

# **International Centre of Sustainable Rural Development Brockville, Ontario, Canada**

May 2014

Biosphere reserves are challenged by the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) to develop innovative strategies to encourage sustainable community development. The creation of an International Centre for Sustainable Rural Development was proposed as a legacy project to the EuroMAB 2013 meeting that was held in Brockville, Ontario in October of 2013. The proponents of the project were the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association (CBRA), Queen's University, and The Aquatarium. The 200 delegates unanimously endorsed the proposal to form an international working committee to be lead by Gary Clarke of the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association.

The Centre would contribute to the EuroMAB Mission and Vision in providing “a platform for the sharing of knowledge, know-how and experience on sustainable development and a collective tool for the support for sustainable development practices amongst the various players of the 52 member states of EuroMAB”.

The Centre would focus on education, sustainable community development and research and would act as an information clearing-house on EuroMAB projects related to sustainable rural development. Through the Centre’s activities, biosphere reserves would be treated as areas of innovation for promoting action and transformational change. Programs would respond to issues affecting rural areas as a result of climate change, environmental degradation and globalization such as food security and agricultural issues, obstacles preventing rural economic and social development, and damage to the rural environment and ecosystems. It is anticipated that the Centre would also provide a permanent national office for the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association.

The primary focus of the Centre would be to engage a wide range of stakeholders to partner in the delivery of applied research, education and rural community development. Applied research would involve national and international institutions. Educational programming would target local citizens as well and Canadian and international participants. The Centre would also facilitate student engagement through internships, employment, and involvement in rural community development initiatives.

The Centre is designed to partner with the Brockville Aquatarium project and compliment their multi-million dollar investments in natural and cultural interpretive displays by focusing on the role and on-the-ground impact of Biosphere Reserves in Ontario, Canada and internationally. Other potential partners include the private sector; CBRA and its 16 member Biosphere Reserves and their related research institutions including Queen's University, University of Waterloo, University of Saskatchewan College of Agriculture and international EuroMAB Biosphere Reserves and research institutions; First Nations groups, elementary and secondary educational institutions; the Rural Ontario Institute; government at all levels and the private sector.

The project is well placed to be positioned as an initiative celebrating Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday and as an International/National Centre. It responds to a growing global interest in rural sustainability issues and provides a venue for the creation of a knowledge space that engages stakeholders at all levels.

Efforts are currently underway to form a senior level advisory committee for the Center, to engage an eight member working committee composed of representatives from 4 European Biosphere Reserves (U.K., Sweden, Spain and Germany) and 4 Canadian BRs, on a preliminary basis, to refine the program and space requirements for the Centre, and to identify potential financial partners from the private sector, foundations and government.

