

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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

Thirty-third session

Abuja, Nigeria (Hybrid meeting)

13 – 17 September 2021

ITEM 7. PROVISIONAL AGENDA: Presentation of the MAB UNESCO International Environmental Experts Network “UNESCO Earth Network”

1. Background

On December 1st, 2020, Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO launched a Multi-Partner Trust Fund “UNESCO Network of international environmental experts- the UNESCO Earth Network” with a global resource mobilization target of USD 20 million over an initial period of 4 Years.

The Fund became effective with the signature of a funding agreement between Italy, the first donor and founding partner, and UNESCO, with a contribution of USD 3.9 million over three years.

The Fund offers an international cooperation platform in the area of biodiversity, oceans and climate change between experts and UNESCO Member States, opening the door to transformative actions within territories to regenerate human/nature relationships and restore ecosystems, conserve ecosystem harmony and amplify the power of youth, which are the three pillars of UNESCO's strategic actions for biodiversity.

2. Purpose of the UNESCO Earth Network

Through the “UNESCO Network of international environmental experts’ training will be provided in the restoration and conservation of ecosystems in biosphere reserves, geoparks and natural heritage sites. The program also aims to regenerate the relationship between humans and nature through the promotion of good practices, knowledge and

know-how that respect biodiversity, as well as the elements of intangible heritage related to local and indigenous knowledge and practices.

The main objectives of the program are centered on:

- (i) support to capacity for ecosystem management, restoration and resilience in UNESCO-designated sites (or sites in the process of being designated), through training and exchange of experiences and good practices;
- (ii) mitigation and adaptation of ecosystems to the effects of climate change;
- (iii) support to youth and local communities for transformative change in values and practices.

This program will create a unique network of experts, including young people, to support UNESCO designated sites and demonstrate that living in harmony with nature is already possible.

3. Overall challenges and needs

The challenge is to transform and rebuild human-nature relations, (notably by restoring degraded ecosystems) through education, science, culture, local and indigenous knowledge, based on shared values (trust, solidarity, respect for diversity, long term...). UNESCO can provide inspiring examples of living in harmony with nature by building on the unique network of sites such as Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage Sites and UNESCO Global Geoparks to conserve and sustainably use the planet's key ecosystems by mobilizing the knowledge, practices and know-how of committed citizens and partners.

The Network will help to ensure access to this diversity of knowledge, to create opportunities and translate them into action to engage stakeholders and empower young people and future generations through UNESCO networks of sites and international network of experts. UNESCO can provide expertise, practices knowledge and know-how that can support Member states to address these interlinked issues.

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

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

A call for volunteers will be issued end of July and will be matched with the needs expressed by the sites.

4. Strategy and governance

The creation of a Multi-Partner Trust Fund 'UNESCO Earth Network' is in line with UNESCO's Strategy for Biodiversity and will contribute to the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework as well as to the two UN Decades of Ecosystem Restoration and Ocean Science.

The Multi-Partner Trust Fund 'UNESCO Earth Network' is guided by a steering committee with representatives of UNESCO and the donors and by a scientific committee of 9 international experts to give respectively strategic and scientific guidance (see annex 1). At its meeting on 22 July 2021 in Naples, the G20 Environment Ministers issued a communiqué which provides support to the Network.

The MAB Council is invited to:

express its high appreciation to the Government of Italy for its catalytic and very generous funding.

encourage Member States, as well as other public and private donors, to share the commitment of UNESCO and the Italian Government to these values and goals by supporting the implementation of UNESCO's biodiversity strategy and participate to the Multi-Partner Trust Fund.