6th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO

on the occasion of the 40th session of the General Conference

(15 – 16 November 2019), Room XII, UNESCO Headquarters

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Figure 1: Participants at the 6th Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO
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DAY 1: 15 NOVEMBER 2019

Introduction

The 6th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO took place on 15 and 16 November 2019 at the UNESCO Headquarters, in the margins of the 40th session of General Conference held from 12 to 27 November 2019. Representatives of 148 National Commissions/Permanent Delegations from all five regional groups of UNESCO attended the meeting. The programme firstly explored the Strategic Transformation and a dialogue with National Commissions for UNESCO (NatComs) on the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029, and secondly, focused on the transversal cooperation between all UNESCO sectors and NatComs.

1. Opening of the meeting by Mr Xing Qu, Deputy Director-General

During the opening remarks, Mr Xing Qu, Deputy Director-General, congratulated Mr Firmin Edouard Matoko, Assistant Director-General for Priority Africa and External Relations (ADG/PAX), for organizing a series of discussions with NatComs. Mr Qu made reference to the Medium Term Strategy for 2022-2029 and the Strategic Transformation that will consolidate the programmes of UNESCO. He mentioned that cooperation and reinforcement of synergies are important to be effective in a multilateral Organisation. Mr Qu recalled that NatComs are key actors to strengthen UNESCO at the national level being on the forefront of the Strategic Transformation.

After the opening remarks, ADG/PAX Firmin Edouard Matoko welcomed the participants, and conveyed his appreciation for the training that was conducted for new Secretaries-General of NatComs on 14 November 2019 at the UNESCO Headquarters. Mr Matoko stressed that NatComs for UNESCO are an essential part of UNESCO and their voices should be heard. He gave a short presentation on Priority Africa, the preparation process of the future Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4), the future Draft Programme and Budget (41 C/5) and the draft Roadmap presenting the different phases of the preparatory process, which is contained in the document 40 C/11 Annex.

2. Election of the Chair, Vice-Chairs (2), Rapporteurs (2) and Adoption of the Agenda

- Dr Ghada Abdelbary, Secretary-General of the Egyptian National Commission for UNESCO was elected Chair.
- The Vice-Chairs elected were: Ms Marjutka Hafner, Secretary-General, Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO, and Mr Mai Phan Dung, Secretary-General of the Viet Nam National Commission for UNESCO.
- The Rapporteurs elected were: Ms Marcellia Henry, Secretary-General, Sint Maarten National Commission for UNESCO, and Mr Rod April, Secretary-General, Namibia National Commission for UNESCO.

The Agenda was unanimously adopted.
3. First Dialogue: Strategic Transformation and Reflection on the Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4)

During his introductory remarks to the dialogue, Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux, Director of Bureau of Strategic Planning (DIR/BSP), highlighted that there could be no relevance without communication with NatComs, because the next Medium-Term Strategy should be a consultative process, which will start from February 2020. Mr Le Saux provided the context of the presentations, and stated that there was a sense of urgency in the dialogue for UNESCO to play a new role in addressing the challenges in achieving the goals of Agenda 2030.

The ADG/PAX, DIR/GE, ADG/SC, ADG/IOC, ADG/ED, ADG/SHS, ADG/CLT, ADG/CI and DIR/BSP, each gave a short presentation on their respective fields.

Pertinent issues outlined in the presentations were:

Mr Firmin Edouard Matoko: ADG/PAX

- It is important to understand the genesis of Priority Africa 25 years ago.
- There is a need to focus on Priority Africa and how to establish partnerships.
- Aim at social transformation and Agenda 2063 “The Africa we want”.
- The Operational Strategy of UNESCO is based on the Vision of the African Union: “To Build an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena”.
- The strategy addresses the stakes and challenges facing Africa’s Development:
  - Demographic growth
  - Sustainable development and economic growth
  - Social transformations
  - Democratic governance
- UNESCO’s Action is focused on building peace through fostering more inclusive and resilient societies, and on institutional capacity-building in favour of sustainable development and poverty reduction.
- The operational strategy for Priority Africa (2014-2021) guides all UNESCO actions in favour of Priority Africa, particularly under the six “flagship programmes” that will raise the profile of Priority Africa as recommended by the Member States.
- The operational strategy of UNESCO for Africa is in alignment with the sustainable development goals of the Agenda 2030 as well as the objectives defined by the African Union in the Agenda 2063.

