

IPBES 11 Highlights: Friday, 13 December 2024

The entire day was devoted to the Nexus and Transformative Change Assessments with delegates meeting late into the night in an effort to make progress and conclude negotiations in a timely manner. The contact group on financial and budgetary issues met at lunchtime.

Working Group 1

Nexus Assessment: In the morning, Co-Chair Douglas Beard (Western European and Others Group, WEOG) invited delegates to continue deliberations on the Nexus Assessment's background messages, focusing on response options that address nexus interactions.

On a response option based on the restoration of natural and semi-natural ecosystems, delegates agreed to note that restoration supports climate change adaptation and socio-ecological resilience, and can also contribute to climate change mitigation when it targets carbon storage in forests, peatlands, seagrass beds, salt marshes, and marine and coastal ecosystems that contribute to carbon sequestration.

Delegates could not reach consensus on language noting that ecological intensification benefits from creating and supporting markets for sustainable products, subsidies, payments for ecosystem services, and other incentives. A delegate proposed adding that currently there is no evidence of the feasibility of large-scale implementation of agroecology and ecological intensification, with IPBES experts noting that such evidence does exist.

A member offered additional language on sustainable intensification, stressing that it is a globally applicable response option for increasing agricultural and livestock production efficiency and increasing overall food production, while reducing environmental impacts and avoiding land conversion. Another proposed adding that sustainable intensification also has variable impacts on human health. The provision remained bracketed.

On text highlighting that shifting to sustainable consumption patterns reduces threats to biodiversity, water, food, and health, while contributing to climate change mitigation, a delegate, opposed by many, called for replacing "reduces" with "can reduce." The text remained bracketed.

On text noting that sustainable healthy diets and reducing food waste can free up land for conservation of biodiversity and/or create carbon sinks, some delegations suggested deleting reference to carbon sinks or adding the qualifier "in some cases." Others noted that "can" already implies contextual variability. The text remained bracketed.

Regarding benefits of circular bioeconomy for all nexus elements, a discussion ensued over whether to refer to "bioeconomy," "circular bioeconomy," or "sustainable circular bioeconomy," with one observer calling for reference to a "social" bioeconomy. Assessment experts suggested adding a reference to the recently-agreed [High-Level Principles on Bioeconomy](#) of the Group of 20 (G20), but some delegates preferred instead maintaining the sustainability qualifiers, noting that the

bioeconomy, on its own, can be detrimental to nature. The text remained bracketed.

On language emphasizing that behavior change will be necessary to shift consumption practices, and that this can be enabled by increasing accessibility and desirability of sustainable healthy diets, delegates agreed to the addition of "and considering cultural acceptance." On reduced subsidies to agricultural production systems supporting pollution controls, members agreed to an insertion noting that developing countries may face multiple barriers in making such subsidy reductions.

Delegates continued discussing background messages in the afternoon.

On transboundary water cooperation, several delegates supported the insertion, "in accordance with national laws and international principles of sovereignty over natural resources." Reference to the UN Water Convention was bracketed.

Regarding messages noting that effective risk management can reduce climate and health risks to people and ecosystems, and on response options to limit climate and health risks, one delegation requested deletion of reference to climate and the text remained bracketed.

On how the health sector can reduce negative impacts from their operations across nexus elements, some delegations, opposed by others, supported deletion of reference to reducing greenhouse gas emissions as an example, noting this may not be a priority in countries that lack robust health systems. Delegates discussed ways to caveat this language without reaching agreement.

On a footnote referencing the One Health High Level Expert Panel's definition of One Health, some delegations requested deletion, noting that divergent views on the definition remain. Delegates eventually agreed to this deletion, along with inclusion of new language referring to risks to wildlife health, food production, and ecosystems that a One Health approach seeks to reduce.

Calling for more nuanced language on the threats from "industrial agriculture," a delegate suggested referring to "pressures from unsustainable practices," which delegates agreed to. Delegates also debated whether to keep reference to the rights of nature and of other non-human entities, without reaching consensus.

Regarding additional economic and financial resources required to implement response options, delegates discussed a suggestion to delete reference to "repurposing" in addition to "eliminating" and "phasing out" subsidies that result in damage to nexus elements. With some delegates pointing to challenges related to subsidy reform in developing countries, the sentence remained bracketed.

On nexus-wide benefits occurring from implementing response options together or in sequence, a few delegates requested adding that coordinated implementation and scaling of multiple response options requires "predictable finance," with others proposing "reliable sources of finance when needed," with the group agreeing to the latter without the qualifier "when needed."

Opening the evening's deliberations, Co-Chair Beard announced a FOC would be taking place later in the evening on how to refer to countries' different levels of income and development. He also proposed, and delegates agreed, that

deliberations on Saturday would begin an hour earlier to facilitate finalization of the Nexus Assessment. Delegates then turned to background messages on “governing the nexus for achieving just and sustainable futures.” As they began to make their interventions, several members urged prioritizing burning issues, rather than smaller changes, underscoring that “we have a carefully balanced text that has been reviewed by governments three times.” Discussions continued into the night.

Working Group 2

Transformative Change Assessment: In the morning, Co-Chair Eeva Primmer (WEOG) invited delegates to continue consideration of key messages related to strategies and actions for transformative change.

On transforming dominant economic and financial paradigms, delegates accepted revised language addressing targeted and just downscaling of consumption and production.

