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Establishment of a Category 2 Centre in Reykjavik under the auspices of UNESCO

Feasibility Study conducted on behalf of UNESCO



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1 Background

On 14 March 2019, the Government of Iceland submitted a formal request¹ to the Director General of UNESCO to initiate all necessary steps for the establishment of a multidisciplinary Category 2 Centre in Reykjavik, Iceland (hereafter: ‘the Proposed Centre’), in application of the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the Auspices of UNESCO².

The Proposed Centre will host four existing training programmes under one umbrella: the Geothermal Training Programme (GTP), launched in 1979; the Fisheries Training Programme (FTP), 1997; the Land Restoration Training Programme (LRT), 2010, and the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (GEST), 2013. The Government of Iceland has funded the activities of these training programmes since their inception, as part of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget. Until now, the four programmes have been implemented in collaboration with the United Nations University (UNU). However, as a result of a change in strategic direction, both parties have decided to put an end to this collaboration in December 2019.

The programmes have historically played an important role in Iceland’s international development cooperation, with a 2017 external evaluation finding that the programmes have contributed to important development results in partner developing countries³. All four programmes have a specific focus on increasing capacities of developing countries in their respective fields of action, and particularly, in the management of natural resources. The programmes are designed to strengthen individual, organisational and institutional capacities in developing and conflict/post-conflict countries, with a focus on the four thematic areas outlined above. The core activity of the programmes is providing five-to-six month training courses (or fellowships) in Iceland that draw on Iceland’s expertise within these four areas to build the capacity of participants from target countries.

A particular feature of this request to create a Cat. 2 centre, is that the Proposed Centre will integrate and therefore be able to capitalise on the track record of four existing training programmes, including their network and international reach. The Proposed Centre is also intended to represent the first transdisciplinary UNESCO Category 2 Centre, capable of working on cross-cutting themes. As will be further explained in subsequent sections, both of these elements represent key attributes of the request, as well as key challenges that will need to be adequately managed.

Despite the longstanding existence of the four programmes, the Proposed Centre does not currently exist as a stand-alone legal entity and does not have a track record of its own. Despite similarities in their content, governance, format and funding sources, the four training programmes are hosted by different institutions (henceforth ‘host institutions’) and operate separately. The definitive configuration of the single-centre structure, its governance scheme, and its role vis à vis the existing programmes it will regroup, is yet to be defined. The Government of Iceland is actively exploring the best alternative to complete this merger and ensure the development of a cohesive structure.

Pursuant to the instructions of the Director General, and in accordance with the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy, the current feasibility study is developed based on the findings of a technical mission to Reykjavik (20 - 21 May 2019), led by independent consultants and funded by the Government of Iceland, to assess the relevance of the Proposed Centre for the work of UNESCO and its capacity to support the programmes of the Organisation. A previous exploratory fact-finding mission undertaken by UNESCO on 10-11 January 2019 found numerous synergies between the programmes of the Proposed Centre and UNESCO.

¹ Annexed to this report.

² Adopted by the General Conference at its 37th session (37 C/Resolution 93)

³ NIRAS (2017), Evaluation of the UNU Programmes in Iceland, final report. ; annexed to this report.

The current feasibility study hereafter presents the programmatic component, the governance and managerial component, and the sustainability component of the Proposed Centre. It concludes by making a recommendation to UNESCO on the feasibility of establishing such a centre.

2 Programmatic component

The Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the Auspices of UNESCO (37 C/Resolution 93) states that “the activities of Category 2 Centres must be global, regional, subregional or interregional in scope”. In addition, Category 2 Centres “shall contribute to the achievement of UNESCO’s strategic programme objectives and global priorities of the Organisation, as well as sectoral or intersectoral programme priorities and themes, defined in the C/5 document”.

This section of the feasibility report thus analyses each of these dimensions, on the basis of the work of the existing Icelandic programmes, and the planned development of the proposed Cat. 2 centre.

2.1 Relevance of the programmes and activities of the Proposed Centre to UNESCO’s Strategic Objectives

The relevance of the proposed Cat. 2 centre vis à vis UNESCO’s strategic objectives has been analysed according to the three following points:

- The high-level strategic objectives of UNESCO, according to its institutional mandate and Medium-Term Strategy, including global priorities
- The thematic focus of the proposed Cat 2. Centre, in light of the global priorities of UNESCO and the Centre’s obligation to act on a global, regional, subregional or interregional basis
- The links between the proposed Cat. 2 centre’s ambition and objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals as defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2.1.1 High-strategic objectives and mandate

In 2014, UNESCO adopted its 2014-2021 Medium-Term Strategy (37 C/4), which set out two overarching objectives: contributing to lasting peace, and contributing to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. UNESCO also has two global priorities: Africa and Gender Equality. UNESCO’s Strategic Objectives 2 and 6⁴ respectively focus on “empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens” and “supporting inclusive social development, fostering intercultural dialogue for the rapprochement of cultures and promoting ethical principles”. The needs and aspirations of youth are additionally central concerns to UNESCO⁵.

