

Bonn, 26 January 2016



## Position paper of the German MAB National Committee

### Participation of German UNESCO biosphere reserves in the World Network

#### 1. International cooperation – an important task of UNESCO biosphere reserves

Sustainable development means taking global responsibility for both present and future generations. As model regions for sustainable development, there is a particular onus on UNESCO biosphere reserves to foster global partnerships aimed at advancing the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 under the 2030 Agenda.

Designated UNESCO biosphere reserves form a world network and a Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) was adopted alongside the Seville Strategy. Under the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework, biosphere reserves should foster partnerships and cooperation, especially in regional or thematic subnetworks (Seville Strategy for UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO, 1995).

In line with this, the catalogue of national criteria adopted by the MAB National Committee and the Federal Government/Länder Working Group on Nature Conservation, Landscape Management and Recreation (LANA) also include the following criteria (B-40): "In accordance with the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework, biosphere reserves have to make their contribution to the World Network. The technical and budgetary resources must be provided to enable the biosphere reserve administration to undertake the necessary activities" (Criteria for Designation and Evaluation of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Germany, MAB National Committee, 2007).

The Strategy for the MAB Programme and the WNBR was adopted in June 2015 for the period up to 2025. Under Strategic Action Area B it contains recommendations and targets for cooperation in the WNBR (MAB Strategy 2015-2025, UNESCO, 2015). This strategy is being lived in practice throughout the world, with the majority of biosphere reserves fostering collaboration, including many long-term partnerships.

The aim of this MAB National Committee position paper is to make recommendations to biosphere reserves and the municipalities and Länder authorities they report to, as well as to associations and other stakeholders, on how to make the most effective and constructive use of international cooperation opportunities.

By adopting this position paper the MAB National Committee is also committing itself to place even greater emphasis on international cooperation in its own future activities.

## **2. Context and value added**

Germany uses biosphere reserves as a tool of development cooperation perhaps more intensively than any other country in the world: "German development cooperation views UNESCO biosphere reserves as an ideal instrument to support partner countries in their efforts towards conservation and sustainable use of their own biodiversity." (Biosphere Reserves – Model Regions for a Green Economy, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2011). Accordingly, UNESCO biosphere reserves are firmly established in the German government's Policy Guidelines for Africa (Federal Foreign Office (AA), 2014). The BMZ and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) are investing substantially in identifying, establishing and strengthening biosphere reserves worldwide, and their total funding for ongoing projects is more than 110 million euros (Committed to Biodiversity, BMZ and BMUB, 2014). In this work, the German government and its administrative bodies rely on the practical expertise in Germany's UNESCO biosphere reserves.

Within its budgetary framework the BMUB also provides financial support for the participation of German UNESCO biosphere reserves in the World Network. This is further bolstered with technical, policy and strategic consultancy and mediation of contacts by the German MAB National Committee - chaired by the BMUB and managed by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) - the German Commission for UNESCO (DUK) and other German partners in nature conservation and development cooperation such as the BMZ, Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the KfW development bank.

German UNESCO biosphere reserves also benefit greatly from Germany's vigorous support of the MAB Programme, also at political level, within UNESCO. Such active involvement means Germany's UNESCO biosphere reserves are under a particular obligation to act as genuine role models in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). This is also called for since there are particular expectations on Germany as a UNESCO member and committed advocate of the MAB Programme to offer active support with practice-oriented advice. Germany must respond to these expectations accordingly. On three occasions since 2009, Germany has very successfully tabled resolutions on the

MAB Programme at the UNESCO General Conference and has been elected several times, by large majorities, to the MAB International Co-ordinating Council.

German biosphere reserves play at least three active and closely interconnected roles in the WNBR:

- *Participation in or support of expert missions*, either in biosphere reserves abroad or international missions in German biosphere reserves.
- Long-term *twinning partnerships* with one or several biosphere reserves (or comparable protected areas) in other countries.
- Involvement in regional (e.g. Europe-wide) *networks* or networks that focus on specific ecosystem types (e.g. coastal, forest) or address other thematic aspects of biosphere reserves.


Transboundary biosphere reserves (e.g. Palatinate Forest – Northern Vosges) are a vital form of international cooperation, but are not dealt with in this position paper as the issues relating to them are very specific.

