

IPBES-6 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 22 MARCH 2018

On Thursday, IPBES-6 delegates continued their discussion of the key findings of the assessment on land degradation and restoration and agreed on how to proceed with three pending assessments of the first work programme. In the evening, plenary convened to finalize the regional assessments.

Highlights of the day included the following:

- Plenary approved the summaries for policy makers (SPMs) of the four regional and subregional assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia, and accepted the chapters of the assessment reports.
- On pending assessments, delegates agreed to initiate work on the thematic assessment on the sustainable use of wild species and the methodological assessment on diverse conceptualizations of multiple values of nature in 2018.
- Work on the thematic assessment on invasive alien species will be initiated at IPBES-7 in 2019.
- Regarding future work, delegates agreed to develop a draft strategic framework up to 2030 and shared views on elements of a rolling work programme.

CONTACT GROUPS

LAND DEGRADATION AND RESTORATION: The group engaged in a first reading of the key messages in the SPM. Delegates exchanged views on land degradation's impacts and contribution to a sixth mass species extinction, with some suggesting the world might be heading towards such an extinction and others stressing that the extinction is already underway.

Views also diverged on a proposal to add text on the main drivers of biodiversity loss to underline their importance. Delegates suggested drivers such as: unsustainable agriculture and forestry; infrastructure; mining and extraction; urban encroachment; and climate change. Many preferred not to include specific references to agriculture, including to crop, meat and dairy production.

Participants emphasized the need to refine the message on economic benefits of halting land degradation and investing in restoration and to explain the economic rationale for investing in curbing land degradation including non-monetary actions.

The group also refined a list of positive contributions of timely action taken to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation, including: increasing food and water security; contributing to the adaptation and mitigation of climate change; and, in concert with other socioeconomic stresses, reducing the chance of conflict and migration.

Views also differed on recognizing global consumption patterns as the dominant factor driving land degradation, and the need for a systemic approach to deal with consumption and production patterns. Some preferred a clear differentiation between developed and developing countries' leadership roles and responsibilities. Others preferred a "de-politicized" reference to "high consumption lifestyles" without development status attributions.

They also discussed how to refer to impacts of consumer choices on land degradation, noted that land degradation is a major contributor to climate change, and that climate change can also exacerbate the impacts of land degradation.

The group worked into the night to complete the deliberations on key messages.

BUDGET AND PENDING ASSESSMENTS: This group was co-chaired by Spencer Thomas (Grenada) and Rashad Allahverdiyev (Iran). The Secretariat introduced the document on pending assessments (IPBES/6/8) including thematic assessments on the sustainable use of wild species, and invasive alien species; and the methodological assessment on the diverse conceptualization of multiple values of nature and its benefits (the assessment on values).

Co-Chair Thomas explained that the budget group had: addressed the need to increase the number of lead authors per assessment; decided to cap the number at eight; and agreed on the costing of a maximum of two assessments in 2018 for a total of US\$375,000. He called for comments on the scope and sequencing of the assessments, noting the proposal by the Bureau and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) to initiate two assessments in 2018 and one in 2019.

Many prioritized initiating the assessment on values and the sustainable use of wild species in 2018, and the invasive alien species assessment in 2019. Some prioritized initiating the assessment on values in 2018, expressing flexibility on when to initiate the thematic assessments. A few opined that the assessment on invasive alien species may offer higher political visibility, noting that the assessment on sustainable use should follow a stepwise approach.

Some delegations suggested that the Platform convene a workshop with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) to discuss ongoing work on sustainable use of wild species to inform a future IPBES assessment on the issue.

Participants further stressed the need to consider: lessons learned and ensure coherence between completed assessments and the pending ones; and that the sustainable use and invasive alien species experts had been solicited, nominated, and selected in the IPBES regional teams in 2015.

Co-Chair Thomas summarized the discussion, noting: agreement not to modify the scope of the assessments; agreement on the budgetary dimensions of the assessments; and a general preference to initiate the assessment on values and the assessment on sustainable use in 2018, followed by the one on invasive alien species in 2019. Delegates agreed and formed a small informal group to suggest additional language on collaboration with other international organizations.

REVIEW OF THE PLATFORM AND DEVELOPMENT OF A SECOND WORKPROGRAMME: This contact group, co-chaired by Robert Watson (UK) and Alfred Oteng-Yeboah (Ghana), considered the draft decision related to the second work programme (IPBES/6/11).

Delegates discussed the nature and periodicity of future work programmes, and decided to develop a strategic framework until 2030 and a rolling work programme, rather than a time-bound one. They also considered: whether to explicitly refer to other relevant environmental agreements; encouraging governments and others to provide comments on the draft strategic framework and future elements of the draft work programme; and including both short-term priorities and long-term strategic needs in the formal call for requests, inputs, and suggestions.

