

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

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

Thirty-fourth session

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**ITEM 6 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA: Report of the Secretary of the MAB Programme**

1. This report provides the International Co-ordinating Council (ICC) of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme with a brief overall update on the development of the MAB Programme since its last hybrid session in Abuja, Nigeria, in September 2021. The report is accompanied by a PPT presentation and is available on-line with other MAB-ICC documents.
2. **Statutory duties and procedures related to MAB Programme and WNBR**
  - 2.1 The 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the MAB-ICC took place in hybrid format in September 2021 due to the COVID-19 health crisis. The session was attended by a total of 630 participants.
  - 2.2 The DG of UNESCO attended *in presentia* the opening ceremony of the session which took place on Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at the banquet hall of the Presidential Villa, Abuja, Nigeria. Other participants at the opening included state representatives, including line ministries, and dignitaries, Ambassadors, heads of missions and high commissioners of member states and UN agencies..
  - 2.3 At its 33<sup>rd</sup> session, the MAB-ICC approved 20 new biosphere reserves, 3 new countries joined the WNBR: Lesotho, Libya and Saudi Arabia; as of September 2021, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) comprises 727 biosphere reserves in 131 Member States, including 22 transboundary biosphere reserves (TBRs), of which two are transcontinental and transregional respectively. Over 250 million people live in biosphere reserves across the world.
  - 2.4 Currently, biosphere reserves represent 5% of the world's terrestrial surface, an area about the size of Australia, of which 1.5% is composed of core areas under strict protection, an area larger than Peru. As such, biosphere reserves are a major contribution to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) target to place 30% of the Earth's surface under conservation status and 10% under strict protection by 2030 and this shows the High Ambition Coalition for Nature.
  - 2.5 Since the last ICC, the MAB Bureau met virtually on 2 December 2021. Two main issues were discussed: recommendation to include the UNESCO MAB Programme and its WNBR in the implementation of CBD's post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and re-launching of the World Network of Mountain Biosphere Reserves call for applications for the function of Technical Secretariat of the Network.
  - 2.6 To ensure that biosphere reserves serve as models for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), two decisions were taken: the completion of the 2013 Exit strategy and the adoption of the 'Process of excellence and enhancement of the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all members of the WNBR'.

- 2.7 In 2013, while 270 sites in 75 Member States were concerned by the 'Exit Strategy'. In 2021, only 3 sites were withdrawn by the Council. It is expected that the 'Process of Excellence' will prevent any further 'Exit Strategy'.
- 2.8 The 41st session of the General Conference of UNESCO took place from 9 to 24 November 2021 and at the initiative of Spain and Uruguay, proclaimed 3 November of each year as International Day for Biosphere Reserves.
- 2.9 Establishment of new Category two centres and renewal of existing ones:
- Category 2 Centre on Mediterranean Biosphere Reserves: located in the premises of the Abertis Foundation in Castellet I la Gornal, Spain, the Centre was created in November 2013 and officially inaugurated in April 2014. The Centre, which works closely with the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge and its Autonomous Agency for National Parks (OAPN), is the first category 2 Centre to be born of cooperation between the public and private sectors. The renewal of the agreement for the Category 2 Centre will be signed by UNESCO's Director General and the Ambassador of Spain to UNESCO on 18 May 2022 in Spain for a period of six years.
  - The 41st session of the General Conference approved the establishment of the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management (CoEB) in Huye, Rwanda, as a centre under the auspices of UNESCO (category 2). The CoEB's mission is to encourage, enable and support stakeholders to generate and apply knowledge on biodiversity and natural resources for sustainable development. The Center was officially established as a Research Centre under the University of Rwanda in 2017. The CoEB is organized as a consortium of governmental and non-governmental institutions with a hub office located at the University of Rwanda (UR) in Huye, and institutions that are nodes of the Center. The CoEB was established to coordinate and reinforce the capacity for scientific research and linkage of science to policy for the environment, biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable use of natural resources in the Albertine Rift and Great Lakes region, a biodiversity hotspot.
  - In 2019, Iceland and UNESCO established GRÖ category 2 center under the auspices of UNESCO. The Cat 2 center includes 4 thematic: Gender, Fisheries, Geothermic and Land restoration. The **Land Restoration Training Programme (LRT - [www.grolrt.is](http://www.grolrt.is))** provides postgraduate training for specialists from the developing countries in the broad field of restoration of degraded land and sustainable land management and aims at assisting developing countries in capacity development within this field. The GRÖ - LRT programme is an annual six-month training programme in Iceland on land restoration and sustainable land management including an individual project, which provides specialization with reference to the academic and practical background and needs of the individual Fellow and their workplace. In this context, GRÖ-LTR kindly offer to train two 2 fellows coming from Nigeria and Malawi Biosphere reserves within the 2022 cohort. Both UNESCO and GRÖ-LRT are partners of the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration.
- 2.10 The 28<sup>th</sup> meeting of the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR) was held virtually from 28 February to 3 March 2022, with its recommendations communicated by the MAB Secretariat to all the Member States concerned in a timely manner. The Advisory Committee examined thirteen (13) proposals for new biosphere reserves, including two (2) requests for extensions of existing biosphere reserves. Among the biosphere reserve proposals received, three (3) Member States are aspiring to be included in the WNBR for the first time: Chad, Georgia and Zambia. Furthermore, the IACBR examined twenty-seven (27) Periodic Review (PR) reports and Follow-up (FU) reports on the MAB-ICC recommendations.

