

IPBES 11 Highlights: Saturday, 14 December 2024

The Nexus and Transformative Change Assessments dominated the negotiations with delegates trying to make progress and conclude deliberations in a timely manner. The scheduled plenary session to adopt the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) of the Nexus Assessment was postponed to Sunday, 15 December. 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 resume consideration of outstanding issues on background messages of the Nexus Assessment. On the section “governing the nexus for achieving just and sustainable futures,” regarding strengthening specific actors’ capacities to improve nexus governance and approaches, delegates decided to replace reference to “synergistic benefits” with “multiple co-benefits,” after a delegate expressed developing countries’ concerns about double counting and greenwashing. They further agreed on the need to strengthen institutional and research capacities, which can help address inequalities among countries, and bridge capacities and promote transdisciplinary research, including the ability to bring together different ways of knowing.

On a background message focusing on economic and financial systems, and biodiversity finance flows, delegates agreed that available evidence shows a clear bias in the current distribution of biodiversity finance, with absolute levels of domestic public spending concentrated in countries in North America and Europe, as well as in China. They further agreed to note that only 5% of global private finance flows for biodiversity are allocated to least developed countries and other low-income countries, which highlights the challenges faced by all developing countries, “including those already devoting much public finance to biodiversity.”

Following discussions, members agreed to highlight the challenges faced by developing countries in mobilizing resources from all sources and recognize that developing countries may not be able to dedicate sufficient resources to the nexus elements, underscoring the need to strengthen the capacity to implement economic and financial response options.

On response options that address nexus interactions, delegates agreed to insert reference to ecosystem-based approaches in addition to nature-based solutions. They then turned to new proposed text that emphasizes that the response options provided are not meant to be exhaustive, agreeing to note, among other caveats, that they represent a range of evidence-based options at different scales and feasibility levels that can be adapted to different national and local circumstances, in accordance with relevant international obligations.

On ecological intensification benefiting from, among other support, payments for ecosystem services (PES), delegates agreed to maintain reference to PES, caveated with “in accordance with relevant international trade obligations.”

Assessment authors suggested deleting a proposed insertion stating that there is currently no evidence for the feasibility of large-scale implementation of agroecology and ecological intensification, noting that such evidence does exist, which delegates accepted. Some delegates supported inserting reference to sustainable intensification being a “globally applicable response option for increasing agricultural production efficiency and food production while reducing land conversion and environmental and health impacts.” Delegates agreed, with the inclusion of “some” before health impacts. They also agreed to insert a sentence noting that different response options acknowledge the importance of combining land-sparing and land-sharing practices in a context-specific manner.

On shifting to sustainable healthy diets and reducing food waste, which reduce emissions, delegates agreed that this “could” – rather than “can” – free up land, providing “in a range of cases” co-benefits for nexus elements, such as biodiversity conservation and carbon sinks.

Delegates agreed to refer to “sustainable bioeconomy,” noting this term has been included in a recent UN General Assembly resolution.

Regarding the effectiveness of integrated approaches incorporating planning and governance for use of land and sea areas in addressing complex sustainability challenges, delegates agreed that transboundary water cooperation facilitates sustainable management of resources at the basin scale, and better collaboration between sectors and stakeholders, deleting reference to the UN Water Convention.

A lengthy discussion took place on provisions to address pollution as a key driver of degradation of biodiversity, water quality, and human health, and on relevant response options. Members agreed that reducing pollution from all sources is particularly significant for people in developing countries, further agreeing to refer to evidence noting that 90% of premature deaths from pollution, of which air pollution is the major cause, occur in low- and middle-income countries. A delegate suggested, and members agreed, adding that access to adequate sanitation services and domestic wastewater treatment is a critical issue in several parts of Latin American and the Caribbean, Asian, and African countries.

Agreement could not be reached in reference to the reduction and regulation of single-use plastics. A delegate suggested a general reference to the treatment and management of wastes or to plastic pollution. Others insisted on retaining the reference to single-use plastics.

On reduction of climate and health risks to people and ecosystems through effective risk management, one delegate opposed highlighting the role of decreasing greenhouse gas

emissions in the energy intensive health sector, noting this would not be relevant for developing countries. The sentence was kept in brackets.

On positive outcomes for people and nature through promoting rights and equity, delegates were not able to resolve a debate surrounding reference to human rights principles related to access and management of natural resources and reference to the rights of nature, agreeing to formulate footnotes to resolve the concerns raised by a few delegates.

After a short break for informal discussions, authors suggested, and delegates agreed, referring to “rights” relating to access and management of natural resources, instead of “human rights principles,” to accommodate a delegate’s concern. Delegates also agreed to delete reference to rights of “non-human entities,” with one delegate arguing they are implied in “rights of nature.”

On eliminating, phasing out, reforming, or repurposing subsidies that damage nexus elements, delegates decided to delete “repurposing” after a delegate highlighted political challenges, especially in developing countries.

Delegates returned to a box outlining the relationship between the presented response options and global policy frameworks. One delegate requested to change wording from “improved integration” to “improving implementation” of global policy frameworks, noting that “integration” and “coordination,” which authors suggested as alternative wording, are too prescriptive. Further consideration of the box was postponed to a later stage.

