

IPBES-9 Highlights: Wednesday, 6 July 2022

On the fourth day of the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-9) delegates in Working Group 1 (WG1) met throughout the day, finalizing consideration of the summary for policymakers (SPM) on the thematic assessment of the sustainable use of wild species and starting discussions on the methodological assessment of the diverse values and valuation of nature (values assessment). WG2 devoted the day to the scoping report on the business and biodiversity assessment.

Working Group 1

On scenarios projecting the future use of wild species, a member suggested considering poverty, inequality, and food insecurity, and taking into account national socioeconomic conditions and cultural preferences. The suggestion will be considered under the section on status and trends.

A lengthy discussion ensued over reference to subsidies and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. A member suggested reference to subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. Delegates debated whether IUU fishing should refer to the High Seas, exclusive economic zones, and/or continental waters. The assessment co-chairs pointed to a lack of data on freshwater fisheries as well as to the existence of various types of subsidies, suggesting referring to harmful subsidies.

A suggestion to include reference to bioeconomy policies and strategies generated disagreement. Some delegates noted the concept of bioeconomy is not adequately defined, while others pointed to the relevant definition developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Yet others suggested referring to “environmentally sound” bioeconomy policies or bioeconomy policies to support biodiversity-based products, as appropriate.

On wild meat as a primary objective of terrestrial animal harvesting, some members noted that other objectives exist, using ivory as an example. The co-chairs pointed to lack of relevant data, noting the issue as an area for further research.

On a subsection discussing interventions to implement and scale up policy actions to enhance the sustainable use of wild species, members accepted the headline statement without comments. On a paragraph specifying seven key elements of such policies and their current state of integration into binding and voluntary agreements, and certification schemes, several iterations were needed to clarify changes for consistency with revised infographics and diagrams contained in the SPM.

On a list specifying how these seven key elements could be used as levers of change, delegates focused on:

- ensuring language is in line with the science, precise and not policy-prescriptive;
- references to access and benefit-sharing (ABS) agreements, and consistent use of language pertaining to “free, prior, and informed consent” and to “ensure and promote fair and equitable distribution of costs and benefits”;
- differentiating between ABS in the context of genetic resources, and the use of wild species; and
- highlighting that resource limitations and institutional challenges for monitoring exist in all countries, whereas some challenges are more pronounced in developing country contexts.

Delegates agreed setting quotas or levels of extraction is crucial to prevent species decline. They further agreed on the need for coherence and consistency with existing international obligations and for taking into account customary rules and norms.

On the need for constant negotiation and adaptive management for the use of wild species to remain sustainable, delegates debated whether:

- to differentiate spillover disease from pandemics;
- to reference the One Health approach;
- relevant scientific evidence supports that the intensification of uses can reinforce negative impacts, including zoonotic diseases; and
- to refer to the interconnection of human, domestic, and wild animals, plants, and the wide environment.

WG1 further addressed the SPM’s appendices. On definitions, delegates agreed to refer to “good quality of life” rather than “human wellbeing” in the definition of transformative change. They further decided to add a definition for bioeconomy, and include a definition on robust fisheries management as a footnote.

A section on knowledge gaps was accepted with one additional entry for “data and information availability and access.”

Delegates then addressed all outstanding issues in the SPM.

In the introduction, delegates agreed to refer to the aim to “reduce and eventually eliminate” unsustainable and illegal use. For the definition of sustainable use, delegates agreed to: specify “socio-ecological systems” when referring to this assessment; add a reference to the “social, economic, and environmental dimensions” of sustainability in a reference to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and separate the three components of the definition.

WG1 resolved issues related to the share of wild species used for food, and their contribution to achieving food security and nutrition, and terminology referring to nature-based tourism and wildlife watching. Delegates agreed on adding text to a paragraph discussing overexploitation on the use of wild species in the context of a significant decline in wild species populations and range.