Ms Gulser Corat: DIR/GE

- Gender equality remains a global priority of UNESCO and continues to be mainstreamed in all areas of work, across all programmes.
- The need for STEM education, more women in marine science, and science careers for girls and women.
- More women representation in key creative and decision-making roles in culture and science is essential.
Gender equality in the media is vital, especially as it relates to representation, participation, decision making and security of women journalists.

The need to tackle disengagement and the dropout rate of boys especially in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Indicative questions:
- How can National Commissions strengthen their actions for gender equality?
- How to strengthen the advocacy role for gender equality of National Commissions at national level?
- How to increase the capacity of National Commissions to implement gender equality?
- Could National Commissions commit to more transformative national gender action?

Ms Shamila Nair-Bedouelle: ADG/SC

Harnessing science, technology, innovation and knowledge for sustainable development is essential.

Closing the technology gap (Artificial intelligence, biotechnology).

Closing the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

Open access to promote open science.

Protection of natural resources.

Science diplomacy and science for peace.

Capacity building through Category II Centers, UNESCO Chairs, IBSP-basic sciences, and partnerships.

Multi-sectoral, pluri-disciplinary responses are needed to achieve SDGs.

UNESCO and Member States are asked to reflect on these questions with regards to the future of the natural sciences:
1. How to better reposition UNESCO in the 2030 Agenda, the 2063 African Union Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda?
2. How to best ensure UNESCO’s support to the Member States in the implementation of these Agendas in its various domains? How to best support countries to access Science and Technology & Innovations for sustainable development?
3. Ways to empower women scientists?
4. Ways to connect UNESCO science structures?
5. What is the role of UNESCO in the broad global responses to global environmental crisis, biodiversity and habitat loss? How does science provide the baseline and the potential solutions?
6. What capacities are needed for sustainable and natural resource management?
7. How does Science Diplomacy fit in with the global UN 2030 agenda?
8. What opportunities are available for a more integrated and transdisciplinary UNESCO, and activities that are inclusive, participatory, as well as Climate-neutral and climate-friendly?
9. What tools do we need to measure impact of Science initiatives?
Mr Vladimir Ryabinin: ADG/IOC

- We depend on the ocean. Ocean is around us but we do not feel it. Ocean is polluted. Science is needed to manage the ocean.
- IOC mainstreams activities and uses science to organise the work of the ocean in a sustainable way.
- Oceans are losing capacity to absorb carbon.
- National data centers provide services such as tsunami warning and conduct assessment.
- African scientists do not publish enough.
- Seagrass in the Caribbean is affecting the tourism industry.
- Decade: Science Capacity for Ocean Management.


Ms Stefania Giannini: ADG/ED

- Salient and emerging issues for UNESCO after sectoral dialogues are as follows:
  - SDG 4 at global level, reinforcing SDG4 coordination:
    - Raising visibility and impact of the SDG4 Steering Committee;
    - Global Multilateral Education platform: joint action;
    - Global Education Forum: advocacy and financing.
  - SDG 4 at country level:
    - Technical support and capacity development as crucial delivery modalities and reinforcement of monitoring and evaluation;
    - Two global priorities on Gender and Africa to be maintained;
    - Key thematic areas to be strengthened in education: sector wide policies and plans, teacher training, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Higher education, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital education, education for migrants and refugees, literacy and media information literacy.
  - Data collection, analysis, and key publication such as Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR).

- Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education (SDG 4.7) are cross-sectoral and transversal themes.
- Other cross-sectoral and transversal themes: Culture and climate; Africa, cultural industries, creativity and economic growth; youth.
- In regards to Sustainable Development Goals (13, 16, 8,10, 3 & 17) the following indicative questions were outlined for consideration as it relates to education:
  - What role can education play in fostering the creativity needed and in changing human behaviour to help resolve climate change? (SDG 13)
  - In an increasingly interdependent world, how can we harness diversity to foster peaceful coexistence and strengthen social cohesion? (SDG 16)
  - In a context where technology is transforming the way we work, live and learn, what are the relevant skills and competencies required for tomorrow? (SDG 8)
How do we harness the youth dividend, plan for new skills, new jobs and lifelong learning? How can education reduce inequalities? (SDG 10)

How can education develop the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives? (SDG 3)

What role for the private sector education? How can we uphold the principle of education as a public good while recognizing a role for private actors to contribute? (SDG 17)

UNESCO’s Education programme: Flagship initiatives:

- Girls’ and women’s education:
  - New initiative “Her Education, Our Future” – 3 priorities: better data; better policy and planning frameworks; and better teaching and learning practices.

- Education for vulnerable migrants, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees:
  - New strategy underway to help countries deliver on international commitments, particularly the two Global Compacts, to increase the humanitarian-development nexus and guarantee the inclusion of crisis-affected populations and facilitate the recognition of their qualifications.

- Research & foresight, including Information and Communication technology (ICT) in education and artificial intelligence:
  - Reaffirming UNESCO’s intellectual leadership through the Futures of Education project, which includes the development of a new global report for 2021.

- Higher education:
  - New Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications adopted, a milestone in UNESCO’s efforts to promote inclusion, mobility and international cooperation in higher education.

Ms Nada Al-Nashif: ADG/SHS

- Growing inequalities: Poverty persists – 3.8 billion people, almost half of the world’s population are living on less than $5.50 a day. Women and girls affected in a disproportionate manner.

- Frontier technologies: Developments in science, technology and innovation have a great potential to transform the present and future of humanity for the better, and in favour of sustainable development, but they also raise potential risks and ethical issues that need to be addressed.

- Climate change makes vulnerable populations more vulnerable, threatening the achievement of all aspects of the 2030 Agenda.

- The interplay of identity and diversity is an increasingly important determinant of the inclusiveness and peacefulness of our increasingly diverse societies.

- Assertive young women and men emerge today as critical stakeholders for our societies.

- UNESCO has the only global blueprint for sports.

- Ethics of artificial Intelligence becomes critical in discussions.

- We need closer cooperation with UNESCO, UN Agencies and youth.

- SHS contributes to achieving Agenda 2030, in particular SDGs 16, 10 & 11, and is embedded in SHS’s thematic and functional areas:
  - Social Inclusion and Equality
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- Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship
- Global partnership
- Gender Equality and Diversity
- Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability
- Institutional Capacity

- Indicative questions:
  - What are/will be the key global trends, opportunities and challenges of relevance to SHS mandate over the next 10 years?
  - How to best ensure UNESCO’s support to the Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in its various domain while we also think beyond it?
  - Each of the four overarching challenge areas- peace, inequalities, technologies, the environment- demands an integrated approach. Where and how can you see opportunities for a more integrated and interdisciplinary UNESCO approach?
  - Given the emphasis in SHS on mainstreaming, how can the Global Priorities Africa and Gender be better reflected in our programmes?

**Mr Ernesto Ottone Ramírez: ADG/CLT**

- Salient and emerging issues after sectoral dialogues:
  - The Defense of cultural diversity, pluralism and social cohesion;
  - Development of creative economy and innovation;
  - Fundamental freedoms, access to culture;
  - Prevention and mitigation of conflicts and natural disasters;
  - Policy-making, role of conventions and country interventions.

