



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Programme outline

UNESCO international environmental experts network

UNESCO Network for Earth



Biosphere and Lake Chad Heritage (BIOPALT)

1. Programme information

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Geographical scope/benefitting country(ies)	N°	Global/Region/Subregion/Country	Amount (USD)
	1	Global	USD 20 million
	+Add		
Duration in months	48		
Resource mobilization target in US\$	<i>USD 20 million</i>		

2. Rationale and background

2.1 Summary Description

Under the aegis of UNESCO and with the Ministry of Environment of Italy as a founding partner and first major donor to the initiative the programme establishes a network of international environmental experts. Open to other donors and partners and funded through a Multi-Partner Trust Fund, this international network will contribute to increasing the conservation of terrestrial, coastal and marine biodiversity and better management of global ecosystems services. Its action will be framed within UNESCO's programmes on biodiversity and heritage and be implemented globally in UNESCO designated sites.

It will provide technical support and training to the staff of UNESCO designated sites on conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity and the ecological restoration of ecosystems. UNESCO designated sites are hubs for sustainable development. They comprise Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO Global Geoparks, natural and mixed World Heritage sites (including marine sites and cultural landscapes), and may also include elements of intangible cultural heritage inscribed on UNESCO's Lists of the 2003 Convention which are directly linked to knowledge about nature and the environment. In addition the scope of the programme will also include sites or elements that are being considered for designation as UNESCO designated sites with particular attention to requests from transboundary sites and transnational elements. This programme will contribute to the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement and to the Post-2020 global biodiversity framework as well as to the UNESCO Biodiversity Strategy. It will also increase the sharing of good practices and solutions between different sites and elements and strengthen UNESCO's contribution the international biodiversity agenda and in both the UN Decades on ecosystem restoration and on ocean science for sustainable development.

2.2 Sustainable Development Goals



Halting the loss of biodiversity is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 15) and is closely linked to all other SDGs. Biodiversity is fundamental to the proper functioning of terrestrial and marine systems, but also to the provision of ecosystem services essential for the dignity and well-being of humankind. Ecosystem services that depend on biodiversity include access to drinking water, food and fibre, soil fertility, preservation of the genetic database of biodiversity, climate regulation, and recreational and aesthetic values, among others. Biodiversity and cultural diversity are closely linked. These diversities give us the flexibility to adapt to change, including climate change. Thus, biodiversity underlies most of the SDGs and its impoverishment poses a threat to the economy, security and peace.

By integrating social, economic and cultural contributors to the loss of biodiversity and

degradation of ecosystem services the programme also contributes to a range of other SDG targets and indicators, for instance target 6.6 (protecting and restoring water related ecosystems); 8.3 (decent and inclusive job creation); 12.8 (ensure access to information for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature); and 16.7 (responsive, inclusive and participatory decision-making).

2.3 Overall purpose and relevance (including needs, issues and baselines)

UNESCO aims to promote the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature through conciliating conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development within its global network of 714 biosphere reserves (BRs), 161 UNESCO global geoparks, and 252 natural and mixed World heritage sites (WHS). These sites span over 10 million km², an area equivalent to the surface of China or 6% of the land surface of the planet, representing a worldwide framework of sites internationally designated for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the case of Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage sites and include protected areas. In addition, [183 elements](#) inscribed on UNESCO's Lists of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage are directly or indirectly related to knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, highlighting the diverse ways in which nature and culture are intertwined.

The UNESCO designated sites are home to more than 260 million people including indigenous peoples facing global challenges related to climate change and loss of biodiversity and ecosystems' resilience. Consistent with the contribution to the Agenda 2030 and with a view to the preparation of the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029 UNESCO and its Member States are encouraged to improve cooperation and building capacities towards the safeguarding, management and promotion of this worldwide framework considering the important relationship between biodiversity and cultural diversity for conserving the harmony of ecosystems.

