

Discussion Paper

Towards an IUCN Strategy on Mountains

For

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1. Introduction

This report has been prepared at the request of IUCN Canada as a preliminary "scoping" document, to outline the rationale and potential options for an IUCN mountain strategy. It has not yet received discussion within IUCN or with IUCN partners. Nor does it discuss, at this stage, a set of detailed objectives and outputs. Rather, it is designed as a point of departure for just such a discussion. It begins with an outline of present IUCN activities, followed by a description of the growing international momentum towards a more comprehensive global approach to mountain sustainable development. The paper then suggests options for new IUCN activities, to complement those of the international community, and then concludes with some suggestions for preliminary steps that may be taken to achieve these ends.

The opportunity to prepare an IUCN strategy for mountains has three principal sources.

The adoption of Agenda 21 - The Earth Action Plan, at UNCED in 1992, including Chapter 13 on sustainable mountain development, marked a major commitment by governments that remains unfulfilled. Limited (although accelerating) progress towards implementation of Chapter 13 reflects international financial constraints, the slow pace of the multilateral institutions and a traditional lack of attention paid to remote environments which have small human populations and indices of biodiversity that are perceived (often incorrectly) to be low. New efforts from organizations such as IUCN are essential.

The recent designation of 2002, by the United Nations General Assembly, as the International Year of the Mountains (IYM) renews international attention on mountains and provides a significant opportunity to evaluate existing programmes, design new activities and achieve the resources necessary for large scale implementation. A major World Conference on Sustainable Mountain Development has been proposed for 2002 and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) now intends to focus on mountains in their work programme in 2004. These benchmarks represent a significant opportunity for input from IUCN.

The next World Parks Congress will be convened in September 2002, in Durban, South Africa. The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) is the principal organizer of the Congress, and there is evidence of growing enthusiasm among the IUCN membership for a new focus on mountain protected areas and conservation corridors in the forthcoming decade. Underpinning this effort is the decade long WCPA effort to promote mountain sustainable development through the organisational efforts of the mountains theme group of the WCPA, which includes some 400 protected areas scientists and managers in

65 countries. The effective utilisation of these diverse professional resources for the IYM and the Parks Congress deserves special, additional attention by IUCN.

Mountain environments are potentially important components of several existing IUCN programmes, but with exception of an earlier effort at co-ordination among IUCN Commissions, mountains have seldom received explicit treatment, other than in WCPA. A significant opportunity is therefore available to re-invigorate, and promote an IUCN mountain strategy to celebrate the Year 2002 designation, to support Agenda 21- Chapter 13 and to establish a long term approach to sustainable mountain development and biodiversity conservation. This paper is intended as a starting point for a discussion of the IUCN response to these opportunities.

2. Existing IUCN Initiatives

IUCN has a variety of thematic programmes, country offices and specialist commissions with activities and projects in mountain environments.

Thematic conservation programmes with mountain activities include protected areas and natural heritage, endangered species, forests, biodiversity as well as cross-sectoral "people-centred" themes such as strategies for sustainability, social policy, sustainable use and environmental law. New IUCN thematic initiatives, such as the Freshwater Initiative and the IUCN role in the World Water Council and its Vision exercise, will play a significant new role in highlighting global freshwater conservation issues. With IUCN taking a lead in work on "water and nature" issues in the World Water Vision, new attention will focus on the interdisciplinary problems inherent in conserving fresh water. In particular, the problems with deforestation and land degradation in upper catchment areas are now acknowledged as critical. IUCN has recently announced that the forthcoming World Conservation Congress in Amman, Jordan (October 2000) will include major components related to ecosystem management, upper watersheds, deforestation and the human consequences of environmental degradation.

IUCN country programmes, regional offices or state members with either a direct or *de facto* role include the Asia Region (Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Vietnam and Laos in particular), South America (Andean country members), Meso-America, and parts of Africa, Europe, Canada and the United States. Within these organisations, there are *ad hoc* groups of individuals with mountain (e.g. forests, water, people and wildlife) interests. There is also a large number of state members (e.g. Japan, Russia, and East Asia) or countries with NGO members (e.g. Central Asia) where there are mountain projects. Often the principal sponsor is a partner organization of IUCN (e.g. ICIMOD, the Andean Mountain Association, the African Mountain Association and others) or a bi- or multi-lateral donor organization. Other IUCN partners such as the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) are also important contributors to our understanding of mountain environments.

