

## **IPBES-8 Highlights: Tuesday, 15 June 2021**

The eighth session of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-8) continued its work in a virtual working group setting, addressing the scoping report on assessing the interlinkages among biodiversity, climate, water, food, energy, and health (nexus assessment).

Highlights of the day included:

- A lengthy discussion on a potential chapter on climate and energy, revealing differing approaches among Members, particularly on the importance of studying energy in the assessment;
- Discussions on the importance of promoting participatory processes and including different knowledge and value systems in the assessment; and
- An extensive—though not unprecedented in biodiversity fora—discussion on the use of the term “nature-based solutions.”

### **Working Group on the Nexus Assessment**

Doug Beard (US), Co-Chair of the working group addressing the scoping report, presented the relevant document (IPBES/8/3). Recalling the drafting process, he highlighted earlier work, including in a Friends of the Chair group, which looked specifically at the inclusion of the issue of energy in the assessment, among other issues.

In their general comments, many Members congratulated the experts and the Secretariat on the work done. Some Members called for a shorter, clearer, and less prescriptive scoping report.

Delegates stressed:

- the importance of incorporating questions on transformative change into the report;
- promoting participatory processes and ensuring a regional and cultural balance between experts, leaders, and chairs, and learning from initiatives on the ground;
- the inclusion of nature-based solutions as cost-effective tools providing co-benefits;
- the need to strengthen collaboration and synergies with other processes and assessments, highlighting the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the CBD;
- the importance of including quantitative elements;
- the need for better balance between terrestrial and marine ecosystems, with concrete methodologies for the latter;

- approaches to link human and environmental health;
- different stages of development among countries need to be recognized in the approach, including poverty, capacity gaps, and infrastructure challenges; and
- the need to take into account international trade as well as develop relevant modelling and projections.

Members expressed different opinions on the use of the terms “nature-based solutions” and “ecosystem-based approaches.” A few Members expressed concerns for the inclusion of climate and energy as standalone aspects of the assessment; they further questioned the timeframe of analysis, noting it should take into account realities prior to 1970, which is used as the baseline.

Regarding the Workshop Report on Pandemics and the IPBES-IPCC Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Climate Change, many Members welcomed the reports. Some stressed the documents are of high scientific quality and should be considered during the development of the nexus assessment. Others lamented governments were not involved at any stage of the process, stressing that the content of the reports may not be considered as having been endorsed by governments.

**Climate and energy:** Delegates initiated their work on the scoping report’s text, discussing the content of a potential chapter on climate change and energy to bridge different perspectives by Members.

A few Members expressed concern over references to climate change within the chapter, with some suggesting it be referenced in general terms or, in fact, be deleted altogether and addressed as a cross-cutting issue with other aspects of the nexus. One delegate pointed out that regardless of whether climate change is referenced in the paragraph or not, it is a significant driver of biodiversity loss—with one of its key determinants being energy production—and it will likely feature throughout the report, including in the relevant chapter. Some pointed to ongoing climate negotiations, stressing they need to be taken into account.

Regarding energy, some Members reiterated it should not be a standalone aspect of the assessment. Others highlighted that energy is a fundamental aspect of the nexus, calling for broad references, because both energy infrastructure and energy generation can have biodiversity and climate impacts.

A lengthy discussion took place on terminology around “nature-based solutions” and “ecosystem-based approaches.” Delegates disagreed, with some insisting on including the term “nature-based solutions,” noting the Global Assessment Summary

for Policymakers makes reference to “nature-based solutions.” Others suggested deleting it, while a few preferred middle-ground solutions, such as referring to nature-based solutions with safeguards.

Other issues raised included:

- The importance of including different knowledge and value systems, suggesting references to Indigenous and local knowledge or Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs); and
- The need to include freshwater ecosystems in the analysis, along with terrestrial and marine ones.

One Member suggested compromise language simplifying the paragraph under discussion. The suggested text includes references to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and relevant aspects of energy production. An IPBES expert confirmed it provides a reasonable framework for future work.

