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Man and the Biosphere  
Programme

## National MAB Youth Focal Point Webinar Series

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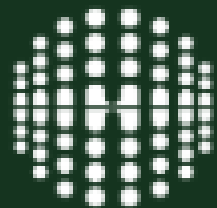




# Webinar Agenda




- Welcome, Introductions, and Goals of Webinar
- The Context and Structure of UNESCO and MAB
- Biosphere Reserves' Functions and Structure
- Youth as Key Partners in MAB Governance
- Fifth World Congress of Biosphere Reserves and Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan








# Welcome & Introductions / Accueil et Introductions

## In 1 Minute...

-  Your name and organizational affiliation
-  Your Biosphere Reserve and/or country
-  One MAB Youth initiative or achievement in your BR/country that you are proud of.

## En 1 minute...

-  Votre nom et votre affiliation organisationnelle
-  Votre Réserve de biosphère et/ou votre pays
-  Une initiative ou réalisation Jeunes MAB dans votre RB/pays dont vous êtes fier/fière.



# The context of UNESCO

Established in  
**1945**



UNESCO aims to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.

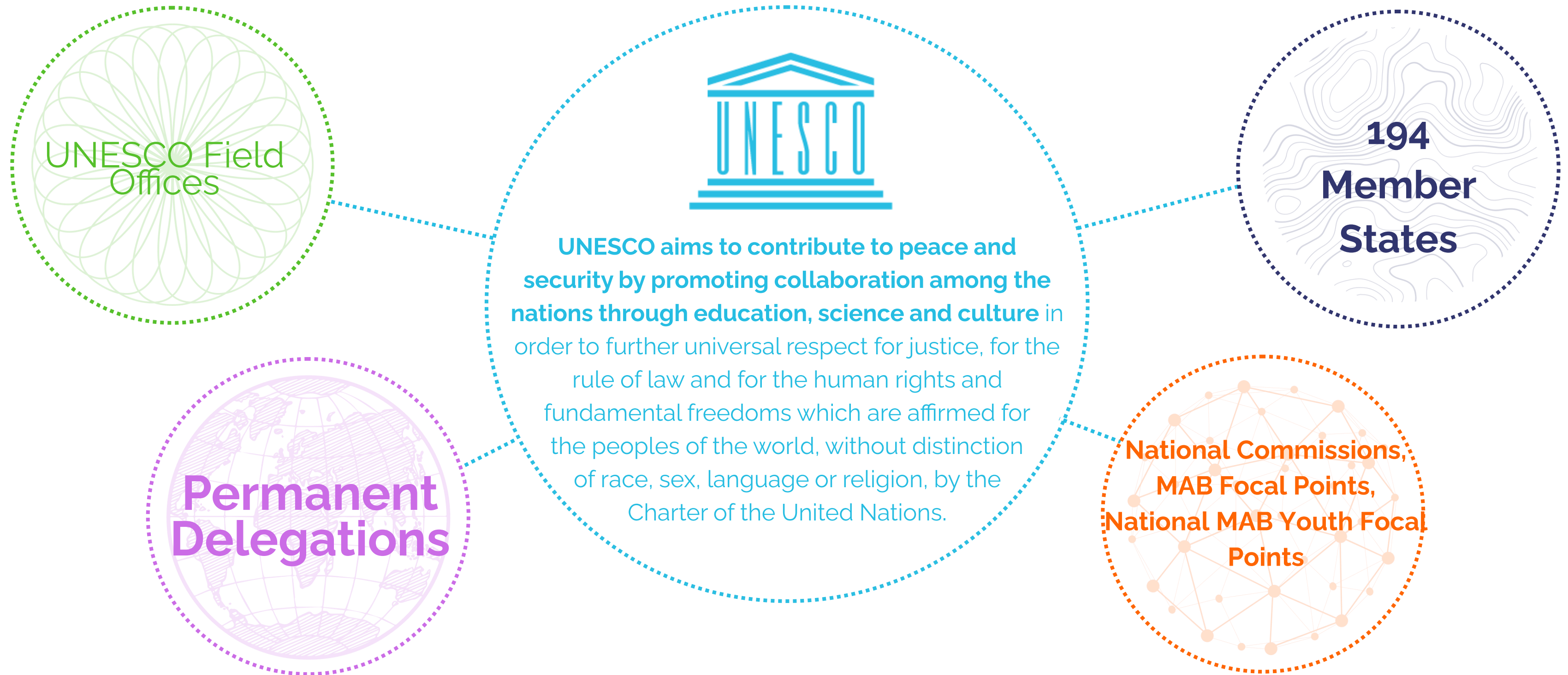
**1248 World Heritage sites**  
170 countries  
**784 biosphere reserves**  
142 countries  
**229 Geoparks**  
50 countries

**194 countries**  
in 2025

**NETWORKS**  
C2C, Chairs, National Commission, National Committees, sites, Cat. 1 Institutes, scientific networks, networks of sites, etc



# Structure of UNESCO





# Making peace with nature

In **1971**, evoking **UNESCO's** mandate to build peace in the minds of people through **Education, Science and Culture**, the Man and Biosphere Programme, commonly known as **MAB** was created to study and promote a **brand new way to live in harmony with nature, not against it.**

## A pioneering movement

The Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme is an **intergovernmental scientific programme** that aims to establish a scientific basis for enhancing the relationship between people and their environments..



