The Panos Oral Testimony Mountains Project has been an extensive and successful project thanks to the steady support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the commitment and energy of our partner organizations in 10 countries: Peru, Mexico, Lesotho, Kenya, Ethiopia, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Poland. In each country the Oral Testimony Programme (OTP), together with our partners, trained a team of local interviewers, most of whom had no previous interviewing experience. Our partners then coordinated the collection of testimonies (usually between 30 and 40). All partners were supported to develop information outputs based on the testimonies for local and national audiences. The OTP checked, summarized, and analyzed English translations of the testimonies sent by partners and produced a booklet series (Voices from the Mountain) and an online archive (www.mountain-voices.org) for international audiences. A review of the booklet series will appear in the next issue of MRD.

A guiding principle throughout the international OT Mountains Project has been that process is as important as product. This informed the decision to train teams of local men and women, so that interviews were always carried out in people’s first language, by someone familiar to them and with the local context. The belief in process also guided our working arrangements; if participation was to be meaningful, we had to respect the timetables and existing commitments of our partners, which meant that some projects took 3 or 4 years to get to the dissemination stage. Overall, the OTP aimed to encourage partners’ ownership of activities. This approach most definitely paid off when the project became a springboard or catalyst for further activities driven by our partners: for example, community radio work in India, further oral testimony work in Poland, and our partner in Kenya becoming a leading national consultant on the methodology.

In IYM 2002 we provided all partners with a seed grant to go towards attendance at an international event or a community development activity. This was a great way to effectively close our formal relationship with partners and resulted in a varied portfolio of activities including participation at an international tourism conference in Mexico, a fuel-efficient stove project in Ethiopia, the construction of an irrigation channel in Pakistan, and the improvement of village electricity supplies in southwest China. Although the project formally ended in December 2003 many of our partners’ activities continue.

In India, our partner, the Himalaya Trust, collected interviews in the high valleys of Garhwal in Uttarakhand, and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh. The testimonies are rich in environmental knowledge and full of concern about the changing natural resources, increasingly affected by deforestation, monoculture forestry, a decline in traditional agriculture, and infrastructure development (road building and the construction of the Tehri Dam). The impact of education and the related issue of migration are other key themes.

The Himalaya Trust has completed two Hindi booklets based on the testimonies for a series called Eternal Wisdom. The two booklets cover biodiversity and traditional farming practices; a third will focus on the changing position of women. Over the last two years, local coordi-