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REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COORDINATING COUNCIL OF THE MAN AND THE BIOSPHERE (MAB) PROGRAMME ON ITS ACTIVITIES (2002-2003)

OUTLINE

Source: Article X of the Statutes of the International Coordinating Council of the MAB Programme.

Background: MAB and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves were increasingly perceived as concrete means to ensure a follow-up to the MDGs and the World Summit on Sustainable Development and to implement certain main environmental agreements. Partnerships were strengthened with relevant organizations and contributions made to International Years on mountains, ecotourism and freshwater. Logistically, MAB was implemented by government institutions through MAB National Committees and has been increasingly strengthened through its regional networks. The approval of a UNESCO-MAB UNEP-GEF project for six biosphere reserves in West Africa gave this region a special impetus. The “Seville+5” recommendations have been carried out, guided by the MAB Bureau, with focus on topics such as quality economies, legal and institutional aspects, and the preparation of practical guidelines for biosphere reserves. The World Network for Biosphere Reserves continued to develop, with 440 biosphere reserves in 97 countries as of July 2003, including the first tri-national transboundary biosphere reserve in Africa. The functioning of existing biosphere reserves continued to improve through the periodic review process. The MAB Bureau made comments on the evaluation carried out under document 31 C/5 and on draft document 32 C/5. Special emphasis was given to education and capacity building, through actions such as the MAB Young Scientists Awards, the *Ecole régionale d'aménagement intégré des forêts tropicales* (ERAIFT) and *Ecotechnie*, with a new focus on education and training centres related to biosphere reserves and a strategy on conflict prevention and resolution in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. The book *Biosphere Reserves: Special Places for People and Nature* was published in English and French and distributed to Member States.

Decision required: This report requires no decision.

Introduction

Since the 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference, the MAB International Coordinating Council (ICC) met at UNESCO Headquarters for its 17th session from 18 to 22 March 2002 and its Bureau met from 6 to 8 November 2002 and from 8 to 11 July 2003. The reports of the ICC and the Bureau have been distributed in hard copy to all Member States and can be consulted on the website (www.unesco.org/mab). The Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves met from 23 to 25 September 2002 and from 2 to 4 July 2003. On each occasion, its recommendations were submitted to the MAB Bureau.

Composition of the Bureau of the ICC

The ICC, at its 17th session, elected the following officers to constitute the Bureau: Chairperson: Mr Driss Fassi (Morocco); Vice-Chairpersons: Mr Olabiyi J. Yaï (Benin); Mr Jan Kvet (Czech Republic); Mr Maximo Aquino (Dominican Republic, elected for 2002); Mr Alfredo Reca (Argentina, elected for 2003); Mr Robert Barbault (France); and Mr Kunio Iwatsuki (Japan).

In July 2002, the MAB community was saddened to learn of the passing away of Professor Mohamed Abdel Gawad Ayyad of Egypt, who was Chairperson of the MAB ICC for 2000-2002. A tribute was given to him on the MAB website and in the *Bulletin of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves* No. 11, dated October 2002.

National and regional activities

At the 17th session of the ICC, the Council heard the national reports of a large number of countries, which demonstrated the vitality and dynamism of the MAB Programme. Speakers highlighted in particular the importance of biosphere reserves in their countries, including new sites in areas as yet not represented in the World Network. Emphasis was given as to how the current generation of large-scale biosphere reserves could serve as tools for land management, addressing major issues such as eradicating poverty, ecosystem rehabilitation, development of ecotourism, and the participation of indigenous people. Transboundary biosphere reserves were given special mention.