Regarding inclusive, accountable, and adaptive governance systems, members agreed that incorporation of diverse knowledge systems should be “encouraged” rather than “required,” and “multiple values” should also be incorporated. They discussed a list of challenges for governance systems, including institutional misfits, corruption, and disinformation, deciding to cite fragmentation as a widely known example of institutional misfit.

On shifting societal views and values to recognize and prioritize human-nature interconnectedness, delegates noted that not all views and values need to be shifted. They discussed how these shifts are facilitated, with one delegate requesting focusing on the worldviews and values of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs). Disagreement emerged over the use of “ethics of care.” Delegates agreed that “dominant” societal views and values need to be shifted; modified the sentence to reflect the importance of different knowledge systems, worldviews, and values that recognize human-nature interdependence; and maintained reference to “ethics of care.”

A discussion ensued over the role of worldviews and values of Indigenous Peoples for questioning paradigms that perpetuate the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. Some delegates highlighted their importance, with one noting that Indigenous Peoples’ values are under attack and thus require special emphasis. Others stressed that non-Indigenous worldviews and values are also relevant for transformative change. Following a lengthy debate about making reference to “Nature,” “Earth,” or “Mother Earth,” the sentence was kept in brackets.

On unquestioned habits and social norms around consumption and growth that prevent transformative change by disrupting human-nature relationships, one delegate suggested removing a qualifier around social norms as being “acceptable” in normalizing certain behaviors or de-normalizing others. The text was revised to clarify that acceptable behaviors are defined within specific contexts.

Delegates then proceeded to discuss ways to enable transformative change. On positive shared visions that recognize socio-ecological interdependencies to inspire transformative change, delegates discussed: the complexity of language being used, including clarifications on the meaning of “the agency of non-human life”; what makes shared visions “positive”; and additional text on the “visions and values of IPLCs living in harmony with nature as enhancing transformative change,” and whether “Mother Earth” could be included after the word “nature.”

Assessment Co-Chair Agrawal clarified that “the agency of non-human life” refers to non-human life producing change by its intrinsic existence and that it is necessary to retain “positive shared visions” in the text. On the addition of “Mother Earth,” Assessment Co-Chair Agrawal stressed that “Mother Earth” has been included in the glossary. A Friends of the Chair (FOC) group was established to further discuss “Mother Earth” terminology.

In the afternoon, Markus Fischer, Multidisciplinary Expert Panel member, highlighted progress in the FOC group addressing figures and tables, emphasizing that an additional meeting would enable the group to finalize its work. He further reported on the FOC group discussing references to “Mother Earth” across the

assessment. He stressed that delegates agreed that “Mother Earth” should not always be explicitly mentioned, noting there are other eco-centric approaches.

Delegates then resumed discussions on key messages enabling transformative change, focusing on the roles of relevant agents. They agreed that achieving transformative change “requires” rather than “implies” a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. They further discussed asymmetries in political and economic powers, agreeing that different groups of actors possess specific abilities, resources and powers, and encounter different opportunities to act for transformative change.

On government actors, members agreed they “are critical for changes, notably in governance arrangements and systems, as are demands from civil society actors and citizens.” Delegates further highlighted “community-based initiatives that bring together multiple actors with different but complementary skills and capacities, such as agroecology initiatives.”

On the role of governments as powerful enablers of transformative change through stronger regulation in policies and plans and innovative economic and fiscal tools, delegates discussed and approved replacing “ecosystems” with “nature’s contributions to people.”

On the role of civil society organizations, including social mobilizations that have faced violence and rights violations in fighting against biodiversity loss, delegates agreed to remove the word “incremental” as a qualifier to responses to pursue change when the goal is to be transformative. On the outcomes of social mobilizations, delegates agreed on the word “reforms” to define “relocation, technical solutions, environmental improvements, application of existing regulations, and compensation,” that did not result in key elements of transformative change.

Concluding consideration of the key messages, delegates addressed the role of businesses and the private sector. They agreed that well-designed policies, as well as business and private sector initiatives and tools aimed at transformative change for a just and sustainable world, provide economic incentives that influence socio-economic development and consumption practices.

Following discussions, members agreed that both the private sector and international financial institutions have played a role in debt-for-nature swaps, creating additional financial opportunities to conserve nature. They further pointed to weaknesses of such schemes, including the potential to undermine the respective rights and interests of IPLCs and marginalize small producers.

In the evening, Co-Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Latin American and Caribbean Group, GRULAC) invited delegates to accept two edits in the key messages: one specifying, in a footnote, the sectors that heavily contribute to biodiversity loss; and another providing an example for business and private sector initiatives that contribute to transformative change. With both edits accepted, Co-Chair Díaz congratulated members for completing consideration of all key messages and turned their attention to the 33 background messages, noting they have been edited by the authors to reflect discussions on the key messages.

Delegates started considering background messages and worked into the night.

In the Corridors

Throughout the day, delegates considered a wide range of themes relevant to the Nexus Assessment, revealing meaningful divisions on issues such as sustainable and healthy diets; the respective merits of food production approaches such as sustainable intensification, ecological intensification, and agroecology; definitions of the bioeconomy; and transboundary water cooperation. By the end of the afternoon, many issues remained unresolved, with Co-Chair Beard warning that scheduled celebrations to mark the document’s adoption on Saturday evening were unlikely to go ahead unless the pace increased.

Meanwhile, negotiations of the Transformative Change Assessment felt like “stepping into another world,” according to one observer, who welcomed the “refreshing” consideration of concepts that go beyond “nature,” in particular “Mother Earth.” Whether this optimistic mood will continue once delegations are able to shift their full attention to this Assessment remains to be seen.