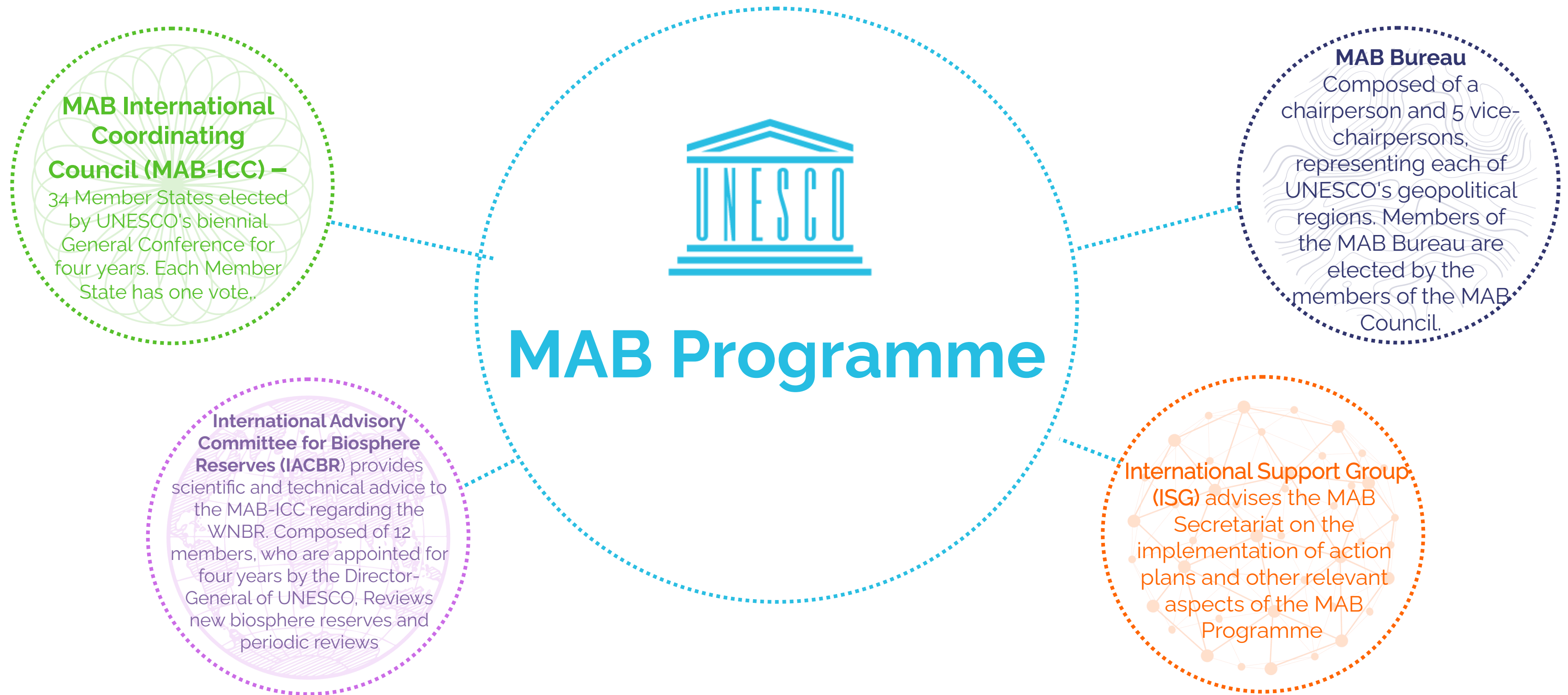
## Putting it into practice

In **1977**, the MAB Council designated the first **UNESCO Biosphere Reserves**, “**learning places for sustainable development**”.





# MAB Governance



# The Structure of Biosphere Reserves

While flexibility is one of the most important characteristics of the Programme, **biosphere reserves must demonstrate they are able to articulate three functions** (**Conservation, Socio-Economic Development and Logistic Support to Research and Education**), as well as detailed territorial planning, pursued through the biosphere reserves' three main zones: the **core area(s)**, the **buffer area(s)** and the **transition area(s)**.

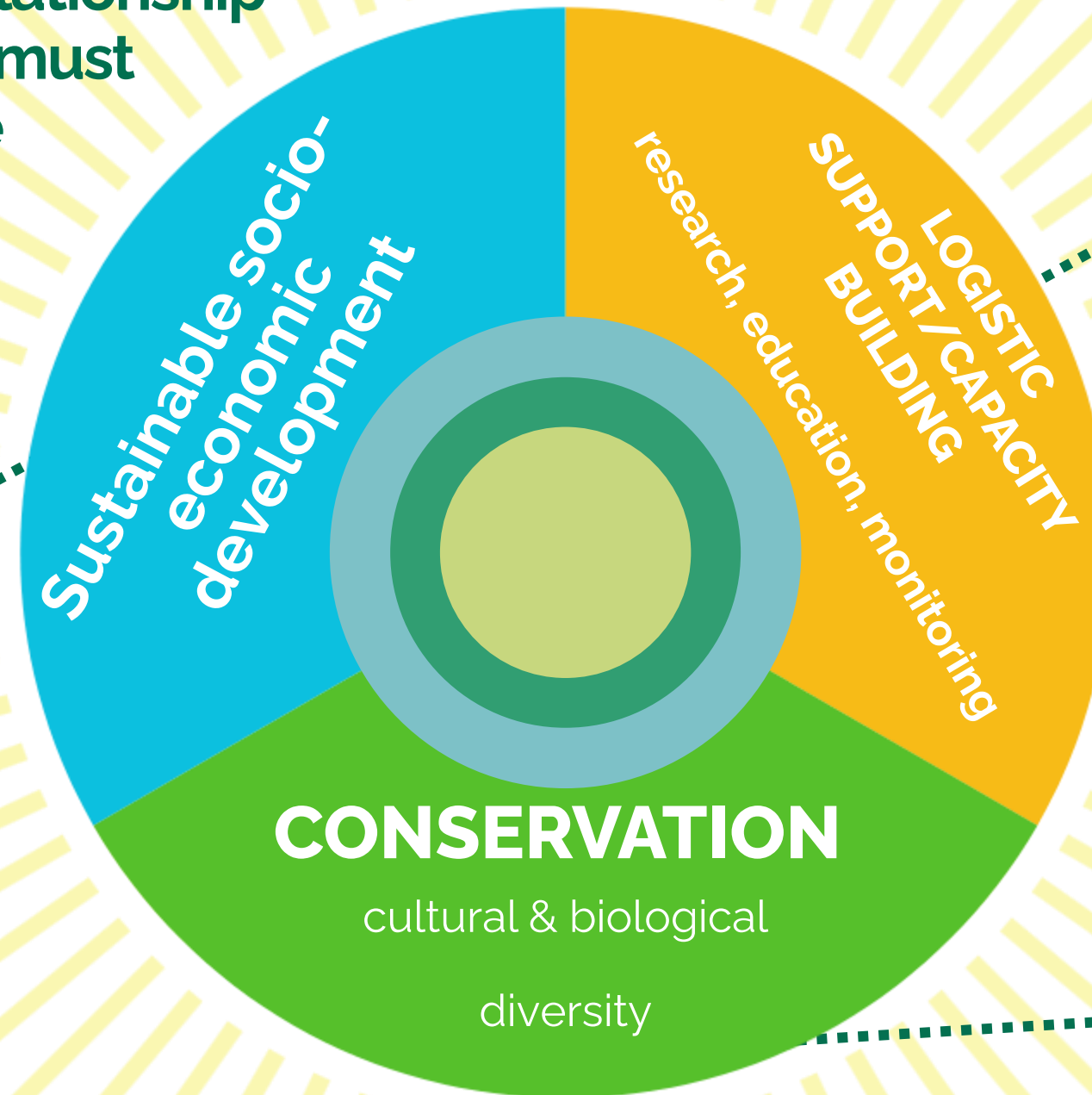




# 3 Functions of a Biosphere Reserve

The three functions of the biosphere reserve reflect **different aspects of the relationship of people living with nature that must concur** biosphere reserves come into fruition.

