

REPORT OF THE CONSULTATION OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL WITH MEMBER STATES AND NATIONAL COMMISSIONS FOR UNESCO IN THE ARAB STATES ON THE MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGY FOR 2014-2021 AND THE PROGRAMME AND BUDGET FOR 2014-2017

(29 September – 1 October 2012, Muscat, Oman)

1. Delegations of National Commissions for UNESCO of 17 Member States from the Arab States participated in the consultation of the Director-General on the preparation of the draft medium-term Strategy for 2014-2021 (37 C/4) and the draft Programme and Budget for 2014-2017 (37 C/5). Two representatives respectively from ISESCO and ALECSO participated in the meeting as observers, as well as the representative of UNESCO Liaison Committee.

The opening

2. Dr Madiha bint Ahmed Al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science delivered a statement at the official opening of the meeting, in which she began by expressing her thanks and appreciation to all the participants, wishing them a pleasant stay and every success in their work.

3. Her Excellency said that she hoped that the important consultation would indeed prove to be a welcome opportunity for the National Commissions from the Arab world to propose future-oriented visions in order to lay a framework for joint work by the National Commissions at the regional level. She did not doubt that the outcomes and recommendations of the consultation meeting would reflect positively on the work of the National Commissions in the Arab countries.

4. She added that the National Commissions were vital partners for UNESCO. It was therefore no accident that there was good cooperation between them and the Organization, in a bid to achieve the progress that all were striving for by means of mutual support and joint programmes. She stressed the importance of holding such consultation meetings, in view of their considerable impact on the implementation of the policies, plans and programmes of the Organization and its Member States, in order to take the appropriate measures to strengthen the performance of the National Commissions and enable them to shoulder their responsibilities in optimum fashion.

5. With regard to the current Medium-Term Strategy (2008-2013), she underscored the importance of attaining the objectives that had not yet been completed, which had been adopted as a basis for the drafting of the various programme and budget documents, especially with a view to helping countries to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, and in particular that of reducing poverty by half by 2015, and to achieve the six education for all (EFA) goals by carrying out activities in all fields of competence of the Organization, which was one of UNESCO's thematic objectives throughout the current medium-term period.

6. She said that it was important to check the course along which the Organization's objectives were being implemented and to follow up their outcomes, and to begin to draw up new objectives and visions which were consonant with the requirements of the coming period, and which would realize the aspirations of the Member States during the next medium-term Strategy.

7. Her Excellency referred to the social, political and economic changes facing the global community in general and the Arab community in particular. It had become incumbent on all to seek out effective partnerships and to build fruitful relations and other cooperation mechanisms with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and effective parties in civil society and the private sector, in their capacity as a means for addressing issues and attaining strategic objectives in order to find coordinated joint solutions to existing needs.

8. Mr Eric Falt, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Public Information, representing the Director-General of UNESCO, conveyed to the participants her greetings and her best wishes for a productive and successful meeting. He expressed the Organization's deep gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for its great generosity in hosting this consultation with member States and National Commissions of the Arab States region on the preparation of the draft medium-Term Strategy (37 C/4) and the draft Programme and Budget (37 C/5). He took this opportunity to reiterate UNESCO's appreciation for the contribution of the Sultanate of Oman amounting to US \$2 million to the Emergency multi-donor fund, and referred to the recent agreement signed by the Director-General.

9. He also mentioned that these consultations are part of a broader process which will lead to consideration and further directives by members of the Executive Board at its 190th session; the preparation of the draft 37 C/4 and draft 37 C/5 by the Secretariat for consideration by the Executive Board at its spring 2013 session, and ultimately, at the General Conference for adoption.

10. Altogether, there are five regional consultations in the global process. Four of them have been held, namely for Africa, Asia and Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and Caribbean regions. This is the final consultation in the Arab region. The reports and recommendations from all these meetings will be submitted to the coming 190th session of the Executive Board.