Climate change and biodiversity loss are interconnected and mutually reinforce the degradation of ecosystems, biodiversity, nature's contributions to people and natural and cultural heritage. Their multifaceted impact is reflected in droughts, extreme heat waves, bushfires, sea level rise, food shortages, forced migrations and health hazards, to name but a few. The IPCC Reports are clear that it is crucial to limit global warming to 1.5° C if we are to adapt to and mitigate this phenomena and avoid even more dramatic consequences. Similarly, the Global Report on Biodiversity of IPBES (2019) echoes the severity of the biodiversity crisis in which we are immersed. Human activities have already profoundly altered nature across most areas of the planet: 75% of the Earth's environment, 40% of the marine environment, 50% of water streams, one million animal species are threatened with extinction.

The challenge is to transform and rebuild human-nature relations, (notably by restoring degraded ecosystems) through education, science, culture, local and indigenous knowledge, based on shared values (trust, solidarity, respect for diversity, long term...). UNESCO can provide inspiring examples of living in harmony with nature by building on the unique network of sites such as Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage Sites and UNESCO Global Geoparks to conserve and sustainably use the planet's key ecosystems by mobilizing the knowledge, practices and know-how of committed citizens and partners. The programme will help to ensure access to this diversity of knowledge, to create opportunities and translate them into action to engage stakeholders and empower young people and future generations through our networks of sites and international network of experts. UNESCO can provide expertise, practices knowledge and know-how that can support Member states to address these interlinked issues.

Biosphere reserves have been designated under UNESCO's MAB Programme since 1976 and highlight solutions to reconcile biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity at the local and regional levels. As of September 2020, the World Network comprises 714 biosphere reserves in 129 countries, including 21 transboundary sites. This dynamic and interconnected network of sites encourages the harmonious integration of human communities with nature in order to promote sustainable development through participatory dialogue, knowledge sharing, improvement of human well-being, respect for cultural values and efforts to improve society's capacity to cope with climate change. This programme aims to enhance the management of biodiversity in a biosphere reserve framework to ensure the most effective possible ecosystem self-regulation service to ensure the ecological, social and economic sustainability of economic activities.

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. Their bottom-up approach of combining conservation with sustainable development while involving local communities is becoming increasingly popular. At present, there are 161 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 44 countries. While a UNESCO Global Geopark is built around exceptional geological sites, it is the interaction between the geological, biological and cultural heritage and how this allows local communities to create income that makes these places unique. The conservation of the biodiversity and the restoration of valuable ecosystems, in cooperation with the local, indigenous and scientific communities is integral part of the Geopark concept.

The World Heritage Convention is a global legal instrument ratified by 194 countries to protect natural and cultural sites deemed of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), inscribed on the World Heritage List. The List currently comprises 1121 properties, of which 252 are recognized for their natural values, including 156 for their globally important biodiversity.

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is the international community's only binding multilateral instrument tasked with safeguarding living heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations. Ratified by 180 countries, it promotes the safeguarding of cultural practices or living expressions inherited from generation to generation, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills necessary for traditional crafts. The Convention includes provisions in its Operational Directives (Chapter VI.3) highlighting the contribution of intangible cultural heritage to environmental sustainability and its potential role in the protection of biodiversity and the sustainable management of natural resources. It recognizes that communities, groups and individuals should have the primary role in safeguarding their own cultural heritage and all safeguarding activities should be undertaken with the free, prior and informed consent of the communities concerned. UNESCO's interactive tool "[Dive into ICH](#)" provides a specific visualization to give further insight on how living heritage elements inscribed under the 2003 Convention are linked to different biomes and natural resources.

UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO) strives to promote intergovernmental cooperation in order to generate knowledge about the nature and resources of the ocean and coastal areas and apply that knowledge to management, sustainable development and marine environment protection. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the Ocean Decade) will strengthen international collaboration to develop transformative ocean science to support evaluation and science-based management of the marine sites of the World Heritage and biosphere reserves, strategies and policies promoting more relevant and integrated understanding and accurate prediction of ocean ecosystems and their responses and interactions. Such knowledge is important to recognize thresholds and avoid ecological tipping points and thus ensure ecosystem functioning and continued delivery of ecosystem services. The Ocean Decade

through higher density ocean data and improved forecast systems including those related to sea level, marine weather and climate will empower UNESCO's designated sites management policies and decision-making and mainstream community resilience.

