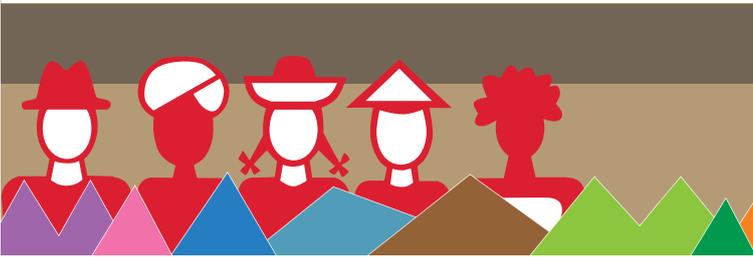


## Why mountains of the Southeast Asia and Pacific region matter



**Mountains of the Southeast Asia and Pacific (SEAP) region spread across mainland Asia and the island/archipelagic states in the Pacific Ocean. These countries host one of the world's highest and most severely threatened biodiversity and gene pools. Many of the region's indigenous peoples who live in the highlands have developed home-grown and time-tested knowledge and skills in protecting and conserving tropical mountain ecosystems. The SEAP mountains have been generally ignored or are subsumed in forest and other resource-based national policies and programmes. Consequently, forest, water and mineral resources have been expropriated with little benefits going to the mountain peoples who have mostly remained marginalised and vulnerable.**

How can SEAP mountains contribute to sustainable development?

SEAP mountains provide ecosystem goods and services such as regulation of natural systems and carbon storage, as well as forest and biodiversity, water, minerals, and energy that are vital to the region's sustainable development and economic growth. Unlike many goods and services produced downstream, mountain products are strongly integrated with the topography, and coexist with other mutually supportive resources. Downstream populations share in the benefits that mountains provide, but many have limited awareness of the mountains' contributions to the overall well-being.

Indigenous peoples who call SEAP mountains their home account for almost 20% of the global indigenous population. These mountain populations serve as custodians of a vast diversity of cultures, languages, and traditional knowledge. Governments must increase efforts to engage indigenous populations, by acknowledging their rights and by devising more inclusive forms of governance and sustainable environment and mountain development initiatives. There is also a need to engage

the private sector in increased investment in mountain-based enterprises and in more equitable profit-sharing.

The SEAP mountains' resources need to be better harnessed by strengthening institutions and engaging all stakeholders in sustainable development. States must heighten public awareness of the mountains' benefits and must strive for better transboundary cooperation to achieve synergies in pursuing common goals concerning mountain resources. For example, management of the region's largest river, the lower Mekong, requires better coordination across states to minimise damage from the regular occurrence of devastating floods and droughts and to maximise its contribution to agricultural productivity.

The SEAP mountains' high biodiversity is extremely vulnerable to climatic and hydrologic changes. Better management of biodiversity, which supports a wide range of industries, requires both science-based regeneration and harvesting systems and community-based participatory management. Mountain resources offer vast opportunities for green enterprise development. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) can serve as resource base for sustainable livelihood development, provided that adequate mechanisms ensure regeneration and equitable profit-sharing. Opportunities for green tourism can help further the development of mountain areas in SEAP, preserve traditional cultures, and bring in financial resources for developing health, transportation, education, and communication infrastructure in remote mountain villages.

In order to reduce the impacts of climate and global change, mountain people must be capacitated to adapt to climate change and reduce their vulnerability, for example through resilience building and adaptation programmes, including REDD+ and payment for ecosystem services.



Children performing a song about mountain agrobiodiversity (Susanne Wymann von Dach)

## Policy action for the mountains of the SEAP region – and the future we want



Mekong, Laos (Susanne Wymann von Dach)

In the SEAP mountains, issues about equity, social justice and ownership have plagued development efforts, raising doubts about the sustainability of mountain initiatives. A mountain-focused public policy and participatory actions can help build community resilience and long term sustenance of these mountain systems. It is imperative that such public policy actions incorporate the following:

### **Developing good governance and equitable mechanisms**

Economic accounting of the full value of the mountain ecosystem goods and services internalising the unique characteristics and biodiversity wealth of mountains can help reduce poverty and at the same time give incentives to conserve forest and biodiversity through sustainable development plans and programmes.

### **Promote inclusive approaches incorporating the voice of mountain peoples**

Assisting mountain communities in negotiation and collaborative dialogues is necessary for resolving conflicts, enabling them to achieve equitable benefit sharing and co-management of resources in collaboration with government, civil society, donors, and the private sector.

### **Strengthening collaborative research**

Combining traditional practices and scientific knowledge can help develop actionable plans for implementing through meaningful participation of stakeholders both in the mountains and downstream.

### **Develop mountain-resource based livelihoods**

With the growing possibility of inflow of capital from non-mountain entities including private sector in mountain ecosystems, equitable sharing of profits with mountain dwellers can not only help finance ecosystem conservation efforts but also provide incentives to local communities.

### **Consolidating international and national funding mechanisms**

Increasing synergies, efficiency, and coherence among international and national financing instruments and mechanisms is necessary to promote immediate actions in sustainable development programmes in the SEAP region.



Market in Luang Prabang, Laos (Susanne Wymann von Dach)