

7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO

REPORT



Online 22.02.-25.02.2021

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Executive Summary

The 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO was organized by the Swiss Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO Secretariat from 22 to 25 February 2021 and gathered 450 participants from around 150 National Commissions, as well as from of Permanent Delegations and UNESCO Secretariat. The meeting was held online with interpretation in French, English, Arabic and Spanish.

Despite the postponement of the meeting initially scheduled for May 2020 in Lugano, the objectives of the 7th Interregional Meeting, while adapted to the calendar, have been retained. The programme of the meeting is attached as Annex I to the full final report. This executive summary presents the recommendations to each of the following three objectives:

- The **first objective** was to contribute to the ongoing elaboration process of the next [Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 \(41 C/4\)](#) and the [Draft Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 \(41 C/5\)](#) of UNESCO by collectively commenting on the Director-General's preliminary proposals in the light of the suggestions made during the regional and sub-regional consultations and [Executive Board decision 210 EX/22](#).
- The **second objective** was to exchange on the role of National Commissions for UNESCO in strengthening in concrete terms the implementation of the Organization's programmes and provide the Secretariat and Member States with shared recommendations from National Commissions, to be included in the synthesis report as requested in [decision 210 EX/5.III.D](#) on the strategic transformation of the Organization.
- The **third objective** was to share experiences on actions undertaken or initiatives planned by the National Commissions, particularly those that have a sub-regional, regional, trans-regional and interregional cooperation dimension and/or strong inter-sectoral dimension at a thematic level, as well as projects that are part of the response to COVID-19, the enhancement of the 2030 Agenda, or the challenges and opportunities of digitalization.

First Objective

The first objective was to contribute to the ongoing elaboration process of the next Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4) and the Draft Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5) of UNESCO by collectively commenting on the Director-General's preliminary proposals in the light of the suggestions made during the regional and sub-regional consultations and Executive Board decision 210 EX/22.

Key recommendations on the role of National Commissions for 41 C/4:

- Strengthen multilateralism and partnerships with relevant stakeholders, such as youth and civil society, through strategic positioning of National Commissions as key national coordinators.
- Empower National Commissions as principal agents of change at the national level, accelerating UNESCO's response to global challenges.
- Involve National Commissions in the implementation and assessment of the Organization's programmes, using a human rights-based approach.

Key recommendations on inter-sectoral collaboration for 41 C/5:

- Inter-sectoral planning and implementation of holistic multidisciplinary approaches in addressing cross-cutting issues should be enhanced.
- Clear and strategic visions for inter-sectoral collaboration should be developed to capitalise on the intrinsic potential of National Commissions to link their programmes, networks, and partnerships, including with each other, to attain SDGs' targets.
- Inter-sectoral collaboration should be fostered and applied at a regional or sub-regional level in a One UNESCO approach (UNESCO HQ, Field Offices, Regional Offices, National Commissions), in order to put international cooperation at the service of all stakeholders since multidisciplinary may involve different capacities.
- Harness capacities and share best practices with a view to responding to the challenges as such posed by the COVID 19 pandemic in a pluridisciplinary perspective, inter alia by enhancing consultations and knowledge exchange through already available platforms, such as National Commissions' interregional and regional networks, in an inclusive manner and benefiting from new digital tools.
- Additional support should be given to institutional networks such as associated schools, clubs and chairs, by asking UNESCO to give more support to the associated schools network and UNITWIN Programme (i.e. by creating a special unit for both).
- Youth should be reflected as a priority throughout strategies and documents rather than through a separate youth strategy.

Key recommendations on partnerships for 41C/5:

- Full consideration should be given to the National Commissions system, as key comparative advantage of the Organization for programmes' implementation.
- Member States should utilize the National Commissions' role of advisors to national and UNESCO governing bodies as well as raise National Commissions' capacity to effectively deliver on their mandate.
- Reinforce and strengthen the collaboration of UNESCO HQ and UNESCO Field Offices with National Commissions to identify their priorities and support the execution of their projects (i.e. country plans).
- Mobilize UNESCO's network and stakeholders, including Category II Centres.
- Mobilize youth from around the world to interact, to engage and get involved in UNESCO meetings and other initiatives.
- Establish and strengthen partnerships with institutions, civil society, private sector, national, regional and international platforms and networks, or to leverage on the partnerships to emerge from the new UNESCO Partnership Strategy.

Key recommendations on international cooperation for 41C/5:

- National Commissions could reinforce and strengthen the collaboration among them and be mutually supportive
 - a. by doubling efforts on capacity-building, joint workshops, celebrating international events, sharing good practices and encouraging joint initiatives at the regional and interregional levels.
 - b. by enlarging the use of their active networks as a support to designations and partners to take part in international cooperation and dialogue.
- Develop project management tools as well as qualitative and quantitative performance indicators to guide the improvement of joint international work, and making it available to National Commissions for utilization.
- Establish and coordinate a database, at the regional and international levels, of experts in various educational, scientific, cultural and technological fields, and making it available to National Commissions for utilization.

- Increase the use of the on-line platform for sharing information and best practices, as well as for initiating joint cooperation.

Key recommendations on visibility for 41C/5:

- UNESCO should increase the visibility of National Commissions' work by awareness campaigns on social media platforms.
- National Commissions should work on a communication system based on a model 'to tell a story' focused on communicating about UNESCO at country level.

Key recommendations on the format of 41 C/4 and 41 C/5:

- C/5 should integrate clearer and better capable quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to measure the long-term impact on and outcomes for all groups in society.
- C/4 and C/5 should include information on the roles of National Commissions in the effective planning and implementation of UNESCO's programmes, especially with a view to strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration, and partnerships.
- C/4 and C/5 should be more focused, concise and better structured, including diagrams and graphs, by tailoring the language and the format of the C/4 and C/5 documents to the needs of the different target groups.
- Documents have to be translated in the official languages of UNESCO and be user friendly.

Second Objective

The **second objective** was to exchange on the role of National Commissions for UNESCO in strengthening in concrete terms the implementation of the Organization's programmes and provide the Secretariat and Member States with shared recommendations from National Commissions, to be included in the synthesis report as requested in decision 210 EX/5.III.D on the Strategic Transformation of the Organization.

Key recommendations on Strategic Transformation

- Empower and fully engage UNESCO networks in the delivery of UNESCO's activities.
- Strengthen cooperation with the National Commissions to better empower, engage and further mobilize UNESCO networks.
- Further use of the vision paper "[National Commissions for renewed multilateralism](#)" by National Commissions themselves and by the UNESCO Secretariat in the follow-up work to the Strategic Transformation (Annex III of the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO full final report).

Third Objective

The **third objective** was to share experiences on actions undertaken or initiatives planned by the National Commissions, particularly those that have a sub-regional, regional, trans-regional and interregional cooperation dimension and/or strong inter-sectoral dimension at a thematic level, as well as projects that are part of the response to COVID-19, the enhancement of the 2030 Agenda, or the challenges and opportunities of digitalization.

17 National Commissions presented their completed or planned projects. All projects presentation are published on the meeting [website](#).

Key messages

- National Commissions worldwide have had different kinds of experiences in these difficult times caused by the pandemic which has resulted in pressure and crisis on governments and the economy.
- However, in spite of all the difficulties, National Commissions have played their crucial role contributing towards the relevance of UNESCO's mandate.
- Through experience, existing and innovative ideas, existing links and the building of new networks, National Commissions have demonstrated intersectorality in action.

Report of the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO

Introduction

The 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO was held online from 22-25 February 2021. The meeting was hosted by the Swiss Commission for UNESCO and attended by more than 450 representatives from around 150 National Commissions for UNESCO (referred to hereafter as 'National Commissions'), the UNESCO Secretariat and Permanent Delegations.

The main objective of the meeting was to gather comments from National Commissions on UNESCO's Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4) and Draft Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5), and to share with the Secretariat and Member States recommendations from the National Commissions in respect of the preparation and examination of the drafts of 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 to be submitted to the 211th Session of the Executive Board (7–21 April 2021). A further aim of the meeting was to share views on the role of National Commissions in the implementation of the Organization's programmes and its Strategic Transformation.

In her welcome address, Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, highlighted the capacity demonstrated by the National Commissions in mitigating and addressing the current global health, educational, social, and cultural crises. She also underscored the importance of National Commissions' various roles in liaison and coordination, in providing consultation and information, and in taking action. She affirmed that the National Commissions' unique expertise, perspectives and experience on the ground would be invaluable in drawing up the 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 documents.

Mr Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the fields of Education, Sciences, Culture, and Information as essential elements in the realization of the peace, security and prosperity of humankind. He reiterated the importance of the National Commissions, which he said were key players in the field, and affirmed that their views and roles should be well reflected in the next Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4).

