EDITORIAL

Developmental assistance in publishing marine biology research – quo vadis?

Marine Biology Research (MBRJ) is strongly dedicated to support developmental initiatives and to stimulate all users of our journal to join us in those efforts. Backed up by a publisher with a well-established responsibility in developmental assistance (http://taylorandfrancisgroup.com/about/corporate-responsibility/development-initiatives), MBRJ editors-in-chief have visited a number of developing countries such as Ghana, Mozambique, Peru, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Tonga and Vietnam (Figure 1). Contacts with marine research institutions and local scientists were established, the journal was presented at invited seminars, and submissions were motivated. Selected institutions in developing countries were offered the opportunity to receive free hardcopy issues or assistance in pre-reviewing of intended submissions, or were supported in the organization of scientific meetings for possibly generating later submissions. The eight countries listed above are all among the 115 total countries eligible for the Research4Life programme (http://www.research4life.org) (supplementary Table S1) allowing subscriptions of MBRJ and many other journals for free or at reduced rates.

Submissions to MBRJ have so far been received from 15 Research4Life-eligible countries; this is 19% of the 80 countries that have submitted manuscripts to MBRJ (status at October 2015). Seven out of these 15 developing countries have successfully published in our journal so far. However, for these countries the acceptance rate (= publications as a percentage of submissions received) has been far below the average acceptance rate of submissions to MBRJ (18% vs. 35%). Also, many rejections of their submissions were prior to being passed to reviewers. Important goals for us are therefore (1) to reach out to more developing countries and stimulate submissions, and (2) to communicate detailed information on how to avoid immediate or pre-review rejection due to submissions being out of the journal’s scope or of insufficient scientific or language quality.

Apart from informal visits and associated promotional actions, journal outreach can be enhanced by already established scientific contacts or collaboration agreements. For instance, we have appointed a number of subject editors who have longer-term research collaborations or other strong ties with developing countries. Furthermore, we have also invited several colleagues from countries of emerging economies to join us as subject editors, because those countries often already have well-connected scientific networks and related high-quality research output, hence providing excellent examples for others to follow. Also, starting with this issue, ‘Regional Support Editors’ will join the journal to represent MBRJ and assist to increase submission and publication rates in selected and yet underrepresented regions.

Because many of the target developing countries are in tropical or subtropical areas, MBRJ has also tried to motivate submissions of manuscripts featuring research in lower-latitude regions covering topics such as fisheries, environmental biology, ecology and taxonomy. All these fields should be of particularly high relevance for countries faced with both socio-economic (poverty, unemployment) and environmental pressures (climate change, overfishing, etc.), while still urgently needing to fill persisting knowledge gaps through exploration and monitoring of their highly diverse marine ecosystems.

Good examples of publications from developing countries in MBRJ, all based on submissions received to a sufficiently high standard for straightforward reviewing, are the following papers: Al-Rousan et al. (2011) and Al-Horani & Khalaf (2013) feature in their studies seagrass community ecology and mitigation of coral-reef loss by implementing artificial reefs off the Jordanian coast (Red Sea); Rashed-Un-Nabi et al. (2011) studied fish and shrimp assemblage patterns and water quality in a large river estuary in Bangladesh (NE Indian Ocean); El Ayari et al. (2015) have focused on imposex induction in snails from habitats with different environmental impacts along the coast of Tunisia (Mediterranean); and Vladimir Pešić (2013), a scientist from Montenegro, described a new marine water mite species from a coastal lake of Madagascar (SW Indian Ocean). The latter publication is especially remarkable, as it covers two Research4Life-eligible countries!
Where to go from here? *MBRJ* wants to motivate advancement in marine biology research in all countries, be they with access to the sea or landlocked, be they still developing or (already) well-developed. We shall continue to focus on high-quality publishing (Uiblein 2015), but also give all authors a fair chance, especially in cases where we see a need for developmental assistance and/or regional research stimulation. The overall connectedness through our oceans should be mirrored by overcoming obstacles when it comes to publishing, even though turbulent waters may need to be crossed.

**Editorial board note**

Starting with the first issue of volume 12, *Marine Biology Research* appears in a new style, with the subject editor information provided on the heading page beneath the abstract. This will emphasize the important and often hard work of our 50 subject editors and I want to use this opportunity to thank them as well as our two technical editors for their much appreciated assistance, many of them already collaborating with us for more than ten years!

I am very happy to announce here that our subject editor Dan Smale has recently been appointed to also serve as an *MBRJ* co-editor and Farnis Boneka, Universitas Sam Ratulangi, Manado, Indonesia, has joined us as a regional support editor (Indonesia, SE Asia). Furthermore, we welcome Sharon Hook, *CSIRO* Oceans and Atmosphere, Kirrawee, Australia, as our new subject editor for Ecotoxicology. Sharon has followed Frederieke Kroon who recently left us, as did Peter R. Møller. Many thanks and good luck to both of them!

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Figure 1. *Marine Biology Research* promotional activities have often been combined with invited seminars, research visits, or scientific meetings in developing countries. These photographs show me amidst local scientists, experts, and students in marine biology, fisheries biology, or ichthyology at the following institutions: (A) at the Research Institute for Marine Fisheries, Hai Phong, Vietnam, during a research stay with visits at five Vietnamese research institutions and associated seminar presentations (November 2013); (B) at the Natural History Museum, Lima, Peru, during a promotional tour with invited seminars at seven research institutions in five Latin American countries (May/June 2014); and (C) at the Faculty of Marine Science and Fisheries, Red Sea University, Port Sudan, where I gave an invited seminar featuring *MBRJ*, during a *UNIDO* (www.unido.org/) marine fish taxonomy workshop with participants from three Sudanese research institutions, the Red Sea State Fisheries Administration, and three *UNIDO* coordination offices (October 2015).
Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article is available via the Supplemental tab of the article’s online page at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17451000.2015.1115644

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