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***Regional Meeting on Sustainable Development in African Mountain Regions -
climate change impacts, adaptation and development in fragile ecosystems***

Mbale Resort Hotel, Uganda, 16 to 18 November 2011

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

The following paper is intended to serve as a background for discussions held in the frame of the regional meeting on sustainable development and climate change in African Mountain Regions, Mbale, Uganda, 16 to 18 November 2011. It is recommended to be read in conjunction with the provided Assessment Reports on Sustainable Mountain Development in Africa and the MENA Region for Rio+20: "Draft Regional Report Africa, prepared for the Lucerne World Mountain Conference, 10-12 October 2011 – Executive summary", the "Report on Progress in implementing A21, PFIA21 and JPOI Commitments on Sustainable Mountain Development" and the "Regional Report MENA" that provide a detailed insight of the *status quo* of Sustainable Development in African Mountain Regions.

WHY MOUNTAINS MATTER

1. Mountains are typically characterized by high levels of biological and cultural diversity, and vast untapped natural resources, as well as being key regulators of climate and the storage/source of more than half the world's freshwater resources. Together, mountains account for about 25 percent of the world's terrestrial land area and, while they are home to only about 10 percent of the world's population, the highland-lowland linkages in the climate change discussion cannot be ignored without serious consequences, particularly on urban populations, plains agriculture and coastal ecosystems, such as hydrological disruption, increasingly intense flooding, siltation of dams and coastal zones, and landslides/mudslides. For those who choose to remain living in the mountain areas, climate change directly and indirectly contributes to unsustainable land use, often with maladaptation leading to further food insecurity. Furthermore, the effects of climate change have also shown to lead to mass migration of impoverished rural peoples, further adding to the resource pressures of the lowlands and cities, leading to social and economic conflicts, marginalization and further impoverishment and exploitation. In several mountainous areas, the combination of socio-political conflicts with natural disasters often augments the spread of malnutrition and disease.

2. The continued political marginalization of mountains at both the international and national levels in favour of short-term economic growth continues to put the critical functional attributes and uses at high risk of further degradation, having potentially disastrous effects on the wellbeing of all people and sectors, including ironically economic development. More specifically, climate change is expected to impact mountain ecosystem services in the following ways:



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- With climate change, climate variability may change beyond the limits of past experience and traditional knowledge may not be sufficient for mountain people to cope with more frequent extreme climate events such as droughts and floods, and associated risks such as avalanches and landslides
- Agricultural production and the viability of pastures will suffer from increased climate variability leading to decreased food security
- Retreating glaciers will lead to more water flows in the short run and drought and less water availability in the long run
- Change in water regimes may affect both mountain and lowland people's livelihoods and economic activities, including hydropower generation and tourism
- Ecosystems will experience a vertical shift towards higher altitudes. This may also lead to the extinction of wild plants and animals that are adapted to the cold
- Human health conditions in mountain areas could be severely impacted leading to reduced human productivity and increased vulnerability. For instance, it has been reported that the incidence of malaria at higher altitudes in East Africa is increasing.

All the above impacts may be exacerbated by political and civil conflicts that are rife in some mountain areas of Africa.

3. In spite of these critical challenges to meeting the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability and the Millennium Development Goals, there remains very limited awareness among policy- and decision-makers at all levels of the impacts caused by climate change in mountain areas, and how best to go about adapting to these challenges in the 21st century.

THE MOUNTAINS OF AFRICA

4. The continent of Africa covers about 20 per cent of the Earth's land surface. Around 50 per cent of the countries in Africa contain mountains or have steep land problems, and about 10 per cent (3 million Km²) of Africa's surface area is classified as highland, mountain or steep sloping land¹. The large mountains in Africa are limited to the north-western, eastern and south-eastern parts, while isolated and relatively smaller mountains are found scattered throughout the continent. Although the mountain ranges in Africa are not comparable in size to the Himalayas or the Andes, they are nevertheless of huge importance to the development of many African countries. This is particularly the case in the tropical and sub-tropical regions where the mountain ecosystems have more favourable environmental conditions and greater resource potential than the surrounding areas (although this also depends on historical political development of the countries, current socio-political conditions, and increasingly also foreign economic investment). Consequently, the areas tend to have intensive land-use, particularly in terms of agriculture, forestry and mineral extraction) and dense populations; implying that without a clear understanding of the relatively fragile environments of these areas and the political will to redefine national development in terms of a sustainable development framework, continued severe degradation is almost inevitable.