11. At the start of the meeting the chairperson, Mr Mohammed al-Yaqoubi, Secretary-General of the Omani National Commission, welcomed the Assistant Director-General for External Relations, representative of the Director-General, the Secretaries-General of the Arab National Commissions, the directors of UNESCO field offices, the representatives of ISESCO and ALECSO and all participants to the consultative meeting and wished everyone a pleasant stay in the Sultanate of Oman. The representatives of the following countries were elected as members of the Bureau – Chair: Sultanate of Oman, vice-chair: Jordan, general rapporteur: Lebanon and co-rapporteur: Egypt.

12. Mme Touriya Majdouline, Secretary-General of the Moroccan National Commission and chairperson of the previous consultative meeting (Rabat, May 2010), delivered a statement in which she noted that the present consultative meeting, held in the context of critical global and regional conditions, will discuss the key priorities and fundamental issues relating to the real needs of the Arab States in the areas of education, science, culture and communication, as perceived by the Arab National Commissions in their capacity as the representatives of their Governments at this meeting. As such, this meeting assumes considerable importance, requiring full commitment on the part of UNESCO to producing significant recommendations and outputs that will be reflected in the draft medium-term Strategy for 2014-2021 and draft Programme and Budget for 2014-2017. Indeed, the Director-General of UNESCO affirmed in her introduction to the Approved Programme and Budget (document 36 C/5) that, in this time of multiple crises more than at any other time in the past, there is a need for UNESCO to ensure the provision of excellent education for all, be a driver of science, technology and innovation, build inclusive knowledge societies, safeguard and encourage cultural diversity and foster sustainable development and the culture of peace and dialogue between cultures.

13. Mme Majdouline focused on strengthening the position of the National Commissions in terms of their relationship with Governments and UNESCO offices away from headquarters and on improving their situation through consultation. She further recalled the recommendations of the last consultative meeting, held in Rabat, in May 2010, relating to placing the National Commissions at the very core of UNESCO's concern and seeking to encourage cooperation with them by proposing joint action programmes in UNESCO's fields of work at bilateral, regional and international level, as well as those recommendations relating to the field offices and certain specialised centres, which must play a greater role.

14. She further spoke of the need to accord the Arabic language sufficient attention, enabling a higher level of benefit to be derived from UNESCO consultations, conferences and publications. In addition, there is a need to act to involve centres under the auspices of UNESCO, particularly category 2 centres, in activities and programmes that fall within their area of competence, to entrust them with conducting studies and research and to connect them with category 1 institutes and centres working in the same field.

15. Mme Majdouline highlighted the need to follow-up on the Euro-Arab Dialogue initiative and to adopt the principle of the democratic dialogue approach in discussing issues that concern humanity. This coincides with the mission of UNESCO, which calls for treading paths that lead to the establishment of peace, including, of course, spreading the culture of dialogue and respect for the other through the cultural diversity programme.

16. She viewed the meeting as an opportunity to think out loud about the future role of UNESCO in the light of the major changes experienced by the Organization and the world at various levels, to enable the Organization to respond in the best way to the needs of Member States and harmonize its priorities with those of the Arab region. This will require it to focus and concentrate its activities to avoid dissipation of effort, particularly in view of the financial crisis the Organization is currently experiencing.

17. Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux, Deputy Assistant Director-General of the Bureau of Strategic Planning and Director of the Division for Programme and Budget, introduced the discussion on documents 37 C/4 and 37 C/5 outlining first the new external environment of the current consultations, including pre- and post-2015; post-MDG period; post-Rio+20 outcome and follow-up; post-EFA context; post-WSIS; the United Nations Secretary-General's calls for an integrated approach to human development, sustainable development, economic development, peace and security, as well as his global Initiatives on education and science; the strengthened aid effectiveness agenda; and the renewed approaches to United Nations coherence and effectiveness at country level.