There is a clear and strong relevance of the programmes and activities of the Proposed Centre to UNESCO’s aforementioned mandate, in particular:

- Contribution to lasting peace and to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty: The Proposed Centre’s focus on enhancing capacities in developing countries for a more sustainable management of natural resources is fully in line with this mandate and objective. The Proposed Centre will seek to strengthen individual, organisational and institutional capacities in developing and conflict/post-conflict countries, with a special focus on the thematic areas of expertise of its four training programmes: geothermal energy resources; fisheries and living aquatic resources; land degradation, and gender equality. The programmes seek to ensure that fellows and partner institutions serve as change agents for evidence-based and inclusive sustainable development at organisational, institutional, national and sub-national levels in UNESCO Member States.

⁴ 2014-2021 Medium-Term Strategy (37 C/4).

⁵ As emphasised in 37 C/4 and in UNESCO’s Operational Strategy on Youth.

- UNESCO also has a mandate to provide education and capacity building, in order to reach its global ambitions. Hands-on capacity building is conducted throughout the Organisation, as well as by a number of its entities such as its Category 1 institutes and TWAS – The World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries. To this extent, the capacity building dimension of the Proposed Centre is fully in line with UNESCO activities.
- Through its capacity building activities for mid-level professionals, the Proposed Centre will be in line with UNESCO’s vision to harness the potential of youth as change agents for peace and development.
- Through its Gender Equality Studies and Training programme, the Proposed Centre will be fully aligned with UNESCO’s global priority on gender equality. It is foreseen that the merger of the four programmes into a single Centre will enable gender to be further mainstreamed into the three remaining programmes.

2.1.2 Geographic focus

There is little doubt that the focus of the Proposed Centre will be, by definition, global in nature. This is fully confirmed by the existing composition of the four programmes, and the global reach they have generated until now. The four programmes have attracted participants from all over the world, and work with a range of partners in very geographically diverse settings.

The geographic focus of the proposed centre is also in line with the geographic priorities of UNESCO interventions, particularly as regards the Africa region and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The priority countries of the four existing programmes are determined in part by the Icelandic development strategy, which names Afghanistan, Mozambique and Palestine as ‘priority countries’ (with which they work through UN Organisations), and Malawi and Uganda as ‘partner countries’. Regional cooperation is also already in place on particular themes, such as in East Africa for geothermal energy (GTP), and West Africa for fisheries (FTP).

The beneficiary countries of the four programmes up to now illustrates the very strong focus that has been set on supporting African countries. There has also been an important number of participants from SIDS, particularly when it comes to the geothermal and fisheries programmes. This said, the programmes have also been very present in other regions of the world including Asia and Latin America. All programme representatives confirmed their intention to continue working with both priority countries, and are confident about the possibility of adjusting to UNESCO geographical priorities in the future.

Box 1 The participation of African countries in the Geothermal Training Programme

The largest share of fellows attending geothermal programme’s (GTP) six-month training course hail from Africa (39%), with Kenya being the country with largest number of participants. Furthermore, GTP organises short courses in the East African rift zone in cooperation with Kenyan companies, and provides customer-designed sponsored courses on four continents (24 out of the 44 events have taken place in Africa). The programme also supports graduate studies in Icelandic universities (3 out of 4 PhD fellows from Africa), with a high participation from Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania and Uganda. GTP, along with the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), is also involved in the operation of Africa’s Geothermal Centre for Excellence.

This said, the Proposed Centre will have to be mindful of how it incorporates geographical criteria in its formal selection processes of the different programmes, ensuring full alignment with UNESCO priorities as well as an adequate justification of cases where support is provided to regions which are not part of the Organisation’s priorities.

2.1.3 Links to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

To the extent that the Proposed Centre will be working under the auspices of UNESCO, it is expected that the Centre contributes to UNESCO’s efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UNESCO is contributing to the implementation of the SDGs through its work on: Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Natural Sciences (e.g. SDG 6,9,14), Social and Human Sciences (e.g. SDGs 5, 10, 11, 14, 16), Culture, Communication and Information (SDGs 9 & 16), and the Sustainable Development Goals for Ocean (SDG 14).

