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## ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL BASIC SCIENCES PROGRAMMES (IBSP)

### OUTLINE

**Source:** 172 EX/Decision 12 and 176 EX/Decision 11.

**Background:** The International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP) was established by the General Conference at its 32nd session (32 C/Resolution 15).

**Purpose:** Pursuant to the above-mentioned decisions, the present document is designed to inform the General Conference about the assessment of the IBSP activity during the first biennium of its operation. (A report of the Scientific Board of Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP) is contained in document 34 C/REP/22).

1. In pursuance of 172 EX/Decision 12, the Executive Board at its 176th session examined document 176 EX/11, the report by the Director-General on the evaluation of the first phase of the International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP) and proposals regarding the draft Medium-Term Strategy (34 C/4) and draft Programme and Budget (34 C/5). In his report, the Director-General presented an assessment of the first phase of the International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP) based on consideration of the take-off of the IBSP, initial returns of the projects launched in 2005, the development of partnerships, and lessons learnt so far. Since the first phase of the IBSP will be terminated in 2007 and its strategy fulfilled, the report introduced principal elements of a new strategy proposed for the forthcoming phase of the programme falling within the Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 and the Programme and Budget for 2008-2009. As requested by the Executive Board in 172 EX/Decision 12 and 176 EX/Decision 11, the Director-General's report, together with the conclusions of the Executive Board, can be consulted at the following address: [http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/ex\\_boardsession.html](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/ex_boardsession.html). They will also be available for consultation at the meeting room during the working session.

2. When assessing the take-off of the IBSP, the Director-General emphasized in his report that the considerable feedback to the first call for project proposals provided explicit evidence of the pressing need of Member States to strengthen their national capacities in the basic sciences and science education, gave an initial insight into what Member States are expecting from the IBSP activity and, hence, constituted a legitimate launching pad for the IBSP. Following the recommendations by the IBSP Scientific Board established by the Director-General, 39 projects to be carried out in the 2006-2007 biennium were selected and launched in the regions. This was

done within a strategy that sought to concentrate the IBSP on the implementation of a limited number of priority projects that could catalyse a substantial action for capacity-building in science, and would not call for an unrealistic budget.

3. In the framework of the programme and budget for 2006-2007, the IBSP has been a flagship activity and in accordance with 167 EX/Decision 3.4.2 resources for it were provided from existing budgetary provisions. Support for the IBSP projects was also made available by the State Department of the United States of America, the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (TWAS), and the participating institutions through the extrabudgetary contributions they obtained for their projects. In 2006-2007, owing to the budget available, the IBSP had to principally focus on the implementation of the projects already selected. In parallel, work was started on examining which major IBSP partnerships could be forged and which initiatives developed in 2008-2009.

4. At the current stage, the number of IBSP activities carried out and fully reported on to UNESCO is of course limited. Notwithstanding this, it is expedient to mention some successful noteworthy projects in the regions. To cite a few: Project 5-KE-01 in Africa for the Establishment of the East African Biological Resource Centre that seeks to enhance regional science capacity through the development of an infrastructure for identifying and preserving microbial genetic resources and their sustainable utilization to support the development of biotechnological industries; Project 4-ID-12 in Asia, that is based on regional cooperation, in particular with Japanese institutions, and focuses on capacity-building in science to counteract the lack of human resources in bioinformatics, of capability to construct an advanced database, and of a facility for recombinant technology-based research; Project 2-RU-04 in Central and Eastern Europe, that aims at developing an international plasma research and education centre for developing countries in the Asia and Africa regions, and a network of benchmark scientific-educational laboratories in developing countries for cooperation with world centres of excellence in plasma physics. In the Caribbean region, the IBSP focused on science advocacy that resulted in the preparation of the report *Using science, technology and innovation to change the fortunes of the Caribbean region: practical recommendations to ensure implementation of the Plan of Action of the CARICOM Conference on "Harnessing Science and Technology for Caribbean Development"*. In 2007, this report is to be presented to the Caribbean governments by the Prime Minister of Grenada, the Right Honourable Dr Keith Mitchell, and UNESCO.

