

Work plan for the
WORLD NETWORK OF ISLAND AND COASTAL
BIOSPHERE RESERVES
(2023-27)



WORLD NETWORK OF
ISLAND AND COASTAL
BIOSPHERE RESERVES
UNESCO MAN AND THE BIOSPHERE PROGRAMME



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Approved on the 6th of September 2023, at K'gari Islad (Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve, Australia) during the XI Meeting of the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves

1.BACKGROUND

1.1. Islands and coastal zones in the context of global change

Islands and coastal zones, while representing a great diversity of socio-ecological contexts, have shared features and face common challenges. They are complex socio-ecological systems holding a critical role in global cycles and a particular vulnerability to global change. Some features shared by coastal system are the complexities arising from the land-sea interface, high biological and cultural diversity, dense population and socioeconomic dynamism, historical networks and high vulnerability.

Island and coastal ecosystems are being degraded by pollution, overfishing, increasing tourist pressure and unsustainable development, among other factors. Climate impacts including sea-level rise, increased frequency of extreme climate events, and changing temperature and rainfall patterns raise serious threats to coastal communities, both human and ecological. All these factors impact food and water security, biodiversity, loss of cultural identity and threats to sovereignty.

Coastal and island communities hold a valuable cultural heritage expressed in practices, uses, languages and ontologies shaped by coastal-marine cultural landscapes and seascapes. Islands, in turn, hold singular identities deeply rooted in the territory, and a memory of self-sufficiency and adaptation to biophysical limits; this is expressed in a rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage that constitutes a valuable source of knowledge for testing planetary boundaries.

In the face of the ecological crises, there is an urgent need to recognise the great value of island and coastal systems for biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation and eco-social transformation. Biosphere reserves provide an ideal framework to develop their potential as observatories of global change and as laboratories for testing innovative, transdisciplinary approaches and governance models. They are spaces for cooperation and collaboration between different stakeholders, local communities, public administrations and academia, facilitating innovation and the design of creative solutions facing socio-ecological challenges. Cross-regional exchanges and capacity building can foster the development of innovations and reinforce the critical role that island and coastal ecosystems play in climate adaptation and just transitions, providing models for broad adaptation efforts.

1.2. The World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves

According to Art. 8 of the Statutory Framework for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, Member States are encouraged to constitute and operate regional & thematic subnetworks of the WNBR. These networks will facilitate joint research, training, exchanges, and initiate joint cooperation projects with a view of engaging with international, regional, national and subnational research and demonstration initiatives and programmes that contribute to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, and other internationally agreed objectives and frameworks (Strategic Objective 3. Of the MAB Strategy 2015-2025).

In this framework, the World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves (WNICBR) is a thematic network launched in 2009 to study and promote sustainability in islands and coastal zones, and to foster adaptation and mitigation strategies against climate change. The Network is a platform for cooperation and knowledge exchange on critical issues for islands and coastal zones; it provides a meeting point for BR managers, researchers and practitioners to highlight local lessons learned and good practices that will enable us to move towards fair and sustainable social models, as well as for disseminating the values of island and coastal territories and their cultures.

Since 2012, the technical offices in Jeju and Menorca BRs are in charge of coordinating and supporting the network activities, in collaboration with the MAB Secretariat and supported by the MAB national committees of Korea and Spain. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Island Council of Menorca, the Government of Jeju Special Self-Governing Province and UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme to support UNESCO's World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves was signed in May 2023 for the period 2023-27¹.

1.3. Process of design of the work plan

The objective E.4. of the Lima Action Plan establishes that each regional and thematic network should develop a plan with objectives, performance assessment mechanism and timeframe. The MOU 2023-27 mentioned above sets the timeframe for the operation of the Network to be fulfilled by the work plan.