MAB Youth are vital to these 3 Functions.

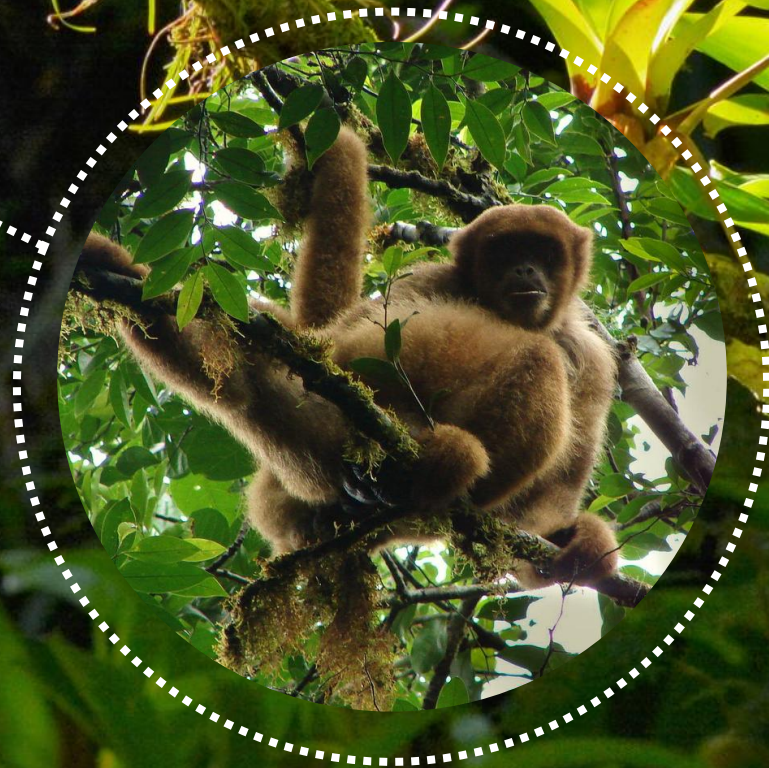




# Core Zones ●

They comprise one or various strictly protected zones that contributes to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation.

With 9 million hectares, **Mata Atlântica Biosphere Reserve (Brazil)** has the biggest core zone in the world.



Core  
Zone



Buffer  
Zone



Transition  
Zone

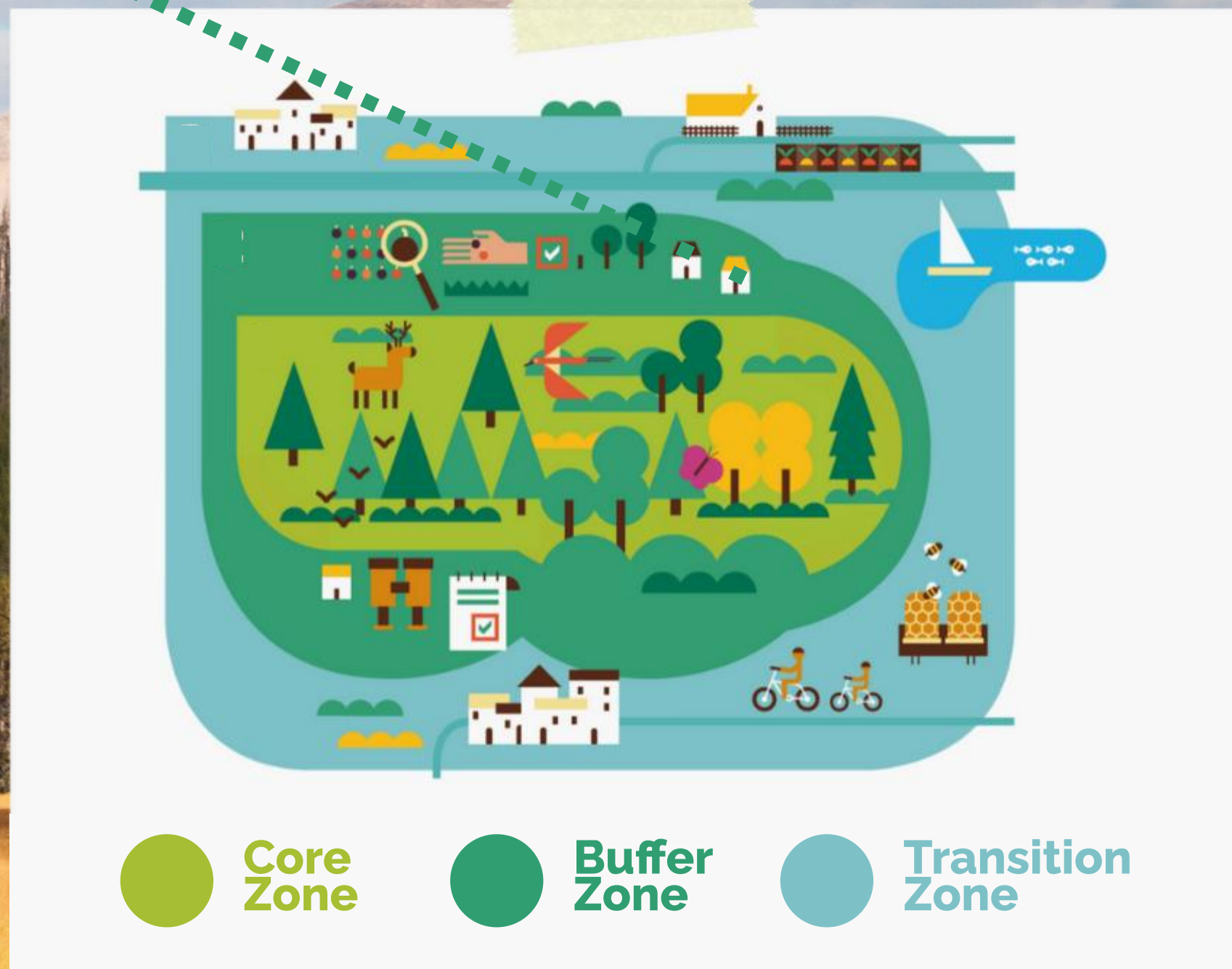


# Buffer Zones ●

They surround or adjoin the core area(s), and are used for activities compatible with sound ecological practices that can reinforce scientific research, monitoring, training and education.



Within **Yellowstone-Teton Biosphere Reserve's** buffer zone (United States) there is a well developed tourism sector and ranches that implement sustainable land use.





# Transition Zones

The transition area is where **communities foster socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable economic and human activities.**

The transition area of **Minnett Biosphere Reserve (Luxembourg)** hosts various high-tech sustainable industries.