- Cross-sectoral and transversal themes:
  - Culture and climate change;
  - Africa, cultural industries, creativity and economic growth;
  - Culture and identities;
  - Youth.

- Indicative questions:
  - What programmes should be prioritized to defend cultural diversity and pluralism, inclusion, access to culture and knowledge (SDG 4, 11, 16)?
  - What place should be given to the prevention and mitigation of conflicts and natural disasters (SDG 11, 13, 15, 16)?
  - What levers should be used to defend fundamental freedoms, access to culture, including in digital form, gender equality (SDG 5, 16)?

**Mr Moez Chakchouk: ADG/CI**

- Freedom of expression, Safety of journalists and access to information (online and offline):
  - Reinforce action to implement the UN Plan of Action
  - Director-General’s reports and monitoring actions

- Digital transformation and internet universality:
  - Artificial Intelligence
  - Universal access to the internet
  - Bridging the digital divide
• Media and information literacy and media development:
  o Tackling disinformation and hate speech
  o Strengthen Media and Information (MIL) in the CI Sector and across Sectors
• Gender equality:
  o Safety of women journalists
  o Representation of women in and through media
• Africa:
  o Continued focus on Africa in all CI areas
  o Capacity-building in view of digital transformations
• Intersectoriality:
  o Cross-sectoral approaches (e.g. on freedom of expression, Media and Information Literacy, preventing violent extremism)
  o Furthering cooperation between Communication & Information and Education Sectors
• Access to information society.
• Information day for Access to Information was newly recognized. The day will be commemorated on 28 September. Member States asked to commemorate the date.
• World Press Freedom Day event will be held in the Netherlands in 2020.
• Indicative questions:
  o In your opinion, what are or what will be the global, regional or key national trends, opportunities and challenges relevant to the CI Sector’s mandate over the next 10 years?
  o Where do you see opportunities for a more integrated and interdisciplinary UNESCO approach with CI involvement?
  o How can the CI Sector better reflect Priority Africa in our programmes and organizational culture?
  o How can CI Sector strengthen institutionalize the promotion of Gender Equality Priority in our programmes?

Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux: DIR/BSP

A key point made in Mr Jean-Yves Le Saux’s presentation was that National Commissions would play a key role in the formal consultation process of the Director-General to take place in February-May 2020 such as:
• National level consultations: replying to online questionnaires that the Director-General will address to each Member in February 2020. It is expected that national experts, members of UNESCO’s International and Intergovernmental Programmes will be involved in these consultations;
• Sub-regional/regional consultations will be organized by the Field Offices, which is a novelty of the preparatory process;
• Interregional meeting of the National Commissions: will be held from 25-29 May 2020 in Lugano, Switzerland, and the programme will focus on the Consultations on 41 C/4 and 41 C/5.

Mr Le Saux mentioned that a guidebook for members of UNESCO’s International and Intergovernmental Bodies has been published in 2019 with the following objectives:
• Familiarize new members of International and intergovernmental bodies (IIB) with UNESCO working methods and C/4 and C/5 mechanisms;
Provide good practices on how to contribute effectively to the Organization’s work.

It is available online at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368533

He stated that within the framework of Pillar 3 of the UNESCO Strategic Transformation, a series of 5 Sectoral Dialogues and one Dialogue on Global Priorities and Interdisciplinary issues between the Secretariat and the Permanent Delegations were organized in July and October 2019. The summaries of these dialogues contain preliminary indications of key aspects related to major trends and challenges impacting UNESCO’s action in the future. The reference documents are: 40 C/ INF.18 and 40 C/7 Annex.

Discussion

During the discussion that followed the presentations, the major points raised by NatComs were:

- Reinforcing the dialogue between the Secretariat and NatComs and among the NatComs themselves. UNESCO needs to consult NatComs in order to focus its action and adjust it to the specific circumstances of each country. NatComs are important because they provide for day-to-day interactions between UNESCO and Member States.