### **3. Highlight of MAB activities since the 2021 MAB-ICC**

- 3.1 Celebration of 50th anniversary of MAB programme (see Item 7 for more detailed report on this point).
- 3.2 Contribution to the Biodiversity global agenda:
  - The Secretariat co-organized on March 12 the workshop “Rethinking Conservation: Intergenerational Pathways for Reconciliation with Nature Reflections on qualitative criteria for area-based conservation” in the margins of the CBD 3rd Open Ending Working Group (OEWG3), in collaboration with the Global Youth Biodiversity Network. The outcomes of this workshop were presented to Parties of the Convention during a side-event of the CBD OEWG3 on March 18. The Secretariat took part in the CBD OEWG3 SBI Item 8 discussions on “Cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives”.
  - The MAB Programme coordinated the celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity, which took place on 22 May 2022 with a biodiversity film festival at UNESCO and celebration of Bee Day on social media as well as a campaign on actions taken by UNESCO designated sites.
  - The Secretariat is co-chairing the Working Group on “Awareness raising and knowledge sharing” of the Issue Management Group on Biodiversity of the UN Environment Management Group. More will be reported on this during the session (see Item 6).
  - Both initiatives on Youth and Women for connecting with Nature – the ArabMAB network competition launched in 2020 – have been relaunched this year during the First Wildlife Talks 2022 on May 22, 2022 (International Day for Biological Diversity).
  - The series of Webinars “WildLife Talks 2022 towards COP 27 in Sharm El Sheikh” with a focus on ArabMAB network have been launched on May 22, 2022. ArabMAB is open to the public outcomes of these Wildlife Talks 2022, which are addressing the prevailing ecosystems in the Arab region shall be presented at COP 27.
- 3.3 The manual entitled "Guidance for the assessment of ecosystem services in African Biosphere Reserves - A way forward to sustainable development" is ready and shall be launched during the forthcoming IUCN African Protected area Congress in Kigali, Rwanda scheduled from 18 to 22 July 2022.
- 3.4 A comparative study on “governance model as implemented in Biosphere Reserves’ has been completed. In the development of this study, data were collected through the circulation of 2 surveys. While the results of this research cannot make any clear assumptions pertaining to the full WNBR as only 5.4% of the WNBRs responded to the final survey (i.e. a total of 39 out of 727 BRs in the WNBR), some interesting observations could still be made, and have been highlighted through the report which will be made available online.
- 3.5 From the comprehensive survey, the main governance models represented were the authority model; government-owned company; Non-Profit Organisations; association of municipalities; roundtable model; biosphere reserve specific board; and technical or management committees.
- 3.6 The extra budgetary flagship project “Applying the transboundary biosphere reserve model to promote peace in the Lake Chad basin through sustainable management of its natural resources” in short BIOsphère&PATrimoine (BIOPALT), is coming to an end and will be evaluated this year. Among its results, the creation of the Lake Chad Water Quality monitoring portal is to note, as well as the implementation of activities based on green

