

IPBES-7 Highlights: Wednesday, 1 May 2019

On Wednesday, IPBES-7 delegates met in a brief plenary in the morning to take stock of progress and to approve the draft decision on the response to the External Review, before continuing negotiating the summary for policy makers (SPM) of the Global Assessment in a working group during the rest of the day and in the evening.

A second working group met in the afternoon and evening to begin discussions on the Platform's second work programme.

Highlights from the working group on the Global Assessment included discussions on the following issues:

- human population dynamics and trends, and global trade as drivers of biodiversity decline;
- the relationship between climate change and biodiversity loss; and
- the impact of economic incentives for harmful economic activities.

Plenary

Asghar Mohammadi Fazel, Co-Chair of the working group on the Global Assessment reported that the group met until the early morning of Wednesday, emphasizing the need for discussions to move forward faster. He noted that delegates started addressing key messages on drivers of changes in nature, but some elements in key messages on the status of nature's contributions to people needed further discussion.

Spencer Thomas, Co-Chair of the contact group on Financial and Budgetary Arrangements, said the group met for the first time the previous day and noted that several issues regarding the budget and fundraising strategy were clarified. The group met again during lunchtime.

Senka Barudanovic, Co-Chair of the working group on the Review of the Platform, reported on discussions on the response to the External Review of the Platform. She introduced a draft decision (IPBES/7/L.2), which Plenary approved.

IPBES Chair Robert Watson urged participants to speed up the process on the SPM, indicating that the meeting must conclude on Saturday 6:00 PM at the latest.

Working Group on the Global Assessment

The group continued its deliberations addressing direct and indirect drivers of change in nature. Delegates discussed the direct drivers with the largest global impact and focused on prominent indirect drivers, noting the need to use agreed terminology on "human population dynamics and trends," and ways to reflect effects of consumption and production patterns. They further deliberated on whether to explicitly refer to: potential positive or negative effects of technological innovation and trade; and regional differentiation regarding the rate of change.

In the discussion on key messages on climate change as a driver, delegates focused on finding language that would be meaningful and useful to national policy makers. The group worked to agree on text that emphasizes human-induced climate change, the connection between climate change and biodiversity loss, and that climate change exacerbates other drivers of biodiversity loss. They also discussed strengthening the text with reference to "observed evidence." Time was also spent discussing whether to refer to drivers of biodiversity loss as being "synergistic" or "compound," with many noting similar discussions held at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) where the word "compound" was retained.

Delegates touched upon the increase of different types of pollution as well as of records of invasive alien species and the ensuing negative impacts on nature. They could not agree on which types of pollution should be specifically mentioned. After lengthy debates on how to refer to, among other things, the outputs of industrial, mining, and agricultural activities, Chair Watson moved the discussion to a Friends of the Chair group.

Discussions then addressed the growth in human population and the global economy, which together drive pressures on nature. Delegates delved into lengthy debates on the extent to which unequal access to material goods can be associated with inequity and may lead to social conflict. They considered referring to unequally distributed long-term "impacts" rather than "costs" and to the level of development rather than the income level. They further deliberated on referring to gender exclusions regarding access to nature's contributions to people and on the effect of armed conflicts to ecosystems.

In the afternoon, the working group discussed wording regarding: marine plastic pollution increase since 1980; the Earth's surface area at risk of plant and animal invasion, impacting native species; and armed conflicts and their impact on ecosystems.

Delegates further discussed economic incentives that often bring forth environmental harm, focusing on: ways to incorporate the consideration of multiple values of ecosystem functions and nature's contributions to people into economic incentives; whether to refer to "environmentally harmful subsidies"; whether to refer to high market prices, public subsidies, market distortions, economic incentives related to unsustainable practices, gaps in regulation and unregulated markets, or incentives including subsidies harmful to biodiversity; and necessary policy reforms.

Regarding nature managed by indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), delegates deliberated at length on the extent of land that indigenous peoples manage or have tenure rights over. Different opinions surfaced on the relevant categorization and available data, with suggestions including "lands traditionally owned, used, or occupied" by indigenous peoples.

On prospects for nature and biodiversity, delegates debated the meaning of “transformative change” and whether it should be replaced with “fundamental” change. Delegates made several suggestions to define the term and debated whether it is the only type of change that should be referenced.

Regarding goals for conserving nature and achieving sustainability, delegates debated whether to refer to “historical,” “recent,” or “past” rapid declines in biodiversity and ecosystem functions. They agreed that these declines will undermine other goals, including those in the Paris Agreement and the 2050 Vision of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). A lengthy debate took place on future scenarios that explore effects of low to moderate population growth and transformative changes in production and consumption; delegates exchanged opinions on whether they should also include future pathways and reference equitable sharing of benefits.

