

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

**International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme**  
Twenty-second session

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URL\\_ID=6793&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/science/en/ev.php-URL_ID=6793&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

**Item 12.1 of the Provisional Agenda: Capacity Building:**  
**a. ERAIFT (Regional Post-graduate Training School on Integrated Management  
of Tropical Forests and Lands)**

1. Five years after its launch at the University of Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo), ERAIFT, the French acronym for the Regional Post-Graduate Training School on Integrated Management of Tropical Forests and Lands, had already occupied a prominent place in the Programme-budget 32 C/5 (Biennium 2004-2005) approved by the General Conference as a regional flagship MAB project in the field of capacity building in Africa. Capacity building is now considered as a transversal theme within the MAB Programme as well as in UNESCO and particularly with regard to UNESCO's "Priority Africa" focus, as all the major projects call upon a need to reinforce capacity at different levels: institutional, local communities, resource managers, scientists, decision makers, and the general public.

2. ERAIFT has its origins in the *N'Sele Declaration* adopted during the Regional Seminar on the Strengthening of Co-operation for the Rational Management of African Tropical Forests held in Kinshasa-N'Sele (Democratic Republic of the Congo) in March 1991. In 1995, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the *N'Sele Declaration*, and a special amount was allocated to launch the ERAIFT feasibility study within the framework of the transversal platform between the African Priority Department and the MAB Programme. Since 1998, the MAB Council has noted during its various sessions the progress made by ERAIFT and recommended to the MAB Secretariat to strengthen ERAIFT and to use this project as a model for the development of other regional training facilities for forests and other ecosystems, such as arid lands and wetlands.

3. ERAIFT constitutes a good example of "success stories" in the field of UNESCO's Training, Research and Capacity Building focused on Sub-Saharan Africa. How does ERAIFT work? ERAIFT is not a forestry school. Established within the framework of the Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) of UNESCO, with the extra-budgetary financial support of several donors (UNDP, Belgium, EU, France, etc.), ERAIFT draws its origins from the finding that it is impossible to maintain sustainable forests by limiting interventions and strategies only to field of forestry. It is important to take into consideration the material and psychological needs of people. The ERAIFT logo shows the trilogy between "Environment – Culture – and Sustainable Development" and seeks to convey symbolically the scope, objectives, strategy and the intellectual methodology of the School's training that is based on the "systemic approach".

4. After its creation at the University of Kinshasa in DRC eleven years ago (10 April 1999), ERAIFT has accomplished significant progress from an institutional and academic viewpoint. The School has increased its visibility internationally with respect to strengthening of capacity in Africa

in sustainable land and resource management. The School is at a crossroads and aiming at a new level of recognition and prestige within the international community based on the following principal achievements:

- Despite the conflict and post-conflict environment in DRC, ERAIFT has trained 86 high level specialists (among them 83 Masters II whose diplomas have been recognized by the *Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES - the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education)* and three (3) PhDs) from 12 African countries (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Madagascar, Niger and Togo). These specialists are capable of elaborating scientific policies and national/regional strategic plans and advising the decision-makers on reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other global targets committed to by their national governments;
- An institutional review (audit) carried out by the EU has shown that all the ERAIFT former students welcomed the ecosystem approach as a conceptual teaching method; this “systemic or holistic approach” has ‘opened their eyes’ and changed their attitude vis-à-vis their understanding of development issues. All of them obtained jobs at decision-making spheres (ministerial executive offices, in charge of NGOs, and at the donor agencies). All of them have some influence in their work, they are successfully participating in the conception and elaboration of strategic plans for development and act as advisors to the ministers during the negotiations with donors on the adoption of the DSRP (*Document de stratégie pour la réduction de la pauvreté*) and of the UNDAF process;
- Information given to the Council at its 21<sup>st</sup> session in Jeju on the mobilization of new funds from the European Union (EU) as a result of the donor’s round table organized by SC/EES in Kinshasa (DRC, July 2008) has been confirmed: a new financial agreement of 4,220,000.00 Euros was signed between the European Commission (EC) and UNESCO in its capacity as Executing Agency in January 2010. With this extra-budgetary fund, ERAIFT post-doctoral School will train an additional 90-100 African managers, scientists from about 15 countries till 2013. ERAIFT is the largest UNESCO project that the EC finances in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its success has attracted attention of both the Executive Board and the General Conference. During this phase (2009-2013) feasibility studies on assigning it an appropriate legal status affiliated to UNESCO and reflective of its regional character are being prepared. ERAIFT has already stimulated the creation of a similar Institute in Côte d'Ivoire for West Africa;
- Thanks to the visibility gained by ERAIFT in Africa, new partnerships were launched, in particular:
  - the “MoU” signed between ERAIFT – WWF – MRAC (*Musée Royal d'Afrique Centrale/Tervuren*) – IRSNB (*Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique*) – JBNB (*Jardin Botanique National de Belgique-Meuse*) and validated by the MAB-ICC Chair, with the amount of 750,000.00 Euros funded by the Belgian Co-operation (DGCD) to develop multidisciplinary research and to co-train students at the level of PhD in the field of the emergent topics such as Climate Change, Bio-Carbon and REDD, REDD+, using Dimonika (Congo), Luki and Yangambi (DRC) Biosphere Reserves as “Learning laboratories for sustainable development” as recommended by the Madrid Action Plan (see Target 24 Action 4);
  - the new agreement between ERAIFT and PACEBCo (*Projet d'Appui à la Conservation des Ecosystèmes du Bassin du Congo*) (which is a CEEAC-

COMIFAC-AfrDBank joint initiative): 263,000.00 USD for 2010, to provide fellowships and scientific equipment for ERAIFT Ph.D. students;

- there are on-going discussions between ERAIFT and RAPAC (*Réseau des Aires Protégées d'Afrique Centrale*), both EU regional projects, in order to conclude a *Protocole d'accord* for the production of the digital maps of all of the RAPAC pilot sites in Central Africa, including biosphere reserves and world heritage sites, based on the practices work of the students and using the ERAIFT GIS and Remote Sensing Laboratory.

- In terms of infrastructures, a new building for ERAIFT (ERAIFT campus) has been constructed thanks to a special WB/EU-Trust-Fund of 780,000.00 EUROS, so increasing the capacity of ERAIFT accommodation from 20 to 40 students per academic session. The GIS and Remote Sensing laboratory has been strengthened with new software programmes (*Arc View, Arc-Infos, CIEL Evolution* for budget analysis, etc.). A special website for ERAIFT was created thanks to a special fund allocated by EC/Brussels.
- An initiative of project to be submitted to the AfrDBank for funding under the Chinese Trust Fund is being studied, in order to establish a strategic partnership between ERAIFT and CEODE (Centre for Earth Observations and Digital Earth)-Category II Centre of UNESCO, based in Beijing (China), which has a great potential for capacity building in remote sensing applied to activities related to MAB and the WNBR.

5. Significant progress in the implementation of the reform process started in 2007 have been made in accordance with the recommendations of the institutional audit carried out by EU. Within the framework of this new financial support, one of the main activities to be carried out before this current phase of ERAIFT ends in 2013, will be a feasibility study on the future legal status of ERAIFT so that this institution can become an autonomous body with assurances for its sustainability. Several alternatives are envisaged (e.g. ERAIFT as an Annex to the International Institute on Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) – the one Category I Institute established in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia or some other appropriate status linked to an International Foundation or other such organ). In the same context, a new Director of ERAIFT with managerial skills has been recruited to conduct fund-raising activities aiming to ensure the financial sustainability of the School, in the future.

6. At its 179<sup>th</sup> session, the Executive Board took the decisions (Decision 179 EX/16 and 179 EX/57) to use ERAIFT more effectively to promote the training of African specialists in the management of forests and natural resources in Sub-Saharan Africa within the context of the work of UNESCO's Intersectoral Platforms of "Priority Africa" and "Education for Sustainable Development".