Delegates further addressed and resolved issues around:

- the link between Indigenous territories and deforestation, in cases where secure land tenure exists;
- the percentages of wild fish stocks that are overfished or “fished within biological sustainable levels”;
- selective hunting of particular species and its impacts;
- drivers that impact the abundance and distribution of wild species;
- links among effective policies and levels of poverty, inequality and food insecurity;
- illegal seizures of land that violate the rights of Indigenous Peoples and land holders; and
- gender and its linkages with governance of wild species and the distribution of related benefits.

On tenure in the marine context, delegates referred to language in the FAO’s voluntary guidelines on tenure to “promote secure tenure rights and equitable access to land, fisheries and forests.”

Language specifying the potential contribution of protected areas, and enabling factors, was included in the section on policy tools and instruments, as requested by several members.

Delegates agreed to include text on raising demand for wood-based bioenergy and associated trade-offs between management of natural forests to meet demands for wood and biodiversity conservation replacing pre-existing language related to human drivers of land degradation and deforestation. After a protracted controversy around the role of agriculture and food production, and inquiries regarding old growth forests, delegates agreed on text as suggested by the co-chairs.

Delegates decided to remove numerical estimates describing the extent to which global fisheries catch could be potentially

reduced, particularly in certain geographical areas, as a result of climate change. They reached consensus on language noting that the development and improvement of sustainable forest management practices would provide tools to support sustainable economic activities and wild species-based products.

Agreement was not easily reached on reference to agricultural intensification and its links with forest conservation. Eventually delegates agreed to refer to “sustainably advancing agricultural intensification” that could save land for forest conservation, depending on the type of governance. They also agreed reflecting the need to overcome negative effects.

Multidisciplinary Expert Panel Co-Chair Luthando Dziba presented the revised infographics, following work from the Friends of the Chair Group and the assessment’s lead authors, and members largely approved them.

Individual comments related to the clarity of the gender-neutral pictograms and inconsistencies in some percentage values. A non-governmental organization, supported by a member, requested a change in value for the trend in species populations associated with recreational hunting, which was agreed.

On a table reflecting themes in key elements of sustainable use of wild species in international and regional agreements containing reference to the precautionary approach, delegates agreed to reflect the need to develop science- and evidence-based approaches.

WG1 agreed to include a figure on the assessment of risks around species, containing key elements for sustainable use and the number of existing standards categorized as binding agreements, certification schemes, and voluntary agreements.

A lengthy discussion took place on a suggestion to include a figure on the conservation status of species’ categories for which sufficient data exist. Many pointed out that the figure is not fully representative of the species under use as key groups such as plants (excluding trees) are largely incomplete and others such as animal invertebrates and fungi are totally absent. Others insisted that the graphic representation is important to convey key messages.

Returning to outstanding issues, delegates agreed on language on the links among intensification, land degradation, introduction of invasive alien species (IAS), and spillover risks of novel or known pathogens from wild species hosts to domestic animals and humans. They further agreed to refer to international trade as an important and rapidly growing source of introduction of IAS.

In the evening, WG1 turned to the values assessment.

The assessment co-chairs provided an overview, presented on progress made since IPBES-8, and noted the draft SPM for consideration, annexed in the Chair’s note (IPBES/9/Other/6), incorporated comments received, including in previous days, particularly on values typology, future pathways, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs).

Co-Chair Patricia Balvanera explained the SPM is divided into 10 key messages and four background sections, emphasizing it provides conceptual, methodological, and analytical tools to navigate the diversity of values and incorporate these into decision-making processes.

Members welcomed the draft and commented, *inter alia*, on:

- the draft being too academic in some parts and needing simplification;
- some key messages duplicating each other;
- adding key messages targeted specifically at policymakers;
- having dedicated sections on gaps and research needs;
- including case studies and removing jargon to increase accessibility to stakeholders, including policymakers;
- using typologies of values, and other terms consistently; and
- further emphasizing the role of Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) valuation tools.