5. When summarizing lessons learnt within the IBSP, the Director-General pointed in particular to the need for further efforts to ensure that national and regional institutions be better aware of the opportunities offered by the IBSP. To achieve this, he suggested that each National Commission for UNESCO nominate an IBSP national focal point or establish a National Committee for the IBSP under its umbrella, two possible alternative scenarios that may provide a practical mechanism to help reinforce the interface with national institutions.

6. The major issue the Director-General raised in his report concerns the new phase the IBSP enters in 2008. By virtue of its mandate, the IBSP provides one of the principal means for the attainment of the objectives presented in the draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013, namely overarching objective 2 – "Mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development", and, more specifically, strategic programme objective 4 – "Fostering policies and capacity-building in science, technology and innovation with special emphasis on the basic sciences and energy". Within the IBSP, the Organization will also respond to the appeal by the Ministerial Round Table: *The Basic Sciences: Science Lever for Development* (Paris, 2005) that called for greater emphasis to be placed on promoting the basic sciences and science education with a view to the attainment of a science culture as a precursor of a knowledge-based society worldwide through various means available at UNESCO and, in particular, the recently launched flagship International Basic Sciences Programme. The strong relevance of the IBSP to UNESCO's capacity-building role was recently highlighted by the Overall Review Committee for Major Programmes II and III that also drew attention to the current limited internal funding of the IBSP and the need for a change of perspective (176 EX/7, para. 24). For these reasons, the Director-General consulted the Scientific

Board of the IBSP on the forthcoming IBSP strategy of action, and put forward a number of proposals to the Executive Board as regards the key elements of this strategy.

7. Three basic key elements of the proposed strategy introduce a novel approach to concentration of the programme, dialogue and interface with Member States, partnerships to be developed, and the guaranteeing and certifying of quality standards in science, as well as the contribution of science to the enrichment of cultural heritage.

8. Indeed, in the forthcoming strategy, the IBSP will concentrate on five major priority actions (MPA) embracing institutional capacity-building, human resources development, science education, leverage and transfer of scientific knowledge, and science expertise and advocacy for science. This new scale of concentration being introduced seeks to focus IBSP activities on the principal goals of the programme, and offers an opportunity for consolidated, synergetic action in the regions and on the international stage as opposed to the implementation of important but isolated *ad hoc* projects.

9. The proposed strategy highlights the establishment of a proactive continuous interface with Member States so that there may be permanent communication with the IBSP Secretariat in UNESCO and the IBSP Scientific Board for the purpose of identifying IBSP activities that yield real returns, and providing advice and assistance in the course of their implementation and follow-up. When they are designated, IBSP National Focal Points or National Committees would be major national actors who may foster awareness of the IBSP, its outreach, and interaction with UNESCO and its science partners. Once finalized, information on all practical issues relating to the interface with Member States, including on the IBSP activity, will be communicated to National Commissions and posted on UNESCO's website following the 34th session of the General Conference.

10. The pool of intellectual and other resources of UNESCO's partners in science is an essential prerequisite for the IBSP to multiply its ability to provide the services Member States need. This is why the IBSP is conceived as one of the instruments for fostering global partnerships for development called for by the Millennium Development Goals. It has now demonstrated the ability to provide a promising framework for this and in its new phase the development of partnerships is therefore to be a cornerstone of the programme's strategy of action.

11. In 2006, TWAS was granted the status of major IBSP partner, a status granted to actors that provide sustained financial support to the IBSP and foster participation in the IBSP of their institutions and networks. In the case of TWAS, this concerns *inter alia* its Network of Centres of Excellence in the South and the Third World Network of Scientific Organizations (TWNSO). UNESCO welcomes this new opportunity for partnership with TWAS, which is the most relevant partner in a programme focused on capacity-building in science in developing countries.

