

A publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Monday, 29 September 2025 | Online at: enb.iisd.org/world-congress-biosphere-reserves-wcbr5

Summary of the Fifth World Congress of Biosphere Reserves: 22-25 September 2025

“Inaction will influence our future forever.” Against the stark backdrop of intertwining and accelerating global crises, the World Congress of Biosphere Reserves, meeting for the fifth time, served as a reminder of the power of the interconnected actions taken by biosphere reserves across the globe in responding to these challenges.

Convening under the theme “Shaping a sustainable future for people and nature,” the Congress reviewed progress since it last met ten years ago and deliberated on strategic priorities for the forthcoming decade of work under the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The MAB Programme’s World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) is a catalogue of internationally designated protected areas that act as “living laboratories” for testing novel approaches and implementing actions contributing to advancing global biodiversity and sustainable development agendas. At the fifth Congress, delegates underlined that a main success of the last decade was in enhancing the quality of the Network. They highlighted that future work must focus on scaling up impact and deepening integration, with calls issued for the WNBR to serve as a “global reference for sustainable development in practice.”

Across four days, the Congress brought together leading experts, conservation practitioners, and representatives of biosphere reserves and the networks connecting them. Alongside a ministerial segment, it featured five thematic sessions that provided spaces for experience sharing and deliberation, through a series of panel discussions and dialogues on:

- the new MAB strategic action plan;
- biodiversity, science, and education;
- optimizing partnerships and finance for biosphere reserves;
- enhancing global, regional, and thematic networks; and
- Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, and youth in biosphere reserves.

Panelists underlined that the WNBR is uniquely positioned to bridge the science-policy gap and connect global ideas with local actions across geographies, politics, and themes. To the list of its strengths, they added its capacity to foster collaboration beyond borders, with many pointing to the establishment and governance of transboundary biosphere reserves.

- During discussions, participants converged on the need for:
- stronger coordination among, and investment in, biosphere reserves;
 - equipping the custodians of reserves with the means to access funding, resources, and capacity building in a sustainable way;
 - meaningfully integrating historically marginalized rights and stakeholders in governance processes; and
 - engaging in mutual learning, including through intergenerational education, and integrating traditional and modern knowledge, tools, and approaches.

Delegates endorsed the [Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan](#) (HSAP) 2026-2035, a comprehensive roadmap guiding the work of the MAB Programme and its members. The HSAP’s three objectives are to:

- contribute to implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by and beyond 2030;
- further develop the MAB Programme and its WNBR, including both human and financial resources, and strengthen the excellence of the Network; and

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- develop research and share knowledge and lessons learned from the WNBR to facilitate the vision of living in harmony with nature, align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and inspire and influence sustainable futures and post-2030 agreements.

Alongside the HSAP, delegates endorsed the Hangzhou Declaration, committing themselves to, among other things, promoting community-based sustainable development models within biosphere reserves and utilizing biosphere reserves as places for scientific research and learning.

The fifth World Congress of Biosphere Reserves took place from 22-25 September 2025, in Hangzhou, China, assembling over 4,000 participants from 150 countries.

A Brief History of the Man and the Biosphere Programme

The MAB Programme is an intergovernmental scientific programme that was launched in 1971 by UNESCO and aims to establish a scientific basis for enhancing the relationship between people and their environments. Combining natural and social sciences, it promotes innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable.

In the words of Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General, “the MAB Programme has laid the scientific foundations for a new harmony between humans and their environment – one that reconciles conservation and development, and teaches us how to live with the living world, in the living world, rather than at its expense.”

The WNBR, established under the auspices of the MAB Programme, is a catalogue of country-nominated sites comprising terrestrial, marine, and coastal ecosystems, each featuring three zones:

- the core area(s) comprising a strictly protected ecosystem;
- the buffer zone surrounding the core areas, used for ecological practices; and
- the transition area, which is the part of the reserve where most activity is allowed.

To date, the WNBR encompasses 759 sites across 136 countries, including 25 transboundary sites. The biosphere reserves, covering more than 5% of the world’s surface and home to over 270 million people, are considered “learning places for sustainable development.” They are sites for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and biodiversity management.

Through the WNBR, the MAB Programme aims to:

- identify and assess changes in the biosphere resulting from human and natural activities and the effects of these changes on humans and the environment, particularly in the context of climate change;
- study the interrelationships between ecosystems and socio-economic processes, amid the loss of biological and cultural diversity that hinders ecosystems’ provision of services for human wellbeing;

- ensure basic human welfare and a livable environment in the context of rapid urbanization and energy consumption as drivers of environmental change; and
- promote the exchange and transfer of knowledge on environmental problems and solutions, and foster environmental education for sustainable development.

The MAB Programme is directly linked to the global environment and development agendas, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Previous Congresses

First World Congress: The first World Congress of Biosphere Reserves was held in Minsk, Belarus, in 1983. The Congress agreed on the [Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves](#), which was adopted by the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC) in December 1984.

Second World Congress: The second World Congress took place in 1995 in Seville, Spain. It produced the [Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves](#) and the [Statutory Framework of the WNBR](#), which have since provided a common platform for the development of biosphere reserves, and defined the principles, criteria, and procedure for their designation. A five-year follow-up to the Seville Conference, the Seville +5 International Meeting of Experts, was held in Pamplona, Spain, in 2000.

Third World Congress: The third World Congress was held in 2008 in Madrid, Spain. It adopted the [Madrid Action Plan](#), detailing the strategy of the MAB Programme from 2008-2013 at the levels of the MAB Bureau and Secretariat, regional networks, national MAB committees, and individual biosphere reserves. The Madrid Action Plan promoted biosphere reserves as “the principal internationally designated areas dedicated to sustainable development in the 21st century.”

Fourth World Congress: The fourth World Congress took place in Lima, Peru, in 2016. It reviewed implementation of the Madrid Action Plan, as well as the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework of 1995. The Congress further reviewed lessons learned and remaining challenges and launched the [Lima Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves](#) for 2016-2025.

Report of the Fifth World Congress of Biosphere Reserves

Opening remarks

Liu Jie, Governor of Zhejiang Province, China, opened the fifth World Congress of Biosphere Reserves on Monday 22 September, noting that its motto, “Shaping a sustainable future for people and nature,” is aligned with: Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Thought on Ecological Civilization; UNESCO frameworks on biodiversity conservation; and the [Lima Action Plan](#) (2016-2025) for UNESCO’s MAB Programme.

Ding Xuexiang, Vice-Premier of the State Council, China, underscored China’s holistic approach in biodiversity conservation, pointing to significant improvements in air and water quality. Among suggestions to strengthen biosphere reserves, he noted: reinforcing policy communication and



Ding Xuexiang, Vice-Premier of the State Council, China

international cooperation; improving scientific and technological support and technology transfer; and fully implementing the Paris Agreement and the GBF.

