

Guest Editorial

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Dear Readers,

2005 marked the 25th year of *MRD*'s publication. We plan to observe this milestone throughout the current year by reflecting on our past, re-examining our current position, and considering our future. First, the reflection: *MRD*'s founding editor, Jack D. Ives, has written a brief retrospective on *MRD*'s first quarter-century, which follows in the form of a special editorial. We wish to thank Jack Ives heartily for this contribution.

Energy, the theme of this issue, is central to practically all aspects of human welfare. This was highlighted by the UNDP report, Energizing the Millennium Development Goals (2005), and by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The importance of a sustainable energy supply is accordingly emphasized in the WSSD plan of implementation. At its 14th session in May 2006, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will review progress in 4 interlinked areas: energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution/atmosphere, and climate change.

Energy supply presents a predicament: on the one hand, sustainable social and economic development requires more energy; on the other hand, anthropogenic disturbance of ecosystems in order to generate more energy jeopardizes ecological sustainability. This dilemma requires efficient handling of energy and innovative approaches.

Today 2.4 billion people have no access to modern energy services, and one-quarter of the world's population lives without electricity. Ninety per cent of rural households rely on traditional energy sources for cooking and heating, with associated indoor air pollution. These are global data. Unfortunately, aggregated data for mountain regions are missing, but it is hard to imagine that mountain people are better off with regard to energy supply.

Efficient energy supply in mountain areas as a precondition for industrial development is a matter of specific barriers as well as potentials. Dispersed settlements in rugged terrain hamper connection to electricity grids. Moreover, mountain areas have a diversity of renewable energy sources: high insolation, wind energy, hydropower, and geothermal energy; this represents potential for off-grid solutions to modern energy supply. The question is not so much one of the availability of sources but of efficient use, accessibility to new technology, and financing.

*In the Development section of this issue, the first article illustrates the theme well by presenting a stimulating example of renewable energy as a basis for economic development in small- to medium-scale projects in the Indian Himalaya. Among the other articles are further illustrations of the potential of renewable resources in mountains, a portrayal of the dilemmas of sustainability in terms of highland–lowland interactions relating to large-scale hydroelectric projects in China, and an examination of the concept of innovative approaches to industrial development in Kyrgyzstan, based on the high potential of mountain regions to foster small-scale industries. The Research section includes articles that examine the impacts of development activities on mountain people and their livelihoods and on mountain environments. We hope that *MRD*'s readers find the range of contributions on this theme to be enlightening.*

Hans Hurni, Editor-in-Chief

Theodore Wachs, Managing Editor

Dear Readers,

Mountain Research and Development has attained its quarter century jubilee. It is a pleasure to be able to contribute this editorial, especially because there are often very good reasons *not* to ask former editors and founders of journals to do so: the psychology of “ownership” can press very heavily. Fortunately for me, the new editorial team has surpassed all expectations and Pauline, as original co-editor, and I have been led gently by our friends in Berne to shed the sense of ownership and rejoice in what we perceive as the excellent evolution of the last six years.

New subscribers may be unaware of the serendipitous nature of MRD’s founding. So I will risk a brief repetition. The journal’s origins stem from the International Geographical Union’s Commission on High-Altitude Geocology, Unesco’s Man and the Biosphere Project-6, and the Munich Conference on Mountain Environment of 1974. These components, however, were not sufficient in themselves. The passage of a few more years was required until, in the late-1970s, it became apparent that the new mountain project of the United Nations University (UNU) would provide both modest financial support and, equally important, a strong flow of new research manuscripts from the Himalaya and Northern Thailand. Even then, it was necessary to ‘invent’ a publisher—these things usually work the other way around! Thus, as a piece of entrepreneurship, the International Mountain Society was incorporated in 1980 under the seal of the Secretary of State of Colorado, USA, in Boulder. A brief continuation of the journal’s history to the beginning of the new millennium can be found in my editorial to Volume 19, Number 4—the moment of transfer to Berne.

In retrospect, I think it was highly fortunate that the original editorial team chose to emphasize both ‘pure’ mountain research and applied issues, and relate these to the political arena. Thus the first issue carried the slogan:

To strive for a better balance between mountain environment,
development of resources, and the well-being of mountain peoples.

There was no profound prescience involved, merely an innate conviction. And it is perhaps worth mentioning that ‘mountains’ were in the political wilderness at that time; for instance, the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment had not even a footnote concerning problems facing mountains and mountain people. The way of the mountain world since AD 2000 has overwhelmingly confirmed the accidental ‘wisdom’ of that early editorial conviction. On the one hand, countries such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, northern Pakistan and Himalayan India, Nepal, and Bhutan are constantly in our hearts and minds as violence rages around or within them. Equally critical is the stormy political evolution of such countries as Bolivia, Ecuador, Columbia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ethiopia, Thailand, and China, amongst others. And in addition to violence, there remains the long-term environmental and social impacts of over-development of mountain resources, not least water, and the equally unsettling issue of ‘development for whom?’ These points force our thinking back to the last phrase of our original slogan—the well-being of mountain peoples.

It appears to me that the post-1999 evolution of the journal has placed it in a strong position to accelerate the search for new mountain knowledge and understanding, both for its own sake and as a means of providing a better scientific base for more suitable policy formulation. Equally, it is well-positioned to provide discussion on resource development successes and failures and to establish a firm platform for the debate of controversial issues. The new journal sections introduced by the Bernese editorial team—Mountain Platform, Mountain Notes, Mountain Media, and Mountain Views—are important additions. They enable the journal to handle controversial discussions on issues such as the impacts of global warming on mountains and mountain peoples, mountain hazards and response, and biodiversity, amongst many others. This is especially commendable at a time when the news media, and even several hitherto respectable international science magazines, have yielded to the fogs of sensationalism.

This serves to contrast circumstances prevailing in 1980/81 with those of today. While the Unesco MAB-6 project, the 1974 Munich conference, and the emergence of UNU's interest in the mountains of Asia, in association with IUCN, tried to demonstrate the importance of mountains in a changing world, the mountain ecumene was marginal to the perceived concerns of society at large. This former marginalization of mountains will probably be a difficult concept for most readers of this journal who are under the age of 40 today. The movement of "mountains" onto the world stage at Rio (UNCED) in 1992, followed by special awareness during the United Nations General Assembly of 1997, and finally, the declaration of 2002 as The International Year of Mountains have altered the situation beyond compare. This change in perception has affected academia but, especially, it has permeated the news media, the development agencies, and the NGOs. It is clearly apparent that Mountain Research and Development has acquired a heavy responsibility and, at the same time, comparably fierce challenges.

So it is a great pleasure to record twenty-five years of progress. The very beginnings were certainly fraught with uncertainty: for the first years the journal was produced in our home in Boulder with our then teenage children and their school friends helping to stuff and address envelopes: very inexpensive labour. The teenagers also provided insights into the newly emerging computer technology as applied to editing and publishing. And overall expenses had to be met very largely by subscriptions alone. In fact, within a very few years the actual sale price of the journal exceeded the value of the "subsidy" and it could be argued that the journal was subsidizing UNU. Without a three-year contribution from the Swiss Development Cooperation and the outside funding of occasional special issues we would have foundered. I am almost envious of the large measure of financial support that is attracted today, but at the same time overjoyed that it is so. I doubt that I will be able to prepare the editorial for the half-century jubilee but I am nevertheless confident that there will be one under the continued care of our friends in Berne and their successors, and the many supporters worldwide.

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