The Proposed Centre will contribute, through research, capacity-building, information-sharing and international collaboration, to UNESCO programmes predominantly relating to SDGs 5, 7, 14 and 15. It will also indirectly touch upon a number of other SDGs, as outlined in the table below.

Table 1 Direct and indirect influence of the Proposed Centre’s training programmes on the SDGs

		Training programmes			
		FTP	GEST	GTP	LRT
1	No poverty	(✓)	(✓)		(✓)
2	Zero hunger	(✓)			(✓)
3	Good health and well-being	(✓)	(✓)		
4	Quality education	(✓)	(✓)		
5	Gender equality	(✓)	✓	(✓)	(✓)
6	Clean water and sanitation				
7	Affordable and clean energy			✓	
8	Decent work and economic growth	(✓)	(✓)		
9	Industry, innovation and infrastructure				
10	Reduced inequalities		✓		
11	Sustainable cities and communities				
12	Responsible consumption & production				
13	Climate action	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)
14	Life below water	✓			
15	Life on land				✓
16	Peace, justice and strong institutions		(✓)		
17	Partnership for the goals	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)

Legend: ✓ Direct influence; (✓) Indirect Influence

2.2 Programmatic linkages between the activities of the Proposed Centre and UNESCO’s programmes

Given the multidisciplinary nature of the proposed centre, a number of programmatic linkage have been identified with several UNESCO programmes and sectors. Many preliminary links have been identified as a result of early discussions between UNESCO and the Icelandic programme representatives. For instance, a preliminary list of areas of possible alignment and linkages between the Proposed Centre and UNESCO’s programmes has already been identified, as a result of the fact-finding missions that took place at UNESCO on 29 November 2018 and in Iceland 10-11 January 2019 resulting in a mission report. It has also been made clear during the feasibility study and field visit that both parties see high potential in establishing links between the existing programmes and the work conducted by UNESCO. In particular, UNESCO and Icelandic programme staff see an opportunity to exchange skills and expertise, leverage resources on the basis of each party’s networks and presence, and increased mutual visibility given the solid reputation and track record both parties currently have in their respective fields of action.

An obvious and studied scope for linkages between the Proposed Centre and UNESCO programmes lies with the gender equality programme (GEST). The content of GEST is closely linked to UNESCO’s global

priority on gender equality and to the work of the Education Sector and the Social and Human Sciences Sector. Concrete proposals for collaboration include through the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR), where GEST's capacity-building could be offered to mayors and other officials. UNESCO's Masculinities Initiative presents an additional area of potential collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Indeed, GEST and its fellows have already participated in an interregional Masculinities workshop held in February 2019 in Mozambique, which proved fruitful. This type of collaboration exposes both parties to experts with whom they did not previously have contact (UNESCO has also been invited to a gender conference to be held in Iceland in September 2019 and to a separate conference planned by GEST in Kenya in late 2019). Potential linkages have also been identified with MOST schools, namely in terms of GEST's short and online courses which could be offered under this framework, *inter alia*.

For the geothermal programme (GTP), the core area for potential linkages lie with the Earth Sciences and Geo-Hazards Risk Reduction (ESGHRR) Section and with the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP) of UNESCO's natural sciences sector. GTP is expected to be capable of supplying technical expertise to ESGHRR and IGGP. Both parties are also expected to benefit mutually from each other's network to bring a wider range of candidates to participate in each other's programmes.

The land restoration programme (LRT) primarily shows room for potential linkages with the Man and Biosphere Reserves (MAB) programme of UNESCO. The majority of countries with which LRT currently works are also members of the MAB community. Areas of potential cooperation include networking and exposure to the respective experts of each party; the organisation of joint events (including during the 2019 Conference on Ecological Restoration); collaboration at municipal level through ICCAR; the organisation of a MOST school on land restoration; information-sharing on respective partners and former fellows; collaboration on MOOC; and joint training courses in partner countries.

The fisheries programme (FTP) focuses on sustainable fisheries including food safety, fish product processing, and the livelihood of artisanal fishing communities. To this extent, there are potential links to be explored with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) hosted by UNESCO, and the work it conducts on sustainable ocean resource management. FTP's work on marine research, ecosystem-based management, and blue economy under SDG 14 ties into IOC's mandate and work programme. Synergies have also been identified through the potential integration of the IOC e-learning platform OceanTeacher within FTP's training materials. Cooperation with the Intergovernmental MOST programme represents an additional area of possible alignment, which could strengthen the social and livelihood component of FTP.

