Mountain Societies Research Centre (MSRC) is dedicated to supporting and enhancing the resilience and quality of life of mountain societies through sound research on sustainable mountain development and management of their physical, social, economic and cultural assets.
Establishment of UCA’s First Research Centre

In March 2011, the University of Central Asia (UCA)’s Board approved the establishment of the University’s first research centre, the Mountain Societies Research Centre (MSRC).

The MSRC is dedicated to supporting and enhancing the resilience and quality of life of mountain societies through sound research on sustainable mountain development and management of their physical, social, economic and cultural assets. The MSRC will generate and disseminate relevant knowledge through sound research; build Central Asian capacity to conduct research relevant to mountain societies; inform the policy and practice of sustainable mountain development through evidence-based research; and serve as a knowledge hub in Central Asia for scholars, development practitioners and policymakers. Coinciding with the announcement of MSRC, a new website was launched that provides up-to-date communications on MSRC. Please visit: http://msrc.ucentralasia.org/.

The MSRC is currently staffed by Dr. Chad Dear, Senior Research Scientist and UCA’s Director of Research, Dr. Nasreen Dhanani. The Centre is supported by Senior Research Fellows including: Karim-Aly Kassam, Daniel Maselli, Inam-ur-Rahim, Bettina Wolfgramm and Elmira Köchümkulova. In addition, several Graduate Fellows pursuing their doctoral studies under UCA’s Central Asian Faculty Development Programme (CAFDP) are focusing their studies and research in areas relevant to MSRC’s work. For more information about these researchers, see: http://www.ucentralasia.org/research_profiles.asp and http://www.ucentralasia.org/cafdp.asp. MSRC is actively seeking a Director, Senior Research Scientists and Central Asian Fellows to complement the existing team.

The MSRC engages with regional and international partners to further its programme objectives. Partners include other universities, networks, Aga Khan Development Network agencies, and Central Asian communities and governments. MSRC is currently hosting and engaged in joint projects with the Central Asia Hub of Mountain Partnership/Mountain Forum (MP/MF) and the regional office of the Swiss-funded National Centres for Competence in Research North-South in Central Asia.

This periodic report is the first of a series that highlights activities of the MSRC, its Fellows and Partners since its inception to June 2011.
Activities

Conferences

**International Symposium on Pastoralism in Central Asia: Status, Challenges and Opportunities in Mountain Areas. June 13-18, 2011, Kyrgyz Republic**

The MSRC and NCCR North-South co-hosted the symposium, which was co-sponsored by MP and GIZ. The Symposium was opened in Bishkek by His Excellency Torogul Bekov, Minister of Agriculture, Kyrgyz Republic, who highlighted the significance of pastoralism in the development of mountain societies, regional cooperation and Ministry initiatives to promote environmentally-friendly practices. The Symposium was attended by 140 participants from over 20 countries who sought to create a deeper understanding of the complex issues related to pastoralism in mountain regions and identify measures to positively inform policy and programmes.

The keynote presentation by Dr. Carol Kerven (Odessa Centre, UK) provided an overview of mountain agro-pastoralism in Central Asia, based on a review paper commissioned by the MSRC, with recommendations for future directions in research to address knowledge gaps and inform policy and practice. Scientific thematic sessions were conducted on historical and contemporary challenges of agro-pastoral production; pasture governance in transition; sustainable livestock management: plant-animal interactions and diseases mitigation; and development interventions and Central Asian pastoral committees. A field excursion to Chui and Naryn districts provided the opportunity to meet local herders, learn about current pasture use and management, and observe the impact of related policies and initiatives, including local pasture user committees. Participants visited pastures and met herders in Tosh-Bulak village in Sokuluk rayon, Chui oblast and Tolok, Min-Bulak and Jergetal villages in Naryn district.