**Core  
Zone**



**Buffer  
Zone**



**Transition  
Zone**



# Everyone on Board!

The secret ingredient of successful biosphere reserves is: **participatory governance**. From the very beginning of creating a biosphere reserve, it is advisable to gather and include all relevant parties, including decision-makers, non-governmental organisations, **YOUTH**, community members, indigenous peoples, businesses, researchers, etc.

Endorsement of the chiefdoms prior to the nomination of **Kafue Flats Biosphere Reserve, Zambia**



During the nomination process of the **Bosque Seco Biosphere Reserve, Ecuador**, radio station campaigns were used to raise awareness among the community



Meeting of the board of the **Central Balkan Biosphere Reserve, Bulgaria**



Youth workshop in **Vhembe Biosphere Reserve, South Africa**





# What is a Biosphere Reserve?

It is an area that promotes and demonstrates a balanced relationship between:

**NATURE** and **PEOPLE**



## WHAT A BIOSPHERE RESERVE IS NOT !

- Biosphere reserves are not Nature Reserves or World Heritage Sites, although these can form part of a biosphere reserve, often as core areas.
- Biosphere reserve status does not automatically lead to legal protection, rather biosphere reserves include areas that are already protected.
- Biosphere reserves are not a form of regulation, rather, they rely on existing policies and regulations.



**Biosphere regions are not only about nature rather, they highlight the role humans need to play to conserve bio-cultural landscapes.**





## 784 BIOSPHERE RESERVES

including 25 transboundary biosphere reserves

## 142 COUNTRIES

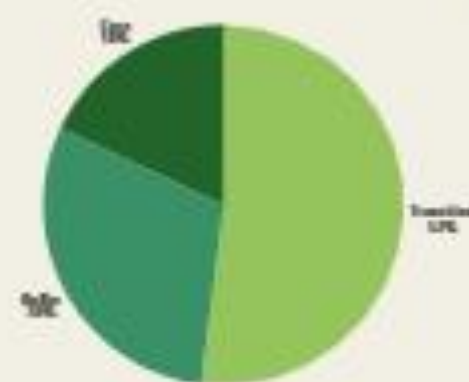
70% of UNESCO Member States host at least one biosphere reserve



Increase in number of biosphere reserves since the beginning of designations (1975-2025)



Biosphere reserves by region



Global average of zones



# Home to more than 300 million people



- **Largest regional network**  
49 Members, 2 Associate Members
- **Meets every two years:**  
14-18 September 2026  
Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region, Canada



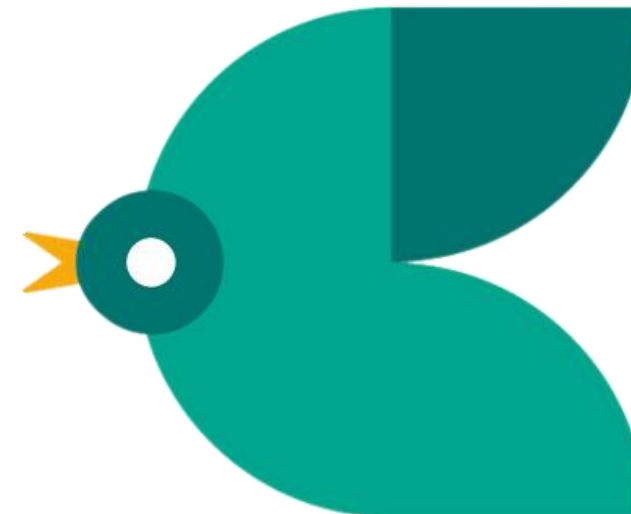


# Number of National MAB Youth Focal Points Designated by Region:

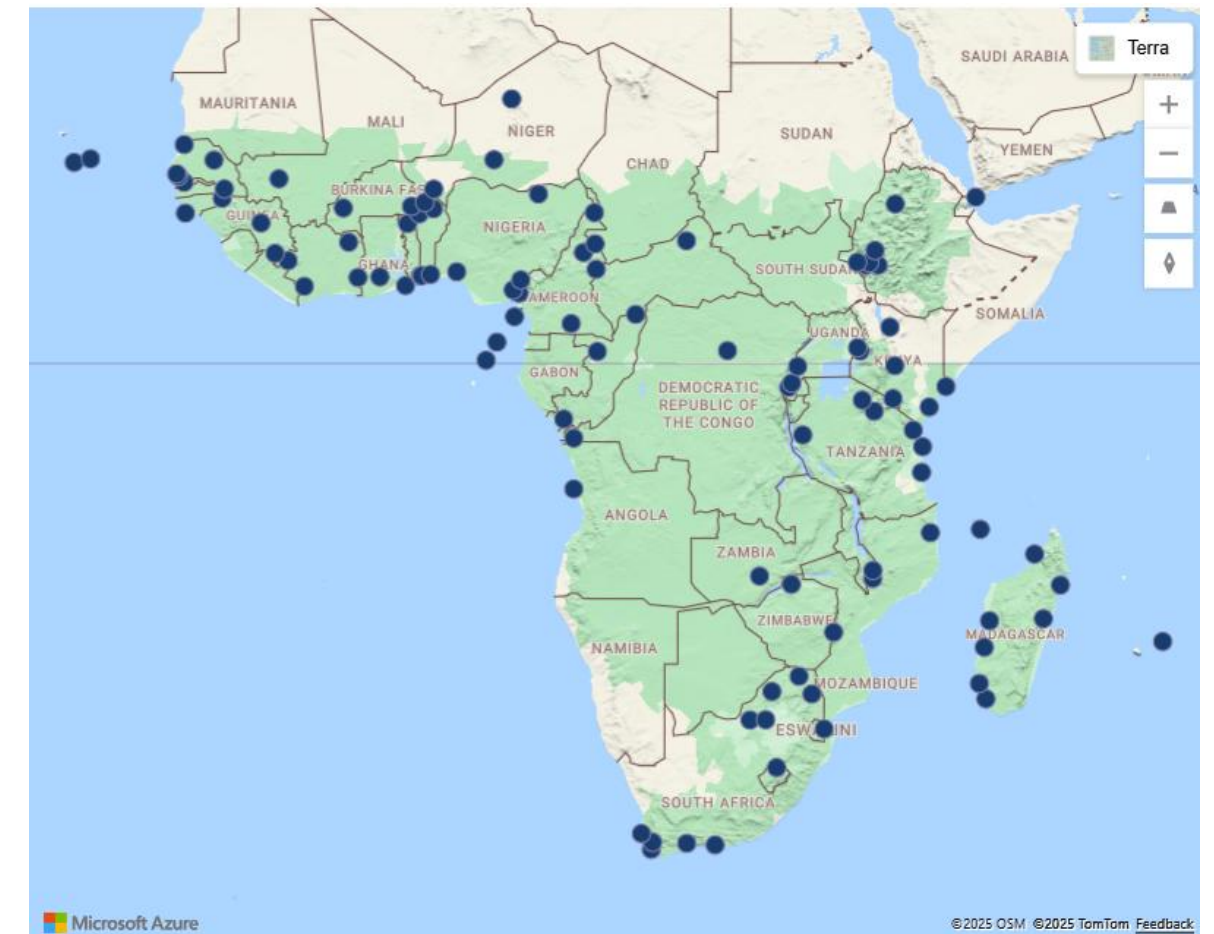
- Africa:  $30/47 = 63.83\%$
- Arab States:  $10/19 = 52.6\%$
- Asia-Pacific:  $20/31 = 64.5\%$
- Europe and North America:  $26/46 = 56.52\%$
- Latin America and the Caribbean:  $22/33 = 66.7\%$

