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International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme
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Item 10.3 of the Provisional Agenda: World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR)
c. Biosphere reserves as learning platforms for sustainable development
including the future work of the task force on quality economies

1. The Madrid Declaration on MAB and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) acknowledges that the WNBR constitutes a global network of places that Member States of UNESCO can prioritize as locations for testing the applications of sustainable development principles and practices dedicated to establishing and maintaining context-specific and mutually beneficial relationships between nature and biodiversity conservation and socio-economic well-being of people. The Madrid Declaration subsequently urges UNESCO, its Member States and Secretariat, to make optimum use of biosphere reserves for the promotion of sustainable development and the WNBR and associated regional, sub-regional and national networks as forums for exchange of experience and lessons learned during the UNDESD.

2. A key overall goal of the Madrid Action Plan (MAP) is indeed to enable the active use of places included in the WNBR as learning sites for sustainable development, i.e. demonstrating approaches to enhance co-operation amongst epistemic (academic), political, practitioner and stakeholder communities to address and solve context specific problems to improve environmental, economic and social conditions for human and ecosystem well-being. There are consequently several targets and actions in the MAP related to this goal, notably those listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Key Targets and Actions in the MAP related to biosphere reserves as learning platforms for sustainable development

TARGET	ACTIONS	TIME	SUCCESS INDICATOR	RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION	PARTNER
8. Increased linkages between biosphere reserve activities and sustainable development initiatives at multiple scales	8.1. Encourage and enable individual BRs to collaborate with UN-led policies, strategies and action plans towards sustainable development, as well as other initiatives outside the UN system	2010 & 2013	Number of BRs contributing to in country UN and other initiatives on sustainable development	MAB National Committees, individual BRs	Regional Networks, MAB Secretariat
19. Biosphere Reserves to have research programmes on analyses of ecosystem services and their management through stakeholder participation	19.1. Mobilize scientific and non-scientific actors combining all knowledge systems in order to strengthen the scientific functions of BRs	2012	Number of BRs having research programmes	BRs and MAB National Committees, Regional Networks	GEF, UNDP, EU, international NGOs, Thematic Networks, etc.
20. Biosphere reserves have research programmes linked to the development of the	20.2. Use BRs as sites for applied, problem oriented research for sustainable development linked to the zoning and management plan.	2012	Number of BRs with research agendas related to sustainable development	Individual BRs	Universities, research institutions, funding agencies

management plan and zoning	Incorporate the results of applied ecological and socio-economic research into ecosystem management				
21. Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) programmes with educational and research institutions	21.1. Promote the BR as a learning site of excellence for sustainable development, for demonstrating trade-offs and balance amongst ecosystem services, human environment interactions and well-being, in the framework of DESD	2010	Number of schools associated with BRs through joint classes, school camps, curriculum development	Individual BRs	Associated Schools Project Network, UNESCO Education Sector
26. Improved generation of profits and livelihood benefits in biosphere reserves through sustainable production, harvesting, processing and marketing of biosphere reserve products	26.1. At least one pilot BR in each Regional Network chosen to carry out an assessment of the economic contribution of BRs to local economies with the active involvement of local communities	2013	Number of BRs developing assessments in each region	Regional Networks	Private sector, research, academic and outreach institutions, and Thematic Networks
	26.2. Further the work of the Task Force on Quality Economies by creating or strengthening partnerships with businesses to identify, develop and promote markets and fair trade for goods using the BR brand	2010	Number of BRs involved with the work of the Task Force on Quality Economies	MAB Secretariat, individual BRs, MAB National Committees	Private sector and Thematic Networks
	26.3 Promotion of alternative and Sustainable livelihoods primarily targeting vulnerable populations within BRs such as local communities, minorities, indigenous and ethnic groups	2013	Number of BRs implementing sustainable alternative livelihoods to ensure ease of poverty	UNESCO Member States, individual BRs	National and international funding agencies, GEF, UNDP, etc.
27. Increased involvement, support and buy-in of private sector	27.1. Create or strengthen partnerships with businesses to identify, develop and promote markets and fair trade for goods and services in BRs and to support management and communication relating to BRs	2013	Number of businesses actively involved in implementing the BR idea/ BR management. Number of businesses actively involved in supporting activities indirectly in BRs	BRs and MAB National Committees	Private sector
	27.2. Promote incentives for product labeling in BRs	2012	Study available on local BR products	MAB Secretariat, individual BRs	Private sector

3. The successful realization of these targets are in most cases likely quite challenging and would probably be facilitated by enhanced collaboration, networking and information exchange among MAB National Committees, biosphere reserves and relevant public and private decision makers and stake holders for this purpose. The challenges are perhaps particularly significant for the pre-Seville biosphere reserves many of which were established with a conservation focus and with less attention to the developmental aspects of the biosphere reserve concept and the importance of well-defined buffer zones and transition areas for this purpose. Revised zonation and associated management plans compatible with the Seville Strategy could therefore be a precondition for enabling such biosphere reserves to meet these targets.

4. Reference is made in relation to Target 26 to the MAB Task Force on Quality Economies. This Task Force was established by the MAB Council in 2002 with the purpose of providing policy advice that could help biosphere reserves to become regional models for sustainable development. The Task Force came to concentrate its efforts on the drafting of a policy document related to labelling of biosphere reserve goods and services as a tool for sustainable development in biosphere reserves and for promoting the visibility of biosphere reserves at the national, regional and international levels.

5. In view of the broad and complex set of issues contained in the MAP related to biosphere reserves as learning sites and platforms for sustainable development, it would now seem beneficial to re-consider the scope and *modus operandi* of this Task Force in order to better reflect this complexity and to engage a larger number of participants. Furthermore, while the notion of quality economies has generally been positively perceived, it has also been met with certain concerns as being ambiguous and subjective, as well as potentially restrictive in relation to development and trade aspirations in the South.

6. It is now therefore suggested that the Task Force be transformed into several *ad-hoc* open-ended Sustainable Development and Green Economy Learning Platform Working Groups with the purpose of promoting collaboration and networking among interested biosphere reserves, MAB National Committees, Focal Points, academia, research institutions, schools, the private sector and interested stakeholders for the successful implementation of the above-mentioned MAP targets and actions.

7. Such working groups could preferably be formed around relevant key themes, such as:

- Biosphere reserves as learning platforms for education for sustainable development;
- Labelling, branding and marketing of biosphere goods and services;
- Tourism and biosphere reserves;
- Ecosystem opportunities for biosphere reserves, such as bio-carbon markets.

8. In view of the importance of cities and urbanization in sustainable development discussions, in addition to addressing the MAP targets in Table 1, it is therefore also suggested that these groups would give due consideration also to MAP Target 23 focusing on “A mechanism for biosphere reserves to address urban issues in a regional context”.

9. The *ad-hoc* open-ended working groups could be coordinated by interested Member States, regional and thematic MAB Networks, MAB Committees, MAB Focal Points or individual biosphere reserves and report back to the MAB Council. The working groups would likely mainly conduct their business using e-mail and the internet, although workshops, seminars and meetings should also be encouraged. The MAB Secretariat staff at UNESCO Headquarters and in the UNESCO Field Offices would facilitate and support the deliberations of the working groups as appropriate.

10. The MAB Council is invited to consider the establishment and priority themes of *ad-hoc* open-ended Sustainable Development and Green Economy Learning Platform Working Groups as outlined above.