MSRC researchers and partners served on the organizing committee and presented their research at the Symposium. NCCR North-South Regional Coordinator Mira Arynova welcomed participants and served as the primary coordinator of the event. MSRC/NCCR North-South researchers Daniel Maselli and Inam-ur-Rahim presented on Market Access and Pastoral Livelihood Strategies in Rural Kyrgyzstan and Fodder Shortage in Kyrgyzstan: Implications for Pasture and Livestock Management respectively. They also presented the Herders’ Manual, a joint project of MSRC and NCCR North-South (see section on Ongoing & New Projects for more details). UCA Central Asian Faculty Development Programme’s (CAFDP) Graduate Fellows also participated: Maksim Kulikov presented on Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) Model of Soil Erosion on Alpine Grazing Lands and Kanat Tilekeyev presented a poster on Poverty and Production Efficiency in the Rural Areas of Kyrgyzstan. MP/MF Regional Programme Officer Elbegzaya Batjargal presented on MP’s Aiyil Demi newspaper with Jyldyz Mukhametsalieva, and Kyrgyz Republic MP Member CAMP Alatoo hosted a field trip to Jergetal, demonstrating progress in enforcing a new law on pasture management in the Kyrgyz Republic. During the field trip, interviews were conducted with pasture committees, local authorities and herder groups to assess the distribution process for the Aiyil Demi newspaper to remote rural areas.
WOCAT is a global network of Soil and Water Conservation specialists, contributing to sustainable land management. The events were jointly hosted by MSRC and partners, NCCR North-South and the global WOCAT management (Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern; Food and Agriculture Organization; and the International Soil Reference and Information Centre) and secretariat. 100 participants from 25 countries came together to create synergies, strengthen collaboration and harmonize activities between different stakeholders, and address climate change adaptation and mitigation, pasture and grazing land management, and new WOCAT modules.

The WOCAT events were opened by His Excellency Torogul Bekov, Minister of Agriculture, Kyrgyz Republic, who stated the importance of sustainable natural resource management in the face of increased population, natural hazards and climate change, and the need for environmentally-friendly agriculture. The Share Fair (21-22 June 2011, Bishkek) brought together over 50 organizations to share information about their projects, and included keynote presentations on challenges, opportunities and synergies in sustainable land management. This was followed by the 15th Annual WOCAT Workshop and Steering Meeting (23-27 June 2011, Naryn Oblast). En-route to Naryn, participants spent a day in the field in Tolok, focusing on pasture management and the Herders’ Manual developed by the MSRC and NCCR North-South (see section on Ongoing & New Projects for more details). The Workshop and Steering Meeting included plenary and working group sessions to assess WOCAT progress to-date, and plan for future activities. It included a field visit to the surrounding areas of Naryn and Jergetal for participants to learn about CAMP Alatoo’s approach to sustainable pasture management and local pasture management committees. The event led to the identification of priority actions that could be undertaken by WOCAT members, institutions and governments in Central Asia to capitalize on the potential benefits of integrated sustainable land management and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies in dryland grazing systems.

MSRC Senior Research Scientist Chad Dear presented an overview of the MSRC, and MSRC/NCCR North-South researchers presented keynote lectures at the Share Fair: Inam-ur-Rahim presented on Sustainable Land Management and Pastoralism (Local Assessment, Mapping and Priority Setting), and Bettina Wolfgramm presented on Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change Adaptation: First Results from the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience in Tajikistan. Inam-ur-Rahim also presented a keynote address on Pasture Management in Central Asia and a summary of the scientific and policy sections of the Pastoralism Symposium that had taken place earlier. He also moderated a session with NCCR North-South researcher Henri Rueff on Pasture/Grazing Land Management, and led the field day on pasture management and elaboration of the Herders’ Manual in Tolok village, Naryn Oblast. UCA Graduate Fellow Farrukh Nazarmavloev attended the events. MSRC partners from the Mountain Partnership served as co-hosts and also participated: Janyl Kojomuratova from CAMP Alatoo, a member of the MP, presented on Camp Alatoo Project Activities in Kyrgyzstan, with a focus on energy efficiency in rural house construction. A field visit to areas around Naryn and Jergetal was organized for participants to learn about the CAMP Alatoo approach to sustainable pasture management and local pasture management committees.

