

IPBES-6 STAKEHOLDER DAY HIGHLIGHTS: SATURDAY, 17 MARCH 2018

The Stakeholder Day preceding the sixth session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-6) was held on Saturday, 17 March 2018 in Medellín, Colombia, followed by the IPBES-6 Opening Ceremony. Stakeholder Day provided an opportunity for organizations interested in the IPBES process to discuss their engagement in the Plenary session. IPBES-6 is expected to finalize and launch five science-policy assessment reports and summaries for policymakers (SPMs): a thematic assessment on land degradation and restoration; and regional assessments on biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Europe and Central Asia.

Stakeholder Day discussions focused on:

- Enhancing the impact of IPBES assessments, including through capacity building for uptake and a new online tool to track assessment impact;
- The role of the participatory mechanism in incorporating indigenous and local knowledge in assessments, and the need to address barriers to full participation of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs);
- Challenges in ensuring the policy relevance of assessments, and interpreting and communicating their findings; and
- Next steps in implementing the IPBES Capacity-building Rolling Plan and how to prioritize requests for capacity building.

OPENING

Arturo Mora, IUCN Colombia, moderated the session. Jonas Geschke, Network-Forum for Biodiversity Research, Germany, introduced the ‘Mentimeter,’ an online tool to collect and visualize feedback from participants. Using the tool, participants indicated that lack of funding and time are key constraints to their engagement in IPBES.

IPBES Executive Secretary Anne Larigauderie explained the Plenary is expected to approve the SPMs of four regional assessments and of the assessment on land degradation, which she lauded as an extraordinary event “unmatched even by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).” She stressed that assessments must be adapted to local contexts, calling on participants to engage actively in assessment uptake.

IPBES Chair Robert Watson (UK) said IPBES’ strength lies in the diversity of stakeholders involved. He emphasized that finalizing five assessments at IPBES-6 is unparalleled by any other intergovernmental process and urged flexibility and goodwill for their approval. He emphasized stakeholder participation in the peer-

review process and their importance for assessment quality, and advised stakeholders to make the SPMs “readable and exciting” to inspire children and future generations.

Responding to questions, Larigauderie reported that IPBES is incorporating diverse knowledge systems including indigenous and local knowledge (ILK). Watson noted that discussing the policy relevance of regional assessments to countries would help guide options for future assessments. He also pointed out the need for policies, innovations and behavioral changes that can achieve multiple goals and targets, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Agreement.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH AND STAKEHOLDER

ENGAGEMENT: Robert Spaul, IPBES Secretariat, discussed the implementation of the stakeholder engagement policy, and presented TRACK, a web-based tool to track assessment impact. On convergence between communications and stakeholder engagement efforts, he suggested a unified strategy including combined reporting.

Günter Mitlacher, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), highlighted a partnership with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to scale up biodiversity communications to achieve Aichi Target 1 (communication, education and public awareness). Stefan Hotes, Ecological Society of Germany, Austria and Switzerland (GfÖ), noted the Society’s work on capacity building and awareness raising in German-speaking Europe, and on engaging scientists in the assessment process. Tui Shortland, Te Kopu Pacific Indigenous and Local Knowledge Centre of Distinction, New Zealand, outlined ILK reports since IPBES-5, noting their contribution to improve assessment uptake.

Jan Henning Sommer, University of Bonn, described how the West African Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (WABES) center supports the implementation of the IPBES Work Programme in the region through a science-policy masters’ programme and regional workshops. Kristina Raab, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, presented the Network-Forum for Biodiversity Research, which improves knowledge exchange and biodiversity awareness. She also highlighted the ‘Internas’ Project, an experimental initiative to develop a process to bridge scientific assessments with policy-making processes.

Participants raised issues concerning, *inter alia*, access to scientific information in other languages; engaging the business community; the importance of engaging younger generations in biodiversity matters; and the need for a stronger link between the biodiversity and agriculture sectors.

INCLUSIVE KNOWLEDGE BUILDING: ILK PARTICIPATORY MECHANISM IN IPBES ASSESSMENTS:

Thomas Koetz, IPBES Secretariat, presented the phases used in the participatory mechanism to incorporate ILK in assessments. He reported that assessment scoping began with the collaborative definition of problems and goals, followed by bridging a wide array of evidence and data for inclusion. He cited engagement with IPLCs in reviews, and the sharing of knowledge and insights gained through assessments.

Brigitte Baptiste, Humboldt Institute, said ILK groups should encourage governments to nominate persons with experience in ILK inclusion and integrate ILK experts in their delegations. She said IPBES needs to explore what knowledge is required from local communities.

Joji Cariño, Forests Peoples Program, said indigenous peoples outside the process see the opportunity to include ILK in the assessments and IPBES at large, as an open door, noting, however, that “entry past the threshold” is constrained by procedural and structural barriers.