**Global average: 60.83%**

**Total National MAB Youth Focal Points: 108**

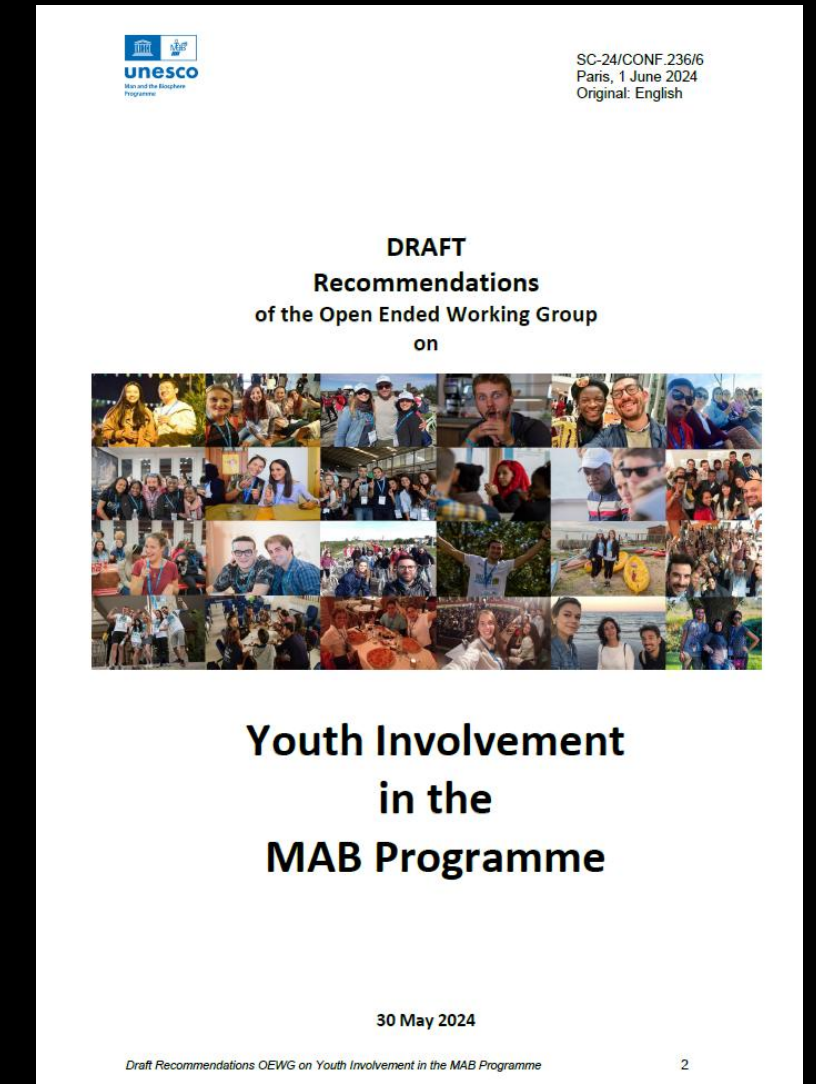
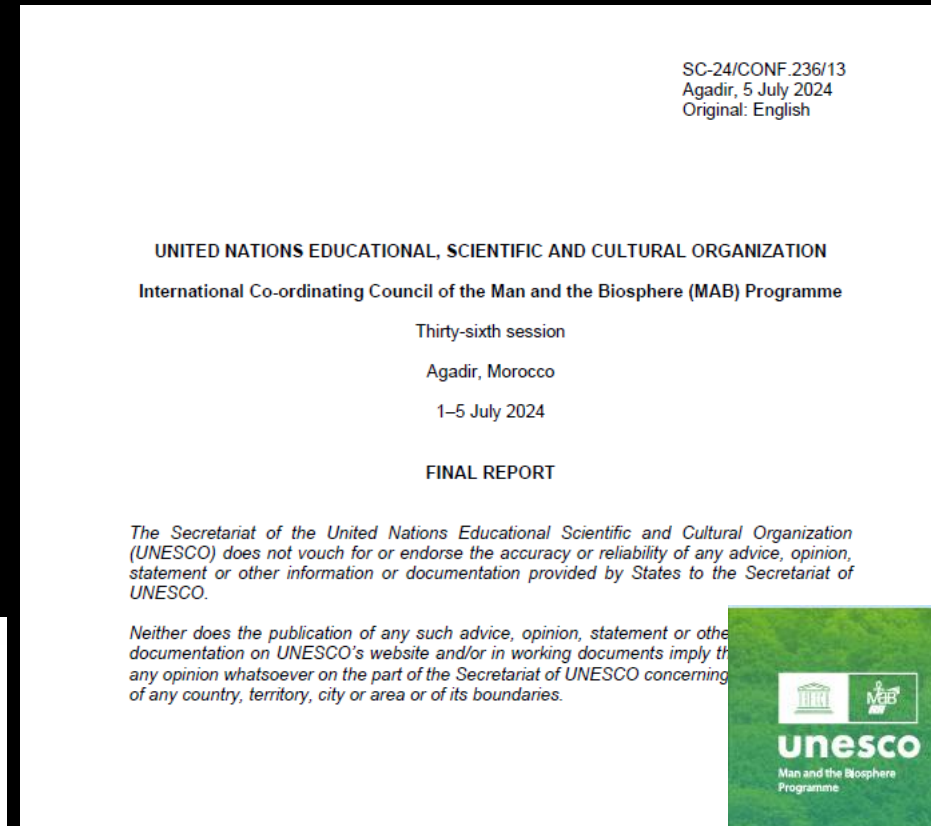


**Did You Know?**





# MAB Resources







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# UNESCO MAB YOUTH COMMITTED TO THE FUTURE WE WANT.



