

IMPORTANCE OF UNESCO MAN AND BIOSPHERE RESERVES IN THE TROPICS

S07-008 - TROPICAL BIODIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

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The UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB), with 669 reserves in 120 countries, including 16 transboundary sites, is an intergovernmental Scientific Program to establish a scientific basis

to improve relationships between people and their environments. Biosphere Reserves (BR) have three zones where scientists, NGOs, local communities work together:

- the core is mainly for long-term conservation and research,
- the buffer zone is for activities like environmental education, monitoring eco-tourism and research,
- the transition zone allows sustainable activities (agriculture, settlements).

The concept of BRs is interesting to model sustainable development and to monitor ecosystem responses to global changes. Well-known as sensitive areas are the tropical forest of which several are already classified as BRs. Recognizing the importance of these ecosystems across the world, in 2009, a Memorandum of Cooperation representing Brazil, Indonesia and DR Congo was signed to address mainly capacity building, however the agreements of the exchange of scientific information and joint trans-continental publications remained too limited.

The MAB-NET project (for Man and Biosphere Reserves Network), financed by the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO) aims at improving the intercontinental exchange of knowledge on the management of the BRs reserves. It addresses aspects like scientific research, data and information management, policy making, conservation, legal issues and public engagement. The project will with two missions on site evaluate and compare the management of the MAB reserves of the Amazonas in Brazil (near Manaus) and in the MAB reserve of Luki in D.R. Congo. In its assessment the positioning and collaboration with site monitoring networks such as the GEO-BON (Group for Earth Observation-Biodiversity Observation networks) and ILTER (International Long Term Ecological Research) will be taken into account.

Since 2004 the Royal Museum for Central Africa developed many interdisciplinary projects in the Luki reserve, together with the Botanic Garden Meise, the ERAIFT and the universities of Ghent and Liège/Gembloux. In this talk the MAB-NET project will be presented, demonstrating how it fits in the new UNESCO MAB Strategy and Lima Action Plan (2016-2015) and how it will contribute to enhance conservation and sustainable development in tropical areas.

