

Editorial

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Dear Readers,

Our first issue for 2003 focuses on freshwater, in commemoration of the United Nations International Year of Freshwater (IYFW2003). Probably no natural resource is of more vital interest at present than freshwater. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights has formally declared that “Water should be treated as a social and cultural good, and not primarily as an economic commodity.” According to the Committee, water is “fundamental for life and health,” and “indispensable for leading a healthy life in human dignity.”

Following upon the International Year of Mountains (IYM2002), IYFW2003 is a natural transition: more than one quarter of the world’s freshwater is derived from mountains, and it has been estimated that at least half of humanity depends on mountains as a water source. This issue of MRD covers many aspects of freshwater. The Development section contains articles on water as a potential source of conflict in the Nile Basin; micro-hydro development in Himachal Pradesh and water scarcity as a source of livelihood crisis in Karnataka, both in India; local reactions to a highlands water project in Lesotho; solutions to water scarcity in rural watersheds in Nepal; water as a multidimensional entity in the Circuito das Águas region of Brazil; and drip irrigation technology in Eritrea.

The Research section leads off with a comparative assessment of the hydrological significance of the world’s mountains. This is an important follow-up to a groundbreaking article previously published in these pages, which defined mountains from a hydrological point of view (see Meybeck et al, MRD Vol 21, No 1, Feb 2001). An article on water scarcity in rural watersheds in Nepal’s Middle Mountains is the study on which the Development section article on this same topic was based. Two other research articles address environmental issues linked with the Yangtze River – one presenting new data in an analysis of seasonal water discharge and sediment load changes, and the second dealing with the need for multidimensional management. An article focusing on the Zagros Mountains of Iran examines artificial groundwater recharge, while the South Central Andes is the focus of a final contribution dealing with sacred mountains.

This issue also features two significant statements in the MountainPlatform section: a preliminary assessment of IYM2002 from the perspective of FAO, the UN Lead Agency for IYM2002; and an outline of how Switzerland intends to build on IYM2002 during IYFW2003, by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The MountainNotes section contains an assessment of water as a risk factor from the viewpoint of the Swiss Reinsurance Company, that generously provided financial support for publication of this issue, as well as the text of the Bishkek Mountain Platform, with a personal introduction by the Editor-in-Chief, who was a member of the planning commission for the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit.

Finally, in our MountainViews section, Manuel de la Fuente gives a personal view of the “water war” over privatization of water in Bolivia. We urge MRD readers to take this contribution as an opportunity to reflect on water as a human right, in the sense implied by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights.

Hans Hurni, Editor-in-Chief
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