18. Among changes in UNESCO's internal environment, Mr. le Saux mentioned the shift to a new planning cycle (eight years for the C/4 document and four years for the programme part of the C/5 document); the recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation; and the decisions of the General Conference and the Executive Board on the preparation of documents 37 C/4 and 37 C/5; the new format of the questionnaires with both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Reiterating the Director-General's statements in her preliminary proposals, he underlined the focus in order to reduce fragmentation, and mentioned also that the budget preparation is proposed to follow the results-based budgeting (RBB) approach, and based on a Zero-nominal growth, details of which were to be found in Part II of document 190 EX/19.

19. Mr Le Saux suggested that deliberations during the cluster and plenary meetings could focus on the following key area/themes: with regard to the Medium-Term Strategy for 2014-2021 (Mission statement, Overarching objectives, UNESCO's functions, Global priorities and the strategic objectives); and with regard to the Programme for 2014-2017 (priority programme areas, intersectorality, working closer to the field, operational effectiveness of the Organization, working with the United Nations, including at country level, partnerships); as well as the role of the National Commissions for UNESCO.

Plenary Session

20. Representatives of the National Commissions from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen, as well as representatives from UNESCO Secretariat held a series of sub-regional discussions and consultations and subsequently presented their respective reports in the plenary session. Discussions in plenary led to the following:

21. The participants expressed appreciation for the preliminary proposals made by the Director-General of UNESCO concerning the Medium-Term Strategy for 2014-2021, and for the principles on which the Strategy was based in order to meet existing challenges and with the aim of making the Organization's work more effective.

22. The participants endorsed the proposed new wording of the mission statement, but they hesitated over the concept of "inclusive knowledge" which should be deepened and broadened in particular, especially since it was not reflected in the overarching objectives. They proposed inserting an amendment to the wording, and adjusting the Arabic translation of the word 'inclusive', so that the amended mission statement would read as follows: "As a specialized agency of the United Nations, UNESCO contributes to peace and sustainable development, building inclusive knowledge societies based on intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences and culture".

23. The participants agreed to endorse the new wording of the definition of UNESCO's functions which were clear, precise and focused. Nevertheless, they proposed inserting some amendments:

- Function 3 (suggested wording): Fostering international and regional cooperation through alliances, partnerships and dialogue.
- Function 4: delete "at the national level" as the following words suffice - "Providing advice for national policy development".
- Function 5: add the word "human" in "Developing human and institutional capacities".

24. The participants endorsed the reduction in the number of overarching objectives to two (paragraph 21 of document 190 EX/19).

25. The participants endorsed the two global priorities of capacity building in Africa and gender equality. However, they emphasized the need to allocate sufficient financial resources for their implementation.

26. The participants highlighted the importance of considering youth as a priority for the Organization, in particular with regard to capacity development of young people and their participation in decision-making. However, they agreed that this issue was best addressed at the level of the various programmes.

27. It was noted that the document did not include reference to the post-2015 period. The participants called on UNESCO to develop a clear vision for post-2015, particularly through its foresight function.

28. The participants found that the reduction in the number of strategic objectives to the six proposed, and the overall structure of document 37 C/4, which was well focused, should lead to greater effectiveness and productivity, to evaluation, and to the achievement of results.

29. With regard to **Major Programme I**, the participants emphasized UNESCO's role in the field of education and the promotion of lifelong education systems at all levels, including in transition, post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

30. In addition, and in the light of the present crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, the participants called on the Organization to provide rapid assistance to ensure education for displaced Syrians in the regions in which they are present.

31. Concerning education priorities in the Arab region, the participants concluded that the priorities were to reform education systems through the development of holistic strategies aimed at better matching education programmes and curricula with the needs of the labor market; to improve teacher training and foster technical and vocational education.

