



MAnews

The Newsletter of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

Report on Fourth MA Board Meeting

The Board of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) met on March 10–11, 2004 at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi. Board members reviewed the progress of the Assessment and agreed on a set of steps to be taken over the next 18 months to ensure the quality of the assessment reports and to promote the effective use of the MA products in order to achieve the intended outcomes (See MA Outcomes on page 4).

The MA reached an important milestone in January 2004: the initiation of the process of government and expert review. The MA Working Groups have now turned to the daunting task of responding to thousands of review comments and finalizing their assessment reports. The

initiation of the review phase also signaled the beginning of the “endgame” of the MA. We are now launching an expanded set of activities designed to ensure that the major effort that has gone into developing “state of the art” assessment products leads to the intended outcomes of the assessment. The timing of the March meeting allowed the Board to provide immediate guidance to the Assessment Panel, which in April 2004 met with the MA Working Groups in Montreal to consider the thousands of review comments.

Ministers of Environment Urge CBD to Establish Scientific Assessment Mechanism, SBSTTA to Review MA Synthesis Reports

MA Activities at the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CBD

Nearly 80 ministers of environment and heads of delegation from another 30 countries attending the Seventh meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties (CBD COP-7) urged their governments “to take an effective role in the review of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment during

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Linking Local Knowledge with Global Science in Multi-Scale Assessments

On March 17–20, 2004, the MA held a conference “Bridging Scales and Epistemologies: Linking Local Knowledge and Global Science in Multi-Scale Assessments.” The goal of the conference was to foster dialogue among academic and indigenous experts, including individuals involved in the MA and newcomers to the process, on two central challenges faced by the MA: how to undertake a “multi-scale” assessment and how to create mechanisms that enable the integration or coordination of information and insights from individuals who possess different “ways of knowing the world.” The conference, hosted by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, offered a unique forum for

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Updates

ASSESSMENT COMPLETES FIRST ROUND OF PEER REVIEW

The first round of review of the Assessment Reports concluded on March 19, 2004 with more than 6,500 comments submitted by 35 countries and nearly 250 expert reviewers and focal points of the MA Affiliated Scientific Organizations. The Review Board, co-chaired by José Sarukhán and Anne Whyte, is tasked with oversight of the review process. Some 200 MA authors and Chapter Review Editors active in the MA Working Groups met together in Montreal on April 25–30, 2004 to address the comments and to work on the second draft reports (*see list of Review Board members on page 6*). The Working Group meeting was sponsored by the Convention on Biological Diversity and Environment Canada. The MA authors are now preparing their chapters for the second round of expert and government review, which will begin in mid-June 2004. If you would like to participate in the review process, please send an email to: review@millenniumassessment.org.

in the way humanity lives and co-exists with other life forms in ecosystems worldwide, and it is therefore important that youth play a full part in it.”

SUB-GLOBAL WORKING GROUP MEETING

The Sub-global Working Group held its third meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, following the MA Bridging Scales and Epistemologies Conference. About 70 members of the working group attended the meeting, consisting of representatives of approved and associated assessments and authors of the Sub-global report. Also in attendance were the Science Panel Co-chairs, the Sub-global Working Group Co-chairs and members of the MA Secretariat.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Ensure progress on the Sub-global Working Group Assessment Report;
- Review the progress of the sub-global assessments (SGAs), and of the Sub-global Working Group, within the overall MA process; and
- Discuss plans to enhance the impacts and outcomes of the sub-global assessments.



World Assembly of Youth

WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH (WAY) TO COLLABORATE FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Representatives of the MA Secretariat met with the World Assembly of Youth at CBD COP-7. WAY and the MA Secretariat recognize that youth have a very important part to play in the assessment and are currently investigating methods in which youth can actively participate in the research, such as the involvement of more young scientists in the program. Tariq Khan, Executive Director of WAY, said, “The results the MA will have a huge impact

OTHER CONVENTION EVENTS:

RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS AND CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

Both the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) considered progress reports on the MA at recent meetings. At their January 2004 meeting, the Ramsar Standing Committee (SC) developed a strategy for review and incorporation of MA findings for the Convention. The members devoted time for discussion of the plans for presenting MA findings and the special synthesis report on wetlands to the Parties, through review by the Scientific and Technological Review Panel (STRP).

