

IPBES-8 Highlights: Tuesday, 22 June 2021

The eighth session of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-8) continued work in a working group setting, addressing the interim work plans for the intersessional period 2021-2022 for the five IPBES task forces as well as the scoping reports for the transformative change and nexus assessments.

Highlights of the day included:

- Initial working group approval of the two scoping reports on the transformative change and nexus assessments, which were forwarded to plenary;
- Difficult negotiations on the scoping report for the nexus assessment, with suggestions tabled until the very last moment; and
- Smooth discussions on the work plans for the five IPBES task forces for the intersessional period 2021-2022.

Working Group on the Nexus Assessment

The working group resumed work addressing all outstanding issues.

On the time frame of the analysis, some Members suggested reference to the industrial revolution and the colonization period alongside the initial time frame of 50 years. Other Members disagreed with the reference to the colonization period, leading to extensive discussion. Following advice from an IPBES expert, Members agreed to including reference to studies going back to the 1500s and deleting the reference to the colonization period. Members also agreed on a broad reference to “as far back as appropriate as data or information is available or as clearly relevant to future response options or to understand current status and trends.”

A lengthy discussion also took place regarding references to the Paris Agreement. One Member urged referring to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in conjunction with the Paris Agreement, as the Agreement was made under the UNFCCC. Members finally agreed to refer to the “UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement.”

On a paragraph on the intended users of the assessment, one Member suggested, and others agreed, removing “environmental” from “multilateral environmental organizations,” as other organizations, such as the World Health Organization, may find such an assessment useful.

Regarding a section including overarching questions for the nexus assessment, an IPBES Expert said the information contained in the overarching questions have been embedded in other parts of the document, so retaining the section was not necessary. Members agreed to removing the section and instead retaining it as an annex.

The overarching questions included:

- How do past and current approaches to the production and use of water, food, and their interactions, impact on/interact with biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people?
- What is the role of biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people in human health and well-being?
- How can synergies among the SDGs be maximized to protect and restore biodiversity and resolve conflicts between development and biodiversity conservation?
- How can biodiversity contribute to and enhance the resilience and adaptability of food and bioenergy production systems?
- How can progress be measured toward equitability and sustainability of access to relevant components of biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people, including among Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs)? and
- How effective are the indicators of the monitoring framework of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the 2030 Agenda at capturing the nexus interactions and what options exist for improvement?

On the methodological approach, a Member successfully suggested the summary for policy makers should summarize knowledge gaps and further research needs on top of reflecting the current state of knowledge.

Members further reached consensus on sections addressing: data and information; capacity building and development; communication and outreach; technical support; and process and timetable.

The working group added an extra session to its original schedule to address remaining contentious items. On the title indicating the elements of the nexus, the main points of discussion focused on how to refer to climate change and holistic approaches to different knowledge systems. Members eventually agreed to the previously-agreed title “Scoping report for a thematic assessment of the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food and health,” with the nexus elements introduced in the first paragraph.

Regarding the chapters’ outline, Members agreed to:

- use previously agreed terminology on references to the Paris Agreement;
- remove reference to “diverse values of water” since the topic is already covered in the relevant chapter; and
- remove reference to international trade laws to not unnecessarily restrict the experts’ investigations.

Following this discussion, one Member proposed a new chapter considering holistic approaches for understanding interlinkages between nature and society to inform the nexus assessment. Following a protracted back-and-forth between Members, they agreed to incorporate aspects of the proposal in the relevant decision text as well as note it in the meeting report.

With these amendments, Members approved the scoping report for the nexus assessment and forwarded it to plenary for adoption Thursday.

Working Group on the Transformative Change Assessment

The working group briefly addressed a reference to the Paris Agreement, agreeing to use “the Paris Agreement adopted under the UNFCCC.”

With this amendment, Members approved the scoping report for the transformative change assessment and forwarded it to plenary for adoption Thursday.

Working Group on Capacity Building

Working group Co-Chair Sebsebe Demissew Woodmatas (Ethiopia) invited Members to discuss the Chair’s note on interim work plans for the intersessional period 2021-2022 for the five IPBES task forces.

Regarding the task force on capacity building and regarding activities to implement the fellowship programme, Members agreed on criteria for nominating early career individuals and selection of up to 12 fellows for each of the nexus and transformative change assessments. The criteria noted the candidates are selected “based on their merit and academic qualifications and in their individual capacity as experts, with the view to achieve disciplinary, gender, and geographic balance.” On organizing the fifth meeting of the capacity-building forum, Members agreed the specific theme of the meeting will be identified by the task force and agreed to by the Bureau.

