

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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

Thirty-fourth session

Paris, UNESCO Headquarters, 13-17 June 2022

ITEM 13 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA: MAB Youth Network

1. MAB Youth testifies the emergence of a new generation of young people who are working everyday in their communities, research centres, non-governmental organizations and as individuals to conserve biodiversity and build a living world in harmony with nature. Their force, enthusiasm, competence and dedication are a gift to the MAB Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
2. At the same time, many avenues are open today for youth involvement in international platforms/summits/debates (such as ECOSOC Youth Forum, Climate Summits and Conferences of Parties on climate change or biodiversity, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, etc.), in which MAB Youth is keen to get involved and bring the voice of youth and lift high that of the MAB Programme itself.
3. As showed in the summary report annexed to the present document, MAB Youth are therefore increasingly involved in these activities and events, but the challenge for the MAB Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves remains that of creating more spaces for the new generations and to strengthen their participation in the governance and management of their biosphere reserves. To this end, it could be recommended to undertake a more systematic assessment of MAB Youth engagement with the programme and its biosphere reserves, at both the national and regional levels.
4. The MAB Council is invited to examine and discuss the present report and provide its comments and suggestions to the MAB Secretariat. Members of the Council are also invited to complete the present summary report with oral communications on MAB Youth activities and initiatives implemented at the national level. The MAB Council might also consider the possibility to elaborate and adopt recommendations on how to engage more strategically with them:
 - a. encouraging a more systematic and regular involvement of MAB Youth representatives in the sessions of the MAB-ICC;
 - b. facilitating and regulating their presence in, and contribution to, regional networks, and;
 - c. leading to the establishment of the MAB Youth Network as a Thematic Network of the MAB Programme (see also guidelines as discussed at Item 14).

ANNEX 1 – A Summary of MAB Youth Activities since the 33rd session of the MAB-ICC

Involvement of MAB Youth in international events and platforms

1. MAB Youth testifies the emergence of a new generation of young people who are working everyday in their communities, research centres, non-governmental organizations and as individuals to conserve biodiversity and build a living world in harmony with nature. Their force, enthusiasm, competence and dedication are a gift to the MAB Programme. Many avenues are open today for youth involvement at various levels in international platforms/summits/debates (such as ECOSOC Youth Forum, Climate Summits and Conferences of Parties on climate change or biodiversity, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, etc.), in which MAB Youth is keen to get involved and bring the voice of youth and lift high that of the MAB Programme itself.
2. MAB Youth representatives have been closely associated with and involved in the **celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the MAB Programme**, with the nomination of six MAB Youth Spokespersons and their involvement in various events. Three of them, Ms Alicia Donnellan Barraclough (EuroMAB), Ms Rebecca Yego Laibich (AfriMAB) and Mr Obed Palagot Echavarria (IberoMAB), took part on 17 November 2021 in an intergenerational dialogue alongside prominent personalities such as Dr Jane Goodall, Mr Anthony Blair Dreaver Johnston, Mr Mauro Colagreco and Mr Vik Muniz. This dialogue was held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.
3. Rebecca Laibich, representative of AfriMAB Youth, lives in the Mount Elgon Biosphere Reserve in Kenya. She reminded the audience that for biodiversity conservation to be sustainable, it is not enough to include young people as volunteers, they need to be able to dedicate themselves professionally and sustainably to this task, and biosphere reserves can play an important role in generating employment for the young people who live there. Alicia Donnellan Barraclough (EuroMAB) currently lives and works in the Nordhordland Biosphere Reserve in Norway and is a researcher at the UNESCO Chair at the University of Bergen. For her, it is of utmost importance to work transversally in the production of knowledge and to share knowledge in an inclusive and equitable way for people and the planet. Obed Palagot Echavarria lives and works in Los Tuxtlas Biosphere Reserve in Mexico. As a representative of IberoMAB, he stressed the importance of collaborating and encouraging the participation of indigenous and local communities in the management of biosphere reserves and insisted that “the inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge in biodiversity conservation is as important as the applications of scientific knowledge”.
4. Plans had been elaborated since 2019 in order to guarantee the **presence of MAB Youth at the CBD COP15**, and the 2019 MAB Youth Forum had been organized and held in Changbaishan, China, with the precise aim of letting them elaborate their views and commitments towards the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Since then, the holding in-presence of that conference has been postponed several times because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and these plans are on standby for the moment. The voice of MAB Youth is however well channeled in this context thanks to a close cooperation started in 2019 with the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN).
5. Ms Rebecca Yego Laibich, one of the MAB Youth Spokespersons, nominated for the MAB 50th Anniversary, has been invited and attended the **5th UN Environmental Assembly hosted by UNEP in Nairobi** from 28 February to 2 March 2022, in order to bring the perspective of MAB Youth in this Assembly. UNEP is dedicating much attention to youth and is running programmes and campaigns targeting them (see more at <https://www.unep.org/youth>). They have also established a Major Group on Children and

Youth, and contacts could be established with the representatives/coordinators/members of this group.

