

Editorial

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Dear Readers,

The global and the local interact in unexpected ways; science has coined the term “telecoupling” to describe how “social-ecological interactions in one system generate mechanisms of influence over another” in a way characterized by “geographic separation between systems as well as a separation of social networks, institutions, and governance” (Eakin et al 2014: 142). In an anecdotal way, MRD just experienced this in the context of the present issue: massive floods in Chennai, India, in December 2015 led to a breakdown of the typesetting services upon which our US-based publishing services rely. The cost-effective business model allowing everyone to work locally while doing business across several disconnected borders functioned perfectly until the catastrophic floods in Chennai caught up with us all around the world, causing human tragedy in India, some degree of business problems in the US, and unexpected delays for authors and readers in many countries. In a small way, this shows how interconnected things are today, but more importantly, how strongly context matters. When exploring pathways for sustainable development, knowledge about context matters just as much as our understanding of global processes. Often, this knowledge becomes relevant and effective only when it is constituted by both scientists and other actors. Co-production of knowledge and a focus on the contextual are important in this Open Issue of MRD, in which papers carefully examine local aspects of development, the social-ecological context in which it is taking place, and the global factors that influence this context.

The first article in the MountainDevelopment section offers a framework for assessing the sustainability of built environments in mountain villages in southwest China; the authors, Wan and Ng, discuss the sensitivity of the framework to local conditions, proving that it can integrate the 3 dimensions of sustainability and take into account the social and natural conditions of the local rural mountain world. In the next article focusing on a Nepalese study area, Sujakhu and co-authors show how use of the Community-based Risk Screening Tool—Adaptation and Livelihoods (CRISTAL) helps to identify and prioritize climate risks and livelihood resources of vulnerable populations, while also creating a space for multistakeholder negotiations and discussions about promising adaptation practices. The third article, by Ikeda et al, focuses on a process to adapt scientific knowledge about flood threats from glacial lakes to the local socioeconomic context while enhancing the population's risk awareness in Ladakh; the authors also illustrate how learning was a two-way process between the scientists and the local actors.

In the MountainResearch section, Vacchiano and co-authors propose a method for assessing the effect of natural disturbances on the functionality of vitally important direct protection forests in Italy, with a view to prioritizing management interventions; their method can be applied in other mountain regions using open-access geographic data. Wiesmair et al estimate grassland vegetation cover in the Georgian Caucasus, in a protected area where unregulated grazing has caused erosion; their remote sensing-based model also appears to be applicable elsewhere. The next paper aims only for contextual value: Dorji et al offer the first comprehensive description of climatic conditions in Bhutan and show how elevation and latitude influence temperature and precipitation, and how this in turn influences vegetation cover.

With the paper by Ruppen and co-authors we turn to another focus—trade-offs that need to be taken into consideration when aiming for sustainable land management and sustainable livelihoods; the authors present a method they applied in Tajikistan. The final two papers use Elinor Ostrom's “design principles” as an analytical framework to carefully explore how sustainably natural resources are governed as commons in new political contexts. Shigaeva et al do this for pasture management in the period following the application of the new pasture law in Kyrgyzstan, while Dell'Angelo et al apply the framework to analyze community-based water management in Kenya after the application of the Water Act of 2002, which established new local-level institutions.

A MountainPlatform article follows, in which the Institute of Mountain Hazards and Environment in Chengdu, China, presents its Key Laboratory of Mountain Hazards and Earth Surface Processes. The issue ends with 4 book reviews in the MountainMedia section.

We would like to conclude this Editorial by announcing that a new Associate Editor has joined the Editorial Team: Dr. Sarah-Lan Mathez-Stiefel has conducted a number of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research projects in the Andes and has been involved in development and conservation work in the region. She is working from Lima, Peru, and is affiliated with both the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Bern and the Regional Office for Latin America of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF).

We wish all readers interesting insights from the articles offered in this issue.

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