In a preliminary session moderated by Mr Genc Seiti, Director of UNESCO's Division of Member States and Partners, the National Commissions of the following Member States were elected to serve as the Chair, Vice-Chairs, Moderators and Rapporteurs of the meeting:

- Chair: Switzerland
- Vice-Chairs: Morocco, Curaçao
- Rapporteurs: Republic of Korea, Mauritius

For the regional meetings (session 2, 23 February), the following members were elected to serve as Moderators and Rapporteurs:

- Moderators - Sri Lanka (APA), Jordan (ARB), Senegal (AFR), Finland (ENA), Argentina (LAC)
- Rapporteurs - Malaysia (APA), Oman (ARB), Zimbabwe (AFR), Serbia (ENA), Bahamas (LAC)

Session 1 (Monday, 22 February 2021)

Priorities for UNESCO's action in 2022-2029

The first session explored the role of UNESCO in light of current global challenges. In his presentation on the priorities for UNESCO's action in the years 2022-2029, Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux, Director of UNESCO's Bureau of Strategic Planning (DIR/BSP) said that UNESCO's mandate had become more relevant than ever, with an increasing demand for action by UNESCO to respond to crises precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted the need for strengthened multilateralism and partnerships, notably, at the national level, with National Commissions. He also highlighted the importance of translating the vision of the Medium-Term Strategy into concrete programmes and budgets.

Mr Le Saux also presented some of the key features and future direction of the Draft 41 C/4, including i) intersectionality, ii) setting of enabling objectives, iii) mainstreaming of a human rights-based approach, iv) a multidisciplinary approach to programming, v) reinforced support and engagement of youth, vi) consideration of how to best involve National Commissions and institutional networks of civil society in the effective planning and implementation of programmes.

Role of UNESCO up to 2030 in light of global challenges

During the panel discussions on UNESCO's role in the period up to 2030 in light of current global challenges, it was asserted that UNESCO's strategic focus is and should be clearly related to the current global challenges, including the global cultural crisis, increasing inequality all over the world, the weakening of multilateralism, and the aggravation of living conditions of already vulnerable people. The session included perspectives from various experts outside of the Organization, in particular their views on questions raised with regard to the next Medium-Term Strategy of UNESCO.

Ms Karima Bennoune, UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, focused on UNESCO's role in response to the global cultural catastrophe. She highlighted that UNESCO's role in this respect could include ensuring that adequate resources were allocated to responding to the violation of cultural rights, operationalizing a human rights-based approach to UNESCO's programmes, providing more remedies to victims, and publicly addressing issues of cultural violation. She provided some examples of how the National Commissions could be involved in work related to cultural rights, including i) working across and with relevant ministries, institutions, and experts in the field, ii) taking part in the universal periodic review, iii) conducting national assessments in cooperation with civil society, and iv) implementing public awareness programmes.

Ms Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), emphasized the need to minimize inequalities, highlighting the gaps in access to learning, culture, and sciences. She stressed the need for enhanced collaboration with relevant institutions and also more strategic governance. She also emphasized the importance of working jointly, both at the regional and global levels, and stated that the National Commissions were a point of contact in fostering multilateral cooperation.

Ms Aminata Touré, a Member of UNESCO's High-Level Reflection Group for Strategic Transformation, raised the issue of multilateralism, calling for greater international solidarity. She stated that COVID-19 had worsened the situation for vulnerable people such as indigenous minorities, women and girls. She emphasized that a human rights-based approach must be a priority in responses to the crisis, especially in light of limited resources. She argued that the additional vulnerability of already vulnerable target groups, and the problem of budget constraints prevalent in many African countries, should be addressed at the recovery stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. She underscored the role of UNESCO in supporting countries to develop expertise in the unique areas of the Organization's mandate such as preservation of oceans and natural heritage. She also highlighted

the importance of partnership with non-governmental organizations and connections with universities, and emphasized the need to strengthen partnerships with the media at the global and national levels to promote the values that the Organization champions.

Ms Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, spoke about the creation of a 'lockdown generation' as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasized the importance of adopting an approach that is not only 'for' young people but also works 'with' them when tackling challenges confronting youth. As an example, she mentioned the importance of integrating young people's perspectives on the future of education. She reiterated the need to promote inclusive, high-quality education, taking into particular account the most vulnerable segment of young people. She said that the role of National Commissions should be to facilitate involvement of young people in the whole cycle of creating, implementing and monitoring of educational policy in this regard.

Mr Peter Messerli, Co-Chair of the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019, drew insights from the UN Global Sustainable Development Report, which shed light on the role of sciences in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He emphasized the interlinked nature of the world today, which calls for transformation of key systems, namely food systems, energy systems, cities, economy, human well-being, and the global environment and the need to rethink partnerships. He suggested reflecting on the purpose of and rationale behind UNESCO's major strategies and initiatives, such as the strategic transformation, beyond ensuring their outcomes. He also called for reflection on the theory of change. He commented that one role of the National Commissions was to lobby for changes in scientific policies.

Key Recommendations on the role of National Commissions for 41 C/4

- Strengthen multilateralism and partnerships with relevant stakeholders, such as youth and civil society, through strategic positioning of National Commissions as key national coordinators.
- Empower National Commissions as principle agents of change at the national level, accelerating UNESCO's response to global challenges.
- Involve National Commissions in the implementation and assessment of the Organization's programmes, using a human rights-based approach.

Session 2 (Tuesday, 23 February 2021)

Future Quadrennial Programme of UNESCO (41/C5): programmes and products – operational involvement of National Commissions for UNESCO and their national networks

The National Commissions shared their views on the future C/5 within their regional groups. Discussions were led by the three following questions:

1. The implication of fostering **intersectoral collaboration** on the work of the National Commissions for UNESCO, **(Q1)**
2. The role of the National Commissions in fostering and concretizing UNESCO's **international cooperation**. **(Q2)**
3. Recommendations regarding the **format and presentation of the 41 C/4 and 41 C/5** documents. **(Q3)**

This session was organized in regional meetings. **The specific discussions and recommendations of each region were presented in plenary (Annex II of the present report)**. A number of similar recommendations across regions or with an interregional scope were made in the conclusions of the meeting, as follows:

Key Recommendations on inter-sectoral collaboration for 41 C/5

- Inter-sectoral planning and implementation of holistic multidisciplinary approaches in addressing cross-cutting issues and challenges should be enhanced.
- Clear and strategic visions for inter-sectoral collaboration should be developed to capitalise on the intrinsic potential of National Commissions to link their programmes, networks, and partnerships, including with each other, in order to attain SDGs targets.
- Inter-sectoral collaboration should be fostered and applied at a regional or sub-regional level in a One UNESCO approach (UNESCO HQ, Field Offices, Regional Offices, National Commissions), in order to put international cooperation at the service of all stakeholders since multidisciplinary may involve different capacities.
- Harness capacities and share best practices with a view to responding to the challenges as such posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in a pluridisciplinary perspective, inter alia by enhancing consultations and knowledge exchange through already available platforms, such as National Commissions' interregional and regional networks, in an inclusive manner and benefiting from new digital tools.
- Additional support should be given to institutional networks such as associated schools, clubs and chairs, by asking UNESCO to give more support to the associated schools network and UNITWIN Programme (i.e. by creating a special unit for both).
- Youth should be reflected as a priority throughout strategies and documents rather than through a separate youth strategy.

Key Recommendations on partnerships for 41 C/5

- Full consideration should be given to the National Commissions system, as key comparative advantage of the Organization for programmes' implementation.
- Member States should utilize the National Commissions' role of advisers to national and UNESCO governing bodies as well as raise National Commissions' capacity to effectively deliver on their mandate.
- Reinforce and strengthen the collaboration of UNESCO HQ and UNESCO Field Offices with National Commissions to identify their priorities and support the execution of their projects (i.e. country plans).

- Mobilize UNESCO's network and stakeholders, including Category II Centres.
- Mobilize youth from around the world to interact, to engage and get involved in UNESCO meetings and other initiatives.
- Establish and strengthen partnerships with institutions, civil society, private sector, national, regional and international platforms and networks, or to leverage on the partnerships to emerge from the new UNESCO Partnership Strategy.

Key Recommendations on international cooperation for 41C/5

- National Commissions could reinforce and strengthen the collaboration among them and be mutually supportive
- a. by doubling efforts on capacity-building, joint workshops, celebrating international events and encouraging joint initiatives at the regional and interregional levels.
- b. by enlarging the use of their active networks as a support to designations and partners to take part in international cooperation and dialogue,
- Develop project management tools and qualitative and quantitative performance indicators to guide the improvement of joint international work, and making it available to National Commissions for utilization.
- Establish and coordinate a database, at the regional and international levels, of experts in various educational, scientific, cultural and technological fields, making it available to National Commissions for utilization.
- Increase the use of the online platform for sharing information and best practices, as well as for initiating joint cooperation.

