

**FEDERAL SCIENCE POLICY**

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RESEARCH COOPERATION WITH UNESCO,

focussed on the programme MAN AND THE BIOSPHERE (MAB)

**2016-2019**

**Call for research proposals**

**Information File**

June 2016



#### FOREWORD

The present document provides the needed information for teams wishing to take part in the call for proposals in the context of the Research Cooperation with the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of UNESCO.

Please note that:

* Applicants are required to observe the rules laid down in this information package, otherwise their proposals cannot be taken into account by the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO).
* This call is addressed to Belgian universities, public scientific institutions and non-profit research institutions.
* Proposals should be presented in English.
* Electronic copy of the proposals must be submitted to the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO). ([secr.coord@belspo.be](mailto:secr.coord@belspo.be)) no later than on 12 September 2016 at 3 PM. A receipt will be sent by e-mail.

***For more information:***

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# 1. Presentation of the programme and of the call

## 1.1 Goals

One of BELSPO's goals is to stimulate the participation of Belgian researchers and federal musea in international programmes and networks. This is done by organising calls for proposals that are also open to the participation of researchers from other countries, such as the present call.

The objectives of this call are:

* to consolidate Belgium’s research potential. This is to be achieved via this call by:
* allow selected institutions to integrate in a UNESCO programme that will add value to their research and museological activities that could not be reached without this cooperation;
* ensuring that Belgium can grow its knowledge and excellence and where possible build on networks of people and infrastructure, where has been invested in previously;
* putting Belgian research teams on the map as international competence centres in research niches such as biodiversity, ecosystem goods and services, sustainable use of natural resources and the coping with climate change challenges;
* contributing to the interface of research and policy and to research uptake in order to tackle global challenges.
* to promoting innovation (in the broadest possible sense)
* to develop dedicated interaction with users of research results.

## 1.2 Programme structure (cooperation with unesco)

In 2013, BELSPO has earmarked a budget of 500 000 € for a five-year programme for cooperation with UNESCO. The cooperation is carried out via research projects that are selected through two calls for proposals. Each of the granted projects, one per call, has a budget of about 250 000 €.

The first call was launched in 2013. That call was addressed to the Federal Scientific Institutes (**FSI)** in order to identify their interests for cooperation with a Programme of UNESCO and to fund a proposal, inspired by a specific UNESCO programme. The selected proposal, linked to UNESCO's programme 'Man and the Biosphere' ([MAB](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme/about-mab/)), is ongoing. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between BELSPO and the MAB-secretariat to manage dedicated interactions among BELSPO and the Belgian research teams with the MAB-secretariat.

The present call - the second one -, **open to all types of non-profit Belgian research institutions**, aims to select and fund a research project to be implemented in at least one African MAB biosphere reserve. This project will contribute to the objectives, activities and research needs of the MAB programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

## 1.3 Thematic priority of the present call

The thematic research focus is the following:

**Development of** **a methodology to evaluate the economic value of ecosystem goods and services in Biosphere Reserves in support to the transition to green economy.**

Natural capital is the most fundamental of the forms of capital since it provides the basic conditions for human existence, delivering food, clean water and air, and essential resources. It sets the ecological limits for our socio-economic systems, which require continuous flows of material inputs and ecosystem goods and services. Natural capital has an ecologic value, and an economic value. Nevertheless, it is not accounted for in nations' wealth accounting systems..

However, there is an increasing evidence that a new economic paradigm is which will overcome the growing environmental risks, ecological scarcities and social disparities is absolutely critical. In this context, many methods to include natural capital in economic evaluations have been developed in order to address the vast array of market, policy and institutional failures that prevent recognition of the economic significance of the environmental degradation. At the same time, the concept of ‘*Green Economy*’ can be seen as a new economic paradigm, driving growth of income and jobs, while reducing environmental risks and scarcities – in short, delivering sustainable development. Valuing the significance of the ecosystems assets is a key challenge for ensuring their protection and consistent use for sustainability and inclusiveness, thus the shift to “green economy”.

