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Authors: Khatoon, Salima, Barros, Agustina, and Sharma, Prashant

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Mountain Forum Reaching the Grassroots through Community Radio

In April 2004, Mountain Forum staff and other stakeholders from around the world congregated in Kathmandu for a Strategic Planning Workshop. Through this workshop and the global survey carried out earlier, the task was to define the direction that MF should take in the future.

One of the main issues to come up was that MF must reach out to the grassroots more effectively. A key reason for the current gap in delivering communication and capacity building support to mountain communities was the limited reach of the Internet as a medium. The technology that allowed MF to exist in the first place had also limited it to be in touch with only those people who are literate (especially in the English language), and who have computers and Internet connections. A clear need was identified to work towards equal access to knowledge by creating a more effective process for information exchange and knowledge sharing.

One of the strategies recommended was the exploration and assessment of other communication media, both traditional and alternative. Looking at existing media for information sharing and their capability to bring out voices of the people at the grassroots level, MF identified radio as a simple, effective and powerful communication tool. To test the feasibility and sustainability of incorporating radio within the tools used by MF, the Mountain Forum Secretariat, the Asia-Pacific Mountain Network (APMN), and Radio Sagarmatha—the oldest independent community broadcasting station in South Asia—launched a collaborative pilot project in September 2004.

Radio Sagarmatha directly reaches out to people at the grassroots level in 8 districts of Nepal. It has also established a network with 8 community radio stations across the country to fill the vacuum of information and critical perspectives at the grassroots level, particularly for communities outside the Kathmandu valley. As Sagarmatha is a community radio station, the voices of people are consistently brought into the fold of the radio programs through interviews in the field.

This collaborative pilot project aims to form a bridge between the audience (and participants) of the radio programs and the MF community. This way, the project hopes to facilitate a regular exchange of dialogue between communities at the grassroots in Nepal and MF communities spread across the region and the world.

The process being followed is simple. Radio Sagarmatha and Mountain Forum research and identify issues for discussion that could be pertinent to several mountain regions in the world. Input is sought from the MF community on these issues through postings on various discussion lists. MF and Radio Sagarmatha staffs then act as messengers for the MF community and take this input to the field and record reactions from community members on the same (Figure 1). These, along with expert opinion, are then put together and produced as a radio program, which is then broadcast across the area. Following this, key ideas to emerge from this process are shared with the MF community through the web and discussion lists. The idea behind this process is to facilitate dialogue and knowledge exchange, and encourage mutual understanding between the MF community and communities at the grassroots.

In the first phase, 8 such programs will be produced. As this is a pilot phase, the purpose is to assess whether such an approach—which



FIGURE 1 Interviewing a Tamang woman. Bhojeni, Kathmandu District, Nepal. (Photo by Nimesh Adhikari)

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links discrete online and offline communities to facilitate mutual support—can be successful or not. This process is constantly evolving, as an attempt of this kind has not been made anywhere before. At the end of the pilot phase, it is hoped that all hitches will be resolved and this model will be ready to be taken to a larger scale.

The first 3 programs have already been produced and are on issues related to mountain identity, mountain tourism, and market linkages for mountain products. The first field trip brought the MF and Radio Sagarmatha team in touch with the Tamang community. The team had the privilege of experiencing Tamang traditions and culture, observing their means of livelihoods and recording their perspective on their identity. The community was very enthusiastic about the prospect of sharing their thoughts on radio and with the larger world through MF. This is what some of the people had to say:

Anjana Tamang:

> *"Village girls are simple; city girls are into fashion. Because we live here in the mountains, we have to clean cowsheds, go to forests, cut fodder and grass…That's what we do."*

Man Bahadur Tamang:

> *"Crisp winds, cold water found here. We can see the Himalayas from here. All vegetables grown on mountainous land are tasty. My clothes, which consist of a* suruwaal *(Nepali tight pants),* bhoto *(Nepali top matching the* suruwaal*) and waistcoat all mark me as a mountain dweller. We do not wear pant suits like you."*

Through this evolving process it is hoped that a dialogue will be fostered, where voices of many Anjana Tamangs and Man Bahadur Tamangs can be heard by more and more people worldwide. An initiative such as this which links existing offline and online communities will hopefully provide these typically discrete groups of people with access to each other's knowledge, skills, and experiences. Bringing people together, after all, is what MF does, and will continue to do.