Key Recommendations on visibility for 41 C/5

- UNESCO should increase the visibility of National Commissions' work by awareness campaigns on social media platforms.
- National Commissions should work on a communication system based on a model 'to tell a story' focused on communicating about UNESCO at country level.

Key Recommendations on the format of 41 C/4 and 41 C/5

- C/5 should integrate clearer and better quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to measure the long-term impact on and outcomes for all groups in society.
- C/4 and C/5 should include information on the roles of National Commissions in the effective planning and implementation of UNESCO's programmes, especially with a view to strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration, and partnerships.
- C/4 and C/5 should be more focused, concise and better structured, including diagrams and graphs, by tailoring the language and the format of the C/4 and C/5 documents to the needs of the different target groups.
- Documents have to be translated in the official languages of UNESCO and be user friendly.

Session 3 (Wednesday, 23 February 2021)

Strategic Transformation: State of Play

Mr Xing Qu, Deputy Director-General (DDG) of UNESCO, stated first that the Draft 41 C/4 and C/5 represented a remarkable milestone in the final phase of the Strategic Transformation. He then conveyed some messages from the Secretariat about the Organization's four Strategic Objectives, its Global Priorities and its Strategic Transformation.

On Strategic Objective 1, Quality Education for All, he stated that UNESCO must aim to reduce inequalities and promote learning and creative societies through inclusive, high-quality education for all, and that education remained a major focus of UNESCO's COVID-19 response.

With regard to Strategic Objective 2, the Environment, the DDG mentioned that negotiating the 'nature-society-development nexus,' in order to find and deliver concrete solutions to environmental issues, required UNESCO to promote open science, build trust in science, and advance international cooperation in science, technology and innovation.

Regarding Strategic Objective 3, Reinforcing UNESCO's Core Mandate to Create Peaceful Societies, he argued that UNESCO should respond to the global challenges resulting from COVID-19 by protecting and promoting heritage, cultural diversity, and inclusion, and combating discrimination, hate speech and stereotypes, to enable people to live peaceful lives without fear of persecution.

For Strategic Objective 4, Technology in the Service of Humankind, he underlined the importance of establishing ethical norms. He added that in a 21st century context, this would mean fostering a technological environment in the service of humankind by developing ethical standards, norms and frameworks for action that meet the challenges of innovative technologies and digital transformation.

On the subject of UNESCO's Global Priorities, the DDG asserted that UNESCO must be able to make concrete strides in advancing gender equality and working with partners in Africa for sustainable and inclusive development on the continent. At the same time, he also highlighted the critical importance of enhancing UNESCO's actions towards priority groups, youth and Small Island Developing States, to ensure that their crucial roles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals are supported.

Lastly, with regard to the Strategic Transformation and enabling objectives, he mentioned that the final stage of the Strategic Transformation had been reinforced by a crucial consultative process with the National Commissions. In this regard, he expressed his appreciation of the value of National Commissions, stating that the National Commissions helped the Secretariat to better understand the needs of people, identify partners on the ground to find solutions together, and deliver UNESCO's mandate across the globe.

Strategic Transformation: Positioning and Role of National Commissions for a Renewed Multilateralism

Mr Lutz Möller, Deputy Secretary-General of the German Commission for UNESCO, introduced a position paper on the 'Positioning and Role of the National Commissions for a Renewed Multilateralism,' with a view to obtaining support from all other National Commissions. He first reminded the delegates of the results of the Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO conducted in 2010, which he noted had said that there was 'limited appreciation among Member States or the Secretariat of the potential of this broader UNESCO 'community', favouring instead an 'institutional' perspective that privileges the formal, top-down, Headquarters-led UNESCO.'

He also reiterated that among the Organization's many comparative advantages, UNESCO's networks and its presence on the ground were key. However, he pointed out that this presence was

not utilized well enough. He suggested that UNESCO networks gave the Organization the ability to continuously reach out to civil society and academia, engage local communities and build shared narratives with them, feed insights and best practice back into the UN system, and thus, allow communities to be an active part of multilateralism.

He emphasized that UNESCO and the National Commissions needed to improve their cooperation in order to i) better empower, engage and further mobilize these networks and their broader communities into multilateral dialogue; ii) improve their quality assurance and quality development; iii) improve national, regional and interregional networking; iv) strengthen the ambition of each network member's work on content; v) seek synergies on these networks within the Secretariat.

Following Mr Möller's presentation, **Mrs Maja Zalaznik**, a Member of UNESCO's High-Level Reflection Group for Strategic Transformation, explained the main mission and composition of the High-Level Reflection Group. She mentioned that the work of the Group was mainly designed to provide UNESCO with a perspective from the outside world. She then went on to explain how the High-Level Reflection Group viewed UNESCO and what conclusions had been drawn by the Group.

Mrs Zalaznik said that the Group's major areas of focus were i) the promotion of shared human values; ii) education as a fundamental lever for resilience; iii) open, creative and peaceful societies; iv) environmental risks and changes; and v) the importance of emerging technologies with human values.

She noted that the recommendations of the High-Level Reflection Group stressed the importance of reinforcing programmes aimed at Global Citizenship Education and international scientific cooperation for knowledge sharing. She also noted that the recommendations included ensuring the ethical character of emerging technologies, acting for cultural diversity, protecting heritage and freedom of expression, and promoting the role of youth in driving positive change.

She concluded by emphasizing the importance of strengthening the identity, core values and contributions of UNESCO to the world, and by asserting that National Commissions should be part of the common focus areas of the Organization.

Chair final remarks

The Chair thanked the DDG, Mr Moller and Mrs Zalaznik and the participants for the discussion. The participants in the Interregional Meeting voiced strong support for the vision paper 'National Commissions for renewed multilateralism' which was presented at the Meeting. The Chair invited the National Commissions to further utilize the paper in their work, and expressed the wish that UNESCO will consider this vision in the finalization of the Strategic Transformation process.

Key Recommendations on Strategic Transformation

- Empower and fully engage UNESCO networks in the delivery of UNESCO's activities.
- Strengthen cooperation with the National Commissions to better empower, engage and further mobilize UNESCO networks.
- Further use of the vision paper 'National Commissions for renewed multilateralism' by National Commissions themselves and by the UNESCO Secretariat in the follow-up work to the Strategic Transformation (Annex III of the present report).

Session 4 (Thursday, 25 February 2021)

From strategy to implementation of concrete initiatives: the comparative advantage of National Commissions

During the session moderated by Mrs Gabriela Tejada, Vice-Chairperson of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO and Mr Dov Lynch, UNESCO Chief of Section for Relations with Member States, 17 National Commissions presented their completed or planned projects with a sub-regional, regional, transregional and interregional cooperation dimension and/or strong intersectoral dimension at a thematic level. All projects presentation are published on the meeting [website](#).

The seventeen presentations (four minutes each) were organized in four thematic groups. After the presentations of each group questions from chat and interventions were dealt with.

Thematic group 1: Pandemic Response and Capacity Building

- Curaçao's Concrete Initiatives (Curaçao)
- Elaboration d'un guide de gestion des crises et de continuité de service des commissions nationales (Morocco)
- Leveraging of partnerships and networks to promote mitigation and resilience to COVID-19 impacts (Uganda)
- La Comisión hondureña de Cooperación con la UNESCO en respuesta al COVID 19 (Honduras)
- Education resources for home schooling (Qatar)
- Imaginecole: créons aujourd'hui l'école de demain (Cameroun)

The different presenters explained the various ways adopted to sustain education during the pandemic, through the Associated Schools Project and integration/continuation of digital education.

Webinars have been developed for capacity building and training of educators to produce online lessons to enable the continuation of education through distance learning with an ultimate goal of attaining the objectives of inclusive education with "No one left behind". It was stressed that the digital divide causes more marginalization. The presentations gave some good examples of international cooperation under the incentive of National Commissions.

Actions were initiated to mitigate the effects of the pandemic also in the field of culture. For example, steps were taken to promote a resilient community that safeguards its heritage and fosters creativity. The use of mother tongue has been stimulated and the implementation of ICH safeguarding sustained during the lockdown and pandemic period. The MAB Programme (Reserves) is also a useful tool for resilience activities with youth.

