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Editorial

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Dear Readers,

Inaccessible gorges and high relief energy once made mountains unsuitable for easy transport systems. But in the last century, these factors turned out to be major opportunities in terms of hydropower generation. A recent Internet search on dams in mountains conducted by Albrecht Ehrensperger of CDE for the Mountain Agenda turned up a detailed record of nearly 2,000 dams worldwide. Location on a global Digital Terrain Model (DTM) shows that more than 50% are located in regions defined as mountainous areas. The Mountain Agenda's forthcoming Commission on Sustainable Development (CDS) publication will discuss dams as a major economic issue in most mountain regions of the world.

The annual United Nations CSD conference, to be held in New York in April 2001, will address energy and infrastructure as its major focus. We have purposely chosen the same theme in order to demonstrate how important mountain ecoregions are for sustainable development of humankind, offering viable economic opportunities and resources that may be sustainably used—provided that ecological and social factors are taken more seriously.

Several articles in the Development Section of this issue of MRD *focus on energy production, especially on hydroelectric power. Although hydropower can have negative ecological impacts, it can be one of the more sustainable and less costly forms of energy production. However, even more sustainable renewable forms of energy can be produced in mountains, including wind energy and, as shown in this issue, solar power.*

One big concern remains: who are the beneficiaries of energy produced in mountains? Local inhabitants are rarely among those who make the largest profits. They may obtain electricity at a cheaper price in the vicinity of power plants. The real beneficiaries, however, are towns, cities and the companies—often state-owned—who make the necessary investments. The same applies to reservoirs created to retain runoff for irrigation. The beneficiaries in this case are the downstream land users, the people who process and trade agricultural goods, and, finally, the end users—not mountain populations upstream. In the worst cases, people and livestock have had to leave the areas above newly constructed dams. New forms of benefit sharing are still very rare in energy production. We thus invite our readers to report examples of mountain people truly benefiting from the construction of hydropower plants or irrigation reservoirs—not just at the time of construction, but over longer periods. For further reading on this subject we recommend the World Commission on Dams report entitled `Dams and Development', published in November 2000, and listed in the Mountain-Media Section of this issue.

The Research Section also deals with water-related research in mountain areas, be it to create a new mountain typology, deal with questions if impact, discuss tectonic control of fluvial landforms, or assess water erosion and conservation in headwaters.

A final note: starting with our next issue (Vol 21 No 2), MRD *will feature a final section entitled "MountainViews". We invite researchers and development practitioners to comment on articles published so far.*

Thomas Kohler, Guest Editor

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