

IPBES-1 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 3 OCTOBER 2011

The first session of the plenary meeting on the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) opened today in Nairobi, Kenya. In the morning, delegates heard opening statements and began discussions on the meeting's rules of procedure and the adoption of the agenda. In the afternoon, delegates convened to consider: adoption of the agenda; the functions and operating principles of the platform; and functions and structures of bodies that might be established under IPBES.

OPENING SESSION

Opening the first session of the plenary meeting on IPBES, Fatoumata Keita, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), called for delegates to observe a minute of silence for Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP, described IPBES as an effort to bridge the distance between where science "speaks" and policy is enacted. He also noted that the international community increasingly relies on science for policy-making and cooperation in addressing environmental change.

Welcoming delegates to Nairobi, Stephene Kalonzo Musyoka, Vice President, Kenya, said that the continued unsustainable and inequitable use of biodiversity and ecosystem resources highlights the need for effective governance and better science-policy cooperation, and called on delegates to make IPBES fully operational at this meeting.

BRAZIL for the G-77/China emphasized biodiversity as a matter of global concern and, with ARGENTINA, called for creating a strong arm for capacity building within developing countries as emphasized in the Busan outcome. GHANA for the African Group supported operationalizing and establishing IPBES through capacity building and technology development and transfer, particularly in Africa.

POLAND for the EU remarked on the importance of multidisciplinary approaches, inclusiveness and incentives to attract scientists' contributions. She argued that procedural, institutional and administrative arrangements should allow fulfillment of IPBES' role and functions by engaging all countries.

NORWAY stated that IPBES will improve the use of science in policy making. INDONESIA highlighted maintaining scientific independence and cooperation with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

JAPAN called for the platform to focus on enhancing synergy between relevant organizations and, with RUSSIA, ensuring that efforts do not duplicate existing initiatives.

MEXICO called for IPBES to be small with a simple bureaucracy and asked that the full operationalization of IPBES not lose sight of biodiversity considerations. SWITZERLAND urged delegates to reach a common understanding for the

platform to be established and said that IPBES should be embedded in UNEP for its administrative functions. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said the meeting will provide a solid foundation for establishing IPBES.

CHILE suggested that information on scientific needs be brought to the attention of relevant ministries, including those responsible for finance, environment and agriculture. FIJI suggested that the functions of IPBES be established first followed by the institutional structure. Describing the science-policy gap as a critical constraint for biodiversity conservation, SOUTH AFRICA, with the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity, highlighted capacity building for the effective participation of developing countries in the IPBES process. PERU called for quick agreement on the institutional arrangements of IPBES. SOUTH SUDAN requested support in capacity building efforts for environmental conservation.

The Society for Conservation Biology urged that IPBES respond to requests from regional, scientific and civil society organizations (CSOs) and said important principles for success of the IPBES are independence, credibility and legitimacy.

IUCN urged governments to provide the platform with clear operational modalities and a strong programme of work, and suggested that IPBES respond to requests from scientific organizations and CSOs.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reiterated its offer to be one of the co-hosts of IPBES. United Nations University expressed its willingness to support education of young scientists in developing countries. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recommended that IPBES clearly distinguish knowledge generation and assessment.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) suggested that the CBD's Strategic Plan for 2011-2020 provides a useful framework for the IPBES work programme and that IPBES can play an important role in implementing the Strategic Plan. The CBD Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) emphasized that IPBES should be responsive to CBD needs.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) described science-policy interfaces within CITES' processes for consideration for IPBES. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) offered to co-host the platform and highlighted FAO experiences in bridging science and policy. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) stressed the need for development organizations to engage in biodiversity protection.

The International Council for Science (ICSU), on behalf of scientific and civil society organizations, affirmed the interest of these organizations in establishing IPBES as both provider and end user of knowledge, and urged that the output of IPBES

be policy relevant but not policy prescriptive. She said key principles in the design of the platform should be saliency, independence and scientific credibility.

Chair Watson called for the modalities of IPBES to be put in place as a matter of urgency while "getting them correct." He highlighted that governments, the scientific community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) showed willingness to support the process and endorse all four elements of the work programme.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

RULES OF PROCEDURE: Introducing the rules of procedure, Achim Steiner noted that the rules of procedure for the UNEP Governing Council (UNEP GC) will apply to IPBES with one amendment concerning the participation of countries. The US objected, suggesting that the plenary can determine appropriate modifications to these rules as required and should not be limited by previous decisions of the UNEP GC. Supported by the EU, G-77/China, MEXICO and BOLIVIA, the US said that decisions should be taken only on the basis of consensus. The EU suggested building on procedures of previous IPBES meetings, and Brazil highlighted the need to adopt rules of procedures for all upcoming IPBES plenary meetings.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Delegates elected Robert Watson (UK) as chair. Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias (Brazil), Ali Mohamed (Kenya), and Senka Barudanovich (Bosnia and Herzegovina) were elected as vice-chairs.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA: Neville Ash, UNEP Secretariat, presented an overview of the steps taken to reach the first session of the plenary meeting on an IPBES. He recalled wide-ranging consultations undertaken by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and the International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB), leading to the request for UNEP to convene a meeting to discuss methods to strengthen science-policy interfaces. He also noted the UNEP GC decision to convene the plenary meeting.