12. In pursuance of consultations between UNESCO, the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) held during the current biennium, CERN, which is a world-renowned intergovernmental centre of excellence, offered to launch joint programmes, among them the *Creation and networking of electronic libraries and repositories for African universities and scientific institutes*, and the *Training of science education trainers*. The IBSP also offers a new dimension for direct cooperation with scientific unions of ICSU dealing with the basic sciences. Memoranda on cooperation within the IBSP were elaborated and signed with IUBMB and IUPAC.<sup>1</sup> A similar memorandum between UNESCO and IUPAP<sup>2</sup> is under preparation. Joint initiatives that respond to what is being sought by Member States and can be undertaken in 2008-2009 were also identified with other partners such as ICGEB,<sup>3</sup> TWAS, IBRO<sup>4</sup> and L'Oréal. At the regional level, there are opportunities for further

<sup>1</sup> IUBMB – International Union for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. IUPAC – International Union for Pure and Applied Chemistry.

<sup>2</sup> IUPAP – International Union for Pure and Applied Physics.

<sup>3</sup> ICGEB – International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology.

<sup>4</sup> IBRO – International Brain Research Organization.

cooperation with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), NEPAD, CARISCIENCE (a UNESCO-affiliated regional network of research departments playing a key role in the development of the basic sciences in the Caribbean), the recently established Regional Centre for Biotechnology Training and Education in New Delhi, India, and, of course, traditionally important partners such as ICTP and the International Centre for Pure and Applied Mathematics (CIMPA) in Nice, France.

13. The Executive Board examined the report the Director submitted in document 176 EX/11, took note of the assessment of the first phase of IBSP, approved the proposals made by the Director-General regarding the future IBSP strategy, and made a number of recommendations to be followed up. The recommendations of the Executive Board are articulated in 176 EX/Decision 11 attached in the Annex to this document.

14. The elaboration of the Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 and the Draft Programme and Budget for 2008-2009 has taken into account the elements highlighted above.

## ANNEX

### **Decision of the Executive Board relating to the Report by the Director-General on the evaluation of the first phase of the International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP), and proposals regarding draft document 34 C/4 and draft document 34 C/5 (176 EX/Decision 11)**

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 172 EX/Decision 12,
2. Having examined document 176 EX/11,
3. Noting that the mandate of the International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP), and the partnerships in capacity-building in science that IBSP promotes are reflected in the strategic programme objectives for the Organization to be set out in its draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 (34 C/4), and are aimed at providing the science inputs to assist countries to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),
4. Recognizing that IBSP is a response to a recommendation by the World Conference on Science, and that UNESCO has sole responsibility for the basic sciences within the United Nations system,
5. Calling for an enhanced partnership with International Council for Science (ICSU) scientific unions and the industrial sector in the framework of IBSP,
6. Recognizing the importance of joint work between governments, the private sector and international and regional organizations,
7. Referring to recommendations of the ministerial round table on "The Basic Sciences: the Science Lever for Development", as well as to the decisions of the African Union Summit on science, technology and scientific research for development,
8. Takes note of the assessment of the initial phase of IBSP presented in document 176 EX/11, and recommends that it be submitted for information to the General Conference at its 34th session, together with the conclusions of the Executive Board;
9. Approves the proposals made by the Director-General regarding the future IBSP strategy;
10. Requests the Director-General to give priority consideration to projects from developing countries, mainly from the least developed countries and post-conflict countries, to be carried out in cooperation with regional science centres, and to consider how to support the submission of high-quality proposals from developing countries in the context of the IBSP strategy;
11. Recommends that Member States continue to inform the Director-General of activities that they would propose for IBSP, and of complementary extrabudgetary support they may provide to reinforce the IBSP budget for the implementation of their proposals and that proposed activities should be in line with the five major priority actions of the new strategy;
12. Requests the Director-General to:
  - (a) take action for implementation of the strategy proposed in document 176 EX/11 for the development of IBSP activities in 2008-2013;

- (b) encourage, within the Third UNESCO/ICSU Framework Agreement for 2008-2013, direct participation in IBSP of relevant scientific unions of ICSU;
- (c) encourage the setting up of national committees for IBSP in order to increase the visibility and effectiveness of the Programme, joining together national scientific committees and institutional partners, as well as private partners, and to develop the committees' networks;
- (d) prepare and circulate to Member States, in 2008, an information document on IBSP and its functioning within the established strategy of action;
- (e) submit to the Executive Board at its 181st session and then to the General Conference at its 35th session a report on the development and outcomes of IBSP during the first biennium of the Medium-Term Strategy, and on measures to be taken to promote the services and efficiency of IBSP.