Some members observed the SPM seemed to go beyond being a methodological assessment in some parts; one noted it contains items more appropriate for other assessments. Delegates engaged on the draft into the night, discussing key messages.

Working Group 2

WG2 began the day with experts presenting a streamlined “Scope and Rationale” section for the scoping report for the business and biodiversity assessment (IPBES/9/8). Delegates discussed:

- references to relevant national legislation and international instruments on Indigenous Peoples’ rights;
- whether the assessment should cover “criteria and instruments,” “tools,” “frameworks, metrics, indicators, and tools,” or “methods”; and
- references to concepts like sustainable bioeconomy and green infrastructure.

There was protracted discussion on whether the rights of local communities could be referenced alongside the rights of Indigenous Peoples, with some stating that in international law local communities do not hold collective rights. After some debate, there was a suggestion to remove reference to rights and simply refer to IPLCs. The text remains bracketed.

Delegates agreed: the promotion of accountability and transparency should apply to all, not just the public sector; and improving knowledge of impacts and dependencies should apply to both producers and consumers.

They actively engaged but did not reach agreement on whether:

- business’ indirect dependencies and impacts should be considered in addition to direct ones;
- risk identification should be “science-based,” “evidence-based,” or unqualified, the latter to account for ILK, which may not fall within the first two; and
- to refer to “existing international obligations, in particular trade-related obligations.”

Delegates debated a sentence on what the assessment can do, particularly whether it: can only identify or also address potentially conflicting approaches; and should refer to standards, different sectors, the entire value chain, producers and consumers, and cumulative effects or impacts.

In the afternoon, delegates turned to the chapter outlines for the business and biodiversity scoping report. On an introductory chapter setting the scene, delegates focused on ensuring language was not too prescriptive for the assessment authors.

On a chapter on the ways business depends on biodiversity, WG2 heavily debated the level of detail, with some delegates proposing listing items the authors should consider, and others suggesting such lists are not necessary as the authors will address all the concerns as they develop the report. Details considered included:

- benefit-sharing;
- direct and indirect dependencies, and related risks;
- supply chains or value chains; and
- linkages with other global crises.

On the last, some members proposed including linkages to other relevant environmental crises like climate change. Some preferred “challenges” to “crises”; others opposed any mention of linkages to environmental crises.

A delegate opposed inclusion of addressing ways to enhance compliance with international environmental law at the national level, noting this is beyond the mandate and is an “absolute red line.” Several brackets remained and consideration will resume later.

On a chapter on ways that business impacts biodiversity, one member questioned how such a chapter fits into a methodological assessment. Experts responded that it is needed to frame the issues. Delegates also considered whether the language on potential synergies was too prescriptive. They further agreed to allow experts to try and streamline the text to be more concise.

In the evening, delegates returned to consider the structure of the assessment’s chapters, trying to streamline and harmonize the text. Delegates maintained brackets around text on value chains, considered referring to both positive and negative business impacts, and bracketed text regarding direct and indirect impacts. Authors suggested the phrasing “chapter four will assess how various approaches to measurement characterize the issues identified in chapters two and three,” replacing a list of issues to be considered. Delegates reached agreement on several paragraphs and initiated discussion on business as key actors of change.

In the Corridors

The corridors were quiet today. WG1 was hard at work finishing the sustainable use assessment’s SPM: initially set to finish Tuesday night, the deadline was extended to Wednesday 11:00 am, and then 3:00 pm, with the chair warning this was “the real deadline, not the threat deadline.” Delegates ended up working non-stop until the early evening, leaving experts on values lingering in the hallways awaiting their turn despite having been summoned for a morning start.

WG2 was similarly occupied, making slow progress with the business and biodiversity scoping report and prompting Co-Chair Julia Marton-Lefèvre to note “rapid is definitely not our middle name!” The German government at least showed impeccable timing, offering a “Happy Hour” precisely with the final whistle for the sustainable use SPM, drawing some thirsty delegates to the halls for a short break and some clinking glasses.