On the interim workplan for the task force on knowledge and data, Marie Stenseke, IPBES MEP Co-Chair, highlighted the intent to mobilize all relevant actors at the regional level through networks. She explained that knowledge gaps can be identified from approved assessments. She also highlighted that the task force supports ongoing assessments, including considerations on data sets and indicators, without developing indicators independently. She then provided information on the IPBES data management policy.

Regarding activities to provide support to assessment authors, a Member suggested a review by the task force of the draft scoping report for the business and biodiversity assessment. The Secretariat explained the contribution of the task force in identifying knowledge gaps takes place upon the completion of the assessment.

On the workplan for the task force on Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) systems, Stenseke explained the process for IPLC representatives’ participation, and introduced the challenges that come with online dialogues, stating efforts will continue to develop and enhance participation in IPBES’ processes.

One delegate proposed adding text providing for translations to all UN languages in order to support the IPLC liaison group, with a short discussion leading to the inclusion of the wording “as appropriate.” Another Member proposed additional changes, including: a comprehensive review of the conceptual framework with balanced participation from all regions; technological assistance for enhancing the inclusion of recommendations based on ILK; and developing and strengthening regional and national networks of IPLCs for enhancing their participation in IPBES’ deliverables. Regarding the Participatory Mechanism, a Member suggested:

- promoting inter-scientific dialogue between academic science and science based on traditional and local knowledge;
- developing and strengthening regional and national networks of IPLCs’ participation in the IPBES deliverables; and
- providing support for the functioning and strengthening of the Participatory Mechanism.

Following concerns raised about budgetary consequences, delegates agreed to include “as appropriate” and “when resources are available” to these additions.

On the workplan for the task force on policy tools and methodologies, Stenseke presented changes to the workplan, including:

- emphasizing the importance to develop a strategy to increase the participation of practitioners familiar with policy-making processes in assessments;
- enhancing the policy relevance of IPBES’ work, including identifying partners to produce sector-specific products based on completed assessments; and
- considering other activities to enhance the relevance of IPBES’ work such as through the use of dialogues, and developing case study materials.

One Member proposed including language that ensures the task force will support policy makers with concrete services resulting from the convening of dialogue workshops with actors at the science-policy interface, and identifying options for potential activities to strengthen the use of IPBES’ assessments in decision-making.

Regarding the task force on scenarios and models, Stenseke said much of the work concerns the nature futures framework and its potential adoption at IPBES-9. She noted the task force plans to promote testing and collect feedback during the intervening time period.

Some Members noted the nature futures framework requires further refinement, including in-depth discussions outside the task forces and with the IPBES community. Following lengthy discussion, the working group agreed the task force will: further develop the nature futures framework to catalyze the development of the next generation of scenarios for biodiversity; submit the framework’s foundations at IPBES-9 for further advice; and report back on further work at IPBES-10, with a view to finalizing the framework.

In the Corridors

Working group Co-Chair Beard opened the floor saying yesterday’s session had been one of the least productive days he’d experienced throughout his years working with IPBES, urging Members to, as one Member said “move on with pace.” The deliberations had a lot to cover—concluding discussion on the scoping reports, addressing the workplans of the task forces, and addressing remaining budget issues.

The session was originally planned to take half a day, with the remainder expected to be used by the budget group. However, despite the pressure of looming deadlines and keeping other groups from concluding their work, it still took the entire day; the budget group will now meet tomorrow to finish their work.

The discussions on the task forces’ workplans moved swiftly; it was the scoping reports that remained the sticking point, specifically the nexus assessment. Members sought compromise, but at times this seemed an unattainable goal. Back-and-forth ensued on the temporal scope of assessments, the title of the nexus assessment, whether or not to directly reference international trade law in the chapters’ content, and lastly, a proposal for a new chapter reflecting the differing approaches to considering the nexus elements. The latter nearly derailed the process, as many stated that given the preparatory process, proposals for new chapters should have been made much earlier to allow all delegations ample opportunity to consider the text. Rather than seeing days of difficult negotiation go to waste, Members ultimately agreed with the Chair’s proposal to incorporate, where appropriate, some of the proposed language into the decision text, and to include the proposal in the meeting report so experts still have access to the guidance being provided.

Some seasoned observers noted that without Co-Chair Beard’s constant urging and creative solutions to reach a compromise, it is entirely possible that no scoping reports would have been adopted at IPBES-8. Instead, both the nexus and transformative change assessments were finally approved in the dying minutes of the day. As one delegate said to Co-Chair Beard in the conference chat box, “we owe you a few beers.”