- economy in biosphere reserves, the restoration of ecosystems as well as the nomination of 1 biosphere reserve in Nigeria and 2 under consideration this year (Chad and Cameroon).
- 3.7 UNESCO is implementing the project- “Sustainable development through biodiversity-friendly livelihoods: Supporting rural communities in the vicinity of Fazao-Malfakassa National Park” otherwise called Togo GEBR project. This project is funded by the India-UN Development Partnership Fund and situated at the Fazao-Malfakassa National Park. The GEBR Togo project which started in 2019 have made good progress despite the lockdown effect of COVID-19 pandemic. 410 families including men, women and young people were trained on the concept of GEBR, ecology related topics and conservation friendly, green economy livelihoods and income generating activities (IGAs); as per preferences of the community. These green economy livelihoods/IGAs have been established and the beneficiaries are running them as per knowledge acquired during the trainings. Feedback from the community of the Fazao-Malfakassa National Park in Togo indicate that the green economy livelihoods/IGAs have begun to improve their socio-economy and reduce their unsustainable pressure on the resources and biodiversity of the Park. Processes have begun with the Togo authority to designate the Fazao-Malfakassa National Park as a Biosphere Reserve (BR). The project will end in June 2022.
- 3.8 In December 2021, a funding agreement of 1.6 million Euros between UNESCO and the Belgian Government (through the Directorate General for Development Cooperation) was signed for the implementation over a period of 18th months of the project "Lifting the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve into a Climate - Biodiversity center of excellence". The project was developed by UNESCO and a consortium of partners: le Centre de Surveillance de la Biodiversité (UNIKIS - DRC), the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (IRSNB), the Ecole Régionale Post-Universitaire d'Aménagement et de Gestion Intégrée des Forêts et Territoires Tropicaux (ERAIFT, a UNESCO category 2 centre), and Ghent University (Belgium) in close cooperation with the 'Institut nationale pour l'Etude et la Recherche Agronomiques (INERA) and the MAB Service of Democratic Republic of Congo are closely associated with this project. The main objective of this project is to contribute to strengthening the role of the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve as a model observation site for sustainable development, by monitoring socio-economic data, biodiversity and climate change. With the first eddy covariance flux tower in the heart of the Congo Basin, the scientific work carried out by Ghent University will allow a better understanding of the contribution of tropical forests to climate change mitigation through the study of greenhouse gas exchanges between the forest and the atmosphere. The project will also focus on improving the governance of the MAB Programme at national and local levels, as well as promoting green economies in support of local communities.
- 3.9 The MAB Secretariat is coordinating activities of the UNESCO Guerlain Women for Bees programme. Trainings and supporting activities have been initiated in Cambodia in December 2021, with support from the Phnom Penh UNESCO Office including small-scale beekeeping trainings with native (including stingless) bees provided to 11 women in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve, a training on apitourism, a technical support to honey hunters and beekeepers on the conservation of the emblematic giant bee, and a roadmap for preparing a National Plan for Sustainable Beekeeping in Cambodia. A specialized hybrid training is ongoing since January 2022 on technical guidelines for organic beekeeping for 6 advanced women beekeepers in European biosphere reserves. A specialized training is also in preparation for entrepreneurial modern beekeeping for at least 2 women in Xishuangbanna Biosphere Reserve in China with support of the Chinese MAB national Committee and the UNESCO Beijing office, as well