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO, stressed the scale and speed at which different factors are impacting nature, urging placing ecological multilateralism at the heart of UNESCO's work. She noted that the WNBR now comprises 759 sites across 136 countries and reaffirmed UNESCO's support in fighting environmental deregulation and protecting biodiversity.

In welcoming statements, Hou Jianguo, President, Chinese Academy of Sciences, stressed the benefits of developing biosphere reserves for implementing new concepts and technologies, and for providing a platform for international cooperation. He highlighted the need for: joint research in key areas; a comprehensive data platform and an integrated monitoring and research network for biosphere reserves; and targeted technical support and capacity training to developing countries.

Wang Hao, Secretary, Zhejiang Provincial Committee, China, highlighted the modernized strategy for provincial development and progress in the Zhejiang Province regarding natural reserves, water and energy consumption, and endangered species protection. He noted improved ecosystem administration, management, and restoration mechanisms.

Latifa Yaakoubi, Chair, MAB-ICC, emphasized that the fifth World Congress is taking place at a critical time for the relationship between humankind and nature as the interconnected effects of the triple planetary crisis, of biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change, are intensifying. Underscoring that "only by deepening our knowledge can we change our behavior," she stressed biosphere reserves' uniqueness for building a sustainable future, in particular their ability to connect global ideas with local and regional actions.

Ministerial Segment

Lidia Arthur Brito, Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO, moderated the ministerial segment on Monday, noting this was the first time that a World Congress featured a high-level session.

Shina Ansari, Vice President, and President of the Department of Environment, Iran, emphasized countries' shared responsibility

toward protecting the environment and future generations. Decrying the targeting and destruction of civilian infrastructures in Iran in June 2025, she underscored the resulting damage and pollution caused to biosphere reserves. Highlighting the strategies developed by nomadic pastoralists and rural communities for living in harmony with nature, Ansari emphasized their role in inspiring modern solutions. She encouraged countries to promote multilateralism as a way of strengthening the WNBR.

Nilda Borges da Mata, Minister of Environment, São Tomé and Príncipe, underscored that the upcoming MAB Programme Strategy and HSAP are essential tools for countries implementing the GBF, Paris Agreement on climate change, and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Addressing the importance of multilateralism, she applauded the 60th ratification of the Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), triggering its entry into force. She cited this as a sign of hope for her island country. Borges da Mata highlighted national progress in restoring mangrove ecosystems, reducing plastic waste, and increasing sustainable farming, underscoring the central role of local communities in building resilient biospheres.

Aram Meymaryan, Deputy Minister of Environment, Armenia, reiterated his country's commitment to deepening science-based management of protected areas. He highlighted Armenia's first biosphere reserve nomination as an example of how biosphere reserves can act as platforms to implement the GBF during Armenia's presidency of the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2026.

"If you are alone, you can only achieve so much, if we all come together we can achieve a lot." Dong Baotong, Vice Minister of Ecology and Environment, China, stressed the importance of mutual learning and technology sharing for improving governance, underscoring China's commitment to multilateralism. He drew attention to China's investment in science and technology for ecosystem monitoring, including satellites, drones, and lasers combined with artificial intelligence, and highlighted their contribution of USD 210 million to the Kunming Biodiversity Fund.



Dong Baotong, Vice Minister of Ecology and Environment, China



Narend Singh, Deputy Minister, National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa

Narend Singh, Deputy Minister, National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa, noted that biosphere reserves are central to conservation areas' integration into ecological and social landscapes. He underscored the importance of including marginalized groups in decision making for empowering communities and strengthening Indigenous knowledge and citizen science.

Stressing that achieving peaceful and harmonious coexistence between people and nature is a common responsibility, Liu Guohong, Administrator, National Forestry and Grassland Administration, China, focused on the philosophy of ecological civilization and the improvement of the quality of environmental systems. Among other things, Guohong called for: expanding grassland areas; strengthening ecological conservation and intensifying restoration efforts; and transitioning to an advanced, sustainable forestry industry.

Bruno Angelet, Ambassador of Belgium to China, highlighted Belgium's active engagement in UNESCO's work, including in the Yangambi project for sustainable forest management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the MangRes Project that supports mangrove conservation and restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean. Angelet drew attention to the



Liu Guohong, Administrator, National Forestry and Grassland Administration, China

recently established Kempen-Broek Biosphere Reserve, part of a transboundary area between Belgium and the Netherlands. He celebrated the forthcoming entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement, recalling Belgium's offer to host its Secretariat.

Sara Aagesen Muñoz, Third Vice-President and Minister for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Spain, underscored that biosphere reserves are not mere conservation areas but provide a link between local wisdom and scientific research. She stressed that the new Strategy and Action Plan will assist in consolidating spaces for biodiversity conservation and inequality reduction in a participatory manner, ensuring resilient communities.

The New MAB Strategic Action Plan

Moderated by Han Qunli, International Research Center of Big Data for SDGs, and MAB-China Expert Advisory Committee, this Monday session reflected on the last decade of work under the MAB Programme and looked ahead to areas of work for the HSAP.

MAB Programme Secretary António Abreu emphasized that under the Lima Action Plan, biosphere reserves contributed to advances in:

- biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation;
- sustainable development, by piloting innovations including in agroecology;
- knowledge generation, by functioning as observatories for monitoring socioecological resilience and climate change impacts; and
- policy integration, by informing and supporting global environmental frameworks.

Abreu underlined that the last decade's primary achievement was quality enhancement, citing the adoption of the "exit strategy" for biosphere reserves as an example, a strategy that ensures all sites in the WNBR conform with standards and criteria for inclusion as defined in the Statutory Framework. He further highlighted greater engagement with, and participation by, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and youth, including in drafting the HSAP.

Looking ahead, Abreu stressed the need to scale up impact and deepen integration, calling for the WNBR to serve as a global reference for sustainable development in practice.

Ouyang Zhiyun, Chinese Academy of Sciences, presented on the contribution of the WNBR to global biodiversity conservation. He noted that biosphere reserves are home to nearly 30% of all threatened plants, 79% of all birds, and over half of all animal species, solidifying their role as key areas for biodiversity conservation. He stressed that lack of a unified monitoring system and data fragmentation among stakeholders hinders knowledge sharing, and that many areas with high biodiversity conservation value have not yet established biosphere reserves. Zhiyun acknowledged significant impacts arising from human activities on reserves, particularly due to cropland and artificial forest expansion.



