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Man and the Biosphere Programme

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

Thirty-eighth session

ITAIPU Biosphere Reserve, Hernandarias, Paraguay

3-6 June 2026

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

This report provides the International Co-ordinating Council (ICC) of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme with an overall update on the development of the MAB Programme since its last session held in Lin'an, Hangzhou, China, in September 2025. The report is accompanied by a powerpoint presentation and is available on-line with other MAB-ICC documents.

1. Statutory duties and procedures related to MAB Programme and WNBR

1.1 The MAB Secretariat implemented the decisions of the 37th session of the MAB-ICC and supported Member States in fulfilling their statutory obligations and in improving their participation in the WNBR through international cooperation and scientific capacity building. As of May 2026, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) counts 784 sites in 142 Member States worldwide, including 24 transboundary sites.

At the invitation of the People's Republic of China, the 37th session of the MAB-ICC took place from 26 to 28 September 2025 in Lin'an, Hangzhou, China. The session report is available here: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000396590. The MAB-ICC included two meetings of the MAB Bureau, held in person on 26 and 27 September 2025. A total of 282 participants attended the session, including 29 out of the 34 Members of the MAB Council, as elected by the UNESCO General Conference at its 41st and 42nd sessions. The session was preceded by the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves held from 22 to 25 September 2025.The MAB-ICC approved 26 new biosphere reserves and five biosphere reserve extensions/modifications, while six new Member States joined the WNBR: Angola, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Iceland, Oman and Tajikistan – among the biggest expansions of the World Network in the programme's history

1.2 Biosphere reserves represent 5.5% of the world's terrestrial surface, an area about the size of Australia, of which 1.6% is composed of core areas under strict protection, an area larger than Peru. The April 2026 UNESCO publication "People and Nature in UNESCO-designated Sites" (see below) confirmed that biosphere reserves - along with World Heritage sites and UNESCO Global Geoparks - have delivered tangible global benefits, including maintenance of wildlife populations in contrast to global decline as well as climate regulation by absorbing vast amounts

of carbon dioxide emissions. Approximately 450 million people live in and around biosphere reserves.

1.3 At its 32nd meeting in February 2026, the Advisory Committee examined seventeen (17) proposals for new biosphere reserves and five (5) requests for extension or modification of an existing biosphere reserve. In addition, three (3) requests for the renaming of existing biosphere reserves were examined as part of the periodic review reporting process, under which the Committee examined 34 periodic review reports and 26 follow-up information from 35 countries.

1.4 In 2021, the MAB-ICC approved the 'Process of Excellence' to ensure that biosphere reserves serve as models for implementing the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. The process is designed to ensure that biosphere reserves uphold the standards set out in the WNBR's Statutory Framework and that progress is reported regularly through submission of Periodic Reviews. As part of the implementation of the Process of Excellence - and to enhance the WNBR as well as quality improvement of all its members - an updated list of sites required to send their periodic review is prepared by the MAB Secretariat, and reminder letters are sent to Member States for their follow up. Item 13 of the agenda (see document SC-26/CONF.238/10) provides more information on this matter.

1.5 The MAB programme's actions in the decade to come will be guided by the Hangzhou MAB Strategic Action Plan, approved at the 37th session of the MAB-ICC. In accordance with the Plan, the MAB Secretariat has begun the elaboration of a dedicated monitoring and evaluation framework, the initial result of which will be presented at this session.

2. Highlights of MAB activities since the 2024 MAB-ICC

2.1 Digitization of MAB processes and data (continued)

2.1.1 The Secretariat advanced the digital transformation of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme through the operationalization of key tools aimed at improving the management, accessibility, and use of programme data. Central to this effort is the completion of the Statutory Submission Platform in early 2026, providing a unified system for the preparation, submission, and review of nominations and periodic reviews. The Platform will be demonstrated at this session of the Council, after which it will be made available for use. Developed through extensive testing with biosphere reserves across multiple countries, the platform enhances efficiency, transparency, and coordination among national authorities, site managers, and advisory bodies. The Secretariat takes this opportunity to thank the national focal points and biosphere reserves representatives from Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Portugal, and the Republic of Korea, who kindly participated in testing the platform. Its demonstration at the 38th session of the MAB Council marks a transition toward fully digital workflows, with voluntary use commencing in 2026 and mandatory adoption foreseen from September 2027.

