



Climate change adaptation in Africa's "living places": mountain-specific actions must be placed squarely on the international agenda
Regional experts meet in Uganda as mountain communities are facing urgent climatic challenges

Mbale (Uganda) 21 November 2011. From the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro to the Atlas in Morocco, the landscape of Africa's mountain regions constitutes a varying and fragile ecosystem with many crucial functions. It is often an agricultural landscape. As a temperate island in a harsh landscape, it is a site for towns and ongoing urbanization. It supports subsistence farming for households. And it provides water for local and downstream communities and other resources for pastoral peoples.

In order to set in motion the development of an enhanced mountain agenda for Africa, international experts, researchers and journalists from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe met in Mbale, Uganda, for three days. Together, they discussed the increasing challenges and opportunities involved in the sustainable development of mountain regions as part of the "Strategic Initiative for Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Development in Mountain Regions". The meeting was jointly organized by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with support from the World Bank.



Participants in the meeting explored the relationship between mountains and climate change, as well as the potential for sustainable development in mountain regions, collectively identifying key issues such as the need for capacity building and the importance of the upcoming Rio+ 20 conference in 2012.

Africa's mountains, "living places"

About 50 percent of the countries in Africa incorporate highlands, mountains or steep sloping areas. While large mountains are limited to the northwestern, eastern or southeastern regions, isolated and relatively small mountains are found scattered throughout the continent. The benefits of mountains, through the provision of ecosystem goods and services, extend well beyond the highland regions, reaching cities, towns and rural areas in the surrounding lowland regions. On the other hand, Africa's mountains face many challenges. As described by Bob Nakileza, Chair of the International Conference on East Africa Mountains 2011, based at the Mountain Resource Centre of Makerere University in Uganda, "Mountains in Uganda are a very important store of wealth but are fragile ecosystems. They are facing major challenges, especially due to population pressure and resource degradation exacerbated by climate change impacts. Uganda recognizes the rights of mountain people to sustainable livelihoods and development, and therefore the need for leverage investments in these regions for poverty alleviation and equity, which are key requisites to reduce isolation and marginalization."

Highlands and lowlands, coping locally with global climatic challenges

To help set the stage for the discussions of the ensuing days, the meeting started with a field visit to two villages located on the slopes of Mount Elgon, showcasing some of the opportunities and challenges faced by communities in Africa's mountain regions. "Africa's mountain ecosystems are important for local communities, national economies and international benefits," said Sam Kanyamibwa, Executive Secretary of the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS), a regional NGO operating in one of Africa's mountain regions. "Owing to their vulnerability, particularly to climate change, these ecosystems need to receive special attention from everyone, especially governments involved in development planning, as well as the donor community," he added.

To reduce vulnerability, farmers in Atari, a high-altitude village, have received soil conservation and livelihood training from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with funding support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A programme on ecosystem-based adaptation has been initiated to boost capacities.

As farmer Rose Kiteiywo, 38, reported: "These days rains are very heavy. As a result, our soil has been degraded. So we do not grow as much food as we used to. And this means that even when the price of food crops is high, we do not get the benefit because we are supplying so little to the market."

In Sansara, a village in the foothills of Mount Elgon, District Councillor Khalifan Towet explained that the biggest challenge villagers face is the lack of clean drinking water: "The water in the river that flows down from the mountains is very dirty and not fit for consumption. We are also experiencing a lot of flooding due to heavy rains."

"The ecosystem services provided by African mountains play an essential role in the livelihood of African communities," said Mohamed Abdel-Monem, Ecosystem Management Officer working with UNEP. "We are consulting concerned stakeholders in order to address these challenges using tools for the



sustainable management and conservation of ecosystems, taking the impact of climate change into consideration,” he added.

Strategic Initiative for Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Development in Mountain Regions

This is the third regional meeting organized by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat in the framework of the World Bank’s Development Grant Facility on the “Strategic Initiative for Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Development in Mountain Regions”. Each meeting has brought together government delegates, policy-makers, journalists, scientists, and mountain and climate change experts, to boost knowledge on the impact of climate change in mountain areas, discuss adaptation options for mountain ecosystems and promote better partnerships and cooperation amongst countries with mountain territories.

“Several groups are working with mountains. However, given the multi-sectoral nature of their projects, they neglect to capitalize on any advances,” said Olman Serrano, Mountain Partnership Secretariat Coordinator, who went on to add: “Very few mountain-specific issues have been highlighted because projects are not labelled as mountain-related or mountain-specific. This needs to be brought to the attention of those setting the international agenda.”

“Without a clear understanding of the relatively fragile environments that mountain areas represent, and the political will to redefine national development in terms of a sustainable development framework, continued severe degradation is almost inevitable,” concluded Serrano.

The first of these regional meetings – for Latin America – was held in Santiago from 26 to 28 October 2011 in collaboration with the Government of Chile. The second – for Central Asia – was held in Dushanbe from 9 to 11 November 2011 in collaboration with the University of Central Asia and the Government of Tajikistan. All the relevant presentations, material and conclusions may be found [here](#).

Links of interest:

www.mountainpartnership.org

www.iucn.org

www.unep.org

www.undp.org

www.fao.org