



United Nations
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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LIMA ACTION PLAN – RESULTS OF THE MID-TERM REVIEW

1. In-line with action E3.2 contained in the Lima Action Plan (LAP) for MAB and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves (2016-2025), and at the request of the the UNESCO Natural Science Sector (SC), UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service (IOS) has undertaken a mid-term evaluation of the MAB Strategy (2015-2025) and the LAP.
2. The full evaluation report is available, along with the management response from the SC Sector, on the IOS web site (<https://en.unesco.org/about-us/ios/services#evaluation>), and as an information document to this MAB ICC session (SC-20/CONF.232/INF.4). The evaluation report will also be presented to the UNESCO Executive Board at its 210th session (doc 210 EX/10, see: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/collections/governing-bodies/executive-board?locale=en>).
3. The purpose of the evaluation, which was conducted between December 2019 and June 2020 by an external team of evaluation consultants and thematic experts, was to provide the MAB Secretariat, the International Coordinating Council and other stakeholders an understanding of the progress achieved in the implementation of the MAB Strategy and its LAP, with the overall aim to strengthen the implementation process and seize new opportunities, where relevant.

Key findings

4. The evaluation, which included the active engagement of a wide range of MAB Stakeholders, assessed the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the MAB Programme Strategy in order to draw conclusions, identify lessons learned and formulate action-oriented recommendations. The key findings thereof were summarized as follows:

Relevance

- The mid-term evaluation points to a high degree of relevance of the MAB 2015-2025 Strategy and its Lima Action Plan with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Member States, especially in Africa and Arab States, largely consider the MAB Programme relevant to the needs of their countries. The majority of MAB stakeholders deem the MAB Programme to respond to current global needs;
- The MAB 2015-2025 Strategy lacks a gender lens.



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Efficiency

- The MAB Programme use of resources is very limited yet it still achieves significant results;
- Limited resources are a bottleneck at all levels to achieving greater results in a timelier manner;
- There exists a real leverage effect of MAB resources to attract more external resources. However, the visibility of the Programme among donors is low.

Effectiveness and impact

- The Lima Action Plan is an effective implementation document for the MAB Strategy 2015-2025;
- The level of achievement of the MAB Programme Strategy over the period in scope for this mid-term evaluation is reasonable;
- While the vast majority of national stakeholders claims that the MAB Programme has had real effects on the communities inside Biosphere Reserves (BR), few consider there are effects outside the BRs;
- The MAB Programme contributes to the global and Member States' achievement of SDGs 13 and 15.

Sustainability

- The MAB Programme leads to long-term effects for individuals and communities through its environmental awareness and training activities, as well as through its support for local empowerment and job creation;
- Positive effects are highly dependent on the involvement, means and level of commitment of local and national actors, which are often still limited.

Conclusions

5. In terms of overall conclusions and the way forward, the mid-term evaluation underlines that the MAB Programme and its Strategy are widely deemed relevant, particularly in achieving SDGs 13 and 15, but it is essential to enhance its visibility by giving greater prominence to its added value and innovative approach to Sustainable Development. Communication is focused on sharing of good practices, but lacks data with concrete feedback on the implementation of the Programme and its impacts in society, hindering the capacity to raise greater resources.

6. The evaluation asserts that the design of the Lima Action Plan was more effective than that of the Madrid Action Plan (2008-2013), with fewer actions and targeted responsibilities. However, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is not carried out systematically and the level of action, governance and empowerment of Biosphere Reserves is heterogeneous. A less cumbersome but more effective M&E system is needed. Monitoring data can then be used by the MAB Secretariat in HQ and Field Offices to strengthen their support to MAB National Committees as well as to Biosphere Reserves.

7. Lack of financial resources is the main bottleneck according to the evaluation. The human resources constraints are also significant and this has an impact on the implementation of activities. Synergies within UNESCO and with other international programmes have been mobilised to increase resources for implementation, however there are missed opportunities particularly with organisations dedicated to sustainable development. Finally, the involvement of



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youth is critical to the Programme's dynamism and sustainability, especially through youth forums. Their role should be developed and structured within the Programme at all levels.

Recommendations

8. The evaluation outlines the following recommendations for the future implementation of the MAB Strategy and the LAP:

- i. Increase the outreach of the lessons learned as a result of the MAB programme.
- ii. Increase the visibility of the MAB programme and its benefits by increasing the communication efforts already undertaken.
- iii. Strengthen support to the MAB National Committees in developing (and emerging) countries.
- iv. Strengthen support to the Biosphere Reserves.
- v. Reinforce the MAB programme partnerships within and outside of UNESCO.
- vi. Develop and structure the role of young people within the programme, at all levels.
- vii. Ensure that a less cumbersome but more effective M&E system is in place.

9. As outlined in the annex to the evaluation report, the SC Sector management response to the evaluation and its recommendations is positive stating that its recommendations will be followed-up by the UNESCO MAB Secretariat and UNESCO Field Office within the purview of their responsibilities, in close cooperation with relevant MAB stakeholders, as identified in the LAP.

10. The proposed draft decision contained in the document on the evaluation submitted to the 210th session of the Executive Board (210 EX/10), furthermore includes the following lines:

- Calls on all Member States, partners and donors to increase their commitment, active participation and financial support for the implementation of the MAB Programme Strategy (2015-2025) and its Lima Action Plan (2016-2025);
- Calls on senior management to include the Programme as a priority area in the Structured Financing Dialogue processes;
- Invites the Director-General to enable the adequate follow up to all recommendations.

11. The MAB Council is invited to take stock of and to discuss the Mid-term Evaluation of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme Strategy (2015-2025) and its Lima Action Plan (2016-2025, its key findings, conclusions and recommendations.