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# Communication Strategy for the Conservation of Flood-Plain Forests in the Amudarya River Basin, Uzbekistan

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**Abstract**

Once widely spread across Central Asia, nowadays the unique tugai flood-plain forests in the lower reaches of the Amudarya river in Uzbekistan are under desperate pressure due to reduced natural flood regime, intensive land use for irrigated agriculture and overexploitation of forest resources. The establishment of the Lower Amudarya state biosphere reserve (LABR) in 2011 demonstrated the governmental commitment to preserve the biodiversity of degrading tugai habitats through a new management model for protected areas and sustainable use of natural resources. Biosphere reserves are worldwide model regions in which sustainable farming systems are tested and disseminated in accordance with the needs of nature and of humans. In addition to the protection of natural areas biosphere reserves serve to integrate the local population through environmental education and promotion of sustainable and ecological farming systems. For the LABR administration all the above turned to be new tasks, for which there still remains an ample room to enhance scope and effectiveness. Furthermore, among stakeholders, there is still a limited understanding of both biosphere reserve concepts, and the urgent need for conservation of tugai ecosystems vital for local communities, as well to humanity on a regional and global level. This calls for creating a common understanding about the importance of tugai ecosystems and elaboration of communication strategies for their conservation, which should be interlinked with almost all activities of management of a biosphere reserve. The suggested communication strategy is based on the following goals: a) use the protected tugai floodplains of the Amudarya river basin and its surrounding areas for research, monitoring, education and training; b) improve education for sustainable development, public awareness and involvement of local people in various activities, generally aiming at the conservation of the unique and globally significant tugai habitat.

The present paper is based on NGO-led activities in LABR within the on-going BMZ-funded 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", which is implemented in Uzbekistan in partnership with the Michael Succow Foundation for the Protection of Nature.

**Keywords:** Amudarya river basin, biosphere reserve, Central Asia, communication, tugai floodplain forest

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