- as a regional training for at least 6 women in Kafa Biosphere Reserve in Ethiopia and Gishwati-Mukura Biosphere Reserve in Rwanda, in cooperation with the Rwanda national commission for UNESCO and UNESCO field offices. Additionally, one baseline survey has been carried out in the Gishwati-Mukura Landscape Biosphere Reserve in Rwanda to assess the feasibility of the programme. The recent activities implemented in the Women for Bees programme were communicated during World Bee Day celebrations (20 May 2022), including an update video featuring biosphere reserves broadcasted during an event hosted by FAO.
- 3.10 The MAB Secretariat is implementing the Amazon biosphere reserves project to create an integrated management model to improve the resilience and halt biodiversity loss by addressing the pressures and needs for the long-term sustainability of the biosphere reserves. The project implemented in 8 biosphere reserves of 4 Amazonian countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru), integrates scientific and Indigenous and local knowledge in all of its implementation steps. Between November 2021 and March 2022, 8 biosphere reserves participatory workshops have been carried out and one regional workshop with the object of creating a Pan-Amazonia working group. Furthermore, a geospatial platform is under development, as well as a database of place-based sustainable initiatives for the organization, analysis, and monitoring of land use and land cover changes and their impact on biodiversity and people's livelihoods. Several place-based initiatives have been identified and support has been initiated to promote local sustainable development. Initiatives such as existing conservation programs on reforestation and rehabilitation of degraded lands, rehabilitation of biosphere reserves infrastructure, support to agroecological cooperatives and local producers in particular women, and assistance of the youth community have been listed as priority.
- 3.11 The MAB Secretariat is implementing the Earth Network programme, funded by Italy to restore human/nature relationships and ecosystems while empowering youth for the challenges ahead. Under the programme, volunteer experts with scientific, practitioner, and indigenous knowledge support UNESCO-designated sites with training and expertise on ecological restoration and the reconciliation of human-nature relationships. The programme has received applications from 23 UNESCO designated sites and 257 volunteer experts (complete applications). A first set of volunteer expert missions, systematically pairing one senior and young expert to foster the intergenerational exchange of knowledge, is scheduled to take place in sites in Ghana, St.-Kitts-And-Nevis and Bulgaria so far. Training workshops on ecological restoration and disaster risk management are also scheduled in 2022. A Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on the topic of 'One Health and ecological restoration' is being developed. Finally, progress have been made in developing the components and the structure of the interdisciplinary and intersectoral scientific database for all UNESCO-designated sites as part of the Earth Network and to monitor actions and impacts on restoration of key ecosystems.
- 3.12 In 2021 the new project "Mangrove Restoration as a Nature-Based Solution in Latin American Biosphere Reserves" was approved funded by the Government of Flanders of the Kingdom of Belgium. The project will be coordinated jointly by the MAB Secretariat and UNESCO Montevideo. This is a 3-year project that will be officially launched during the second half of 2022. It seeks to work on mangrove ecosystem restoration in six biosphere reserves: Seaflower (Colombia), Peninsula de Guanahacabibes (Cuba), Macizo del Cajas (Ecuador), La Encrucijada (Mexico), Darien (Panama) and Noroeste Amotapes-Manglares (Peru). This project counts with a strong component on local and indigenous knowledge and on education for sustainable development. Some initial activities were held during the first quarter of 2022 in which a first meeting was organized to present the project to the participating countries and biosphere reserves and began the data collection phase prior to the official launch.



- 3.13 During the second half of 2021 the MAB Secretariat jointly with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission implemented the project “Nature-based solutions in marine and coastal biosphere reserves” also funded by the Flemish Government. This project was carried out in three biosphere reserves: Galapagos (Ecuador), Noroeste Amotapes-Manglares (Peru) and Juan Fernandez Archipelago (Chile). This project sought to undertake a vulnerability assessment through cartographic analysis and identify potential nature-based solutions to mitigate the natural risks. This project is still under implementation and due to the positive response by the local community in the Juan Fernandez Archipelago Biosphere Reserve, the MAB Programme will continue to support the biosphere reserve with follow up activities including the implementation of two nature-based solutions dedicated to mitigating the risk of wildfires and improving the governance of the site.
- 3.14 The MAB Secretariat is also implementing the project “Training and improvement of biosphere reserves in Latin America and Africa’ to meet the MAB Excellence Strategy and to fulfil the criteria of the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves funded by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID) and with the support of UNESCO Field Offices. This project is being implemented in six countries with a total of nine participating biosphere reserves. Overall, this 2-year project seeks to identify the weaknesses and strengthen the governance of the participating biosphere reserves in order to improve their performance as model sites for sustainable development. The implementation status is ongoing, and it is expected to be finished by the end of 2022.
- 3.15 The Latin American and Caribbean UNESCO Sites Climate, Risk and Resilience Platform was launched by the UNESCO Montevideo Office in September 2020 with the first meeting of the regional Technical and Scientific Advisory Group (TSAG). Since the last ICC meeting it held a series of webinars on climate change and fire featuring inputs from over 60 experts from 16 countries. The webinar will result in a scientific publication highlighting integrated fire management in LAC UNESCO designated sites. It also began a regional vulnerability and risk evaluation of Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks with a view to developing a toolkit and guidelines for supporting adaptation planning at the site level. The work continues in 2022 and 2023 in collaboration with the Environmental and Climate Change Statistics Unit at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and other key partners. The Platform’s new website will be launched in June 2022.
- 3.16 The strategy of the UN Decade for Ecosystem restoration suggests the creation of a panel to provide a platform for discussions addressing core questions on humanity’s role and relation with nature. It would comprise a multi-disciplinary team of thinking leaders and opinion-makers to be established at the outset of the UN Decade. Recognizing the added value of UNESCO’s mandate and thematic areas (Education, Culture, Ethics, Sciences) for the theme of this panel, our organisation, through the MAB Secretariat, has been entitled to lead the panel entitled ‘Our Humanature pathway’ which will be launched in 2022 in collaboration with UNEP and FAO.
- 3.17 The MAB Program and the IOC Tsunami Unit implement the joint initiative on coastal risk preparedness in the Savegre Biosphere Reserve, Costa Rica. The project contributes to address the urgent need to develop and establish coastal risk preparedness mechanisms in this Biosphere Reserve, with important tourism activities and coastal communities, including the Manuel Antonio National Park. Guidelines, tools and lessons learned will inform and support international efforts to strengthen coastal risk preparedness in coastal biosphere reserves worldwide. The initiative is closely working with the National and local emergency institutions, the academia and civil society organisations. Training of local stakeholders and risk/evacuation maps inform decision-

