

Workshop to develop a Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia

REPORT

Dushanbe, the Republic of Tajikistan
10 – 13 November, 201



The workshop participants visited the Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve that is part of the Lower part of Pvand River Ramsar Site.

Acknowledgements:

This workshop was made possible with generous financial support from the Government of Japan. On behalf of the Central Asian Parties as well as other stakeholders of the workshop, the Ramsar Secretariat would like to sincerely thank the Government of Japan for the kind support. Also, the Ramsar Secretariat would like to thank the host, the State Committee of Environmental Protection of Tajikistan, for the generous logistical and financial support.

1. Background:

During the Ramsar Pre-COP12 meeting for the Central Asian Contracting Parties held in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in April 2015, the representatives from all the five Parties (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), agreed to establish a Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA). The broad aim of this Initiative is to contribute to the effective conservation and wise use of all important wetlands in Central Asia through promoting and strengthening regional cooperation among the five Central Asian Parties. For more information about Ramsar Regional Initiatives and how they support the Convention's implementation around the world please click the following link: <http://www.ramsar.org/activity/ramsar-regional-initiatives>.

During the same workshop, the participants developed a draft proposal for the Initiative exchanging preliminary ideas about the geographical coverage of the Initiative's activities, specific objectives, governance structure, membership and hosting arrangements.

It was also agreed that the Parties would meet again later in 2015 to finalize the proposal for the Initiative and submit it to the 51st Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee (SC51) for review and formal endorsement. After a series of consultations with the Parties as well as the host country, it was agreed to hold the workshop to finalize the proposal for the RRI-CA from 10 to 13 November 2015 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

2. Objectives:

This regional workshop served a successful and timely platform for the five Central Asian Parties as well as other relevant stakeholders to discuss and subsequently, adopt the documents critical for formally establishing the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia including:

- A full proposal for the RRI-CA following a template proposed by the Ramsar Secretariat (for the copy of the proposal please click the following link:
http://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/ri_proposal_rri_ca_nov2015_russian.pdf (Russian);
http://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/ri_proposals_nov2015_efs_0.pdf (pp 32 - 47, unofficial English translation)
- A financial plan and a work plan for the RRI-CA for 2016 (annexed to the full proposal for the RRI-CA);

3. Participants:

The workshop was attended by about 30 participants including:

- Two representatives of the Ramsar Administrative Authorities from each of the five Central Asian Parties;
- Representatives from the following international organizations:
 - Fauna and Flora International (FFI)
 - International Union for Conservation of Nature – Eastern Europe and Central Asia (IUCN-EECA)
 - Japanese Embassy in Tajikistan
 - Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
 - Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC)
 - UNEP Sub-regional office for Central Asia
 - World Wide Fund for Nature of Russia (WWF Russia);
- Two representatives from the Ramsar Secretariat;

- Representatives from relevant ministries and agencies within the Government of Tajikistan (Please find the full participants' list of the workshop in Annex 1).

4. Structure:

The workshop comprised two major parts: discussion sessions and a field visit. The discussion sessions were structured to fully address the questions in the new template provided by the Ramsar Secretariat for new Ramsar Regional Initiatives that plan to seek formal endorsement by the Ramsar Standing Committee (Please see the full programme of the workshop in Annex 2).

A one-day field trip was made to the Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve that is part of the Lower part of Pyandj River Ramsar Site.

5. Working languages:

Russian and English with simultaneous interpretation.

6. Proceedings and summary of major discussions:



During the field trip the participants were warmly welcomed by the local authority and schoolchildren of the village.

The workshop was opened by welcoming speeches from the Government of Tajikistan, Embassy of Japan in Tajikistan, and the Ramsar Secretariat.

The Ramsar Secretariat gave a short presentation sharing experiences of how Ramsar Regional Initiatives in other regions operate, introduced the draft proposal for the RRI-CA that was re-written into the template developed by the Secretariat for new Ramsar Regional Initiatives, and identified the sections that needed more discussion and revision. Then, the representatives of the five Central Asian Parties commenced

reviewing the proposal section by section in accordance with the programme. The items that invited in depth deliberations include:

a). Stakeholder involvement:

- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan re-affirmed their interest to participate in the Initiative.
- Uzbekistan saw a clear need for making efforts towards better implementation of the Convention in Central Asia by improving cooperation and coordination between the countries concerned. However, Uzbekistan did not agree with the proposal to establish a Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia as it views such coordination mechanism as a duplication of other forms of coordination already present in the region. Therefore, Uzbekistan stated that they would not participate in the Initiative at the moment but agreed to reconsider its position in due time if needed.
- Tajikistan, who had previously expressed their interest to participate in the Initiative and even provided a letter of support, decided to withdraw their interest because Tajikistan's offer to host the Initiative did not gain support from the other Parties.