The focus of the fisheries programme is of course naturally related to the work and mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) given its very strong focus on ocean resources as a source of food. As a result, cooperation between FTP and UNESCO as part of the creation of the the Proposed Centre should be mindful of this, representing an opportunity to seek stronger cooperation between IOC UNESCO and the FAO.

This said, the degree of programmatic compatibility between the programmes and UNESCO sectors varies considerably, and there is still clearly a need to fully articulate the expected contributions the Proposed Centre will be making to different sector activities and strategies. This will represent a significantly challenging task given that the proposed centre will be linked to several UNESCO sectors of activity and that UNESCO has never previously worked or cooperated with the Icelandic programmes in the past. In sum:

- Encouraging efforts have been made to identify areas of potential linkages between the Proposed Centre and UNESCO programmes;
- Overall, these linkages appear promising, concrete, and realistic, suggesting a mutually-beneficial collaboration between the two parties;
- In certain cases, the training programmes have already initiated collaboration with UNESCO, as is the case between GEST and the Masculinities initiative;

- The level of feasibility and desirability of collaboration varies between the Proposed Centre's programmes, with GEST showing the highest potential and FTP the least;
- Whilst certain linkages between FTP and IOC UNESCO have been identified, the current content of FTP remains substantially different to the IOC mandate. FTP actors have stated that they are open to adapting the focus of their projects and activities to align more closely to IOC priorities and regional needs, including to relabelling the programme to reflect a greater focus on SDG 14. This step would be welcome, in order to ensure programmatic linkages.

One major point to highlight regarding the links between the Proposed Centre and UNESCO programmes is that, if approved, this would represent the first cross-sectoral Cat. 2 Centre within the existing constellation of UNESCO Cat. 2 Centres. The idea of creating a cross-sector Cat. 2 Centre appears to be much welcomed by UNESCO staff, and is fully in line with the mandate which has been attributed to UNESCO by Member States to encourage cross-sectoral initiatives. To this extent, the proposed Cat. 2 Centre could represent a valuable pilot experience for the creation of future similar cross-sectoral initiatives at UNESCO. Yet, while the idea of establishing such a Centre is relevant from a theoretical point of view, much work needs to be done to ensure that the existing framework for the establishment and management of Cat. 2 Centres at UNESCO, which has been conceived on the basis of a single-sector-single-centre-approach, is adapted to fit this new configuration. In particular, considerable thought will need to be given within UNESCO to which sector or sectors will be in charge of managing the relationship with the Proposed Centre from an administrative and technical perspective.

2.3 Scope of the activities of the Proposed Centre and its capacity to meet its objectives

The core activity of the Proposed Centre will be to implement five-to-six month postgraduate training programmes for practising mid-level professionals from developing countries among UNESCO's member states. The key focus areas will remain constant. Furthermore, the Proposed Centre will aim to:

- Facilitate networking and fruitful cooperation among fellows and institutional partners;
- Conduct applied research and support partners in creating and disseminating new knowledge;
- Create innovative electronic learning platforms, including communities of practice;
- Provide scholarships to former fellows to complete MSc and PhD studies, based on applied research in home countries;
- Develop and deliver short courses in partnership with UNESCO, local, and/or international organisations;
- Facilitate the active involvement of former fellows and other partners in topical national, regional, international, and UNESCO workshops and conferences;
- Strengthen the infrastructure of organisations, institutions, and universities in partner countries through the development of joint plans for capacity development and research;
- Provide advisory services to partner organisations at the national and international level.

In considering these activities, it is important to stress the longstanding and proven track record of the four existing programmes. The Proposed Centre will be able to rely on the achievements and expertise that the programmes have built up since the launch of the first programme (GTP) in 1979, as well as the lessons learned. Furthermore, the activities of the Proposed Centre and those of the existing programmes are well-aligned and are not expected to require any major adjustments to fit the UNESCO mandate. An external evaluation from 2017 was positive about the capacity of the programmes to meet their objectives, concluding that the programmes had contributed to important development results at the macro, meso, and micro levels in partner developing countries. For example, an average of one in every five fellows has engaged with national policymaking upon returning home, and approximately one in eight has seen their research used in policymaking. Furthermore, all interviewees in the evaluation recognised that their ability to fulfil their role owed much to the training in Iceland.

The specific role and the activities to be played by the new umbrella structure of the Proposed Centre as presented above are still in the process of being defined. Activities and responsibilities concerning communication, reporting, liaising with UNESCO and the Icelandic Government, and the promotion of internal cooperation between the training programmes are in the process of being defined. At present, the lack of a detailed definition of what the Proposed Centre's exact central coordination role will be makes it challenging to assess the extent to which the Centre will be able to fulfill this role. However, based on the existing track record and achievements of the four individual programmes, which have demonstrated a high degree of effectiveness, there appears to be a high degree of certainty that the Proposed Centre will be in a position to fulfil its role.