5. The major challenges faced by the mountain communities are mainly related to the difficult and sensitive terrain and ecosystems. By virtue of their morphology, mountains

¹ <http://www.mountainpartnership.org/issues/resources/didyouknow.html>



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have always been barriers to human movement. Consequently, development activities have always concentrated away from the mountains. Thus, in spite of economic growth, the mountains changed rather slowly and remained largely excluded from the dominant global economic processes. Recently, however, the situation in the mountains has undergone rapid change with the widespread extension of transportation systems and infrastructure, including the use of modern road and bridge-building technologies, except that this development has been mostly determined by the interests of the lowlands (i.e., resource extraction, trade, access to labour). In this way, while the original, spatial marginality of the mountains has become less marked, new kinds of marginality have emerged: As a result of easier access and transportation, the political authority of the central state over the remote mountain areas (which had so far enjoyed relative autonomy) was consolidated (e.g., the Bakonjo community in the Rwenzori mountains in Uganda). At the same time, mountains have become integrated into the economy of the lowlands.

6. The driving economic forces now have better knowledge about and access to the rich natural resources in the mountains, including hydro-power, minerals, timber and agricultural soils. The roads have become a catalyst to unprecedented mass extraction of these resources. An extra level of exploitation as a result of the new and improved transportation systems involves the rapid movement of cheap human resources from the mountains to work in the lowlands when the latter need them. Thus, in many areas of the continent the relationship between the mountains and lowlands has long been characterized by unequal terms of development opportunities and priorities, and by the enhanced dependence of the mountains on the product, service and labour market system in the lowlands.

7. There is a growing contradiction between the marginalization and integration of mountain areas, one process negatively re-enforcing the other. The present critical thinking is that sustainability of any form cannot be achieved under such circumstances and that there is urgent need for a much deeper understanding of the potential and weaknesses of mountains, and the setting of exclusive priorities for sustainable development in mountains. Thus, a new concept of SMD in Africa must evolve – with the interest and sustainable future development of mountain communities and their environment at the core.

For further information on the situation in specific mountain regions in Africa please see also pages 3 – 18 of the “Report on Progress in implementing A21, PFIA21 and JPOI Commitments on Sustainable Mountain Development”.

GOVERNANCE ASPECTS WITH REGARD TO SD IN AFRICAN MOUNTAIN REGIONS

8. While mountains do not have a global over-arching convention, specific sectors are addressed in other conventions, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change², and within the Convention on Biological Diversity through its Programme of Work on Mountain Biodiversity and Protected Areas. Similarly, issues related to pollution and

² See in particular the Preamble and Art. 4 § 8 UNFCCC.



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chemicals, communications, transport, mining, forestry, water, social development and human rights, are addressed in various legal frameworks at the global level that might apply to mountains as well.

9. The landmark African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (15 September 1968, Algiers)³ signalled impressive forward-thinking on the part of the heads of State at a time when many African countries had recently gained independence and were undergoing rapid political and socio-economic change that was profoundly changing landscapes, often irreversibly. As an illustration of this preliminary understanding of SMD, the Fundamental Principle of the Convention (Article 2) states that: "The Contracting States shall undertake to adopt the measures to ensure conservation, utilization and development of soil, water, flora and faunal resources in accordance with scientific principles and with due regard to the best interests of the people."

10. More recently, the 1997 African Mountains and Highlands Declaration of Antananarivo⁴ highlights the concerns of NGOs on the major socio-economic and environmental issues affecting African mountain ecosystems. Furthermore, it provides general policy recommendations, including:

- More sustainable mountain development
- Action-oriented mountain research
- Inter-institutional communication and collaboration

11. Unfortunately, the Antananarivo Declaration appears to have faded into obscurity; however, the socio-economic and environmental concerns remain relevant to this day (as are those of the 1968 African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) and should be revived in a more modern tone that accurately reflects the ever-increasing challenges associated with political and resource conflicts (including resource scarcity), climate change and post-Kyoto 2012, human population increases, food production demands, etc.

12. The example of the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions and other regional approaches and initiatives could serve as interesting models for similar initiatives that could be developed for a more flexible and relevant view of SMD in the mountain systems of Africa, both on a pan-Africa level and regionally, particularly building upon the 1968 African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. More importantly, this would also allow all African countries to be part of a convention development process built upon consensus and mutual understanding for the sustainable development of the fragile mountain ecosystems that make up a big part of the African continent and provide the basis for decent livelihoods for millions of people.

For further information please see also pages 42 – 45 of the "Report on Progress in implementing A21, PFIA21 and JPOI Commitments on Sustainable Mountain Development".