**MAB**  
YOUTH



# The MAB Youth Programme

Launched by UNESCO in 2017, the MAB Youth Programme engages young people (ages 18–35) living in and around Biosphere Reserves, recognizing them as a key part to addressing the three functions of Biosphere Reserves.

## Goals

1. Empower youth leadership in Biosphere Reserves (BRs)
2. Facilitate intergenerational collaboration to address BRs' three core functions
3. Incorporate youth meaningfully into BR governance and decision-making
4. Support global youth exchanges and knowledge sharing
5. Build youth capacity, foster innovation, and strengthen youth networks across BRs



## ● A pioneering movement

Aligned with global frameworks –UN SDGs, UN Youth2030, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and other global youth networks.

## Putting it into practice ●

The MAB Youth Programme empowers young people to lead, innovate, and drive sustainable solutions in Biosphere Reserves through global collaboration and governance.





# Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Youth Involvement in the MAB Programme



- Objective: Provide recommendations for MAB Youth Involvement in the MAB Programme at the local (BR level), national (country level), regional (regional network) and international level (World Network of Biosphere Reserves, MAB-ICC, etc).
- OEWG was established in Nov 2022
- Draft recommendations approved in July 2024 by MAB International Coordinating Council

## Progress on OEWG Recommendations

- Member States encouraged to use recommendations in national strategies and designate National MAB Youth Focal Points.
- World MAB Youth Mapping Survey – Closes 15 December
- Progress report given at MAB-ICC session, Hangzhou, Sept 2025.
- Secretariat established a youth focal point for global/regional MAB networks.







EuroMAB Youth

ArabMAB  
Youth

AfriMAB Youth

MAB Youth is a  
“Network of Networks”

IberoMAB Youth

ASPAC MAB  
Youth

Five Regional  
Networks



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# MAB Youth in Action – Global Forums



## Global MAB Youth Forums

2017 MAB  
YOUTH  
FORUM



2019 MAB  
YOUTH  
FORUM

TOWARDS THE 15th CONFERENCE OF PARTIES OF THE CBD

Committed  
to  
Biodiversity

## Regional MAB Youth Forums

- EuroMAB Youth Forum
- IberoMAB Youth Forum
- ArabMAB Youth Forum
- AfriMAB Youth Forum

## National and Local MAB Youth Forums

- Portugal MAB Youth Forum
- Kenyan MAB Youth Forum
- Malaysian MAB Youth Climate Summit
- Frontenac Arch MAB Youth Climate Summit





# MAB Youth in Action – Participation in Global Events and International Youth Networks



Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15)  
Montreal, Canada

*Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity  
Framework (GBF)*



Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN)  
Conference  
Yokohama City, Japan



UNESCO Youth Climate Action Network (YouCAN)


Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN)  
Roundtable Discussions



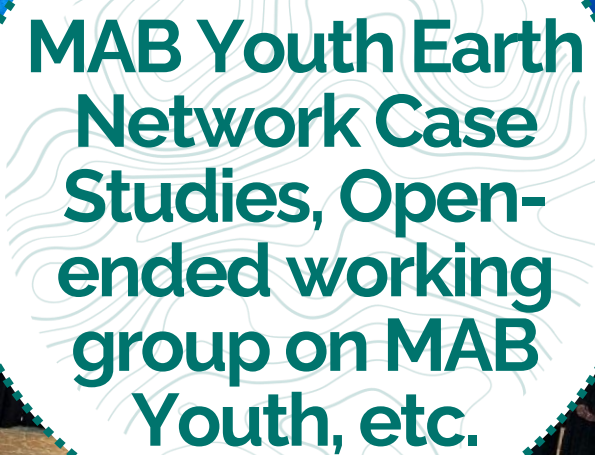




IberoMAB Youth  
Forum  
November 2024



ArabMAB  
Youth Forum  
December 2024

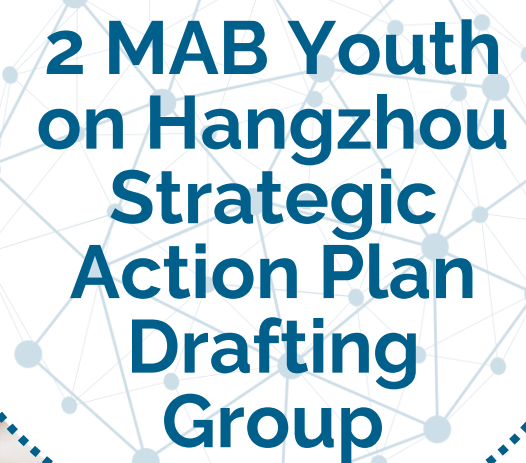


MAB Youth Earth  
Network Case  
Studies, Open-  
ended working  
group on MAB  
Youth, etc.



MAB-ICC July  
2024

EuroMAB Youth  
Forum  
June 2024



2 MAB Youth  
on Hangzhou  
Strategic  
Action Plan  
Drafting  
Group



# MAB Youth in Action



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# Challenges With MAB Youth Engagement

## Structural and Resource Constraints

- Limited resources and funding for MAB Youth initiatives
- Language and digital access inequalities
- Low awareness of the MAB Programme at the local level

## Governance and Inclusion Gaps

- Limited opportunities for meaningful youth participation
- Tokenistic involvement
- Intergenerational disconnects in leadership structures

## Youth Retention Challenges

- High turnover as youth transition into the workforce
- Migration from rural BR areas to urban centers
- Lack of long-term engagement or continuity





# Lessons Learned and What Helps

Importance of trust and responsibility – not just inviting youth, but involving them meaningfully in decision-making and MAB governance. Ex. MAB Action Plan, OEWG MAB Youth, etc.

Consistent and transparent communication between youth and BR managers, UNESCO, and key partners.

Providing space and support for creativity, innovation, mentorship, and leadership.

Recognizing and celebrating youth contributions.

Leverage a 'network of network's approach to build and support existing youth networks and to share resources.







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Opportunities  
for MAB Youth





# How Youth Can Get Involved



- Join/start a MAB Youth Committee in your BR/country
- Attend MAB Youth events and forums
- Follow and promote UNESCO MAB Youth online
- Propose youth-led projects, activities, and funding opportunities
- AfriMAB Dialogues Webinar Series
- Connect with other BR youth in the WNBR, MAB Thematic Networks (i.e. mountains, island and coastal, etc.), and your MAB Youth Regional Focal Point
- 2026 Global MAB Youth Forum, Regional and National MAB Youth Forums, AfriMAB General Assembly March 2026





# MAB Youth Engagement in Thematic Networks

- World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves
- World Network of Mountain Biosphere Reserves
- Mediterranean Biosphere Reserves Network
- CaveMAB
- NordMAB
- People for Living Waters
- Network of Biosphere Reserves in Portuguese Speaking Countries





# UNESCO Chairs and Category 2 Centres

- **Connect with a UNESCO Chair or Category 2 Centre for:**
  - Research
  - Education
  - Training
  - Capacity Building





# MAB Young Scientist Awards

- MAB Young Scientists Awards grant up to US\$ 5,000 to young researchers in support of research on ecosystems, natural resources and biodiversity.