The areas covered by the six presenters included:

- (i) development of tools for virtual classrooms and improved designs.
- (ii) development of virtual learning kits for out-of-school children.
- (iii) development of educational material based on age and grades available even in places without internet connection.
- (iv) creation of partnerships with NGO(s) and other private organisations to carry out the national, regional and interregional programmes put in place.
- (v) cooperation with UNESCO, ICESCO and other technical and financial partners for improved services related to hygiene, sanitation and protection equipment for remote areas.
- (vi) technical assistance for validation of learning.
- (vii) putting in place support programmes for innovation and entrepreneurial skills of women and youth.
- (viii) development of a guide for crisis management and provision of support.

From the six presentations it is clear that during these extraordinary times we have recently been experiencing, the COVID-19 crisis has placed immense pressure on all governments, the economy, societies and people. Social cohesion had to be improved and enhanced during these difficult periods and many National Commissions contributed towards this. National Commissions have been crucial in the promotion of mitigation and resilience to COVID-19. The important role of National Commissions in bringing together and coordinating projects and programmes during lock-down was highlighted by all the presenters. The multi-stakeholder and inter-disciplinary initiatives taken were reflected in all the presentations. National Commissions have been at the heart of enforcing organizational resilience and strengthening collaboration to face the pandemic.

The different challenges have highlighted the relevance of UNESCO's mandate. Different experiences, ideas and innovations which have resulted illustrate the intersectoriality in action of National Commissions which have worked within existing networks and designed others. There has been a plea to governments to provide support and additional resources in a bid to sustain the action.

Thematic group 2: Interregional Cooperation

- How National Commissions can benefit from capacities produced in times of pandemic to develop sustainable relationships in the region and the world? (Islamic Republic of Iran): Iranian National Commission for UNESCO held a commemoration ceremony for Professor Mohaghegh, unique figure of the world of literature and Islamic jurisprudence.
- Development of an M&E Framework for the 2030 Agenda and CESA 2016 25: Experiences of Kenya (Kenya): the presenter from Kenya explained how the National Commission in collaboration with ministries has developed a measurement and evaluation framework for the education sector. This will help with timely reporting at national, regional and global levels as well as promote participation, ownership and accountability.
- 2020 Joint Research Project among National Commissions for UNESCO in East and Southeast Asia & Bridge Programme (Republic of Korea): Korea presented a very good example of cooperation and partnership among National Commissions of different regions. The above programme is designed to contribute to achieving SDG4 by promoting accessibility to education to underprivileged communities in Africa and Asia through National Commission networks.

Thematic group 3: Cultural Heritage and SDGs / Intersectoriality/Climate Action

- Global Solidarity for Heritage and Culture through SOS African Heritage (Germany): Germany provided half a million Euros to help cope with lack of tourism and subsequent problems as a result of COVID-19. The importance of developing digital infrastructure was highlighted. The concept of how to apply fair trade principles to cultural services and goods "Fair Culture" was also explained.
- Heritage and our sustainable future (UK): The Secretary-General from the UK made an exposé on heritage and a sustainable future and how to reduce inequalities. He mentioned the global conference on heritage and a sustainable future, to reflect on how cultural heritage can help achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. The aims are to bring together practitioners and policymakers as well as the private sector.
- Revive the Spirit of Mosul (United Arab Emirates): the UAE shared this example of global cooperation for rehabilitation and restoration of cultural heritage, underlining the different shared goals (job creation knowledge, capacity development and training, reviving the cultural and creative sector, strengthening social cohesion), impacting the local economy beyond the project.

- Culture-based solutions to climate adaptation (Netherlands): cultural dimensions of climate adaptation are often overlooked. Yet, they are fundamental pillars for resilient, healthy and thriving communities. Leitmotiv is 'Changing minds, not the climate'. Culture-based solutions such as local and traditional forms of knowledge, building on experiences from the past, and the use of culture and heritage are of vital importance in order to create the necessary change in mindset and to make climate action more inclusive. The Netherlands made a plea to all National Commissions as follows:

"We call on all National Commissions to join hands: to join us in our efforts by encouraging (on a national level) cross-sectoral collaboration and strengthening knowledge exchange, to share with us concrete examples and projects of culture-based solutions in tackling climate challenges, to become part of the international culture and climate network that we are currently building".

- (Spontaneous) interregional projects on heritage (Romania): the Romanian National Commission mentioned two initiatives, one about sharing between academics, journalists and students with Tunisia, and the other aimed at the exchange of best practice for communities in the performing arts.

Thematic group 4: Social and Human Sciences (SHS) / Other topics

- Deux initiatives pour la culture et l'IA en Afrique centrale (République Démocratique du Congo): the DRC proposed and called for international cooperation for the development of web tools at a sub-regional level i) to monitor the implementation of UNESCO's cultural indicators for the 2030 Agenda, and, ii) to monitor the useful experiences in AI adapted to the context, to avoid a further digital gap.
- Lessons learned and synergy-building on human rights-based approaches in UNESCO (Switzerland): the presentation focused on the way National Commissions could play a role in mainstreaming human rights by linking expertise and experience.
- Open Education Resources & UNESCO & AI (Slovenia): presentation of two initiatives launched by the Slovenian Nat Com with tangible outputs at global and regional levels, also with the support of international cooperation between National Commissions and their networks, still important for the implementation.
- Seminar on SHS (France): the Secretary-General of the French National Commission for UNESCO announced a seminar based on four areas: the individual, the local community (family and neighbourhood), institutions and states, to study the impact of COVID-19 on the individual. It will also include a section to discuss the impact of the pandemic on migration, travel and tourism as well as transport etc.

The above-mentioned presentation by Curaçao also contained a few elements on SHS. Curaçao has initiated programmes to foster social inclusion, intercultural dialogue to achieve knowledge standards, justice, freedom and human dignity in the long term.

One week after the event, the National Commission for UNESCO and ICESCO of the Republic of Kazakhstan also sent a presentation about its initiative: 'Activities of the Kazakhstan National Federation of UNESCO clubs,' available on the event's website.

Key messages

- National Commissions worldwide have had different kinds of experiences in these difficult times caused by the pandemic which has resulted in pressure and crisis on governments and the economy.

- However, in spite of all the difficulties, National Commissions have played their crucial role contributing towards the relevance of UNESCO's mandate.
- Through experience, existing and innovative ideas, existing links and the building of new networks, National Commissions have demonstrated intersectoriality in action.

The virtual mode of communication of this 7th Interregional Meeting did not prevent the National Commissions from pooling their expertise and sharing their dynamic reflections. Once again, different strategies for the priorities Africa, Youth and SIDS were discussed and inputs were provided by National Commissions from all five geographical groups, also at the interregional level, in order to enrich the recommendations on topics aimed at improving the impact of UNESCO's capacity to deliver on the ground. The various sessions reaffirmed the added-value of the network of National Commissions and also strengthened the link to UNESCO Headquarters and field offices.

Annexes:

I – Programme of the Meeting

II – Reports and key recommendations of the five regional group meeting sessions.

III - National Commissions for renewed multilateralism – A Joint contribution of National Commissions for UNESCO to the Strategic Transformation of UNESCO.

Annex I of the Report of the 7th Interregional Meeting of the National Commissions for UNESCO (programme)

Revised Programme (final)

Monday, 22 February 2021

13.00 - 13.30: Opening of the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO.

Welcome Addresses

Mr Thomas Zeltner, Chairperson of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO (video message)

Mr Ignazio Cassis, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation

Election of the Bureau

Mr Genc Seiti, Director of UNESCO's Division of Member States and Partners

Working methods and adoption of the programme

Mr Nicolas Mathieu, Secretary-General of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

1st session

13.30 – 13.45: Priorities for UNESCO's action in 2022-2029

Moderation: Mr Nicolas Mathieu, Secretary-General of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

Introduction: Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux, Director of the Bureau of Strategic Planning of UNESCO (DIR/BSP)

13.45 - 15.15: What is the role of UNESCO towards 2030 in light of global challenges?

Moderation: Mr Jamal Eddine El Aloua, Secretary-General of the Moroccan National Commission for UNESCO

Panel among:

Ms Aminata Touré, Member of UNESCO's High Level Reflection Group for Strategic Transformation

Ms Karima Bennoune, UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights

Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth

Ms Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB)

Mr Peter Messerli, Co-Chair of the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019

Questions/answers

15.15 – 15.30: Wrap-Up / Reminders

Mr Nicolas Mathieu, Secretary-General of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

Tuesday, 23 February 2021

2nd session

Future Quadrennial Programme of UNESCO (41/C5): programmes and products – operational involvement of National Commissions for UNESCO and their national networks

Regional group discussions (*open to participation of Directors of UNESCO Field Offices, ADG, BSP, PAX; possibility of passive participation of all National Commissions in other groups*).