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1 Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP) Alatoo is a national NGO based in the Kyrgyz Republic
On-Going & New Projects

MSRC Projects

Herders’ Manual

MSRC, in partnership with NCCR North-South, is developing a Herders’ Manual for use in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with support from the MP, The Christensen Fund and Pamir Alai Land Management Project of UN/GEF. Drawing on local expertise of Central Asian herders, the manual provides a combination of traditional knowledge about key pasture plants and current scientific knowledge about sustainable pasture management, livestock production, and health management. The manual was designed for on-the-job training of livestock herders, village Pasture Committees and other village-level pasture management and monitoring organizations. The text of the manual was finalized, with Russian text edited by NCCR North-South Regional Coordinator Mira Arynova and English text edited by UCA Research Associate/Writer Sia Nowrojee. MSRC/NCCR North-South project coordinators, Dr. Daniel Maselli and Dr. Inam-ur-Rahim, who authored the Manual, presented the text for discussion to participants and local pasture committee members during the field component of the International Symposium on Pastoralism in Central Asia. The manual is currently undergoing validation exercises, and will be available in English, Russian, Kyrgyz and Tajik languages from MSRC in September 2011.

Sustainable Mountain Development in Central Asia – An Assessment of Progress since the 1992 Earth Summit

MSRC is the focal point for a Central Asian regional assessment of progress related to the 1992 Earth Summit goals specific to mountain areas (Chapter 13 of Agenda 21). MSRC and MP have commissioned fifteen case studies from regional stakeholders, including NGOs, government agencies and MP members in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, to contribute to the Central Asia Regional Assessment Report. The regional assessment will contribute to a global assessment to be presented in Switzerland, October 2011, and the final product will be used to influence delegates to the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012. MSRC and MP are working closely with Zoi Network to complete the report. For more information: http://www.mountainpartnership.org/common/files/pdf/Flyer_RIOplus20_low.pdf

Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience (PPCR) - Tajikistan, Phase 1, Component A5 – Sustainable Land Management (SLM)

Senior Research Fellow Bettina Wolfgramm is coordinating an assessment of existing SLM experience and practices in Tajikistan in Phase 1 of this Climate Investment Fund/World Bank project. Recommendations generated from the Phase 1 assessment will guide the design of Phase 2. MSRC partner - the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, is leading Phase 1 implementation in coordination with MP member CAMP Kuhiston, Helvetas (Swiss Association for International Cooperation), and international and local experts. At the core of the assessment will be an inventory of SLM experiences using the standardized questionnaires of WOCAT (World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies). The assessment will identify the best SLM practices that improve rural livelihoods and resilience to climate change, and provide recommendations on a feasible policy and legal framework for their up-scaling. Senior Research Scientist Chad Dear is serving as a reviewer of WOCAT documentations and project reports.
A WOCAT Introduction and Practical Training was held in Dushanbe, 29 March – 1 April 2011 to train technical staff of government and international organizations how to document SLM practices using WOCAT questionnaires. Participants were further supported in elaborating their documentations, and reimbursed for inserting finalized documentations into the global WOCAT online database. A National level workshop on SLM practices and policies was held in Dushanbe, 5-6 April 2011 to facilitate information exchange and determination of priorities with national level stakeholders. All documentation will be compiled in a publication on SLM best practices in Tajikistan.

In the framework of the PPCR Phase 1, Component 5 on Agriculture and SLM, collaboration was strengthened between CDE, CAMP Kuhiston2 and UCA. New collaborations were formed with Helvetas Tajikistan and their NetLAC project, and with Professor Zvi Lerman of The Hebrew University, Israel.

Increasing Biodiversity and Economic Development in Mountain Areas of Kyrgyzstan

Funded by the Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan Fund for the Environment, the project seeks to identify native species of fruit trees, berries, and shelter breaks which grow in high elevation areas of the Pamir Alai and Tien Shan region and to (re)introduce these species to prevent soil erosion and increase food security.

