

### **The Future of the MIRCEN\***

#### *ASM and MIRCEN Network Collaboration*

The UNESCO MIRCEN-ASM collaboration over the last 14 years was comprised of a joint ASM/UNESCO research fellowship scheme; an ASM/UNESCO resource persons programme; and UNESCO support to the ASM Global Outreach programme.

These programmes, in accordance with the objectives of the joint ASM-UNESCO collaboration, namely of providing opportunities for young scientists to develop their research interests and to obtain expertise in advances in the field of microbiology; providing technical expertise to upgrade national capacity in the biotechnologies and support indigenous research work through the resource persons programme; fostering the development of new inexpensive technologies native to specific regions; and of promoting the economic and environmental applications of microbiology, have reached many scientists in several developing countries, and have responded, to some extent, to the needs for information exchange and technology transfer. The continuation and expansion of these programmes thus remains obligatory in promoting microbiological science education and research on a global scale.

In light of reduced resources as a result of zero-growth, novel ways of responding to the needs of especially the developing and least developed Member States have to be initiated. The above-mentioned joint ASM/

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\* Based on MIRCEN Directors' Meeting held in Washington, DC, in April 2002

UNESCO fellowship programme, an acknowledged mode for cost-effective use of available resources, serves as a proven model for the continued and future development of efforts in capacity building.

Complementary issues covered during the review meeting were:

1. New global initiatives, e.g. the Biological Resources Centres initiative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), that are of immediate concern to the activities of the MIRCEN network
2. Organization of UNESCO training sessions in topical issues in sustainable development, e.g. environmental microbiology and bio-safety in collaboration with international partners working in these fields
3. Development of digital and interactive teaching materials for use at graduate and post-graduate university levels
4. Greater access to online subscriptions of ASM Journals
5. Stimulation and support by UNESCO of national microbiological societies through the MIRCEN network and collaborators for increased co-operation with international institutions like the ASM for a mutually beneficial exchange
6. Procurement of equipment for those institutions and laboratories suffering from the constraints of limited budgets and lack of appropriate and basic laboratory equipment.

### **Proposals for Future Collaboration**

Future collaborative efforts will likely focus on continued capacity building and increased scientific collaboration in applied research by seeking out new international cost-sharing initiatives and extra-budgetary resources whilst maintaining ongoing long-term mutually beneficial co-operation. Two such proposals are the planned development of a joint UNESCO-ASM Professorship Scheme and a Voluntary Senior Resource Persons Professorships programme.

Financial support for laboratory equipment upgrade and research will be through existing programmes. The procurement of used equipment was

indicated via an established link in the ASM Resource Clearinghouse Bulletin Board at <http://www.asmtusa.org/international/international-resource-list.htm>. UNESCO, in approved cases, will provide some support towards the transportation costs.

The development of digital training materials for the biotechnology programmes of the MIRCEN network has been produced through collaboration with partners like the *Electronic Journal of Biotechnology* (EJB) and the MIRCEN at the International Centre for Chemical Studies in Ljubljana, Slovenia. On-line, interactive teaching modules can be considered a collaborative initiative between the ASM and the MIRCEN network. Implementation of these proposals, which will play an important part in furthering microbiological science education, is dependent upon the mobilization and availability of extra-budgetary resources. Efforts to obtain extra-budgetary funds will be initiated by UNESCO in 2003.

The establishment of a MIRCEN web forum for information exchange and thematic discussions has been accepted as a means of following up on some of the ideas put forward during this meeting and bringing to the fore topics of interest and concern at the regional, national, and international levels and which could impact on the activities of the MIRCEN network. UNESCO is taking the necessary action to establish such a forum.

Since the 2002 MIRCEN Directors Meeting, an e-mail discussion among some MIRCEN directors and ASM volunteers has highlighted the desirability of initiating a strategic planning process to develop a common vision for future MIRCEN activities. The proposed MIRCEN web forum is an opportunity for a wide-ranging discussion to determine the future role of the MIRCEN network in the evolving environment of Biological Resources Centres. It has been proposed that a discussion paper could be prepared and posted for input and comment by the MIRCEN Directors.