- Nevertheless, it was agreed that geographical coverage of the Initiative's activities should still aim at primarily involving all the five Central Asian Parties but then later on involve other neighboring countries such as China, Iran (I.R.) and Afghanistan if needed.
- IUCN-EECA, JICA and WWF Russia formally expressed their readiness to support the Initiative from technical, capacity building and financial aspects as relevant.

b). Governance and advisory mechanisms:

- Rigorous discussions were held around what type of governance and advisory mechanism would be required to facilitate effective coordination between the Parties participating in the Initiative. Many of the Parties saw no need for setting up a separate structure/legal entity for the RRI-CA as it may simply add another layer of bureaucracy in decision making.
- Instead, the majority of the Parties agreed on creating a Coordination Committee that will comprise the Ramsar National Focal Points or their appointees as a main decision making body of the Initiative. There were different opinions about who would handle the day to day coordination and communication needs of the RRI-CA, and how it would be handled. The final agreement reached between the three participating Parties was to hire a staff (Technical Secretary) with adequate language and technical skills that would be hosted by a suitable regional organization and the staff would provide technical and administrative support to the Coordination Committee (See Annex 3).
- Tajikistan strongly recommended setting up the RRI-CA in a form of a regional center and offered to host it (if such center is created) under the National Biodiversity and Biosecurity Center of Tajikistan. However, the other Parties considered that this was in conflict with their intention to avoid establishing a separate structure/legal entity for the RRI-CA, at least in the immediate future, and so the offer was not discussed further.

c). Hosting:

- Hosting of the staff that will be hired to handle the day to day functioning of the RRI-CA was another issue that participants debated upon. During the Pre-COP12 meeting in Bishkek, CAREC and the Government of Kyrgyzstan expressed their interest to host the Initiative. During the Dushanbe meeting, the participants developed a list of criteria to review the two hosting offers. In the process, the delegates from Kyrgyzstan withdrew their hosting offer as they saw CAREC more suited to host the Technical Secretary of the Initiative. However, during the subsequent discussions CAREC announced that it will host the Technical Secretary of the Initiative only if all the five countries joined the Initiative and agreed to CAREC's hosting proposal. As Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were unable to join the Initiative in the immediate future (see above), then CAREC was not able to host the Technical Secretary of the Initiative.
- Nevertheless, an interim solution was found to postpone the hiring process of the Technical Secretary and to have the Ramsar Secretariat handle the day to day functioning of the Initiative.

7. Major Outputs:

The outputs from the workshop were the development of a:

- Full proposal for the establishment of the RRI-CA following the template proposed by the Ramsar Secretariat;
- Financial plan for the RRI-CA for 2016 that requested USD 30,000 from the core budget of Ramsar Convention;
- Work plan for the RRI-CA for 2016;
- Selection criteria for hosting the Technical Secretary of the Initiative.

8. Next milestones:

The proposal for the RRI-CA was submitted to the Ramsar SC51 that took place in November 2015. However, its adoption was postponed till next SC meeting along with proposals of other initiatives as SC51 did not have time to discuss them. The proposal will be introduced to SC52 in June 2016 for adoption and allocation of funding from the core budget of Ramsar Convention.

In the meantime, the Parties with support from Ramsar Secretariat who is acting as an interim coordinator/secretary of the Initiative have already started to take steps in accordance with the work plan that was prepared during the workshop in Dushanbe. One of the major administrative tasks is to set up a Coordination Committee of the Initiative. Presently, the Terms of Reference for the Coordination Committee are being developed jointly with the Parties. On the programmatic side, the key Ramsar publications that need to be available in Russian have been identified and sent for translation.

Also, the Ramsar Secretariat has begun discussions with partners such as CAREC and IUCN-EECA to raise funds to implement projects along the priorities set for the Initiative in the next three years.

Annex 1: Participants' list

1. COUNTRY DELEGATIONS			
Kazakhstan			
1.	Mr. Bakytbek Duysekeev	Head, Wildlife and Hunting Department, Committee of Forestry and Wildlife, Ministry of Agriculture, (Ramsar National Focal Point)	duisekeev.b@minagri.gov.kz
2.	Mr. Evgeniy Bragin	Senior Researcher, Naurzum State Protected Area	naurzum@mail.ru
Kyrgyz Republic			
3.	Mr. Ruslan Akulov	Director, Department of the Protected Areas and Biodiversity, State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry, Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, (Ramsar National Focal Point)	rtakulov@mail.ru
4.	Mr. Bakit Irsaliev	Deputy Director, Department of Forest Ecosystems and Protected Areas, State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry, Government of the Kyrgyz Republic	bakytforest@mail.ru
Tajikistan			

