

IPBES-8 Highlights: Monday, 21 June 2021

The eighth session of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-8) resumed work with a stocktaking plenary session and discussions under the working group. The working group continued negotiations on the scoping report for the nexus assessment, without reaching agreement on all parts of the document.

Highlights of the day included:

- A reiteration of the offer by the US to hold IPBES-10 in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2023, which Members gladly accepted, with no offers yet to host IPBES-9; and
- With time running out, disagreements on elements of scope, structure, and chapters' content regarding the scoping report on the nexus assessment that will need to be bridged in the working group.

Plenary

IPBES Chair Ana María Hernández Salgar (Colombia) highlighted progress so far in the discussions under different agenda items, thanking Members for the collaborative spirit.

Organizational matters: Stadler Trengove, IPBES Secretariat, reported on credentials, noting 80 delegations have submitted their credentials. The Plenary approved the credentials' report as presented.

Financial and budgetary arrangements: Vinod Mathur (India), Chair of the budget group, provided an update on the group's deliberations. He said they have concluded discussions on cash and in-kind contributions, and highlighted a request to the Secretariat to provide a report on the lessons learned from holding online meetings for presentation at IPBES-9. He requested more time to continue discussion on the remaining items, including the 2021, 2022, and 2023 budgets.

Working group update: Working group Co-Chair Doug Beard (US) presented a progress report, highlighting:

agreement on how to address energy in terms of the nexus assessment; divergent opinions on how to reference the Paris Agreement in the transformative change assessment; and the introduction of the IPBES task forces' work, with discussion still pending.

Assessing knowledge and improving the effectiveness of the Platform: On work related to biodiversity-climate interlinkages and collaboration with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and improving the effectiveness of the Platform, IPBES Chair Hernández stated a draft decision on assessing knowledge and improving the effectiveness of the Platform will be forwarded to closing plenary for adoption.

Dates and venues of future sessions: IPBES Chair Hernández stated there is no formal offer to host IPBES-9, inviting countries who wish to do so to inform the Secretariat as soon as possible. The US reiterated their offer to host IPBES-10 in Madison, Wisconsin in late-April, early-May 2023, which Members applauded.

A regional group suggested including the holding of preparatory meetings in the modalities of future meetings, noting the future framework should be discussed at IPBES-10. A Member noted it is difficult to determine modalities for future meetings due to current uncertainties, calling for flexibility about dates for IPBES-9, including consideration of decisions on meetings of other fora.

Working Group on the Nexus Assessment

The working group resumed work addressing the report's structure, chapter outline, and scope.

Structure: A Member suggested condensing the content of different chapters in a single one, highlighting the full interactions among the nexus elements. Other Members wanted the chapters' structure to be retained, with each chapter addressing a specific component of the nexus, providing actionable options for policy makers. Co-Chair Beard suggested a way forward, requesting the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) and the Bureau to suggest a logical number of integrated chapters, without altering content, and present it at IPBES-9. Discussion will continue.

Chapters' outline: On a chapter on options for delivering sustainable approaches to finance, a Member suggested including in the considerations "perverse incentives," while others preferred referring generally to incentives. Other proposals included referring to international cooperation rather than international aid, and including that the issues will be addressed in accordance with international trade law.

A Member suggested including, in the response options, an assessment of the existing modalities for handling donor funding from the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Other Members noted this consideration should be addressed under a different agenda item.

Another Member suggested: amending the chapter's title to "options for delivering sustainable means of implementation for the nexus approaches to finance;" considering the provision of means of implementation (finance, technology transfer, and capacity building); and examining the role of public funding through the mechanisms of multilateral conventions and international cooperation. Some Members did not welcome such extensive changes at such a late stage in the process. An IPBES expert noted this chapter specifically addresses how to finance sustainable development from all sectors in the context of the nexus. Discussions will continue.

Following lengthy deliberations, Members agreed to a title on “options for delivering sustainable approaches to public and private finance for biodiversity-related elements of the nexus.” They also agreed the assessment will examine the role of international and national public and private financiers. Delegates further reached consensus referring to cooperation agencies and deleting: an indicative list of economic instruments; response options that refer to IPBES; examples of evolving economic paradigms; and examples of multilateral organizations.

Regarding options for delivering sustainable approaches to biodiversity, Members exchanged opinions on the chapter’s title, with some reflecting earlier concerns regarding reference to climate change and energy systems. They eventually agreed on “options for delivering sustainable approaches to biodiversity conservation, restoration, and sustainable use in synergy with other components of the nexus.”

Members extensively discussed terminology around ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, with some delegates wanting to ensure the two be kept separate, reflecting earlier discussions. Delegates successfully suggested including references to: “Mother Earth rights-based approaches; green and blue urban spaces; “freshwater” alongside marine and terrestrial ecosystems; and “environmental public awareness” alongside education to support change.

