

Editorial

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Dear Readers,

In this issue, we focus on conflict in mountain regions. In his message to the Conference on Women for Peace and Dialogue for Action in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, in September, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan pointed to a crucial link between this theme and the theme of our previous issue, “women in mountains.” Annan noted: “It is one of the tragic features of modern conflict that women and girls suffer its impact disproportionately.” Because women “understand the root causes of tension and are more likely to know which groups within communities and countries are likely to support peace initiatives,” Annan urged that more women be brought to the negotiating table and into decision-making positions.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the lead UN agency for the International Year of Mountains (IYM), armed conflict is currently the greatest obstacle to improving conditions in mountain communities. Most of the armed conflicts in the world today are in mountain areas: in 1999, 23 of the 27 major armed conflicts in the world were being fought in mountain regions. This fact was powerfully reiterated by Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO, in his speech at the launch of IYM in December 2001: “As we begin commemorating the International Year of Mountains, conflict may be the single greatest obstacle to achieving our goals. Without peace, we cannot reduce poverty. Without peace, we cannot ensure secure food supplies. Without peace, we cannot even consider sustainable development.” But peace will come to mountain regions only if the root causes of conflict are addressed by the countries of the world, as well as by UN agencies. “Seek out your unique role as peacemaker,” Diouf urged. “Once you establish that role, your role in sustainable development and conservation of mountains will also become clear.”

The Development section of this issue addresses various types of conflict in mountain areas, in the spirit of furthering the goals proposed by Kofi Annan and Jacques Diouf. Aamir Ali advocates a peace park as the solution to a half-century of conflict between India and Pakistan in the Himalaya. Yuri Badenkov’s interview with Vladimir Sabin illustrates how poverty and remoteness—2 common characteristics of mountain communities—contribute to ethnic tensions. Shahnawaz discusses alternative economic opportunities to mitigate conflict, whereas Akhouri Krishna, Santosh Chhetri, and Kaushal Singh focus on resource conflicts in relation to biosphere reserves. Boniface Kiteme and John Gikonyo examine the promise of Water Users’ Associations in mitigating conflict over water resources, while Patricia Herrmann considers the efforts of governmental and nongovernmental organizations to manage water conflicts in Ecuador. Finally, Shkelqim Bozgo, Xheni Sinakoli, and Emin Spahia look at the role of the traditional blood feud in Albania. The lead article in the Research section examines the effect of conflict on maize production in Guatemala, and the MountainNotes section features a piece on the tinku in Bolivia—a way of dealing with conflict based on native religiosity. Finally, in our MountainViews section, Jack Ives gives a personal view of the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. The editors invite written responses from readers to contributions appearing in MountainViews, which we hope will become a forum for debate and discussion.

We invite MRD readers to reflect on the statements made by Kofi Annan and Jacques Diouf as they consider the various aspects of conflict and conflict mitigation presented here. Perhaps only after such reflection will each of us be able to act on Jacques Diouf’s advice to determine our own role as peacemakers and hence our role in sustainable development and conservation of mountains as well.

*Theodore Wachs, Managing Editor
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