

Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on SDG 15
May 14-15, 2018 – Conference Room 9, UN HQ, New York
Session on Mountains as key providers for a Sustainable Future
15 May, 11:45–12:45

Session Initiation and Opening Remarks: 11:45 – 11:55

By the Ex-Executive Director of The Mountain Institute and Chair of the Steering Committee of the Mountain Partnership.

Distinguished experts, ladies and gentlemen,

- This next session is on mountain systems and their role in global sustainability as it relates to SDG 15
- It is a pleasure to moderate this session on behalf of the mountain community. Mountain stakeholders include indigenous people, species and ecosystems in the world's highlands as well as much of humanity in vast mountain dependent lowland areas. For this session, do keep in mind the tag line for 2002 International Year of the Mountains: **"We Are All Mountain People"**
- I will start this session by briefly **reviewing key facts about mountains in the context of SDG 15**; then we will have **two presentations** – one from a representative of a government agency and another from civil society; and then **open the floor for discussion of key mountain issues** of relevance to meeting targets of SDG 15 and other SDGs, as well as other Multi-lateral Environmental Agreement.
- **Mountains cover about 22% of the earth's land** – including a quarter of the world's forests. They are a source of fresh water; energy; biodiversity; a range plant, animal and mineral products; and other goods and services **vital to much of the world's population as well as national economies.**
- **Their ecosystems are highly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters.** Degradation of steep slopes is increasing the impacts of floods and landslides, with severe consequences for farmers, agropastoralists, and downstream populations and ecosystems. Mountain species, from charismatic Pandas, Vicuñas and Snow leopards, to pollinators like bees and bats face a range of threats, including from invasive species and pathogens.
- The majority of mountain people in developing countries live below the poverty line with over **300 million highlanders vulnerable to food insecurity.** Out-migration is devastating high altitude communities—although potentially creating conservation opportunities—while in-flow of climate refugees at lower elevations is stressing natural systems. Mountain communities are storehouse for traditional knowledge for dealing with tough environmental circumstances – but much of this experience is being lost.
- Aggravating these threats, mountain areas are **often forgotten on the fringes of national and international priorities, policies and investment.**

But, there is some good news:

- **Protected Area coverage of key biodiversity areas in mountains has increased** from 18% to 20% from 2000 to 2016 – but is uneven. For instance, covering only 3.5% of sites in Western Asia. In any case, **relying solely on**

protected areas to secure mountain ecosystem services is likely inadequate. Holistic landscape and watershed level approaches are required along with Other Ecosystem Conservation Mechanisms, PES schemes, prioritization of mountains in EbA, mountain inclusion in other SDGs (e.g., SDG 6), etc.

- Fortunately, at local levels, examples are popping up around the world demonstrating that a range of high-value mountain products and services including medicinal plants, animal fibers and ecotourism show **prospects for building prosperity in remote communities in ways that also incentivize ecosystem protection (some Nepali farmers earning \$30k a year)**.
- At **national levels**, countries are establishing **multi-stakeholder** mountain committees to promote conservation of natural resources and social and economic inclusion in mountains.
- And through the **international community** where the key convener is the **UN's Mountain Partnership**. This was founded in 2002, and has a secretariat hosted by FAO, and a membership (320 entities) including 59 governments; 14 international organizations; five subnational authorities; and 222 NGOs, civil society organizations and private sector companies. **Its efforts to advance the mountain agenda have** included:
 - **Influencing the 2030 Agenda** to explicitly recognize the vulnerability of mountains in three targets under SDGs for “water” and “life on land,” with **target 15.4 dedicated to mountain ecosystems**.

<p>6.6 – By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes</p> <p>15.1 – By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements</p> <p>15.4 – By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development</p>
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- Advocating for mountain at numerous regional and global fora **under various multi-lateral environmental agreements**.
- **Encouraging Members States and NGOs (e.g., IUCN!) to collect disaggregated scientific data on mountain areas, and to integrate the Green Cover Index**, developed by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, in the SDG indicator framework. It already has established a baseline of 76% of world's mountains covered by green vegetation
- At the 5th global meeting of the Mountain Partnership last December, its members endorsed **a [Framework for Action](#) committing to integrate strategies for sustainable mountain development and ecosystem conservation in policies and programmes by 2030; and to advocate for “mountain inclusion” in the:**
 - Annual progress report on the SDGs by the Secretary General,
 - Global Sustainable Development report (every 4 years), and
 - Voluntary National Reviews

- I now turn to our two presenters who will speak on mountain challenges, lessons learned, and policy initiatives relevant to SDG 15 in Papua New Guinea and Madagascar. After each presentation, I will entertain at most two questions from the floor to save time for the following discussion.
- It is my pleasure to give the floor to Ms. Ruth Turia, Director of Forest Policy and Planning, National Forest Service, Papua New Guinea Forest Authority who will speak about **Sustainable Development Goal 15 - Progress and Prospects: A perspective from Papua New Guinea on Mountains**: 11:55 – 12:05
- Now, I am delighted to ask Ms. Hanta Rabetaliana of the World Mountain People Association, to speak about mountains from a Madagascar perspective: 12:05 – 12:15
- It is now your turn, I would like to **open the floor for discussion and comment** on mountains and SDG 15. Let's aim to keep the discussion informal, focused and frank. — 12:15 – 12:35
- Reminder of key questions:
 - How can the role and value of mountains be included in development strategies and policy development across sectors? Here, it would be useful to reflect on strategies to insure mountain issues will be addressed under the umbrella of other SDG agendas.
 - How can the data collected for the Mountain Green Cover Index feed into national planning and policies? And how can other Tier I, II and III indicators better insure that isolated mountain regions are taken into account.
 - How can a Framework for Action on mountains contribute to achieving progress in SDG15 and the other SDGs?
 - Which adaptation measures can prevent the loss of biodiversity and the effects of climate change in mountains? And how can these be promoted and scaled.
 - What mechanisms and partnerships should mountain stakeholder prioritize to accelerate progress?
 - Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN)
 - Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE)
 - Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development (PEAS)
 - The Green Commodities Programme
 - Thematic programmes on financing linked to forests, mountains, agriculture and land management, and illegal wildlife trade.
 - GEF Small Grants Programme, the NBSAP Forum, and BES-Net support for partnership mechanisms at the global, regional, national, and community level.
- Speakers (and Moderator) concluding remarks. 12:35 – 12:45
 - Ms. Ruth Turia, Director, Forest Policy and Planning National Forest Service, Papua New Guinea Forest Authority
 - Ms. Hanta Rabetaliana of the World Mountain People Association, from Madagascar
 - Andrew Taber, Moderator

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