Natalia Beltrán, Co-Chair of the Drafting Group

Presentation of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan

(2026-2035): Natalia Beltrán, Co-Chair of the Drafting Group, described the drafting process since April 2024, stressing that it strived to ensure transparency and inclusivity, upholding gender and geographical balance alongside multi-disciplinary expertise. She highlighted the HSAP vision for a world where “human beings understand their shared future on a finite planet and acknowledge their interdependence with non-human life.”

Beltrán outlined the HSAP’s three main objectives, to:

- contribute to the achievement of MEAs and the sustainable development agenda;
- strengthen and develop the MAB Programme and its WNBR, including both human and financial resources; and
- develop research and share knowledge and lessons learned from the WNBR to facilitate living in harmony with nature, aligning with the SDGs, and to inspire and influence sustainable futures and post-2030 agreements.

Synergies with Other Biodiversity-related Conventions and International Organizations: Moderator Qunli introduced this panel on addressing the interlinkages between the MAB Programme and analogous programmes of different organizations, as well as alignment of the HSAP with relevant institutional strategies for biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development.

Carlos Aldeco, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) Representative in China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, highlighted cooperation between FAO and UNESCO on environmental protection, food security, culture, and health. Among key areas of joint work, he highlighted collaboration on the [UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration](#) and linkages between [World Heritage Sites](#) and [Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems](#). Aldeco further noted the role of biosphere reserves in promoting the global soil agenda by contributing to soil monitoring, sustainable land use, and community management.

Tim Badman, Director, World Heritage, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Centre for Conservation Action, stressed the need to build recognition and understanding of biosphere reserves beyond UNESCO. He highlighted IUCN’s

work in knowledge generation. He identified three levels of collaboration:

- supporting MAB governing bodies in sharing information at the international level, noting that 47% of biosphere reserves also have other designations;
- strengthening implementation through national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs), noting that achieving many of the HSAP targets will require actions at the national level; and
- ensuring biosphere reserve managers are engaged with IUCN global expert commissions on ecosystem management and protected areas, and relevant capacity building for local communities for co-designed processes focused on local needs.

Badman stressed that, in addition to the discussion on the recognition of biosphere reserves as other effective conservation measures, focus should be given to MAB work on youth and culture.

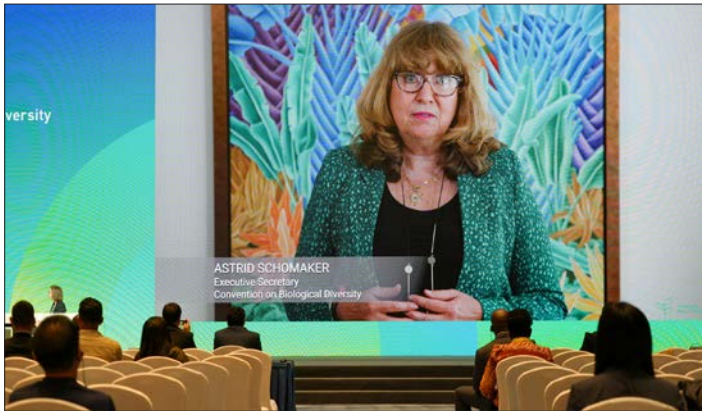
Lü Zhi, Co-Chair, Second Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment, and Executive Director, Peking University Center for Nature and Society, noted the interlinkages between CBD objectives and GBF targets with the MAB Programme. She emphasized that biosphere reserves provide vital knowledge for the second IPBES global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Carolina Adler, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Lead Author, and Executive Director, Mountain Research Initiative, suggested that biosphere reserves serve as pilots that set the context for evaluating nature-based solutions (NbS) and praised their inclusive design process. She stressed that NbS need resilient ecosystems to function, noting degraded ecosystems risk becoming sources, rather than absorbers, of greenhouse gas emissions. Adler further underscored the crucial role of biosphere reserves in meeting the Paris Agreement goals on adaptation.

Motohiro Hasegawa, Japan International Cooperation Agency, stressed the need for collaboration with other MEAs and institutions. He underscored the importance of biosphere reserves as a practical instrument to achieve post-SDGs commitments and post-GBF targets, and proposed integrating them in NBSAPs.



Motohiro Hasegawa, Japan International Cooperation Agency



Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, CBD

Malene Nielsen, Deputy Permanent Delegate of Denmark to UNESCO, drew attention to the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change. She highlighted the role biosphere reserves play in combating disinformation at the local level. She suggested increasing collaboration between biosphere reserves and local journalists to help them understand interlinkages between biodiversity and climate change.

Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, CBD, via video message, noted that the MAB Programme provides necessary space for dialogue and community engagement. She called CBD COP 17 “a moment of truth” for GBF implementation and drew focus to the upcoming submission of the Global Plan of Action on Education for Biodiversity.

Panelists converged on emphasizing that biosphere reserves contribute to many GBF targets beyond Target 3 (Conserve 30% of lands, waters, and seas). Sharing takeaway messages, they highlighted:

- the need to reduce monitoring data fragmentation by linking biosphere reserves to other monitoring systems;
- the valuable expertise of individuals from around the world that the MAB Programme supplies; and
- the importance of transboundary collaboration in peace and security.

In ensuing discussions, panelists addressed, among other things:

- opportunities for best practice and knowledge sharing from other conventions, organizations, and toolkits, including the World Heritage Convention that links nature and culture;
- the need to strengthen integration of Indigenous Peoples, their worldviews, value systems, and traditional knowledge in the application of the HSAP;
- technical challenges in including biosphere reserves in NBSAPs, including the need for guidance on which targets and indicators to use; and
- calls for the MAB Programme to strengthen links between global agendas and local actions.

Biodiversity, Science, and Education

Moderated by Fernanda Rollo, New University of Lisbon, this session on Tuesday showcased how UNESCO initiatives and institutions promote science-based solutions for biodiversity conservation and contribute to HSAP Objective C (Develop research and share knowledge and lessons learned from the WNBR).

Via video message, Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO, emphasized the centrality of education for safeguarding biodiversity, noting it reveals “how much our lives depend on healthy biodiversity.” Giannini pointed to UNESCO partnerships and initiatives, including with the CBD and with Indigenous Peoples, that aim to holistically transform education systems to support people in the face of the climate crisis.

Shaofeng Hu, Director, Division of Science Policy and Capacity Building in the Natural Sciences Sector, UNESCO, reported on the development and launch of the [International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development 2024-2033](#). Among key challenges for the Decade, he outlined: tackling dis- and misinformation globally, which harm trust in science; ensuring research is producing actionable knowledge to facilitate SDG implementation; and closing the gaps in capacity to produce, use, and access science between the Global North and South. Hu further detailed the calls for proposals for Decade Initiatives and encouraged multi-stakeholder engagement in the process.

Presentations by the Representatives of UNESCO Category 2 Centres, Chairs, and Research Institutions:

Moderator Rollo outlined the importance of Category 2 Centres in capacity building and research. Category 2 Centres are independent research centers and institutions committed to supporting UNESCO’s strategic programme objectives.