IUCN has been a leader in the promotion of "conservation strategy" approaches to post-UNCED sustainable development now broadly accepted by most funding agencies. There has often been a vigorous debate about the conservation priorities that should be identified within such strategies. One very positive example of the benefits of the strategic planning approach for mountain environments is found in the IUCN Pakistan programme. The development of the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy for UNCED led to subsequent provincial and territorial strategic plans for several parts of the country, including the mountainous north. A variety of initiatives to implement these plans were discussed, resulting in a major GEF-financed mountains conservation programme led by IUCN Pakistan. As part of the developing IUCN Asian regional initiative it has recently been proposed that respective country programmes be combined in a "Himal" strategy, which will combine and unify the international elements of respective country initiatives. From first principles, these initiatives are focussed on sustainable mountain development, not on more traditional species-specific conservation plans.

The evolution of this approach, beginning in the mid-1980s was not initially intentional but it evolved into an approach to mountain issues that treats the western Himalayas on an ecosystem basis. This experience could potentially be replicated for many other ranges. It will require a new commitment to co-ordination and leadership from IUCN members and partners to be successful.

The IUCN Commissions with the most specific mountain activities include the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), the Species Survival Commission (SSC) and the Commission on Environmental Law (CEL). The WCPA, however, is the only group with a specific network of mountain specialists. There are over 400 (and growing), largely volunteer members in 65 countries. They promote the conservation of mountain ecosystems in protected areas, with a historical focus on IUCN Categories I-IV. More recent work, since 1990 has seen the adoption of more "people-centred" approaches, development of new collaborative management approaches, and a new emphasis on linking sustainable development and biodiversity conservation (IUCN Category V in particular).

There have been numerous WCPA consultative meetings on new approaches to protected area designation and management (e.g. Guidelines for Mountain Protected Areas 1992 - also referred to more colloquially as the "parks, peaks, and people initiative"), transboundary protected areas, and international co-operation in protected area management and related projects. Innovative proposals to link core protected areas within mountain ranges has resulted in the identification of mountain "corridors" that would protect migratory wildlife, species with extensive habitat needs, recreation opportunities and indigenous communities. These range from the Yellowstone to Yukon project (an initiative of The Wildlands Project, which has approximately 30 similar subprojects) in western North America to the Karakoram Constellation (an IUCN suggestion) in the Himalayas among others. There are however, only limited resources available to the Protected Areas Programme for mountain work and the promotion of the corridor concepts. This tends to limit the effective utilisation of the volunteer members of the mountain theme group of the WCPA. No funds are allocated within the other commissions for mountain activities.

There have been over 200 similar interagency and interdisciplinary meetings on mountain-related issues ranging from mountain biodiversity and trans-boundary co-operation to literacy and poverty alleviation since 1992. Many of these have involved the very active IUCN commission membership, when resources are available.

In addition, IUCN has undertaken (for UNESCO) a fundamental role in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, evaluating specific sites that have been nominated for inclusion as World Heritage Sites, based on the natural heritage values. Many of these are located in mountain ecosystems and the values range from the significance of physical environmental processes to the spiritual importance for human populations.

In September 2002, the World Parks Congress (occurring once per decade) has been announced for Durban, South Africa. This event is the principal global gathering of parks and protected areas professionals and advocates, reviewing all aspects of the global movement for the designation of representative landscapes, wilderness areas, and the array of other protected areas categories. IUCN, the World Commission on Protected Areas is the principal organiser of this initiative and although the agenda has yet to be specified for 2002 it is anticipated that mountain protected areas and conservation corridors will be a major theme. The IUCN Protected Areas Programme takes the lead role in organising the Congress and the extent of involvement of regional staff and programmes is determined (and often constrained) by the availability of resources.