MSRC is providing the oversight for the research component of this project and the implementation is being carried out in collaboration with the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (MSDSP) in the Kyrgyz Republic. In the first quarter of 2011, MSRC established a research team of local experts, developed a research framework with team leader Murat Aitmatov, and provided technical backstopping and management support for the research process. The research team produced the first of two reports: a practitioner-oriented report for MSDSP that provides specific recommendations for (re)introducing native fruit tree, berry, and shelter-break species to high-elevation areas. The second report is a comprehensive literature review of all known fruit, berry, and shelter break tree species that grow in high elevation areas, their basic characteristics, status, and needs. The second report will be externally reviewed and prepared for external distribution. MSRC is in currently in process of defining a final evaluation study of the project.

UCA Research Fellows’ Activities

Dr. Karim-Aly Kassam is Co-Principal Investigator on a two-year project on Bridging Learners with Practitioners: Interdisciplinary Experiential Learning in Conservation Science using Conservation Bridge, which is funded by the National Science Foundation. The project objective is to test a new coupled human ecological systems model of engaging students in conservation science using authentic and service learning educational paradigms that develop collaborative and analytical skills to work across disciplinary and cultural boundaries. His research team is developing cases studies with Beijing Normal University, University of Central Asia and Cornell University. A video and case study entitled “Climate change, food, and ‘sharing’ among the Iñupiat of Wainwright, Alaska (2011)” is already available.

Dr. Kassam is a Principal Investigator on a three-year project on Beyond Diversity: Re-Situating Pluralism, funded by the Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future, Institute of Social Science, American Indian Program, and the Einaudi International Center. The project objective is to engage a multi-disciplinary group of scholars and leaders from civil society institutions in developing a new vocabulary

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2 CAMP Kuhiston is a national NGO based in Tajikistan
around the notion of pluralism. A resulting study examining the ecological basis for pluralism entitled “Pluralism, Resilience, and the Ecology of Survival: Case Studies from the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan (2010)” was published³.

As a Principal Investigator on a four-year project on Indigenous People, Alpine Human Ecology, and Change in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan and Tajikistan (2007-2011), funded by The Christensen Fund, Dr. Kassam is assessing the resilience capacity to develop relevant adaptation strategies resulting from ecological and socio-cultural changes in the Pamir of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. By incorporating a human ecological lens that is sensitive to the indigenous and mountainous population of the Pamir, this project advances the maintenance of biological and cultural diversity while addressing change. Resultant publications include: “Viewing change through the prism of indigenous Human Ecology: Findings from the Afghan and Tajik Pamirs (2009)” and “Medicinal plant use and Health Sovereignty: Findings from the Tajik and Afghan Pamirs (2010)”⁴.

Dr. Bettina Wolfgramm is working with the Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM) Multi-Country Knowledge Management Project to organize an inventory of SLM practices in Tajikistan (through PPCR and CACILM) and Central Asia (through CACILM) using the WOCAT standard questionnaires and the WOCAT online database. All online materials were translated into Russian and a WOCAT Regional Training for Central Asia was conducted in Dushanbe, 18-22 April 2011. From October to December 2011, Dr. Wolfgramm will be involved in reviewing the documented case studies. The efforts will yield a book with guidelines on SLM practices and policies for Central Asia by 2012.

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University Partners

Roundtable on Enhancing Food Security and Natural Resource Management for Mountain Societies in Central Asia: Function, Structure, and Substance of a Collaborative Program of Research: was hosted by MSRC on 10 June 2011 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. In 2010, UCA and Michigan State University (MSU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate on a research programme in Central Asia. MSU is a top-tier American land grant university with a global reputation in food security and natural resource management. MSU, along with their partner US land grant universities (Kansas State University, University of California-Davis, Washington State University, and Virginia Tech) are actively working in Central Asia. The purpose of the roundtable was to elaborate the function, structure, and substance of a collaborative program of research on food security and natural resource management between MSRC and the attending US land grant universities. Over 30 participants attended, including representatives from the five US land grant universities, the Aga Khan Foundation and the Mountain Societies Development Support Program, the World Food Program, the US Agency for International Development, and researchers from numerous organizations in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic.