The programme will prioritize gender-sensitive approaches throughout the entire components. Girls and women will be consulted and involved in the programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The programme will ensure that partners are committed to promote girls' human rights and gender equality. The sites situational analysis will pay particular attention to the specific social-ecological issues faced by girls and women, as well as patterns of gender inequality in each of our study sites. Gender sensitive indicators will be developed, where appropriate.

The programme will also provide an opportunity to engage with early career scientists, experts and knowledge holders and focus in particular on the mobilization of the youth in the different sites, as to prepare a strong basis for interaction with the future generations.

The main expected results of this programme with the view of contributing to the post 2020 biodiversity framework, sustainable development goals of Agenda 2030 and global peace, are :

- (i) improved capacity in environmental management, restoration and resilience of UNESCO designated sites;
- (ii) improved management of UNESCO designated sites by building capacity and exchange of experiences and best practices;
- (iii) provide legal, technical and specialized support for the conservation and safeguarding of ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the mitigation and adaptation to the effects of climate change;
- (iv) Strengthened capacity of site managers and other relevant stakeholders in best management and conservation practices, with the view of them being able to replicate the training locally;
- (v) environmental awareness strengthened among youth and communities for transformative changes in values and practices;
- (vi) strengthened international environmental cooperation on the management, conservation and safeguarding of the UNESCO designated sites and elements among experts and member states;
- (vii) improved inclusion of biodiversity and ocean preservation as a priority in our daily lives, lifestyles and living spaces to drive behavioural change, and;
- (viii) Increased conscience on the interdependence between our health and Earth's health (One Health) to prevent and avoid or mitigate future environmental and health crisis such as COVID-19 (through communication campaigns based on the activities and sites).

2.4 Impact

The world's ecosystems are at risk. Their rapid decline threatens nature and people alike, jeopardizing our economies, livelihoods, cultural diversity, food security and quality of life. The UNESCO networks around the world - including network of sites of biosphere reserves, World Heritage sites and UNESCO Global Geoparks - are located in these critical and sensitive areas. These are places with shared cultural values, fostering action to tackle challenges at the local and global level. UNESCO designated sites illustrate concrete examples of people and nature are living in harmony together - with solutions to the problems facing the biodiversity of our planet today.

UNESCO designated sites also provides examples of sustainable development in action, where a focus on biodiversity helps to restore the relationships between people and nature, conserve the harmony of our ecosystems, and amplify the power of youth. The UNESCO

network brings education, science and culture together to develop tangible, concrete transformative action.

Through our networks, and a new dedicated Multi-Partner Trust Fund established to support loss of biodiversity on key ecosystems, UNESCO is working to give the next generation support and tools they need to bring balance back to our relationship with nature and to support their wellbeing.

Biodiversity is the living fabric of our planet. It underpins human wellbeing today and into the future. For us all to thrive, the relationship between people and nature must shift - addressing climate change, species loss, over exploitation of natural resources, pollution, and the effects of urbanization. A diverse world gives us the flexibility to adapt to change. Biodiversity therefore underpins most of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Taking action towards these goals supports the wellbeing of everyone around the world.

Through sharing methods, practices stories of tangible change in the sites, UNESCO aims to inspire people to engage in the conservation and sustainable management of critical ecosystems. The programme activities will aim to provide for concrete examples to demonstrate that it is possible for people and nature to be in harmony and that through our connection to nature we can create opportunities for change.

3 Summary of outcomes and outputs

Outcome N°1 UNESCO designated sites are better prepared to identify and address emerging challenges and pressures from climate change, multiple stressors, land use change, economic activities that lead to biodiversity loss

Output N°1: %/area of restoration of key target ecosystems identified (baseline)

Output N°2: Scientific data and methodologies available on restoration of ecosystems and sustainable use of biodiversity as well as on mitigation and adaptation to the effects of climate change and multiple stressors;

Output N°3: Number of youth involved in the sites activities and sustainable initiatives through mentorship

Outcome N°2 UNESCO designated sites have built capacity for integrated ecosystems, landscape and resilience management

Output N°1: Increased capacity of local actors to manage sites as well as monitor change through socio-ecological indicators

Output 2: Access and use of collaborative platform for scientific knowledge data, expertise and sharing solutions and good practices

Output 3: Increased knowledge and visibility of UNESCO designated sites as models for sustainable development and resilience

4 Stakeholders, Beneficiaries and partners

The managers and teams of the designated sites, local communities, youth and indigenous peoples are the primary partners and beneficiaries.

