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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Advancing sustainable mountain development: Water towers for people and the planet

23 March 2023, 10:00 – 11:30 EST, Online

Organized by: Government of Andorra and Mountain Partnership Secretariat

Background on the event

Mountains play a vital role as the world's water towers, supplying water to communities living in the mountains and approximately two billion people living in connected lowland areas. Yet, the cryosphere is declining due to rising global temperatures, causing an increase in hazards and extreme weather events that heavily affect mountains' ability to provide water resources. To address these threats, the Government of Andorra and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat (MPS) convened an online session to discuss the importance of bringing mountains to the forefront of international processes, particularly the Water Action Agenda. The event aimed to accelerate political momentum for inclusive, resilient and sustainable mountain development. The panel included representatives from various countries who highlighted the challenges and opportunities related to mountain development. The importance of water resources in mountain regions was a recurring theme, as changes in these regions directly affect the health and water availability of mountain communities and lowland areas. The discussion emphasized the need for collaboration between countries and the importance of platforms such as the Mountain Partnership for promoting integrated water management. The outcomes of the discussion will be captured in a policy brief on water and mountains that will be launched for the UN Climate Change Conference in December 2023.

Water Action Agenda

The Mountain Partnership Secretariat has committed to advancing sustainable mountain development and protecting the world's "water towers". This commitment recognizes that more than half of humanity relies on mountain freshwater for everyday life and that careful management of mountain water resources is a global priority. The commitment is derived from the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions, approved by the

United Nations General Assembly as part of resolution A/RES/77/172. The expected impacts of this commitment include increased financial support for sustainable mountain development and the protection of biodiversity and endangered species. See the commitment, [here](#).

Key Issues discussed

1. The need to bring mountains to the forefront of international processes, particularly the Water Action Agenda, and accelerate political momentum for inclusive, resilient and sustainable mountain development.
2. Andorra Research and Innovation is working with the Government of Andorra to deploy an adaptive ecological flow regime to ensure the country's socioeconomic, energy and ecological needs are met.
3. Efforts by the Kyrgyz Republic to promote international cooperation for sustainable mountain development, including the recent declaration of 2023–2027 as Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions.
4. Melting glaciers and extreme weather events in mountains directly impact health and water availability for mountain and lowland communities.
5. The World Bank is addressing sustainable water management through investments, trust funds for analytical work, and dedicated platforms.
6. Platforms such as ICIMOD, Mountain Partnership, Group of Friends of Mountainous Countries and the Ambition on Melting Ice on Sea-level Rise and Mountain Water Resources facilitate collaboration among governments for integrated water management.
7. The impact of climate change and human activities on the water cycle, and the need to improve observations, data sharing and forecasting and management tools to address these issues.
8. The need to strengthen collaboration to promote the mountain agenda and address the needs of mountain peoples and environments.

Key recommendations for action

1. Advocate for international cooperation for sustainable mountain development, including transboundary water management platforms, investments and data sharing.
2. Leverage the role of science and scientific institutions in sustainable mountain development and water management, particularly in data analysis and forecasting, to inform evidence-based decision-making.
3. Implement early warning systems in mountain areas to better forecast weather, reduce vulnerabilities and further integrate water resource management among different stakeholders.
4. Identify and address thematic priorities common to mountain regions such as water resources, climate change adaptation, biodiversity and ecosystem services.
5. Better understand human activities affecting the water cycle and enhance observations and forecasting tools to mitigate climate change and its impacts.
6. Prioritize mountains in international development agendas to promote inclusive, resilient and sustainable mountain development.