Guo Huadong, Director, International Centre on Space Technologies for Natural and Cultural Heritage (HIST), presented on the latest developments in satellite and sensor monitoring, big-data analysis, and data exchange by HIST. He highlighted work in continuous detection models and dynamic-updating algorithms that support decision making in biodiversity conservation and the sustainable development of natural and cultural heritage.

Baudouin Michel, Director, Regional Postgraduate Training School on Integrated Management of Tropical Forests and Lands (ERAIFT), outlined ERAIFT’s educational and research programmes that focus on training for local research and biosphere reserve management, and offered examples of inclusive governance and knowledge sharing in biosphere reserves in the Congo Basin.



Fernanda Rollo, New University of Lisbon

Carsten Mann, Biosphere Reserve Institute, Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, presented the Institute's work, focusing on the significance of inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, networking, and knowledge exchange in research related to biosphere reserves.

In the ensuing discussion, participants focused on the importance of: open data and knowledge accessibility; South-South cooperation in biosphere reserves; and practical in-the-field training and research.

Insights from UNESCO Chairs and Leading Experts:

Moderator Rollo outlined the University Twinning and Networking (UNITWIN/UNESCO) Chairs Programme, launched in 1992, to promote international inter-university cooperation to enhance institutional capacities.

Aida Mammadova, UNESCO Chair on Intergenerational Learning for Sustainable Development, and Kanazawa University, Japan, described the use of biosphere reserves and geoparks as educational field sites, including for intergenerational learning. She underscored the need to create low-burden, high-impact student exchange models to connect science, policy, and community practice. She also highlighted as future priorities: deepening comparative research; identifying successful models of youth-elder engagement; engaging youth in biodiversity monitoring and community conservation; and linking intergenerational learning to GBF targets.

Helena Freitas, UNESCO Chair in Biodiversity and Conservation for Sustainable Development, and University of Coimbra, Portugal, focused on efforts to promote research and training in the network of 12 biosphere reserves in Portugal, and further expanding research efforts to Portuguese-speaking countries. She highlighted the [Biosphere Reserves: sustainable territories, resilient communities](#) project. In addition, Freitas highlighted on academic capacity building through scholarship discussed community-oriented citizen science projects, and research and knowledge production, including a future project on the agroecology nexus.

Tania Moreno-Ramos, Executive Coordinator, UNESCO Chair on Biosphere Reserves and Natural World Heritage Sites, and University for International Cooperation, Costa Rica, focused on capacity development, fostering intergenerational and intercultural



Tania Moreno-Ramos, Executive Coordinator, UNESCO Chair on Biosphere Reserves and Natural World Heritage Sites, and University for International Cooperation, Costa Rica



Aida Mammadova, UNESCO Chair on Intergenerational Learning for Sustainable Development, and Kanazawa University, Japan

knowledge dialogue. Drawing attention to the [Mycelium Learning Network](#) as an open-source platform connecting learners, land, and wisdom, she highlighted as future priorities: promoting interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration for biosphere reserve management at the landscape/bioregional scale; promoting regenerative practices in production systems; and advancing a One Health approach from soil health to human well-being.

Siqi Liu, Co-Founder, BGI Group, described the Group's efforts to combine research, education, and biotechnology, stressing the close links between biodiversity conservation and genomic information. He outlined research efforts, highlighting the [Ten Thousand Bird Genome Project](#), which is expected to complete the interpretation of all existing bird genomes globally and solve a series of major scientific problems in species origin, evolution, and bird biology. He further addressed educational activities, providing training opportunities for local and international students.

In ensuing discussions, participants focused on, among other things:

- information generation regarding biosphere reserve management;
- the assessment of data collected by communities for scientific credibility;
- closing the gap related to Indigenous knowledge use, and ensuring traditional knowledge holders and academia can work synergistically; and
- specific programmes for biosphere reserve managers and Indigenous Peoples.

In conclusion, Moderator Rollo stressed the need for researchers to continue working with sophisticated knowledge, while simultaneously linking with communities and governments at the local level.

Optimizing Partnerships and Finance for Biosphere Reserves

Moderated by Julien Pellaux, Director, Partnerships Division, UNESCO, this session on Tuesday explored how to harness financing and cross-sectoral partnerships for meeting HSAP Objective B on strengthening and developing the MAB Programme and its WNBR.



Qingfeng Zhang, Agriculture, Food, Nature and Rural Department Sector Office, ADB

Nature Finance Led by Multilateral and International Financing Institutions: Qingfeng Zhang, Agriculture, Food, Nature and Rural Department Sector Office, Asian Development Bank (ADB), shared the ADB's institutional perspective on the importance of using a landscape approach to scale up investments, showcasing initiatives that span the areas of river basins or regional flyways for migratory birds. He underlined the need to derisk investments in nature to enable private sector buy-in, highlighting the role of blended finance projects in this regard.

Jin Tong, World Bank Group, reported: efforts to integrate natural capital assets into traditional economic accounting; partnerships to demonstrate the value of nature in the development agenda; and the development of platforms and tools to integrate ecosystem services into land-use planning and management processes. She highlighted the World Bank Group's expanding portfolio, across sectors, to support ecosystem restoration. She stressed that the institution is well-placed to mobilize experience sharing of innovative financing instruments across countries.

Liu Ning, Deputy Director-General, Nature and Ecology Department, Ministry of Ecology and Environment, China, discussed the Kunming Biodiversity Fund, noting it is the first fund "for developing countries by a developing country," and highlighted calls for project proposals. He stressed the need to strengthen cooperation among institutions and countries, adding that the goals of the MAB Programme and GBF are aligned and mutually supportive.

Mbali Mashele, UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa, underlined that "when biosphere reserves are given funding, it is catalytic." She pointed to the ability of the WNBR to scale projects globally, citing several tools and initiatives that were replicable between continents following the implementation of pilot projects. Mashele further underlined that key challenges for access to funding are governance and capacity, and suggested developing a designated platform to assist biosphere reserves in financing and resource mobilization.

In response to questions from delegates, panelists highlighted: the challenge of developing the biodiversity credit market without

an agreed-upon standard; the need for regulatory frameworks to build incentives for private sector investments; and the complex on-the-ground realities of developing biodiversity credits or other innovative tools.

Resource Mobilization through Bilateral and Government Cooperation: During this panel, Pauline Teillac-Deschamps, French Development Agency, praised the MAB Programme for its approach in placing human relationships with nature at its core. She highlighted the importance of monitoring and evaluating investment impacts on biodiversity for increasing private sector participation. Teillac-Deschamps called for ecosystem accounting to support a sustainable economic model.

