

International collaboration for protected areas in Asia

Draft Message from WG5 on International Collaboration for Protected Areas

Much has been written about the rise of Asia in the 21st Century – the idea that Asia will dominate in the 21st Century in the same way that Britain dominated the 19th Century and America the 20th Century. As Asia continues to grow its global influence into the 21st Century the imperative for greater cooperation between nation states is strengthening across almost every field of endeavour¹. Asian countries are building stronger collaboration between themselves and with the world at large in matters of trade and economic development; on mutual security concerns; on human welfare; and on information technology to name but a few areas. Enhanced collaboration on the environment and natural resource utilization is also rapidly growing in response to the daunting challenge of balancing nature conservation against development pressure, a challenge that will be exacerbated by Asia's rising levels of affluence and the consumption patterns that follow.

Protected areas have an important role in the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainability of the ecosystems that underpin development. In order to properly fulfill these functions, Asia's protected areas need enhanced standards of management which can be greatly improved through collaboration with neighbouring countries and through worldwide cooperation. Asia's diversity of environments from cold regions to tropical areas coupled with the fact that the region supports a majority of the world's major river systems adds weight to the arguments for greater transboundary action, international collaboration and international support².

Collaboration for protected areas is a means to an end not the end in itself. Working across national boundaries, sharing experience, transferring capacity and jointly tackling issues is vital to the end goal of establishing effective protected area systems for Asia. An end goal that is best expressed within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD's) Aichi Biodiversity Target 11.

“By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascapes³.”

Significant differences exist from country to country, however, many common protected area issues exist and addressing them calls for greater supra-national exchange of experience, learning and approaches. As the numbers and extent of protected areas continues to grow in Asia it is self-evident that greater regional collaboration will become more important than ever.

Asia already possesses an impressive portfolio of internationally and regionally significant protected areas. These amount to some 423 World Heritage Sites (natural and mixed); Biosphere Reserves; Ramsar Sites; Geoparks; and ASEAN Heritage Parks across the Region's 24 countries. This wealth of natural assets demands greater collaboration to promote and better manage them at a pan-Asian scale.

The call for improved collaboration between protected areas in Asia has come over many years and from numerous quarters, some internal and some external to the region. All of the

multilateral environmental agreements by definition enshrine principles of collaboration with the CBD acting as the principle convention dealing with protected areas. IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas has had a long history in Asia and has consistently worked toward supporting national efforts for protected areas through regional approaches.

Although focused primarily on economic goals, regional economic cooperation mechanisms in Asia such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) also provide a framework and incentive for enhanced protected area collaboration. ASEAN's Heritage Parks network is a well-developed sub-regional system of iconic parks managed through the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity. SAARC has a long history of promoting regional environmental collaboration in parallel with its other regional interests.

An analysis of regional protected area collaborative networks from around the world has drawn lessons for Asia and suggested steps to further the creation of a pan-Asian collaborative network⁴.

The timing of the Asia Parks Congress leading one year later to the IUCN 6th World Parks Congress (WPC) in Australia offers an ideal roadmap to gain political support and move forward on international collaboration for Asia. One of the significant legacies arising from a WPC held in Australia ought to be a renewed commitment to improve regional cooperation for protected areas across Asia-Pacific.

In light of this, PARTICIPANTS in the Working Group on International Collaboration for Protected Areas at the 1st Asia Parks Congress, in Sendai, Japan (14- 17 November, 2013) commend to those international organizations, governments, NGOs, CBOs, academic institutions, businesses and donors who influence directly and indirectly the future of protected areas the following set of principles to direct international collaboration for protected areas:

1. Achieving the Asian Century requires Asian countries to raise levels of collaboration across all fields of work including protected areas. The regional level is an appropriate scale to focus international collaboration and support as it allows responses to be tailored to regional differences whilst recognising the issues faced by all protected areas. Regional interventions also complement rather than compete with national efforts on protected areas which are now, more than ever, being driven through the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas;
2. Reinforcing the importance of regional perspectives in all aspects of international collaboration on protected areas is critical. Global protected area gatherings such as the upcoming WPC should always incorporate regional perspectives into planning, deliberations and outcomes. Whilst the WPC is structured thematically it should accommodate regional differences and needs in developing solutions to the protected area challenges and opportunities that lay ahead;
3. Recognizing the imperative to elevate levels of collaboration in light of international developments in setting protected area standards and benchmarking systems. IUCN's pioneering of protected area management effectiveness evaluation and the more recent IUCN Green list of Well Managed Protected Areas, launched in 2004 are driving renewed interest in working internationally and regionally;
4. The objectives of a regional protected area collaborative network for Asia should be to:
 - a) enhance regional collaboration, partnership building and capacity sharing;

- b) foster a culture of healthy internal competition to improve the quality of protected area management within the region;
 - c) build stronger pan-Asian tourism branding and marketing of the region's protected areas; and
 - d) set and share common protected area management standards.
5. An analysis of regional collaborative networks for protected areas from around the world has identified a number of lessons for Asia and seven common factors for success. In brief these factors for success are to:
- a) Embrace diversity. Recognize that Asia is extremely diverse and different approaches to addressing protected area issues will be legitimate in different contexts. The natural sub-regions of Asia (South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia) should be accommodated whilst embracing a pan-Asia perspective on protected area issues. Equally a network should accommodate the needs of diverse membership including the institutions, sites and individuals who make up the protected area community in Asia. Existing networks at a sub-regional scale such as the ASEAN Heritage Parks should be accommodated to complement pan-Asian efforts.
 - b) Ensure a site level focus. Experience shows that building a network around protected areas themselves has a galvanizing effect. Sites become emblematic symbols of the network and members of the network and other protected area stakeholders are reassured that network efforts are directed at conservation on the ground.
 - c) Ensure a network adds value. A collaborative network should foster bilateral cooperation between its members which adds value to what is already underway. Network functions such as facilitating, convening, brokering, fostering innovation, setting standards and offering economies of scale are known to be valued by members. In addition the network should advocate for protected areas across the region, in a sense be the voice for Asia's protected areas. The value of the network should be continually reinforced through publicising the results of sound evidenced based assessments.
 - d) Build partnerships and alliances with care. Careful partnering can strengthen the network and add legitimacy. Credible regional institutions, especially intergovernmental are seen to add weight to the network. Strategic alliances for example with regional and national tourism interests and/or with regional economic cooperation mechanisms such as ASEAN or SAARC can also add significant credibility and influence.
 - e) Nurture the glue that holds the network together. Experience has shown that several network services/products are keys to successful collaboration. Network activities which facilitate exchange of knowledge and the sharing of solutions to common problems are the most highly valued by members. The conduct of regular regional conferences or gatherings of the protected area community, hosting of a web-based knowledge service and mechanisms which promote and share innovation are features of successful networks around the world.
 - f) Create light effective governance. Successful networks have a governance structure that is responsive to the needs of the network without being overly complex and bureaucratic. Having a small dedicated secretariat is essential

to support other strategic and decision-making governance structures. An entrepreneurial capacity is also a valuable asset to successful networks.

- g) Face up to the financial sustainability challenge. Most protected area collaborative networks struggle to achieve financial security, however, the pursuit of this goal is paramount. Business models which are based on diverse funding sources and income streams are desirable as is a significant underwriting of operational expenses via realistic membership fees. The separation of an establishment phase from an operational phase with potentially different financing is a positive approach⁴.
6. Call upon leaders within the Asian protected area community to commit to the further development of an appropriate pan-Asia scale collaborative network for protected areas, to marshal the necessary human, financial and technical resources and to take the necessary follow-up actions.
7. Call upon the global community to more systematically establish regional collaborative networks for protected areas across all regions of the world and to marshal the necessary human, financial and technical support to that end.

¹ ADB. (2012). *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century*. Asian Development Bank, Manila, Philippines.

² Ministry of Environment, Japan (2013). Adapted from *1st Asia Parks Congress. Outline of Working Groups*.

³ CBD (2013). *Aichi Biodiversity Targets* .<http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>, Accessed October 2013.

⁴ Shadie, P. (2013). *Regional Protected Area Collaboration across Asia*. Discussion Paper prepared for Asia Parks Congress, Odonata House Consulting.