7. Madrid Action Plan Target 24 calls for the following: "Use biosphere reserves as learning sites for research, adaptation, mitigation in relation to Climate Change". As specified in Action 24.4, ERAIFT is focusing on the following: "Carry out training for different ecosystems types related to climate change, in particular using the ERAIFT regional flagship project for tropical forests and certified forestry as a climate change mitigation approach". In this context, one of the main activities during this current phase (2009-2013) is to enhance the capacity of ERAIFT to host a regional observatory and data base and provide technical support for building the knowledge base on forests in biosphere reserves. Use the ERAIFT School as a 'hub' for training young African experts on emerging topics, in particular in the field of innovative financial mechanisms in forest biosphere reserves, particularly through bio-carbon methodologies such as REDD and REDD+

capacity building and pilot projects using biosphere reserves as a strategic entry point for UNESCO-donors partnership (e.g. EU, AfrDBank, etc.);

8. In terms of the future development of ERAIFT, two major activities will continue during this UNESCO-EU/ERAIFT current phase (2009-2013), both regionally and internationally:

- At the regional, academic and institutional level, the reform process to align ERAIFT to the “L-M-D” educational system within the framework of the “Bologna process” (Licence – Master – Doctorate. Ph.D.) will continue to enhance the choice of specialized subject areas at ERAIFT, reviewing the faculty Chairs and updating the course content to respond to the expectations of the African job market, and to new scientific challenges such as the issue of climate change in particular;
- In this context, and as planned in the UNESCO-EC/ERAIFT project, the MAB Secretariat proposal is to organize an international conference of experts including particularly the rectors of the universities of CEMAC (*Communauté Economique et Monétaire d’Afrique Centrale*) who are in charge of the validation of the “L-M-D” process in Central Africa, to discuss a better adaptation of the “Bologna process” in the context of African universities. The Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences will organize this conference with the support of the UNESCO Higher Education Division which has experience in the higher education reform process. The title of the Conference could be “International Conference of Experts on Strengthening of Scientific Synergies and Higher Education Networking in a Critical Time for African Tropical Forest Basins”. Upon the request of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this Conference will be held in Kinshasa in November-December 2010 under the leadership of UNESCO-MAB, COMIFAC, an UNFF (United Nations Forum on Forests) with the co-sponsorship of CIFOR, EU and AfrDBank, as a contribution to the United Nations International Year of Forests 2011, and will be followed by a Ministerial Round Table;
- At the international level, efforts will be focused on the effective implementation of the existing agreement on “South-South Co-operation Network for Sustainable Development of lands and resources in the humid tropical regions in the World” launched during MAB-ICC in Jeju (Republic of Korea, May 2009) linking ERAIFT School, University of Kinshasa, DRC (Congo Basin), the UNESCO-Chair in “South-South Cooperation for Sustainable Development”, University of Pará, Belém, Brazil (Amazon Basin) and the Indonesian Institute for Sciences (South-East Asia region). This South-South Network could include other interested Southern and Northern countries and their training institutions or research centres in the future, with the objective to create a solid Triangular South-North-South Co-operation Network for Sustainable Development.

9. The Council may wish to note and encourage plans for the future development of ERAIFT as a pioneer capacity building initiative of MAB and UNESCO in Africa stimulating the development of similar institutions in other parts of Africa and networking across the Amazonian and Asian tropics with appropriate South-South and South-North-South partnerships. The Council may wish to note the progress made by ERAIFT as an example of ‘success stories’ and good partnership between UNESCO and its major partners, such as the European Commission. The Council may also wish to encourage the MAB Secretariat to pursue its efforts aiming to ensure the institutional, academic and financial sustainability of ERAIFT and to strengthen the role of ERAIFT as a ‘hub’ for training young African experts on emerging issues, such as bio-carbon and REDD, REDD+ using biosphere reserves as a strategic entry point for UNESCO-MAB and donor partnership.