**8th Meeting of the South and Central Asia Man and Biosphere (SACAM) Network on “Biosphere Reserves and Sustainable Development”**

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The international network of UNESCO biosphere reserves of South and Central Asia Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Network was created during the first regional MAB meeting in Dehradun, India on 22-25 February 2001. At present time in Central Asia there are 10 UNESCO biosphere reserves - in Kazakhstan (6): Korgalzhyn, Alakol, Katon-Karagay, Akzhayik, Aksu-Zhabagly and Barsakelmes; in Kyrgyzstan (2): Sarychelek, Issyk-Kul; in Turkmenistan (1): Repetek; and in Uzbekistan (1): Chatkal.

The 8th Meeting of the South & Central Asia MAB (SACAM) Network was organized on 24-25 October 2016 in Almaty (Hotel Holiday Inn), Kazakhstan by Kazakhstan National Commission for UNESCO and ISESCO and Kazakhstan National MAB Committee in association with SACAM Secretariat, UNESCO New Delhi, Economic Cooperation Organization Science Foundation (ECOSF) and Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The theme of the meeting was “Biosphere Reserves and Sustainable Development”. Representatives from MAB Programme in the South and Central Asian region, including MAB National Committees and biosphere reserve (BR) managers and experts from national and international organizations attended the meeting. The aim was to discuss how to jointly promote BRs to serve as models for sustainable development, including how to better apply the Sustainability Science framework in BRs from the region and how the MAB Programme could collaborate with other UNESCO relevant scientific programmes and designated sites such as Global Geoparks and World Heritage Sites, and other internationally designated sites (e.g. RAMSAR sites).

The meeting was attended by 65 participants including those from SACAM member countries; Bangladesh (1), Bhutan (2), India (2), Iran (1), Maldives (3), Nepal (2) and Sri Lanka (2). Kazakhstan host country was represented by members of National Commission for UNESCO and ISESCO and National MAB committee besides experts from universities, BRs and other institutions. Representatives from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan attended the meeting as observers.

The meeting was opened by the General Secretary of the National Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan for UNESCO and ISESCO Ms. **Assel Utegenova**, who invited for the welcoming remarks Mr. **Erlan Nysanbayev**, Vice-Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan), Mr. **Galymkair Mutanov**, Rector of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Mr. **Ram Boojh**, Secretary of SACAM, UNESCO New Delhi Office, Mr. **Manzoor Hussain Soomro**, President of ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) and Ms. **Marie Prchalova**, Science Programme Specialist, Division of EES, Section on MAB Research and Policy: Ecology and Biodiversity, UNESCO HQ.

During the openning session the Barsakelmes Biosphere Reserve (Kazakhstan) has received the UNESCO certificate of the inclusion of Barsakelmes to the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves, as per the decision of member states of the MAB International Coordinating Council in its 28th session on 19 March 2016 (Lima, Peru).

At the end of the opening session three delegates were approved as Bureau members of SACAM Network for the next biennium period: Mr. **Roman Jashenko** (Kazakhstan) as a Chairperson, Ms. **Amita Prasad** (India) as a Vice-Chairperson and Mr. **Ram Prasad Chaudhary** as a Rapporteur

After that the meeting was divided into five plenary sessions, one of them was devoted to presention and discussion of the national reports of the SACAM participating countries. In other sessions the participants got the information on the current status of the existing Kazakhstan biosphere reserves, as well as two potential biosphere reserves (Karatau and Altyn-Emel) that were submitted to UNESCO for approval in this year. The Kazakhstan MAB Committee stressed the valuable support of the Kazakhstan National Geographic Society for the preparation of nomination dossier of Altyn Emel BR. In addition, the program of the meeting included a discussion on the achievements, challenges and prospects for the development of the network SACAM and development of the final document, "Guidelines for the implementation of the action plan in the Lima region SACAM countries."

After the main sessions, a thematic tour to the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University organized with a visit to the university museums, as well as an additional session on the activities of the University as a global hub of the United Nations on sustainable development and the presentation of the UNESCO Chair of Sustainable Development. At this session, a copy of the official certificate of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve "Barsakelmes" was officially presented for storage in UNESCO Chair on sustainable development.

