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## Mountain Futures: Seeds of Change in the Asian Highlands

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### Abstract

Mountains regions provide vital ecosystem services, serve as storehouses for biological and cultural diversity, and are on the frontlines of global change. Yet their role has often been marginalised, and predictions of the future often cast the mountains as areas of increasing poverty and environmental degradation. We propose an alternative narrative which recognises the possibility of a ‘good Anthropocene’, and which realises the potential for mountains to act as testing grounds for adaptations to global problems. This conception of Mountain Futures aims to harness the ingenuity, diversity and wisdom of mountain peoples for positive change.

The Asian Highlands are home to a unique concentration of both biological and cultural diversity which has co-evolved over centuries to produce a range of farming systems adapted to multiple environments and climates. The knowledge embedded in these systems needs to be recalibrated for new challenges such as climate change, and there is thus an urgent need to combine local, traditional knowledge with nonlocal, scientific expertise in order to build adaptive capacity for a new generation.

The Mountain Futures Initiative was launched in 2016 as a means of meeting this challenge. The Initiative aims to realise sustainable visions of the future through the establishment of a multi-stakeholder regional platform aimed at identifying, supporting and scaling up “seeds of change”. “Seeds” are ideas or projects that are currently undeveloped but which have the potential to bring about positive environmental, social, and economic change in mountain regions. Agroforestry can play a key role in bringing about this change through equipping land managers with effective tools to safeguard their livelihoods and environments.

Examples of seeds include: an integrated approach to mining site restoration using agroforestry and fungi to rapidly deliver improvements to soil health and recover ecosystem functions; the revitalisation of traditional ecological calendars to synchronise agricultural activities with phenological cues; wild mushroom domestication in the Mekong region; the development of sustainable urban food systems in mountain areas; smart infrastructure planning to minimise the costs and maximise benefits of road-building.

**Keywords:** Agroforestry, food systems, good anthropocene, mountain futures, seeds for positive change