

Making eradication of poverty an integral objective of all policies: what will it take?

Submitted by: Russian Academy of Natural Sciences
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Covering about 22 per cent of the world's land surface, mountains are home to about 13 per cent of the world's population and provide globally essential goods and services such as fresh water, biological diversity, food and energy. They are areas of cultural diversity, knowledge and spirituality, as well as destinations for recreation and tourism.

Yet mountain areas are among the poorest in the world. In the mountain areas of developing countries the risk of food insecurity affects one in every three people. By 2012, the FAO study "Mapping the vulnerability of mountain peoples to food insecurity" had found that, while the global mountain population had increased just 16 per cent overall, the number of those vulnerable to food insecurity had increased by 30 per cent, to nearly 329 million, corresponding to 39 per cent of the global mountain population in 2012. The results show that global progress and improvements in living standards do not appear to have made their way up the mountains, and many mountain communities lag behind in the eradication of poverty and hunger.

Harsh climates and the difficult, often inaccessible terrain, combined with political and social marginality certainly contribute to making mountain peoples particularly vulnerable to food shortages.

Climate change, natural disasters, desertification and land degradation in mountains are also drivers of poverty and often lead to migration. As men migrate to lowlands areas or abroad in search of better income, women are left to manage the farm and household, but they often lack access to land tenure rights, markets, training and possibilities of credit.

In mountain areas, where family farming and smallholder agriculture are the prevailing farming systems, it is essential to create a supportive, enabling environment in which mountain peoples have access to training, information, credit and healthcare, and benefit from inclusive governance systems and infrastructure.

The United Nations General Assembly resolution on sustainable mountain development (SMD) is clear. It encourages greater efforts by States, all stakeholders and the international community towards the conservation of mountain ecosystems and the enhancement of the well-being of their local populations.

It also recommends strengthening cooperative action, with the effective involvement and sharing of knowledge and experience of all relevant stakeholders, including traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples living in mountain areas and knowledge of local mountain communities. It also stresses the importance of innovative solutions for the diversification of livelihoods and income enhancement opportunities for local mountain communities, and in this regard encourages the promotion of innovative solutions and entrepreneurship within local mountain communities, as appropriate, to end poverty and hunger.

These could include mechanisms to compensate mountain people for the benefits their actions, services, and resources provided to the lowlands. Farmers who maintain a relatively stable terrain — taking steps such as terracing and planting cover crops — rather than harvesting the resources in the most profitable manner should also be compensated. The promotion of high value mountain products such as coffee, herbs, ancient grains and crafts can help improve mountain incomes by tapping into the current demand for high quality, traditional, organic and sustainable produce and fetching a higher price for the producers. Finally, tourism in mountains — which accounts for around 20 percent of global tourism, if developed sustainably, could bring benefits to the communities as well.

As a Mountain Partnership member, the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, in concert with Utah Valley University, emphasizes the important role which academic institutions might play in eradicating poverty and promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since 2007 the curricular and extracurricular programs encourage regular and non-traditional students to promote the SMD agenda through student experiential learning. As a result, students combine education with experiences, time and resources to poverty alleviation through SMD promotion.

The challenges are many but the goal is clear: to ensure the sustainable development of mountain environments so as to allow for healthy and prosperous livelihoods in mountains.

As we move into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we need to ensure that no one is left behind. It's our responsibility to reverse this trend and support mountain peoples.

Thank you for your attention