The main results of the meeting are the updated Statues of the SACAM Network and the Meeting Recommendations. The Statues adopted by all present members of the network, among other things, includes updates on the history and membership requirements, as well as the admission of the 3 new member states of the SACAM Network: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with the adoption of Azerbaijan as an observer. The updated statutes and Recommendations will be published in the "Bulletin of the Al-Farabi Kazakh Nartional University, geographical series».

The 8th SACAM meeting recommendations focus on the implementation of the principles of the Lima Action Plan into the national MAB Action Plans to strengthen the cooperation within SACAM network. The document includes the following recommendations:

1. SACAM Network member countries should make efforts to set up National MAB Committees and designate biosphere reserves which have none. SACAM Network Secretariat and respective UNESCO offices should provide necessary support to such efforts.
2. Member countries should establish incentives and schemes to promote research, education and management of biosphere reserves and make use of these sites for education for sustainable development activities.
3. Efforts should be made to create Trans-boundary Biosphere Reserves wherever feasible. The transboundary issues were discussed as a predominant subject across the region which require continued intensive dialogue and discussion for preparation and declaration of a site as a transboundary BR. Strengthening of existing and creating new partnership and enhancing the transboundary, regional and international cooperation at different thematic and organizational levels was agreed.
4. For sustaining activities of the network, it was decided to create a Biosphere Reserve fund/SACAM Trust Fund by voluntary contribution from member countries. Other sources of funding should also be explored.
5. Capacity building programmes for biosphere reserve managers and other stakeholders should regularly be organized by each country. At the SACAM region level at least one such programme be organized each biennium. Best practices, success stories and lessons learnt should be documented and information disseminated.
6. Network members agreed to work together, as well as individually, to raise the Visibility of the Network through appropriate branding and communication by variety of media including social media. Need to properly communicate LAP and its regional/national implementation efforts, was also stressed.
7. The meeting felt the need to develop joint programmes based on identified common interests and subjects across the SACAM Network. The Network should base their planning and efforts in identifying new value and new thinking, and echoing that in one voice, to make the system transparent, accountable, and legitimate. Strengthening existing and seeking new partnerships - in particular, with regard to resource mobilization and joint / regional project development was recommended.
8. The need for using existing platforms such as the ECO/ECOSF, SAARC and synchronizing with various UN programmes was stressed.
9. The group reviewed a number of best practices within individual BRs and the involvement of populations in management and providing livelihood opportunities. SACAM should actively work towards engaging local communities in order to strengthen the management and governance processes by developing appropriate indicators for review of BR performance and also to promote application of traditional / indigenous knowledge in various BR planning processes. In this regard, the SACAM Network shall initiate to set-up an effective mechanism to share best practices and lessons learnt in BR management, on-the-ground implementation of LAP, stakeholders involvement, cooperation, partnership, etc. MAB Communication strategy shall be instrumental in this regard.
10. The network stressed that periodic review of implementation of MAB Programme show improvement leading to conservation and sustainable development. The meeting also noted the wealth of information provided within these reports that highlight issues faced by many which could be taken note of by the MAB secretariat to be addressed.
11. Closer/targeted cooperation with relevant UNESCO Chairs and UNESCO Category 2 Centers - sub-regional, regional and international levels; in particular in research areas related to MAB and sustainable development was recommended.
12. The meeting discussed in detail the proposed amendments to the Statutes and agreed on the following:

12.1. The Procedure of accepting new SACAM members of new countries was decided upon and shall be as under:

(i) new countries to be observers for at least one SACAM Network meeting

(ii) legal framework or National MAB Committee to be in place

12.2. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were unanimously accepted as new members, provided that SACAM Network Secretariat receives official letter from the corresponding national authorities of the new members.

On the last day of the meeting the participants were invited to the Ile-Alatau National Nature Park, as UNESCO potential biosphere reserve. They visited the Nature Museum, located in the main administrative building of the National Park and then the park, accompanied by park staff, who gave information on the most interesting sights, environmental education and tourism programs. A separate site of excursion was the Rehabilitation Center for Birds of Prey (Sunkar), which is located on the border of the park and provides also environmental education programmes for broad audience.