32. In order to keep up with the rapid changes which the world was witnessing in recent times, the participants proposed formulating measures that might include, for example:

- UNESCO to establish for reference a database of best and potential practices in the field of teaching bearing the UNESCO label for assimilation and emulation, so as to avoid missing possible opportunities that promote sustainable development in the field of education;
- Introduce a training certificate in new technologies in the name of UNESCO;
- Strengthen the database of digital education resources;
- Promote further education for citizenship, democracy and human rights;
- Ensure attention to cultural heritage, to safeguarding of the environment and to cultural tourism;
- Encourage countries to develop standardized indicators for the development of education so as to improve the quality of education and to reduce academic underperformance. These indicators should be made available to researchers through UNESCO's website;
- Strengthen and support initial and in-service training for teachers.

33. The participants wondered why UNESCO had dropped its support for philosophy in the field of the human sciences, as philosophy was a fundamental pillar in critical thinking and the raw material which had constituted the first principles of the Organization. They considered that philosophy contributed to the ultimate achievement of main line of action (MLA) 3 of Major Programme I "Improving the quality and relevance of education", which was in line with the wish to sharpen the outlines of a new humanism.

34. The participants proposed inserting some amendments in the wording of some phrases, and recommended the following: Replacing the word "transforming" in paragraph 7 under MLA 3 in Major Programme I with the word "developing". Concerning the wording of MLA 2 in Major Programme III, they proposed to replace the word "policy" used as an adjective in the Arabic version with the following word: "policies".

35. Regarding strategic objective 2 of **proposed Major Programme I**: "Fostering inclusive, quality and lifelong learning opportunities for all to support creative and innovative and global citizenship", the phrase "global citizenship" gave rise to a lengthy and rich discussion as the participants were of the view that in order to be realized, the concept (which all peoples long for, including the Arab peoples) requires the establishment of a global system based on equality, justice and the balanced distribution of wealth and resources. But that is precluded by present realities, given the dominance of superior power and the global disequilibrium. Likewise, it is a pre-condition for the individual to be a citizen of a nation before being a citizen of the world. This is in contradiction with the reality in many countries and especially in the Middle East region, where the Palestinian people are still striving to live in a nation whose borders are final and that is sovereign and free. Citizenship is incompatible with occupation and therefore the concept of "global citizenship" is not an urgent priority in the Arab region, at least not at the present stage. The participants suggested that UNESCO reconsider the concept taking into consideration these remarks.

36. The participants endorsed **the proposed Major Programme II** and the two strategic objectives to be attained and the related MLAs, noting the importance accorded in the document to the part on the interface between science, policy and society, building capacities, and supporting the development of policies for sustainable development. They also commended the importance of UNESCO's role in laying the foundations for the concept of "integrated science for sustainable development" in order to foster opportunities for cooperation among scientific knowledge holders in the fields of the natural, human and engineering sciences.

37. With respect to strategic objective 1 of **proposed Major Programme III**: "Fostering peace, dialogue and reconciliation through heritage and cultural expressions", the participants were unanimous in expressing their appreciation of this objective as being fundamental to UNESCO's action, and the firm foundation that had maintained the strength of UNESCO until the present day.

38. In connection with the proposed Major Programme III – “Culture, creativity and freedom of expression”, the participants endorsed the priorities of the programme and emphasized the role of UNESCO in preserving and protecting the cultural heritage, in particular in view of what was happening in Palestine as a result of the occupation and the attacks against sites inscribed on the World Heritage List currently taking place in the Syrian Arab Republic and previously that in the “Arab Spring” countries.

39. A number of participants expressed their reservation as to the merging of the culture programme with the communication and information programme, expressing the concern that this merger might negatively impact on UNESCO’s work in the area of culture, which constitutes a unique field of competence for UNESCO.

40. Concerning MLA 4 of the proposed Major Programme III, regarding promoting freedom of expression, it was proposed that it be amended to read as follows: “Promoting freedom of expression and free, pluralistic and independent media, within a framework of respect for religious beliefs and common human values”. While the participants recalled the importance accorded by UNESCO to upholding its commitment to defending freedom of expression, they also emphasized the need for the Organization to provide assistance in drawing up legislation and guidelines which guaranteed that no religious symbols or values or peoples could be offended.