In sum, the Proposed Centre will be able to capitalise on the programmes' wide partnership base and established track record in Iceland and partner countries, so as to consolidate past achievements and strengthen its visibility, legitimacy, and authority. However, further work must be conducted in order to specify the exact role and responsibilities of the new 'umbrella structure' of the Proposed Centre, covering the four existing programmes; and what its added value will consist of in comparison with the existing set-up. Furthermore, additional thought must be given to plan the merger in a way that will allow an 'upgrade' of the four existing programmes, by strengthening their visibility, streamlining their content, and ensuring compatibility with existing UNESCO initiatives.

2.4 Complementarity and redundancy of the Centre with other Category 2 Centres or other similar institutions created or operated by United Nations organisations

To date, there is no Category 2 Centre with a transdisciplinary mandate. The Proposed Centre will therefore be unique as a Centre working under a common vision of capacity-building in developing and conflict/post-conflict countries, with a focus on four thematic areas: fisheries, geothermal energy, gender equality, and land restoration. The analysis conducted as part of the feasibility study did not reveal the existence of another Cat. 2 Centre with a similar thematic focus, or as heavily invested in delivering hands-on capacity building activities⁶.

The Proposed Centre will be complementary to UNESCO Chairs in the fields of fisheries, geothermal energy, gender equality, and land restoration, since they have a different mission and role: the Proposed Centre is more practice-oriented, while Chairs have a more academic orientation. The Proposed Centre will thus be able to benefit from the research findings of UNESCO Chairs, but also contribute to their work by, inter alia, feeding them with insights, experiences and needs from the field, and by assisting them in rolling out and translating their research findings to a broader audience of policymakers and practitioners.

⁶ The mandate of the International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (CIEFFA), a Category 2 Centre located within the Education Section of UNESCO, is sufficiently different from the mandate of both GEST and the Proposed Centre as a whole given CIEFA's exclusive focus on gender in education.

3 Governance and managerial component

The Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the Auspices of UNESCO (37 C/Resolution 93) states that a Category 2 Centre:

- must be independent of UNESCO and have the legal capacity necessary for the exercise for its function under the laws of the country in which it is located;
- must have a governing body or a similar supervisory and decision-making mechanism, which shall meet annually. Such body shall appoint the director and approve the budget and the programme of activities. The Director-General may be consulted on the choice of a candidate;
- must include UNESCO as a full member in its governing body.

It is important to highlight that given that the Centre has not been officially created, the assessment of each of the aforementioned criteria is strictly based on the Government of Iceland's current plans on how the Proposed Centre will be governed and managed. Most of this information was transmitted orally to the feasibility study team, in the framework of the interviews conducted for this purpose; as well as in an informal document entitled "Proposed guideline for the establishment of a Category 2 Centre under the auspices of UNESCO"⁷. In addition to this, the Government of Iceland has expressed a high level of assurance that it intends to follow the criteria set forth in UNESCO's comprehensive strategy for Cat. 2 Institutes.

3.1 Legal status and governance structure

It is proposed that the Proposed Centre will be established with a regulation, issued by the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) on the basis of Article 10 of Act no. 121/2008 on International Development Cooperation, in accordance with 37 C/Resolution 93. The regulation will stipulate that the Proposed Centre will act as a separate legal entity under Icelandic law, independent of UNESCO and of the Government of Iceland, with the legal capacity to exercise its functions according to Icelandic law, in accordance with Article 4 of the Model Agreement. The regulation will also serve as the constitutive act of the Proposed Centre in accordance with Article 5 of the Model Agreement of UNESCO. The feasibility study team has been told that the Government of Iceland has previously employed this process using similar regulations to establish other such legal entities.

The governance structure of the Proposed Centre is still under discussion and has yet to be formally decided upon. Since the Proposed Centre will bring four existing programmes together under one umbrella, it has been proposed that the administrative structure of the Centre will be kept to a minimum (one director and one support staff). The regulation establishing the Proposed Centre will stipulate a governing body and decision-making mechanism which shall meet annually. It will further note which entities shall nominate representatives to such a body, with the formal appointment made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. UNESCO will be represented as a full member of the governing body. It is also foreseen that the governing body shall be able to make decisions in accordance with Article 7 of the Model Agreement.