Director of Research Nasreen Dhanani opened the event and MSRC Senior Research Scientist Chad Dear facilitated the workshop. Senior Research Fellow Bettina Wolfgramm and UCA CAFDP Fellows Muratbek Laljeeekov and Farrukh Nazarmavloev also attended. A key outcome of the roundtable was the creation of a Central Asian post-doctoral research fellow position to be developed at MSRC in Food Security. The selected fellow will work with one or more professors from MSU to develop a background paper on Food Security which will be used to develop research proposals for external funding.

Mountain Partnership/Mountain Forum (MP/MF)

Upon its establishment, MSRC assumed the role as official host for MP/MF’s Central Asia Hub launched at UCA in the beginning of 2010. The MP/MF are global initiatives that serve mountain people, their governments and institutions by providing them with platforms for better connections and networking with each other for shared learning and the exchange of knowledge and experience. Mountain Partnership serves institutions and governments, and is designed to forge joint initiatives between members, and link them to funding sources, while Mountain Forum provides services to individuals. Ms. Elbegzaya (Zaya) Batjargal is the Regional Program Officer for MP/MF.

In addition to joint activities with MSRC, MP/MF are engaged in the activities described below.

Aiyl Demi newspaper: To create platforms for outreach to remote mountain villagers, MP/MF recently launched the Kyrgyz-language newspaper Aiyl Demi. UCA Research Fellow Elmira Köchümkulova serves on the editorial board of the newspaper, and contributes as a writer and reviewer. The Rural Advisory Service (started by the Swiss Government and the World Bank-funded Community Development and Investment Agency) works closely with the newspaper team and locally-based MP members to actively explore opportunities for creative use of the provided space, and the paper is working jointly with the Kyrgyz Government’s Agency for Local Governance, to open platforms in reaching out to remote areas of the Kyrgyz Republic. The newspaper serves rural communities which comprise over 65% of
the population, and provides herders, farmers and rural entrepreneurs information on legislative policy developments; best practices on sustainable farming and pasture management; and agricultural product markets and prices. The paper is published monthly and 5,000 copies are distributed at no charge.

MP has contracted through MSRC to implement a wide range of activities addressing the socio-economic, environmental and institutional aspects of sustainable development in mountain communities to the following MP regional members:

• AGOCA (Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan/Kazakhstan)5
• CAMP Kuhiston (Tajikistan)
• Eco-Forum (Uzbekistan)
• Centre for Climate Change and Disaster Reduction (Tajikistan)

These contracts support regional members and their joint initiatives including the following activities: livelihood and local entrepreneurship support through regional training on organic leather; establishing an interactive demonstration centre for the application of renewable energy; and setting up the Women Scientists Network for Central Asia to bring together women researchers and scientists contributing to development of their states and the region.

For more information, see: www.mountainpartnership.org and www.mtnforum.org.

National Centre of Competence in Research North-South (NCCR North-South)

Based on an agreement between UCA and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at the University of Berne, UCA (and now MSRC) hosts the Central Asian Regional Coordination Office for the NCCR North-South.6 NCCR North-South supports research on issues related to sustainable development, particularly in developing and transition countries, in collaboration with eight Swiss research and teaching institutions, including the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Berne. The most salient features of the program are: North-South partnerships for scientific research; Integration of disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research; and Interactive exchange of development research and practice. Research is organized around four main themes: Governance and Conflict, Livelihood and Globalization, Health and Sanitation, and Resources and Sustainability. Mira Arynova is Regional Coordinator of NCCR North-South in Central Asia.

Dr. Bettina Wolfgramm co-supervised the work of UCA CAFDP Fellow Farrukh Nazarmavloev, who is currently working with other RP11 (NCCR North-South Research Project 11 on Land Resource Potentials) doctoral students on soil spectral issues in the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE)/NCCR North-South Dushanbe office and elaborating a proposal for his doctoral studies. Through CAFDP, Farrukh received his MSc from the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok and presented his results at the Annual Central Asia GIS Conference-GISCA 2011, Geoinformatics: Managing Environment, Resources and Risk in Almaty, 19-20 May 2011. He was awarded a joint Swiss Confederation7, NCCR North-South and UCA Scholarship allowing him to attend University of Bern to continue his studies at the doctoral level.