- making in local institutions and organisations. A drill exercise took place in May 2022 for the communities of Quepos and Manuel Antonio. The initiative strengthens participatory governance and enhance resilience of Biosphere Reserves in island and coastal areas.
- 3.18 In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, UNESCO is implementing a number of notable activities: UNESCO Brazil developed a website for the Brazilian Network of Biosphere Reserves (<https://reservasdabiosfera.org.br>). Launched in November 2021, it will store images, maps and serve as an e-learning platform. Projects related to natural and cultural heritage-based development were implemented by UNESCO Montevideo, UNESCO's Earth Sciences Unit and UNESCO Mexico. During the first half of 2022, the EU-funded Ruritage Project ran two workshops introducing the Ruritage methodology of cultural and natural heritage-based rural regeneration to UNESCO designated sites in 11 countries in the region. On-going follow-up and capacity-building with pilot Biosphere Reserves is continuing through 2022. UNESCO Mexico works with 8 BRs in southeastern Mexico on the "Accompaniment Program for Sustainable Development in Southeast Mexico: Strengthening and Safeguarding Cultural and Natural Heritage".
- 3.19 The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe in Venice, Italy has initiated in March 2022 a partnership and a 3-year project with the Aberdeen Charitable Foundation to promote sustainable development through UNESCO programmes and sites. The project will work through Biosphere Reserves and other UNESCO sites to promote the SDGs, notably SDGs 6 (water), 13 (climate), 14 (ocean) and 15 (land). This project aims to build on UNESCO's expertise and scientific programmes notably MAB, IHP and IOC to promote the SDGs through biosphere reserves and other designated sites (5 sites per year). The project focuses on 3 expected results:
- Promoting research and capacity development in biodiversity, water and the ocean in UNESCO biosphere reserves and other relevant sites;
  - Education for Sustainable development, water education and ocean literacy and climate change education promoted and hands-on knowledge shared in UNESCO sites;
  - Innovative 'green' and 'blue' solutions for sustainable development and climate change mitigation and adaptation promoted through UNESCO biosphere reserves and other relevant sites.
- 3.20 The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Europe has initiated the implementation of a Bulgarian government funded interdisciplinary project to be undertaken in 2022 which focuses on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction for UNESCO sites, including biosphere reserves, in 5 beneficiary countries from South-East Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The project aims at contributing to a more climate-resilient region and resilient UNESCO designated.
- 3.21 Activities of the Southeast Asian Biosphere Reserves Network (SeaBRNet):
- On 15–17 November 2021, 13th SeaBRNet Meeting in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia gathered representatives of the UNESCO MAB community from across Southeast Asia in a blended virtual and in-person format, the event marked the first in-person gathering of Indonesian Biosphere Reserve community since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The event included a combined in-person and virtual field trip to four different locations, part of Rinjani-Lombok Biosphere Reserve, across the island of Lombok.
  - Active peer-to-peer learning and exchange of knowledge are being conducted within the network. UNESCO Jakarta organized a youth leadership programme for water

security by building capacity and public engagement for Integrated River Basin Management in a water-stressed district of the Rinjani-Lombok Biosphere Reserve and UNESCO Global Geopark, Indonesia.