This document draws on the former work plan (2018-22) and has been elaborated through a participatory process in several steps:

¹It follows the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 12 September 2012, which was superseded by the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 12 September 2017

- a) An online survey was circulated among all recipients of the network's mailing list previous to the annual meeting of the Network held in October 2022. The aim of the survey was to determine first results regarding the former work plan (2018-23); another objective of the survey was to explore themes that would potentially be addressed in more depth in the following steps. The survey was completed by 39 participants, who take on a variety of roles within their BR or the MAB. These results were used during the annual network meeting's workshop dedicated to the work plan.
- b) A participatory workshop during the annual meeting of the network in Wilhelmshaven (October 2022) was dedicated to the work plan, in order to discuss the topics and the means of networking for the 2023-28 period. The workshop marked the beginning of the formation of this work plan.
- c) A working group was formed in order to revise the goals and objectives of the former work plan, formulate the main operational objectives and actions for the new plan, and to prioritize the actions. Participants from 14 BRs along with the Spanish MAB committee and the MAB Secretariat have formed this group, and have gathered along four participatory online sessions from January to May 2023.
- d) Both technical secretariats have collected, ordered and categorized the outcomes of the working sessions into goals (former general objectives), operational objectives and actions, as a tentative structure for the plan. The actions included in this plan are prioritized as 1 (high) and 2 (medium) accordingly with the prioritization sent by 8 members of the working group. The tentative calendar and performance indicators for each action have been added by the technical secretariats after the prioritization process.
- e) The resulting draft work plan has been circulated among all the members of the network to collect inputs and suggestions prior to its approval in September 2023.

2.GOALS OF THE NETWORK

1. Enhance cooperation and exchange of knowledge and experiences on sustainable management of islands and coastal zones among biosphere reserves' managers, scientists and policy-makers
2. Promote training and capacity building for island and coastal BR managers
3. Enhance knowledge on the sustainable management of islands and coastal zones facing global change, with a special focus on cultural values and indigenous and local knowledge
4. Increase the relationship and collaboration between island and coastal BRs and academia
5. Enhance the visibility of the Network and liaison with international programs related with ocean and coastal issues, biodiversity, geodiversity, geoheritage and cultural heritage

3.OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

The operational objectives and actions, and the assigned priorities (1-high / 2- medium) have been drafted by the technical secretariats from the contributions by the members of the working group. These should be considered as a strategic framework for guiding action, subject to the availability of funding and resources for the network. The assigned calendar and responsibilities (TS-Technical secretariats / MS-MAB secretariat / BR-Member biosphere reserves) are orientative. A set of performance indicators are proposed, to assess the progress of the work plan in the mid-term and at the end of period.

| Op. Obj. 0. Maintain an operational network and improve its internal processes (consolidate internal structure and governance) <i>Goals: all</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Establish governance rules and a steering group to advise and support the activities of the Network | TS, MS | <i>Not prioritized</i> ² | 2024 | . Governance rules establishment |

²This action has been added in order to identify if there is a need for establishing governance rules in the network.

| Op. Obj. 1. Create and implement a communication strategy <i>Goals 1, 5</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| 1.1. Design an internal communication plan to keep the members informed on matters related to the WNICBR, including the work plan progress, events, training and funding opportunities, other newsletters... (consider time zone and language issues). Subtask 1. Maintain the contact information of all member BRs Subtask 2: Define communication tools and channels (e.g. drive space, shared library, monthly newsletter, biannual newsletter) | TS, MS | 1 | 2024 | . Communication plan established . Distribution lists updated and operative . Communication tools defined and operative |
| 1.2. Prepare a welcome pack for new members (including an overview of the WNICBR & toolkit of resources of the Network) | TS | 1 | 2023 | . Welcome brochure available on the website |
| 1.3. Provide opportunities for new members to introduce themselves to the network | TS | 2 | 2023-27 | . Number of communications/interactions of new members |
| 1.4. Set a login area/form on the website and encourage members' participation in updates of information (BR sheets) (subject to technical possibilities of the web platform) | TS | 2 | 2024 | . Login area operative |
| 1.5. Maintain and promote the catalogue of relevant experiences in BRs | TS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of experiences in the catalogue . Number of BRs sharing experiences |
| 1.6. Enhance the Network's visibility and outreach by targeting external actors (managers, policy-makers, actors, citizens); and identifying and reinforcing an identity mark for the Network | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2023-27 | . Number of presentations of the Network in external events |
| 1.7. Increase awareness of global socioenvironmental problems critical to island and coastal areas (especially the climate emergency and plastic pollution) and articulate advocacy messages at national and international levels | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of reports, articles and press releases related with activities of the Network |

