

IPBES-6 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 19 MARCH 2018

IPBES-6 delegates continued discussing the key findings of the four regional assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services in contact groups, throughout the day and in the evening. While each group focused on the specific messages of its respective assessment, several cross-cutting concerns emerged during the day; most prominently the use of the concept of ‘nature’s contributions to people,’ which may require further discussion in an informal group with representatives of all regions.

Highlights of the day included the following:

- The contact group on the Europe and Central Asia assessment debated on information consistency and how to ensure that messages are irrefutable and policy-relevant.
- The contact group on the Americas assessment discussed at length definitions of terms and concepts, and how to reflect them in the summary for policy makers (SPM).
- The contact group on the Africa assessment held extended discussions on drivers of biodiversity loss.
- The contact group on the Asia-Pacific assessment progressed in the first reading of the draft SPM and began tackling outstanding issues.

CONTACT GROUPS

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL

ASSESSMENT: Contact group Co-Chair Ivar Andreas Baste (Norway) invited participants to provide their comments paragraph-by-paragraph rather than line-by-line. On the key messages and background, participants requested that the SPM set the scene on nature’s contributions to people as it relates to ecosystem services and other values of nature. They also emphasized the need to clarify and ensure adequate evidence for other concepts, including the use of ‘biocapacity’ and ‘ecological footprint.’ The group also raised the need for simplicity in infographics.

In the afternoon, participants asked for crosschecking the SPM structure with other assessments. They emphasized the need to ensure messages are backed by irrefutable evidence. On biodiversity trends and attribution to direct drivers, they considered referencing the European Union’s Habitat Directive regarding information on species decline and habitat loss. They also elaborated on the list of direct drivers on terrestrial species and habitats.

Discussion on drivers scenarios continued in the evening.

AMERICAS REGIONAL ASSESSMENT: Delegates continued to address nature’s contributions to people and quality of life. The group stressed the need for consistent definitions and terms across the board for all the assessments. Participants addressed: intensification of agriculture and negative consequences linked with relevant unsustainable practices; whether individual countries should be highlighted regarding their performance on different environmental indicators; and ways to deal with underlying uncertainty in the different trends.

They further debated: the homogenization of units of analysis across the SPM; whether there is a uniform increase of crop production in the region or whether it is differentiated by area; reasons for potential decline of fish stocks; Indigenous Peoples’ and Local Communities’ (IPLCs) contributions to local food production and livelihoods; including additional regional specificity in different parts of the text; causes for a decline in timber and fibre production, and differentiation between hardwood and softwood; water security issues in both arid and non-arid areas; and the relationship between biofuel production and commodity prices.

During the afternoon session, Co-Chair Watson reminded delegates to “pick up the pace” to ensure timely approval of the SPM. Participants then focused on biodiversity and health, discussing, *inter alia*: relevant terminology; the commercial development of medicinal products; ways to refer to international agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Protocols; ways to differentiate between “non-material” and “regulating” contributions in the context of nature’s contributions to people; and whether to utilize some indication of confidence on estimates of economic values of ecosystem services. They further addressed: the definition of “cultural continuity;” and the inclusion of an introductory, descriptive paragraph on the region, prior to the key messages of the SPM.

In the evening, participants deliberated on trends in biodiversity affecting quality of life.

AFRICA REGIONAL ASSESSMENT: In the morning, the group discussed and made changes to the key messages contained in the SPM. Assessment Co-Chair Jo Mulongoy noted that, in some cases, the key messages were not linked to specific background information, explaining that, where the Co-Chairs or the group find it necessary, the background information will be more clearly referenced.

Participants discussed whether to include a general statement on the context regarding published studies on nature's contributions to people on the continent. They also considered whether to elaborate on ecosystem valuations and trade-offs among biodiversity and ecosystem services, and whether to include definitive, compelling messages specifically targeting African policymakers.

The group further considered the need for additional information on the value of biodiversity to the health sector and noted that this could be an issue cutting across all the regional assessments.

During the afternoon and evening sessions, they further discussed challenges to biodiversity, such as threats to marine and coastal biodiversity, and the attendant impacts on human wellbeing. Delegates discussed the impacts on biodiversity of over-harvesting, pollution, poaching and illegal wildlife trade, invasive alien species, as well as wildlife crime and armed conflict. On drivers of loss, participants considered including infographics showing long-range extinction trends, and discussed the need for concrete solutions to the population growth pressures on biodiversity. The group also discussed the impact of climate change and land-use change on biodiversity.