Through their participation in the Steering Committee of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund the main donors to the programme will provide advice on the strategic direction of the programme, and be closely associated with the monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

The roster of experts will be composed of international experts in the field of biodiversity and land-restoration, environmental management and environmental law experts and knowledge holders and researchers from UNESCO's relevant Intergovernmental and International Programmes and Conventions, their advisory bodies and relevant networks. They will provide technical advice, generate data, build partnerships and provide training.

Training and capacity sharing workshops will be conducted with and for local actors. Training will be provided so that local actors, particularly indigenous people, youths, and women, can share their learning and knowledge throughout the Networks of UNESCO designated sites through targeted activities, including during UNESCO key international events, and participation in both the UN decades on restoration and oceans as well as regional meetings.

Key partners include:

- Biosphere reserves managers and MAB National Committees, MAB international advisory committee experts, World Heritage national focal points and site managers, ICH designated contact person, stakeholders, groups and communities, experts from the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme, UNESCO-IOC experts, experts of the 2003 Convention's global facilitators network and collaborating institutions in participating countries, local and indigenous experts
- Donors and other key stakeholders on the Steering Committee of the Programme
- Ministries of Environment, Ministries of Ecology and of Research of participating countries
- UNESCO Chairs and Youth Networks
- UNESCO Category 2 centers (e.g. GRO, Centre for Capacity Development amongst others training on land restoration)
- Governmental and non-governmental organizations

5 Implementation Strategy and Governance of the Multi-Partner Funds in Trust

A network of international experts- "UNESCO environmental Experts Team"

UNESCO can rely on extensive and existing networks of experts in relevant fields to provide the expertise necessary in responding to the specific needs of the many UNESCO designated Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage Sites, UNESCO global Geoparks sites and ICH elements worldwide and to those in the process of approval. The network of experts will provide technical support and training to sites' or elements' competent bodies' staff, with regards to protection, management and ecological restoration of the beneficiaries Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO global Geoparks, World Heritage natural and mixed sites and cultural landscapes. This will also include the identification and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage related to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in these areas, in line with the principles of the 2003 Convention and its community-based approach.

Following a bottom-up approach, the international network of experts would only operate at the request of the UNESCO designated sites and relevant ICH stakeholders, groups and communities in consultation with their National Commissions for UNESCO or National MAB committee and National Geopark Committees, IOC National Commissions and National Ocean Decade Committees where appropriate.

The group of experts would work on a voluntary basis and only costs related to field interventions would be covered by the fund of the project. The Roster of international experts will be developed by UNESCO on the basis of international scientific expertise and repute, taking into consideration geographical and gender distribution.

An Open Platform for international cooperation on the environment

The programme offers an international platform for cooperation in environmental matters among experts and UNESCO Member States, opening the door to new partnerships and

avenues for conservation of the harmony of ecosystems which is one of the three pillars that constitutes UNESCO's strategic action for biodiversity¹.

A Multi-Partner Trust Fund

To foster programmatic coherence, reduce fragmentation, and strengthen national capacity and systems around the UNESCO designated sites and to capture and replicate innovation, the programme is financed through a dedicated Multi-Partner Trust Fund. Created with catalytic funding from the Ministry of Environment of Italy, other public and private donors who share the commitment of UNESCO and the Government of Italy to the core values and objectives of the programme and to support the implementation of the UNESCO Biodiversity Strategy will be actively encouraged to participate in the Fund.

The focus of the Fund will be capacity building activities in conservation of biodiversity and management in UNESCO designated sites and in the process of becoming UNESCO designated sites and elements as Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage Sites, Geoparks and ICH.

