

INTRODUCTION

1. At its 31st session, the General Conference approved the Medium-Term Strategy for the period 2002-2007 (31 C/4) which sets out the main strategic thrusts for UNESCO's action over the next six years, as well as the Programme and Budget for 2002-2003 (31 C/5) which corresponds to its first implementation phase.

2. Built around a single unifying theme: **Contributing to peace and human development in an era of globalization through education, the sciences, culture and communication**, the Medium-Term Strategy defines a limited number of strategic objectives – a total of 12 for the entire Organization and three for each of UNESCO's four main domains. These strategic objectives are complemented by two cross-cutting themes: the **Eradication of poverty, especially extreme poverty**, and **The contribution of information and communication technologies to education, science and culture, and the construction of knowledge societies** which are intrinsic to all programmes, and constitute an entry point to foster intersectorality in UNESCO's action, both at Headquarters and in the Field.

3. The Approved Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007 (31 C/4) and Programme and Budget for 2002-2003 (31 C/5 Approved) represent the programmatic pillars of the reform of the Organization. In the two documents, the **strategic objectives** are translated into clearly defined **outcomes and expected results**, thereby making a major breakthrough towards the introduction and application of results-based programming and budgeting, management and monitoring. Another new feature for UNESCO, in the context of the Medium-Term Strategy, is the development of **specific regional and subregional strategies** for the period covered by document 31 C/4, to be agreed upon by the stakeholders subsequent to the adoption of document 31 C/4 by the General Conference.

I. OVERALL ISSUES

4. Documents 31 C/4 and 31 C/5 together constitute the **conceptual framework for UNESCO's action**, proposing strategies, orientations, programmes and activities that will allow the Organization to achieve its mission with the greatest efficiency possible. Many hard choices had to be made, especially in terms of streamlining the planning process, setting clear and a limited number of programme priorities and determining strategic windows for today's UNESCO. Much has been accomplished, but there remains sufficient scope for further improvements. The preparation of the next Programme and Budget (32 C/5) provides an opportunity to make an early assessment of the adjustments and reforms already introduced in the programming process and to proffer further improvements. Overall, all modifications should be geared to the Organization's effectiveness, enhance its relevance for Member States and communities and increase its accountability and transparency.

5. The Programme and Budget for 2002-2003 was drawn up – for the third time in succession – on the basis of zero-nominal growth pegged at some US \$544 million for the biennium. Zero-nominal growth, which in reality represents a reduction of 4.2% in resources, imposes serious constraints on the Organization at a time when reform efforts would necessitate additional resources.