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3<sup>rd</sup> GLOBAL MAB YOUTH FORUM

18 – 23 May 2026, Delta Po Biosphere Reserve (Italy)





# Role of National MAB Youth Focal Points



- Serve as the primary liaison between National MAB Commission and MAB youth networks
- Support the integration of youth perspectives into national MAB strategies, policies and programmes
- Mobilize and engage youth in biosphere reserve activities, advocacy, and sustainable development initiatives (3 functions of BRs)
- Facilitate communication, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among youth locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally (don't just keep information to yourself ; )
- Promote the values of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme within youth communities and beyond



# Key Responsibilities



- Coordinate youth-led projects within biosphere reserves and support their visibility
- Help identify youth needs, priorities, and opportunities for capacity-building that align with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan
- Contribute to local, national, regional, and international MAB meetings representing youth voices
- Maintain active communication with the MAB Youth Network and other focal points
- Share success stories, challenges, and innovative practices from youth groups at local, regional, national and international levels



# Reporting and Sharing MAB Youth Activities



- The National MAB Youth Focal Point is encouraged to provide updates and reports about MAB Youth activities, priorities, and improvements to their National Committee, MAB Youth Networks, and World Network of Biosphere Reserves
- Their reports can be shared by their National Committee at the MAB-ICC meeting and in the corresponding report



# What you can expect from UNESCO



- Capacity-building opportunities, workshops, and knowledge exchanges through the MAB Programme related to the 3 functions of a BR
- Networking with global MAB youth, experts, and biosphere reserve partners
- Inclusion in UNESCO-supported initiatives, visibility platforms, and youth engagement activities
- Guidance, tools, and resources to strengthen youth participation in biosphere reserves
- Opportunities to contribute to MAB events, consultations, and policy dialogues.

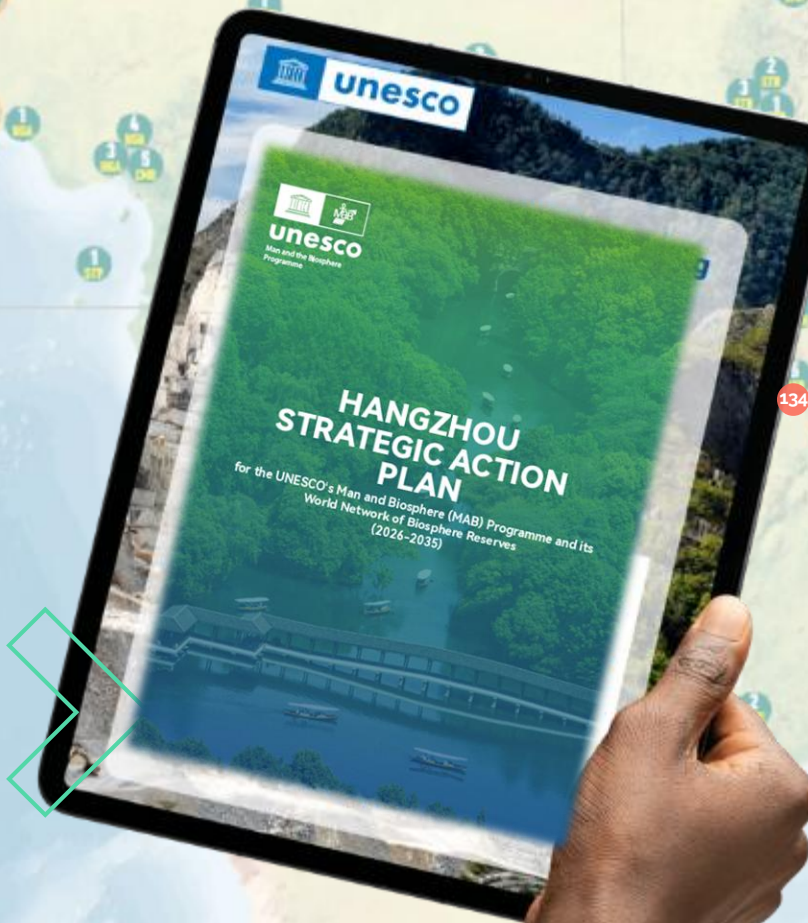




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# Current MAB Youth Priorities

- Designation of National MAB Youth Focal Points
- 2025 World MAB Youth Mapping Survey
- MAB Youth Action Plans
- MAB Youth Roadmap with Regional Contributions to align with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan
- Prepare for 2026 Global MAB Youth Forum







Hangzhou, China | 22-26 September 2025

# 5<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Biosphere Reserves







# Why?

UNESCO convenes the **World Congress of Biosphere Reserves (WCBR)** every ten years to review the progress of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, share experiences, and set future directions.

## Goals

- shape the next **MAB Strategy and Action Plan (2026–2035)**
- foster **cross-sectoral collaboration** to address the interconnected planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable development
- **ensure that the World Network of Biosphere Reserves remains a global model for sustainable development**, a hub for conservation innovation, and a living laboratory for science-based solutions.



## Key focus areas



### Check the track record and **envision the future**

Endorse the **new MAB Strategy and Action Plan (2026–2035)** while reviewing progress under the 2015–2025 Strategy and Lima Action Plan to reaffirm, reimagine, and strengthen the vision of the MAB Programme.

### **Boost cooperation** and global synergies

Strengthen the **World Network of Biosphere Reserves** through broader cooperation and knowledge-sharing while building synergies with MEAs to enhance MAB's global impact.

### Expand **strategic partnerships**

Expand partnerships by engaging financial institutions and the private sector to support biosphere reserves.





# Participation overview



**+3,000**  
participants

from **140 countries**, spanning  
from national authorities,  
biosphere reserves, local  
communities, international  
organizations and  
development agencies, NGOs,  
as well as academic  
institutions



**7** plenary  
sessions

**88** network meetings  
and side-events

**65** exhibition  
booths



**High-level  
speakers**

including then **UNESCO  
Director-General Ms Audrey  
Azoulay**, **Mr Xuexiang Ding**,  
**Vice-premier of the State  
Council, People's Republic  
of China**, State Ministers from  
7 countries and Principals of  
UN agencies and  
development agencies.