2.1.2 In parallel, the Secretariat finalized the development of the Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks Resource Hub, expanding the former Biodiversity Portal into a comprehensive data and knowledge platform with significantly enhanced features. The Resource Hub provides structured access to programme-generated data, including enhanced site profiles derived from statutory documents through AI-

supported processes, as well as new functionalities such as document libraries, contact directories, and advanced search tools. Designed to support research, policymaking, and resource mobilization, the platform reflects a strategic effort to integrate data across UNESCO site-based programmes and to operationalize open science principles, while allowing Member States to validate and manage the information associated with their sites prior to broader public release. Alongside the Statutory Submission Platform, the Resource Hub will be demonstrated at this session of the Council and made available for use by the MAB community.

2.1.3 Complementary developments include the introduction of training programmes to support Member States in the use of new digital tools, the continued refinement of a GIS-based alert system for monitoring threats to sites within the context of the UNESCO Sites Navigator, and the establishment of internal data management instruments such as the ICC decision tracker. The Secretariat also advanced discussions on data-sharing arrangements with international partners such as UNEP-WCMC and proposed revisions to periodic review processes to streamline reporting and align with evolving programme priorities, including potential updates to the Periodic Review report format and cycle.

2.1.4 The MAB Secretariat's significant investment in data management is undertaken not only to meet the growing interest from Member States and the demands arising from the Programme's expansion - which already now place significant strain on the Secretariat's limited human resources - but also to align MAB with the principles and decisions of UNESCO Member States regarding the integration of programmes, improved communication, and management efficiency. Further efforts by the entire MAB family are required to ensure the long-term effectiveness and scalability of the Programme's digital infrastructure, which will require sustained technical and financial resources, as well as continued engagement from Member States.

2.2 **MAB Youth related activities**

2.2.1 The MAB Council decided in 2022 to establish an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Youth involvement in the MAB Programme to discuss proposals for more strategic youth involvement in the MAB Programme at national, regional and international levels. Following the completion of the OEWG's work, the Secretariat presented the outcomes and an update on progress made regarding the engagement of youth in the MAB Programme at the 37th session of the MAB-ICC.

2.2.2 In line with the recommendations of the OEWG report, the Secretariat has established a dedicated youth focal point and has asked all Member States to identify and confirm their own national MAB youth focal points - an important step toward enhancing national and local-level engagement, support, and formal recognition of MAB Youth within the overall MAB Programme. At the time of writing, confirmation of National MAB Youth Focal Points had been received from 60.1% of the member states.

2.2.3 Effective youth participation in the preparation of the new MAB Strategic Action Plan was assured through the engagement of two MAB Youth leaders in the drafting group. The Secretariat conducted a global mapping survey in November–December 2025 to take stock of the rapidly growing number of MAB Youth activities across the network and to identify key challenges, opportunities, and priority areas for strengthening youth engagement and impact.

2.2.4 The 3rd Global MAB Youth Forum was held in the Po Delta Biosphere Reserve in Italy during 18-22 May 2026, with participation from more than 150 youth between 18 and 35 from across the World Network. Under the theme “Committed to the Future We Want” and fully aligned with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035), it reflects MAB Youth’s strengthened commitment to addressing biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable development. This was the first global gathering of the newly designated official National MAB Youth Focal Points. Among other key outcomes, the Forum produced concrete youth-led outputs and recommendations to inform MAB youth governance and future youth-led action at national, regional, and global levels. It also resulted in the development of a MAB Youth Declaration and a MAB Youth Roadmap, aligned with the implementation of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan, and identified strategies to strengthen the integration of youth within MAB governance structures, decision-making processes and daily actions of the Biosphere Reserves.

2.3 **Partnerships, New Projects and Initiatives**

2.3.1 New partnerships and fundraising increased in 2025-2026. The Government of Germany’s International Climate Initiative (IKI) approved the development of a new UNESCO-led project supporting mangrove, coral and seagrass restoration and conservation in Colombian and Mexican Biosphere Reserves at a total value of 8.4 million euros over the coming five years. Expected to begin implementation in early 2027, it marks the largest single MAB project in the programme’s history.

2.3.2 Under the first call for catalytic projects of the Kunming Biodiversity Fund, UNESCO was selected by Member States to lead three initiatives that were awarded funding totaling USD 800,000: enhancing ecological connectivity in the Trifinio–Fraternidad Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras), promoting the integration of Indigenous and local knowledge into biodiversity policies in Malawi, Namibia and Trinidad and Tobago, and strengthening community engagement for biodiversity conservation - and a potential biosphere reserve nomination - in the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in Nepal. The three projects were implemented and concluded on time and with tangible outcomes, comparing favourably with projects implemented by other UN agencies.