If you are interested in learning more about this project, or have any ideas or suggestions, please contact us at radio@mtnforum.org

Salima Khatoon, Agustina Barros, Prashant Sharma
Intern (S.K.), Information Services Assistant (A.B.), and Information Services Programme Officer (P.S.). Mountain Forum Secretariat, C/O ICIMOD, GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal.
E-mails: salima@mtnforum.org, agustina@mtnforum.org, prashant@mtnforum.org
Web site: www.mtnforum.org

Mountain Researchers Bridge the Disciplinary Divide—Interdisciplinary Research and Management in Mountain Areas (IRMMA), September 23–27, 2004—Banff, Alberta, Canada

THE BANFF CENTRE

September 23–27, 2004: Mountain Culture at The Banff Centre hosted "Interdisciplinary Research and Management in Mountain Areas (IRMMA)" in Banff, Alberta, Canada. It was the fourth conference in a five-part series examining topics relevant to mountain communities worldwide.

Participants came from 8 countries and represented disciplines ranging from wildlife biology to anthropology, history and plant ecology. Together, 95 delegates explored the best ways of planning, scoping, defining, running, and implementing interdisciplinary projects in mountain areas.

The conference revealed a number of ideas shared by many delegates. Speakers including David Mattson, Hans Schreier, Bruno Messerli and others emphasized the role that interdisciplinary research could, and must, play in finding practical solutions to "real-world" problems.

Yet defining these problems means consulting with local stakeholders. "The time to include locals is from the very beginning," said one delegate. Several speakers noted that stakeholder involvement requires more time and money but results in more meaningful knowledge exchange and richer research results, particularly where traditional knowledge is concerned. P.S. Ramakrishnan argued that scientists could build on traditional knowledge. For example cropping systems are traditional, but upon closer inspection, may maintain soil fertility.

Working successfully with multiple disciplines and stakeholders requires sophisticated "soft skills," pointed out Georg Grabherr, David Mattson, and Bruno Messerli. Skills such as communication, transparency, charismatic leadership, mutual respect, flexibility, clearly defined responsibilities, dispersed finances, respect for different epistemological beliefs, and building positive, informal relationships among all project participants. "We are often dealing with politicization of science around conflicted issues. Build communication. Build trust. Build common ground," said one speaker.

But some of the most provocative statements during the conference were made by regional and national decision-makers, and representatives of indigenous commu-

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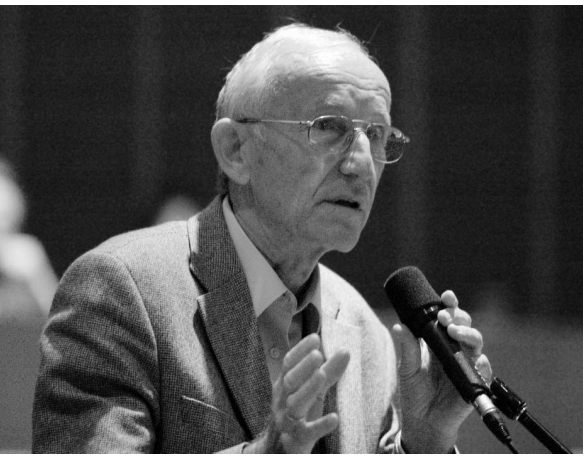


FIGURE 1 Professor Bruno Messerli, a member of MRD's International Editorial Advisory Board, addresses the conference on Interdisciplinary Research and Management in Mountain Areas. (Photo by Don Lee, The Banff Centre)

nities. They called for greater consensus-building, but also encouraged private citizens to speak passionately and trust their own knowledge and expertise. "As a decision-maker, if I had to decide between speaking with an organized lobbyist or one passionate resident, I would always choose the latter," said one representative.

Personal involvement in any issue, including mountain issues, can make decision-making and research a murky task. But several speakers pointed out that all stakeholders, including researchers themselves, bring subjective assumptions and values to any project. Said David Mattson, "Problem solving means reflecting on the baggage you bring and understanding context and perspectives. Understand the complex processes involved in decision-making and address the needs of all the actors involved—science is not enough."

