

IPBES-8 Highlights: Wednesday, 16 June 2021

In a virtual working group setting, the eighth session of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-8) addressed the scoping report on assessing the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and the determinants of transformative change (transformative change assessment).

Highlights of the day included:

- A lengthy discussion on the need to consider all differing worldviews and forms of knowledge in the assessment; this discussion surfaced on various occasions and an effort to resolve it by introducing a new umbrella paragraph under the methodological approach is ongoing;
- The realization, underscored by many Members' interventions during their general remarks, that transformative change requires work across sectors to address the drivers of biodiversity loss; and
- An exchange of views on the building blocks of transformational change, with some Members stressing related challenges, including lack of relevant quantitative objectives.

Working Group on Transformative Change

Working group Co-Chair Doug Beard (US), presented the relevant document (IPBES/8/4). Marcus Fischer, IPBES Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) Member, gave an overview of changes to the latest draft, including those made to ensure the usefulness of the study to policy makers, looking closer at proposed pathways, and including an explicit mention of a task force on capacity building. IPBES Executive Secretary Anne Larigauderie offered an overview of the practical measures to ensure complementarity between the transformative change and nexus assessments.

In their general comments, many Members congratulated the experts and the Secretariat on the work done. Many stressed that since the transformative change and nexus assessments have interlinkages, complementarity and synergies must be maximized without duplicating work. Some delegates also urged that the document address how to realize transformative change, emphasizing it must be applied to all countries equally.

Members also stressed:

- the importance of this report for strengthening the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the CBD and achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity;
- the need for a clear explanation of what transformative change entails, including tangible examples on how it can be achieved;

- the importance of linking up with work across sectors, including trade and finance, and addressing the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss;
- promoting engagement with all stakeholders, including women, youth and Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs);
- the need to consider marine as well as terrestrial ecosystems, and looking at ecological regions as well as geo-political ones;
- the importance of recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and the need to address differences between regions and countries; and
- the role of equity and justice in transformative change.

Chapter outline: Members considered the text paragraph-by-paragraph, addressing the outline of the assessment's chapters in the draft.

On an introductory chapter titled "Transformative change and a sustainable world," some Members cautioned against directly referencing the Paris Agreement, as it could lead to a number of processes being named and potentially "bloat the text." They added that transformative change is a broad concept and highlighting specific agreements does not provide any added value. Others opined such an addition should not be controversial, noting similar language had already been used. To clarify the text, an IPBES expert emphasized that the experts sought to take a broad perspective as is required to achieve transformative change. Some delegates suggested referring to "relevant global objectives."

There was also a suggestion that references on the inclusion of indicators to monitor transformative change be deleted. Other Members favored its retention, stressing there needs to be a way to monitor if transformative change is being achieved.

On a chapter reflecting visions of a sustainable world for nature and people, including specific challenges that transformative change presents, one Member suggested reflecting both "anthropocentric" and "cosmobiocentric" understandings, as well as Indigenous Peoples science-based considerations, reflecting different knowledge systems and worldviews. Other Members expressed concerns regarding adding new concepts and terminology as well as going into such detail in the scoping report. They further underscored the significance of the assessment on transformative change and the importance of concluding discussions on the scoping report in a timely manner in order for work to start. Additional suggestions by Members included deleting references to normative ethics and explicitly referring to the role of media. Delegates also discussed the best way to refer to existing climate scenarios and agreed to replace references to

specific agreements with general language on “relevant global objectives.”

Regarding a draft chapter on how transformative change occurs, an expert clarified that principles of action for decision-making were included in the strategies to be explored.

On a draft chapter on overcoming challenges of achieving transformative change toward a sustainable world, some Members made additional suggestions on the scope of challenges to be looked at. Delegates discussed the inclusion of “knowledge systems and systems of values” alongside actions and habits, as well as the difference between “habits” and “behaviors.” An IPBES expert clarified that “habits” is a more specific term that may help guide experts in their work. Members also discussed a proposed reference to power imbalances, as well as political, social, and economic inequalities among and within nations. One Member proposed additional sub-paragraphs including references to the “influence of anthropocentric developments through ideological, financial, and other technical means, including modern colonialism.” The same Member suggested including “the lack of commitment of developed countries in fulfilling the provision of means of implementation to developing countries in the context of UN conventions.” Both these suggestions were opposed by a number of delegates, with several responding to the second proposal that it is not the role of experts to assess countries’ “intent.” An IPBES expert remarked that different paradigms of development and related challenges are implicit in the document.