Governance

A Steering Committee will be established comprising representatives designated by UNESCO, the Italian Government and other major donors who contribute to the Fund. It will be responsible for approving the annual work plans, providing strategic direction and advice, inter alia on communication and resource mobilization and outreach for the Fund. Operational procedures for the Steering Committee will be approved by the Steering Committee on its first meeting.

A Scientific Committee will ensure technical and scientific support to the Steering Committee and to correctly guide the implementation of the Programme, particularly in selecting the UNESCO designated sites and environmental experts. The final decision on the selection of experts will lie with UNESCO. The Scientific Committee will be composed of professors, scholars and experts designated by the donors and UNESCO. The terms of reference of the Scientific Committee will also be approved by the Steering Committee on its first meeting. UNESCO will develop the detailed project document and the first annual work plan and will assess the applications received, designate the team of experts to be deployed and ensure that the sites are consulted before receiving assistance.

UNESCO will organise an international call for applications, select appropriate experts and further develop the experts' network over time. It will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the project, producing outcome reports on annual basis and evaluation of the project after 3 years in close consultation with the Steering Committee. UNESCO also will manage the communication on the project.

The programme will be coordinated from the Division of Ecological Sciences where a coordination unit will be established comprised initially of two professional staff funded under the programme at P.3 and P.2 level respectively. To foster knowledge exchange and networking, donors and partners of the programme can second or loan experts to the coordination unit.

6 Risk analysis and preventive mitigation measures

¹ The high attention of the Italian authorities toward UNESCO initiatives and mission has been lately reiterated by the Italian Parliament which voted a law on 12 December 2019 allocating funds for a new programme concerning international collaboration initiatives for the environmental safeguard of areas internationally recognized.

The programme involves capacity sharing and training of local stakeholders, including youth, indigenous peoples and women in relevant sectors and in the transmission of relevant knowledge and know-how. The project will provide an opportunity to bring together several scientific and technical UNESCO networks to contribute to multi-sectoral, interdisciplinary networks of experts and scientific partnerships that can lead to the development of courses, which can be taught by relevant institutions, including the UNESCO Chairs Network, Category II Centres and on-line.

The expert's platform will help local actors and sites to access information and practices and understand the impacts and linkages between different land-uses threats and challenges and identify opportunities for integrated landscape management and resilience initiatives in the long term.

7 Sustainability and Exit Strategy

The communication component will ensure better visibility of these issues, the promotion of local solutions implemented within the UNESCO designated sites and the sharing of inspiring stories for different target audiences at key international and regional events including for the biodiversity international agenda and UN Decades

It is also planned to produce methodological guides, toolboxes, training courses and special events during the upcoming UN decades on restoration and ocean.

8 Evaluation

Monitoring will be carried out by UNESCO. An annual report on the implementation of project activities will be submitted each year in close cooperation with experts, scientific committee and sites.

UNESCO will measure the direct and indirect effects of the project, including after the end of the project.

UNESCO will prepare, in cooperation with the scientific committee and the sites, a monitoring report to assess the involvement of beneficiaries, partners and other stakeholders.

9 Visibility

The success of the partnership lies not only on local successes but the dissemination of “good practices” at the global level. In this regard, the communication aspect of the project is a key dimension and will be embedded in the UNESCO Biodiversity Strategy communication campaign and UNESCO website.

The partnership will yield numerous opportunities for communication and dissemination of impacts and results:

- **From year 1:**
 - **Launch meeting** of the partnership at UNESCO Headquarters with Italy
 - **Photos** of stakeholder meetings
 - **Videos of the biosphere reserves and sites**
 - **Films and/or photos** of field missions in sites, showcasing the biodiversity being protected and the livelihoods of local stakeholders protected by sustainability initiatives
 - **Maps** of the sites
 - **Side events at IUCN World Congress and COP 15 in 2021**

- **From year 2:**
 - **Photos** of stakeholder meetings
 - **Films and/or photos** of sustainability projects to be supported at their initial stage (photos, videos) and on the field missions
 - **Reports/publications** on the scientific evaluation of conservation outcomes
 - **Production of visuals** and knowledge products for wide dissemination including on UNESCO Websites
 - **Events.**