2.3.3 Held in July 2024, the conference ‘Rooted in Resilience: Unearthing the importance of soil in sustainable development’ held in Agadir, Morocco, launched a new UNESCO Soil Initiative. In 2025, the initiative defined its thematic priorities, built partnerships and began its first activities, including a “Rooted in Resilience II” meeting held in Schelde Delta UNESCO Global Geopark in August 2025, which included the ad-hoc formation of a technical advisory group and soil sentinel network of Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Global Geoparks. The major project “Improving soil health and resilience in UNESCO designated sites (UNES-Soil)” was included in the 2026-27 EU Horizon workplan with a budget of 2.8 million euros. The project will introduce the Soil Sentinel approach, which mobilizes UNESCO-designated sites to improve soil resilience in their site through science, soil literacy, and Indigenous and local knowledge. The proposal is currently under review by the European Union.

2.3.4 The MAB Programme has continued to expand its collaboration with private sector partners. Two projects totaling USD 1.8 million were approved by the Volkswagen Foundation to support activities on mangrove restoration (Brazil, Mexico and Peru) and ecological connectivity (Brazil, Indonesia and Zambia). Two key private sector

projects, the Amazonia project ($5 million) and Woman for Bees ($1.5 million) funded by LVMH and Guerlain, were completed with significant achievements recorded over five years of implementation and with a new Women for Bees Phase 2 project in the final stages of approval. Furthermore, a small-scale project (USD 60,000), funded by Dior, supported the sustainable development of local and Indigenous Peoples linked to the Monarch butterfly in Mexico, and a second phase is currently under discussion.

2.3.5 A new global project was initiated with financial support of $220,000 from the telecommunications company Vivo, focusing on youth capacity building through enhanced digital literacy, creativity and awareness in and around biosphere reserves with an initial focus on Egypt, Italy and Malaysia.

2.4 Global action through the field office network

2.4.1 Across regions, UNESCO field offices reported a strong portfolio of operational projects implemented within biosphere reserves, with a clear emphasis on climate adaptation, sustainable livelihoods and governance. The UNESCO Office in Nairobi played a key role in mobilizing external resources and partnerships, notably through its contribution to the EU-funded ALBATROSS project, in which UNESCO leads key components related to multi-level dialogue, knowledge transfer and the application of climate services and nature-based solutions in biosphere reserves across Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Ghana and South Africa. The project is expected to benefit 50,000–70,000 people, positioning biosphere reserves as platforms for large-scale, externally funded interventions. In parallel, the Office advanced a major agroecology initiative in the Mt. Elgon Transboundary Biosphere Reserve (Kenya and Uganda), directly benefiting up to 20,000 community members and introducing innovative participatory research and community-led approaches. Complementing these efforts, the UNESCO Office in New Delhi implemented targeted initiatives to strengthen women-led sustainable livelihoods in biosphere reserves in India, including support to 50 women through sustainable beekeeping in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve under the Women for Bees project – as well as 60 women through circular economy activities in the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, linking income generation with biodiversity conservation and pollution reduction. These combined actions demonstrate the growing use of biosphere reserves as operational platforms for partnership-based programmes with measurable socio-ecological impact.

2.4.2 In Latin America and the Caribbean, the UNESCO Office in Montevideo and the UNESCO Office in Lima reported sustained, high-impact engagement combining long-term investment and targeted interventions. In Paraguay, over 500 indigenous and rural young women have graduated from the Mbaracayú Educational Center, supported within the Mbaracayú Biosphere Reserve, significantly improving livelihoods and leadership opportunities. In Bolivia, projects in the Beni and Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserves strengthened agroforestry systems, local value chains and fire resilience through the establishment of community brigades and provision of equipment. In Peru, the Women for Bees initiative in the Oxapampa–Asháninka–Yánesha Biosphere Reserve supported 74 women through training and enterprise development, while the completion of the Amazon Project reinforced governance, local economic development and participatory planning frameworks across multiple biosphere reserves. Complementing these field-based interventions, the Offices also advanced the development of a bilingual pedagogical guide on education for

sustainable development for UNESCO-designated coastal and island sites, including biosphere reserves, building on experience from the Archipelago de Juan Fernández Biosphere Reserve in Chile. The guide, structured around teacher-oriented frameworks and practical student activities, is designed to strengthen place-based learning aligned with the SDGs and is expected to be disseminated across the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves. These combined actions highlight strong links between UNESCO-supported projects, capacity-building tools and tangible socio-economic and environmental outcomes.

