

IPBES-7 Highlights: Monday, 29 April 2019

The seventh session of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-7) opened on Monday in Paris, France, with a youth dance performance. After listening to opening statements and addressing organizational matters, delegates initiated negotiations on the summary for policy makers (SPM) of the Global Assessment and other agenda items.

Highlights of the day included:

- A youth dance performance titled “Steps for a Change” that interpreted biodiversity loss and linkages with climate change, and conveyed delegates with a sense of urgency;
- The report on prioritization of the second work programme, which proposes that IPBES focus on promoting biodiversity to achieve the 2030 Agenda, understanding the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and determinants of transformative change to achieve the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, and measuring business impact and dependency on biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people; and
- A speech by François de Rugy, French Minister for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition, who warned delegates of the imminent “bio-climatic catastrophe.”

Plenary

Delegates observed a youth dance performance, titled “Steps for a Change,” choreographed to nature videography.

IPBES Chair Robert Watson opened the session, noting that the Global Assessment is the first comprehensive intergovernmental biodiversity assessment since the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in 2005, stressing it provides evidence for informed action by governments, private sector, and civil society. He underlined that failure to immediately address biodiversity loss will undermine efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and urged delegates to jointly address climate change and biodiversity loss.

Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General, stressed international alliances between science and youth, disseminating messages more broadly to civil society, and addressing challenges of economic development. She underlined UNESCO’s support for IPBES and said that after this Plenary no one will be able to say “I didn’t know” about global biodiversity loss.

IPBES Executive Secretary Anne Larigauderie said the Global Assessment will not only highlight the importance of biodiversity conservation for attaining the SDGs, but also address the intangible contribution of biodiversity to our identity and cultural heritage. She noted the Assessment will provide the scientific basis for making biodiversity “the great rallying cause, along with climate change.”

Speaking on behalf of Jean-Yves Le Drian, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Laurent Stéfani, Permanent Delegate of France to UNESCO, recalled that, in 2005, then President Jacques Chirac called for creating an intergovernmental expert platform on biodiversity. He emphasized France’s commitment to mobilize collective support for the development of an ambitious post-2020 biodiversity framework.

Regional Statements: Ghana, for AFRICA, underscored capacity building, transparency regarding the nomination and selection of experts, and financial resources for fulfilling all four functions of the Platform.

Bhutan, for ASIA AND PACIFIC, called for: transformational, multi-sectoral policies to address the drivers of biodiversity loss; transregional policy making; a flexible, demand-driven second work programme; and an ambitious fundraising strategy.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, for EASTERN EUROPE, called for better communication with the scientific community, including greater participation of natural and social scientists from the region.

Romania, for the EU, called for: stepping up work on capacity building and knowledge generation; further reinforcing integration between IPBES functions; an ambitious but realistic second work programme; and strengthening collaboration with relevant bodies.

Colombia, for GRULAC, said the second work programme should align with the 2030 Agenda and the post-2020 biodiversity framework. She also recognized the link to climate change. The US recommended postponing adopting the work programme to align it with the process for developing the post-2020 framework.

The Convention on International Trade in endangered Species (CITES), on behalf of eight biodiversity-related Conventions, emphasized the value of IPBES deliverables for their work and called for special attention to inputs from other processes when developing the second work programme.

The Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IIFBES) proposed that the second work programme: uphold UN best practices regarding the inclusion of seven self-selected representatives from indigenous peoples organizations; and ensure the fair and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the early scoping phases of upcoming assessments.

The Open-Ended Network of IPBES Stakeholders (ONet) asked to immediately initiate work on the thematic assessment on the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and the determinants of transformative change, and to engage local and regional governments in implementing the second work programme.

Reports: Executive Secretary Larigauderie presented her report on the implementation of the first work programme (IPBES/7/2 and IPBES/7/INF/2,5,11, and 14-16), highlighting work on capacity-building activities, integration of indigenous

and local knowledge (ILK), indicators and data, achievements regarding scenarios and modeling, and policy support tools and methodologies. Robert Spaul, IPBES Head of Communications, reported on media interactions and the impact tracking database, and described the three-phase approach for launching the Global Assessment.

Review of the Platform: Maria Rosales Benites and Peter Bridgewater, Co-Chairs of the Review Panel, presented the Review's findings (IPBES/7/5, IPBES/7/INF/18-20). Bridgewater stressed as key messages that IPBES should: define a vision and mission; adopt an adaptive strategy; strengthen policy aspects of its work; maintain independence; develop a more collaborative approach to stakeholders; and achieve financial sustainability. Watson, on behalf of the Bureau, stressed policy relevance. Larigauderie drew attention to focusing on long-term policy influence to strengthen impact.

Discussions will continue in a Working Group on Tuesday.