The regional networks are increasingly functional and proactive, working with the UNESCO field offices. This gives MAB a truly decentralized operational structure adapted to different ecological, cultural and socio-political contexts. These networks are ArabMAB, EABRN (East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network), AfriMAB (covering both Anglophone and Francophone Africa), IberoMAB (Latin American countries plus Spain and Portugal), CYTED (Programme of Iberoamerican Cooperation of Science and Technology), the MAB Northern Science Network, REDBIOS (Canary Islands, Spain, Cape Verde, Mauritania, Morocco and Senegal), SeaBRnet (South-East Asia Biosphere Reserve network), Ecotones in East and South-East Asia, and EuroMAB. Reports on the meetings and activities of these networks were given in the annex of MAB Report Series No. 70 and the reports of the MAB Bureau's meetings in November 2002 and July 2003. The number and variety of activities are too many to describe here, but special note should be taken of the following:

- the launching of the new South and Central Asia MAB Network (SACAM) in October 2002 at a meeting in Sri Lanka. This new network comprises eight countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka;
- the implementation of specific activities under the project "Asia-Pacific Cooperation for Sustainable Use of Renewable Natural Resources in Biosphere Reserves and Similarly Managed Areas" (ASPACO), financed by the Government of Japan, for which a second period of three (3) years is foreseen;

- the IberoMAB meeting organized by MAB Brazil with the support of MAB Spain at which the new logo and subtitle for IberoMAB were approved (Latin American Network of MAB National Committees);
- the EuroMAB 2002 meeting hosted by Italy in Rome under the patronage of the President of Italy, in October 2002, with a special emphasis on building MAB cooperation in South-East Europe in conjunction with the UNESCO Venice Office.

The UNESCO-MAB/UNEP-GEF Regional project on “Strengthening scientific and technical capacities for effective management and sustainable use of biological diversity in dryland biosphere reserves of West Africa” was approved by the GEF Council in May 2003. This project concerns six biosphere reserves: Pendjari (Benin), Mare aux Hippopotames (Burkina Faso), Comoé (Côte d’Ivoire), Boucle de Baoulé (Mali), the “W” region (Niger) and Niokola Koba (Senegal). The project, amounting to \$6.5 million (\$4 million co-financing and \$2.4 million from the GEF) is being implemented by UNESCO-MAB for the period 2003-2007. This full project was prepared through a preparatory phase from April 2001 to July 2002 led by UNESCO-MAB, which focused on mobilizing the technical staff, national scientific expertise and the local communities for each of the six biosphere reserves to identify activities to strengthen their functioning, with an emphasis on research and capacity-building, for example on conflict prevention and management in the six sites.

In the 14 SADC countries, efforts were concentrated on the project on “Sustainable Integrated Management of Arid and Semi-arid Regions of southern Africa”.

Cooperation with international partners

Cooperation among UNESCO’s five intergovernmental programmes was discussed at the meeting of the Chairpersons of the respective programmes on 3 and 4 October 2002. On that occasion, the theme of ecosystems and water in the context of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development was confirmed as the main priority theme for 2004-2005.

A joint Ramsar-MAB work programme for 2002-2003, prepared as a follow-up to an ICC recommendation at its 2000 session, was endorsed by the MAB-ICC at its 17th session in March 2002. One concrete activity was the organization of a joint expert mission to the Dunaiasky Biosphere Reserve in Ukraine in 2003.

In the field of drylands and desertification, MAB collaborated with UNU and ICARDA (International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas) to hold international workshops on “Desertification: rehabilitation of degraded drylands and biosphere reserves” in Aleppo (Syria) on 2 and 3 May 2002 and on “Sustainable management of marginal drylands” in Cairo and Alexandria (Egypt) from 20 to 25 September 2002. This latter workshop served to discuss a new project on Sustainable Management of Marginal Drylands (SUMAMAD) for joint implementation by UNESCO, UNU and ICARDA, with funding interest *inter alia* expressed by the Flemish Government of Belgium and China. In cooperation with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the UNESCO-MAB Education Kit on Combating Desertification was tested in 18 desertification-affected countries in 2002. Thanks to funding from Italy and Morocco, the kit was reprinted in English, French and Spanish and translations were prepared for Arabic, Chinese and Russian versions.

A joint framework of cooperation was concluded between the Council of Europe and UNESCO-MAB with the special aim of ensuring consistency and complementarity between the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and the networks of the Council of Europe, with a special emphasis on transborder sites and biosphere reserves which have also received the European diploma.

Cooperation in implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) focused on preparations for the debate on protected areas, which is a main topic of the ninth meeting of the CBD's scientific body meeting in November 2003 and the seventh meeting of the Conference of Parties (Malaysia, February 2004).

