

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PROJECTS ON BIOSPHERE RESERVES¹

The following “Guiding principles” were formulated in response to the Seville + 5 Recommendation on the Secretariat’s role as a adviser and “broker” for projects on biosphere reserves. They were endorsed by the MAB International Council at its 17th session on 18-22 March 2002. MAB National Committees are encouraged to use these “guiding principles” in planning and designing projects for biosphere reserves. The MAB Secretariat, at UNESCO Headquarters and in the UNESCO Field Offices, stands ready to help countries to put these principles into practice.

Why projects concerning biosphere reserves?

Biosphere reserves have multiple functions – conservation, sustainable development, research and monitoring, training and education – and, as a member of the World Network, have a responsibility for international co-operation in these fields. Many biosphere reserve authorities, and especially those in developing countries and in transition countries, and/or those designated well before the adoption of the Seville Strategy, do not have the capacity nor the resources to enable them to meet this global mandate. Countries and biosphere reserve authorities are therefore encouraged to seek funding in the form of projects and/or endowment funds from appropriate donor countries, multilateral funding sources (such as UNDP, GEF), regional development banks or agencies and, in certain cases, the private sector².

Countries vs groups of countries: Countries are sovereign and have their own national priorities in the broad field of environment and development. In elaborating projects which focus geographically on sites which are biosphere reserves, mention of their biosphere reserve status should be explicit. However, projects which involve adjacent countries, or groups of countries offer more scope for playing out the mandate of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves for international cooperation and information sharing and should be given priority. Projects to develop transboundary biosphere reserves (TBRs) should receive special attention, using the recommendations endorsed by the MAB International Coordinating Council.

UNESCO’s role:

UNESCO’s financial resources and the capacity of staff located both in HQ in Paris and in the various field offices to help with project development design and implementation are limited. UNESCO however is the best placed institution for offering technical guidance and scientific advice as to the orientation of the project, for helping to identify suitable funding sources and for providing supporting letters. In certain circumstances, UNESCO can grant seed funds to aid countries and groups of countries in elaborating projects and/or securing appropriate counterpart contributions. The UNESCO Field Offices are particularly well placed to advise countries and help the regional biosphere reserve networks to develop and

¹ These guiding principles refer specifically to biosphere reserves and potential biosphere reserves but can also be used to guide the elaboration of projects for similarly managed sites.

² It is recommended that projects with the private sector follow the UNESCO guidelines.

apply for projects and to build synergistic links with relevant ongoing and planned activities in the region. For this, these Offices can act as a catalyst to build partnerships amongst national authorities, biosphere reserve management, other projects and programmes and the private sector. In this connection, these Offices can also help to improve the information flow, to ensure that MAB National Committees are aware of initiatives for projects involving “their” biosphere reserves, although their biosphere reserve status may not be explicit. *Vice versa*, MAB National Committees, UNESCO Commissions and UNESCO Permanent Delegations are encouraged to keep the UNESCO Secretariat informed of relevant projects in their countries.

Priority for projects on biosphere reserves

Priority should be given to projects aiming at making biosphere reserves fully functional with effective participation of local communities and different sectors of society and to projects which implement the recommendations for specific biosphere reserves resulting from the periodic review of the Statutory Framework. Projects should also be sought to implement the recommendations of the regional biosphere reserve networks, especially to create new biosphere reserves in under-represented areas and Transboundary Biosphere Reserves.

Content and orientation of projects

Projects on biosphere reserves should give emphasis to UNESCO’s mandate in education, science and culture, and to the MAB approach, promoting the integration of the natural and the social sciences. Attention should be paid to cultural sensitivity, participation and benefits for local communities, tailoring scientific research to resolve natural resource use problems; fostering dialogue amongst different stakeholders, conflict resolution, biodiversity education and awareness raising, and training of specialists. Preference should be given to relatively small-scale projects with a long-term, holistic view, and the building up local and national capacity for land and water management and sustainable development.

Modalities for project execution

Project execution should whenever possible be the responsibility of the national or local institutions, and preference should be given to calling on experts and NGOs from the country or region concerned. In certain cases, some biosphere reserve authorities request, or are solicited to become recipient of, a number of projects funded by different bodies, with different objectives. For this, the biosphere reserve authority is encouraged to use the biosphere reserve as an integrating and coordinating mechanism giving coherence and direction to these various activities.

Capitalise on formal existence of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

The WNBR is the only intergovernmental network of sites of its kind devoted to meeting conservation, sustainable development and scientific co-operation objectives. It formally exists through the adoption of the Statutory Framework for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves by the UNESCO General Conference in 1995 (under 28C/Resolution 2.4). Projects on biosphere reserves should use their status as members of the WNBR as an

attestation to their international importance and a guarantee to their long-term commitment to international conservation and sustainable development efforts.