Nelson Castiaux, Embassy of Belgium in China, noted Belgium's long-standing financial support to the MAB Programme, highlighting that it: acts as a model for partnerships; provides local data with global importance; improves livelihoods; and builds trust with local communities.

Geert Verreet, Government of Flanders, Belgium, underscored that efficient use of funding is the best way to attract further resources. He stressed that projects must:

- reduce complexities and increase synergies during their planning stage;
- establish effective monitoring mechanisms and explore additional funding sources during the implementation stage; and
- critically evaluate and learn not only from successes, but also from failures.

Javier Pantoja Trigueros, Director, National Parks Autonomous Agency, Spain, noted the importance of the World Congress in times where cooperation and multilateralism are declining. He underscored Spain's involvement in several bilateral and triangular cooperation initiatives, bringing special attention to the MangRes Project that spans seven Latin American and Caribbean countries and drives community-led mangrove restoration.

June Marie Mow, Executive Director, Providence Foundation, and Seaflower Biosphere Reserve, Colombia, explained that ecological restoration is a long-term process that requires stable, long-term financing. She noted how the MangRes Project shifted traditional approaches to restoration to more holistic ones. She



June Marie Mow, Executive Director, Providence Foundation, and Seaflower Biosphere Reserve, Colombia

highlighted that employing a participatory approach from the planning stages was key to building trust with local communities.

Responding to interventions from participants, speakers focused on:

- the role of governments in creating sustainable funding ecosystems;
- the importance of building trust between governments and local communities;
- ensuring youth and local community involvement in decision making; and
- the importance of ecosystem accounting to inform policymakers of the value of biodiversity.

Innovative Contributions from the Private Sector and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships:

During this panel, Elena Salgado, President, Abertis Foundation, emphasized that private companies have the responsibility to go beyond compliance and achieve transformative change. She outlined the private sector's vision, focused on measurable results, monitoring and tracking, and considering the interactions between biodiversity conservation and human activities, thus improving local communities' living standards. Salgado further highlighted work under the International Center for Mediterranean Biosphere Reserves, hosted in the headquarters of the Abertis Foundation in Barcelona, Spain.

Xiaoying Wang, Director of Sustainable Development, Ant Group, and Secretary-General, Ant Forest Foundation, advocated for science-based management and technological applications in monitoring and local community development, focusing on driving sustainability and environmental protection through innovation. He highlighted the Ant Forest initiative, which encourages users to lower carbon emissions by planting trees when they engage in activities that reduce carbon emissions. He stressed that 800 million users have participated in green, low-carbon lifestyles.

Jingru Song, Chinese National Geography, discussed the power of media and communication for raising awareness and mobilizing action, focusing on the Chinese National Geography, a popular magazine in China that reaches 100 million readers. She outlined various initiatives, including an annual competition on the power of life that attracted 150,000 proposals, as well as hosting national education conferences. She called for a standardized curriculum and tailor-made training courses for different biosphere reserves.

Yohanes Purwanto, Chairman, National Research and Innovation Agency, and MAB-Indonesian Association, focused on multistakeholder partnerships integrating ecological and social dimensions, and supporting best practices in planning and resource management. He offered numerous examples of working with biosphere reserves at the national level and underscored the importance of monitoring to track progress, measure impact, ensure accountability, and allow early detection of problems for the timely adjustment of strategies.

In discussions, participants focused on: transparency and ways to evaluate the outcomes of private sector investments; expanding work in more regions, including Latin America; and identifying the best strategies for engaging the network of biosphere reserves with the private sector.



Elena Salgado, President, Abertis Foundation

Enhancing Global, Regional, and Thematic Networks

Former MAB Programme Secretary Noëline Raondry Rakotoarisoa introduced this session on Wednesday, emphasizing that “regional networks are the backbone of cooperation within the WNBR.” She recalled that the WNBR connects almost 300 million people and underlined the importance of regional cooperation in building resilience. Drawing attention to the HSAP targets directed at the various networks, she noted that priorities for the next decade include strengthening capacity development and solidarity mechanisms.

Representatives of the Regional Networks: Moderator Raondry Rakotoarisoa invited representatives to share insights on key priorities, obstacles, and opportunities for their regional and subregional networks.

Telesphore Ngoga, Chair, African Biosphere Reserves Network (AfriMAB), reported on key priorities for AfriMAB, including strengthening transboundary cooperation. He noted that many important ecological zones in Africa span multiple countries, and highlighted work to integrate biosphere reserves into national and regional policy frameworks to enhance their visibility. Ngoga stressed that main challenges are: limited scientific cooperation due to gaps in infrastructure and funding; under-recognition of success stories resulting from lack of visibility; and limited capacity for resource mobilization.



Noëline Raondry Rakotoarisoa, Former MAB Programme Secretary



Aseela Al Moalla, Chair, ArabMAB

Aseela Al Moalla, Arab States Biosphere Reserves Network (ArabMAB) Chair, highlighted the network's achievements over the last decade, pointing to regional capacity-building workshops and the establishment of community initiatives connecting women and youth with nature. She noted the role of biosphere reserves in monitoring and contributing to climate change adaptation goals. She underlined the strong regional expertise within ArabMAB on dryland and desert ecosystem management. Al Moalla acknowledged opportunities to increase cross-regional cooperation with other MAB networks in the forthcoming decade.

Jean-Philippe Messier, Representative, Europe and North America Biosphere Reserves Network (EuroMAB), underscored EuroMAB's main priority is to enable biosphere reserves to implement global agreements. He outlined work on governance and reconciliation to advance the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Messier noted that successfully implementing the HSAP will require equipping biosphere reserves with sufficient tools and human and financial resources. He suggested that the MAB Secretariat support the development of an entrepreneurial approach for autonomous resource mobilization by biosphere reserves.

Rosario Barrera, Vice-President, Ibero-American MAB Network (IberoMAB) Board, noted IberoMAB comprises 25% of biosphere reserves in the world. She highlighted the network's main targets, including: maintaining biodiversity and agrobiodiversity; bolstering the role of biosphere reserves as stewards of environmental and social sustainability; working on the co-creation and transfer of scientific and traditional knowledge; developing methods for democratic management to mitigate territorial inequalities; and strengthening the role of biosphere reserves in reducing poverty.

Dato Cheok Lay Leng, Asian Biosphere Reserve Networks, outlined challenges facing regional and subregional networks, including limited data availability, pressures from unsustainable development norms, lack of resources, and language and communication barriers. He highlighted the importance of subregional networks in inclusive management for transformative change.

During the discussion, participants focused on:

- approaches to fostering collaboration between regional networks, the private sector, and academia;
- increasing recognition of the MAB Programme for its unique capacity to deliver international agendas on the ground; and
- improving awareness of the MAB Programme through education.