Estimates of the value of ecosystems as natural capital are very closely related to the estimates of the flow of benefits they provide. Ecosystems and the provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services they provide have economic value to human societies because people derive utility from their actual or potential use. The purpose of an economic valuation is to make the disparate services provided *by ecosystems comparable to each other, using a common metric*.

Beyond this objective, ecosystems valuation can, inter alia, provide information:

1. to assess of the overall contribution of ecosystems to social and economic well-being
2. to analyze economic actors strategy for using specific ecosystems
3. to inform decision-making
4. alternative uses of assets
5. Uncertainty involving demand and supply of natural resources, especially in the future.

Biosphere reserves are socio ecosystems established by UNESCO Man And the Biosphere (MAB) intergovernmental scientific programme to better understand and improve of the relation between human being and nature. They are sites dedicated to test and propose sustainable development approaches. All the above informations are relevant for BR management.

Therefore is a strong interest to evaluate the economic value of biosphere reserves especially in view of the transition to a green economy in Biosphere Reserve which is one of the main action areas of the MAB Strategy (2015-2025) and Lima Action Plan (2016-2025). However, the methodologies are complex, costly and time-consuming.

The present call for proposals aims at using Biosphere Reserves as special places for testing interdisciplinary approaches and stakeholder’s involvement in the development of an iterative methodology for valuating natural capital in the view of integrating ecosystems goods and services into decision making as a basis for promoting green economy.

**Main components of the research project to be funded:**

The evaluation of the economic value of ecosystem goods and services implies working step by step. The first necessary step consists in the recognition of the value of the ecosystem as well as the identification of its benefits, characteristics, services, etc. Then, as a second step, the ecosystem valuation has to be done by using economic tools and methods. This measurement allows making natural capital and ecosystem’s services economically visible. And finally, because of the ecosystem valuation, it becomes possible to incorporate ecosystem and biodiversity benefits into decision-making.

Operate in this way, step by step, requires working in a trans-disciplinary way: The development of a methodology to evaluate the economic value of ecosystems calls for multidisciplinary skills (each step requires specific skills that are rarely specific to a single discipline) and will engage stakeholders in each step. This will contribute to guarantee that research outcomes are tailored to local (incl. MAB) contexts, increasing the likelihood that outcomes will be adopted, applied and incorporated into decision-making.

**Technical information:**

The technical skills required for the development of a methodology to evaluate the economic value of ecosystems are the following:

* Mapping the ecosystem to be evaluated,
* Applying economic tools and methods to value the ecosystem assets and services,
* Translating ecosystems valuation results in effective actions and initiatives to consider in decision-making processes implemented in Biosphere Reserves.

Required skills are:

* a very good practical knowledge of total economic value method and measurement tools,
* a good command of quantitative data collection processes and data analytical tools,
* a good knowledge of the ecosystem functioning,
* a strong capacity to collect and to analyze many and multidisciplinary information, and
* the ability to work on the field and in a multi-disciplinary team and

## 1.4 Implementation of the (selected) project

* The selected proposal will be funded by an **agreement** between BELSPO and the funded Belgian partners.
* The agreement will describe the project network, the funding, the timing ... The practical requirements for the project implementation will be described in the technical annex of the agreement. There, the tasks of the different partners will be described, as well as the money allocation, the project follow-up procedures, the expected output, etc.
* The following principle applies to the **ownership and diffusion of the results**:
* The results developed in the context of the project shall be the property of the partner responsible for these results. The State shall nonetheless reserve the right to use results for its own needs without any charge and on a non-exclusive and irrevocable basis.
* The results of the research should be made available to the public in accordance to BELSPO's and UNESCO's open access policy.
* The selected project will be supported by a **Steering Committee**. The objective of this committee is to provide active follow-up of the project and to contribute to its valorisation. It should provide advice to the project team.