Use the Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves and Seville + 5 recommendations

These are the technical orientations for the work of the WNBR, resulting from international expert meetings (Seville 1995 and Pamplona in 2000) and endorsed by UNESCO and the MAB International Coordinating Council. They are therefore government-endorsed recommended actions at the site, national and international levels, which can serve to guide and justify specific projects involving biosphere reserves. The Seville Strategy implementation indicators should be used as part of the results-based project design and implementation.

Capitalise on the MAB structures: MAB National Committees and the MAB Council

MAB National Committees or Focal Points should proactively work with the GEF National Focal Points, the UNDP Resident Representatives and national contacts for the various development banks and/or regional economic development bodies, and/or the private sector to develop projects involving biosphere reserves. The MAB National Committees should also serve as a technical body for ensuring quality control, transparency and accountability. It should also ensure appropriate liaisons amongst government authorities, academics and NGOs at the national level, as well as correspondents with the MAB National Committees of other countries. In turn, the MAB Council and its Bureau can be attributed with being responsible for continually monitoring and evaluating the overall implementation of the MAB Programme and the development of the WNBR, again giving an assurance on long-term commitment and quality control.

Take advantage of the regional MAB and Biosphere Reserve networks

Although these regional networks differ in size, structure and operations, every effort should be taken to use the planned meetings, training courses, publications and web sites of these networks for information exchanges and capacity building. The regional biosphere reserve networks offer the added values of providing a framework for activities in a number of sites within similar ecological and/or cultural systems, often providing a gradient of parameters. They are tailor-made for facilitating exchanges and pooling of resources, and they can address the application of the ecosystem approach in “bioregions”, and building large-scale ecological corridors.

Use biosphere reserves as tools for implementing the main Environmental Conventions

- Convention on Biological Diversity – projects should build on the fact that MAB’s emphasis on the ecosystem approach and sustainable use of the landscape fits well with the aims of the Convention. (see “Solving the puzzle: the ecosystem approach and biosphere reserves” available from www.unesco.org/mab)
- Ramsar Wetland Convention: a joint Ramsar -MAB workplan has been elaborated by the Secretariats, under which a selection of sites with both BR and Ramsar status have been proposed, giving synergy to this work. (contact the MAB Secretariat for details);

- UN Convention on Combating Desertification: biosphere reserves have been identified as offering pilot sites for testing out and demonstrating approaches to desertification UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD): biosphere reserves can be site-based tools for integrated land management and can be used for testing out and demonstrating approaches to combating desertification, as stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding concluded between UNESCO and the UNCCD as from November 1999. To this end, a joint project is being developed by UNESCO-MAB, the United Nations University (UNU) and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) entitled “Sustainable Management of Marginal Drylands”. Using an interregional comparative approach, this project focuses on some biosphere reserves in Northern Africa and Asia, as well as similarly managed areas, with a view to rehabilitate degraded drylands in buffer and transition zones using relatively undisturbed core areas as reference sites for potential natural vegetation.
- World Heritage Convention: Certain core areas of biosphere reserves meet the criteria of outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Convention: the presence of a buffer zone and an outer transition area, and particularly the focus of biosphere reserves on people’s participation, serve to reinforce the protection necessary for World Heritage. (See Article by M. Batisse in PARKS Vol 11 (1), 2001))

Biosphere Reserves in the follow up to the International Year of Mountains (IYM) (2002)

Of particular importance to biosphere reserves is the “Mountain Research Initiative” by IGBP, IHDP and GTOS in which mountain biosphere reserves could be used as monitoring sites for assessing the impact of global change. Moreover, the new initiative of UNESCO, IUCN and WWF on the importance of natural sacred sites for biodiversity conservation will include mountain biosphere reserves to explore the mechanisms of culture-based environmental conservation.

Biosphere reserves and the follow up to the International Year on Ecotourism (IYE) (2002)

Under the auspices of the CBD, a draft set of “International Guidelines for activities related to sustainable tourism development in vulnerable terrestrial, marine and coastal, and mountain ecosystems” were drawn up in 2001. These make explicit references to the biosphere reserve concept and to the WNBR. UNESCO has been invited to consider testing and applying them. The MAB Secretariat has therefore invited Members States to prepare project proposals on ecotourism in biosphere reserves for this purpose. (see MAB Circular Letter 6/2001).

Enhance visibility: All project documents, reports, information brochures, web sites should mention and make cross references to biosphere reserve status under UNESCO’s MAB Programme. MAB National Committees should also inform the MAB Secretariat of any new projects or project results so that this information may be incorporated as appropriate into MAB publications and the MABnet.