07.00-08.30: Asia-Pacific region

10.00-11.30: Arab region

13.00-14.30: Africa region

16.00-17.30: Europe and North America region

19.00-20.30: Latin America and the Caribbean region

Wednesday, 24 February 2021

3rd session

13.00 – 13.30: Presentation of the results of group discussions

Moderation: Ms Marva Browne, Secretary-General of the Curaçao National Commission for UNESCO

Rapporteurs of the regional group discussions

Questions/answers

13.30 – 14.15: Strategic Transformation

Moderation: Mr Nicolas Mathieu, Secretary-General of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

State of Play

Presentation: Mr Xing Qu, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO

Positioning and Role of National Commissions for a Renewed Multilateralism

Presentation: Mr Lutz Möller, Deputy Secretary-General of the German Commission for UNESCO

High Level Reflection Group Report

Presentation: Ms Maja Zalaznik, Member of UNESCO's High Level Reflection Group for Strategic Transformation

14.15 - 15.00

Moderation: Ms Gabriela Tejada, Vice-Chairperson of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

Discussion, Q/A and key messages

Thursday, 25 February 2021

4th session

13.00 – 15.00: From strategy to implementation of concrete initiatives: the comparative advantage of National Commissions

Moderation: Ms Gabriela Tejada, Vice-Chairperson of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO, Mr Dov Lynch, UNESCO Chief of Section for Relations with Member States

Presentation of Completed / Planned projects from National Commissions

15.00 – 15.30

Closure of the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO

Presentation by the Rapporteurs and Adoption of Conclusions

Mr Kyung Koo Han, Secretary-General of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO

Mme Aneeta Ghoorah, Secretary-General of the Mauritian National Commission for UNESCO

Mr Nicolas Mathieu, Secretary-General of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

Closing remarks

Mr Firmin Edouard Matoko, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Priority Africa and External Relations (ADG/PAX)

Mr Thomas Zeltner, Chairperson of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

Annex II of the Report of the 7th Interregional Meeting of the National Commissions for UNESCO

Key recommendations of the five regional group meetings, session 2 (Tuesday, 23 February 2021)

The National Commissions shared their views on the future C/5 within their regional group. Discussions were led by the three following questions:

1. The implication of fostering **intersectoral collaboration** on the work as the National Commissions for UNESCO, **(Q1)**
2. The role of the National Commissions in fostering and concretizing UNESCO's **international cooperation**. **(Q2)**
3. Recommendations regarding the **format and presentation of the 41 C/4 and 41 C/5** documents. **(Q3)**

Asia-Pacific Region

The recommendations proposed by the delegates of the Asia-Pacific Region for the first topic included i) positioning and empowering the National Commissions within UNESCO's network to strengthen intersectoral collaboration with clear and strategic visions, ii) utilizing UNESCO's projects as flagships for intersectoral activities focusing on regional and interregional collaboration, iii) including possible thematic areas for intersectoral collaboration, such as Education for Sustainable Development, distance learning and digital skills, Global Citizenship Education, ethics of AI, and Media and Information Literacy, iv) establishing comprehensive and focused consultations between UNESCO and the National Commissions on regional and sub-regional issues, and v) strengthening resources in order to implement intersectoral projects.

On the second topic, the delegates recommended that the National Commissions i) mobilize UNESCO's networks and stakeholders, ii) maximize regional and international platforms in concretizing UNESCO's international cooperation, iii) utilize online platforms to initiate joint cooperation among the National Commissions during the pandemic, and iv) develop specific Country Plans to support/complement 41 C/4 and 41 C/5. They also recommended that the Secretariat draw on lessons learned from Global Priority Africa and adopt them for the SIDS.

The recommendations of the delegates in regard to the third topic were i) including detailed information relevant to the roles of the National Commissions in relation to the effective planning and implementation of UNESCO's programmes, especially in the context of intersectoral collaboration, for instance by listing national networks across different sectors that have the most relevance and potential for the delivery of programmes that call for intersectoral collaboration, ii) ensuring that the 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 documents are more focused, concise and better structured, and iii) setting more measurable and quantitative targets for performance indicators.

Arab Region

On the first topic, the delegates from the Arab region recommended the following – i) encouraging joint projects and activities at the regional level to reduce unnecessary costs and efforts, ii) exchanging expertise and increasing interdependence, iii) putting forward joint projects and initiatives among the National Commissions and implementing them at the regional and international levels, iv) promoting science programmes, science education and scientific research to reduce the gap between the scientific elite and the public, which has been evident during the Covid-19 crisis, v) supporting the ASPnet, UNESCO Clubs and UNESCO Chairs, particularly by allocating adequate budgets for the ASPnet programmes within the draft 41 C/4 and 41 C/5, and vi) focusing on Global Citizenship

Education, outlining it in much greater detail in the draft 41 C/4 and 41 C/5, while working to secure funds for the relevant programmes.

The delegates' recommendations on the second topic were to i) double efforts for capacity building, joint workshops, celebrating international events and encouraging joint initiatives at the regional level with the aim of strengthening UNESCO's international participation, ii) encourage establishment of a database, at the regional and international levels, of experts in educational, scientific, cultural and technological fields, and making the database available to the National Commissions, iii) further activate Category 2 Centres in line with the interests of the National Commissions and the Member States, iv) work to develop project management skills and create appropriate mechanisms to evaluate them, and v) provide qualitative and quantitative performance indicators to guide the improvement of joint international work.

On the third topic, the delegates recommended i) building current strategies based on evaluations of performance during previous strategies, while addressing the challenges and weaknesses observed earlier to avoid recurrence, ii) translating strategies into Arabic, as a lack of translation has been observed in recent years, although Arabic is one of the official languages of UNESCO, iii) revising country priorities and redefining them in line with available financial resources, iv) formulating clearer and better quantitative and qualitative performance indicators to measure the long-term outcomes and impact on all groups in society, and v) considering rewriting the Strategic Objectives as they remain unclear at the moment.

Africa Region

The recommendations of the delegates from the Africa Region on the first topic were to i) embrace intersectoral planning, ii) adopt and apply holistic multidisciplinary approaches in addressing cross-cutting issues and challenges, for example, youth, gender, culture and social services, through UNESCO programmes, iii) strengthen research capability in all UNESCO programmes, e.g. through capacity building initiatives, iv) mobilize youth from Africa and other parts of the world to interact with each other, v) integrate the goals and aspirations of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

The delegates' recommendations on the second topic were to i) strengthen collaboration between UNESCO and the National Commissions, and among the National Commissions, ii) establish and strengthen partnerships among the National Commissions, institutions, private sector and other networks, regionally and interregionally, iii) engage and involve youth in UNESCO meetings and other initiatives e.g. organizing UNESCO Youth General Conferences, iv) promote entrepreneurial skills development among young people, v) strengthen the National Commissions' systems to effectively deliver on their mandate, and vi) increase the use of the National Commissions platform that has been provided to share information and best practices.

Regarding the 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 documents, the delegates recommended that the National Commissions should take advantage of the two documents and utilize them during their planning stage. Furthermore, it was recommended that the National Commissions should participate in local, regional and international mobilization of partners and financial resources to complement the 41 C/5.

Europe and North America Region

The recommendations of the delegates from the Europe and North America Region on the first topic were i) to increase consultations and enhance knowledge sharing, using platforms already available, such as the National Commissions' interregional and regional networks, in an inclusive manner and benefiting from new digital tools, ii) to encourage use of potential within National Commissions themselves, as they link diverse programmes, networks (e.g. Chairs, ASPnet schools, Geoparks, Cities), stakeholders (e.g. expert communities, civil society, youth), transversal themes (e.g. Global Priorities and Priority Groups), and cross-cutting themes (e.g. climate change, gender, human rights,

peace education), iii) to create a special unit for ASPnet and the UNITWIN Programme to better achieve the relevant Sustainable Development Goals. The delegates also identified thematic areas that require intersectoral collaboration, including use of a human-rights based approach, especially in areas of work such as freedom of expression, Education for Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship Education, ethics of AI, and water management. They also emphasized that intersectorality should be seen as a “must” to diminish the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the second topic, the delegates recommended that National Commissions i) enlarge the use of their networks to help designations and partners to take part in international cooperation and dialogue, by connecting and mobilizing stakeholders (e.g. in campaigns, joint projects in WH and MAB, regional networks), ii) utilize their role as advisers to national and UNESCO governing bodies, iii) work on their communications using the model of ‘telling a story’ to communicate about UNESCO on the country level, and iv) leverage the partnerships that emerge from the new UNESCO Partnership Strategy.