MAB at international events

The MAB Council at its 17th session in March 2002 made several recommendations on how to improve the visibility of the MAB Programme and Biosphere Reserves at the **World Summit on Sustainable Development**, held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002. These included the joint distribution with the World Council for Travel and Tourism of a greeting card with programme information, the production of a video for the Virtual Exhibition (now on the Web: (www.unesco.org/mab/video/htm)), and a promotional brochure. The highlight was a field trip to the Waterberg Biosphere reserve on 5 and 6 September 2002, organized by the South African MAB National Committee. The role of biosphere reserves is implicitly recognized in the WSSD Plan of Implementation, especially through the promotion of the Ecosystem Approach and in helping to significantly reduce the loss of biological diversity by 2010.

The MAB Programme also made several contributions to the **International Year of Mountains in 2002**, such as an education calendar prepared in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, and also the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in Kyrgyzstan from 29 October to 1 November 2002. One follow-up to the Summit was the "Mountain Research Initiative", a joint endeavour of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), the International Human Dimension Programme on Global Change (IHDP) and the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS), to be carried out jointly with UNESCO-MAB to study the impact of global change on mountain environments and mountain communities using biosphere reserves in mountains all over the world.

2002 was also the **International Year of Ecotourism**, for which MAB prepared a special brochure for distribution at the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec City in May 2002 and made a statement emphasizing the role of biosphere reserves as pilot sites for developing sound ecotourism practices, and referring to the International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism Development under the CBD.

The 5th **World Parks Congress**, organized by the World Conservation Union, will take place from 8 to 17 September 2003. This ten-year event is important for shaping work on protected areas in general, and MAB is contributing to one of the seven workshop streams on the topic of "Linkages in the Landscape/Seascape" led by Peter Bridgewater, former MAB Secretary. The Chair of the ICC will take an active part in this event. It is expected that certain recommendations from this Congress will make reference to biosphere reserves: these recommendations will thereafter be taken into consideration by the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its seventh meeting in early 2004.

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves

At its 17th session, MAB-ICC reviewed the various measures that had been taken to fulfil the "**Seville+5**" recommendations on the implementation of the Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves and the Statutory Framework. Some main highlights are summarized as follows:

- a work plan for 2002-2003 of the Biosphere Reserve Integrated Monitoring programme (BRIM) was endorsed by the MAB Council in March 2002. Work has proceeded on developing the concrete BRIM products of this plan including inventorying tools, a harmonized approach to information and metadata gathering and handling, manuals and guides on monitoring methodologies; including socio-economic monitoring. Two

subregional training courses for young scientists on BRIM and the Ecosystem Approach were planned by the UNESCO Nairobi Office in Zambia and Uganda in October 2003;

- a set of “guiding principles” for extrabudgetary projects on biosphere reserves was published on the MABnet;
- a Task Force on the development of “Quality Economies” in biosphere reserves was established, which met in conjunction with the MAB-ICC session in 2002 and in Berlin (Germany) from 24 to 26 October 2002. The importance of ecotourism and other forms of sustainable tourism in the development of quality economies was emphasized by the MAB Bureau, and this topic was accordingly included in the work of the Task Force. Forty-six replies were received for a questionnaire addressed to all biosphere reserve coordinators in order to take stock of the present situation (available on the Task Force website: <http://www.unesco.org/mab/qualityEconomies/qualityhome.htm>). The MAB Bureau at its July 2003 meeting stressed the importance of issues related to labelling of quality goods and services from biosphere reserves and the possibility of promoting trade among biosphere reserves.
- following a request by the MAB-ICC to prepare guidelines on appropriate institutional mechanisms for biosphere reserves, a circular letter was sent to Member States to identify experts for a task force and voluntary biosphere reserves to serve as cases studies. Some 20 biosphere reserves have responded and the task force will be meeting in October/November 2003 at the invitation of the Spanish authorities in Minorca Biosphere Reserve, Spain.
- the Secretariat was requested to prepare a “methodology handbook” as a set of guidelines for the implementation of the Statutory Framework and the Seville Strategy for biosphere reserves. A preliminary outline of this document was presented to the MAB Bureau at its meeting from 8 to 11 July 2003: The text will be prepared with the help of a small group of experts, for submission to the MAB-ICC at its 18th session in 2004.