One delegate suggested a paragraph for inclusion in the scoping report stating the result of the process should be considered by the authors as indicative, recalling that when the Assessment is adopted at IPBES-11, Members can negotiate then line-by-line.

On a draft chapter on the summary and synthesis of options, knowledge gaps, and capacity development, an IPBES expert, urged addressing concerns on capacity building and technology gaps in this part of the scoping report. One delegate suggested, and Members agreed, to include “women, youth, and other stakeholders” in the list of relevant stakeholders. Delegates further agreed to the title “Summary and synthesis of options, knowledge gaps, capacity development and technology gaps.”

Scope: A lengthy discussion took place on an introductory paragraph on scope. Members debated terminology around nature’s contributions to people and ecosystem services; discussed references to the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, the SDGs, and other relevant multilateral objectives; and exchanged views on adding to a MEP suggestion on the scope.

Regarding terminology, options included using previously agreed language referring to “nature’s contributions to people, which embody different concepts, such as ecosystem goods and services, and nature’s gifts” or “nature’s contributions to people, a term that includes ecosystem services and other analogous concepts.”

On the MEP suggestion to “address climate change adaptation and mitigation, including relevant aspects of the energy system and technologies and policies to allow the assessment to fully consider synergies and trade-offs,” some Members proposed further considering the goals of other relevant biodiversity-related goals found within other multilateral agreements and processes. A Member proposed adding consideration of “different worldviews, knowledge and multiple value systems, and systems of life.” The relevant part of the text remains bracketed.

Regarding a paragraph on multi-scale and interlinking policies, Members briefly discussed references to the IPBES conceptual framework and different knowledge systems, ultimately agreeing to introduce this as an overarching principle earlier in the text. Delegates also discussed whether to list specific elements of globally agreed goals, such as “affordable and clean energy,”

rather than referring to these in broader terms as linking up to the components of the nexus. This prompted a wider discussion on what the components were, with the title and preceding paragraph still containing brackets. The final agreed text took a broad approach, making reference to “globally agreed goals”.

On a paragraph providing definitions for the purposes of the assessment, Members exchanged opinions on references to “climate change adaptation and mitigation including relevant aspects of the energy system” and the One Health approach. Some delegates wanted the reference to climate change and energy to be put in brackets, with others asking for explicit mention to plant and ecosystem health alongside a reference to human health. It was also suggested to add “and other holistic approaches” alongside the One Health approach. Some emphasized the need to include reference to the emergence and spread of infectious diseases. The paragraph remains bracketed.

On a paragraph discussing thresholds, feedbacks, and resilience in nexus linkages, as well as opportunities, synergies, and trade-offs between different response options, one delegate proposed ensuring the terminology is consistent with the three pillars of sustainable development. Another suggested deleting examples of social, economic, and environmental issues for brevity. On limits and safeguards, one delegate requested these be referenced as examples of different response options. Delegates eventually agreed to include this reference at the end of the paragraph where it states “emphasis will be placed on response options considering the nexus elements and their diverse dimensions.”

In the Corridors

Following the gear change that led to considerable progress prior to the weekend, the working group changed gears once more; this time to a lower one. Lengthy debates hindered progress in addressing the scoping report for the nexus assessment; draft chapters’ content remains undecided, and discussions on scope sometimes felt like, as one observer termed it, “Groundhog Day,” with several previously agreed issues resurfacing and time running out. Working group Co-Chair Beard implored Members, on more than one occasion, to find compromise solutions in an effort to move forward. Despite the prevailing spirit of collegiality, there is still a considerable amount of work prior to the closing plenary and, hopefully, the adoption of the two scoping reports.

As a participant noted, Members will have to find common ground on both general and specific issues in the limited time left. General considerations include the structure of the assessment, with some supporting a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the nexus’ components, whereas others strongly suggested a streamlined approach. Specific disagreements include long-debated terminology on nature’s contributions to people and ecosystem services; while options to use previously agreed upon language may eventually offer a way out, discussions revealed the need to develop a deep, common understanding on the methodological framework, including terminology.

The session concluded with Co-Chair Beard reiterating the need to pick up the pace, urging Members to work hard overnight and to carefully consider the significance of their interventions. A seasoned participant saw the glass half full. She stressed agreement had been reached on a number of paragraphs with several ideas successfully introduced, which has improved the scoping report. She added the remaining disagreements can be bridged, bearing in mind the purpose of the scoping report is essentially to provide guidance to the experts on the questions that need answers, while also affording them the necessary flexibility to address an issue as wide as the nexus.