

Cooperative Regional Projects Described

A proposal to use Biosphere Reserves as the focus of integrated projects on a regional ecological scale to demonstrate solutions to conservation and resource management problems was made to the First International Biosphere Reserve Congress, held in September in the USSR. The paper, entitled "Cooperative Regional Demonstration Projects: Environmental Education in Practice," was delivered by Vernon C. (Tommy) Gilbert, Regional Representative for Environmental Training and Management in Africa (ETMA), P. O. Box 67839, Nairobi, Kenya.

Gilbert pointed to two Man and the Biosphere (MAB) projects that have influenced development of the Cooperative Regional Demonstration Project (CRDP) approach – the Biosphere Reserves at La Michilia and Mapimi in Durango, Mexico. There, under the leadership of Dr. Gonzalo Halffter and his colleagues in the Institute of Ecology in Mexico, scientists, politicians, and local people work together to improve conservation of natural resources of the region and at the same time raise the economic and social level of people living in and around the reserves.

Gilbert quotes Dr. Halffter: "It is not Utopian to believe that new strategies for ecological development can spring from the Reserves: on the contrary, this is an objective of no less importance than the conservation of the germ plasm."

The situation in Kenya was characterized by Gilbert as "increasing, horrifying, long-term loss of natural resources for short-term returns" and one that was likely to get worse unless there was "concerted national action organized and expressed right down to the users of the country's resource base."

Gilbert's last position with the National Park Service before retiring in 1981 was NSP/AID Environmental Project Manager. Before accepting the African assignment, he served a term as Director of the International Science and Technology Institute in Washington, D.C.