Periodic review of existing biosphere reserves

Since 1997, the Secretariat has been carrying out the periodic review foreseen in the Statutory Framework of the World Network, aimed at improving the functioning of biosphere reserves designated over ten years ago. At the time of the ICC session in March 2002, 121 files had been examined by the Advisory Committee, a further 18 files were examined in September 2002 and 21 in July 2003. The recommendations of the MAB Bureau on these sites have been transmitted to the countries concerned for follow-up action.

New biosphere reserves

At the occasion of the meetings of the Bureau during the 17th session of the ICC in March 2002, in November 2002 and in July 2003, 36 new biosphere reserves, including one transboundary biosphere reserve, plus seven extensions to existing biosphere reserves, were approved. Three sites belonged to countries new to the World Network (Dominican Republic, Slovenia and Yemen). These are listed below:

Chr a, Algeria
Las Yungas, Argentina
Mornington Peninsula and Western Port, Australia
Mata Atlantica, Phase V (extension), Brazil
R gion du “W” (extension to create a transboundary reserve), Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger
Thousand Islands-Frontenac Arch, Canada
Dalai Lake, China

Wudalianchi, China
 Yading, China
 Lower Morava (extension to Palava), Czech Republic
 Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo, Dominican Republic
 Extension to Sumaco, Ecuador,
 Badiar, Guinea,
 Haut Niger, Guinea
 Valle del Ticino, Italy
 Tuscan Islands, Italy
 Mount Elgon, Kenya
 Littoral de Toliara, Madagascar
 Banco Chinchorro, Mexico
 Sierra La Laguna, Mexico
 Hustai Nuruu, Mongolia
 Rio San Juan, Nicaragua
 Jeju Island, Republic of Korea
 West Polesie, Poland
 Commander Islands, Russian Federation
 Darvinsky, Russian Federation
 Far East Marine, Russian Federation
 Nijegorodskoe Zavoljye, Russian Federation
 Smolensk Lakeland, Russian Federation
 Ugra, Russian Federation
 Julian Alps, Slovenia
 Extension to Cape West Coast, South Africa
 Dehesas de Sierra Morena, Spain
 Terras do Miño, Spain
 La Palma, (extension to Los Tiles), Spain
 Monfragüe, Spain
 Muniellos, Gran Cantabrica, (including an extension in 2003), Spain
 Picos de Europa, Gran Cantabrica, Spain
 Valle de Laciana, Gran Cantabrica, Spain
 Valles de Jubera, Leza, Cidacos y Alhama, Spain
 Shatski, Ukraine
 Extended Branton Burrows, United Kingdom
 Socotra Archipelago, Yemen

In conformity with the provision of Article 9 of the Statutory Framework, one site was withdrawn by Australia, one by Bulgaria, and four sites by the United Kingdom. As of July 2003, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves consisted of 440 sites in 97 countries.

Urban systems

The work of the MAB Urban Group was strengthened at a workshop jointly organized by the European Science Foundation, EuroMAB, the UK-Urban Forum and the MAB Urban Group, focusing on the development of an Integrated European research programme on the Urban and Peri-Urban environment in April 2001. At its July 2003 meeting, the MAB Bureau discussed the report of the MAB Urban Group, taking note of associated initiatives such as the Columbia UNESCO Project on Biosphere and Society (CUBES) and a Canadian proposal for MAB urban demonstration areas. A discussion paper on criteria for applying the biosphere reserve concept to urban systems, referring to the work of former MAB Project 11, was requested for the next session of the MAB ICC.

Water and ecosystems

Under the joint IHP/MAB main line of action, preparation began on two sets of guidelines for the sustainable use of water in specific ecosystems, with regional meetings in Belem, Brazil (March 2003) for ecosystems with abundant water and in Muscat, Oman (September 2003) for ecosystems with a scarcity of water.