The US stressed that the nature of the platform's work needs to be considered before addressing legal issues relating to the establishment and operationalization of IPBES and said that decisions on such issues will depend on a clearer articulation of the work programme of the platform. He requested that the legal advice from the UN Office of Legal Affairs be made available.

ARGENTINA, with BRAZIL, the EU, KENYA, MEXICO, CHILE and BARBADOS, suggested postponing consideration of legal issues until after discussions on the functions, structure and procedures of the platform. On the understanding that some decisions taken may depend on decisions that will be adopted at a later stage, the agenda was adopted with minor amendment.

MODALITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR AN IPBES

FUNCTIONS AND OPERATING PRINCIPLES OF THE PLATFORM: The Secretariat introduced document UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/3, which sets out the platform's functions and principles as identified in the Busan outcome. MEXICO and the African Group stressed the need for and importance of financial support for capacity building, with THAILAND expressing concern that the platform may not have enough financial resources for such support.

BOLIVIA noted that not all countries participated in the process leading to the Busan outcome and reserved the right to re-open discussions on particular items. COLOMBIA emphasized the non-legally binding nature of this document and expressed concerns on how to operationalize the IPBES functions.

The EU stressed that: the work programme shall respond to the functions of the platform; coordination between functions is important; IPBES should not be involved in implementation *per se*; the core functions go beyond performing assessments; considering a full spectrum of activities; and emphasis be given to how closely the functions could be linked. AUSTRALIA said the overarching objectives of this session should be to ensure that the platform achieve practical action and called for agreement on operating details.

ARGENTINA noted remaining questions on, *inter alia*, how the platform incorporates NGOs' input, and how the plenary decides on priorities. CHINA said the platform has limited human and financial resources at the moment and should focus on global and regional levels. COOK ISLANDS emphasized the need for the platform to respond to requests from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the CBD.

SWITZERLAND suggested in-depth consideration of the platform's functions when discussing its work programme, and highlighted that the priority for capacity building should be on access to information and broad participation of stakeholders. BOLIVIA called for clarifying that funding organizations are responsible solely for funding and not, together with scientific and other organizations, for priority setting. In response, Chair Watson suggested taking this into consideration in operationalizing the platform, and highlighted the necessity for dialogue between funding and other organizations. MOROCCO underscored the importance of assessing the knowledge available to individual countries.

Chair Watson, welcoming the broad support for the Busan outcome, identified the operationalization of the platform as the key challenge and highlighted the need for clarifying the process of prioritization of functions and the emphasis given to capacity building.

FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURES OF BODIES TO BE ESTABLISHED: The UNEP Secretariat introduced document UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/4, which outlines possible institutional arrangements, their functions and structures of bodies that might be established under the platform. EGYPT asked whether regional economic integration organizations will have full membership in the plenary, including the right to vote. The US noted that this raises issues of additionality and competence. The EU said it will not accept having an observer status. Chair Watson noted current understanding is that such organizations will have full membership but participation will be governed by the rules of procedure of IPBES. He suggested clarifying the exact role of regional economic integration organizations, other UN organizations and IGOs when establishing these rules. Delegates agreed to add a note calling for clarification at a later stage.

On considering membership of countries in IPBES, BRAZIL suggested broad participation to include countries that are members of UN specialized agencies. The US, originally calling for membership to be limited to UN member states, said it could support language that includes reference to the agencies and programmes sponsoring IPBES, namely UNDP, UNESCO, FAO and UNEP. THAILAND, CHILE, MEXICO and COLOMBIA called for including all states. Opposed by the US, MEXICO and others suggested including member states to the IAEA to address biodiversity issues in the area of nuclear energy. Chair Watson postponed this issue and the question raised by delegates on whether states will automatically be members of IPBES or only those who signify their intent to be a member.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The IPBES plenary opened in a positive spirit and discussions advanced throughout the day boosted by Bob Watson's "punchy" chairmanship. Progress appeared to be slow; but given expectations that a group of developing countries could have opposed in principle the establishment of the platform and a remarkably active US delegation, many participants were ready to admit that the risks involved were high. The flexibility showed by the US meant lengthy discussions on the work programme that could have paralyzed deliberations for the whole week were postponed. Most delegates welcomed the widest possible participation, but others feared that reopening the text of the Busan outcome may set a potentially dangerous precedent for the work of the plenary. Chair Watson left the question of membership pending over night, expressing his hope that the evening reception might bring delegates closer together on this issue.