

IPBES 11 Highlights: Wednesday, 11 December 2024

The second day of the 11th session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES 11) saw delegates working hard into the night in two working groups (WGs) to advance deliberations on the Nexus and Transformative Change Assessments and progress on other agenda items. A contact group on budgetary issues met at lunchtime.

Working Group 1

Nexus Assessment: In the morning, Co-Chair Douglas Beard (Western Europe and Others Group, WEOG) invited delegates to continue discussions on the background messages of the summary for policymakers (SPM) of the Nexus Assessment.

On indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, delegates held a lengthy discussion, without reaching consensus, on armed conflicts. Among other issues, they discussed a suggestion to note that “armed conflicts create barriers for collaboration, including undermining political capacity to address climate change in support of sustainable development.” Co-Chair Beard called for informal discussions.

On freshwater biodiversity, a delegate suggested deleting specific statistics derived from the Living Planet Index, noting they are likely to overestimate the decline in the abundance of wildlife population, which was accepted.

On a figure addressing temporal trends in indicators of the most important indirect drivers affecting the nexus elements, a delegate opposed references to “per capita consumption (protein)” and “livestock.”

Delegates agreed to modify language highlighting wetland and inland water bodies being the most affected by, and vulnerable to, human activities and climate change.

Delegates also considered whether to refer to:

- climate change mitigation and “adaptation” or “resilience” in the context of wetlands and inland water bodies’ contribution to climate action;
- challenges related to “unsustainable” or “excessive” water withdrawal; and
- freshwater and marine coastal ecosystems as being particularly “vulnerable,” “exposed,” or “sensitive” in the context of biodiversity loss, eventually agreeing on “sensitive.”

Some delegates stressed that it is “misleading” to note that only a third of reef-building coral species are at high risk of extinction, suggesting strengthening the message.

On a message addressing the interlinkages between increases in food production and biodiversity loss, delegates held a lengthy debate around the notions of land expansion for agriculture and unsustainable agricultural practices. Some expressed concerns on sending a message that increasing food production is inevitably negative for the environment while many countries struggle with food insecurity. Others underscored the strong link between land use change and biodiversity loss, opposed by some, who stressed that not all land expansion necessarily affects biodiversity. Yet others noted that increases in food production and overconsumption are mainly applicable to developed countries. Co-Chair Beard invited informal discussions.

A proposal to highlight the transformative role food can play across nexus elements, together with the relevant pre-conditions,

remained bracketed. On negative impacts of food production, delegates discussed various options on how to express unequal impacts of these effects for different populations, including whether to refer to “poor people,” “poor and marginalized people,” or populations in developing or lower income countries specifically. Discussions will continue.

In the evening, delegates continued negotiations on the background messages. On health outcomes linked to various challenges associated with nexus elements, there was discussion on whether or not to single out mental health issues. Delegates agreed to align language referencing the food system’s contribution to climate change with that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), agreeing to include a range of 21 to 37 per cent for the sector’s contribution to all greenhouse gas emissions. On adverse health outcomes such as obesity being associated with certain diets, there was discussion on the inclusion of red meat. Deliberations continued into the night.

Scoping report: In the afternoon, Co-Chair Beard invited delegates to address the scoping report ([IPBES/11/7](#)) for a second global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Josef Settele, IPBES expert, provided an overview of the scoping process. He discussed the assessment’s proposed scope and rationale, specific objectives, geographic and temporal coverage, and the methodological approach. He offered a draft chapter outline, including a distinct chapter on Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) and the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs). Anne Larigauderie, IPBES Executive Secretary, provided an overview of the comments received by members and the main changes suggested.

In general opening remarks, many members applauded the high quality of the draft scoping report, stressing its importance in supporting the monitoring and implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) as well as informing a post-2030 biodiversity framework.

Delegates supported, among other issues:

- highlighting the role of women, youth, and the private sector;
- considering soil biodiversity, pollinators, and high altitude ecosystems;
- including references to intergenerational equity;
- acknowledging the importance of supporting IPLCs’ livelihoods;
- taking a cross-cutting, human rights-based approach; and
- ensuring a broad approach to financing from all sources, including reduction of harmful subsidies.

Delegates also emphasized the value of: methodological and thematic comparability between the first and second Global Assessment Reports; balance between regional and global coverage; and aligning the report with relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), in addition to the GBF, as well as informing action on the ground. Many delegates supported dedicating a chapter to oceans and seas, while others expressed reservations.

Co-Chair Beard then invited delegates to commence textual negotiations on the scoping report. On the assessment’s scope and rationale, delegates agreed on “assessing the progress in transformation needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and living in harmony with nature.” A member suggested adding reference to Mother Earth, which was bracketed.

A lengthy discussion took place on a provision noting that the assessment will strengthen the science-policy interface on biodiversity by providing knowledge and policy support tools needed for informed decision making by governments and stakeholders. Delegates were unable to agree on a list of stakeholders. Many supported reference to women and youth, together with IPLCs, the private sector, and civil society. A delegation suggested “governments and relevant stakeholders.” Another proposed as a compromise “decision making by governments, with a view to foster the full and effective contribution of IPLCs, the private sector, civil society, women, and youth.” Some highlighted the status of IPLCs, noting they are not mere stakeholders. A delegate suggested taking into account different knowledge systems. The section was kept in brackets.

On language regarding the specific objectives of the second global assessment, delegates engaged in lengthy discussions on how to reflect the various international agreements, goals, and frameworks that the assessment could support.