- A comparative study on Biosphere Reserve governance and implementation in Southeast and East Asia was completed, with focus on three research sites; Cu Lao Cham-Hoi An BR (Vietnam), Rinjani-Lombok BR (Indonesia) and Aya BR (Japan).
- The restrictions on movement and interaction imposed by the pandemic spurred the organization of a number of innovative online networking initiatives across Asia and the Pacific, led by the region's Biosphere Reserves. Key events included the International Conference on Biosphere and Sustainability (organized by the Palawan Biosphere Reserve, the Philippines, in November 2021) and the International Webinar on Biosphere Reserves in Thailand and Around the World (organized by the Sakaerat Biosphere Reserve, Thailand, in December 2021).

3.22 Due to the pandemic restrictions, the network's regular training programme of the East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (EABRN) was held in a series of 6 webinars from September to October 2021, organized by the UNESCO Beijing Office.

3.23 Activities of the ArabMAB network included:

- An event on ReWilde Arabia: A new era for biosphere reserve in the Arab region was organised on February 27, 2022 at the UN hub at EXPO Dubai 2020 in Dubai to discuss ways to strengthen the ArabMAB network and identify potential partnerships in the Region. Work is underway and Regional and international cooperation is put in place to advance on this initiative. Maraweh Biosphere Reserve, the first marine BR in the Arab region presented conservation activities and highlighted on partnership with the private sector.
- An event to launch the book "Biosphere Reserves in the Arab region: outreaching to Society" was organized on February 26, 2022 at the UN hub at Expo Dubai 2002 in Dubai. The book is now made available in English and Arabic. During the event, there was proposition to translate the book to other languages.
- An event on Kids reconnecting to nature was organized in partnership with Wadi Wurayeh and Maraweh Biosphere Reserves on February 27, 2022 at the UN Hub at EXPO Dubai 2020 in Dubai. Both reserves were presented to the kids and the successful dynamics brought together UNESCO little Arab explorer to be little genius, scientists, artists, and craftsman.
- An event was co-organised with UN-ESCWA Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2022 – Recovery and Resilience on March 16, 2022 on SDG 15 Life on Land whereby Shouf Biosphere Reserve presented the important role of the reserve itself and the ArabMAB network in meeting the targets under SDG 15.
- The Handbook on Management Effectiveness Pathways – ArabMAB was finalised in November 2021 and ongoing work on its publication is underway. A toolkit will be developed as a collateral product of this handbook. Follow up on this is ongoing with two planned workshops in the region and the first one is scheduled in July 2022 to bring together Biosphere Reserves to update their management plans.
- Preparatory meeting of the First ArabMAB Youth Forum was held in October 11-12, 2021. Follow up meeting with ArabMAB youth focus group was held on November 29, 2021 whereby CBD Youth Network- Arab chapter was invited to share their experience and identify potential partnership for the upcoming ArabMAB Youth Forum. The AMYF was originally at the beginning of this biennium to be held in



November 2022 but with the COP 27, it will be most probably postponed until December 2022 or March 2023.

- Appropriation of fund from the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society (SHPS) for the organization of the First Edition of the Intensive Course on Leadership in Biodiversity Conservation – ArabMAB Network – Saudi Arabia Edition in September 2022.
- The study on “Impact of COVID 19 on Biosphere Reserves in the Arab region: Accounting for Positive and negative externalities in future conservation pathways” was completed in December 2021 whereby biosphere reserves selected based on the availability of data. The working document will be published in selected peer reviewed Journal and it will be presented during upcoming regional workshop to be held in July 2022.
- The revamped ArabMAB website was launched integrating a webpage for each biosphere reserve with photos, space for trainings and forums, news and publication. Ongoing work is underway for its update and making the website available in Arabic.

