

# SAWTEE

## TRADE & DEVELOPMENT MONITOR

### BGMS: A promise or a performance ?

The success of the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit (BGMS) lies in creating a bond between promise and performance.

Mountains are globally important as water towers of the earth, repositories of rich biological diversity, target areas for recreation, and as a hub of cultural integrity and heritage, yet the vast majority of mountain people live in acute poverty. It is because the most valued mountain resources, such as forests, minerals and water, are often expropriated and exploited by outsiders.

Moreover, economic activities in mountain areas are seldom managed sustainably and central governments often tend to ignore mountain people in the decision-making process and formulation of national policies and programmes. On one hand, due to fragile ecosystems, they are subject to adverse and harsh climatic conditions (excessive rainfall, aridity, high solar radiation), natural disasters (avalanches, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions), on the other hand, harsh socioeconomic conditions (poverty, isolation, lack of infrastructures etc.) have made their lives more pathetic. They are being handicapped in terms of capacities and preparedness to effectively participate in and fully benefit from the processes of liberalisation and globalisation. Fear is ripe that these mountain communities are on the verge of marginalisation from the global economy.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, in 1992 made an impressive effort in the global arena to highlight the mountains. And in November 1998, the UN General Assembly declared 2002 as the International Year of Mountains (IYM) and drew the attention of the world leaders to the mountains, their importance and their problems. It not only provided a unique platform to reinforce the long-term process started at the UNCED in Brazil of raising public awareness and ensuring adequate political, institutional and financial commitment to concrete action for sustainable mountain development but also promoted a great variety of events including meetings at local, national and international levels.

Notably, the World Food Summit: *five years later* held in July 2002 in Rome, Italy, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in August-September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa also had mountain perspectives on their agenda. However, these events, as was expected, failed to address the specific needs of mountain regions and ways to

promote their conservation and sustainable development.

Against this backdrop, the global community has another but final global event of the IYM - Bishkek Global Mountain Summit (BGMS) to be held from 29 October to 1 November 2002 in Kyrgyzstan. It has been expected that the Summit will draw together the ideas and recommendations generated by previous events, from all levels and sectors of society, into proposals for concrete action including the Bishkek Mountain Platform, a synthesis of the results of mountain meetings since the 1992 Earth Summit; the International Partnership for Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions; a draft proposal for a UN General Assembly resolution on a framework for action for integrated management of mountain ecosystems; establishment of a network of Mountain Developing States (MODS); and the Central Asian Mountain Charter. Likewise, 10 thematic papers have also been prepared by lead authors in collaboration with a broad based alliance of organisations and individuals in order to look into various mountain issues, *inter alia*, prospective international agreements, national policies and institutions and legal, economic, and compensation mechanisms in support of sustainable mountain development; and the challenges of mountain environments. These 10 areas will be the focus of working sessions during the BGMS and their recommendations will be later included in the Bishkek Mountain Platform.

The Summit is significant not merely because hundreds of representatives from governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), UN organisations and media will descend to Bishkek to prepare a future guideline for sustainable mountain development but also because the agenda they have tailored for the forum is vital to promote prosperity, growth and peace in the world. It is hoped that BGMS will guide the governments to bring the mountain problems in their national policies, sensitise the CSOs to act in support of sustainable mountain development through mountain specific programmes, and encourage the media to highlight the mountain needs – all of which will ultimately make a contribution towards sustainable development of mountain areas in the long run. ■

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## Mountain issues and farmers' rights: South Asian perspective

**A farmer-centered approach is the key to the attainment of sustainability in both developed and developing countries, writes Shafqat Munir.**

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 adopted Agenda 21, which under its various chapters discusses mountain ecosystems, livelihood options of their inhabitants, agriculture and land use issues. Chapter 32 calls for strengthening the role of farmers describing them as rural people who derive their livelihood from activities such as farming, fishing and forest harvesting. Chapter 26 urges the need to recognise and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities. Similarly, Chapter 13 entitled "Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development" has identified two main platform areas:

- Generating and strengthening knowledge about the ecology and sustainable development of mountain ecosystems; and
- Promoting integrated watershed development and alternative livelihood opportunities.

The major issues confronting the mountain communities are: abject poverty, dependence on natural resources which sometime in some areas causes depletion of certain natural resources, land use patterns, subsistence farming, water shortages, access to markets, fuel and housing needs, etc. The people living in mountains are more vulnerable than the people living in plains. Only the rights based approach could properly reduce vulnerability. Thus, investing in people, particularly the vulnerable segments, could contribute much towards sustainable human development. Being the poorest of the poor, the mountain communities are vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters and miscalculations. Moreover, mountains are generally among the last on the list for investment, whether by the public or the private sector. And this is quite relevant in the context of developing countries, particularly in South Asia where mountains are often neglected in national development plans.

### Farmers' rights

The sufferings of the mountain communities are gradually rising as they are neglected at policy and practice levels by the governments as well as international monetary and trade organisations. They largely depend on agriculture for livelihood that happens to be unsustainable at the moment. Particularly, under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreements, farming communities in mountain areas along with their counterparts in plains are being put under a risk of deprivation of their local knowledge. Their right to store, reuse and share their plant and



seed varieties is being snatched, as they have no means to check bio-piracy.