Participants briefly discussed the probability of achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and exchanged views over the spatial coverage of protected areas, and whether they are ecologically representative and effectively or equitably managed. They discussed growth in Official Development Assistance and agreed on the need for further resource mobilization from all sources to achieve the Aichi Targets. Delegates further agreed on the percentage of strategic objectives and goals across six global environmental agreements that are on track to be met and those that have seen little or no progress, or even regressed.

In the evening, delegates discussed current negative trends in biodiversity that undermine progress towards the SDGs as well as important positive synergies between nature and given goals. They deliberated on significant negative effects from global changes in climate and biodiversity to areas where indigenous peoples and many of the world’s poorest communities live. In that respect they exchanged views on the ability of IPLCs to manage and conserve wild and domesticated biodiversity in face of these challenges.

Negotiations continued into the night.

Working Group on Future Work

Working group Co-Chair Ivar Andreas Baste presented relevant documents on the second work programme (IPBES/7/6 and 6/Add.1&2 and INF/5&21).

As priorities, many members emphasized the assessment on the nexus between biodiversity, water, food, and health, as well as the technical report on interlinkages between biodiversity and climate change to be prepared with the IPCC. Some members said IPBES should focus on completing the three remaining assessments of the first work programme, pointing to budget and human resource constraints, and highlighted that the work programme should be responsive to changing needs and priorities.

Delegates further emphasized the need to consider the recommendations of the External Review, especially regarding strengthening all four functions of the Platform. On communicating and engaging, delegates stressed enhancing integration with the scientific community and integration at the national level.

Members also noted that a report on business impact and dependence on biodiversity will be key for further engaging the private sector and that it should focus both on business impact as well as on possible positive contributions of business and financial actors to halting biodiversity loss. They highlighted a lack of knowledge on the impacts of climate change mitigation and adaptation action on biodiversity and suggested that the nexus reports will be key to inform work on the SDGs. Some stressed the need to ensure that indigenous peoples participate as

core experts in IPBES processes. Others focused on enhancing the Platform’s impact and visibility. One delegation noted the need to clarify cooperation with the IPCC.

Several members supported giving more prominence in the work programme to the requests put forward by several Multilateral Environmental Agreements to focus on the issue of connectivity. One member noted this would allow for addressing the issues of urbanization and land-take.

The CBD recalled decisions of its Conference of the Parties, *inter alia* about the rolling nature of IPBES’ work programme, which should allow for ongoing exchanges and additional requests to be made in light of the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IIFBES) emphasized the need for funding to allow for the participation of indigenous peoples as experts and the need to consider peoples’ contributions to nature, including regarding the socio-cultural mediation of climate change impacts.

Delegates then discussed the draft work programme (IPBES/7/6). On the introduction, despite general support for the rolling nature of the work programme, views differed on how to define a timeline for deliverables and on the implications for budgetary matters. One delegation emphasized the need for the Platform to remain flexible and responsive, for instance in accepting submissions prior to plenaries. Several delegates stressed alignment with the 2030 Agenda timeline, and for informing the post-2020 biodiversity framework. The working group supported reference to timing that allowed research and programming entities to strategize support for the completion of deliverables.

Delegates then delved into lengthy discussions on how to move forward, with many noting the difficulty of discussing deliverables without having found agreement on the priority topics. Resuming discussions in the evening, delegates moved to debating textual proposals on the formulation of the prioritized topics for the new work programme. Discussions then focused on finding formulations that are neither too policy prescriptive or too narrow.

Negotiations continued into the night.

In the Corridors

On Wednesday morning the atmosphere in the working group on the Global Assessment changed noticeably. After negotiating late into the previous night, delegates were confronted with a proposal to eliminate the scientific background section from the SPM to ensure negotiations can be completed on time. Many delegates expressed their strong concern about this idea with one noting that “this would substantially weaken the SPM and lose the enormous amount of work that went into its preparation.” “The background section,” as an expert explained, “provides the link between the key messages and the evidence. Without it, policy makers won’t be able to see how strong these findings really are.” Others felt that the proposal does not merit serious consideration, with one seasoned negotiator suggesting “this was a much-needed wake-up call, but at this point I am not ready to entertain the possibility.”

Disagreements also arose in the discussions on the next work programme where delegates struggled to reconcile the need for flexibility with the need for budget planning and prioritization, triggering an unplanned evening session. As delegates of both working groups prepared for another long night of negotiations, some feared that IPBES-7 might end without adopting the Global Assessment or the Work Programme. An IPBES veteran was more optimistic noting, “it always seems like everything is falling apart, but that’s when we kick into high gear.”