

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves in Africa

(Identification, establishment, management, functioning, and benefits)



Background

“I believe humankind has looked at climate change... as if it were a fiction, happening to someone else’s planet, as if pretending that climate change wasn’t real would somehow make it go away”. (Leonardo Di Caprio, United Nations Climate Summit, 2014).

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are places to develop and apply climate change resilience and mitigation. Science and technology-based practices need to be developed and applied. Women and men are at the heart of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, and they need to benefit from them.

Launched in the early 1970s, UNESCO’s MAB Program proposes an interdisciplinary research agenda and capacity building that targets the ecological, social and economic dimensions of biodiversity loss as well as the reduction of this loss. One of UNESCO’s most important comparative advantages is the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). The Network currently counts 631 biosphere reserves (BR) in 119 countries. BRs function as models for sustainable human living and for the reconciliation of sustainable development and nature conservation. They are modeled with considerations in biodiversity, climate change resilience, renewable energy, waste-management and water-management practices, as well as jobs and income for people.

Ethiopia has successfully established three Biosphere Reserves. That is the Kafa, the Yaju and the Sheka Forest and three more currently under discussion (Lake Tana, Desa Forest, Simien Mountains). The 54 African Union Member States have a total of 78 BRs in 33 countries (Algeria 6; Benin 2; Burkina Faso 2; Cameroon 3; Central African Republic 2; Congo 2; Democratic Republic of Congo 3; Cote d’Ivoire 2; Egypt 2; Ethiopia 3; Gabon 1; Ghana 2; Guinea 4; Guinea-Bissau 1; Kenya 6; Madagascar 3;

Malawi 2; Mali 1; Mauretania 1; Mauritius 1; Niger 2; Nigeria 1; Rwanda 1; Sao Tome and Principe 1; Senegal 5; South Africa 6; Sudan 2; United Republic of Tanzania 3; Togo 1; Tunisia 4; Uganda 2; Zimbabwe 1).

Considering Africa's size, number of countries, and enormous importance regarding biodiversity conservation, there is a lot of scope for more participation of African Union Member States in the WNBR. Also, considering issues related to human population growth, natural resources consumption, water-security, food-security, natural disasters, climate change mitigation and resilience, rangeland ecology, urban and natural ecosystems, tourism development, alternative income and human development in general, it is advisable for African Member States to identify and establish additional BRs. Likewise manage the existing and future BRs at the highest professional standards based on science and with a focus on human benefits.

There is the need to apply and demonstrate existing science-based technology, increasingly involve the youth. We need to turn from decades of too much talking to a new era of environmental ethics, seriously focusing on the application of best practices.

UNESCO and Ethiopia's Ministry of Science & Technology, as well as support agencies such as EOC-DICAC, MELCA, the African Eco-Hydrology Center, ECFF, NABU, Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung, Michael Succow Stiftung, aim to use their combined capacities to form synergies for good BR management in Ethiopia. African Union Member States are encouraged to boost their participation at the WNBR.

This is a major contribution to biodiversity conservation, climate change resilience, inter-agency cooperation, as well as community participation and gender balance.

Indicators:

- Number of activities supported that enhance BR functioning
- Number of activities supported that enhance ecological monitoring
- Number of activities supported that enhance socio-economic monitoring
- Number of men, women, and youth that benefit from BRs

Biosphere Reserves contribute to the following commitments:

- UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014),
- UN Convention on Biodiversity (1996); UN Decade on Biodiversity (2011 – 2020),
- UN Convention to Combat Desertification (1999),
- UN Decade for Deserts and against Desertification (2010 – 2020),
- UN International Decade for Action "Water for Life" (2005 - 2015),
- MDG7 – Environmental Sustainability
- MDG 1 - Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
- MDG 3 – Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1995),
- Generating jobs and income,

- Ethiopia's Climate-Resilient Green Economy,
- Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan 2010 – 2015,
- UNESCO's overarching priorities Africa and Gender Equality.

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