

A New Concept for Sustainable Natural Resources Management in Uzbekistan: The Case of the Lower Amudaryastate Biosphere Reserve

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The Lower Amudarya State Biosphere Reserve (LABR) was established in 2011 by the initiative of the Government of Uzbekistan and with the support of the UNDP/GEF programme on the basis of the former *Badai-Tugai* state Strict Nature Reserve (zapovednik) established in 1973. The territory of LABR consists of a core zone (11.568 ha), a buffer zone (6.731 ha) and an economic zone (50.418 ha). LABR was established with the aim to preserve the biological diversity of the flood-plain tugai forests in the Amu-Darya river delta in Uzbekistan, as well as to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources; the social and economic development and protection of cultural values in the region. Once widely spread across Central Asia, nowadays the unique *tugai* forests are under desperate pressure due to an intensive land use and over exploitation of forest resources. Thus, the establishment of LABR demonstrated the governmental commitment to a new management model for protected areas and a step towards preserving the unique *tugai* forests by involving the interests of local communities. The new functions such as the development of sustainable land use practices, cooperation with local communities and environmental education were assigned to the administration of the biosphere reserve. Yet, an innovative for the country, the concept of biosphere reserve and relevant changes in management still require a wider understanding and acceptance among the stakeholders in the region.

The Project “Ecosystem based land and forest management of the tugai habitats of Amudarya river for improving livelihood of local communities and as adaptation strategy to climate change (Uzbekistan/Turkmenistan)” financed by the German Federal Ministry of Development and Economic Cooperation (BMZ) is implemented between 2015 and 2017 by NGO KRASS in Uzbekistan and research institute under the Ministry of Nature Protection in Turkmenistan in partnership with the Michael Succow Foundation for the Protection of Nature (Germany). The project addresses a sustainable, climate- and site-adapted management of natural resources in the Amudarya River, thereby improving the livelihood of the people in the target region and the environmental capacity of the floodplain natural space.

Planned project activities

In the context of the development of LABR, the following activities are envisaged within the framework of the Project.

- The capacities of the LABR administration will be strengthened through continuous training for a better preparedness to perform the new duties of educators and multipliers. The capacities for the development and implementation of ecosystem-based adaptations and required communication skills will be strengthened as well. The commitment of the administration for ecotourism development in the area will be backed up in line with environmental and conservation issues.
- An environmental education center will be established and the communication strategies for promotion of the concepts of the biosphere reserve management and sustainable resource use will be elaborated.
- Local population will be involved into sustainable land use and forest management. Awareness raising activities will aim at an improved understanding and stronger identification with the biosphere reserve.
- Cross-border cooperation in nature and biodiversity conservation will be strengthened through experience exchange and partnership with the *Amudarynski* Strict Nature Reserve in bordering Turkmenistan.

Current status of the Project

Whereas the described activities are currently underway, it is expected to reach the following aims towards the Project' completion in the end of 2017:

- Developed and implemented land use concepts lead to a restoration of saline soils, reduction of water consumption and the improvement of biodiversity protection;
- The local population is able to obtain information about the relationship between resource use and quality of life and to take appropriate measures to adapt their economies;
- The biosphere reserve fulfills its function as a model region for sustainable land uses practices and is communicated appropriately in line with environmental and conservation issues.