

IPBES-7 Highlights: Thursday, 2 May 2019

On Thursday, delegates continued negotiating throughout the day and night on the draft summary for policy makers (SPM) of the Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and finalizing the Platform's future work programme.

Highlights from the discussions on the Global Assessment included:

- References to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs); and
- Key messages on simultaneously achieving nature conservation and other social objectives, including food security, climate change mitigation, sustainable cities, and sustainable economic growth.

Highlights from the discussion on the second work programme included:

- The role of national focal points in capacity building;
- Tools and instruments for policy support; and
- Improving the effectiveness of the Platform's assessments and functions.

Working Group on the Global Assessment

Delegates continued negotiating key messages in the draft SPM focusing on messages on conserving nature while simultaneously achieving other societal goals.

On recognizing the rights of IPLCs as a way to enhance nature conservation and restoration, delegates debated at length how to reflect that indigenous peoples have different rights than local communities and that such rights are recognized in international law but must be implemented through national law in most countries. The group made different attempts to insert the expressions "in accordance with national law" and "international obligations," without reaching agreement.

A similar impasse emerged over a reference to indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, which, according to some delegations, does not apply in the same way to local communities.

On simultaneously achieving food security and nature conservation, members debated extensively over references to specific agricultural production systems, agricultural practices that support this goal, and whether to broaden the scope to include all of nature's contributions to people (NCPs). Experts clarified that assessing all NCPs in the context of food security is too complex to address in one key message and that evidence varies across production systems and practices. Delegates eventually agreed not to reference specific systems and practices.

The working group addressed ways to sustain and conserve fisheries and marine species, deliberating whether to list specific actions or include overarching activities only. They agreed to refer to ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management, effective quotas, marine protected areas, reducing run-off pollution

into oceans, marine spatial planning, identification of key marine biodiversity areas, and close work with producers and consumers. They further agreed on examples that could enhance relevant capacity.

A lengthy discussion took place on land-based activities that have shown to contribute to climate change mitigation. Delegates exchanged opinions on: the merits and downsides of afforestation; whether to include ecological reforestation and whether reforestation with "indigenous" or "native" species is always possible; and reference to large-scale deployment of bioenergy plantations and afforestation of non-forest ecosystems, in line with the last report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and their effects on biodiversity.

In the afternoon session, the working group discussed the probability of negative impacts on biodiversity and threats to food and water security of intensive bioenergy plantations including monocultures replacing natural forests and subsistence farmlands. Participants also addressed urban areas focusing on: increased use of green infrastructure and other ecosystem-based approaches to advance sustainable urban development while reinforcing climate mitigation and adaptation; solutions, including retrofitting green and blue infrastructure, urban agriculture, green spaces, and vegetation cover in existing urban and peri-urban areas; and the potential for complementarity between green infrastructure in urban and surrounding rural areas and large-scale "grey" infrastructure.

Regarding sustainable pathways and global financial and economic systems, lengthy discussions took place on whether to refer to: the need for the economic systems' "evolution," "reform," or "transformation"; inequalities or inequities; "environmental impacts" or "negative externalities"; specific examples regarding the necessary mix of policies and tools; and environmental governance or environmental monitoring and evaluation.

Background Section: Delegates began reviewing the background section containing scientific evidence substantiating the key messages. They approved many paragraphs with minor amendment, including on nature underpinning quality of life, NCP's role for human health, irreplaceability of NCPs, and humans' influence on life.

On distinguishing impacts for various groups of countries, delegates debated changing from categories based on income to categories based on development, in line with IPCC practice.

Regarding coastal ecosystems, delegates agreed to reference how loss and deterioration reduces ability to provide sustainable livelihoods to people in coastal areas. They further agreed to refer to the exact percentage of fish stocks currently classified as overexploited rather than to an estimate.

Participants also discussed the number of vertebrate species driven to extinction since 1500 and debated whether references to specific examples of successful conservation efforts should be included, and if so, which ones.

Regarding the detectability of rapid biological evolution, delegates agreed to reference that the phenomenon has been observed in some species within all major taxonomic groups. They also agreed to reference that climate change favors the evolution of “seasonal earlier reproduction” in many organisms. A lengthy discussion took place regarding fishing as a significant driver of biodiversity loss in the last 50 years in marine ecosystems. Delegates discussed industrial fishing, small-scale fisheries, and the negative effects of illegal, unreported, or unregulated fishing.

Participants further discussed the results of agricultural expansion on intact ecosystems, exchanging views on the pace of expansion that differs from country to country.

Working Group on Future Work

Delegates resumed discussions on the objectives and deliverables of the work programme up to 2030, starting with the objective on capacity building. Many delegations highlighted that the elements currently labeled as “deliverables” are not measurable. Some highlighted that the task forces could be requested to develop specific activities tailored to the priority topics for consideration by IPBES-8. On distinguishing activities from the first and second work programmes, one member noted there should only be reference to “one IPBES work programme.” Delegates agreed to instead refer to “ongoing and future activities of the work programme.”

