face-to-face training to other mountain networks on a case-by-case basis.

e) Calendar of Mountain Events

Members of Mountain use a searchable online calendar to publicize mountain events worldwide.

f) Thematic Regional and E-mail Discussion Lists

Subscribers to e-mail discussion lists read on-going dialogues on the latest issues and e-mail ideas to add to the discussion. Discussion lists cover different topics and regions and are fully moderated to maintain a high level of quality in the posting.

g) Publications

Mountain Forum’s publications include annual reports, e-conference reports and bulletins.

Mountain Forum Secretariat and Regional Nodes

Mountain Forum operates in a decentralized way through its Secretariat, hosted by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) at Katmandu, Nepal and five regional nodes in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Europe and North America. The Secretariat coordinates governance, provides global information service and promotes the network at international meetings.

The regional nodes are autonomous, serving the interests of the membership in their respective regions with a focus on local issues and concerns. Functionally, they create regional linkages between individuals and organisations concerned with mountain cultures, environment and sustainable development.

African Mountain Forum

African Mountain Forum is a network of mountain communities, individuals and institutions living, working or deriving their livelihoods in mountain areas of Africa.

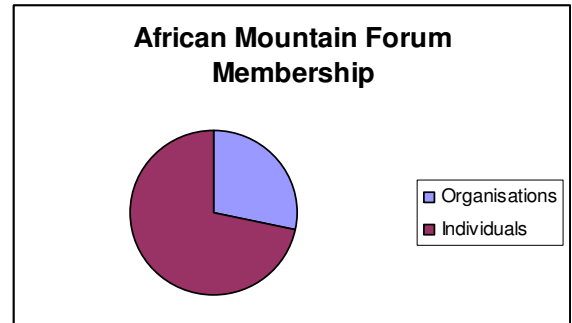
It is currently hosted by African Highlands Initiative (AHI) at the World Agroforestry Centre (formerly named ICRAF) Kampala, Uganda, and is funded by the Global Mountain Programme of CGIAR.



As of 23 August 2006 there were 44 organizational members and 111 individual members who were registered with African Mountain Forum.

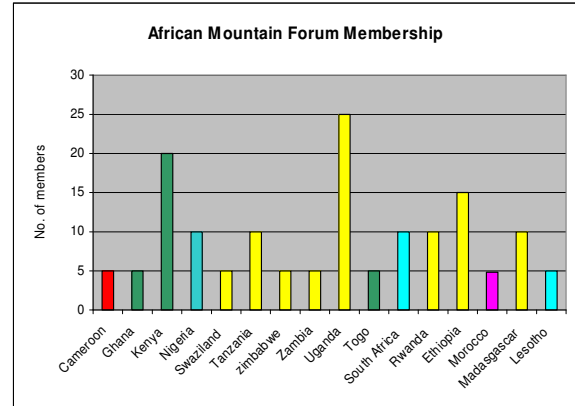
Its objectives include:

- Contribute to sustainable development and conservation of mountain areas in Africa
- Establish partnership and cooperation among communities and other stakeholders for sustainable mountain development in Africa
- Establish a framework for information exchange on African mountain issues
- Promote advocacy and awareness raising on mountain issues in Africa



African Mountain Forum addresses the following main issues:

- Poverty reduction / Improvement of the livelihoods of mountain people
- Land use change
- Environmental and watershed degradation
- Gender equality and empowerment of women
- Promotion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development
- Sustainable utilization of natural resources in mountain areas.



African Mountain Forum seeks to provide, among others, the following services:

- Enhance the exchange of technical, economic, social and policy-area knowledge, ideas, experiences and practices to improve the welfare of mountain communities;
- Improving linkages and building partnerships among regional mountain networks;
- Providing a platform for advocacy on mountain conservation and development issues;
- Creating a "market-place" to link various actors promoting mountain enterprises and sales of mountain products;
- Improving the availability and organization of research findings, and link research and development.



Some Challenges

African Mountain Forum is currently facing challenges which include;

- Funding of national and regional projects
- Alternative methods of communication
- Reaching remote and rural mountain areas.

How do I become a member and benefits?



To become a member of the Mountain Forum, visit <http://www.mtnforum.org> and fill out a membership form online or on paper or. Membership is free.

Members of the Mountain Forum have the right to:

- Elect a member representative to the MF Board of Directors and participate in elections;
- An online profile in the MF membership database;
- Participate in moderated regional and thematic discussion lists;
- Fortnightly summaries of postings on all discussion lists;
- Up-to-date information on mountain events;
- Access to the MF Online Library; and
- Preferential access to publications of MF and its partners.

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