5.	Mr. Khayrullo Ibodzoda	Chairman, Committee for Environmental Protection, Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, (Ramsar National Focal Point)	muhit@hifzitariyat.tj
6.	Mr. Neimatullo Safarov	Head, National Center for Biodiversity and Biosafety, (Convention on Biological diversity National Focal Point)	nsafarov@biodiv.tojikiston.com
7.	Mr. Khisravshoh Shermatov	Chief Specialist, National Center for Biodiversity and Biosafety	shermatov.khisrav@gmail.com
Turkmenistan			
8.	Mr. Eldar Rustamov	Wetland expert, Project “IBAs in Turkmenistan”, Ministry of Nature Protection, (Ramsar National STRP Focal Point)	elldaru@mail.ru
9.	Ms. Shirin Karieva	Manager of the joint project by RSPB and the Ministry of Nature Protection on “Conservation of Birds and Biodiversity in Turkmenistan”; Focal Point for the SBSTTA of the Convention on Biological Diversity, (Ramsar Convention National Working Group Expert)	shirinkarryeva@mail.ru
Uzbekistan			
10.	Mr. Sergey Zagrebin	Head, Division of the State Inspection on Fauna and Flora Protection, State Committee for Nature Protection	Zagrebin66@mail.ru
11.	Mr. Islomov Jamshed	Embassy of Uzbekistan in Tajikistan	sng@tiv.uz
2. Ramsar Secretariat			
12.	Mr. Lew Young	Senior Adviser for Asia/Oceania, Secretariat of Ramsar Convention	YOUNG@ramsar.org
13.	Ms. Solongo Khurelbaatar	Assistant Adviser for Asia/Oceania, Secretariat of Ramsar Convention	asia.oceania@ramsar.org
3. International Organizations			
14.	Mr. Abdulhamid Kayumov	Director, Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) in Tajikistan	akayumov@carececo.org
15.	Mr. Boris Erg	Director, Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	Boris.Erg@iucn.org
16.	Mr. Kioshi Ishii	Permanent Representative	Japan International Cooperation Agency in Tajikistan
17.	OR Mr. Takuro Fujii	Assistant Representative	
18.	OR Mr. Azizbek Sattorov	Programme Officer	
19.	Ms. Natalia Alekseeva	Head, Subregional Office for Central Asia, UNEP Regional Office for Europe	Natalia.alexeeva@unep.org
20.	Ms. Olga Pereladova	Director, Central Asia Programme, World Wildlife Fund - Russia	OPereladova@wwf.ru
21.	Ms. Saltanat Zhakenova	Manager, Environmental Management Program, Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC)	szhakenova@carececo.org
22.	Mr. Chie Tamura	Embassy of Japan in Tajikistan	support@db.mofa.go.jp
23.	Mr. Ubayd Gulamadshoev	Director, Fauna & Flora International, Tajikistan	Ubayd.Gulamadshoev@fauna-flora.org
4. The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan			
24.	Mr. Azizullo Ismatzoda	Director, Forestry Agency	
25.	Ms. Firuza Nosirova	Leading expert, Committee for Environmental Protection	muzaffar1961@rambler.ru

26.	Mr. Madibron Saidzoda	Director, State Agency for the Protected Areas, Forestry Agency	saidov_madibron@mail.ru
27.	Ms. Oykhon Sharipova	Deputy Chairman, Committee for Environmental Protection	muhit@hifzitabiat.tj
28.	Ms. Tatiana Novikova	Deputy Head, National Biodiversity and Biosafety Center	biodiv@biodiv.tajikiston.com
29.	Ms. Zarina Nazarova	Deputy Chairman, Regional Committee for Nature Protection, Khatlon Region	nzarina@mail.ru
Research Institutions in Tajikistan			
30.	Mr. Dilovarsho Dustov	Chief Researcher, Research Laboratory for Nature Protection	ddilovar@gmail.com
31.	Mr. Vladimir Lekarkin	Researcher, Research Laboratory for Nature Protection in Tajikistan	vlekarkin@mail.ru
Independent consultant in Tajikistan			
32.	Mr. Jorg Dinkelaker	Independent Consultant	jdinkelaker@gmx.net