In regard to the third topic, the delegates recommended i) providing a shorter and more readable format of 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 to increase usage of the documents as tools and guidance, in order to ensure better visibility and advocacy of UNESCO’s work on the ground, ii) adapting the language and format of the documents to the needs and perspectives of different target groups, iii) testing the design of a new communication tool for outreach purposes with the National Commissions, and iv) increasing visibility of the National Commissions’ work through awareness campaigns on UNESCO’s social media platforms.

Latin America and the Caribbean Region

On the first topic, the delegates from the Latin America and the Caribbean Region recommended strengthening cross-sector processes across the region, to strengthen UNESCO’s mandate in the region and to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals. They emphasized that intersectorality was extremely important in establishing relationships between Field Offices, Regional Offices, Headquarters and the National Commissions. They also recommended that National Commissions host joint projects, seminars, regional projects and meetings, in order to enhance intersectorality. They mentioned that platforms could be used to strengthen democracy in education and the National Commissions. The delegates noted that the pandemic had provided challenges in all sectors to the National Commissions, particularly in the fields of education and culture, and therefore they recommended promoting collaboration and support among the National Commissions at the regional level. They also recommended that the Secretariat make use of the intersectoral approach for the purpose of enhancing the Organization’s programmes, while at the same time not losing the core of them.

In regard to the second topic, the delegates suggested that National Commissions should promote cooperation through the digitalization of educational tools, which would better enable them to share best practices inclusive of the visions and values related to international solidarity. They recommended that the Secretariat take steps to strengthen the capacities of the National Commissions in the Caribbean and in SIDS, taking into account the small size of these states, inequality with other larger countries in the region, and issues relating to limited resources, the digital divide, oceans, and climate change. The delegates recommended that Field Offices consult with the National Commissions to identify their priorities and support them in executing their projects. They also emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of capacity building, training tools and best practices. It was also highlighted that financial support from the Secretariat is necessary for implementation of programmes and to realize positive outcomes in the region.

On the third topic, the delegates said that strengthening intersectoral collaboration would be determined by the content of the upcoming 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 documents. They noted that it would also be determined by how National Commissions reach out and deepen their relationships with

partners in the Member States. The delegates argued that the role of UNESCO in promoting sustainable development and fostering peace must be clarified during the next General Conference. They agreed on the need to strengthen intersectorality by strengthening the capacity of the SIDS and Caribbean countries especially during the current pandemic, which they noted was impacting the education and culture sectors. They added that this also involved provision of training and capacity-building sessions as well as sharing of best practices. The delegates said they believed that the 41 C/4 and 41 C/5 documents would be useful tools for their work, and highlighted the need for the Member States to be provided with sufficient information.

Annex III of the Report of the 7th Interregional Meeting of the National Commissions for UNESCO

Joint contribution¹ of National Commissions for UNESCO to the Strategic Transformation of UNESCO

“National Commissions for renewed multilateralism”

The Strategic Transformation process has created high expectations by Member States and National Commissions for substantial positive change of UNESCO in order to upscale impact on the 2030 Agenda. Through this paper, we seek to support moving UNESCO towards a long-term, impact-oriented engagement with its Member States and civil society. We are convinced that National Commissions are a huge asset for UNESCO and multilateralism at large. We are convinced that one of the most effective levers for UNESCO to gain impact is to strengthen its interaction with National Commissions and, through them, with UNESCO networks, as multipliers for UNESCO and its goals. This will allow UNESCO to be a strong and proud “hub and spoke” organisation for a renewed multilateralism, a UN agency of the future, deeply rooted in vital civil society and academia networks across the globe. UNESCO’s key asset is its intersectoral and network character. Let us exploit this huge potential!

National Commissions, as a constitutional part of UNESCO as an intergovernmental organization, need to be fully engaged in the Strategic Transformation, providing their perspective in order for the Strategic Transformation to succeed. They have in-depth experience and comprehensive knowledge of the factors that drive real long-term impact of UNESCO programmes and conventions. National Commissions add enormous value for UNESCO in multiple dimensions, in particular for the presence and visibility of UNESCO in the Member States and for securing the participation of their Member State in UNESCO in a full way. They often coordinate and/or manage the national implementation of UNESCO networks based on conventions and programmes. They make independent conceptual contributions. They directly cooperate at (sub-)regional and interregional level, below the diplomatic level, and therefore strengthen multilateralism, trust and collaboration in line with the objectives of the UNESCO constitution.

In addition to the National Commissions, another unique feature and comparative advantage of UNESCO is its multitude of high-quality and ambitious networks, including designations and designated sites, that are increasingly mobilized and activated. These networks include World Heritage Properties, Intangible Cultural Heritage elements, Memory of the World entries, Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks, ASPnet schools, Chairs, Category 2 Centres, UNEVOC Centres, national committees of intergovernmental programmes, Creative Cities, Learning Cities, Sustainable and Inclusive Cities, Clubs and Associations. These networks and their network members are and should become even better multipliers for UNESCO and its objectives, individually and collectively.

While the new Comprehensive Partnership Strategy acknowledges these networks, it does not capture all networks and does not fully capture the central role of National Commissions, in particular in relation to UNESCO networks and programmes. Through these networks, UNESCO can continuously reach out to civil society and academia, build shared narratives with them and engage them in multilateral dialogue. The landmark Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO of 2010 had already made this observation: “There is limited appreciation among Member States or the Secretariat of the potential of this broader UNESCO 'community', favouring instead an 'institutional' perspective that privileges the formal, top-down, Headquarters-led UNESCO.”

¹ This paper is developed in an iterative process, involving, if possible, all National Commissions for UNESCO. The first draft had been formulated in October 2019 by the National Commissions for UNESCO of Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland, specifically addressing pillar 3 of the Strategic Transformation. During the C/4-C/5 consultations of National Commissions in 2020, it will continuously be further developed in an inclusive way. This paper mainly addresses issues that are relevant in the interaction of UNESCO with its National Commissions and other networks. It is an informal contribution of our National Commissions, put forward in the spirit of enriching the reflection towards a successful reform of the Organization. It does not represent views formally endorsed by our governments.

We believe in the potential of UNESCO, together with its National Commissions, to leverage these extensive networks to function as an exemplary “hub and spoke” organization, reaching out to and engaging with local communities in a unique way and then feeding insights and good practice back into the UN system. Thus, UNESCO fosters scalability and leverage, delivering impact, innovation and leadership for the 2030 Agenda, pursuing its overarching goals of human rights, peace, freedom and sustainable development.

For UNESCO and its National Commissions, it is a combined task to empower, engage and further mobilize these networks and broader civil society; to support their independent contributions to multilateral dialogue; to improve their quality assurance and quality development (criteria, operational guidelines, resilient monitoring and evaluation procedures); to improve national, regional and interregional networking and the ambition of the work of each networks and its members in terms of content. Each network and its members should be understood as partners of UNESCO and its National Commissions in addressing issues such as global citizenship, sustainable development, peace, intercultural dialogue and diversity. Synergies across networks and more intersectoral offers to each network should be identified by the entire Secretariat. Coordination units within the Secretariat should be better staffed and funded; the different coordination units should be better connected across sectors in order to optimize procedures and improve quality. Overcoming any political instrumentalisation of nomination/inscription processes as well as overcoming “competitive self-interest-driven inscriptions” is a high priority across all programmes.

In this context, UNESCO should work hand-in-glove with National Commissions, which should be entrusted more implementation authority, if they have the resources and mandate. There is need for dynamic co-ordination and information sharing between National Commissions, their Member States and UNESCO. Improved cooperation modalities are needed in particular in Member States with Field Offices, since there remain cases of futile competition between Field Offices and National Commissions for mandate and visibility.

We call on the Director-General to advocate for National Commissions in all high-level interaction with ministers and government officials. We encourage training for Secretariat staff across all sectors, about the role and comparative advantage of National Commissions. UNESCO should also ask its Member States to empower all National Commissions to cooperate at sub-regional, regional and international level, both the National Commissions themselves and the different networks through them.

This leads us to additional recommendations, beyond UNESCO networks. We believe that UNESCO can go a long way in improving its action in a long-term and impact-oriented way. The key task is to overcome silos – silo-thinking between sectors, but also within sectors and within divisions. The key words are: bundling action, scaling-up action and learning from own best practice. We believe that UNESCO benefits greatly from bundling and integrating different forms of intervention, such as policy reviews, institutional capacity building and monitoring and evaluation support, moving beyond one-off interactions. Across the Secretariat, UNESCO requires a more coordinated approach towards national stakeholders.

For the period 2022-2029,

...We see UNESCO having overcome political instrumentalization, speaking up and being heard in the name of human rights, peace, freedom and sustainable development.