- Several NatComs supported the idea of a twinning program between NatComs from developed countries and NatComs from developing countries. NatComs have great networking potential.

- Achieving true intersectoriality within the Secretariat. UNESCO’s sectors need to cooperate more and coordinate their action in the context of the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029. This holistic approach will allow UNESCO to deploy a more unified and therefore effective action on the ground. This will also render UNESCO’s action more inclusive by allowing all stakeholders to play a role and by connecting social and environmental goals.

- Making Small Island Developing States (SIDS) a Priority on par with Priority Africa. This involves institutional capacity, increased budget, and an approach designed to meet the specific needs of the SIDS. UNESCO’s influence in the Pacific and the Caribbean has been dwindling, and an increased budget could address that problem. UNESCO’s action concerning the preservation of oceans must be fully integrated into the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029.

- Rethinking UNESCO’s communication in order to include the wider population into its efforts. This can be done through better storytelling and the creation of a narrative that engages the citizens.

- The world’s youth needs to be engaged with and included into UNESCO’s work. UNESCO must also improve its approach to gender equality, especially in the field of education and in its data collection methodology.
Priority Africa must be enhanced. Several African NatComs stated that Africa is still lagging behind and that UNESCO’s objectives on the continent cannot realistically be met if UNESCO’s approach remains the same.

5. Positioning UNESCO at country level

Present were Ms Claudia Uribe, Director of the Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean and Representative in Chile (DIR/FU/STG); Ms Ann Therese Ndong Jatta, Director of Multi-Sectoral Regional Office for Eastern Africa (DIR/UNESCO/Nairobi); and Mr Eliot Minchenberg, Chief of UN Section, Division of External Relations, Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations (C/PAX/DRX/UN).

The presenters explained the goals of the current UN reforms and raised the question of their impact on UNESCO’s relationship with its Member States. The following issues were raised:

- NatComs should reflect on how they can position themselves in the UN Reform as they have a crucial role to play.
- The UN Reform calls for high-level strategic dialogue.
- NatComs can play a crucial role in helping to identify and secure new opportunities for partnerships and resource mobilization.
- NatComs can help in improving the public information and outreach of UNESCO field offices in order to create greater awareness of UNESCO’s programmes in the country.
- NatComs can work together with UNESCO field offices to develop new projects proposals and support the implementation.
- NatComs must be more involved in monitoring and evaluation.

Discussion

The points/arguments presented were:

- NatComs must become bridges between UNESCO and its Member States. They must not be sidelined by UNESCO or by their national governments.
- The role of the Cluster Offices, Liaison Offices and Field Offices must be clarified. Their relationship with Member States must be streamlined. The impact of the UN Reforms on the Offices must be anticipated and managed.
- DIR/UNESCO/Nairobi underscored the strategical role played by NatComs and the strategic dialogue which ought to take place between Member States and the UN.
DAY 2: 16 NOVEMBER 2019

1. Special Session in preparation for the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions

Mr Nicolas Mathieu, Secretary-General of the Swiss National Commission for UNESCO, gave a short presentation on the preparations for the 7th Interregional Meeting of National Commissions, which will take place from 25 to 29 May 2019 in Lugano, Switzerland. He was accompanied by representatives of the city of Lugano, including the Mayor. Practical information would be forwarded to all National Commissions by mid-November 2019, and a website will be available shortly.

2. Role of National Commissions in Strengthening UNESCO’s Partnerships at Country Level

In attendance for this session were Ms Shamila Nair-Bedouelle (ADG/SC) and Mr Mohammed Djelid (DIR/BSP), who shared their perspective on the new draft Comprehensive Partnership Strategy. Mrs Esther Kuisch-Laroche, Director of UNESCO in San José (DIR/FU/SJO) provided her views from a Field Office perspective.