Representatives of the Thematic Networks: Miguel Clüsener-Godt, Director, Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences, UNESCO, introduced this panel, noting the thematic networks bring together biosphere reserves sharing environmental, ecosystemic, geopolitical, and cultural similarities, thus allowing replicable solutions for biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable development.

Weihua Xu, Technical Secretariat of the World Network of Mountain Biosphere Reserves (WNMBR), offered a brief introduction to the WNMBR. He focused on its contributions, including: raising awareness of mountains' importance; monitoring climate change impacts; fostering knowledge exchange and capacity building; and promoting mountain values in Gross Ecosystem Product frameworks. As key priorities, he highlighted:

- contributing to achieving the objectives of MEAs and the 2030 Agenda;
- providing sufficient human and financial resources to Indigenous Peoples and communities at the grassroots level; and
- promoting synergies between humans and the biosphere, including merging local technologies and Indigenous knowledge.

Georgina Flamme, Director, Abertis Foundation, and Mediterranean Network of Biosphere Reserves (MedMAB Network), offered insights on the creation of the MedMAB Network, highlighted implementing climate-positive action initiatives. She highlighted three pillars of contributions to the global agenda:

- building collective impact both within the biosphere reserves and externally to broaden connections and foster agreements;
- enhancing knowledge-based resilience, stressing that applied research is a bridge between science and practice; and



Georgina Flamme, Director, Abertis Foundation, and MedMAB Network

- empowering for sustainability, underscoring the need for measurable outcomes.

Alex Cortada, Coordinator of the Menorca Secretariat, World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves (WNICBR), highlighted the significance of island and coastal ecosystems. He drew attention to WNICBR's work, including on capacity building through dedicated training courses addressing challenges ranging from sea-level rise to plastics and lack of employment opportunities. Cortada highlighted priorities for WNICBR, including on: network governance; supporting biosphere reserves' contributions to the GBF 30 x 30 target; developing coastal and marine NbS and blue carbon projects; and enhancing the usability and interoperability of monitoring data.

Helena Freitas, Network of Biosphere Reserves in the Portuguese Speaking Countries Community (CPLP-MAB), noted CPLP-MAB offers a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation among Portuguese-speaking countries. She highlighted the development and consolidation of knowledge through information exchange and capacity-building activities as well as through pilot initiatives. Freitas emphasized the need to highlight biosphere reserves' value by promoting their heritage, tourism, and ecological assets, including foodscapes and other ecosystem services, with a focus on their territories and communities.

Clayton Lino, CaveMAB Network, focused on promoting the conservation and sustainable use of caves and karsts in biosphere reserves. Noting caves and karstic systems are often overlooked despite their importance, he emphasized they preserve a large part of Earth's history and highly important traces of the evolution of life, including the human species. Lino discussed CaveMAB's work, combining speleology, geology, anthropology, and archaeology. He stressed its objectives to, among other things: identify and assess cave and karst biosphere reserves through cooperative efforts; promote communication and information, experiences, and research sharing; and enhance community involvement.

In the ensuing discussion, participants focused on:

- ways to include youth in thematic networks and in decision making;
- employing technological advancements to improve biosphere reserve management;
- avoiding overlaps and improving synergies across different networks; and
- the importance of securing stable funding for training and capacity building.

Biosphere Reserve Dialogue

Moderated by Barsha Lekhi, UNESCO, this session took place on Wednesday and brought to the fore stakeholders and rights holders with crucial roles in the stewardship of biosphere reserves. Lekhi emphasized that the HSAP enshrines the principle of leaving no one behind.

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities: Lidia Arthur Brito, Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO, highlighted the forthcoming launch of a UNESCO publication on "Indigenous Knowledge, Ancestral Places: Navigating Change in



Lidia Arthur Brito, Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO

UNESCO Designated Sites." She emphasized it will contribute to creating an atlas of testimonies and case studies on Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and custodianship of biosphere reserves.

Delegates then watched a video by the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum for World Heritage that underlined the historical contributions, roles, and rights of Indigenous Peoples as custodians of the biosphere. The video further emphasized the need to honor the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples as a prerequisite to their participation in governance processes.

Samuel Carney Curruchich, National Focal Point, MAB-Guatemala, shared insights from the drafting process of the IberoMAB Action Framework for Indigenous and Afro-descendant Rights in Latin American and Caribbean Biosphere Reserves, which contributes to the MAB Programme strategy's goals of building socioecological resilience of reserves. He outlined that this roadmap aims to improve the meaningful participation of the region's Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities in decision making, and highlighted its priority areas, including improving territorial and land rights, economic rights, and gender equality.

A video highlighting a case study from the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area in Nepal reported on the development of a biosphere reserve through conservation actions that combine



Samuel Carney Curruchich, National Focal Point, MAB-Guatemala



Barsha Lekhi, UNESCO

modern and traditional methods, knowledge, and tools. Moderator Lekhi noted this project is among those supported by the Kunming Biodiversity Fund. The video showcased the impact of engaging communities through mutual learning and intergenerational partnerships on effective land management and biodiversity conservation, underlining that Indigenous knowledge is “part and parcel of the solution.”

MAB Youth Networks: Moderator Lekhi emphasized the importance of youth networks for regional collaboration and the future of the MAB Programme.

Rova Mirindra Ralambomanana, National MAB Youth Focal Point, Madagascar, outlined key obstacles faced by African youth in biosphere reserves, including: limited representation in governance; high unemployment rates resulting in increased urbanization; and impacts from climate change, biodiversity loss, and conflicts. She emphasized that with adequate support, youth can act as agents of innovation and as bridge builders that connect communities and policy.

Adel Al-Juhani, Deputy Focal Point for ArabMAB Youth, Saudi Arabia, drew attention to the first-ever ArabMAB Youth Forum held in December 2024, which addressed regional biodiversity restoration and climate actions. He advocated for building stronger networks and strengthening the role of youth in biosphere reserves.

Soyoon Chang, National MAB Youth Focal Point, Republic of Korea, outlined recent regional youth activities that aimed to raise awareness and motivate future action. She stressed a lack of resources to transform youth ideas into action. She underscored that regional youth initiatives are drivers of transformative change and shape youth leaders with a deeper understanding of regional issues.

David Beland, National MAB Youth Focal Point, Canada, advocated the need for strong youth leaders and underscored their capacity to approach biosphere reserves with creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit. Beland highlighted that “MAB Youth is more than networking – it is about uplifting youth and ensuring that biosphere reserves remain ambitious communities.”

Gabriela Gehlen Leite, Regional MAB Focal Point for IberoMAB, Brazil, outlined regional work on building an inclusive, democratic decision-making process in their network

with the aim of ensuring greater legitimacy. She showcased several regional projects with local-level impact and called for mutual support within these projects’ frameworks.

