

MOUNTAIN PARTNERSHIP
Education Initiative Workshop
24 September 2004

The following participants met to discuss working themes and priorities to be presented at Cusco for the Education initiative:

Edwin Bernbaum of The Mountain Institute

Asylbek Aidaraliev of the Government of Kyrgyzstan and chairman of the National Centre for the Development of Mountain Regions in Kyrgyzstan

Libor Jansky of the United Nations University

Harald Egerer of the United Nations Environment Program

Lavinia Gasparini of the FAO

Before proceeding to discuss in general the situation of education in mountains and proposals for priority areas for action to be adopted by the initiative group, each participant gave a brief presentation of his/her key areas of interest related to education and mountains, with the aim of identifying potential synergies and linkages between participants.

Lavinia Gasparini spoke about the Partnership on Education for Rural People (ERP) a joint project of FAO/UNESCO. The Partnership was created to combat hunger and poverty by addressing an identified priority area established by the international community: the need for universal primary education. It is clear that there is a direct correlation between poverty, hunger and illiteracy (ie. a lack of life skills) for rural people.

Key approaches of the Education for Rural People Partnership centre on education for children, youth and adults:

- Capacity building for policy makers
- Access – helping those traditionally excluded from education (girls and women, the disabled, those living in remote areas)
- The question of quality – what to teach in order to make education relevant to rural people, and to provide rural people with an incentive to learn.

Clearly there is considerable overlap here with the issue of education in mountain areas, and an opportunity for linkages and exchange with the Mountain Partnership.

Edwin Bernbaum gave a presentation on The Mountain Institute's programme on the cultural and spiritual significance of mountains. This programme works with a number of national parks in the US and elsewhere on conservation projects that also aim to teach visitors about the cultural heritage of the areas involved and to highlight the importance of respect for mountain peoples, their culture and their sacred sites. These projects, as in the Institute's Sacred Sites Programme based in Nepal, incorporate conservation activities that are based on local cultures, values and beliefs.

Libor Jansky spoke of the activities of the United Nations University that take in the themes of mountains and education. The general mission of the UNU is to provide a centre of research, capacity building, networking and dissemination of knowledge through which to address pressing global problems. The UNU's specific mountain project, part of the Environment and Sustainable Development Programme, was launched 20 years ago, but was given fresh impetus and focus by the International Year of Mountains 2002.

The emphasis is on Education for Sustainable Development, rather than Sustainable Development Education, and UNU works with countries to bring education to local communities, especially to remote areas where distance learning is a necessity, to discuss livelihood issues and the relevance of education, and also to help disseminate local knowledge. Activities include conferences, publications but especially country-driven field projects. Capacity development programmes are now implemented all over the world with training courses of both short and long duration.

Harald Egerer. During the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that begins in 2005, UNEP will focus on the environmental side of education. Both in the sectors education on mountains and for mountains, environmental education plays a key role. UNEP in its regional strategy for implementation places emphasis on partnership and sub-regional cooperation. The Carpathian Convention is an example of a sub-regional initiative, a small-scale partnership, a micro version of the larger Mountain Partnership. One of its partners is the Environment and School Network initiative (ENS) which operates in 25 countries and develops strategies of bringing educational and environmental experts together.

Asylbek Aidaraliev spoke about the Education Network for Mountains (ENM), a project that was launched in Kyrgyzstan after 2002 and which is seeking support from donors in order to expand through the Central Asian region and potentially throughout most of Asia. The Network operates as a distance learning programme using an already existing Russian satellite system to reach remote areas. In this way specially prepared lectures can be sent via video to local populations. This has already proved a cheap and very effective education tool for those living in remote areas where internet connections are too expensive. Key elements of the Education network programme cover science, cultural heritage and environment.

Identification of priority areas for action

Participants were asked to consider and assess the general state of mountains and education, identifying gaps and challenges, followed by priority areas of activity – ways in which current activities can be linked to Partnership activities, or ways in which a small-scale feasible project might be initiated with potential for replicability.

Lavinia Gasparini made useful distinctions in terms of what is meant by education and mountains, pointing out that there are three basic understandings of the term:

- 1) Environmental education on mountains and mountain ecosystems
- 2) Education for mountain people
- 3) Education on mountain issues for managers and policy makers involved in decision making for these areas

In addition, there is a need to recognise that there are three basic strata of educational priorities: 1) primary and secondary education, 2) higher education and 3) environmental education – and that the educational requirements of mountain people around the world are very different depending on whether they live in developed, transitional or developing countries. Priorities need to be established according to these categories.

Plan of Action – general guidelines

It was agreed that the best way forward was to extract guiding principles and recommendations regarding mountains and education laid down in already existing documents (the Tokyo Declaration, the Bishkek Platform, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation) as a basis for a discussion of mountain specific issues within education.

Workshop participants would then be asked for their input in order to finalise this general document.

It was also agreed that general objectives should be closely combined with identifying concrete expertise. It is important to consult with member countries relating to their needs and priorities in the education sector, and also to learn of activities already launched in the area. This will help the Mountain Partnership to build on what is being done by already existing partners, share experiences on how certain issues are already being tackled and to build alliances around specific needs. Centres of excellence in different countries should be identified and singled out as a focus for capacity building.

It is clear that at policy level what needs to be done is to introduce mountain environmental subjects into national curricular.

Moving towards concrete action

The Partnership intends to develop one or more case studies on the theme of education and mountains that will address the specificity of particular needs in particular regions. The case studies should however be projects that lend themselves to replicability: with expertise and/or material that could be applied to other regions. One hypothesis put forward is that countries could be paid if they develop a successful case study project that can be applied elsewhere, for example, the Kyrgyz package of statistics and teaching material. The intention is that successful case studies would be built up from pilot sites in a step-by-step process.

The Kyrgyz example demonstrates the real and varied needs at country level; problems of migration to the lowlands, high unemployment in mountain areas, the increase in conflicts and cultivation of illegal substances in mountain areas which are directly related to the lack of jobs and opportunities. In places like Kyrgyzstan the priority is education for young adults with an emphasis on vocational and technical training. Cultural and environmental education are lesser priorities. A project such as the Education Network for Mountains could be developed as a Partnership initiative.

Presenting material for Cusco.

In order to clarify the kind of discussion that should be aimed for in Cusco, it was agreed that the position paper should be developed by workshop participants. This document would then be sent out to other members of the initiative together with a questionnaire in order to focus the discussion at the Cusco Conference, and to gather as much information as possible on members' activities in the sector.

The Conference initiative meeting would then make the final adjustments to the position paper.

After Cusco

The Education Workshop should remain flexible as to what it expects to come out of the Cusco Conference. It seems likely however that the discussion at Cusco will lead to an e-consultation on education, with the aim of honing the plan of action and searching for good ideas for concrete activities. This e-consultation could conceivably be open to the whole of the Mountain Forum readership in addition to Partnership members.

Deadlines

By Friday 1 October draft of position paper sent on to participants

By Friday 8 October input from the participants

Send on to members prior to Cusco with a questionnaire (in which members are asked to outline ongoing projects that might be built upon or replicated, or simply to identify common areas of interest)

2002 Tokyo Declaration for the International Year of Mountains

<http://www.unu.edu/mountains2002/declaration.html>

The Bishkek Mountain Platform

<http://mountains.unep.ch/mtn/platformtext.html>

Johannesburg Plan of Implementation

http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POIChapter4.htm

UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>