Emerging ecosystems

The MAB Bureau at its meeting in July 2003, took note of the progress made by the Division of Ecological Sciences and SCOPE in defining a novel ecological theory of Emerging Ecosystems, i.e. ecosystems arising as the product of intense human activity. The Bureau stressed the importance of continuing this work and of elaborating a fully-fledged proposal for an activity on this theme, using the World Network of Biosphere Reserves for validating the Emerging Ecosystems theory. This proposal would be submitted to the MAB Council for endorsement at its next session in 2004.

Education and capacity-building

Education and capacity building are priority areas for the MAB Programme. Various activities are under way including the joint initiative on biodiversity education with the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Education Kit on Combating Desertification prepared for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, tested in 18 desertification-affected countries in 2002.

The *Ecole régionale d'aménagement intégré des forêts tropicales* (ERAIFT) is supported by UNDP and donor countries, such as Belgium, Canada, France, Netherlands and the United States (USAID/CARPE) and the European Union, and is located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The DESS diploma of this school was formally recognized by the academic authority of the region, and the first 32 DESS students graduated in June 2002. The second meeting of the Academic Advisory Committee took place in June 2003 at UNESCO Headquarters.

The International *Ecotechnie* Chairs workshop in March 2002 drew together the 10 existing Chairs and four potential universities interested in joining the Programme. These Chairs are in particular helping to contribute to ecosystem and water research (the priority for the Natural Science Sector) and also in capacity-building for sustainable development in the wake of the WSSD.

Following a recommendation of the MAB-ICC at its 17th session in March 2002, a feasibility study was initiated on the Biosphere Reserve Management Training centres, with a focus on needs and existing opportunities, options for the establishment of such Centres, their role in the context of the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development, and financial aspects. The full study will be presented to the MAB-ICC at its 18th session.

In the period 2002-2003, the MAB Bureau granted 26 MAB Young Scientists Awards to young specialists in the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Latvia, Mali, Mexico, Myanmar, Romania, Slovakia, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam. The results of these awards are presented on the MAB website: <http://www.unesco.org/mab/capacity/mys/awarmab.htm> (“Supporting young people helping the planet”).

The 2003 Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation, for which the MAB Bureau serves as a jury, was awarded jointly to the *Centro de Ecología* in Venezuela and to Peter Johan Schei of Norway.

The MAB Bureau endorsed a proposal for a MAB Strategy on conflict prevention and resolution in biosphere reserves. This topic arose due to interest generated by two training workshops on this topic, for EuroMAB (Vosges du Nord Biosphere Reserve, France, 2002) and in relation to the UNEP-GEF Project in West Africa (Pendjari Biosphere Reserve, Benin, May 2003).

Information and communications

The MAB Council welcomed the continued enrichment of the MABnet site (www.unesco.org/mab) but requested that print publications, such as the *Biosphere Reserves Bulletin*, should continue. The publication *Biosphere Reserves: Special Places for People and Nature* presenting an overview of the biosphere reserve concept was released in English in 2002 and in French in 2003 and a Spanish version was set in train.

Evaluation of the MAB Programme

In accordance with document 31 C/5, an external evaluation of the MAB Programme was carried out and its findings submitted to the MAB-ICC and its Bureau, which agreed that action should be taken to implement them. This is gradually being done.

Discussion on the draft 32 C/5 document

The MAB Bureau at its meeting in November 2002 examined the draft 32 C/5 document. The Bureau made several comments, for example:

- the wording retained by the Executive Board for the principal priority of the Natural Sciences Sector, i.e. “water and associated ecosystems”, was not appropriate as it could be understood as implying a hierarchy between water and ecosystems or be interpreted as ecosystems being part of the catchment area and therefore being affected by water availability. Considering that this was too reductive, the Bureau requested that the initial wording, “water and ecosystems”, be retained;
- the activities of the joint MLA with IHP were, on the contrary, reflecting well the desired content of this priority;
- the idea of a joint MLA with the Sector of Culture was fully supported, and the Bureau stressed that the MAB Programme had already a long experience on the issue.

Secretary of the MAB Programme

The MAB Bureau at its meeting in July 2003 noted that Mr Peter Bridgewater, the current Secretary, was leaving UNESCO at the end of the month and that a new Secretary would be recruited.