| Op. Obj. 2. Increase the opportunities for exchange and cooperation among members <i>Goals 1, 2, 3</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| 2.1. Organize annual meetings among the network partners (in person and online) to exchange experiences and knowledge and to develop collaborative processes. | TS, MS | 1 | 2023-27 | . Number of meetings (in person/virtual/hybrid) . Number of participants . BRs represented at the meetings |
| 2.2. Promote exchange programs for BR managers, researchers, students and other actors, based on partnerships and common interests. | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2025-27 | . Number of exchanges . BRs benefiting from exchanges |
| 2.3. Define a list of priority topics to organize thematic management, training and tools for collaboration: migratory pathways, Zero Plastic, biodiversity conservation, marine and coastal management (e.g. integrated coastal zone management), ocean literacy, traditional and indigenous knowledge, monitoring and assessment tools, eco-social transformation, (...). | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2023-24 | . Thematic list defined |
| 2.4. Raise funds through UNESCO headquarters for specific projects | TS, MS, BR | 1 | 2025-27 | . Annual budget |

| Op. Obj. 3. Enhance partnerships of island and coastal BRs around topics of interest and migratory pathways <i>Goals 1, 3, 4</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| 3.1. Establish thematic groups around topics of interest and migratory pathways Subtask 1. Define a list of topics/migratory species & pathways and one or two BRs willing to lead each thematic group, and set a sign-up process for thematic groups among the members. Subtask 2. Prepare kick-off meetings for working groups to define roles, objectives and means for collaboration for each group. Subtask 3. Define channels to share information between the working groups and the whole network. | TS, BR | 1 | 2023-27 | . Number of thematic groups . Number of forums/activities by theme . Number of BRs participating in groups |
| 3.2. Continue the Zero Plastic in Biosphere Reserves initiative in alliance with the Marine Sciences for Society research network. | TS, BR | 1 | 2023-27 | . Number of ZP forums/activities . Number of BRs participating in ZP |
| 3.3. Support connections and alliances of thematic groups with external actors and platforms working on the same topics. | BR, TS | 2 | 2024-27 | . Number of agreements/collaboration activities with external platforms/actors |

| Op. Obj. 4. Enhance training opportunities in virtual/in-person format for BRs close in proximity, in similar landscapes, and in topics of interest and common challenges. <i>Goals 1, 2</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| 4.1. Conduct training events on a regular basis (e.g. 2 trainings per year) on the defined topics of interest. Define the tools (online programs/platforms) and the scope of each training (number of sessions, participants, time zones). Focus training both on themes of interest and on processes for collaborative action. | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2023-27 | . Number of trainings (in person/virtual) . Number of participants . BRs benefited from training |
| 4.2. Maintain a repository to make the outcomes of each training available: conclusions, summaries, and video recordings. | TS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Repository available through the website . Number of updates |

| Op. Obj. 5. Develop support mechanisms for young/applying BRs in order to improve technical and management capacities to fulfil the technical requirements and documents for the BR management/nomination. <i>Goal 2</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| 5.1. Support managers of young BRs in developing the technical and procedural requirements in the MAB framework (e.g. BR Action plan, periodic reviews) (for example, by holding specific meetings or seminars on a yearly basis, or by answering specific information requests). | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of meetings or support activities . BRs participating in support activities |
| 5.2. Involve experienced BRs willing to mentor younger ones; for example, by an expression of interest to be involved in mentoring/receiving support. | TS, BR | 2 | 2025-27 | . Number of mentoring activities . BRs involved |
| 5.3. Support applying island and coastal BRs in the specific procedures for nomination. | TS, MS | 2 | 2025-27 | . BRs supported |