On a paragraph discussing the range of literature the experts carrying out the assessment should draw on, delegates agreed to include reference to case studies in literature discussing how transformative change can cause losses for IPLCs. They also agreed to reference the modification of sectoral frameworks as an approach to address the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss. Other issues highlighted included whether the inclusion of reference to subsidies duplicates work in the nexus assessment, which the expert clarified it did not.

On a chapter on assessing options for institutions, instruments, evaluation, and pathways to achieve a sustainable world, Members agreed to add reference to scientific research, and social experimentation and learning. Regarding instruments, they debated ways to refer to businesses. Some supported business models, others preferred business approaches, while yet others opted for deleting the reference. Members suggested the analysis presents suitable instruments for all key actors. A lengthy discussion took place on whether to refer to the assessment of “existing,” “possible,” “desirable,” or “relevant” scenarios and transitional pathways, eventually reaching an agreement to remove all qualifiers. Members further agreed to clarify timescales, noting they refer to the initial start of the assessment.

On assessing potential interventions and pathways, a Member suggested also assessing efficiency. Others noted the difficulty of assessing efficiency of potential pathways regarding transformative change, stressing the lack of relevant methodologies. Delegates also discussed at length principles to be considered, with many Members suggesting adding to “justice, equity, and power” references to legality; international law; social capital; and internationally agreed principles.

One Member noted the difficulty in projections and quantitative objectives regarding transformational change, stressing the need to explore different options. Some Members emphasized that work should aim to provide experts with the necessary flexibility to conduct the assessment.

Methodology and scope: A short discussion took place on the title of the document, with a Member suggesting adding the study of “pathways for” transformative change. Other Members noted it is inappropriate to make such fundamental changes so late in the development of the scoping report, with the suggestion ultimately being deleted.

Co-Chair Beard introduced a proposed new paragraph under the methodology section, making specific reference to the recognition and consideration of different worldviews and knowledge systems, including Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK). One Member proposed adding an explicit reference to scientific knowledge. It was later also suggested to move the proposed paragraph under the section on scope.

Regarding scope, a few delegations made suggestions for the text to reflect internationally agreed terminology. A lengthy discussion took place regarding a proposed inclusion of a reference to paragraph 59 of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which reflects different approaches and circumstances of countries for achieving sustainable development, and includes mention of “Mother Earth.” After extensive deliberations, proposals were made that the paragraph make reference to the IPBES conceptual framework or to certain elements of paragraph 59. Others suggested the paragraph remain as it was originally, with elements of paragraph 59 brought in at different parts of the document. Discussions will continue tomorrow.

In the Corridors

Everything is negotiable. Whether or not the negotiation is easy is another thing (Carrie Fisher).

Today’s virtual deliberations focused on the draft scoping report for transformative change to tackle biodiversity loss, and they certainly demonstrated just how difficult negotiations can be. When the day’s session closed, working group Co-Chair Beard noted there were eight hours of negotiating time left and neither the nexus assessment nor the transformative change scoping report was near to being approved. Throughout the back-and-forth exchanges on word choices, Members walked a fine line in balancing a scientific assessment with the needs of policy makers.

Members sought to focus on creating a scoping report that allows the experts to provide policy makers with suggestions for what to do and a way forward. Some delegates contended this included a need to ensure experts take different paradigms, knowledge systems, and visions into account, leading to some paragraphs becoming “overloaded” with text. Another emphasized this could also lead to transformative options being constrained unnecessarily.

With visions of transformative change differing between Members, the working group walks the difficult path of developing mutual understanding with the intention, in the words of a Member *via* their comment in the meeting’s official chat box, “to avoid extreme anthropocentrism that could lead to ecological anarchy and, through time, to a point of no return.”