The Committee should include at least:

* 1 international scientific experts;
* 2 potential end users of the project results (1 of the MAB secretariat,1 African representative stakeholder)

and will be chaired by BELSPO.

It will be tasked with:

* Assessing the progress of the project;
* Providing technical advice/recommendations on the implementation of the project as appropriate
* Adjusting the objectives and activities of the project via a binding opinion in the light of the scientific, technical and methodological demands of the project and the intermediate achievements;
* Assessing the impact of the partnership/project and the synergy between the various tasks and partners;
* Assessing and guiding exploitation activities and contribute to the dissemination the results nationally and internationally;
* Drawing attention to problems within the partnership/project resulting in the termination of the agreement.

The Committee should meet once a year, in Belgium. The **costs** of the participation of foreign experts are shared:

* the MAB-secretariat will fund the participation of its representative
* the cost of maximum 1 international scientific experts and 1 African stakeholder will be included in the project and reimbursed via the programme.

## 1.5 budget of this call

The maximum total budget to be granted (one single proposal will be selected!) is **250.000** €**.** The **duration** of the project must comprise 2,5 up to 3 years maximum.

## 1.6 Timetable

Submission of proposals 12 September 2016

Selection of proposals (indicative date) 30 October 2016

Start of contracts (indicative date) 1 December 2016

# 2. Profile of the proposals and respondants

## 2.1 Proposals's network

The present call is for network projects. Individual projects will not be considered for funding. Multi-disciplinarity and promotion of south-south cooperation is strongly encouraged.

The following Belgian actors qualify for funding under the programme:

* + Universities
  + Public research institutions
  + Non-profit research institutions

The proposal must include at least two Belgian researchers from different Belgian institutions.

Participation of non-Belgian research organisations in the network is also possible and encouraged ,as well as, where appropriate, of a NGO or a public or a private partner . The participation of these organisations will not be funded by BELSPO. Such partners should be indicated as "optional partner" in the submission form. Self-financed partners should clearly demonstrate an added value to the project and secure their own funding while co-funding can be in kind. They must provide a signed officialletter of support from their Head of Department, Financial Director, or equivalent position, stating the commitment of the organisation to provide its own funding. The letter is to be included as an appendix to the proposal submission form.

## 2.2 Budget breakdown

### 2.2.1 Staff

The staff costs cover: index-linked gross salaries, employer's social security contributions and statutory insurance charges, plus any other legally due compensation or payments as amounts added to the salary.

Scholarship students and post-doctorate scholarship students who enjoy exemption from tax liability and are covered by the social security system in accordance with the Royal Decrees of 5 July 1996 and 26 March 2003 concerning employees' social security may be appointed only exceptionally subsequent to permission being granted by the President of the Belgian Science Policy Office.

### 2.2.2 Operating

Lump sum limited to 10% of the staff item, pro rata distributed over the period covered by the project (evidences are not required). This part covers standard necessities and products for the laboratory, the workplace and office; documentation, travelling and accommodation (including allowances for guest researchers); use of ciphering equipment; common software; machine and appliance maintenance and operation; data costs (costs for using large ciphering equipment, conversion of datasets for further analysis, buying data, surveys, …); exploitation costs (costs for planned exploitation activities, not including staff and operating costs) and, more generally, consumables.

### 2.2.3 Subcontracting (only for the Belgian partners):

Expense incurred by a third party to carry out tasks or to provide services that require special scientific or technical competence outside the institution's normal area of activity. The amount may not exceed 25% of the total budget allocated to the Belgian partner concerned.

### 2.2.4 Overheads

General expenses ("overheads") account for a maximum 5% of the total staff and operating costs.

# 3. Procedures

## 3.1 Submission

Proposals should be submitted solely via the form intended for this purpose, which is available online, on the Internet site of BELSPO (<http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/call_en.stm>): [Submission Dossier](http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/call/forms/MAB/2016/SubmDossierCall2016_en.docx).