Supported by several Members, the Open-Ended Network of IPBES Stakeholders (ONet) called for moving reference to convening national focal points from the objective “communicating and engaging” to the objective “building capacity,” noting that this will ensure that the Technical Support Unit responsible for enhancing national capacities will also be in charge of convening events. The Secretariat clarified the original placement enabled focal point meetings to serve several functions beyond capacity building, such as providing feedback on the scoping for assessments.

On the objective to strengthen the knowledge foundation, delegates elaborated on capturing “data sharing” as well as the identification and systemic cataloging of knowledge and data gaps so they can be used for all the Platform’s functions.

Delegates then discussed the objective “supporting policy.” Several asked to specify supporting “policy instruments” in addition to “tools and methodologies.” Discussion ensued as to whether their development should be restricted to instruments and tools reviewed in assessments or be open to instruments from other fields or sectors. One delegation stressed that addressing transformative change will require tools beyond what is available in the assessments.

In the afternoon, Co-Chair Baste called attention to a proposal being discussed in the budget group to postpone IPBES-8 until January 2021, which, if decided, would have implications for the elaboration of the work programme.

Delegates then resumed discussing objectives on policy support focusing on a deliverable on scenarios and models of biodiversity and ecosystem services. They quickly agreed to this text with the addition of “promoting coherence” with the work of the IPCC and other bodies.

Delegates exchanged views on adding a review of the IPBES conceptual framework. Many noted this might be better placed in the decision rather than the work programme and an informal group was invoked to develop a relevant proposal.

On the objective “communicating and engaging,” delegates discussed how to strengthen the engagement of governments and stakeholders, respectively. Regarding which stakeholders to strengthen, delegates added “self-organized stakeholder networks of IPBES,” with a footnote referencing IIFBES and

ONet. IIFBES emphasized the need to consider participatory mechanisms conducive for engaging holders of indigenous and local knowledge (ILK).

On the objective “reviewing effectiveness,” delegates debated whether this was an operational or strategic objective, favoring keeping it as a strategic objective. As such, they agreed that the aim should be to “improve” the Platform’s effectiveness and further outlined that this should include a periodic review of effectiveness of IPBES, review of IPBES’ conceptual framework and functions, and a review that enables communicating lessons learned from outgoing to incoming authors, scientists, and other contributors to the assessments.

On deliverables continuing from the first work programme, delegates emphasized the need for better integration among the Platform’s four functions. The discussion then revolved around prioritized topics for future assessments, with one delegate proposing adding global or regional assessments and another proposing adding an assessment on conservation connectivity. Disagreement ensued on the practicality of adding more assessments and thus filling the agenda for the foreseeable future, creating budgetary concerns, and restricting flexibility to respond to needs arising from the post-2020 biodiversity framework. Others preferred to emphasize the importance of demand-driven assessments. On the way forward, suggestions included: retaining the list of priority assessments, and adding a second list of issues that should be considered at a later stage; and incorporating connectivity as a cross-cutting issue to be considered across assessments.

In the evening, delegates considered the interdependence of timing and budget in the discussions on prioritizing deliverables. They noted that some work needs to be delayed and staggered and asked the Secretariat to take stock of its capacity to take on new work. Some stressed that new assessments would exhaust the pool of available experts while others raised concerns that new topics like transformative change might not be ripe for comprehensive analysis. One delegate underscored that the working group really must find a way forward, saying that if IPBES does not inform the post-2020 process then surely another body will step in to do so.

Debate continued into the night.

In the Corridors

On Thursday, most delegates gave up hope to visit the city of lights during the meeting as both the negotiations on the summary for policy makers (SPM) of the Global Assessment, and the discussion on the Platform’s future work again dragged on into the night. While many lauded the completion of the SPM’s key messages section as an important milestone, some were still pessimistic about finishing the much longer background section. “We’re only on the first page and have already latched on to another seemingly unresolvable issue” noted one delegate pointing to divergences over categorizing countries by income or by development status. “We know these issues too well from the IPCC, it takes time to work them out,” suggested another one who added that “we’ll be fine in the end.” One observer, however, stated “What I am worried about is that all this back and forth is weakening the messages,” as he sprinted back into the room to rejoin the discussions that picked up speed as the evening wore on.

Despite lengthy deliberations on the Platform’s future work, feelings in the other working group were somewhat more optimistic and the debate was “constructive,” according to one delegate. Although a solution to the conundrum of “prioritizing the priorities,” while keeping in mind financial and human resource constraints and accommodating a flexible and adaptive approach to taking on new deliverables remained elusive. Another participant reasoned that prioritizing transformative change is the “way to the future,” pointing out that waiting until 2025 to address this issue “is simply be illogical.”