2.4.3 Field offices also reported targeted support to biosphere reserve processes, including nominations and periodic reviews. The UNESCO Office in Apia facilitated technical and financial assistance to complete periodic reviews for biosphere reserves in the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau, supporting their continued inclusion in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. In South Asia, the UNESCO Office in New Delhi facilitated transboundary cooperation between India and Nepal through a knowledge exchange on the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, while the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu provided technical support to preparatory work for the nomination of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area as a biosphere reserve, with funding secured and technical groundwork underway. These efforts demonstrate continued demand for UNESCO's technical support in expanding and maintaining the global network.

2.4.4 In Africa and the Arab region, activities focused on linking biosphere reserves to broader development and humanitarian frameworks. The UNESCO Office in Khartoum supported projects in the Dinder Biosphere Reserve to enhance food security in collaboration with UNEP, and facilitated innovative infrastructure such as a solar-powered desalination plant in coastal biosphere reserve areas, while also coordinating humanitarian assistance in marine protected areas. These interventions illustrate the role of biosphere reserves in crisis response, resilience-building and basic service provision in fragile contexts.

2.4.5 Regional and thematic networks— such as the Southeast Asian Biosphere Reserves Network (SeaBRnet) supproted by the UNESCO Office in Jakarta - have played an important role in scaling impact through coordination, capacity-building and externally funded programmes. SeaBRnet, with support from Japan Funds-in-Trust, engaged over 400 stakeholders across multiple countries in training and strategic planning aligned with the MAB Strategy 2026–2035, while also strengthening regional cooperation and youth engagement.

2.4.6 The Secretariat, in coordination with the field office network, monitors with particular attention the situation of biosphere reserves in areas affected by conflict and/or natural hazards, focusing its interventions on medium- and long-term monitoring, capacity building, and restoration once the necessary conditions for these interventions have been re-established. The Secretariat calls for solidarity and cooperation among biosphere reserves, regional networks and thematic networks, as well as UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 Centres, with a view to contributing to any actions that may be required.

2.5 Contributions to global processes and programmes

2.5.1 MAB continues to be associated with leading international processes, assisting with UNESCO's overall contributions to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), IPBES, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Future Earth Initiative. In recognition of its intersectoral and interdisciplinary nature, the MAB Programme serves as UNESCO's focal point for biodiversity, coordinating closely with related sectors to advance the Organization's contribution to this critical global agenda.

2.5.2 MAB closely works with the Education sector and the Convention on Biological Diversity to lead the development of the Global Plan of Action on Education for Biodiversity, which is expected to be adopted at COP17 of the CBD in Armenia this October. As part of this effort, MAB co-organized with IPBES and hosted at UNESCO Headquarters the First Authors Meeting for the Second Global Assessment in November 2025. This collaboration underscores MAB's commitment to strengthening the science–policy interface and contributing to global biodiversity agendas.

2.6 **Regional and Thematic Networks**

2.6.1 The World Network of Biosphere Reserves encompasses regional and subregional networks connecting biosphere reserves in the Pacific (PacMAB), South and Central Asia (SACAM), Southeast Asia (SeaBRnet), East Asia (EABRN), Europe and North America (EuroMAB, NordMAB), Africa (AfriMAB), Arab States (ArabMAB), Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal (IberoMAB). In addition, a growing number of thematic networks allow for interactions with particular focus on shared priorities among biosphere reserves across the world, including islands and coastal areas, mountains and caves, among others.

2.6.2 Following consultations, the MAB Council adopted in 2023 a procedure under which a thematic network proposal is brought to the MAB Council for recognition, adding these guidelines to the Technical Guidelines on Biosphere Reserves.