³ Entry into force: 16 June 1969. For the full text, see: http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/Convention_Nature%20&%20Natural_Resources.pdf

⁴ <http://europe.mtnforum.org/rs/econfreports/MountainLawsAndPeoples.pdf>.



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OBJECTIVES AND CONTENT

13. This Africa Regional Meeting has been organised by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat (MPS) – Central Hub hosted at FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Mbale, Uganda, from 16 to 18 November 2011.

14. The main objective of this meeting is to contribute to the development of an African agenda and constituency on SMD that builds upon and contributes to regional and global climate change discussions. The meeting will provide an opportunity for participants (including national delegations to the UNFCCC, governments, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, civil society representatives and other policy makers) to share views and experiences on the current state of SMD in Africa and to discuss future challenges and opportunities with regard to SMD, particularly with regards to climate change.

15. Furthermore, the meeting will be used to present UNEP's sustainable mountain development activities in Africa and present the recently elaborated Assessment Reports on Sustainable Mountain Development in Africa and MENA Region in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro (Rio Earth Summit 2012). The first versions of these reports were presented at the margins of the World Mountain Conference, Lucerne, Switzerland, 11 to 12 October 2011.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

16. The main results expected to be achieved with this Regional Meeting include:

- Contribution to the development of an African agenda and constituency on sustainable development of mountain systems
- Contribution to national, regional and international climate change discussions and provide capacity building to African stakeholders in this sector
- Experience sharing on the current state of sustainable development in mountain regions in Africa and to discuss future challenges and opportunities *vis-à-vis* climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Exploration of opportunities for future collaboration to promote SMD and climate change adaptation in African mountain regions

17. In addition, the Regional Meeting aims to provide recommendations and further inputs to the Assessment Reports on Sustainable Mountain Development in Africa and Mena Region for Rio+20.



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Annex 1. The Mountain Partnership and the World Bank DGF Strategic Initiative

18. The Mountain Partnership was launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg (South Africa) in 2002 to support positive change in mountain areas. Conceived as a so-called Type II outcome (Partnership Initiatives) of the WSSD, the Mountain Partnership is a voluntary alliance of partners which today encompasses 183 members, including governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The Mountain Partnership is served by a Secretariat that consists of a Central Hub, hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with decentralized hubs hosted at the Consorcio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Ecorregión Andina (CONDESAN) in Peru (Latin America Hub), the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Nepal (Asia Pacific Hub), the University of Central Asia (UCA) (Central Asia), and the Environmental Reference Centre (ERC) of United National Environment Programme (UNEP), hosted by the Interim Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention - UNEP Vienna Office, which is responsible for facilitating UNEP's involvement at large and thereby ensuring adequate attention to environmental concerns in the Partnership.

19. In 2011, the Mountain Partnership Secretariat received a Grant from the World Bank through its Development Grant Facility (DGF) to support a "Strategic Initiative on Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Development in Mountain Regions". The DGF is the mechanism through which the World Bank provides direct grant support for innovative Global Partnership Programs that are of high value to client countries but which cannot be supported adequately through regular Bank-country assistance operations or economic and sectoral work. As stated in the Grant Agreement, the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, by building on its existing global network, aims to implement capacity and technical knowledge exchange activities, as well as communication and advocacy in support of the overall objectives of the Strategic Initiative.

20. The Strategic Initiative focuses on raising the awareness of members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) National Delegations, as well as politicians, scientists, and practitioners in climate change policy. The purpose of the Strategic Initiative is to strengthen cross-regional and cross-thematic cooperation and to empower National Delegations and experts to negotiate and gain visibility and stronger representation within the UNFCCC negotiation processes in order to mobilize international support and resources for promoting climate change adaptation for the mountain ecosystems. In the framework of this Strategic Initiative, the Mountain Partnership Secretariat is directly responsible for strengthening cross-regional and cross-thematic cooperation to:

- Enhance the advocacy of climate change impacts and development challenges in mountain regions at the international and cross-regional policy levels and dialogues
- Facilitate cross-regional capacity building for politicians, scientists, and practitioners as regards climate change adaptation in mountains



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- Accelerate cross-regional knowledge dissemination and exchange with respect to climate change adaptation in mountains

21. The Partnership has become a significant instrument to stimulate long-term action at all levels in mountain regions, aimed to protect mountain environments and support mountain livelihoods through the integration of environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development in the regions concerned. This is being achieved both through networking among members of the Partnership at all levels as well as through promoting increased awareness on challenges affecting mountains as a consequence of global changes.