Working Group 2

Building capacity, strengthening knowledge foundations, and supporting policy: In the morning, Co-Chairs Eeva Primmer (WEOG), Sebsebe Demissew (African group), and Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Group of Latin America and the Caribbean) outlined the group’s task to consider workplans for objectives 2 (building capacity), 3 (strengthening the knowledge foundations), and 4 (policy support tools and methodologies) of the rolling work programme up to 2030, presented in documents [IPBES/11/9](#) and [11/INF/13-18](#).

Delegates heard reports on past and planned activities to:

- enhance learning and engagement;
- facilitate access to expertise and information;
- strengthen national and regional capacities;
- advance work on knowledge and data;
- enhance recognition of and work with ILK systems; and
- advance work on policy instruments, policy support tools, and methodologies.

Co-Chair Primmer presented the draft decisions containing the workplans. She invited delegates to address the intersessional activities proposed for each objective. Delegates first discussed the workplan for building capacity.

On the organization of a workshop to strengthen youth engagement in IPBES’ work, the Secretariat highlighted the need to delay the workshop for a later time due to a packed schedule for 2024-2025, with eventual agreement that it would take place by IPBES 13.

Delegates then turned to the workplan on data and knowledge management. One member called for better accessibility of underlying data for maps and figures, with the technical support unit (TSU) assuring this will be reflected in the work plan for 2025-2026.

On advanced work on knowledge generation catalysis, one delegate suggested, and others agreed, to include preparation of a process to identify general knowledge needs as part of future scoping processes in the work programme.

On enhanced recognition of ILK systems, one member requested the insertion of precise wording on the title of a workshop for scenarios and models to reflect different knowledge systems, including ILK and “Mother Earth-centric scenarios and models” as agreed at IPBES 10.

On advancing work on scenarios and models for biodiversity and ecosystem services, members discussed a new paragraph on preparing a compilation of gaps and needs regarding nature-centered scenarios and models set out in completed IPBES assessments and suggested minor textual revisions. One member suggested moving the text to an annex as the task of compiling gaps has not yet been completed.

Transformative Change Assessment: In the afternoon, Co-Chair Primmer invited delegates to commence review of the draft SPM of the Transformative Change Assessment. Assessment Co-Chair Karen O’Brien (Norway) outlined the assessment process; the conceptually and empirically innovative character of the assessment; and the inclusion of ILK through dialogue workshops and more than 30 Indigenous Lead Authors and contributing authors. Assessment Co-Chairs Lucas Garibaldi (Argentina) and

Arun Agrawal (US) presented the assessment’s scope, outlining its structure and explained how comments from the final government review have been addressed.

In general remarks, delegates highlighted: the necessity for transformative change; the timeliness in conveying a comprehensive framework; the substantial work of translating complex concepts into concrete examples for policymakers; and the significant and necessary role of experts from social sciences and humanities in drafting the text.

Among suggestions for improvements, delegates proposed:

- shorter and more concise messaging of knowledge gaps and more straightforward language for the key messages;
- reordering key messages with titles reflecting all actions proposed under each key message;
- avoiding placing responsibilities of action on certain country categories;
- providing a clearer conclusion on the theory of change required to achieve the 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature; and
- removing language around “true-cost accounting” as capacity to implement this approach remains uneven.

Several delegates highlighted the need for clearer language to enhance report uptake at all levels.

Following general statements, Co-Chair Primmer invited delegates to engage in textual negotiations, starting with the first key message, which states the urgency for and necessity of transformative change to address the interconnected crises related to biodiversity loss and nature’s decline.

On the interconnected crises, delegates discussed a suggestion to increase the sense of urgency by emphasizing the planetary scale of the problem and agreed on “global interconnected crises.” A discussion ensued over what is meant by previous and current approaches that have failed to halt or reverse nature’s decline at global scale.

A lengthy discussion ensued on the financial resources needed to protect and restore biodiversity loss as being small compared to global gross domestic product (GDP) and substantially less than total global expenditures on subsidies that damage ecosystems. Some delegates suggested replacing “protect and restore” with “conserve,” considering that restoration costs are significantly higher than the figures suggested. Discussions will continue.

Engagement with IPCC: In the evening, Executive Secretary Larigauderie introduced relevant documents ([IPBES/11/8](#) and [11/INF/10](#)), providing an overview of engagement with the IPCC since IPBES 10. Simone Schiele, IPBES Secretariat, explained how governments’ comments have been addressed ([IPBES/11/Other/4](#)).

In general remarks, delegates highlighted the interdependence between biodiversity loss and climate change; strongly supported collaboration between IPBES and IPCC at all levels; acknowledged the complexities involved in integrating IPCC and IPBES work streams; and lauded the Chair’s note as a good basis for advancing collaboration. One delegate pointed at the opportunity to deepen collaboration between the bodies since both have major assessments scheduled for release in 2028.

Delegates continued engaging with the draft decision text into the night.

In the Corridors

The first dark clouds started to loom over IPBES 11 during its second day of deliberations as the first challenges in textual negotiations for both assessments emerged and progress was slower than most expected. One delegate informally mentioned that while IPBES is typically free of geopolitical considerations as a science-based intergovernmental platform, such issues can still pose obstacles, resulting in delays in deliberations.

IPBES 11 has exceptional characteristics compared to previous Plenary sessions, offering, among other things, a unique opportunity for policymakers and social scientists to interact through, in particular, the Transformative Change Assessment. While delegates recognize the potential of such interaction, some emphasize that it remains to be seen whether all participants, including government representatives and the assessments’ co-chairs and authors, are up to the challenging task of bridging the gap between intergovernmental negotiations and conveying complex knowledge on fundamental, system-wide reorganization.