In summary, IUCN has a wide variety of interests and core competencies in mountain environments and the maintenance of mountain ecosystem integrity is completely congruent with the broader IUCN mission. The combination of technical expertise, experience with policy development, and a constituency and membership involved in advocacy for mountain peoples strongly suggests that a new emphasis on mountain sustainable development would be justified within IUCN. However a new strategic approach will be needed for IUCN to act on the opportunities that are emerging on the international stage.

In the following section some of the steps taken by the global sustainable development community are outlined.

3. International Initiatives

The Rio Earth Summit (UNCED) in 1992 and the adoption of the Agenda 21 implementation document was a significant benchmark in turning international attention towards mountain environments. Agenda 21, Chapter 13 - *Managing Fragile Environments: Sustainable Mountain Development* outlines a comprehensive programme for global activities by governments and non-government organizations (NGOs). Management responsibility was assigned to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1993, reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). An Interagency Task Group was established, including IUCN, to undertake the work programme.

Agenda 21, Chapter 13 contains two broadly defined programmes, including:

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

Both programmes include a variety of recommendations related to management activities and institutions, international and regional co-operation, human resource and institutional capacity development.

With the creation and implementation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), significant new funding opportunities for Agenda 21 and related international conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), became available. Mountain environments were specified as a priority operational programme within the biodiversity focal area of the GEF in 1995 and the CBD in 1996. Approximately 20 biodiversity conservation projects have subsequently been designed and approved, to date, for mountain regions including the recent announcement of two new \$10 million programmes in the Himalayas. IUCN Pakistan was the principal sponsor/proponent of a Karakoram/Hindu Kush project beginning in 1995, with approval finally forthcoming in mid-1998. A Central Asia project was similarly approved in June 1999. The latter focuses on snow leopards, white-clawed bear and Central Asian goat in the Tien Shan ranges of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. More projects are in the pipeline.

FAO undertook a five year review of progress towards the implementation of Chapter 13 (1992-1997) published in 1999. This report outlines the wide variety of organizations that have been involved to date, the extensive consultations that have occurred, regional consultations and programme initiatives (that are continuing), related initiatives by a variety of academic, industry, and quasi-governmental organizations and, most significantly, a report card on the work to date. The conclusions of the review, include:

- The vast array of consultations have not provided a consistent, prioritised response to Chapter 13, and several new priorities, not previously included in Agenda 21 have emerged.
- Funding has not been adequate to implement Chapter 13, with the exception of the emerging project-specific attention from GEF.
- UN agency attention has diminished, while NGO involvement has accelerated.
- Information about the implementation of Chapter 13 has not been collected, nor collated, in a consistent fashion.

More specific observations on the specific commitments in Chapter 13 include:

- Strengthening of management institutions in mountain ecosystems has been successful in some countries but ignored in others.

- Integration of sustainable development activities in mountain areas has been adopted in principle, but seldom achieved in practice.
- Protected area establishment has not reached levels needed for successful biodiversity conservation.
- International and regional co-operation has improved but needs to accelerate.
- Human resource and capacity development initiatives are slowly achieving some results.

Since the release of this report there is mounting evidence that many of these problems are increasing in magnitude. While widespread deforestation is now widely acknowledged to pose considerable risk to a variety of human activities, certainly by the FAO mountain programme managers, the recent stalemates and lack of progress at the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (Session 3, May 1999)

"Although several governments were prepared to demonstrate leadership, particularly with respect to protected areas, their proposals were often not included in the text being negotiated even though they received broad support. Furthermore, the results of the time-consuming and expensive inter-session meetings were largely sidelined, including those on protected areas and the underlying causes of forest loss. Meanwhile, other governments seemed content to renegotiate elements of *Agenda 21* as if decisions had not been taken seven years ago"

(*Arborvitae* June 1999)

Similarly there has been relatively little attention given to the mounting problem of environmental refugees from mountain ecosystems. In the 1999 Red Cross World Disaster Report there are now more refugees fleeing from environmental problems than from warfare, a total of 25 million people. Deforestation, land degradation, and global warming are having an increasing negative impact on the mountain environments of many developing countries and in several cases internal migration from rural to urban environments is often ignored or under-reported.

Progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 - Chapter 13 is understood to be better in those areas where large-scale, integrated GEF funding for projects has been forthcoming. This is also true for areas where "modern"-era multi- and bi-lateral donor initiatives are being implemented. It is anticipated that a subsequent five-year FAO review will reflect more positively on the results of these programmes. But broader scale replication of the earlier successes appears to be warranted.

Other critics of government implementation of Chapter 13, consulted by FAO during the preparation of the report¹, have identified areas where almost no international effort has been forthcoming include:

- The creation of institutions for integrated watershed or natural resource management.
- Development of new legal mechanisms for regional and international management.
- Programmes for strengthened environmental monitoring.
- Targeted capacity development programmes for mountain inhabitants.
- Programmes to alleviate gender and indigenous minority disadvantages.

In summary the FAO report concludes:

"At regional and global levels, wide participation in the inter-governmental and NGO consultations, the strengthening of (several institutions), and the creation of new institutions ... may be seen as successes. Similarly, the developing initiatives within scientific organizations and programmes... may also be regarded as successes, although

¹ Space does not permit a detailed description of these, but they are as diverse as the WMO, the UN University, IUFRO, Oxford University, ICALPE, the African Highlands Association, the Andean Mountains Association, ICIMOD, the EC, and a variety of donor agencies, NGOs, academic and other regional institutions.

they remain at early stages of development. All of these institutions and initiatives were, to a greater or lesser extent, catalysed by the existence of Chapter 13. They have considerable potential to contribute to its further implementation, as long as adequate resources are provided on a sustainable basis"

(FAO Task Managers Report, 1999)

Since the completion of the FAO progress report several additional steps have been taken by the world community which further the implementation of Chapter 13 and the broader Mountain Agenda. The UN General Assembly has designated the year 2002 as the International Year of the Mountains. This has provided a degree of new emphasis among some governments and multi-lateral organizations. In particular, the government of the Kyrgyz Republic and several mountainous Central Asian neighbours are enthusiastically promoting the IYM. As mentioned above, the GEF announced a \$10.2 million biodiversity programme for Central Asia in June 1999. The UNDP-sponsored Ferghana Valley programme and a variety of academic conferences, sectoral studies, and new ecotourism-based economic development initiatives, all focussed on mountain sustainable development, are underway in that region. Similar momentum is building in other mountainous developing country regions (e.g. Central Andes, Western Himalayas, Siankiang, etc.)

The UN/CSD, with annual priority programmes specified through 2004, has a tourism focus in 1999, a concentration on integrated planning and management of land resources in 2000, and atmosphere and energy in 2001. Mountains are to receive treatment in 2004, which represents another benchmark opportunity for IUCN to advance a mountain strategy. All of these programming initiatives contain elements that are congruent with, and supportive of initiatives in Chapter 13. The Conference of Parties for the CBD, as recently as June 1999, confirmed the significance of mountain environments and their intention to provide a future emphasis in association with the IYM.

A large number of international and regional NGOs, including many IUCN members, commission participants and professional staff have become involved in the implementation of Chapter 13 since 1992 with the encouragement of FAO. With funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) several of the principal international NGOs organized The Mountain Forum (TMF), now a global internet-based network of organizations and individuals dedicated to the implementation of the Mountain Agenda. This is based at The Mountain Institute in West Virginia, with regional nodes now operational in Asia-Pacific (Nepal), Latin America (Peru) and Europe (Switzerland). TMF conducts issue-specific consultations, regional theme discussions, and technical interchange and maintains an open access library, with efforts underway to provide multi-lingual services as well. (A full description may be accessed at www.mtnforum.org).

The efforts of the Mountain Forum membership have complemented the work of agencies charged with the implementation of Chapter 13. The NGO regional consultations have been more broadly based than those used by government to prepare Agenda 21, although TMF regional meetings in North America have yet to take place. The range of priority concerns also differed from those that were part of Chapter 13. Additional TMF thematic concerns included: a need for attention to cultural survival and heritage conservation; recreational use of mountain environments; expansion of trans-boundary protected areas; and a need for better attention to, and documentation of, the full range of benefits that accrue from sustainable mountain development. Similarly, institutional reforms to allow for improved information exchange, designation of focal points for co-ordination of mountain programming, the development of appropriate criteria to assess success in achieving sustainability, and a monitoring mechanism, have all been emphasized by TMF members. IUCN is an active participant but greater IUCN involvement in TMF could prove very useful: to advance the IUCN mission; to exchange information; to avoid duplication of effort; and to ensure that resources are applied to the highest priority development issues in the most effective manner.