For more information on NCCR North-South see: http://www.north-south.unibe.ch/ and for Central Asia: www.nccr-central-asia.org

5 Association of Central Asian Mountain Communities
6 The Secretariat of NCCR N-S is based at CDE at the University of Berne
7 Funded by the Swiss Cooperation Office - SCO
International Mountain Society

MSRC is an institutional member of the International Mountain Society (IMS), which promotes knowledge and disseminates information about mountain research and mountain development throughout the world. The IMS aims to promote sustainable mountain development through improved communication among institutions and individuals, with a particular focus on mountain eco-regions in the developing world. Based in Berne, Switzerland, the IMS collaborates with like-minded institutions active in the fields of mountain research and/or mountain development. IMS also publishes a quarterly journal, Mountain Research and Development (MRD), with institutional members serving on the MRD editorial board.

To promote understanding of systems and practices most relevant to Central Asian mountain communities, MSRC is facilitating a special issue of MRD on Central Asian Mountain Societies in Transition to be published in 2012. The issue is being compiled by Dr. Chad Dear as the guest editor. For more information on the special issue see http://www.ucentralasia.org/news.asp?Nid=31; for MRD, visit http://www.mrd-journal.org/default.asp
Chad Dear joined UCA as a Senior Research Fellow in September 2010 facilitating the implementation of numerous MSRC research projects and other Centre activities, while continuing to work with UCA Director of Research, Nasreen Dhanani, on MSRC’s strategic development.

Chad earned his PhD in Forestry from University of Montana’s Department of Society and Conservation, his MSc in Geography from Western Washington University’s Huxley College of the Environment, and his BA in Interdisciplinary Studies (Communications, Legal Institutions, Economics, and Government) from American University’s School of Public Affairs in Washington DC. Chad’s professional focus is at the nexus of rural development and conservation, particularly in and around protected areas, and he has addressed these issues as both an academic and a development professional.

As a Fulbright Fellow in Swaziland (2001-3), Chad led an action research project on rural community participation strategies for a landscape-scale conservation and tourism development project. As part of a long-term collaborative research program between University of Montana and University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Chad investigated decision-making regarding human displacement from protected areas and the associated livelihood consequences in Mozambique (2004-8). Chad’s research in the United States has focused on conflicts between wilderness and subsistence users of Alaskan national parks (1999-2001), public policy options for the wildland-urban interface in western Washington State (2000-2001); and visitor use, users, and user attitudes in Montana’s Bob Marshall Wilderness (2003-2004). In all of Chad’s research endeavors he has worked closely with individuals and organizations to apply the findings of his work. Chad has published in interdisciplinary academic journals and has produced technical reports for the US Forest Service, World Bank projects and non-governmental organizations.

As a development professional, Chad managed natural resource management, disaster risk reduction, agro-enterprise, and women’s empowerment programs for Catholic Relief Services in Afghanistan and East Timor. Prior to joining UCA, Chad worked with the Aga Khan Foundation-Afghanistan, where he authored a facilitators’ guide for community rangeland management trainings and a popular book on the development of nature-based tourism in Afghanistan’s Central Highlands. Earlier in his career, Chad founded and directed a high school environmental education program in Washington State.

Outside the office, Chad has cycled across the United States, walked across Swaziland as part of a conservation and tourism public awareness raising campaign, and skied across the Koh-e-Baba mountain range in Afghanistan’s beautiful and peaceful Bamiyan Province in the Central Highlands. He and his wife, Laurie, are expecting their first child in October.
Resources & Publications

MSRC Publications


Research Fellow Publications


Employment & Fellowship Opportunities

MSRC is seeking candidates to fill the following positions:
• Director, MSRC
• Senior Research Scientist

MSRC is seeking Central Asian candidates for the following Fellowships:
• Food Security Fellow
• National Hazards Fellow
• Research Fellow in any MSRC theme

For more information on these opportunities: http://msrc.ucentralasia.org/