When we assumed the *Journal's* editorship a year ago we proposed to cover public health in developing countries more attentively. Sadly, although “global” policy debates on how to improve population health often are carried on in English, the presence of authors from the world’s most affected countries remains limited in the public health literature.

As we looked for ways to encourage submissions from authors in developing countries, an unanticipated opportunity presented itself. The Rockefeller Foundation invited JPHP, Inc. to submit a proposal to provide developmental editing for a promising group of authors—participants in collaborative projects supported by a one-time competitive grant program of the Foundation, entitled “International Health Research Awards” (IHRA). An impressive selection committee assembled by the World Health Organization (Members are listed in the article below) selected awardees and the Foundation made ten awards at the Bangkok meeting of the Global Forum for Health Research in 2000.

The International Health Research Awards program supported developing country researchers to explore alternative ways to conduct research and to strengthen capacity in their settings—in ways particularly suited to the health needs and the local research environments—to contribute to health and development. Representatives of the ten projects met twice to share experiences and reflect collectively on what they were learning. At their first meeting, in Arusha, Tanzania in 2002, the IHRA researchers decided to prepare a paper on their reflections. At their second gathering, in Annecy, France in 2003, they began to prepare it.
In July 2004, organizers of the Ministerial Summit on Health Research (Mexico City, November 2004) offered the IHRA researchers a “working session” as a forum to present their paper and to discuss it with national policymakers and funding agencies — international organizations, development aid agencies, science agencies, and private foundations — as well as with other health researchers.

We believe that the IHRA authors of “Changing the Debate about Health Research for Development” raise issues that warrant further debate. In this Special Section we print in full the paper authored collectively by 47 of them. (Unlike most articles in the Journal, this article has not been subjected to independent peer review.) Now, we will solicit comments from policymakers, funders, and researchers. We hope to publish some of these in subsequent issues of the Journal.

Two issues seem particularly worthy of further debate and discussion:

1) How to understand and evaluate unconventional research approaches and strategies to enhance research capacity such as those discussed by the IHRA authors; and,

2) The response of funding agencies to the call by the IHRA participants to support a wider scope of activities with research funds. (For example, in their article they urge support for communications networks to permit otherwise isolated researchers to function as members of research communities.)

Accompanying the collective IHRA paper is the first of what we expect will be a number contributions from projects supported by IHRA grants or similar health research. The first such contribution to clear the Journal’s peer review process, “Access to Essential Drugs in 11 Brazilian Cities: A Community-Based Evaluation and Action Method,” from the IHRA group in Brazil, follows the collective article.

Thus, this Special Section is a start to what we hope will continue in subsequent issues, and become a tradition within JPHP: submissions from authors whose perspectives appear less often in peer-reviewed, English language journals than the subject matter warrants.

Phyllis Freeman