Alba Alicia Rosero Alpala, Organización Indígena para la Investigación Tierra y Vida, Colombia, noted that involvement of IPLCs should consider the diversity of groups and knowledge systems.

Zsolt Molnár, Centre for Ecological Research, Hungary, reported that the ILK liaison group supported incorporating ILK information, including case studies written by ILK experts. Peter Bates, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), reported on the use of grey literature, videos, and other non-academic contributions from IPLCs.

Participants stressed the need to prioritize the characterization of local communities; noted that full participation of IPLCs is hampered by English language requirements and the use of the internet for communication; and called for innovative ways to engage IPLCs.

ASSESSMENTS UNDER REVIEW AT IPBES-6: In the afternoon, participants received information on the thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration, and the regional and sub-regional assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The Secretariat informed on the process and structure of the assessments and stressed the role of stakeholders in their dissemination after the approval of the SPMs and the acceptance of the chapters expected at IPBES-6.

The Co-chairs then shared some initial reactions on the respective assessments. The Co-chair of the thematic assessment highlighted different perceptions on land degradation and efforts made to involve different scientists. The Co-chairs of the regional assessment echoed this and described additional challenges, such as ensuring policy relevance, including at the sub-regional level. They explained cultural, economic, social and biological diversity posed challenges because findings had to be interpreted to inform how trends would affect the quality of life in a diversity of livelihoods.

In the ensuing discussion, regarding stakeholders’ engagement in the assessments, the Co-chairs prioritized strategic partnerships to support communication by scientists and focus on core ideas including positive messages. Regarding ways to catalyze generation of new knowledge and identify knowledge gaps, the Co-chairs referred to methodological difficulties and lack of necessary expertise in certain fields, and access to information as an additional hurdle. On the criteria for selecting the type of information, the Co-chairs stressed the need for quality assurance and to incorporate both local and indigenous knowledge.

BUILDING THE IPBES STAKEHOLDER’S COMMUNITY

AND ITS CAPACITY: Rob Hendriks, IPBES Capacity-building Task Force, noted that the IPBES Capacity-building Forum was instrumental in developing the capacity-building rolling plan and its principles. Ingunn Storrø, Head of the Technical Support Unit for Capacity Building, IPBES, underlined the desire to engage and expand collaboration with partners. IPBES Scenarios and Models Expert Carolyn Lundquist noted that tools originally developed to be used for assessments related to climate change need to evolve to better address biological diversity and ecosystems and consider stakeholder input. Adriana Flores, Contributing Author, Mexico, underscored the need for more information on “what happens on the ground” and called for international pressure to address human right’s violations.

Katja Heubach, Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), described how regional assessments can be used to “radiate” knowledge at the national and sub-regional levels. Alvaro Fernandez-Llamazares, IPBES Fellow, highlighted the IPBES Fellowship Programme, noting it builds institutional memory and promotes intergenerational inclusion.

In the ensuing discussion, regarding prioritization of capacity-building requests, Storrø described a process from description of capacity needs towards prioritization by the Task Force. Participants also addressed capacity-building programmes targeting youth, as well as activities at the national level.

Jessika Carvajal Gonzales, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Colombia, concluded the session, underscoring that, given limited resources and capacities within governments, “we need to work together, see the big picture and attain our common purpose.”

IN THE CORRIDORS

In his opening remarks, IPBES Chair Bob Watson challenged IPBES stakeholders and delegates to not only make history by finalizing five assessments and summaries for policy makers at a single plenary meeting, but to do so on time and without pushing evening negotiations beyond 10pm.

His announcement led to speculations in the narrow corridors and on the sunny terraces of the Medellín Intercontinental Hotel regarding the potential for success against the odds: will IPBES-6 succeed in smoothly negotiating the key messages for policy makers of four regional assessments and the assessment on land degradation? Or will discussions stumble over debates on linkages between regional assessments and cross-cutting issues, such as diverging views over equity regarding the use of nature’s contributions to people and the responsibility to maintain these contributions for future generations?

According to most, the assessment on pollinators adopted at IPBES-4 set the bench mark for other assessments, with some stakeholders worrying that the regional assessments may have less policy-relevance due to their scope.

Stakeholder Day participants expressed mixed satisfaction regarding the recognition of indigenous knowledge in IPBES assessments. While some lauded ILK inclusion mechanisms, others said too few efforts have been made to address barriers to full participation, an issue that was particularly sensitive among those who feel marginalized by the use of the English language as the key mode of communicating.

At the end of the day, stakeholders took home a clearer message on their role in the uptake and implementation of the assessments, including interpretation for diverse audiences like children and youth. Their ability to do so, however, depends on the week’s greatest task – to negotiate and adopt the SPMs and launch them into the public domain.