The participation of German biosphere reserves in the WNBR generates significant value added for both the German biosphere reserve and the partner reserve abroad:

- Creating an extensive international network (since bilateral partnerships are usually part of a larger nexus of partners). For biosphere reserve administrations, associations and the local business sector these networks can foster new contacts and even open up potential new markets for a green economy.
- Expanding experience, gaining an "outsider viewpoint" and identifying new solutions.
- Boosting motivation for the work in the home biosphere reserve.
- Raising international awareness of the biosphere reserve (not only in the partner country) and consequently increasing its appeal for tourists.

Furthermore, in countries of the South a small amount of funding generally enables cooperation to achieve significant value added with regard to the objectives of the biosphere reserve, including biodiversity conservation and the promotion of sustainable development. Stronger global cooperation and increased trust are, moreover, valuable benefits in themselves.

### **3. Recommendations for expert missions conducted by managers of German biosphere reserves:**



**Expert missions** can play a key role in establishing or strengthening biosphere reserves in other countries. The world is aware that the work of several German biosphere reserves has been rated by the MAB International Co-ordinating Council (ICC) as particularly exemplary. For this reason, many countries which are setting up biosphere reserves or want to strengthen their existing ones not only wish to use the expertise of Germany's development cooperation, nature conservation associations and foundations, but also to draw on the experience and practical knowledge of the German biosphere reserves themselves. Developing countries in particular are approaching Germany more and more in this regard, generally seeking technical expertise rather than financial support.

For German biosphere reserves such expert missions are an important way of gaining experience and boosting motivation for the work in their home reserve. Practice has shown that such missions have a powerful influence to improve nature conservation and foster sustainable development in the target country, i.e. they advance the main objective of biosphere reserves.

**The following recommendations aim to optimise the planning and implementation of such expert missions abroad:**

- Managers should only undertake missions if they possibility of being able to provide follow-up missions, distance consultation and other means of maintaining contact is *generally* promising. Initial exploratory missions are recommended if a clear need is apparent and value added can be anticipated. Follow-up missions should be conducted in a significantly wider context, for instance when a strategy or project plan is submitted with a well-conceived medium-term plan for financing the partnership.
- As a general rule and depending on the partner reserve's requirements, German managers should focus on overarching tasks such as applications/evaluations, zonation, drawing up framework concepts (referred to internationally as management plans) participation, research planning, monitoring, education for sustainable development or tourism.
- Priority should be given to sending expert missions to biosphere reserves in German development cooperation partner countries or in countries where specific measures are being funded through German development cooperation. The planning and implementation of a mission must observe the safety recommendations of the Federal Foreign Office for the country in question.
- All relevant local partners should be involved in the mission planning. Participation in missions run solely by German or international organisations, without any input from local


actors, should be discouraged. On the other hand, German or international organisations already active in a region and with relevant expertise can certainly play an important mediatory and/or supportive role, or provide valuable advice on political obstacles and opportunities.

- The German embassy or consulate should be contacted in advance. The German MAB office and German Commission for UNESCO (DUK) can advise on how best to establish contact with relevant local partners.
- The organisers of the mission should bear in mind that German managers are generally considered to be high-level experts. In addition to specialist exchange on specific, agreed topics, the mission should also include meetings with policy-makers aimed at raising the political profile of biosphere reserves and strengthening the position of the local partner. To this end, thought should also be given as to how expert missions could be useful in cultivating links between biosphere reserves and national strategies for development and nature conservation. This would mean that a mission should generally comprise at least five days.
- The decision as to whether a particular German manager should take on a particular mission should include looking into whether there are other German managers (or other experts) available who are better qualified to provide the sought-after expertise.
- All German biosphere reserves can be expected to actively participate in such consultations and experience sharing. Ideally, this process will culminate in a twinning partnership.
- It is recommended that the municipalities and Länder authorities in charge of German biosphere reserves facilitate an international mission at least every two years by authorising the necessary staff journeys and possibly paying the travel expenses.