The WTO's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agree-

ment directly violates the farmers' rights by allowing countries to provide patent protection for microorganisms, microbiological and non-biological processes and intellectual property protection for plant varieties. If countries do not comply, they face the threat of sanctions at the WTO. Likewise, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) directly affects farming communities in mountain areas mainly because subsidies are being abolished under this agreement.

The people in mountain regions are already being deprived of basic necessities of life. To protect folk knowledge from bio-piracy, it is an imperative for developing countries to reject patents on life forms. They should not accept the principle of intellectual property systems on life forms and private monopolies over genetic resources. Rather they should call for strengthening the Convention on Bio-Diversity (CBD) to avoid any sort of bio-piracy and patents on life forms.

TRIPS should be changed and made compatible to the principles of the CBD so that patent rights are not granted for naturally occurring plants and animals or their parts, or the uses of plants and animals raised in the upland areas. An international body for the protection and patenting of indigenous knowledge should be created to interface traditional knowledge with the legal framework.

A farmer-centered approach is the key to the attainment of sustainability in both developed and developing countries and many of the programme areas in Agenda 21 address this objective. A significant number of the rural population in South Asia depends primarily upon small-scale, subsistence-oriented agriculture based on family labour. However, they have limited access to resources, technology, alternative livelihood and means of production. As a result, they are engaged in overexploitation of natural resources, including marginal lands.

Under these circumstances, there is a dire need to encourage a decentralised decision-making process through the creation and strengthening of local and village organisations that would delegate power and responsibility to primary users of natural resources; support and enhance the legal capacity of women and vulnerable groups with regard to access, use and tenure of land; and promote and encourage sustainable farming practices and technologies.

To ensure protection of farmers' rights in South Asian perspectives, the governments and farmer organisations should initiate mechanisms to document, synthesise and disseminate local knowledge, practices and project experiences so that they will make use of the lessons of the past while formulating and implementing policies affecting farming and establish networks for the exchange of experiences. ■

(Mr. Munir is President of JDHR, Islamabad, Pakistan)



## The Asia High Summit:

### Need for an action plan for the mountains of Asia

**Governments should design policies and programmes that are focused on mountains and their problems.**

The Asia High Summit held in Kathmandu, Nepal from 6-10 May 2002, was one of four conferences of the High Summit held simultaneously in Africa, Europe, and South America, interconnected through live web casts on the Internet with a shared videoconference 'news hour'. The Asia High Summit was a regional event that marked the observance of the International Year of Mountains (IYM) 2002, declared by the United Nations General Assembly. The Asia High Summit was coordinated by the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and sponsored by the Italian Committee on IYM and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

The three primary objectives of the Asia High Summit 2002 were:

1. To bring forward challenges of poverty and degradation of resources that mountain people face, and to find workable solutions.
2. To facilitate transboundary cooperation, exchange ideas, and help frame policies that recognise the importance of protecting mountain environments through sustainable development of mountain areas and communities.
3. To produce a policy document on the future development of mountain areas in Asia, in preparation for the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit. The resulting policy oriented document could lead to the development of a global mountain charter or action plan.

The five day event devoted the first four days to presentation of papers, discussions and summarisation of issues related to four pillars: water and natural resources (sustainable use and management), culture (threats, adaptation and risk management), economy, (poverty, economic development and social and cultural constraints) and risk (hazard mitigation). The final day was devoted to discussing policy recommendations for sustainable development in the mountain areas of Asia.

Almost every country in Asia, home to the highest mountains in the world, has significant mountain areas. A number of them are dominated by mountain ecosystems that support the livelihood of hundreds of millions of mountain people, as well as millions living in the lowlands and downstream. A diversity of ecosystems, cultures, political systems and levels of socio-economic development characterise the mountains of Asia. This diversity makes it difficult to

generalise about the challenges and opportunities in the mountains of Asia.

Over 100 participants from over 20 countries attended the Summit including regional participants from Turkey, Iran, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan in Western Asia; Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh in South Asia; China, Myanmar, Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines, and Australia in East Asia and the Pacific, in addition to participants from North America and Europe. A diverse group of professionals engaged in research, policy making, programme implementation and grassroots organisations met to deliberate on issues, challenges and opportunities faced by communities living in, or dependent on mountains and mountain resources throughout Asia and the Pacific.

#### Conclusion

In order to uplift the mountain people and make them able to participate in and fully benefit from the global economic system, the governments should design

policies and programmes that are focused on mountains and their problems. However, this will not be easy to implement. They will involve mediation and negotiation with inevitable trade-off between competing interests and values. They will require extra investments that mountain areas require. They will require willingness to entrust mountain people with assets such as forests, rangelands, and water

while introducing transparent and effective mechanisms to engender greater equity for poor families, women and socially discriminated groups. They will require devolving more authority and resources to local institutions for managing investments and services. They will require adaptation to differing ecosystems and national conditions. They will require more critical assessments of mountain social and physical realities. They will require enlisting the support of a variety of stakeholders (upstream and downstream) in developing negotiated arrangements for long-term sustainability.

