

## Recommendations for the Establishment and Functioning of Transboundary Biosphere Reserves

As borders between states are political and not ecological, ecosystems often occur across national boundaries, and may be subject to different, or even conflicting, management and land use practices. Transboundary Biosphere Reserves (TBR) provides a tool for common management. A TBR is an official recognition at an international level and by a UN institution of a political will to co-operate in the conservation and sustainable use through common management of a shared ecosystem. It also represents a commitment of two or more countries to apply together the Seville Strategy for biosphere reserves and its objectives. It corresponds to the increasing recognition of the appropriateness of the ecosystem approach, for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

The recommendations presented below deal with the establishment of TBR, the measures which can be taken to respond to the MAB principles and in particular the goals of the Seville Strategy and the way of ensuring that a TBR is truly operational. However, it should be kept in mind that, although the biosphere reserve provides a general framework for action in a transboundary location, the real-world situations will vary very much from a place to another, and flexibility is needed even more than in a national context.

The process leading towards the official designation of a TBR can include many forms of co-operation and co-ordination among the existing areas on either side of a border. These serve as a basis for formalizing the TBR proposal and should be encouraged.

### Procedure for the establishment of a TBR

Up until now, all existing TBR were established as separate biosphere reserves in individual countries before being designated as TBR. However, it could be envisaged in the future that a TBR be established jointly by the countries concerned in one step. In both cases, the ultimate aim should be to have one *functional biosphere reserve*.

In these two different scenarios, the following respective procedures are recommended :

- Establishment of a biosphere reserve on each side of the border;
- or, when the TBR is established in one step, definition of the zoning of the area according to the general criteria for designation of biosphere reserves.
- Identification of local and national partners and establishment of a working group to define the basis and identify key issues for co-operation.
- Signing of an official agreement between governmental authorities regarding the TBR.
- Nomination of the various parts by the respective State authorities;
- or, when the TBR is established in one step, joint nomination for the whole area by the concerned State authorities.
- In both scenarios, indication of the main components of a plan for co-operation in the future.

- Official designation by ICC MAB of UNESCO.

### **Functioning of the TBR**

Among the measures recommended to make the TBR function effectively, priority should be given to:

- Preparation and adoption of a zoning plan for the whole area and implementation of the zoning by strict protection of core areas, delimitation of the buffer zones and coordinated objectives for the transition areas; this implies that the countries concerned have a common understanding of the characteristics of each of the zones, and that similar management measures are in place for each zone.
- When the zoning plan is defined, publication on a joint map of the zoning.
- Definition of common objectives and measures, work plan, time table, and required budget; this should be a demand driven process, based on perceived needs or management requirements. This work plan should take into account the elements listed under the goals of the Seville Strategy as suggested below.
- Identification of potential funding sources for the work plan and joint or simultaneous application for these funds.
- Establishment of a means of communication between the coordinators/managers of the different parts of the TBR, including electronic mail when feasible.
- Efforts towards harmonized management structures on each side.

### **Institutional mechanisms**

The TBR will not function without a joint structure devoted to its co-ordination. Although this structure can vary greatly from one TBR to another, the following points can be recommended:

- The coordinating structure is representative of various administrations and the scientific boards, as well as the authorities in charge of the protected areas, the representatives of local communities, interested and affected groups, including youth, and of the private sector.
- The NGO sector in the area is also represented in the structure.
- This structure has a permanent secretariat, and a budget is devoted to its functioning.
- A person is designated on each side to act as a focal point for co-operation.
- General and regular meetings of the coordinating structure are complemented by thematic groups, on an *ad hoc* basis, in order to create a platform for discussion among stakeholders from the countries concerned, with a view to promote all opportunities for exchanging views and knowledge.
- Joint staff teams are operational for specific tasks.
- An association is set up with the specific aim of promoting the TBR.

## **Responding to the Goals of the Seville Strategy**

### **Goal I : Use Biosphere Reserves to Conserve Natural and Cultural Diversity**

In order to develop a concerted strategy for conservation, the following measures can be recommended:

- Co-ordination of regulatory measures on protection and, in case of incompatibility, their harmonization.
- Common or coordinated policies for threatened and protected species and ecosystems, migratory species, as well as control of invasive alien species.
- Common or coordinated policies for rehabilitation and restoration of degraded areas.
- Coordinated action against illegal activities such as wildlife poaching and unauthorized logging.

### **Goal II : Utilize Biosphere Reserves as Models of Land Management and of Approaches to Sustainable Development**

The human component of biosphere reserves and their role in promoting approaches to sustainable development can lead to a variety of forms of co-operation, ranging from the use of natural resources to the protection of cultural heritage. Among the measures that can be recommended in TBR are the following:

- Co-ordination of management practices, for example in forestry, logging, forest regeneration, or in the field of pollution control.
- Identification of possible perverse incentive and promotion of viable sustainable alternatives.
- Elaboration and supporting of the implementation of a joint tourism policy.
- Promotion of partnership among various groups of stakeholders having the same interests, in order to make the TBR a common project.
- Promotion of participation of local communities in the TBR, including local NGOs.
- Promotion of joint cultural events and fostering of co-operation on cultural and historical heritage preservation.
- Developing of common strategies for planning based on research and monitoring.

### **Goal III : Use Biosphere Reserves for Research, Monitoring, Education and Training**

Joint activities on research and monitoring should be led by scientific boards and planned in joint sessions; these activities could be carried out along the following lines:

- Define and implement joint research programs.

- Develop common data collection formats, indicators, monitoring and evaluation methods.
- Exchange existing data, including maps and geographical information, and facilitate access to results of research.
- Share scientific information, including through the organization of workshops, conferences, etc.
- Share equipment when feasible.
- Jointly publish results of common research.
- Develop joint mapping and GIS.

Many joint activities in the field of education and training can be recommended, such as:

- Organization of joint training courses and technical meetings for managers and field staff.
- Promotion of staff exchanges.
- Promotion of understanding of neighboring country's culture.
- Organization of linguistic training when needed.
- Exchanges of scientists between universities and academic and research institutions of each country.
- School exchanges.
- Launching of participatory training programs for various groups of stakeholders.

Information and public awareness are crucially important to develop a common understanding and build support for and appropriation of the objectives of the TBR by the different stakeholders. Therefore, the rationale and objectives of the TBR should be explained by varied means to different target groups (decision makers, local populations, visitors, schools, scientists, managers, etc). Among other activities, the following can be recommended:

- Develop a common public relations' strategy with the aim of raising awareness and promoting the TBR.
- Produce information material, brochures, books, etc.
- Organize exhibits and events around the TBR.
- Develop a common logo for the TBR, as well as a common design for published material.
- Implement joint demonstration projects.
- Set up a common internet site.