#### **4. Recommendations for twinning partnerships:**

**Twinning partnerships** are medium- or long-term cooperations between two or more biosphere reserves. They are based on genuine value added for all partners. Partnerships with biosphere reserves in developing countries are particularly valuable – and ambitious. Among the typical positive impacts these have is the wealth of experience gained by the biosphere reserve stakeholders, greater motivation for their own work and advancement of sustainable development – in both biosphere reserves. Twinning partnerships are not "development aid", they are equal learning partnerships.

Twinning partnerships should be formalised with a written agreement. In particularly successful partnerships the biosphere reserve administrations work well as coordinators for launching different



cooperations between local groups, associations, companies and schools and similar organisations in the partner country. Especially educational partnerships and the use of volunteers help partnerships thrive on a number of levels. The German biosphere reserve administrations should focus mainly on helping to set up bilateral cooperations which can continue autonomously and possibly can establish their own formal basis for the partnership.

Often, twinning partnerships arise through chance contacts or preparatory work. It is more advisable, however, to build a partnership on strategic reciprocal missions and visits. Identifying a common theme is often helpful to begin with, as a means of explaining the partnership and the rationale behind it in the home biosphere reserve. In the long term it is important that the partner biosphere reserve administration is well-positioned and recognised locally, has an effective organisation and above all has useful contacts in its own area. Both administrations should have similar ideas in the direction the partnership will take.

A single well managed, effective partnership is more valuable than a number of partnerships showing little or no activity. If the value added of a twinning partnership is no longer present another partner biosphere reserve should be sought.

Twinning partnerships with biosphere reserves in developing countries should investigate linking up with and possibly obtaining funding from relevant, where possible long-term projects being implemented as part of Germany's development cooperation. The MAB office and German Commission for UNESCO can provide advisory support in initiating new partnerships and building on existing ones.

Each German biosphere reserve can be expected to be involved in at least one twinning partnership (at the beginning as part of a first expert mission or in the cementing of the partnership at a later stage). They should primarily seek partnerships with developing countries. It is recommended that the authorities in charge of the German biosphere reserves make staff funding available and authorise and/or finance the necessary travel. To help overcome language barriers, foreign language courses should also be offered, for instance as educational leave, to wider circles of the administration.

An application for financial support for the cooperation can be submitted to the competent division, N I 2, at the BMUB.

## **5. Recommendations for missions in German biosphere reserves:**

Typically, each German biosphere reserve **hosts** between 3 and 10 **missions or visits of international experts each year**. Visitors are either representatives of foreign biosphere reserves, international scientists, government officials or other specialists interested in sustainable development.

**Supporting such missions or visits is one of the tasks of biosphere reserves. The following recommendations for minimising cost and effort should be noted:**

- Only accompanied groups with a contact person should be received. Administrations should reject mission applications which are ultimately primarily interested in a recreational programme for an extended stay in Germany. The fact that more and more groups of experts from abroad visit German biosphere reserves on trips they have organised themselves is, in principle, to be welcomed. However, biosphere reserve administrations must make sure that these unofficial visits do not exploit or place an excessive burden on their own expert partners.
- Whenever possible and appropriate, administrations should offer a programme tailored to the visitors and their interests. Scheduling a presentation from the visitors is recommended as well, with suitable time allowed for discussions.
- Expert support, including organising presentations and lectures, is the responsibility of the biosphere reserve administration, provided the amount of work involved is reasonable. It is up to individual administrations to decide whether to levy a charge for this work. Providing missions with logistical support is not the responsibility of biosphere reserve administrations.
- Local partners should also be compensated financially for their additional work.

## **6. Recommendations for participation in regional/thematic MAB networks:**

UNESCO attaches particular importance to its networks which encompass biosphere reserves in particular regions (e.g. Europe, North America) or particular ecosystems (e.g. coastal/island, mountains, urban sites). The MAB-Strategy 2015-2025 aims to strengthen and formalise these regional and thematic networks. German biosphere reserves are urged to give serious thought, in consultation with the MAB office, to accepting invitations to conferences or other international events relating to such networks. Where at all possible and appropriate, German biosphere reserves should seek an active role in these networks; setting up new ones is also a feasible option. German biosphere reserves can submit an application for financial support for their participation to the competent division, N I 2, at the BMUB.