Participants also provided comments on the initial draft elements for a second work programme, highlighting the importance of, *inter alia*: subregional assessments on ecosystem types of high importance for human well-being; one or more assessments on the nexus between biodiversity and other global challenges; limiting the number of assessments launched and undertaken simultaneously; assessment report cycles, such as those of the IPCC reports; and aligning the IPBES processes with other relevant international processes, emphasizing intersectoral collaboration.

They further addressed: actively involving youth in the process; emphasizing short-term assessments with brief, policy-oriented documents; rethinking the frequency of IPBES plenary meetings, as well as that of taking up regional and global assessments; addressing the conceptual framework of ‘good quality of life,’ new knowledge generation; balancing the four IPBES functions; and the importance of taking into account suggestions derived from the internal and external review processes.

PLENARY

Plenary convened in the evening to approve the SPMs of the four regional and subregional assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Chair Watson reported that the Friends of the Chair on cross-cutting issues had agreed for each of the regional assessments, to use the terms “ecological footprint,” and “biocapacity,” and had also agreed to use the Appendix 1 (degree of confidence) drawn from the Pollinators Assessment. (On Appendix 2, related to nature’s contributions to people, delegates agreed to note that “this appendix describes the evolving concept of nature’s contributions to people and its relevance to this IPBES regional assessment.” Delegates also agreed to delete a figure related to 18 categories of nature’s contributions to people. Chair Watson regretted that it was impossible to complete the translation of all regional assessments, noting they will be available on Friday.

The Co-Chairs of the regional assessment contact groups submitted the revised SPMs of the regional assessments for approval and the chapters of the assessment reports for acceptance.

Members approved the SPM and accepted the chapters of the Asia-Pacific regional assessment (IPBES/6/L.3 and INF/5) without amendments.

On the assessment for Europe and Central Asia, the EU drew attention to a missing reference to the EU Habitats Directive. Delegates approved the SPM (IPBES/6/L.3) and accepted the assessment chapters (IPBES/6/INF/6) with this inclusion.

Regarding the Americas assessment, DENMARK reiterated its request to reflect that Greenland had not been properly assessed and is underrepresented in the assessment. The US stressed that this is true for the whole of the Arctic region, noting that Greenland should not be singled out. COLOMBIA cautioned against setting a precedent for tabling new text at such a late stage. Chair Watson suggested, and delegates agreed, to include a preface, acknowledging that the Arctic region in general, and Greenland in particular, were underrepresented in the assessment. With this understanding, the SPM (IPBES/6/L.5) was approved and the assessment chapters (IPBES/6/INF/4) accepted.

On the African regional assessment, MOROCCO noted gaps and inconsistencies in the regional report, which had not been reflected and said that his country could only “take note of” the SPM and the chapters. Chair Watson stated that this would be reflected in the meeting report. Delegates then approved the SPM (IPBES/6/L.4) and accepted the chapters of the assessment (IPBES/6/INF/3).

In a general statement, FRANCE reminded delegates that ‘nature’s contributions to people’ should be used in general statements and ‘ecosystem services’ for specific issues.

Co-Chair Watson encouraged the land degradation assessment contact group and others to achieve equally successful outcomes, saying their adoption in plenary would be the “icing on the cake.”

IN THE CORRIDORS

On Thursday, IPBES-6 delegates entered the land degradation assessment contact group with differing approaches on the tone to be set by the key messages. Some pushed for more positive messaging, while others asked for realism. “We should delete long statements that are too fatalistic,” one delegate suggested, with another cautioning that “specifying the issues with negative impacts won’t be helpful! It will only increase already confrontational debates between sectors.”

Yet others reflected that the evidence provided in the assessments adequately supports the level of realism required to motivate policymakers into action. In a tongue-in-cheek statement, one said, “I sure hope the optimistic and simplified messages do not lead to the now infamous statement that ‘everything is just great!’”

Meanwhile, delegates in the basement, in a sincere spirit of valuing and progressing IPBES’ work and objectives, agreed to the sequencing of the pending assessments, an issue that had led to arduous debates at previous sessions of the Plenary. The group swiftly agreed to initiate the thematic assessment on sustainable use of wild species and the methodological assessment regarding the diverse conceptualization of multiple values in 2018, pushing the invasive alien species assessment to the year after. This early “win” was applauded by many in the contact group. “Understanding various world views on biodiversity and ecosystem services will really underpin thematic assessments in the future,” opined one seasoned observer. “This has been a long time coming,” noted another delegate, “and its value for other biodiversity-related agreements will be huge.”

Expecting more wins, delegates approached the much-anticipated ‘moment of truth’ for the regional assessments, hoping to adopt all four assessments in a winning streak. One by one, the adoptions were gavelled amidst applause from plenary. A visibly elated Chair Watson, declared this to be his best birthday present, and encouraged the land degradation assessment to deliver what he referred to as the “icing on the cake.”