| Op. Obj. 6. Identify and enhance traditional and indigenous uses and knowledge of island and coastal resources <i>Goals 1, 3</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| 6.1. Identify the existing resources and catalogues on traditional and indigenous knowledge (in the MAB program and beyond) | BR, TS | 1 | 2024-25 | . Inventory of the selected resources |
| 6.2. Gather traditional uses and knowledge across the network and make this information accessible through a publication (lead by a working group) Subtask 1. Define a methodological approach Subtask 2. Identify sources and perform data collection across the participating BRs Subtask 3. Prepare a publication | BR, TS | 1 | 2024-27 | . BRs involved . Number of entries in the catalogue . Publication available |
| 6.3. Organize a conference focused on traditional knowledge | TS, BR, MS | 2 | 2026 | . Meeting organized . Number of communications presented . Participating BRs |

| Op. Obj. 7. Develop/improve monitoring and assessment tools for island and coastal BRs <i>Goals 2, 3</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| 7.1. Provide monitoring and assessment tools (e.g. indicators systems) to be implemented at the local level to track the evolution and trends of the BRs in socioeconomic and environmental aspects, through specific seminars and meetings. | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2025-27 | . Number of activities performed . Participant BRs |
| 7.2. Share monitoring methodologies for specific issues among the network and compare data in different locations. | BR, TS | 1 | 2026-27 | . BRs involved . Number of reports/publications |
| 7.3. Promote the application of citizen science methodologies to achieve the participation of local people in monitoring programs in BRs and share the experiences obtained among BRs in the network. Several tools might be set up to encourage citizen participation, and to register observations and incidences within the BRs in the network (e.g. mobile application). | BR, TS | 2 | 2026-27 | . Number of CS activities . BRs implementing and sharing CS activities . Registered Incidences |

| Op. Obj. 8. Identify research structures and experts across the network and enhance partnerships with BRs <i>Goals 3, 4</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| 8.1. Map the existing research structures connected to the Network BRs, the main research lines going on and the experts involved; share the results among the network. | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2024-25 | . Inventory of research centres and research lines . BRs involved |
| 8.2. Explore the possibilities of connection and synergies of research along the thematic axis (e.g. migratory routes, effects of climate change in seagrasses...), and possibilities of integrating and systematizing the advancing knowledge, for example through observatories. | TS, BR, MS | 1 | 2025-27 | . Number of connections between research activities . Number of publications derived from collaborations |
| 8.3. Encourage the participation of BRs as research sites and make visible BR partnerships in research papers and publications. | BR, TS, MS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of publications referring to BRs of the Network |
| 8.4. Define a stable connection between BRs and academia aiming to develop the potential of BRs as sites for eco-social transformation; e.g. a laboratory involving research centres, BRs managers and practitioners - ETlab. | TS, MS, BR | 1 | 2025-27 | . Number of research centres and BRs involved . Number activities/publications |

| Op. Obj. 9. Increase research opportunities and capacities in BRs <i>Goals 2, 3, 4</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| 9.1. Hold a tutoring workshop on how to connect BRs with academic partners, based on the experiences of BRs in the Network. | TS, BR | 2 | 2024 | . Number of participants . BRs involved |
| 9.2. Promote the mobility of internship students and researchers across the Network based on partnerships and common research interests. | BR, TS, MS | 2 | 2026-27 | . Number of internships developed . BRs involved |
| 9.3. Promote and support applications to international calls for research projects involving BRs in the Network, mainly focused on climate change adaptation and mitigation. | BR, TS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of joint applications . Number of successful applications . BRs involved |

| Op. Obj. 10. Enhance the opportunities to connect with other programs and networks <i>Goal 5</i> | Responsibility | Priority | Calendar | Indicators |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| 10.1. Create spaces of connection with other regional and thematic MAB networks (e.g. mountains and Mediterranean networks, Iberomab, Euromab, EASBRnet). | TS, MS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of activities/ meetings with other networks . Participant BRs |
| 10.2. Search for synergies with other UNESCO programs (e.g. geoparks and global heritage sites). | TS, MS, BR | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of activities focused on UNESCO programs . Participant BRs |
| 10.3. Find collaboration channels with international programs, agreements and institutions with related goals with our network; e.g. the Ocean Decade, the Restoration Decade, the UN treaty on plastic pollution. Provide access to tools, frameworks, learning materials. | TS, MS | 1 | 2024-27 | . Number of agreements/activities in relation with international programs . Participant BRs |