...We see UNESCO with a sharpened portfolio of clear-cut and adequately funded programmes, built around the priorities that correspond to the unique features of UNESCO.

...We see UNESCO organized effectively, learning across sectors from experience and working oriented towards long-term impact, scalability and leverage.

...We see UNESCO as a key player and powerful partner within the UN system and in the cooperation with other multilateral actors.

...We see UNESCO communicating clearly and effectively, capturing people's imagination by telling its story in new ways and linking those stories to global and national priorities.

...We see UNESCO effectively supporting its Member States to implement policies in line with its goals and priorities, in a long-term and coherent perspective.

...We therefore call upon UNESCO to closely interact and coordinate with its networks and above all the National Commissions as multipliers for UNESCO and its goals.

To make UNESCO a strong and proud platform for a renewed multilateralism.

Annex: In-depth elaboration of the arguments on pages 1&2

1. The background

The world is undergoing fundamental changes: urgent transformation needs towards sustainability are not sufficiently well addressed. The political and societal response to the persisting lack of learning opportunities, poverty, inequity and hunger, digital transformation, demographic change, gender inequality and increasing migration as well as global environmental change is not enough. This is demonstrated most strikingly by the youth call to action in response to the climate crisis. The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) sets out much of what needs to be addressed; its implementation is widely insufficient so far.

All implications of the Covid-19 pandemic cannot yet be fully understood, but what has become obvious already is that the global challenges of inequality and "leaving no one behind" have increased in unprecedented ways.

At the same time, rising nationalism and populism are undermining the achievements of decades of global institution-building, and in particular, multilateral organisations and their agreements. We need more multilateralism today and we need to defend its achievements.

UNESCO is key to the multilateral system; it is a global forum for both governments and civil society to discuss, elaborate and codify ambitious concepts based on shared values and empirical facts. Due to its culture and communication/information mandate, UNESCO is a platform to reach consensus on concepts that are at risk of being "(re-) nationalised" by governments with reference to a distorted form of "cultural diversity". Due to its education and science mandate, UNESCO underpins such consensus-building with scientific evidence and disseminates it to all societies. Through its convening power and by connecting the different facets of its wide portfolio, UNESCO provides the opportunity for much needed interdisciplinary approaches. Thus, UNESCO is key to negotiate the future of our joint understanding of the "global commons", "globalization", "public space", "public interest", "human dignity and security" and "participation", for peace and sustainable development.

As new risks emerge that threaten peace, such a climate change, inequality, pandemics, and challenges to multilateralism, new defences to manage those risks must be constructed. UNESCO with its 193 Member States provides a strong multilateral intergovernmental platform, which is connected to people via National Commissions and UNESCO designations: This institutional solution seems custom-fit for such new defences.

Over the last three decades, UNESCO has standardised its practices in line with other UN specialised agencies. UNESCO is striving to address the requirements of "One UN", of the 2030 Agenda and the

UN system reform. UNESCO indeed makes great efforts to demonstrate impact, effectiveness and efficiency just like any other modern organisation. This led some to believe that UNESCO has lost much of its appeal as a forum for the intellectual, ethical and civil-society based cooperation and dialogue of the world.

In contrast, one of UNESCO's unique features, beyond its standard setting and convening power at the highest, strategic level, is its multitude of high-quality and ambitious networks. Through these networks, UNESCO can continuously reach out to civil society and academia, build on their independent contribution and engage them in multilateral dialogue. The 199 National Commissions for UNESCO are the key network nodes connecting UNESCO with its diverse networks.

The 199 National Commissions for UNESCO throughout the world are structured and equipped very differently; they have a wide range of diverging responsibilities and working methods. What they have in common is that they have a decisive role in shaping the impact and visibility of UNESCO in their respective Member State. The relevance of UNESCO is both created through global consensus-building and at country-level. Thus, the impact UNESCO has and the perception UNESCO generates at the level of the societies to whose sustainability and development it intends to contribute in concrete terms, are key elements of UNESCO's success. National Commissions for UNESCO are key factors for UNESCO's success.

2. UNESCO's current challenges

a. Defending multilateralism

Multilateralism requires long negotiations, compromises and complex international organizations. It is increasingly challenged by populism and nationalism and their unilateral approaches. UNESCO cannot solve the crisis of multilateralism by itself, but it should demonstrate why multilateralism is also pragmatically the wise choice in the long run. By engaging its various networks and wider civil society structurally, UNESCO can build a new multilateralism model and make a convincing case for multilateralism.

b. Mitigating political instrumentalization

We welcome the successful efforts by the Director-General to mitigate several notorious cases of political instrumentalization of UNESCO programmes and bodies. Addressing all forms of instrumentalization in all programmes and conventions remains a key task for UNESCO's leadership, since they run counter to the goals of the UNESCO constitution. We consider it valuable in this context to recall the provisions of most UNESCO programmes and conventions that foresee the representation of Member States by experts in the decision-making bodies. Expertise and experience from UNESCO networks inform and enrich the intergovernmental dialogue. National Commissions can promote relevant dialogues between government, academia, civil society, and in particular UNESCO networks, both at national and international level.

c. Sharpening the profile

UNESCO has within its portfolio several highly significant and well-respected programmes – and many other activities without sufficiently proven impact. The relevance and quality of programmes does not necessarily depend on extrabudgetary funds raised on their behalf. UNESCO still is active across too wide a spectrum both in terms of sectoral policies and in terms of forms of interventions. Activities are not always well planned, coordinated or communicated and are sometimes too small-scale. The result is a lack of profile, in particular vis-à-vis national policy-making. Thanks to their expertise and networks, National Commissions can identify the future potential of relevant programmes. This would require appropriate formats for the 41C/4 consultation of National Commissions as a global network leading to informed and bold decisions regarding UNESCO's profile.

d. Improving visibility

Visibility cannot be equated with the result of communication, visibility is mostly the result of impact over a long time-frame. UNESCO does not fully identify the impact of its work or replicate its good practices, and does not communicate well enough its true relevance and effectiveness to its political constituencies. Public communication of UNESCO is often insufficiently coordinated with others who might tell its story to others and significantly increase UNESCO's visibility – in particular with National Commissions. UNESCO needs to reach out to National Commissions in order to tell the story of UNESCO in the 2020s in such a collaborative way that it captures the imagination and passions of people, with a limited number of unifying, clear and compelling stories. The new communication strategy, in order to be concerted, structured and impactful, has to foresee appropriate cooperation and support mechanisms with UNESCO networks, in particular National Commissions, in their public relations efforts. For example, if UNESCO were to inform the National Commissions in advance about press activities on certain highlights, the National Commissions could replicate these messages and thus strengthen the visibility of UNESCO in their respective Member States.

e. Responding to a competitive environment

In the last thirty years, Member States, foundations, philanthropists and others have created new formats of cooperation which compete with UNESCO. Foundations, think tanks, NGOs and associations often make use of the concepts and programmes developed by UNESCO and use the room for action only opened up by UNESCO, without referencing UNESCO, and thus weakening the very basis of their action. It is necessary for UNESCO to defend its political leadership vis-à-vis these actors. UNESCO should be on the offensive for its intellectual, human-rights based and ethical leadership in the key areas with a competitive advantage. By activating and engaging its networks, UNESCO will be able to underscore such leadership.

3. Added value – for UNESCO – of the National Commissions for UNESCO

- a. National Commissions *secure the permanent presence and visibility of UNESCO in the Member States*, in the long-term and across programmes, beyond one-off engagement by the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris and Regional Offices. For example, they regularly brief ministers (of several line ministries) and the wider leadership level of ministries, participate in parliamentary committee hearings, inter-ministerial meetings and bodies, and support participatory processes of governments with civil society, etc.
- b. National Commissions secure the presence and visibility of UNESCO and its programmes *at the state, district, municipal and local level*, which UNESCO itself could hardly ever achieve. The same applies to national institutions, umbrella associations, academia, NGOs and civil society in a country, again in a long-term and systematic way, beyond one-off engagement of the Secretariat with selected national institutions or NGOs.
- c. National Commissions *secure the participation of their Member State in UNESCO* in a more comprehensive and long-term way, beyond ad-hoc priorities. One example is ensuring that the Member State submits all due state reports on standard-setting instruments (conventions and recommendations), e.g. by formulating draft reports and conducting national consultations. Another example is ensuring that government representatives and national experts participate in specific UNESCO fora, even if they may not be considered important at that moment. Such participation can in turn lead to a UNESCO programme becoming a national priority.
- d. National Commissions *coordinate and safeguard long-term policy processes*. For example, they initiate and continuously uphold protracted ratification processes of UNESCO conventions, they recall previous government commitments to implement UNESCO recommendations, they often

lead the national implementation of the 2030 Education Agenda or ESD-GAP/ESD2030 or GCED, and they promote progressive policies and instruments of UNESCO.