The 37th Session of the MAB-ICC welcomed the People for Living Waters Biosphere Reserves Network. This new thematic network aims to strengthen the protection and sustainable management of inland aquatic ecosystems by connecting biosphere reserves working on rivers, wetlands, lakes and related socio-cultural systems. It seeks to foster cooperation, knowledge exchange and joint research to address shared challenges such as water quality, biodiversity loss, climate change impacts and competing water uses, while promoting nature-based solutions and participatory governance approaches. Through workshops, collaborative projects and capacity-building activities, the network will develop transferable methodologies, support science–policy dialogue, and enhance public engagement. It brings together biosphere reserves, national MAB committees, research institutions and international partners, ultimately benefiting local communities, policymakers and scientists by improving integrated water management and reinforcing the role of biosphere reserves as laboratories for sustainable human–nature relationships.

2.6.3 The Secretariat notes with satisfaction the continued consolidation of the Network of Biosphere Reserves in Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP-MAB), which held its 4th Meeting in March 2026 at the Cerrado Biosphere Reserve in Brazil. The meeting approved the network's Action Plan and elected its management bodies (led by the Cerrado Biosphere Reserve, Brazil, and Quiçama Biosphere Reserve, Angola). The network's 5th meeting will be held in Angola in 2027.

2.7 MAB Awards

2.7.1 Since 2022, the MAB Young Scientists Award Scheme has received support from the Principality of Monaco, enabling five additional annual fellowships specifically benefiting studies on marine, island and coastal issues in biosphere reserves. In 2024, it was decided to formally name the Monaco-funded coastal, island, and marine research award under the MAB Young Scientists Award as the "MAB Young Scientists Award – Prince Albert I of Monaco", commemorating the 100th anniversary of Prince Albert I and supporting young researchers contributing to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

2.7.2 At the time this report was prepared, the call for 2026 submissions was still open, with a closing date of 7 May.

2.8 Cooperation with Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO

2.8.1 The MAB Programme continues to strengthen its collaboration with Category 2 Centres.

2.8.2 The HIST category 2 Centre (China) contributed climate modelling projections for 2050 and 2100, assessing the impacts of extreme climate events on Biosphere Reserves and other UNESCO sites. This work supports evidence-based policies and investment in site conservation.

2.8.3 ERAIFT (Democratic Republic of the Congo) is a partner in the project Lifting the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve into a Climate–Biodiversity Center of Excellence project in the Congo Basin, currently in mid-implementation of its second phase. Managed by the UNESCO Office in Kinshasa, the project is financially supported by the Government of Belgium.

2.8.4 The International Centre for Capacity Development, Sustainability and Societal Change GRÓ (Iceland) offers dedicated six-month Land Restoration Training Programmes (LRT) for fellows from African biosphere reserves. The participation of MAB Fellows in this programme has been highly successful, strengthening capacities African MAB community to address ecosystem degradation and climate challenges. Through an intensive six-month postgraduate programme combining academic coursework, field-based training and applied research projects, Fellows acquire advanced knowledge and practical tools in ecosystem restoration and sustainable land management, directly linked to their work in biosphere reserves. The collaboration between UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme and GRÓ LRT thus plays a key role in building expertise and translating global commitments—particularly under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration—into concrete action on the ground. The most recent intake welcomed four MAB Fellows from Africa – Cameroon, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe.

2.9 Communication, Publications and Awareness-raising

2.9.1 Communication, publications and awareness-raising activities are a structural part of the MAB Programme. The MAB Secretariat maintains an active online presence across multiple platforms and ensures broader visibility through UNESCO's main

communications channels. The International Day for Biosphere Reserves is observed globally on 3 November each year, with over 100 biosphere reserves hosting local events such as forums, tree-planting, school activities, and youth gatherings, thereby reinforcing the Programme's public outreach and community engagement.

2.9.2 Coverage of the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves by the International Institute for Sustainable Development through its Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) marked a significant milestone for the MAB Programme, placing it within the same reporting ecosystem as major global environmental negotiations. ENB provided daily reports from Hangzhou, including highlights, images and a comprehensive summary, reaching its well-established audience of policymakers, negotiators, UN officials, researchers and civil society actors who rely on it as a primary source of information on sustainable development processes. Its reporting emphasized the importance of biosphere reserves for addressing biodiversity loss, climate change and sustainable development, and highlighted calls for greater investment, stronger coordination and enhanced science–policy integration emerging from the Congress discussions. The inclusion of MAB in ENB coverage significantly enhanced the Programme's visibility and policy relevance, extending its reach far beyond the immediate community of biosphere reserves and reinforcing its position within global environmental governance debates.