Delegates then turned their attention to outstanding issues on background messages related to past and present nexus interactions. They resolved contentious language on armed conflicts, noting that they have increased in number since 2010 and adding that they have intensified some direct drivers and, in addition to loss of human life, may damage or destroy biodiversity, agricultural lands, water supply and impact human well-being. Members further agreed that armed conflicts create barriers to collaboration, severely delaying collective and transformative action in support of sustainable development.

Delegates reached agreement on provisions underscoring the importance of wetlands and inland water bodies, as well as forests. On coral reefs, they agreed that approximately one third of reef-building coral species are already at high risk of extinction, further noting that coral reefs are the most endangered ecosystems and may disappear globally in the next 10 to 15 years.

Following lengthy discussions, members agreed to note that:

- negative impacts on the nexus elements from food systems from both land expansion and unsustainable practices have decreased biodiversity and consequently many of nature’s contribution to people, deleting an example on anti-microbial resistance;
- rising global food demand, particularly from affluent societies, has driven an increase in agricultural “production” rather than “productivity”;
- increases in production have partially been achieved by unsustainable agricultural practices; and
- climate change has also slowed growth in agricultural productivity over the last decades.

Following an intervention by an observer, members agreed to amend a provision on global agrobiodiversity to note that it is declining, including genetic resources for food and agriculture, with global food production heavily dependent on just nine crop species that contribute to 65% of the world’s crop production.

In a revised sentence on how the global transition towards low-diversity diets has contributed to 2.1 billion people becoming overweight or obese, a few delegations suggested deleting reference to “meat,” which was eventually accepted, with some delegates noting regret.

On the economic impacts of biodiversity loss disproportionately affecting low-income developing countries, one delegate opposed

this language, noting that middle-income developing countries may also face such challenges and questioning the accuracy of the statement. The text remained bracketed.

Regarding groups bearing a disproportionate burden of degradation of nexus elements, delegates agreed, among other changes, to refer to “persons in vulnerable situations,” instead of “socioeconomically marginalized people.”

On a box describing different scenario archetypes, members agreed to a range of changes proposed by the authors in response to delegates’ comments. However, in the “climate first” scenario, they did not agree on whether to delete reference to “competition for land” in the context of climate mitigation actions that could conflict with food production.

In the “food first” scenario, several delegations expressed concern that a scenario that emphasizes prioritizing food production is associated with negative environmental impacts, and delegates agreed to include text noting that in contrast to certain other scenarios, the “food first” archetype focuses on unsustainable agriculture.

In the “nature overexploitation” scenario, one delegate asked for deletion of “fossil fuels” in the context of unsustainable energy demand. Delegates compromised on “including, but not limited to, fossil fuels.” Several delegates expressed concern about negotiating language in a box that is “merely descriptive.”

On background messages related to future nexus interactions, delegates agreed to note that evidence from scenarios shows that protecting up to 30% of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine areas can provide nexus-wide benefits if these are effectively managed for nature and people. They further agreed that higher levels of protection in terrestrial systems beyond 30% would have greater biodiversity benefits, but could also have trade-offs for food production, food security and nutritional health, including through food price increases.

Members could not reach agreement on: language noting that impacts on biodiversity and climate can also be caused by food trade, with increasing imports in one country leading to land-use change in exporting countries. Text also remained bracketed on scenarios that explore the potential implications of delayed climate change mitigation action showing that, without integrated planning and ambitious emission reduction strategies, there could be adverse impacts on various nexus elements.

Following discussions, delegates agreed that scenarios rarely assess implications for poverty and inequality, which represents an important knowledge gap. A Friends of the Chair (FOC) group was established to address all outstanding issues in the background messages.

In the evening, Luthando Dziba, IPBES Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP), reported that the FOC that had worked on the SPM’s figures throughout the week had completed its work. He noted that about 40% of the discussions on figures had entailed substantive changes and about 60% focused on improving the clarity of the figures. Reporting back on progress from the FOC group that had discussed outstanding issues from the background messages, Co-Chair Beard noted agreement had been reached on most, but not all, outstanding issues, with Assessment authors still working on proposed language related to trade. Delegates then turned their attention to discussing the 12 key messages of the SPM, with negotiations continuing into the night.

Working Group 2

Transformative Change Assessment: In the morning, Co-Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Latin American and Caribbean Group, GRULAC) invited delegates to continue discussing background messages. After modifications were made to the text on overarching challenges to transformational change, one delegate requested assurance that “rebound effects,” occurring when efficiency improvements result in higher consumption,

be included among the five overarching challenges. Delegates agreed to remove specific reference to capitalist and state socialist systems as political economic systems that generate intersectional inequalities and hierarchies shaping people's relations to nature and biodiversity.

On biodiversity offsets as “reformist” responses that are inadequate for addressing underlying causes of biodiversity loss, following lengthy discussions, delegates agreed that “many” biodiversity offsets may appear to address biodiversity loss but have faced challenges, including with compliance. Members agreed that poorly designed offset schemes may further lead to dispossession and violation of rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), following clarifications from the Assessment's co-authors.