It is foreseen that the governing body will appoint the director⁸ of the Proposed Centre and approve budgets and the programme of activities. It's also foreseen that the Proposed Centre shall operate on the basis of a five-year strategy and budgetary cycles⁹, which will be jointly formulated by the relevant stakeholders and approved by the governing body. On the basis of this strategy, the Proposed Centre will prepare budgets and operational documents for its programmes, which will be discussed and approved by the board.

⁷ This is an internal document which has been prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁸ The director has not yet been appointed.

⁹ Funding is currently provided by the Government of Iceland on a yearly basis.

It is yet to be decided if and how the creation of this governance structure will impact the existing governance structure of the four individual programmes. However it is highly likely that the creation of a central governing body will make the individual programme governing bodies redundant to some extent. This in turn may have consequences on the current balance of power and interests among the four programmes, their managers, and host institutions. This shift will have to be adequately managed by the new Centre in order to avoid any potential disruptive effects on the the current partnership structure. This current structure, which includes the sustained support of the four host institutions, represents the backbone of the programme delivery system¹⁰.

3.2 Staffing

The administrative and staffing structure of the Proposed Centre have yet to be formally decided upon. As previously mentioned, the governing body will appoint the director of the Proposed Centre. The job description for this position is yet to be developed. However, the role of this individual in ensuring an adequate set-up of the Centre in its initial phases will be crucial. Initially, it is foreseen that only one or two additional staff members will be appointed to support the operations of the centre. As such, the majority of the Proposed Centre's staff would continue to be employed by the host institutions of the respective programmes, under the current configuration. Currently, each of the programmes employs 3 full-time employees on average. They also employ individual experts in order to deliver training on a case-by-case basis. The 2017 external evaluation found that the four programmes had a smooth administration: it is proposed to retain these effective administrative structures to the extent possible.

3.3 Premises

The premises of the Proposed Centre have also yet to be formally decided upon. The programmes are currently located within separate premises, namely within Orkustofnun (GTP), the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute (FTP), the Agricultural University of Iceland (LRT), and the University of Iceland (GEST). The four programmes are all headquartered in Reykjavik but a number of them include field work and visits outside of Reykjavik. As part of this arrangement, the programmes are equipped with dedicated rooms for administrative purposes. In addition, each has access to the equipment and facilities of their host institution, including libraries, laboratories, lecture rooms, housing, vehicles, and IT resources. The programmes also benefit from services that their host institutions provide, such as bookkeeping, IT management, and procurement. Students are generally housed in private housing in or near the city, which is paid for by the programmes.

It has been proposed that the office requirements of the new Centre will be kept to a minimum, in line with the efficiency considerations outlined above (see staffing section). In accordance with these considerations, the MFA has proposed to host the administrative staff of the Proposed Centre at its premises in Reykjavik, which they would be able to do free of charge and using existing infrastructure. This could include office space for the Centre's team of one or two people, plus additional space for board meetings. It could potentially also include meeting spaces for cross-programme learning activities, or some type of cross-programme resource centre. Whilst the Proposed Centre would have a presence within the MFA for administrative purposes, it is nevertheless foreseen that the four programmes continue to be hosted in the current premises in each of the four partner institutions.

4 Sustainability component

4.1 Financial sustainability

The programmes are strongly, if not fully, dependent on funding from the MFA. Some steps have been taken by programmes to diversify their funding sources, but with mixed results between the

¹⁰ The four host institutions represent key technical partners for the delivery of the programmes. Their support and commitment ensures an adequate roll-out of the programmes and the training activities they launch every year. In most cases, partner institutions provide considerable in-kind support and additional financing for the delivery of programme activities.

programmes. The 2017 external evaluation found that the degree of financial dependency varies between programmes and year-on-year, that the size of the annual grants from the MFA have been unpredictable, and decisions on fund allocations sometimes unpunctual, resulting in uncertainty that has impeded long-term planning. Historically, funding has been provided on a yearly basis, which only provides short-term visibility over sources of income at the programme level. Given that the MFA is the main source of funding of the programmes, they are extremely vulnerable to any cut or change in budget allocation from this source. In addition, the existence of yearly funding cycles implies that programmes cannot necessarily anticipate and manage any potential budgetary fluctuations.

The fact that the MFA is the main source of funding for the programmes is not surprising given that these were created at the initiative of the Government of Iceland, as part of its development cooperation policy. Financial dependence on the public sector can be seen as a guarantee that the programmes will remain independent and true to their original mission as a tool for development assistance. This vulnerability will not disappear with the creation of the Proposed Centre.