The presentations covered the following points:

Ms Shamila Nair-Bedouelle (ADG/SC) & Mr Mohammed Djelid (DIR/BSP)

Discussed Strategic Partnerships – Pillars 2: Strengthening UNESCO’s means of action.


In regards to outreach and access, it was suggested to help UNESCO identify and reach out to suitable public and private partners on their territory.

For visibility at the country level, it was advised to support UNESCO positioning the Organization vis-à-vis national partners, and participation in regional/national partners’ forum.

As for new directions on private sector engagement, the following were proposed: scaling up private sector in selected countries with strong private sector potential, exploring opportunity for fundraising from individuals, and strengthening engagement with high net worth individuals and foundations.

Mrs Esther Kuisch-Laroche, (DIR/FU/SJO)

Indicated that NatComs can play a crucial role in the development of new partnerships such as:

- helping to identify new opportunities for partnerships;
supporting UNESCO Field Offices in carrying out “due diligence” and ensuring that new partnerships (particularly with the private sector) are in the best interest of the Organization and host country;

- helping in improving the public information and outreach of UNESCO field offices in order to create greater awareness of UNESCO’s programmes in the country;

- supporting the organization of national events to introduce UNESCO to new potential partners;

- working together with UNESCO field office to develop new project proposals and support the implementation.

Mr Sebastien Goupil, Secretary-General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, and Mr Everton Hannam, Secretary-General of the Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO shared the perspective of NatComs. Their presentations are summarized below:

Mr Sebastien Goupil, Secretary-General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO

The key to youth engagement and intergenerational dialogue is to:
1. address barriers preventing youth from participating in your work (Action1);
2. champion inclusive programming, information & governance (Action 2);
3. mainstream youth perspectives through active roles in your structures and initiatives (Action 3);
4. invest in developing the leadership potential & skills of youth (Action 4).

Youth Engagement in NatComs yields benefits for the youth, National Commissions, and UNESCO. For the youth they receive social and professional development, become global citizens (global citizenship), and participate in youth programs that are youth-centered. The benefits for UNESCO and National Commissions are new ideas and perspectives, organizational stability and sustainability and our work equals more impact.

Mr Everton Hannam, Secretary-General of the Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO

NatComs play a pivotal role in preparing, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the Organization’s strategies and programme actions as well as in promoting its mandate and visibility in Member States and Associate Members.

NatComs serve as focal points for governments, reference in assessing development needs and challenges in their respective countries and repositories of information and resources from the Organization.

When utilizing the Comprehensive Partnership Strategy (CPS), it is important to:
1. Review priorities defined by member states;
2. Examine collaborations with various partnerships (government, private sector, civil society, National Commission, academia) in forging a new and dynamic strategy in achieving SDGs in UNESCO mandate;
3. Strengthen relationships with UN Agencies, Funds;
4. Focus outreach with private sector to ensure support and involvement in UNESCO’s programmes and projects relevant to the region;
5. Increase cooperation from international development agencies including financial institutions
6. Prioritize partnerships that strengthen the impact and visibility of UNESCO’s programme.

Recommendations made at the end of the presentation were:
- Technical and other support via the field offices and the Secretariat should be offered to NatComs whose engagement or involvement in the CPS is absent or limited.

**Discussion**

During the discussion that followed the presentations, the major points raised by NatComs were:

- The necessity to develop a partnership between NatComs and the private sector. NatComs underscored the need for a memorandum drafted by the Secretariat, providing the guidelines for cooperation with clubs and private enterprises. DIR/DRX explained that such a partnership emerges from progressively increasing cooperation.

- The symbolic power wielded by UNESCO. UNESCO’s strength is derived from its use of symbols. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance UNESCO’s symbolic power. This could be done through public ceremonies, awards, etc. NatComs are comparable to small UNESCOs in their respective countries. Increasing the Organization’s symbolic power at the national level via NatComs will increase its visibility worldwide, thereby initiating a virtuous circle.