A friends of the Co-Chairs group, working with the Assessment Co-Chairs, was tasked to clarify some of the more contentious sections of the SPM.

ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL ASSESSMENT: The contact group continued textual negotiations on the background sections of the SPM. Proceeding in a "constructive and respectful manner," experts and authors reacted to comments, including referencing evidence and clarifying terminologies such as ecosystem classifications. Co-Chairs were able to resolve several outstanding issues and established small groups to tackle issues where diverging views persisted. An NGO proposal, supported by an IPBES member, also helped improve the text. Urging for more efficient time use, one delegate called for focusing on issues that policy makers would find difficult to understand. Another suggested looking at examples relevant in the whole region and cautioned against focusing on other specific issues.

During the afternoon and evening sessions, delegates continued to impress the Co-Chairs with their "excellent review," detecting typos and improving language and the text by ensuring consistency with the use of terms across processes, such as the CBD, and making it "easier" for policy makers. Detailed discussions clarified, *inter alia*, nuances between "green infrastructure" and "blue-green infrastructure" considering the complementarities with waterways and wetland ecosystems; and that ecosystem-based mitigation and adaption measures have worked in practice although their outcomes regarding climate, biodiversity, and ecosystem services may not yet be very widely reported.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates entered the second day of IPBES-6 conscious of how little time they had to address the regional assessments. The optimism from the previous day on the adequacy of 16-17 hours allocated to regional assessment contact groups was beginning to wane as some of the assessment Co-Chairs began pressing delegates to accelerate progress, some subtly and others more vigorously.

Discussions of the summaries for policy makers proved predictably tedious as delegates carefully analyzed the policy interpretations of definitions and inferences. The quality and sources of evidence to support policy-relevant messages was discussed in several groups. Many acknowledged the challenges of providing

strong evidence for all messages. One delegate, commenting on this, said: "The question at this point is not whether the statements are true or false, but rather, to what degree they are true." Others were heard pointing out that "the key messages are mostly clear, but where we still have different thoughts around certain concepts, we can already predict that policy makers will have difficulties in understanding as well."

'Nature's contributions to people' was the concept most prominent in discussions in contact groups and in the corridors. Introduced by the scientists of the IPBES' Multilateral Expert Panel and adopted at IPBES-5 to replace the well-established, but sometimes controversial, concept of 'ecosystem services,' the approach aims to better reflect the complex relationships between humans and nature, and the diversity of perspectives on those relationships. For example, the concept recognizes that most contributions are co-produced by nature and people and are perceived through different cultural lenses. In a nutshell, the approach seeks to increase the legitimacy and usability of IPBES assessments, by enabling the effective incorporation of knowledge from many disciplines, contexts and cultural backgrounds.

The use of this term and other new concepts coined by IPBES or from contemporary studies sparked a general concern about the "hasty introduction" of new terminology, which could confuse policy makers or even result in a setback. "It took many years to establish the 'citizenship' of the ecosystem services concept in our country, which is now being used by policy makers," one delegate cautioned. Another participant suggested that there is a need to embrace new concepts and information if science is to be policy-relevant, noting however, that such new concepts and information must be factually well established. Others pointed out that nature's contributions to people allows considering both positive and negative contributions, which should facilitate the identification and consideration of trade-offs. This was again countered by experts in using ecosystem services who pointed out that nothing prevents the consideration of "dis-services" in the established approach.

Regardless of the different views expressed, participants were quick to point out that these exchanges are both useful and constructive. Many delegates therefore expressed their support when rumors emerged in the afternoon that plenary could consider establishing a friends of the Chair group to discuss this cross-cutting issue further. One insider stated: "We are at the beginning of a process that will hopefully enable us to assess biodiversity and ecosystems, and their importance to us, more comprehensively. Therefore, all comments are welcome and necessary."

Whether seen as resulting from contributions of nature or ecosystem services, food was also a common issue in many contact groups; its production for example, or the implications of shifting dietary habits for crop diversity loss. On Monday, some delegates had to choose between nourishing themselves during lunch and dinner breaks, and providing food for thought to advance discussions in informal drafting groups. Those who had the opportunity to eat during the day continued engaging in "foody" discussions on sociological and health values of shared meals, including specific delicacies, such as Injera, a teff-based Ethiopian flat bread commonly consumed communally with diverse sauces. Those who involuntarily fasted during the day because of the rapid sequence of contact and informal groups, were more focused on finding the time to replenish their energy reserves and were, understandably, less interested in "sharing" their meal.