The Ramsar Standing Committee: “(i) welcomed the progress of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in relation to the needs of the Ramsar Convention; (ii) urged all Contracting Parties to contribute, as requested, to the review of the MA’s full and summary reports; (iii) strongly encouraged

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*“UPDATES: Other
Convention Events:
Ramsar and CMS”
continued from page 2*

the MA to ensure that its experts contribute, as appropriate, to the work of the STRP and its Working Groups, and expressed its gratitude to the United Nations University for its offer of support for this involvement; (iv) requested the STRP's 12th meeting to review all appropriate MA reports, including the draft Ramsar synthesis report, and to prepare a report and draft COP9 Resolution for consideration by the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee; (v) requested the Bureau and the MA to make all MA findings available for consideration by COP9; and (vi) thanked the MA for its past and continuing contributions to Ramsar ...”

The Scientific Councilors of the CMS invited the MA to attend their most recent meeting, held March 31–April 2, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Neville Ash, of the Condition and Trends Working Group Technical Support Unit, provided information on the MA reports, and discussed ways in which concerns about migratory species are reflected in the Assessment.

WORLD BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATION

Board member Fernando Almeida presented the MA to business representatives from all over the world during the plenary of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) Regional Network meeting in March, 2004. Nearly 300 members attended the event. The MA will continue working with WBCSD and its networks to facilitate engagement and outreach with the business community.

MA BUILDS REGIONAL MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

The MA Secretariat is working with journalist and media groups to arrange briefings and roundtable discussions with regional and local journalists. The first such briefing was held in Prague, Czech Republic, in October 2003. Recently, the Arab Media Forum on Environment and Development hosted a roundtable discussion for Arab journalists, featuring the MA and environmental issues in the Middle East. The discussion took place in Cairo, coinciding with the Bridging Scales and Epistemologies Conference. It included presentations of the sub-global assessments in the region by Dr. Mohamed Tawfic Ahmed (Suez Canal University) and Dr. Adel Abdelkader (UNEP-ROWA). Assessments affiliated with the MA are being conducted in the Talifalt Oasis in Morocco, Assir National Park in Saudi Arabia, and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

APRIL 25–29, 2004

(4/26–29 for Chapter Review Editors)

**Combined Working Group Meeting #2
Montreal, Canada**

JUNE, 2004

**Full Synthesis Team Meeting #1
Mexico City, Mexico**

JUNE, 2004

**Peer review begins — assessment reports
(10 weeks to submit comments)**

JULY, 2004

**Peer review begins — synthesis reports
(10 weeks to submit comments)**

SEPTEMBER 25–30, 2004

**Combined Working Group Meeting #3
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2004

Full Synthesis Team Meeting #2

“Linking Local Knowledge...”
continued from page 1

exploring the integration of different types of knowledge in assessment processes, how to approach issues of scale in assessments, and how indigenous people perceive and participate in assessments.

Approximately 220 academics, practitioners, and indigenous people from nearly 50 countries gathered to share ideas, experiences, perspectives, methods, and tools. The conference included formal paper presentations and panel discussions that brought together conceptual and applied work on types of knowledge and issues related to working at multiple scales as well as open dialogues, video presentations, and storytelling.

The Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples (IKAP) Network on Capacity Building in Mainland Montane South East Asia coordinated a workshop where indigenous views on bridging epistemologies were presented and discussed with other conference participants. This direct input from indigenous peoples' perspectives is captured in several comments from that workshop presented in the final plenary (and posted on the MA web site).

Many participants identified the need to arrive at a common language to discuss the idea of bridging scales and epistemologies. Participants also indicated that work on these issues will involve bridging disciplines as well. To build bridges for collaboration will require participants and practitioners to develop commonly defined and understood terms.