The participants of the Asia High Summit concluded that there is hope for mountain people and their environment and that the difficult issues can be tackled through enlisting the support of a wide range of organisations and peoples. These recommendations should be adapted into an action plan for the mountains of Asia as the next crucial step in promoting sustainable development in mountain areas of Asia. ■

(Adapted from [www.asiahs.org](http://www.asiahs.org))



## Mountain statistics

- 24 percent of the earth is mountainous.
- 1 in 10 people live in mountain areas. About half of these are concentrated in the Andes, the Hengduan-Himalaya-Hindu Kush and the African mountains.
- Almost 80 percent of mountain people live below the poverty line.
- All the world's major rivers rise in mountain regions.
- In humid parts of the world, mountains provide 30 to 60 percent of the fresh water downstream. In semi-arid and arid environments, they provide 70 to 95 percent.
- 11 of 18 regions identified by the United Nations as in desperate need of humanitarian assistance in 2002 are mountainous (Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Indonesia, North Caucasus, North Korea, Southeastern Europe, Tajikistan, Uganda).
- 23 of the world's 27 major conflicts in 1999 were in mountain areas.
- In 1995 the ability to manage mountain waters was the source of 14 international conflicts.
- Mountain tourism accounts for 15-20 percent of the world's largest industry - US\$ 70-90 billion per year.
- Mountain forests stretch over 9 million square kilometres, representing 28 percent of the world's closed forest area. Almost 4 million square kilometers of mountain forests are found above 1,000 metres.
- Mountain cloud forests are disappearing faster than rainforests - at 1.1 percent per year.
- Of the 20 plant species that supply 80 percent of the world's food, six originated in mountains. ■

Source: Panos Institute (2002), *High Stakes: The Future of Mountain Societies*, London.

## Panel discussion on farmers' rights

Realising the risk factors associated with the forces of globalisation, especially with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreements and their adverse impacts on farmers' rights to livelihood in the Hindu-Kush Himalaya (HKH) region, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) have been effectively implementing a three-year Regional Programme to Secure Farmers' Rights to Livelihood in the HKH Region since the year 2001.

As a part of the three-year action research and policy advocacy programme, ICIMOD and SAWTEE have organised two regional consultation meetings. While SAWTEE itself has published three policy briefs at the regional level, its five project implementing partners have been involved in conducting research and publishing briefing papers at the national level which are being supplemented by awareness creation and policy advocacy efforts. Similarly, as a part of activities conducted during the International Year of Mountains (2002), ICIMOD and SAWTEE in collaboration with other partners have conducted sub-national workshops on farmers' rights and mountain communities in Nepal and India and shall conduct one in

Bhutan and one in Pakistan shortly.

Now, in order to feed the outcomes of these workshops in general and the entire programme in particular into the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit (BGMS), ICIMOD and SAWTEE is going to organise a panel discussion in Bishkek on 30 October. The major objective of the panel discussion is to sensitise the individuals and organisations working on mountain issues, especially in the poor and developing regions; understand and appreciate farmers' rights issues in the context of globalisation and liberalisation; and get a sense of coping mechanisms available to protect such rights. The panel discussion brings together experts from HKH region working on farmers' rights issues with the mountain communities and/or institutions.

These experts shall make the presentations of their papers on the following subjects: Mountain Farmers in the Context of Globalisation; Intellectual Property Rights and Farmers' Rights; Genetic Engineering, Biotechnology and Farmers' Rights; Protection of Farmers' Rights in the HKH region; A Grassroots Perspective; and Farmers' Rights are Human Rights.

The Panel will be chaired by Dr. Gabriel Campbell, Director General, ICIMOD. ■

## SAWTEE NETWORK

### BANGLADESH

1. Associates for Development Initiatives (ADI), Dhaka
2. Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Dhaka

### INDIA

1. Citizen Consumer & Civil Action Group (CAG), Chennai
2. Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), Jaipur
3. Development Research & Action Group (DRAG), New Delhi
4. Federation of Consumer Organisation of Tamilnadu & Pondichery (FEDCOT), Thanjavur

### NEPAL

1. Society for Legal & Environmental Analysis & Development Research (LEADERS), Kathmandu
2. Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public), Kathmandu

### PAKISTAN

1. Journalists for Democracy & Human Rights (JDHR), Islamabad
2. Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad

### SRI LANKA

1. Law & Society Trust (LST), Colombo

## SAWTEE

Launched in December 1994 at Nagarkot, Nepal by a consortium of South Asian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) is a recognised, registered, non-profit and non-governmental organisation. Its mission is to build capacity of the stakeholders in South Asia by equipping them with knowledge, information and skills to voice their concerns particularly in the context of liberalisation and globalisation. It currently operates through its headquarters in Kathmandu and 11 network institutions from five South Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The views expressed in the articles published in this special issue of the *Trade and Development Monitor* are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of SAWTEE or its member organisations.

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