2.9.3 On 21 April 2026, the seminal report *People and Nature in UNESCO-designated sites* was published as the result of a joint effort by the Secretariats of the MAB, IGGP and the World Heritage Convention. The publication highlights the critical role that biosphere reserves and other UNESCO sites play as effective models for balancing biodiversity conservation with sustainable development. Drawing on evidence from across the global network, the report shows that these sites deliver tangible benefits for ecosystems and communities alike – by supporting biodiversity protection, climate resilience, sustainable livelihoods and inclusive governance - while serving as sites for testing and scaling integrated solutions. At the same time, the report underscores that the full potential of UNESCO-designated sites remains under-realized due to persistent gaps in financing, capacity and visibility. The report therefore makes a strong case for increased and sustained investment in UNESCO-designated sites as cost-effective platforms for achieving global environmental and development goals, and provides a robust evidence base that policymakers and partners can use to advocate for funding, strengthen policy integration and position these sites at the heart of nature-positive and people-centred development strategies.

In consideration of the report's strong and evidence-based demonstration of the effective contribution made by UNESCO-designated sites towards the conservation of nature, culture, and socio-economic development, the Secretariat calls upon the MAB Family – MAB-ICC members, biosphere reserve managers, MAB National Committees and UNESCO National Commissions - to raise awareness amongst the relevant authorities and stakeholders at national level and to call for strengthened investment in the MAB Programme

3. Financial information

3.1 A brief overview of the MAB Programme's financial status will be provided in the Secretary's oral report and included in the accompanying slide presentation made available in advance of the session

4. Conclusions

4.1 The relevance of MAB's tangible approach to conservation and sustainable development continues to grow, evidenced by the rapid expansion of its WNBR as evidenced at the 37th session of the MAB-ICC with 26 new biosphere reserve designations – including the coverage of the entire national territory of Sao Tome & Principe. This brings a diverse range of opportunities and contributions to nature and biodiversity conservation and the promotion of sustainable development at local, national and global levels - but also poses important challenges.

4.2 Since September 2025, a number of new extrabudgetary partnerships, projects and activities have (as outlined above) been launched and implemented, but the lack of resources for the MAB Programme remains. This is only overcome by the dedication of a strong, committed, and professional staff in HQ and field offices, whose remarkable work is highlighted in this report. All members of the wider MAB family must make a much greater effort to raise resources, both financial and technical. It is also essential to reinforce recognition of the relevance and contribution of the MAB programme among political decision-makers.

4.3 To sustain and develop this intergovernmental scientific programme at the appropriate level of delivery, one remedial measure to address staff shortage is to mobilize Member States to provide more professional secondments and JPO (junior professional officer) positions to the MAB Secretariat and to the related UNESCO field offices. Mobilisation of UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 Centers must also be enhanced to support MAB's work. Other related bodies linked to the MAB programme could also be reached out.

4.4 In view of the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, MAB and the WNBR are to play a critical role by enhancing effective biodiversity conservation and providing accurate data to monitor global progress and by showcasing sustainable approaches addressing biodiversity conservation, climate change and human development.

4.5 Youth is an essential component of the MAB programme at present and for the future. MAB will remain an innovative and forward-looking programme for the next 50 years only with their effective involvement and empowerment. Besides Youth, MAB must also seek the support of the public with a more proactive communication strategy using all innovative technologies at its disposal.

4.6 The MAB Secretariat has been strengthening communication and cooperation with Member States, supporting the promotion of new biosphere reserve nominations, periodic review processes, technical training and joint projects designed according to the needs and priorities of each situation. The record number of applications received and the diversification and increase in projects in different parts of the world encourage the Secretariat to continue its work in this direction.

4.7 The MAB Secretary is confident that MAB will continue to be one of the most inspiring programmes of UNESCO and the wider UN system with the support of the MAB family: MAB national committees, scientists, practitioners, BR managers, local authorities, local communities, UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 Centres under the auspices of UNESCO, and the private sector.

4.8 The success of the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves, with its record participation, provides a clear demonstration of the relevance of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves and the MAB Programme, with the Secretariat ready to facilitate the implementation of the new MAB Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan.

4.9 On behalf of the MAB Secretariat and all colleagues working in Paris and UNESCO Field Offices, I express my sincere thanks to the MAB Council for your continuous support and guidance.

5. The MAB-ICC is invited to review the report and guide the Secretary in improving the service of the MAB Secretariat in all concerned aspects.