Second Work Programme: Larigauderie described the process for developing and prioritizing the draft work programme (IPBES/7/6 and 7/Add.1). Luthando Dziba, Co-Chair of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP), outlined three priority topics: promoting biodiversity to achieve the 2030 Agenda; understanding the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and determinants of transformative change to achieve the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity; and measuring business impact and dependency on biodiversity and nature's contributions to people.

Discussions will continue in a Working Group on Wednesday.

Financial and Budgetary Arrangements: Larigauderie introduced the document on the budget (IPBES/7/4), highlighting a 25% increase in contributions for 2018 compared to 2017, with four new countries contributing.

Discussions will continue in a contact group.

Future Sessions of the IPBES Plenary: Chair Watson introduced document IPBES/7/7, inviting offers to host the next two IPBES Plenary sessions. The Secretariat noted that if no offer is received by the end of IPBES-7, the next session will be held in Bonn, Germany, with tentative dates 6-10 September 2020.

Institutional Arrangements: Watson introduced document IPBES/7/INF/12 on the collaborative partnership between IPBES and FAO, UNDP, UNEP, and UNESCO. Speaking for the partnership, Dan Leskien, FAO, reported on direct and indirect support provided, underscoring that coordination and collaboration should be further improved. He cited the External Review's finding that "the potential value of the four UN organizations is significantly under-utilized or even poorly understood, by all parties."

Welcoming Speech: In the evening, François de Rugy, French Minister for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition, welcomed delegates to Paris. He noted that climate change has come to the forefront of the international agenda, which would have been unimaginable a few decades ago and proves that global challenges can be turned into top priorities. He emphasized that a "more silent crisis" is the gradual but accelerating species extinction, which, in combination with climate change, produces a worldwide "bio-climatic crisis." Recalling that IPBES was conceived in France, he stressed the need to prepare "for the crucial rendez-vous" with biodiversity that will take place in 2020 when the CBD COP will decide on the post-2020 biodiversity framework. He outlined national efforts to address biodiversity loss, including the French inter-ministerial Biodiversity Plan, emphasizing his nation's broader political vision for an ecological transition. He underscored the need to "have all stakeholders on board," and

stressed that "our ambitions must rise to the challenges," noting that "we can still win, but alas, also lose if we do not act. The choice is ours."

Working Group on the Global Assessment

Delegates convened in the afternoon to discuss the draft SPM.

After an introduction by the Secretariat on the process for external review of the Assessment, the Assessment Co-Chairs highlighted the co-design of the review process, efforts to include ILK, and support for synchronizing policy and practices at all levels.

Assessment Co-Chair Sandra Díaz presented the major messages of the SPM. Noting that none of the Aichi targets touch on indirect drivers of biodiversity loss and that most SDG targets show negative trends, she stated that "deep interdependence with nature may appear obvious, but it seems to be ignored." She also highlighted impacts of climate change as well as impacts of mitigation action on biodiversity. She closed by noting that transformative change is compatible with both the 2030 Agenda and the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, and that the scale of the challenge requires action at the international level.

Chair Watson asked delegates to provide general comments on the draft SPM. In a first round of comments, delegates *inter alia* highlighted the need to: find a greater balance between referring to 'nature's contributions to people' and 'ecosystem services;' consider the sustainable use of biodiversity, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits in the context of transformative change, noting transformative change should provide for a just transition to a sustainable world; highlight the main figures on biodiversity trends that decision makers and the media should remember; include a passage on scenarios, as is the case in the chapters and in SPMs of IPCC reports; and provide more information on direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss.

In the Corridors

IPBES-7 delegates were moved and deeply impressed by the youth dance performance "Steps for a Change" that not only made references to biodiversity loss, but also pointed to interlinkages with climate change, and conveyed delegates with a sense of urgency. In the corridors, many echoed statements made during the opening ceremony, expressing confidence that the Global Assessment will clearly establish the urgency to act against biodiversity loss, with one participant emphasizing that "ignorance can no longer serve as an excuse for inaction."

Most delegates expected long, but cordial negotiations on the Global Assessment with one explaining that "it is not that we disagree on the findings, there is just so much material in the assessment that we need time to get it right." A brief shockwave went through plenary when the delegate of Turkey stated that his country was unable to accept the draft summary for policymakers as basis for discussion. IPBES Chair Watson was glad to resolve the situation with laughter, explaining that Turkey was referring to an erroneous map in the draft SPM on which Turkey, among other countries, seemed to have disappeared. As the sudden tension in the room diffused, he noted that no one had intended to suggest that "entire countries had gone extinct."

As delegates headed to the evening reception, most were pondering the more serious words articulated by French Minister François de Rugy, with one noting that, "yes, I believe we can still win the fight against biodiversity loss, but, since I have seen the findings of the Global Assessment, I know we are running out of time."