Engaging in an interactive discussion, panelists focused on:

- challenges that disproportionately impact youth, such as unemployment and lack of funding opportunities;
- how to kickstart new youth networks and engage the next generation in biosphere reserves;
- the capacity that youth bring in building awareness by using modern technology and social media; and
- the need for added-value projects that inspire young people and create employment opportunities.

Women in Biosphere Reserves: Moderator Lekhi highlighted the critical role of women in biosphere reserve management. She stressed that despite being on the frontline of conservation actions, they remain underrepresented in decision making.

Sheila Ashong, Director for Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, Ghana, stressed that African women are at a disadvantage regarding their rights and access to resources and opportunities, including land access. She underscored that few women reach higher management roles, with research funding and opportunities remaining limited. Calling for “introducing a gender lens in everything we do,” she urged combatting stereotypes, providing access to technology and credit facilities for women in biosphere reserves, and addressing the inadequacy of data to address these issues.

Beni Rodríguez, Chair, Network of Biosphere Reserve Managers, Spain, emphasized that gender issues must be addressed as a matter of need to involve women in decision-making processes and offer them economic security and a future in these areas. She provided examples of creating spaces for integration and equal opportunities, highlighting the case of mountainous regions, and urged continued efforts to develop a gender perspective.

Neha Midha, UNESCO, offered case studies from Indian biosphere reserves, including: the Women for Bees project that boosts income security and provides alternative livelihoods while simultaneously strengthening biodiversity conservation; and a circular economy initiative transforming discarded temple



Gabriela Gehlen Leite, Regional MAB Focal Point for IberoMAB, Brazil

flowers in the Gulf of Mannar into various organic products. She outlined further opportunities for women, including reaching bigger markets through cooperatives, and channeling government support for Indigenous communities and new entrepreneurs.

Kaline Rossi, Amazon Biosphere Reserves, outlined the establishment of the Women's Network of the Central Amazon Biosphere Reserve, stressing that women's leadership often remains invisible in formal decision-making spaces. She described the creation of safe spaces to hear women's voices, dreams, ambitions, and visions for the conservation of the Amazon rainforest. Rossi urged: institutionalizing women's participation in governance bodies; recognizing women's role in the Amazon bioeconomy; and building mechanisms for cooperation across networks.

Responding to participants' questions, panelists discussed ways to strengthen the narrative for progress toward gender equality, and considered strategies to provide space for involving women and ensuring their contributions are fully recognized.

Closing Plenary

Panel moderators presented reports from the discussions and dialogues, and delegates watched a video that presented key moments of the Congress.

Endorsement of the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan and the Hangzhou Declaration: Ouyang Zhiyun, Chinese Academy of Sciences, presented the Hangzhou Declaration. He drew attention to the Declaration's three pillars, mirroring the three HSAP objectives, on: advancing MEAs and sustainable development; strengthening the MAB Programme and its WNBR; and inspiring sustainable futures through more effective cooperation, education, science, and inclusive participation.

Zhiyun underscored that the Declaration launches a call for collective action under a whole-of-society, government, and process approach, involving all stakeholder groups and offering a new paradigm for people and the planet. He called for the Declaration to signal "not just a beginning, but a collective commitment" to leave a thriving planet for generations to come.

Delegates endorsed the HSAP and the Hangzhou Declaration by acclamation.

Closing Statements: Participants watched a video paying tribute to all those who worked behind the scenes to ensure the success of the Congress.

Lidia Arthur Brito, Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO, offered special tributes to Gaoyuan Yao, Mayor of Hangzhou, and Shen Jian, Governor of the Lin'an district, acknowledging their contributions to the successful organization of the Congress.

In closing remarks, He Hongping, Vice President, Chinese Academy of Sciences, underscored China's commitment to promoting an ecological civilization. He noted, among other things, the need to:

- enhance cooperation and foster harmonious coexistence between people and nature, with greater participation at the grassroots level;

- strengthen capacities for science and technology and narrow existing gaps through information and knowledge sharing;
- focus on global planning to foster synergies on environmental protection, climate change, and human livelihoods; and
- continue engaging in multilateralism to improve global environmental governance and face global challenges.

Hongping emphasized that the HSAP will "bring together the wisdom and expectations of all stakeholders," and set a path for more inclusive governance structures for biosphere reserves, noting it offers models for sustainable development beyond the MAB network.

Reiterating the importance the Chinese government attaches to the vision of ecological civilization, Yao outlined municipal initiatives contributing toward designating Hangzhou as the "capital of ecological civilization." He underscored that the city will continue to advocate for the harmonious coexistence between people and nature, and engage in experience sharing for the sustainable development of urban areas worldwide.

Simona-Mirela Niculescu, President of the 42nd session of the UNESCO General Conference, highlighted that the Chinese core principle of "harmony between humanity and nature" is perfectly aligned with the MAB Programme. She noted that with over 4000 attendees from 150 countries, the fifth World Congress demonstrates UNESCO's convening power during times often defined by division. Niculescu urged delegates to carry the spirit of harmonious living with nature back home, to be "audacious in action," and to use their biosphere reserves to advance human rights, peace, and sustainable development.

In her closing statement, Brito stressed that the next decade will be "shaped by our response to the triple planetary crises" of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. She underscored that they are no longer distant threats but are already affecting our economies and survivability, and that inaction will influence our future forever. Brito emphasized that biosphere reserves continue to be a powerful response to these challenges, acting as living frameworks that unite conservation, sustainable development, and science innovation.

The Congress ended at 12:40pm.



Simona-Mirela Niculescu, President of the 42nd session of the UNESCO General Conference



Group photo at the end of the fifth WCBR

Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan

The HSAP guides the work of UNESCO Member States and other stakeholders in addressing key global challenges through the MAB Programme and the WNBR for the period 2026-2035.

Three key objectives are outlined that contribute to the MAB Programme mission of fostering harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. They are to:

- contribute to achieving MEA goals and the 2030 Agenda by 2030 and continue contributing to the post-2030 agenda;
- further develop the MAB Programme and its WNBR, including both human and financial resources, and strengthen the WNBR's excellence; and
- develop research and share knowledge and lessons learned from the WNBR to facilitate living in harmony with nature, aligning with the SDGs, and inspiring and influencing sustainable futures and post-2030 agreements.

Thirty-four Action Targets provide Member States and stakeholders with a series of voluntary actions to be implemented at various levels of governance and scale by 2035. Under the first objective, these include:

- promoting restoration projects;
- integrating biosphere reserve contributions to the GBF;
- implementing climate-positive action initiatives;
- using productive land and seascapes more sustainably; and
- reforming incentive structures.

