



Government of Nepal  
**Ministry of Environment**  
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# Mountain Alliance Initiative for Climate Change



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### Introduction

Mountains cover around 24% of the Earth's land surface and host about 13% of the world population. Mountains are the providers of essential ecosystem services and play the role of water towers to billions of people living in downstream slopes, valleys and plains – directly and indirectly. In Asia, the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) mountain system, also referred to as the third pole, contains the largest volume of snow and ice outside the polar region. The Hindu Kush-Himalayas, Andes, Alps, Pamir, and Atlas mountain systems all play a critical role. As a source of water flows and river systems, the world's mountain watersheds support livelihoods and food security for almost half of the global population. Notwithstanding the significant role of mountain ecosystems, the mountain agenda is not addressed adequately by the UNFCCC deliberations to reflect the needs of mountain livelihoods and environments. Realising this, the Prime Minister of Nepal in his address to COP 15 said:

**"I therefore take this opportunity to call on all the mountain countries and stakeholders to come together, form a common platform and make sure that mountain concerns get due attention in the international deliberations. Let us make sure that our interests are prominently represented in future COP negotiations and let us make sure that our efforts towards adaptation obtain the required international support."**

Mountain people, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalised groups, suffer from increasing poverty, natural hazards, deprivation and socioeconomic conflicts. Climate change has exacerbated these challenges. Climate change, natural hazards and other forces threaten the functioning

of the complex web of life and livelihoods that mountains support. The consequences of poverty and environmental degradation reach far beyond mountain communities, and escalating numbers of landslides, mudslides, catastrophic floods and other natural disasters in highland areas adversely affect the densely populated lowlands. Moreover, the rapid melting of mountain glaciers and degradation of watersheds is reducing water availability and increasing conflicts over dwindling natural resources and supplies. These changes will be felt most immediately by poor and isolated mountain communities, who have little capacity to cope with and adapt to these changes. The consequences for the billions of people downstream of major mountain areas who depend on critical environmental resources provided by mountains, mainly water, biodiversity and hydrological processes, will be equally severe.

### The rationale for the Mountain Alliance Initiative

The ongoing UNFCCC processes on its key elements such as adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer, financing and capacity building, have so far not addressed the specific situation of mountain systems, especially the increased physical and socioeconomic vulnerability of its population. Countries that have large mountain areas have been raising issues individually in various COP sessions, Ad-hoc Working groups of the UNFCCC process and multilateral environmental agreements (MEA), but so far they have not been able to influence the negotiation process in favour of the global mountain agenda in the context of the climate change. In order to bridge this gap and ensure that the benefit from climate change conventions accrues also to mountain ecosystems and the protection of the lives and livelihoods of their vulnerable and disaster-prone people, some of the mountain countries have realised the need to take a collective approach and bringing countries that have mountain ecosystems together in a single forum. Nepal in consultation with various regional and global stakeholders including the Mountain Partnership has launched this initiative.



A proposal has been made to initiate a ‘**Mountain Alliance Initiative for Climate Change**’ to provide a framework within which mountain countries in collaboration with mountain specialized global and regional agencies can work together to understand better the changes occurring in mountains and comprehend the challenges they face as a result of climate and global changes. The Alliance will advocate for better attention and action in order to reduce the risk and build resilient mountain communities, while maintaining the vital mountain-based ecosystem services for the welfare of the billions of people living downstream.

### **Objectives and expected outcome of the Mountain Alliance Initiative (MAI)**

The Government of Nepal, in collaboration with major development partners including the Mountain Partnership (MP), ICIMOD and other key global and regional stakeholders especially among the Asian and Andean countries, will take the lead in this Initiative to further better communication of the anticipated impacts of climate change in mountains to global communities. Concerted efforts will be made to bring all the major mountainous countries from the HKH, Andean, Alpine, Pamir and Atlas regions on board with the objective of mobilizing meaningful support

and ensuring solidarity to enable the Alliance to achieve the goal of securing global attention for the situation in mountain ecosystems and mountain populations. Through organization of stakeholder consultations and conferences at regional and global levels, the MAI aims to promote the specific concerns of mountain ecosystems and livelihoods within the ongoing UNFCCC negotiations. More specifically, the Alliance will document and analyse specific climate change scenarios and impacts in the high mountains and highlands, gather best practices and information about local knowledge and propose different options available, and share these in the preparatory meetings of MEAs, and Subsidiary Bodies (SBI and SBSTA) leading up to the COP 16 in Mexico and beyond. The aim is to see the outcome of these efforts included in the form of a resolution on specific climate adaptation related instruments, mechanisms and programmes for mountains that might then be included in the legally binding agreements under the UNFCCC and/or other MEAs.

### **Steps taken by the Government of Nepal**

The Government of Nepal (GoN) endorsed this initiative in May 2010 and has designated the Ministry of Environment (MoE) as the focal ministry to carry forward the tasks of

the Mountain Alliance Initiative. A Secretariat has been established within the Ministry to coordinate the related activities and mobilize support from the stakeholders. A Steering Committee to guide the MAI process, and an organizing committee to organize the Ministerial meetings of the mountain countries, have been set up. In view of the likelihood that such an ambitious goal may not be achievable within one year, the GoN has planned both short and medium-term activities with an initial planning horizon of three years. The first major agenda of the programme is to organize a Ministerial Conference in 4 to 5 October 2010 in Kathmandu, which has also been endorsed by the recently concluded 16th SAARC Summit in Thimpu, Bhutan.

### **For further information contact**

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