41. Some matters were raised which UNESCO had not included in **the questionnaire**, one of which was that the Organization should play a greater role in the field of the sustainable management of freshwater, as that was a problem that was worsening in the world. Likewise, UNESCO should be a future-oriented body so as to be able to perform its various roles as effectively as possible. The participants suggested involving local and regional expertise to a greater extent.

42. All participants recalled the importance of intersectorality and interdisciplinarity as a principle for UNESCO’s work.

43. Concerning the field offices, emphasis was placed on strengthening cooperation among them and with the National Commissions, and for field offices avoid bypassing the National Commissions, as well on increasing field offices budgets to enable them to meet the needs of Member States in accordance with the various priorities of each country.

44. With regard to work with United Nations agencies, the participants underscored the need for coordination and concerted efforts, in particular within the country-level UNDAFs, so as to avoid dispersion and the duplication of initiatives, and for the delineation of fields of work that was clear to all sides.

45. In connection with partnerships, the participants emphasized the importance of fostering cooperation relations with international and regional governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as with civil society organizations and the private sector.

46. The participants stressed the importance of the role of the National Commissions and the need to strengthen cooperation among them. They underlined the importance of holding consultative meetings on a regular basis to enable the National Commissions to exchange experiences and coordinate efforts. Participants further highlighted the importance of facilitating and strengthening communication between the National Commissions and the Organization.

47. Some participants mentioned the importance of UNESCO Clubs and called for the strengthening of the relationship between them and the National Commissions, also underlining the importance of involving youth in UNESCO’s areas of work.

Special session on UNESCO cooperation with National Commissions

48. At the beginning of this session, Mr Eric Falt, Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Public Information, gave a brief presentation on the following topics: UNESCO strategy on partnerships with civil society; liaison with Member States and National Commissions; the Participation Programme; and the follow-up of the review on cooperation between the Secretariat and National Commissions.

49. Mr Eric Falt began his presentation by focusing on the strategy of work with the private sector, the media, civil society, non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, affiliated schools and UNESCO clubs. This strategy, to be submitted to the 190th session of the Executive Board, affirms the role of the National Commissions in fostering these partnerships, the importance of liaison between National Commissions and the Organization, and the need for cooperation between National Commissions and UNESCO clubs, which must operate under the auspices of the National Commissions. In the context of strengthening liaison between UNESCO and the National Commissions, Mr Falt drew attention to the special website set up by the Organization for the use of Member States and National Commissions to shed light on their activities and to the monthly newsletter sent by the Secretariat to the National Commissions to disseminate information.

50. As regards the Participation Programme, Mr Falt noted that the reduced budget had led to the adoption of a policy of austerity, resulting in a reduction in the number of projects receiving direct funding from UNESCO. He thanked those countries which enjoy an abundance of resources for refraining from submitting projects to the Participation Programme,

51. Mr Falt explained the role of the open-ended tripartite working group for the review of the cooperation of the UNESCO Secretariat with National Commissions for UNESCO, which the Executive Board at its 189th session resolved to form within the framework of strengthening the relationship between the National Commissions and the Organization. The tripartite working group includes representatives from the National Commissions, the Organization and the Permanent Delegations to UNESCO. The first meeting of the group will be held on 19 October 2012.

52. At a previous session, Mr Diego Gradis, representative of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, had presented the point of view of this committee and its work in fostering cooperation between UNESCO and non-governmental organizations.

53. Participants discussed the manner of and conditions for defining the relationship with the private sector and other partners and how to achieve greater cooperation between National Commissions and field offices, stressing that these offices should not bypass the National Commissions. They discussed the need in some countries for greater awareness of UNESCO. This would encourage private sector and civil society partners to collaborate with National Commissions in carrying out their activities. The need to promote UNESCO clubs and allocate a budget to these in the Organization was also mentioned.