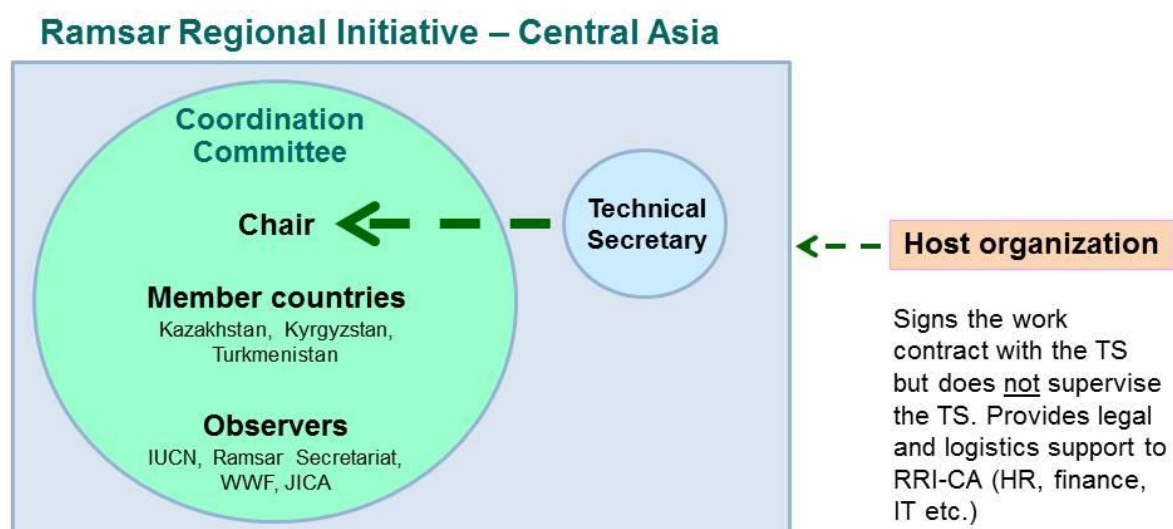
Annex 2: Programme of the workshop

(Note: the Ramsar Secretariat developed a template for new Ramsar Regional Initiatives and as specified above, the main aim of the workshop was to fill in this template and its annexes. The programme below provides a schedule for filling in all the questions in the template and its annexes.)

Day 1	
08:30 – 09:00	Registration
09:00 – 09:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcoming remarks (government of Tajikistan, embassy of Japan, Ramsar Secretariat) Introduction to the aims of the workshop (Ramsar Secretariat)
09:15 – 10:00	Presentations on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Result of the Ramsar Pre-COP12 meeting for Central Asian Contracting Parties held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; 12th Conference of Parties and the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 (Ramsar Secretariat) Ramsar Regional Initiatives: best practices, lessons learnt, governance, financing, operational guidance (Ramsar Secretariat) Draft proposal for the RRI-CA and identification of the gaps (Ramsar Secretariat)
10:00 – 10:30	<i>Break and group photograph</i>
10:30 – 12:30	Discuss and reach consensus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q1. Implementation of the Ramsar Approach Q2. Strategic and operational targets Q3. Geographical region covered Q4. Stakeholder involvement Q14. Political support for the initiative Q10. Effective regional cooperation Q6. Identity of the initiative Q12. Increased visibility for Ramsar Q11. Optimal use of Ramsar tools
12:30 – 13:30	<i>Lunch</i>
13:30 – 15:00	Discuss and reach consensus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q8. Governance and advisory mechanisms Q9. Regulations for the governance and coordination bodies of the initiative
15:00 – 15:30	<i>Break</i>
15:30 – 17:30	Discuss and reach consensus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q5. Coordination of day-to-day activities Q7. Coordination and supervision of regional projects

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation by IUCN-EECA: Potential synergy and cooperation between IUCN work plan for Central Asia 2017-2020 and the RRI-CA
Day 2	
09:00 – 10:00	Discuss and reach consensus on: Q13. Financial plan and forecast for 2016-2018
10:00 – 10.30	<i>Break</i>
10.30 – 12.30	Discuss and reach consensus on: Q13. Financial and work plan for 2016
12.30 – 13.30	<i>Lunch</i>
13.30 – 15.00	Discuss and reach consensus on: Q15. Request of Ramsar core budget financial support
15.00 - 15:30	<i>Break</i>
15.30 – 17.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on hosting arrangements of the RRI-CA • Presentation by CAREC: Hosting of the RRI-CA by CAREC
Day 3	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field trip to the Lower Part of Pyanj River Ramsar Site
Day 4	
am	Review and improve the proposal for the RRI-CA and its annexes
pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of the final the proposal for the RRI-CA and its annexes • Identification of the follow-up activities • Wrap-up

Annex 3: Flow diagram explaining the relationship between the Coordination Committee, Chair of the Coordination Committee, Technical Secretary, hosting organization, Ramsar Secretariat, and observer organizations for the Ramsar Regional Initiative – Central Asia.



Chair: Is elected from one of the Ramsar National Focal Points of the member countries. Supervises the TS to ensure that his/her work follows the annual work plan set out by the Coordination Committee. The Chair rotates every 3 years after each Ramsar COP.

Members: Meets annually to review the report from the previous year, and to decide the work plan for the coming year.

Observers: Provides technical advice to the Chair and members. Does not have any decision making powers.

----- The End -----