The Bridging Scales conference introduced many individuals to the MA, and injected new approaches into the Assessment's sub-global work. Many participants expressed interest in the MA methodologies and in undertaking new sub-global assessments. Many also expressed willingness to help the MA with indigenous and community empowerment issues. The Sub-global Assessment Working Group members who attended the conference have indicated that discussions during the week had direct impact on their work for their assessment report.

A book of selected papers from the conference will be published by Island Press in early 2005, as part of the MA publication series. Several special-edition journals are being prepared featuring different themes and concepts presented during the course of the conference. All presented papers, the list of participants, and

other information about the conference can be found on the MA web site

<http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/about.meetings.bridging.aspx>.

The MA Secretariat organized this international conference with support from the Swedish International Biodiversity Programme, The Christensen Fund, the International Council for Science, the Canadian International Development Agency, and Bibliotheca Alexandrina.



MA OUTCOMES

The goal of the MA is to improve the management of ecosystems and their contribution to human development. The desired outcomes of the project include:

- Significantly increase understanding of the linkage between ecosystems and the goods and services they provide in a manner that will facilitate the integrated decision-making required to pursue more sustainable paths of development.
- Strengthen the influence of international environmental agreements and improve environment-related decisions of national governments (in all ministries) by arming decision-makers with scientifically credible and politically legitimate information about the current condition of ecosystems and the economic, public health, and environmental consequences of different actions.
- Enhance NGO activities by enabling civil society to draw on peer-reviewed, government-authorized, easily available, and publicly promoted data and information to press for action and to hold decision-makers accountable.
- Give the private sector greater incentive to address its contribution to problems involving ecosystem change through engagement in a transparent process that will close the "credibility gap" that often exists between scientific assessments and the private sector.
- Develop methodologies to undertake cross-sectoral assessments and to effectively integrate information across scales from the local to the global.
- Undercut the "experts disagree" excuse for inaction by providing an authoritative and policy-relevant source of information detailing areas of clear scientific agreement and areas of scientific uncertainty.
- Legitimize the substantive and political importance of including local community perspectives and assessments in national, regional, and global scientific assessments.
- Break new ground in making policy relevant ecosystem information available through the Internet to civil society, business, and government users worldwide.

“Ministers of Environment...” continued from page 1

2004 and establish a mechanism for continuing scientific assessment input into the Convention on Biological Diversity.” Walt Reid, one of three experts invited to address the Ministerial Segment of the Convention, spoke on the “Role of Scientific Assessments for Decision-making in Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use” (the text and accompanying slides can be downloaded from the MA web site www.millenniumassessment.org/partners/conventions/cbd).

Delegates participating in COP-7 adopted a decision directing the technical body of the Convention (SBSTTA) to review the MA synthesis report on biodiversity, and provide comments to COP-8 based on MA findings as follows:

“The Conference of Parties... Takes note of the progress of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the outline for the synthesis report that will be prepared for the Convention on Biological Diversity as contained in annex I of the progress report of the Millennium Assessment submitted to the Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting; Encourages national focal points to participate in the review of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reports; [and] Requests the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to review the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), including the synthesis report on biodiversity, to be taken into account by the MA in finalizing its

reports; and to prepare recommendations to the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.”

The MA Secretariat, in partnership with the United Nations University and the CBD Secretariat, coordinated a workshop for Convention on Biological Diversity delegates immediately prior to the COP. The workshop was attended by many of the individuals responsible for handling the MA review process for their countries. The participants provided strong ideas for the content and structure of the biodiversity synthesis report. Presentations for the workshop were made by Walt Reid, Capacity-building Coordinator Habiba Gitay, MA Board Co-chairs Bob Watson and A.H. Zakri, CBD Executive Secretary Hamdallah Zedan, and Coordinating Lead Authors Anantha Duraipappah and Max Finlayson.

In addition, Dr. Zakri, David Suzuki, and Walt Reid participated with The Nature Conservancy President Steve McCormick in an open discussion with community leaders sponsored by the UN Development Program. This “Global-Local Leaders Dialogue” addressed local challenges related to biodiversity.

The MA publishes this online newsletter every quarter. If you would like to be added to the e-mail distribution list, please send your contact information to info@memiassessment.org.

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