- e. National Commissions *coordinate and/or manage the national implementation of UNESCO networks* based on conventions and programmes (e.g. World Heritage Properties, ICH elements, MoW entries, Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks, ASPnet, Chairs, Category 2 Centers, national committees of intergovernmental programmes, Creative Cities, Learning Cities, Sustainable and Inclusive Cities). This includes quality assurance, monitoring the fulfilment of criteria, further differentiating and developing criteria, national and regional networking, inter-network cooperation, and promoting relevant education and research. Thus, they can considerably improve the calibre of programme implementation, which is key to the effectiveness and visibility of UNESCO in the Member States.
- f. National Commissions themselves have high *convening power* and are able to establish consensus between different national governmental, non-governmental and academic stakeholders, thus contributing to a coherent voice of the Member State within UNESCO.
- g. National Commissions *strengthen the visibility of UNESCO in the Member State*. For example, they do this through establishing long-term relations with editorial offices and journalists, through issuing press releases in the local language and targeted to current national discourses, through offering interview partners in the local language, through the translation of UNESCO publications, and dedicated press conferences and events.
- h. National Commissions contribute to a coherent practice regarding the *use of name and logo of UNESCO* across all programmes.
- i. National Commissions mobilise *expertise from the Member State for UNESCO debates*. For a universal organization such as UNESCO, it is of paramount importance that its intellectual and/or policy debates draw upon the widest possible expertise, from as many Member States as possible, and represent the full diversity of an academic and/or policy discourse.
- j. National Commissions offer *independent conceptual contributions* and have initiated substantial debates at UNESCO often leading to programme activities. This expertise is also mobilised through encouraging and supporting ratification of Conventions and membership of Intergovernmental Programmes.
- k. National Commissions directly *strengthen (sub-)regional and interregional cooperation* among Member States, and therefore multilateralism, trust and collaboration in line with the objectives of the UNESCO constitution. This has been the case in many transnational (serial) nominations for World Heritage, ICH or MoW, in the creation or strengthening of (sub-) regional networks of UNESCO designated sites and through (sub-) regional and interregional networks of National Commissions themselves.
- l. National Commissions support *dialogue with potential donors* of extra-budgetary funds to UNESCO, in particular with line ministries of their government.

In short, activities organized by National Commissions directly build profile and create outstanding visibility and long-term reliable trust for UNESCO at the national level.

4. Strengthening individual networks – non-exhaustive list of examples

- a. *ASPnet*: This global network of UNESCO has enormous potential and an excellent reputation in many Member States. Many Member States and their National Commissions have invested heavily in recent years in improving quality assurance procedures, networking at national level and the ambition of the work of schools in terms of content. Beyond the small, active and committed coordination unit, the Secretariat seems to identify only few synergies with other UNESCO activities. In contrast, UNESCO should identify ASPnet as a key asset across the UNESCO Secretariat. The coordination unit should be empowered to ensure full quality assurance of the network (based on the 2018 guide for national coordinators and the 2019 member guide),

stronger coordination of transnational exchange and cooperation, more offers analogous to the 2016-2018 project on the Whole School Approach, and stronger incentives for the networking of schools with UNESCO designated sites in their vicinity, etc.

- b. *World Heritage*: Increasingly, Member States are strengthening the management systems of their World Heritage Site properties in terms of staff, capacity and infrastructure which enables them to fulfil their mandate as “World Heritage actors”. Thus, more and more sites are becoming active partners of UNESCO at the local level, communicating its goals and values to a wide community and strengthening 2030 Agenda related action. They cooperate nationally and internationally. This trend should actively be advanced by UNESCO together with National Commissions. World Heritage properties should also be understood as places fostering community cohesion. Also, there are growing expectations upon UNESCO to take a stance to prevent and counter threats to World Heritage properties. Innovative formats are needed to strengthen credible protection. Another challenge for UNESCO’s credibility is to find solutions for politicized processes of nomination and dealing with State of Conservation reports. In addition, transnational serial and transboundary nominations should be encouraged wherever possible.
- c. *Intangible Cultural Heritage*: As in the case of World Heritage, UNESCO should understand and address the bearer communities of the ICH elements inscribed as partners in promoting goals such as global citizenship, sustainable development, peace, and disaster prevention. In several Member States, National Commissions already pursue this approach. Also, overcoming any political instrumentalization of the inscription processes is a high priority. The Secretariat should work with Member States and National Commissions so that inscriptions are not pursued competitively, but rather through encouraging transnational processes including inventories. Another urgent issue is to limit the commercialization of ICH.
- d. *Memory of the World*: Beyond the current reform efforts, which should i.a. overcome instrumentalization, what has been said above about World Heritage properties and ICH elements also applies to depositories of MoW register entries.
- e. *Biosphere Reserves*: UNESCO Biosphere Reserves should be recognized as an asset across the house. Many of them are already active partners in addressing global issues such as climate change. Through global, regional and national meetings, Biosphere Reserves have significantly improved the use of their potential as active multipliers. Increasingly, National Commissions interact with their Biosphere Reserves in a meaningful way, involving them into all aspects of their work, and fostering national/international networking. Still, further improved formats for regional and interregional networking are needed, as well as for North-South-South twinning partnerships. UNESCO needs to strengthen further the quality assurance of the global network through the consistent transformation of the "Process of Excellence" into a permanent process.
- f. *Global Geoparks*: In the few years since the adoption of the IGGP, Global Geoparks have already successfully positioned themselves as partners of UNESCO. Increasingly, National Commissions interact with their Global Geoparks, fostering national/international networking in a meaningful way, involving them into all aspects of their work. UNESCO can leverage this approach and further improve IGGP quality assurance and support mechanisms.
- g. *Chairs/UNITWIN*: Many Member States and their National Commissions have invested heavily in recent years in improving quality assurance (accreditation) procedures, networking at the national level and the ambition of the work of Chairs in terms of content. Within UNESCO, even stronger quality assurance of the global network and feedback to the Chairs is needed (cp. VINCI recommendations). There should be more concrete and more intersectoral offers by UNESCO to activate the network. UNESCO Chairs foster international academic cooperation and innovation for the 2030 Agenda. Chairs can contribute to breaking the silos between programmes. Finally, Chairs should also be regularly involved by UNESCO when implementing its programmes as has recently been done with the “Futures of Education” consultation.

5. Inter-sectoral recommendations for the Strategic Transformation

It has been emphasized above repeatedly: It is in the interest of UNESCO to better utilize one of its most important unique features: its networks. UNESCO should significantly increase human and financial resources for guidance, quality assurance and quality development of these networks (criteria, operational guidelines, resilient monitoring and evaluation procedures) and for their active management. This concerns all relevant Secretariat entities, most of which have been severely cut in recent years. In this context, UNESCO should work hand-in-hand with National Commissions, which could take over some delegated mandate. The goal is that all network members have meaningful interaction in the respective (and intertwined) networks (at national, regional and interregional level), as entry points for cultural and scientific multilateral diplomacy. All network members should become multipliers for UNESCO and its objectives, individually and collectively.

UNESCO should develop, across programmes, new and overarching procedures to prevent political instrumentalization, to curb the number of nominations in the national self-interest, to foster transboundary and transnational serial nominations and to increase the quality of all procedures.

Member States require UNESCO to plan and implement policy-support processes (e.g. for a new national literacy policy) in a long-term and impact-oriented way. This means that UNESCO should bundle and integrate different forms of intervention, such as policy reviews, institutional capacity building and monitoring and evaluation support, instead of one-off interactions. Across the Secretariat, UNESCO requires a more coordinated approach towards national stakeholders. Such coordination should increase UNESCO's leverage and also the scalability of its action. Also within the Secretariat, stronger coordination to learn from good practices across different sectors is needed. This applies in particular to the Secretariat's action on the Sustainable Development Goals, which too often is still sectoral; this includes as well feeding solutions into UN National Voluntary Reporting processes.

We are convinced that UNESCO will benefit from stronger cooperation and coordination with the National Commissions as a constitutional part of UNESCO. This will enable them to emphasise their added value for UNESCO (compare above 3). For this to happen, we encourage training for Secretariat staff as part of their standard induction process and across all sectors about the role and comparative advantage of National Commissions. UNESCO should again call upon Member States to foster their support to their National Commissions, possibly adapt their structure, mandate, composition and functioning to the aims of Art. VII.

UNESCO should also ask its Member States to empower all National Commissions to cooperate at sub-regional, regional and international level, both the National Commissions themselves and the different networks through them.