



25th Anniversary Survey: MRD's Readers Assess the Journal

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25th Anniversary Survey: *MRD*'s Readers Assess the Journal

Preliminary survey results

MRD is now in its 26th year of publication. The *MRD* Editorial Office saw this quarter-century milestone as a suitable moment to conduct a survey of the journal's global audience. The principal objective was to obtain feedback from *MRD* readers, authors, reviewers, regional editors, and members of the journal's editorial advisory board on the current status and future potential of the journal. In particular, we hoped to evaluate the needs of *MRD*'s constituency regarding content, assess the direct impact of the journal in the South and the North, and solicit ideas about the future thematic orientation and the format of *MRD*.

The survey was developed by the Editorial Team in Berne, and conducted with the expert help of the Mountain Forum. The results, compiled at the Mountain Forum's International Secretariat in Kathmandu, are interpreted below in a brief initial analysis.

Audience

We received a total of 203 responses, amounting to a response rate of about 20%. It is difficult to say whether the responses are representative of the *MRD* audience at large, because many respondents have a special relation to *MRD* (ie they are either authors or reviewers, or both):

- More than half (139) of the respondents were authors, 40% (85) were reviewers.
- Half of the respondents work in the South or transition countries, the other half in the North.
- About 42% are directly involved in development cooperation; 121 respondents fulfil more than one

function, ie their work links research and development. Another way of interpreting this result is that functions among those who replied are no longer clearly separated.

Assessment of content

Sections

A great majority of respondents (89%) said that *MRD* bridged the gap between research and development, and a high percentage found both the Research and the Development sections very important for their work. Interestingly, 86% of development practitioners described the Research section as very important, while a slightly lower number (74%) of scientists found the Development section very important; among this latter group, the importance attributed to the Development section was higher in the South (87%) than in the North (64%). Generally speaking, the importance of the other sections (Platform, Notes, Media, and

Views) was not rated as high (about 40–50%) as the Research and Development sections.

Overall, it seems that the diversity of sections and content in *MRD* appeals to readers: over 55% read several articles or even the whole issue, and nearly 45% (of which 5% read one article per issue) browse through the entire issue to find what they are seeking.

Disciplines and themes

The assessment made by respondents of the importance of disciplines represented in *MRD* for their work varied depending on the degree of their involvement in research or development, as illustrated in Table 1. For scientists, the most important areas (bold and underlined) are ecology and interdisciplinary work, whereas for development practitioners and consultants, the social realm is even more important, though they are in agreement with scientists regarding the importance of ecological and interdisciplinary work. Overall,

TABLE 1 Topics ranked as most important by scientists, development practitioners, and consultants. Bold and underlined: > 40% of respondents; bold and italics: < 20% of respondents.

Topic	Type of respondent	Scientist (% of respondents)	Development practitioner (% of respondents)	Consultant (% of respondents)
Physical		21	10	19
Ecological		44	47	52
Social		39	50	48
Cultural		30	35	35
Political		16	18	12
Economic		21	29	22
Institutional		14	18	16
Interdisciplinary		42	44	56

TABLE 2 Themes ranked as most relevant to sustainable development in mountains by scientists, development practitioners, and consultants. Bold and underlined: > 40% of respondents; bold and italics: < 20% of respondents.

Type of respondent Theme	Scientist (% of respondents)	Development practitioner (% of respondents)	Consultant (% of respondents)
Sustainable land management	<u>67.5</u>	<u>64.7</u>	<u>73.7</u>
Health	18.2	18.4	17.1
Natural hazards	28.4	14.3	25.6
Education	28.2	30.6	24.4
Climate change	37.1	26	<u>41.9</u>
Economic opportunities	34.5	<u>46</u>	31
Conflict	21.1	26	33.3
Energy	22.6	22	31
Infrastructure	18.7	20	31
Institutional development	24.7	26	33.3
Water	<u>50</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>53.5</u>
Forests	37.7	<u>41.7</u>	<u>40.5</u>
Biodiversity	<u>43.45</u>	<u>49.0</u>	<u>47.7</u>
Soils	25.5	23.5	38.6
Equity	26.9	34.8	38.1

political and institutional issues as well as physical aspects are less of a priority for all 3 categories of respondents (bold and italics).

It is interesting to observe how the profile of readers appears to have changed over the quarter century of *MRD*'s existence (detailed results not shown in Table 1 for reasons of space): there is an increasing importance of the "institutional" and "ecological" topics, and a decreasing importance of the "physical" topic. There is a similarly interesting temporal variation with regard to the themes considered most relevant for sustainable development. Furthermore, a geographical variation of responses regarding thematic priorities can be observed.

The respondents' assessment of the relevance of themes with regard to sustainable development reveals the following notable priorities (Table 2): sustainable land management (SLM) is at the top of the list for all categories of readers (bold and underlined), and health at the bottom (bold and italics). Apart from SLM, water, forests, and biodiversity are also considered key themes by the 3 main categories of respondents.

Impact of *MRD*

Respondents seem to use *MRD* for manifold purposes; the most frequently mentioned were scientific insights (over 80%), followed by program implementation (especial-

ly in the South). Altogether, about 35% of readers use *MRD* for teaching purposes.

In addition, *MRD* stimulates communication among authors: more than 75% of the authors who responded were contacted by readers. *MRD* is also seen as contributing to career-building, especially in the South (78% as against 51% in the North).

The road ahead

This preliminary analysis of the survey results appears to indicate that the themes and approaches published to date correspond broadly to the priorities expressed by respondents. *MRD* serves a composite audience, and the survey indicates that the journal succeeds quite well in linking the research and development communities concerned with mountains and mountain people.

The Editorial Team would like to thank all those who took time to respond to the numerous questions asked. More time will be required in future to carry out a full evaluation of respondents' answers and comments and provide a more detailed analysis in order to improve and possibly adapt *MRD*'s profile, content and impact.

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