In addition TMF has reiterated the call for a World Conference on Sustainable Mountain Development. This would be a logical event to be included in the IYM celebration.

In summary, it is clear that there are very important international opportunities to promote mountain sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. A coherent voice is needed to advocate these

interests, particularly within the multi-lateral institutions and processes that determine so much of global development policy. IUCN has a distinct comparative advantage to advance these interests.

4. Opportunities for IUCN

The forthcoming international mountain activities provide three major opportunities for IUCN to step forward and take an enhanced role in mountain conservation. IUCN is the only international conservation organisation that combines technical expertise in biodiversity conservation, knowledge and experience with environmental policy, and a broadly based interest in responsible advocacy. Thus IUCN has nearly unique abilities to act on the international opportunities. In general:

- IUCN can act, within and outside the FAO structures, to re-invigorate global attention to the implementation of Agenda 21-Chapter 13. IUCN is the only international conservation organisation with the specialist networks and governance structure to influence this process.
- IUCN is the only international conservation organisation with the expertise and global reach to act as the mountain conservation voice for the IYM in 2002 and CSD programme in 2004.
- IUCN is the only international organisation with both the ability to implement the World Parks Congress and the potential to implement the global promise of the Congress.

To act on these opportunities requires a new IUCN strategy for the mountains. For the purposes of this discussion paper, two basic options can be described for such a strategy.

One approach would be based solely on IUCN programme strengths (e.g. protected areas, national conservation strategies, bio-diversity and collaborative management case studies). We would identify three or four existing projects that are presently active in mountain environments, and provide sufficient additional resources to allow these initiatives to be profiled for the world community. These "case studies" could then lead to the projects being replicated in additional locations, thereby advancing the overall IUCN mission and indirectly (and passively) influence the agendas of governments and NGOs. The extent to which mountain environments would receive additional attention would depend in large measure on the interest and capacity of a particular regional IUCN office or country programme to assume additional responsibilities. This option would be largely reactive and dependent on issue or project-specific funding. This would be the least expensive and simplest option to implement.

At the present time suggested candidate programmes for enhanced attention seem to be: the protected areas programme (with an emphasis on mountain "corridor" projects); new "model" regional or national sustainable development strategies for mountain environments with an emphasis on collaborative management approaches in mountain communities, new innovative projects within the Sustainable Use Initiative; a GEF-funded biodiversity strategy project; and a new upper watersheds initiative within the context of IUCN's forest and freshwater initiatives. Other candidates may be suggested as a result of the discussion of this paper.

A more comprehensive approach would include a formally defined "New Mountains Strategy" (NMS). A comparison of existing IUCN programme strengths with the Agenda 21 - Chapter 13 priorities and the additional priorities identified by TMF shows there are significant opportunities for IUCN to step forward and take an enhanced role in mountain conservation. Five examples where expanded IUCN activities would benefit the global mountain conservation effort include:

- Expansion of the protected areas programme to cover new conservation "corridor" initiatives (including all PA categories) and new attention to the "parks, peaks and people" theme, to expand the application of WCPA Category V.

- Development of a specific initiative for upper watersheds within the IUCN activities that may emerge from the World Water Vision / Freshwater Initiative, and the Forest Programme.
- Expanded advocacy for mountain peoples and communities that would integrate work on sustainable human development, and environment and security issues, building on the existing work on IUCN strategies for sustainability.
- Priority attention to the initiation of new GEF or other strategic regional initiatives in mountain environments, building on the Biodiversity Programme and respective regional programmes.
- New attention to the development and implementation of legal, regulatory, and policy instruments for international, regional, and transboundary co-operation, in all of the above, building on the Environmental Law Programme

This list of suggestions may be modified or amended based on discussion of this paper.

Amplifying this list into a coherent strategy with formally defined objectives, an activity list, well-defined outputs, and an implementation mechanism is the principal purpose for the further discussion of the ideas in this paper.