6. In the framework and prior to the CBD negotiations held from 14 to 29 March 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland, UNESCO and GYBN took the initiative to organize on 12 March **an intergenerational workshop on “Rethinking conservation: intergenerational pathways for reconciliation with nature - Reflections on qualitative criteria for area-based conservation”** in which MAB Youth representatives took an active part. The outcomes and recommendations of these discussions were presented during a 90-minute side-event on 18 March 2022.
7. The Inaugural **IUCN Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC)**, previously scheduled from 7 to 12 March 2022, will be held from 18 to 23 July 2022 in Kigali, Rwanda, and UNESCO will have a booth there for the whole duration of the event. MAB Youth representatives from Rwanda and neighboring countries will be involved in order to guarantee a continuous presence at the booth and animate activities during the whole week.
8. A proposal has been made to the organizers of the next **World Science Forum, to be held in South Africa in December 2022**, to organize a side-event involving up to 50 young representatives – researchers or activists – of Southern African UNESCO designated sites (including MAB Youth from biosphere reserves) in a “world café” where conference participants interested would be invited to discuss with them scientific topics of interest. Similarly, discussions have been started with the organizers of the next **G20 meeting in Indonesia** in order to explore the possibility of having special preparatory events involving youth from both the MAB and the UGGP networks.

Involvement of MAB Youth in Regional Networks and initiatives

9. With a view of holding the **second ArabMAB Youth Forum** in December 2022 (or March 2023, still TBC), the colleagues of the UNESCO Office in Cairo have organized a preparatory meeting of the ArabMAB Youth Forum on 11 and 12 October 2021, followed by a meeting with the ArabMAB Youth Focus Group on 29 November 2021, during which the Arab Chapter of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network shared their experience and identify potential partnership for the upcoming ArabMAB Youth Forum, in the overall context of contributing to the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
10. The ArabMAB Network launched in 2020 the **contest “Youth for connecting with Nature”** that will be relaunched on 22 May 2022, on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity.
11. The IberoMAB Bureau held, in March 2022, a virtual meeting with IberoMAB Youth members in order to discuss the organization of the **second IberoMAB Youth Forum** in November 2022. During this Forum, an action plan of the network will be finalized to become a working document for MAB Youth in all IberoMAB countries. This document will also touch upon youth representation and engagement within MAB National Committees and Biosphere Reserve Management Committees.
12. A publication summarizing the outcome of the project **“Building our Future: Youth entrepreneurs in biosphere reserves in LAC”** was released in late 2021. This first MAB project designed and implemented by youth from biosphere reserves has been a learning process, highlighting the need to generate sustainable socio-economic opportunities that

contribute to protecting biodiversity while reducing unemployment and alleviating poverty. In fact, young people in Latin America and the Caribbean between aged 15-24 account for 29% of international migrants, many coming from poor rural areas (UNICEF, 2013). Initiatives such as this project are crucial to avoiding economic migration and generating capacity-building opportunities, and to guarantee a future to biosphere reserves themselves in the long run.

13. MAB France has undertaken the preparation of a MAB Youth Forum in the newly established Martinique Biosphere Reserve which should see the participation of a good number of youth representatives of the Archipel de Guadeloupe Biosphere Reserve. It is also foreseen that one or two representatives from each Biosphere Reserve from the **Caribbean islands** will be invited to take part in this youth gathering, in view of their participation in the next IberoMAB Youth Forum later this year.
14. On the occasion of the 9th edition of the **Sava Youth Parliament** in October 2021 (Serbia), co-organized the SHELTER H2020 project and dedicated to the theme "Let's protect our cultural heritage", around 60 students participated to the event and were inspired to take action in protecting cultural and natural heritage.
15. MAB summer universities have been ran in **Europe and the Mediterranean** since 2014, organized in close cooperation the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) and in collaboration with the Greek National MAB Committee. These summer universities are organized in coordination and coherence with regional networks as well as with national partners making sure the role of youth is central in relation to climate change, biodiversity conservation and education for sustainable development discussions. In this framework, the 2021-2022 edition of the **"Hybrid University of Asterousia - sustainable Integrated Management of Biosphere Reserves"** was organized in two phases: face-to-face and virtual. Phase A in-presence in October 2021 in Asterousia Biosphere Reserve in Crete, Greece, gathered 16 young participants from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania. Phase B consisted of a 4-week online course online from 10 January to 6 February 2022, combining asynchronous (self-paced) and synchronous sessions (weekly live meetings). The key topics of this training included the framework of Sustainable Development and Biosphere Reserves; the insights in BRs' management; coastal, water and marine topics; and, a focus on Youth and Education for Sustainable Development. The course enrolled 123 participants from the region and around the world.
16. UNESCO is co-chairing the UN Regional Issue-based Coalition (IBC) on environment and climate change for Europe and Central Asia together with UNEP and UNECE. On the occasion of a Peer learning roundtable related to SDG 15 on "Actions to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems", Ms Alicia May Donnellan Barraclough was the Youth representative of UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme that discussed the key role of the youth in action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems and specifically the MAB Youth Community and activities worldwide.

Involvement of MAB Youth at the national level

17. Member States will be given the floor during the 34th MAB-ICC session to report orally on activities undertaken with MAB Youth at the national level, within the particular framework of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the MAB Programme.

18. The challenge for the UNESCO MAB Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves during the coming years will remain that of creating spaces for the new generations and to strengthen their participation in the governance and management of their biosphere reserves. Following a proposal made by the MAB Youth representative from Australia (one of the 4 MAB Youth regional Focal Points for Asia and the Pacific), the Secretariat intends to undertake **a more systematic assessment of MAB Youth Networks and general youth engagement at the international and national levels.** Our assumption is that a better understanding of the functioning of national-level engagement of MAB Youth would allow us to develop a far more effective assessment of the MAB Youth Networks and to refine our plans to engage more strategically with them.