- The need for a mobilization of the youth. The youth ought to be given greater responsibility in decision-making. This could be done via the creation of transnational youth networks and of an online youth platform.

- The need for a platform for best practices. Since NatComs have different experiences, they would benefit from a platform that would allow them to share their best practices.

- The necessity to better support NatComs. There are vast differences in terms of funding and capabilities among NatComs. The Secretariat could consider directly supporting the NatComs in order to level the playing field.

3. **Sharing Good Practices and Initiatives across the network of National Commissions**

The following Secretaries-General gave presentations on lessons learnt, good practices and initiatives. They were: Ms Rosie Agoi (Uganda), Mr Mai Phan Dung (Viet Nam), Ms Tala Zein (Lebanon), Mr Alexandre Navarro (France), Mrs Baiba Molnika (Latvia) and Mrs Marva Browne (Curacao).

The Ugandan National Commission started by giving a presentation on how to establish a functional and effective National Commission. This included:

- Understanding the specific role of National Commissions and ensuring adequate staffing.
• Emphasizing the role of advocacy and publicity on UNESCO and NatComs’ respective mandates and enhancing the visibility of implemented activities.
• Involving all stakeholders for better tripartite working relationships, information sharing and coordination.

Members of the panel then proceeded to share examples of best practices from their countries. These are summarized below:

• Creating space and platforms to showcase cultural material to a foreign public, and engaging stakeholders such as indigenous filmmakers and artists through collaborations with cultural institutions as well as setting up an Advisory Council on SDG4 to establish connection and linkages between government and society.

• Designing tools and databases in support of programmes and projects such as a cross-cutting analytical matrix linking UNESCO Programs, major areas of activities and SDGs (UK); a UNESCO Culture development Index 2018 to help assess the overall levels of performance, achievement and advancement of culture.

• Prioritizing Youth and SDGs through events such as training workshops on Intangible Cultural Heritage and World heritage, organizing science cafes with academia, youth volunteering programs, celebrations and commemorations, and events focusing on women.

• Fostering cooperation at the national and regional levels, including with summer schools on good practices in sustainable development, joint support for UNESCO anniversaries and joint exhibitions.

• Hosting international events and platforms for dialogue and peace such as the World Culture Forum in 2021 and World Press Freedom Day and synergizing UNESCO Networks, including Secretariats, UNESCO Chairs, ASPnet, and Memory of the World program and LNC.

This session concluded with two spotlight presentations. Prof Dr Kiran Jude Fernandez, Vice Chairman and Director, the United Kingdom National Commission gave the first presentation, entitled “Demonstrating the national value of UNESCO” for UNESCO. Dr Hyung-Gun Kim, Director, Office of International Cooperation, Korea Legislation Research Institute then presented on “Proposal for a joint research project among National Commissions in Asia and the Pacific”.

The main message of Prof Fernandez’s presentation was that people should be able to see the value that an UNESCO designated site has for UNESCO and the Member State through the rich data captured. Dr Kim proposed that a project be implemented in Asia and the Pacific in order to embark on joint research.

During the ensuing discussion several NatComs shared examples of their own best practices and presented the following views:

• Technology should be used to collect data in, e.g. education. Increased knowledge on how to collate UIS data is needed.
• Smaller NatComs still contribute tremendously to the visibility of UNESCO through programmes, projects and activities.
• A call was made for standardized material and support to NatComs be given, so that they can fulfil their mandate.
• NatComs should listen to and learn from each other. What NatComs should learn is “How to make the best impact”.
• The study on the wider value of UNESCO was generally welcomed as a start to be innovative and creative.
• Twinning with other NatComs on various projects were also highlighted.

In conclusion, NatComs were thanked for their fruitful discussions and wealth of ideas, for sharing best practices, and their contribution towards the preparation of the Medium-Term Strategy. They were wished well with their work, and called to convene in Lugano, Switzerland, in May 2020.