On the challenges to transformative change, delegates agreed to specify that among the estimated 2,000 civilians, activists, and environmental defenders fighting environmentally destructive activities killed between 2012 and 2022, one third were Indigenous Peoples. Delegates discussed whether “power dynamics,” “power inequalities,” or “structures,” within the international monetary and financial systems influencing biodiversity and climate finance further entrench structural inequalities. They agreed to refer to “power dynamics” and to delete reference to “climate finance” due to a lack of evidence from the underlying literature.

With minor amendments delegates also agreed to a background message introducing six broad approaches for promoting and accelerating deliberate transformative change, comprising systems, structural, inner transformation, empowerment, knowledge co-creation, and science and technology approaches.

A lengthy discussion took place on a statement noting that increasing biodiversity and protecting native habitats can enhance crop productivity, with delegates agreeing to remove reference to a 24% improvement that was only referring to studies that focused on enhancing pollinator abundance and diversity. Some delegates suggested a qualifier statement that conventional farming has a higher productivity and yield compared to diversified farming systems and delegates agreed on the formulation that “studies” suggested that increasing biodiversity can enhance crop productivity. Text around nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches remained bracketed as delegates expressed divergent opinions.

In the afternoon, Co-Chair Eeva Primmer (WEOG), invited delegates to continue addressing the background messages. On the dependency of emerging technologies on critical minerals, the extraction of which often harms ecosystems, delegates agreed that “research on deep-sea activities in response to rising demand for critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, and graphite from the ocean floor reveals the importance of increased attention to the ecological implications of such activities on deep-sea ocean functioning.”

On efforts for conserving, restoring, and sustainably using nature being significantly under-resourced in relation to the global economic value generated by activities dependent on nature, one delegate requested to submit an additional comment by email and the provision remained bracketed. Delegates agreed that more than half of the world's total gross domestic product (GDP) is generated by sectors dependent on nature “to a moderate or high extent.”

On significantly reducing pressures on nature through the elimination, phase out, or reform of current subsidies to economic sectors responsible for biodiversity loss and nature's decline, some delegates proposed including “redirection” and “identification” of subsidies, and qualifying these subsidies as “harmful.” A suggestion to reinsert text describing the need to release substantial funds to implement the sustainability agenda through

subsidy reform remained bracketed. On aggregate numbers for global public direct subsidies to agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and fossil fuel sectors ranging between USD 1.4 to 3.3 trillion per year, authors were tasked to provide a more detailed sectoral breakdown.

Regarding estimates for the global biodiversity funding gap amounting to USD 598-824 billion per year until 2030, delegates urged for consistency with the Nexus Assessment. On a list of financial and economic instruments, comprising PES, taxes, subsidies, and tradable permits, delegates suggested adding “transfer payments” and clarifying such instruments be used in accordance with national legislation. Lacking support from the underlying literature, delegates decided not to include “transfer payments” and agreed to accept the latter inclusion. They also accepted a sentence stating that most tools and methodologies are still in early stages of development, and hence, many countries would require enhanced technical and financial support.

On targeted and just downscaling of production and consumption to reduce global footprints to sustainable levels in all high-income countries and among high consuming actors, one delegation pointed to their alternative text submitted by email and the paragraph was bracketed.

Regarding data highlighting that between 1990 and 2015, high-income countries “obtained without compensation in equivalent terms through trade” the raw material equivalents, embodied land, and embodied labor from low-income countries on a scale to end extreme poverty 70 times over, one delegate said that the text should be removed, arguing that, while the dataset is big, the empirical model is “controversial at best.” The paragraph was bracketed.

On mitigation of “ecologically unequal exchange” between producer and consumer countries having the potential to reduce excess consumption and ecological footprints, one delegation suggested including a definition of this term in the Assessment's glossary.

Delegates accepted a background message on redefining goals, metrics, and indicators to acknowledge economic, social, and environmental dimensions, as well as the many different values of nature with minor edits.

In the evening, Co-Chair Primmer guided members in their discussions on background messages relating to strategies and actions for transformative change. On governance systems that effectively reduce biodiversity loss and nature's decline, delegates accepted sentences on: institutional options to foster integrated and nexus governance; “positioning biodiversity and its advocates in land, sea, and resource-use decisions”; and inclusive governance systems. Discussions continued into the night.

In the Corridors

Despite late-night negotiations the previous evening, Saturday's negotiations on the Nexus Assessment continued to be bogged down by a range of edits. Delegates commented extensively on text deemed by many to be merely scientific and descriptive, rather than political. Frustration was palpable as planned celebrations for the evening – a reception organized by the host government – could not go ahead due to the lack of progress.

In their interventions and in the corridors, many attendees expressed frustration that a rigorous assessment written by scientists over a three-year process and already reviewed by governments three times was undergoing substantial last-minute revisions. Others observed the issue of food—deeply intertwined with concerns around food insecurity, but also with cultural, social, and personal preferences, as well as major economic and corporate interests—was bound to raise significant political sensitivities among certain countries. As one delegate wryly remarked: “this is where the rubber really hits the road.”