Finally, speakers such as Daniel Fagre and Georg Grabherr asserted that the most pressing problems in mountain areas, such as global change, are usually so complex they cannot be addressed solely with a disciplinary approach. Yet they, and other delegates, felt that existing structures and institutions support and reward work within disciplines, and that few existing structures reward interdisciplinarity. Said one speaker, "What we need is a revolution."

At the end of the conference, participants synthesized key points in break-off groups then reported back in a closing plenary session. Many conference participants asked for the rough notes so that they could implement them immediately. Conference proceedings will be produced, and discussions are currently underway about creating a book from the event.

Interdisciplinary Research and Management in Mountain Areas was sponsored by Parks Canada and Natural Resources Canada, in collaboration with the Mountain Research Initiative, and with assistance from the North American Mountain Forum and IUCN.

Leslie Taylor and Amy Krause
Mountain Culture at the Banff Centre, 107 Tunnel Mountain Drive, Box 1020, Banff, Alberta, Canada T1L1H5.
E-mail: Leslie_Taylor@banffcentre.ca, Amy_Krause@banffcentre.ca
Web site: www.banffcentre.ca/mountainculture

King Albert I Memorial Foundation Honors Swiss Institution and MRD Associates

The King Albert I Memorial Foundation was founded in 1993 in honor of King Albert I of Belgium (1875–1934), a noted alpinist and mountain climber. The Foundation's purpose is to honor persons or institutions whose activities in relation to the world's mountains have had an outstanding and lasting impact.

This year, the Foundation's awards for 2004 were presented on September 11 in the Santa Maria church in Pontresina, Switzerland. The recipients were the Swiss Alpine Museum, Berne, Switzerland; Professor Peter Rieder of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland; Professor Lawrence Hamilton of Vermont; publisher Michel Guérin of Chamonix, France; and Stephen Venables of England, a mountain climber and writer.

The Swiss Alpine Museum, founded in 1905 by the Berne chapter of the Swiss Alpine Club, is the only museum devoted to the Swiss Alps. It features permanent and special exhibitions, cultural events related to mountains, and pedagogic and information services. The award cited the museum's uniqueness as a center of alpine culture and nature that imparts the significance of mountains to a broad public. Its particular focus on young people and its continually expanding collections and information services were mentioned as being of particular importance.

Professor Peter Rieder has graciously offered his services on numerous occasions as a reviewer of articles submitted to *Mountain Research and Development*. MRD greatly depends on the expertise of leading professionals such as Professor Rieder to ensure the quality of its peer-reviewed Research section. Peter Rieder, a Swiss national, is currently professor of agricultural economics at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, where he specializes in national and international agricultural policy and markets. He has undertaken numerous missions on behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation focusing on mountain areas in developing countries, and has served as an advisor to the Swiss

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government and a member of national commissions concerned with agricultural policy. Professor Rieder's award cited his deep commitment to mountain populations, their agricultural systems, and their survival in a rapidly changing world.

Professor Lawrence Hamilton is a member of MRD's International Editorial Advisory Board, where his contributions have ranged from general advice and peer reviews to collaboration as a guest editor. His experience and expertise in forest watershed management have been of great service to the world's mountain regions. In 1991 Lawrence Hamilton became a leading advocate of mountain protected areas in the World Conservation Union (IUCN), where he edited a regular newsletter on mountain protected areas and served as Vice Chair for Mountains, heading the Mountain Protected Areas sub-commission. He was one of a small group of scientists who successfully lobbied to place mountains on the global agenda at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. This initiative led directly to Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 on mountains, and has done much to keep mountain issues on the international development agenda. Professor Hamilton's award cited his fundamental role in conservation of mountain areas worldwide, in connection with sustainable development of mountain communities.

MRD is proud to note the achievements of a Swiss institution and of 2 individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the world's mountains and to this journal. We heartily congratulate the Swiss Alpine Museum and Professors Rieder and Hamilton on their awards!

Theodore Wachs
Managing Editor, MRD; MRD Editorial Office, Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Berne, Steigerhubelstrasse 3, CH–3008 Berne, Switzerland.
mrd-journal@giub.unibe.ch

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