In spite of this, evidence shows that there is a very strong political commitment within Iceland, which is likely to ensure sustained financing for the centre in the foreseeable future. In addition, despite some variations in the levels of financing allocated to the programmes, the annual grants from the MFA have been sustained and have steadily increased since the time of the programmes' establishment. This highlights a continued commitment and support from the MFA to the programmes' operations, even enduring the 2008-2011 Icelandic financial crisis. Furthermore, the Government of Iceland has stated its intent to implement a five-year governmental budget policy for the Centre from this year onwards. This will enable the Proposed Centre to anticipate its budget over a five-year cycle and overcome previous issues linked to the unpredictability of annual funding decisions.

In addition to this, the host institutions have also been a source of continuous co-financing (in kind and monetary) for the programmes. Given their current level of involvement and commitment in the programmes, this support is also likely to be sustained in the immediate future. All host institutions interviewed as part of the feasibility study are keen to continue supporting their respective programmes, and engage in this new phase of collaboration as part of a potential UNESCO Cat. 2 Centre.

4.2 Sustainability of operations

The ability and capacity of the Proposed Centre to meet its objectives is enhanced by the close collaboration and support that the training programmes receive from their host institutions. They provide a conducive environment and access to a range of resources from which the programmes' staff can benefit. The strong support and core funding that the programmes receive from the Government of Iceland through the MFA is also beneficial for the smooth administration of the training programmes. The 2017 external evaluation found that the institutional partnerships that the programmes have established with organisations in partner countries have proved advantageous as an entry point into their respective sectors and ensure the sustainability of the capacity gained by the fellows within their respective workplaces.

The UNESCO partnership would additionally help to ensure the sustainability of the Proposed Centre's operations, by enhancing the visibility and strength of the programmes' activities.

5 Recommendations

The creation of a Category 2 Centre under the auspices of UNESCO, based on the four existing capacity-building programmes supported by the Government of Iceland, is largely seen as a win-win opportunity by both parties. From the Icelandic perspective, regrouping the four programmes under a single umbrella structure benefiting from the support and recognition of UNESCO represents an opportunity to continue delivering its effective capacity building, in a more streamlined manner, and on the basis of a very strong network of actors and expertise tied to UNESCO – particularly on the ground. The Icelandic programmes wish to benefit from the UNESCO brand and visibility to continue attracting fellows and talent, and use UNESCO infrastructure to bring life into their alumni networks around the globe. Given that the current partnership with UNU is currently phasing out, the partnership with UNESCO will be key to ensuring that the programmes continue to benefit from the level of recognition and international reputation which they have managed to build.

From the UNESCO perspective, the creation of the Cat. 2 Centre represents a unique opportunity to expand and diversify the Organisation's activities in the field of gender equality, sciences (social and natural), and education. This collaboration is also viewed as a chance to develop a cross-sectoral approach to the development of capacity building in key areas and regions of UNESCO's mandate and strategy. From this perspective, the creation of the Centre would represent an institutional innovation which would be very much in line with current calls for the Organisation to act in a more cross-cutting manner. All of the sectors and programmes who would be directly involved in this cooperation appear to be very keen to engage with their Icelandic counterparts through the creation of the Centre, and agree that this is a good opportunity for the Organisation. Several early collaborations, particularly in the social science sector, have already begun to take place. This is a sign of the potential of such a partnership. UNESCO also views this as an opportunity to continue strengthening its ties to Iceland at the institutional level.

Based on the findings of the feasibility study, the proposal to establish a transdisciplinary UNESCO Category 2 Centre in Reykjavik, Iceland fulfils and complies with the guidelines and criteria stipulated in the Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the Auspices of UNESCO, adopted by the General Conference at its 37th session (37 C/Resolution 93). **The establishment of the Centre is therefore recommended.**

Notwithstanding, and in accordance with the findings of the feasibility study, the following points should also be considered:

- The centre does not yet exist (governance structure, administrative structure, staff, premises), and many of the key roles and mandate of the Centre are yet to be defined. There is much work which still needs to be carried out by the Government of Iceland to define the exact set-up of the programme, its human resources, and the roles and responsibilities of its governance structure. Particular attention needs to be given to the role of host institutions in the new governance scheme, and the level of discretionary authority they will have over key resource management and decisions such as the recruitment of personnel and the allocation of financial resources.
- Programmatic linkages between the Centre and the four programmes on one side, and UNESCO on the other, should be clearer and more precise. This is particularly the case for the FTP and the ties it shall have to the IOC. The launching of the Centre should be accompanied by an in-depth and collaborative reflection on what the mutual commitments of both parties will be, including the type of reporting and performance indicators that will be used to measure the level of success of the partnership.
- The identity and visual recognition of the programmes are still very much linked to the former collaboration with UNU. A significant investment will have to be made by the Government of Iceland to rebrand its programmes, including the suppression of any reminiscent elements of the UNU-era collaboration. This includes changing logos and domain names for websites which are two of the most visually identifiable elements of the programmes.

