

Editorial

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Dear Readers,

Bringing together development and research is a very important aim of Mountain Research and Development in its new format. In order to bridge the gap between two differing and sometimes contrasting approaches, we asked the authors of the Development section in this issue to reflect on the role of research for development in their specific areas of experience. On receiving their contributions, we were surprised by the multiplicity of dimensions addressed. The relationship between research and development is informed by a great variety of historical, social, political, economic, technological, cultural, spatial, and other aspects, making it clear that common denominators can only be defined at a high level of abstraction.

Many global, regional, and local initiatives currently focus on sustainable development in mountain areas. Each attempts in its own way to make research work for development: Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, IYM 2002, Mountain Forum, AMA Africa, AMA Andes, and the Alpine Convention are only a few of many examples that could be mentioned. At the same time, global research initiatives attempt to promote scientific activities at the highest level, either by focusing on a single field of research (ie, the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment (GMBA), whose inaugural conference was described in MRD Vol 21, No 1), or by promoting cross-disciplinary interaction, as in the recently launched UNU Global Mountain Partnership Program (GMPP, see MountainNotes) or in the new Mountain Research Initiative (MRI) briefly presented in this issue's MountainMedia section. MRI is a collaborative interdisciplinary project established by the IGBP (International Geosphere-Biosphere Program), IHDP (International Human Dimensions Program), and GTOS (Global Terrestrial Observing System). The diversity of topics covered by the articles in the Research section of this issue mirrors the wide array and complexity of problems encountered in mountain areas.

A thorough reflection on how to make research work for development in mountains necessitates years of attention. It is a challenge that needs to be met repeatedly by researchers as well as development specialists and requires that greater attention be paid to personal social and communications skills. What is needed is not a new metascience for academics in search of a fashionable niche to exploit but serious personal and intellectual commitment to the communicability of development needs and research results. Though many efforts are currently being made to define an urgently needed new paradigm for mountain research, there may be a danger that discussions on this topic are conducted only among researchers, without involving the many levels of the development community. This issue of MRD tries to avoid such a pitfall.

Hans Hurni, Editor-in-Chief

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