#### **4. Improving participation, quality and the related instrumentation of WNBR**

- 4.1 At its 33rd session, the MAB-ICC was invited to provide guidance on how to strengthen and manage thematic networks and suggested that a document be prepared to standardize the establishment and functioning of these thematic networks, to be reviewed at the 34th session of the MAB-ICC. The Secretariat started the elaboration of guidelines (see document SC-22/CONF.234/12) to stimulate and facilitate a discussion on this item by the Council (see more under Item 14 of the provisional agenda).
- 4.2 The Technical Guidelines for Biosphere Reserves (TGBR) is a document which provides clear guidance on how the MAB Programme and the WNBR should function to comply with and complement the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework of the WNBR. The TGBR is available online in two languages and is very much used by the MAB Community. It is available in Korean language and translation in Arabic, Spanish and Chinese are ongoing. Being a living document, the TGBR will be amended in order to consider the new logo of UNESCO, and instructions for its use in relation with designated sites.
- 4.3 The UNESCO Regional Bureau of Science and Culture in Europe organized a high-level MAB-IHP Regional Symposium at its premises in Venice, Italy, on 16-17 December 2021, with the aim of contributing to sustainable water management in biosphere reserves of South-East Europe and the Mediterranean. The symposium brought together 35 participants from MAB National Committees, IHP National Committees, UNESCO National Commissions, Chairs and Category 2 centers in ecohydrology, climate change, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and biosphere reserves from 12 countries of the region. The symposium explored how UNESCO and its water related networks in the region, as well as its network of biosphere reserves, can promote innovative solutions and projects relating to water resources management in biosphere reserves. The event marked the first time the MAB and IHP programmes had jointly organized an European regional event to bring together the two communities and networks. The symposium initiated discussions among the MAB communities and IHP communities on MAB-IHP future collaboration in the region and strengthened UNESCO’s regional network of stakeholders working in water, ecosystems, biodiversity and climate working in biosphere reserves.
- 4.4 The UNESCO Regional Bureau and the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) organized, as part of a longstanding series, the 2021 edition of the MAB summer university in hybrid fashion in October 2021 (in presence in the Asterousia biosphere reserve in Crete) and February

2022 (on-line), focusing in particular on monitoring of marine litter and plastic pollution  
Climate Change adaptation and managing sustainable tourism in biosphere reserves.

- 4.5 The UNESCO New Delhi office launched the “Pockets of Hope” brochure on the occasion of the celebration of the “International Day for Biological Diversity”, on 22 May 2022. The brochure gives glimpse of the unique and diverse biological and cultural diversity of Indian, Sri Lankan and Maldives Biosphere Reserves. It aims to raise awareness and excitement about these sites amongst different stakeholders in these countries and globally.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Despite the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has created new challenges for the MAB Programme and the WNBR, critical meetings such as the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of MAB-ICC, the GC could be successfully held in hybrid format. With this first ICC held *in presentia* since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the MAB community shall reconnect at global level.
  - 5.2 Part of the fieldwork had to be delayed, but the MAB Programme supported biosphere reserves by mobilizing funds and through technical support. The MAB Programme has proven its resilience, effectiveness and continued relevance, with a significant number of new nominations received and new people involved in the Programme and the WNBR.
  - 5.3 The MAB Secretariat would like to invite all UNESCO Member States to actively join the celebration of the first International day of Biosphere reserves on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2022 and to continue to commemorate the 50 years anniversary of the Programme.
  - 5.4 The MAB Programme and its WNBR started a new era with the implementation of the 'Process of Excellence' strategy and expand the use of the TGBR. The MAB agenda continues to mobilise all stakeholders at the local, national, regional and global levels.
  - 5.5 The MAB Programme is actively seeking new partnerships to provide further support to its stakeholders, particularly young people involved in the programme. The MAB Programme continues to be a leader in developing new ideas and innovative concepts for the implementation of the SDGs.
  - 5.6 The MAB Secretariat invites Member States to advocate for the full recognition of the contribution of the MAB Programme and its WNBR for sustainable development in the relevant global agenda and, in particular, in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity framework.
6. The MAB-ICC is invited to review the report and guide the Secretary to improve the service of the MAB Secretariat in all aspects concerned.