- While this is seen as a great opportunity for UNESCO to launch a cross-sectoral collaboration project, there is a considerable risk that this type of collaboration may be challenging to put into practice. It is not clear how the relationship with the Category 2 Centre will be managed and who will be responsible for overseeing the relationship with the Centre. While many sectors are interested in engaging with the Centre, under the current scheme only one sector will be able to 'host' the Centre. As a result, ensuring that a truly cross-sectoral dynamic is built around the Centre will require some level of investment on behalf of UNESCO and the corresponding appointed sector, in order to succeed.

Appendix A List of meetings/people interviewed during the technical mission to Iceland

A.1 Monday, 20 May 2019

Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with MFA staff

- Ágústa Gísladóttir, Director/Minister Counselor, Directorate for International Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ásdis Bjarnadóttir, Adviser, Regional Development Cooperation and Partnerships, Directorate for International Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Áslaug Dóra Eyjólfadóttir, Senior Adviser, Department of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
- Davíð Bjarnason, Director World Bank Unit, Directorate for International Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Gautur Sturluson, Specialist, Directorate for Legal and Executive Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- María Erla Marelsadóttir, Ambassador/Director General, Directorate for International Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Meeting at the Geothermal Training Programme (GTP)

- Lúðvík S. Georgsson, Director, GTP
- Málfriður Ómarsdóttir, Environmental Scientist/Editor, GTP
- Þórhildur Ísberg, School Manager, GTP
- Guðni A. Jóhannesson, Director General, Orkustofnun

Meeting at the Fisheries Training Programme (FTP)

- Þór H. Asgeirsson, Deputy Director, FTP
- Julie Ingham, Office Administrator, FTP
- Mary Frances Davidson, Senior Project Manager, FTP

A.2 Tuesday, 21 May 2019

Meeting at the Gender Equality Studies and Training (GEST) Programme

- Irma Erlingsdóttir, Director/Associate Professor, GEST
- Milica Minic, Project Manager, GEST
- Védís Ólafsdóttir, Project Manager, GEST

Meeting at the Land Restoration Programme (LRT)

- Hafdis Hanna Ægisdóttir, Programme Director, LRT
- Katrín Björnsdóttir, Project Manager, LRT

- Halldóra Traustadóttir, Office Manager, LRT
- Árni Bragason, Chair of UNU-LRT Board and Director, Soil Conservation Service of Iceland
- Jóhann Þórrsson, Project Manager, Soil Conservation Service of Iceland

Meeting with the Chair of the Expert Advisory Committee on the institutional arrangements and operations of the Icelandic Capacity Development Programmes

- Jón Karl Ólafsson

Wrap-up meeting at the MFA with MFA staff and representatives of the four programmes.

Appendix B List of documents consulted

- NIRAS (2017). Evaluation of the UNU Programmes in Iceland, final report.
- UNESCO (2013). 37 C/Resolution 93 Integrated Comprehensive Strategy for Category 2 Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2014). 37 C/4 Medium-Term Strategy, 2014-2021.
- UNESCO (2014). UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth 2014-2021.
- UNESCO (2015). MAB Strategy 2015-2025.
- UNESCO (2016). Lima Action Plan for UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves (2016-2025).
- UNESCO (2018). 39 C/5 Approved programme and budget 2018-2019: first biennium of the 2018-2021 quadrennium.
- UNESCO mission report from the January 2019 fact-finding mission (non-published).
- Internal documents provided by the Icelandic MFA:
 - Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019). "Institutional arrangements, operations and organisation of the Icelandic Capacity Development Programmes in International Development", *Report by the External Advisory Committee appointed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs* (non-published).
 - MFA, Formal request by the Government of Iceland to the Director-General of UNESCO for the establishment of a multidisciplinary Category 2 Centre in Reykjavik, Iceland (non-published).
 - MFA, Budget estimates for the four programmes (non-published).
 - MFA, Government Proposal for Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's policy in the field of international development cooperation in 2019-2023 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs (non-published).
 - MFA, Government Proposal for the governance and managerial aspects of a new potential UNESCO Category II Centre in Iceland for capacity development for the SDGs (non-published).
 - MFA, First outline for the development of a Strategic Plan for a new Category II Centre in Iceland (non-published).
 - Powerpoint presentations provided to the external consultants by the four programmes.

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