Some Members underscored other aspects of energy, including consumption, transport, and storage. A delegate suggested referring to energy “development;” others offered alternative language referring to the delivery of sustainable approaches to energy; and yet others suggested focusing on “relevant aspects” of the energy system.

A few delegates noted the compromise language omits important elements and suggested including language on the mainstreaming of biodiversity into the energy sector, including carbon and non-carbon systems.

Following lengthy debates, some progress was made with most Members agreeing on the inclusion of different knowledge systems, including Indigenous and local knowledges (ILK). Many delegates further agreed on the inclusion of freshwater and marine ecosystems. Divergence of opinions remains around terminology on “nature-based solutions” as well as on general approaches on whether to explicitly address energy in the nexus assessment. Given the myriad of changes proposed and the differing positions, Working Group Co-Chair Beard agreed to move to review the remaining text in the scoping report. He pleaded with delegates to take the intervening time to consider the topics under discussion; consult with capitals; and show spirit of compromise to move forward.

**Scope:** Members began considerations on the section on scope. Amendments were made, with text being bracketed to reflect the unresolved issues on energy. Some delegates called for clarifying the proposal by the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) regarding the inclusion of energy in the scope, bracketing the relevant part of the text. One delegate suggested reference be made to ILK, as well as different knowledge and value systems, with Co-Chair Beard proposing a new paragraph introducing this as an overarching concept.

Co-Chair Beard closed the session, noting discussions will continue on the scope of the report and will then move to the other sections. He expressed his concern regarding progress, stressing that the documents are already the product of an extensive consultation process and emphasizing that, at the current rate, the Platform will be unable to agree on the scoping reports.

### *In the Corridors*

IPBES’ reputation for sound science is well known. Indeed, a pre-G7 joint statement from US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated “Together we will work to [...] bend the curve of biodiversity loss by 2030. We will champion the best available science – particularly reports from IPCC and IPBES.”

The day’s working group deliberations focused on work to maintain this reputation. Delegates poured over text for the nexus assessment scoping report, specifically on text outlining a chapter regarding climate change and energy. Delegates devoted almost the whole of the session trying to find a balance between providing guidance to the experts who will undertake the assessment, while also affording them the necessary latitude to remain independent when conducting their analysis.

The virtual setting may have been a hindrance as much as a blessing. The online space means delegates are still able to meet to ensure IPBES can continue its valued work despite the global pandemic. As a significant obstacle, however, delegates are not able to converse on the margins to iron out any differences. This led to a lot of back and forth over word choices and their nuances, without much progress being made.

Lengthy negotiations are not new to the Platform; IPBES has had its fair share of late nights in the past. However, some participants expressed concerns. They pointed to disagreements that will be difficult to bridge where Members have diametrically opposing initial positions particularly on specific issues, such as energy.

Looking to the negotiations ahead, these participants cautioned against extensively discussing every single line of the 11-page long draft scoping report. They emphasized that Members had been provided the opportunity to express their positions during an extended period of consultations, including calls for comments. With this in mind, they opined the draft does not need to be scrutinized word by word.

Other delegates were not on the same page. They pointed to important elements missing in the current draft, especially during the discussion on energy, where they also underscored the need to explicitly refer to taking into account all forms of knowledge. They also sought explicit references made in different parts of the report. While the latter problem might be solved by addressing concerns via an overarching new paragraph, other issues seem more challenging.

Working group Co-Chair Beard did not look overly optimistic following discussion on a single paragraph that lasted more than two hours. Admittedly it is one of the more challenging topics for negotiation. Still, looking at the pace of discussions and the work ahead, delegates were repeatedly implored by Co-Chair Beard to use the downtime between sessions to consult with each other and their capitals to find concessions. IPBES-8 has its plate more than full if the scoping reports are to be accepted to kick off much awaited research efforts. As one delegate was seen frantically typing, “at this rate, we’ll approve the documents in 2023.”