5. Next Steps

Since this discussion paper was initially conceived and proposed earlier in 1999, the programme planning system within IUCN has been significantly amended. To be included in the next triennial IUCN programme the detailed NMS will need to be designed to ensure that it meets the criteria for the new planning process. Although this task remains to be done, it is initially clear that the mountain strategy falls within the overall priority focus areas and core competencies of IUCN, and that IUCN brings a significant comparative advantage to this work, which cannot be provided by any other international conservation organisation.

A more detailed approach needs to be designed in consultation with IUCN staff, commission members, members and partners. A more detailed activity statement could be developed and tabled at the Amman Congress in October 2000.

Potential steps in developing a New Mountains Strategy include:

a. Initial Explorations (Sept 1999-October 2000)

Initial activities could include: co-ordination of the discussion of this paper, development of a detailed proposal, organisation of a North American mountains (and other) consultative meeting (with TMF), participation in TMF activities and meetings, representation at the World Mountain Forum (June 2000), discussion and design of a longer term NMS, preparation for discussions at the 2nd World Conservation Congress and related meetings and consultations.

b. International Year of Mountains (IYM) Programming (Nov 2000 - Dec 2002)

If a decision were taken to proceed with an IUCN mountain strategy this could begin following the Amman Congress and concentrate on preparations for the IYM, including the preparation for a major IUCN presentation to the global community at a forum to be determined, possibly the proposed World Conference a Sustainable Mountain Development. A major role in the World Parks Congress, and other activities is also appropriate.

c. IUCN Mountains Activities (Ongoing)

The elements of an ongoing strategy would be determined based on the results of a and b. The generic elements would likely include ongoing fundraising, programme support and co-ordination, project development and implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

6. Funding

The first steps will require initial funding to assist in scoping the NMS. IUCN Canada can explore potential sources for exploratory work for the NMS (eg. Parks Canada, Swiss Innovation Fund).

It will also be important to determine the level of interest in funding the medium term preparations for the IYM. Given the growing collaboration with multi-lateral donors such as the World Bank on country-specific initiatives (e.g. Pakistan etc.), themes of mutual interest (e.g. forest policy development), and special projects (e.g. World Commission on Dams) it may be possible to leverage funding for Phase 2 in particular. The World Bank may be interested in financing a specific mountain strategy, such as an IUCN/IYM initiative or the proposed World Conference on Mountain Sustainable Development and follow up work on international regulatory and policy development projects.

A similar canvass of non-traditional donors, with an interest in mountain environments, will be important. These include a variety of philanthropic foundations and corporate sponsors with mountain interests. There are numbers of these that have not previously been approached by IUCN, but which express an interest in mountain conservation.

7. Conclusion

The forthcoming International Year of the Mountains provides a threefold opportunity for IUCN. First, there are both a need and an opportunity to better co-ordinate and focus the existing IUCN mandate for conservation and sustainable development in mountain environments. Second, there are new emerging challenges that need to be met by the conservation community in mountain environments. Finally, there is an emerging international resolve to address the issues that have been recognized, providing an opportunity for IUCN to become more effectively involved through an integrated strategy.

The proposed New Mountain Strategy would meet these challenges and better fulfil the IUCN mandate.

References and Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared using a limited number of print, Internet sources, and discussions with IUCN Canada (M. C. Mercer), WCPA (David Sheppard, Larry Hamilton), TMF and FAO. It is primarily a literature review designed to initiate discussions and first steps towards an IUCN strategy on mountains. The more formal consultation could begin with the circulation of this draft, within the IUCN community.

Principal sources include: Agenda 21 - Chapter 13, the FAO Task Managers Report, Mountain Forum Bulletins 1-3, WCPA newsletters (1998/99), Mountain Protected Areas Updates (1998/99), Arborvitae Issues 9-11, People and the Planet (1998/99), World Conservation (1998/99), World Development Report 1999, World Disaster Report 1999, and the State of the World 1999. A variety of other IUCN reports and journals were surveyed.

Extensive use was made of websites for IUCN, WWF, FAO, GEF, CBD, TMF, UNDP and UNEP.