* Applicants are required to meet the conditions set forth in this document.
* Enclosures with the submission form will be disregarded during the assessment and selection procedure. The only accepted enclosure is (are) the letter(s) of optional partners with regard to their self-funding engagement (see 2.1)
* Proposals should be submitted in English.
* An **electronic copy[[1]](#footnote-1)**of the proposal, in **Word-format, with the page with signature in pdf,**  should be submitted to BELSPO ([secr.coord@belspo.be](mailto:secr.coord@belspo.be)) not later than:

**12 September 2016 at 3 p.m.**

* The Belgian Federal Science Policy Office may disregard any proposals that are submitted after the closing time.

## 3.2 Assessment and selection

* Once the call is closed, all proposals are submitted to an **eligibility check** comprises two steps:
* Check if the proposal matches the theme of the call (in/out of scope)

Only proposals 'in scope' will be further considered for eligibility.

* Check if the proposal fulfils the requested administrative criteria provided in the check list (see annex 1).
* **Only the proposals eligible for funding will be evaluated.**
* **Evaluation will be done** by written procedure by **3 international peer reviewers** on the basis of the submitted documents. One of the peer reviewers is from the MAB Programme Secretariat.

The assessment criteria are:

1. Scientific quality of the proposal

* clarity of the objectives and of the tasks
* relevance, applicability and replicability of the methodological approach
* scientific originality of the proposed research (incl. the innovative character of the potential results)
* positioning of the proposed research vis-à-vis on-going research in the field in question.

1. Quality of the network

* level of scientific excellence and, or expertise of the candidates
* complementarity of the competences among proposed partners
* interdisciplinary nature of the network
* distribution of tasks between the partners
* added value of foreign partner's contribution
* scientific quality and recognition in the field, coordination, management, synthesis and communication skills of the coordinator.

1. Potential impact for science, society and decision making

* plan for disseminating project results, interaction with the (potential ) user community, visibility given to the project especially within the [WNBR](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/biosphere-reserves/world-network-wnbr/).

1. Adequacy of resources

* balance of the distribution of resources between partners
* realism of means deployed (duration, budget, personnel)
* gathering, use and accessibility of data necessary for the project

1. International dimension

* position of the project in relation to international activities (existing or in preparation)

# 4. Compliant policy

BELSPO has a global procedure to handle complaints. If, at any time, in the course of the Call, you have the feeling that your application is not handled properly, please fill in the complaint form that you will find on this webpage:

<http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/complaints_en.stm>.

Your complaint will be treated independently, and with strict confidentiality.

\* \* \*

**Annex 1**

**UNESCO-MAB Cooperation**

**Call for Proposals 2016**

**Check list 'Eligibility of Proposals'**

The Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO) ensures that proposals meet all the eligibility criteria listed below. Proposals that do not meet one or more eligibility criteria will not be evaluated.

Coordinators of ineligible proposals will be informed by BELSPO.

The eligibility of each proposal is verified on the basis of information provided by the submitters in the submission file.

**List of criteria**

Each proposal is checked (up) on the following criteria. Only proposals fulfilling ALL criteria will be evaluated.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * The submission dossier is submitted to BELSPO the latest on 12 September 2016, at 3 p.m. |  |
| * The submitted dossier fits to the content of the call (in/out of scope) |  |
| * The submission dossier is provided in electronic version, in Pdf and in Word format at signed by the coordinator |  |
| * The requested funding is for participants from universities and/or public scientific institutions, and/or non-profit research centres |  |
| * The proposal concerns a research project with at least 2 Belgian partners |  |
| * In case that an optional partner participates in the project, the letter mentioning its own funding is included in the submission form |  |
| * The proposal complies with the rules written in the rubric 'budget' of the information file |  |
| * The demanded BELSPO budget contribution does not exceed 250.000 EUR |  |
| * De duration of the proposed project is minimum 2,5 years and maximum 3 years |  |

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)