



Editorial

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Source: Mountain Research and Development, 25(1) : 3

Published By: International Mountain Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741\(2005\)025\[0003:E\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741(2005)025[0003:E]2.0.CO;2)

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Dear Readers,

The last Human Development Report (HDR), entitled Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World (<http://hdr.undp.org/2004/>), asserts that “states must actively devise multicultural policies to prevent discrimination on cultural grounds—religious, ethnic and linguistic,” and that “expansion of cultural freedoms, not suppression, is the only sustainable option to promote stability, democracy and human development within and across societies.” This is a strong statement, but the HDR offers sufficient examples and analyses showing that diversity is not a threat to national unity, nor the cause of strife or “backwardness,” and certainly not an obstacle to development—on the contrary.

Without falling into natural and/or cultural determinism, the articles in the Development section of this issue of MRD demonstrate how important diversity is in mountainous environments, often arguing that there is a direct link between cultural diversity and biodiversity—a feature of the biophysical world that has arguably become one of the major pillars of sustainable development. Thus, linguist Mark Turin discusses the relevance of language diversity for equitable development in a highly diverse mountain state, Nepal. Tourism specialist Million Belay, botanist Sue Edwards, and marketing specialist Fassil Gebeyehu present a national program to enable young students in Ethiopia to understand and bank on their rich cultural heritage. Architect William Semple also shows the value of preserving traditions and how this can benefit the environment in an area that has experienced a muffling of cultural diversity and overuse of timber resources. Agronomist Andreas Neef and co-authors show how diversity of irrigation systems can be the result of communal cultures adapting very fluidly to pressures of all kinds on the micro-scale. Finally, geographer Tu Jian-jun and co-authors present a brief overview of the multiplicity and flexibility of cultures in the “corridor” of the upper Min River basin, thus debunking the myth of backward highland cultural isolation. In MountainViews, MRD presents an essay on cultural identity written from an indigenous perspective.

In the Research section, several authors also address the value of cultural multiplicity: Peter Gerritsen and Freerk Wiersum discuss the importance of Mexican farmers' perspectives on conservation for the preservation of biodiversity (vs the traditional conservationist perspective). Carsten Smith Olsen and Nirmal Bhattarai offer a typology as a means to systematize the debate on economic and social aspects of an important opportunity in the Himalaya—plant trade. Tefera Mengistu and co-authors present the results of a participatory study of the perceived costs and benefits of area enclosure for environmental protection. And Estela Farías Torbidoni and co-authors discuss ways of integrating the diversity of visitor preferences to optimize park management. The final two papers in this issue tackle other aspects of sustainable development: Kang Mu-yi and co-authors present a model to evaluate “ecological security” in a farming and pastoral area that has suffered from overuse in Mongolia, while Kazuharu Mizuno analyzes the influence of glacial fluctuation on vegetation succession on Mt Kenya, whose glaciers face the threat of disappearance in the coming decades.

Though this issue of MRD can hardly claim to represent even a fraction of the cultural diversity that exists in the world's mountains, we hope our readers will enjoy its plurality.

Hans Hurni, Editor-in-Chief

Anne Zimmermann, Assistant Editor