

# Stakeholders Call for Linkage on South-West Ethiopia Biosphere Reserves

In the mid-August 2014 MELCA-Ethiopia in collaboration with Ministry of Science and Technology and Jimma University organized a stakeholders meeting at Jimma University. The objective of the meeting was to create a favourable environment for Yayu, Kafa and Sheka Forest Biosphere reserves as well as those coming in the future to come together, share experiences, learn from each other and work hand in hand for mutual development. Other objectives were to design a strategy for connecting universities and research institutes to the biosphere reserves to enhance the research function and to create an information exchange network among the biosphere reserves.

Representatives from government institutions and private sectors attended the workshop. These included members from Federal and regional levels, biosphere reserve managers, university associates, research fellows, NGOs and CSOs representatives. Relevant institutions included UNESCO, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ethiopia Wildlife Conservation Authority, Addis Ababa University, Metu University and Mizan- Tepi University. Biosphere reserve representatives came from Sheka, Kafa, Yayu and Majang Biosphere reserves.



*Some participants of the workshop (Photo: MELCA)*

The meeting started by a welcoming note then a brief explanation of the objectives. This was followed by presentations from the three biosphere reserves outlining the situation, achievements as well as the challenges they face in managing the biosphere reserves as per the objectives and principles set by UNESCO for biosphere reserves.

Achievements since the establishment of biosphere reserve included increased sense of belonging to the community around the biosphere reserves; increased economic benefits through participation of community members in livelihood activities; certification and branding of products and value addition to the products; increased attention of research and study by research institutions and universities under biosphere reserves and decrease in the implementation of investments that are inconsistent with the principles and objectives of biosphere reserve.

Challenges in relation to managing the biosphere reserves were: lack of institutional set up; lack of trained manpower and financial system; illegal settlement and expansion of agriculture and weak coordination and communication among the biosphere reserves.

Stakeholders raised concerns on the need to have legal support to arrange institutional set up for the biosphere reserves. They were also concerned about the transitional zones in the

biosphere reserves and their capacity to carry the growing population in the future thus they decided that there is a need to do the following: - (1) Establishing a combined mechanism to manage the biosphere reserves in the region and (2) Invite the government to collaborate in designing effective and efficient institutional set up which will take sole responsibility of coordinating the biosphere reserves. The Ministry of Science and Technology was urged to design institution management at national and regional levels and organize and initiate stakeholders' meetings at least once in a year.

Other outcomes included identification of research priorities and other stakeholders to be involved in the whole process of managing and developing biosphere reserves. The workshop meeting also identified two key priority issues to be taken forward and these were: a) to call a meeting of the working group on research whereas Jimma University was given a task to organize. b) to organize a joint meeting of biosphere reserves at Sheka for further linkage and cooperation of which MELCA- Ethiopia took the responsibility.

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*A workshop poster at the gate of Jimma University (Photo: MELCA)*