For the second objective, the HSAP encourages: promoting coherent data collection, advanced monitoring, and assessment; encouraging the effective operation and representativeness of MAB National Committees, or equivalent structures; and improving the representativeness of the WNBR by establishing new biosphere reserves, particularly transboundary sites.

Action Targets under the third objective focus on: synergizing education, science, and culture for sustainability; enhancing the participation of national scientific institutions as well as scientific collaborations in implementing the MAB Programme; and removing obstacles to intra- and intergenerational peace, equity, gender equality, and justice within the WNBR.

The monitoring and evaluation of the HSAP is coordinated by the MAB Secretariat, in line with the decisions of the MAB-ICC.

Hangzhou Declaration

In the Declaration, delegates at the fifth World Congress of Biosphere Reserves commit to encourage UNESCO Member States to:

- establish MAB national committees, prioritize the establishment of biosphere reserves in areas of high biodiversity, promote transboundary ones, and ensure universal representation;
- take measures to implement the GBF and the SDGs in biosphere reserves, and to establish interdisciplinary committees to monitor their implementation;
- strengthen synergies between climate change responses and biodiversity conservation actions, while implementing NbS and/or ecosystem-based conservation and rehabilitation projects using regeneration and holistic management practices; and
- strengthen the application of advanced technologies and digital tools, such as artificial intelligence, to biosphere reserve management, set up online monitoring systems, and create open-access databases for implementing the SDGs and GBF.

They also commit to promote UNESCO Member States to:

- take effective measures against natural habitat loss within biosphere reserves, promote the restoration of ecosystems in degraded areas, cease human-induced loss of species, and mitigate the impact of alien invasive species; and
- achieve ecological and sustainable management of production and operations within biosphere reserves, commit to reducing pollution, strengthen solid waste management, prevent or eliminate significant emerging risks that may threaten ecological integrity, and ensure the sustainability of biodiversity use activities.

The Declaration further commits delegates to:

- promote community-based sustainable development models and best practices within biosphere reserves, advocate for the philosophy of ecological civilization, and enhance the socioeconomic well-being of residents;
- properly utilize biosphere reserves as places for scientific research and learning, using the WNBR as a platform to support future consensus after 2030;
- call on UNESCO to strengthen links between internal sectors, specialized agencies, and programmes in the UN system, as well as active non-governmental organizations, to consolidate multi-stakeholder efforts and participate in the MAB Programme; and
- call upon UNESCO Member States to provide strong support for the MAB Programme and its WNBR and to promote implementation of the HSAP.

The Declaration underscores: the need to establish an exchange mechanism between Member States and UNESCO-recognized regions to share experiences and lessons learned; promoting the integration of traditional knowledge, modern technology, knowledge sharing, and education; and the importance of participatory governance in all biosphere reserves, by elevating the status and role of residents, women, and youth in management and decision-making processes.

Upcoming Meetings

MONDIACULT 2025: MONDIACULT is the world's biggest cultural policy conference and a major advocacy platform. With the conclusion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in sight, the 2025 Conference, which is organized by UNESCO, is happening at a decisive moment to build a consensus and momentum to establish culture as a "stand-alone" goal within the post-2030 UN development agenda. **dates:** 29 September - 1 October 2025 **location:** Barcelona, Spain **www:** unesco.org/en/mondiacult?hub=68184

IUCN World Conservation Congress: Held once every four years, the World Conservation Congress brings together several thousand leaders and decision makers representing government, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, business, and academia, with the goal of conserving the environment and harnessing the solutions nature offers to help overcome global challenges. **dates:** 9-15 October 2025 **location:** Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates **www:** iucncongress2025.org

CBD SBSTTA 27: The 27th meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice will address matters of relevance to the implementation of the Convention and the GBF. **dates:** 20-24 October 2025 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** www.cbd.int/meetings/SBSTTA-27

CBD SB8(j) 1: Held back-to-back with SBSTTA 27, the first meeting of the Convention's new Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) will address matters related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. **dates:** 27-30 October 2025 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** www.cbd.int/meetings/SB8J-01

43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference: At its 43rd session, the UNESCO General Conference is expected to consider, *inter alia*: the state of implementation of the UNESCO Action Plan for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem; a report on the implementation of UNESCO's Emergency assistance programme for Ukraine; and recommendations on the ethics of neurotechnology. The conference brings together representatives from all UNESCO member states and numerous organizations, and plays a crucial role in setting UNESCO's strategic priorities. **dates:** 30 October - 14 November 2025 **location:** Samarkand, Uzbekistan **www:** 43session.unesco.uz/en/home

Second World Summit on Social Development: Convening at the level of Heads of State and Government, the Summit aims to address gaps and recommit to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action and its implementation, as well as provide momentum towards advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda. **dates:** 4-6 November 2025 **location:** Doha, Qatar **www:** social.desa.un.org/world-summit-2025

25th World Heritage Convention: The 25th session of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage will: define which sites can be considered for inscription on the World Heritage Sites list; and set out duties of each country's government to identify potential sites and to protect and preserve them. **dates:** 11 November 2025, and 24-25 November 2025 **location:** Paris, France **www:** whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/25GA

CITES CoP 20: The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) CoP convenes every two to three years to review implementation of the Convention, review progress in the conservation of species included in the Convention's Appendices, and consider proposals to amend the lists of species in Appendices I and II. **dates:** 24 November - 5 December 2025 **location:** Samarkand, Uzbekistan. **www:** cites.org/eng/cop/20

IPBES 12: This meeting will focus on several key topics, including the methodological assessment of the impact and dependence of business on nature, and the continued development of a second global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services. **dates:** 3-8 February 2026 **location:** Manchester, UK **www:** www.ipbes.net/events/ipbes-12-plenary

CBD SBI6: The sixth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) of the CBD will review implementation of the CBD in advance of the next COP. **dates:** 16-19 February 2026 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** www.cbd.int/events

CMS COP15: The 15th meeting of the COP to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP15) will convene to review implementation of the Convention. **dates:** 23-29 March 2026 **location:** Campo Grande, Brazil **www:** cms.int/cop15docs

CBD SBSTTA 28, SBI 7: The 28th meeting of the SBSTTA and the seventh meeting of the SBI will address, among others, planning, monitoring, reporting, and review, including the global review of collective progress in implementation of the GBF and the monitoring framework for the GBF. **dates:** 27 July - 1 August 2026 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** www.cbd.int/events

For additional upcoming events, see: sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

ArabMAB	Arab States Biosphere Reserves Network
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
HSAP	Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan
IberoMAB	Ibero-American MAB Network
ICC	International Coordinating Council
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MAB	Man and the Biosphere Programme
MEAs	Multilateral environmental agreements
NBSAPs	National biodiversity strategies and action plans
NbS	Nature-based solutions
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WNBR	World Network of Biosphere Reserves