**UN agencies**

inter-governmental  
organizations  
and platforms

**World Bank, Asian  
Development Bank, IPBES,  
IPCC, IUCN**, among others





# Core Topics & Discussions

**Synergies with other biodiversity-related conventions and international organizations**



**Financing and partnership on the core agenda**

- A first for global WNBR

**Integrating science and education**



**Strengthened networks and governance for BRs**

- People-centred conservation: gender responsive, youth driven and inclusive of Indigenous Peoples and local communities





# Highlights & Innovations



**Emphasis  
placed on  
the  
implementati  
on of the  
new HSAP**



**Science and  
Technology  
empowered  
solutions  
introduced**



**Alignment of  
strong  
networks**



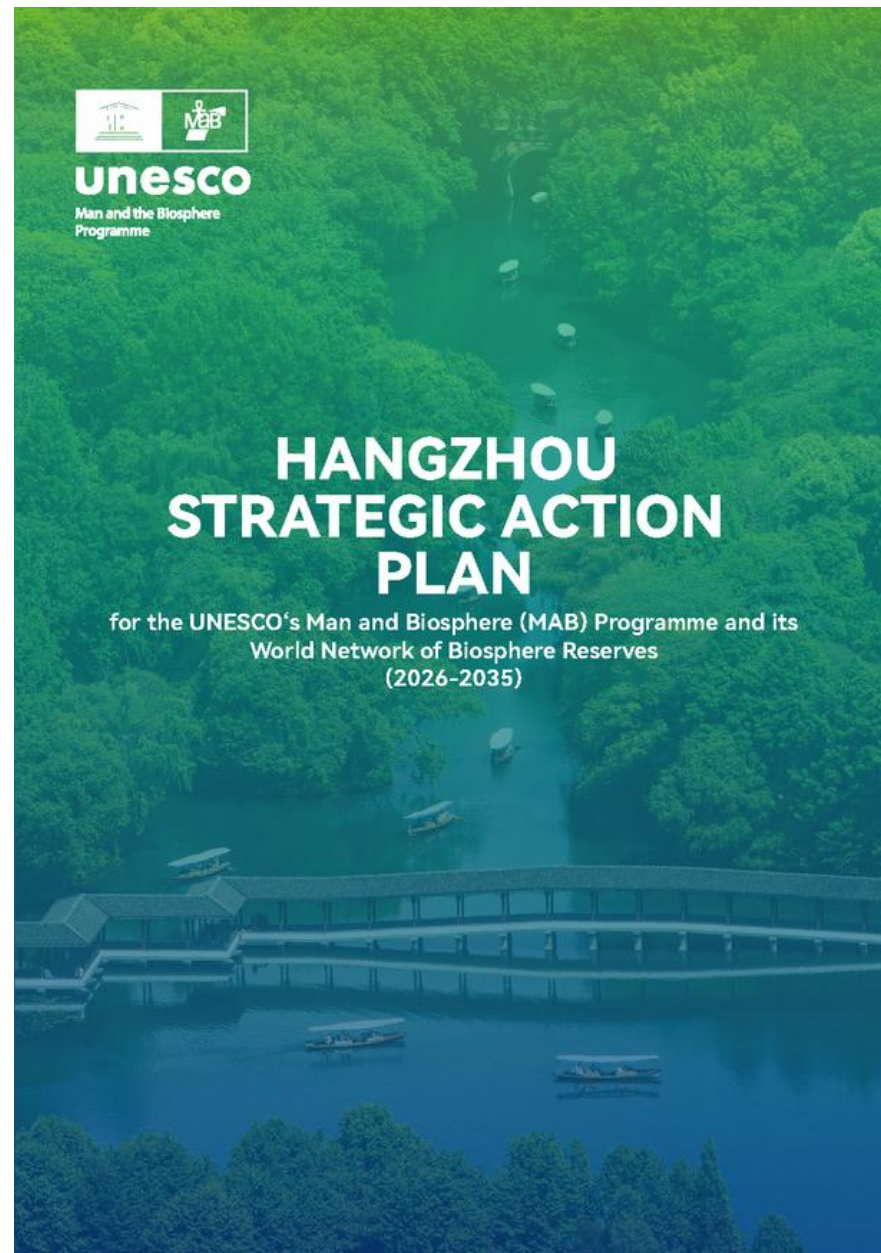
**Best practices  
and case  
studies shared**



**Inclusive  
conserva  
tion**



# Major Outcomes



Our vision is a world where we human beings live up to the collective understanding of our shared future on a finite planet and acknowledge our interdependence with non-human life. **The Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan empowers biosphere reserves to fully fulfil their role as catalysts for such transformational change in their territories and beyond.**

**Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan 2026-2035**

**Encouraging UNESCO Member States to strengthen the application of advanced technologies and digital tools**, such as artificial intelligence, to develop robust monitoring, open access data base, evaluation, and learning framework for measuring progress toward SDG and GBF goals.

**Hangzhou Declaration**



# Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan

## Action Target 20: Develop the MAB Youth Network

### Action Target 20

#### Develop the MAB Youth Network

- By 2027, the MAB Youth Networks have developed a funding strategy and by 2030 have secured funding through partnerships and other financial mechanisms, including encouraging contributions from the WNBR.
- By 2030, the WNBR sustains opportunities for youth to actively engage in MAB-related activities at local, national, regional and global level, including the development of both formal and informal youth networks.
- By 2035, the WNBR has facilitated broad and stable youth participation in decision-making processes at all levels, including within biosphere reserves, to ensure the representation of youth in all bodies of the MAB Programme, including the MAB ICC, the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR), MAB National Committees, biosphere reserve management committees, biosphere reserve participatory bodies and Regional and Thematic Networks.
- From 2026 to 2030, the MAB Secretariat, in collaboration with UNESCO regional and field offices, biosphere reserve networks and key stakeholders, develops and implements tailored capacity development activities for at least 150 youths annually, ensuring diverse and inclusive participation.





# Draft Monze Strategic Action Plan for AfriMAB Youth 2026-2035



## Overview

- Roadmap of AfriMAB Youth priorities that align with the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan 2026 - 2035
- Output from Southern Africa MAB Youth Workshop in Monze, Zambia in November 2025
- Draft will be done in consultation with broader AfriMAB Youth Network
- Will be introduced at AfriMAB General Assembly in March 2026 and Global MAB Youth Forum in Italy in May 2026
- To be integrated into larger MAB Youth Roadmap 2026 - 2035







谢谢你

¡GRACIAS!

СПАСИБО!  
THANK YOU!

شكرا  
MERCI



Contact  
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