IPBES-9 Highlights: Wednesday, 6 July 2022

On the fourth day of the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-9) delegates in Working Group 1 (WG1) met throughout the day, finalizing consideration of the summary for policymakers (SPM) on the thematic assessment of the sustainable use of wild species and starting discussions on the methodological assessment of the diverse values and evaluation of nature (values assessment). WG2 devoted the day to the scoping report on the business and biodiversity assessment.

Working Group 1

On scenarios projecting the future use of wild species, a member suggested considering poverty, inequality, and food insecurity, and taking into account national socioeconomic conditions and cultural preferences. The suggestion will be considered under the thematic assessment of the sustainable use of wild species. A lengthy discussion ensued over reference to subsidies and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. A member suggested reference to subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. Delegates debated whether IUU fishing should refer to the High Seas, exclusive economic zones, and/or coastal waters. They agreed on a lack of data on freshwater fisheries as well as to the existence of various types of subsidies, suggesting referring to harmful subsidies.

A suggestion to include reference to bioeconomy policies and strategies generated disagreement. Some delegates noted the concept of bioeconomy is not adequately defined, while others pointed to the relevant definition developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Yet others suggested referring to “environmentally sound” bioeconomy policies or bioeconomy policies to support biodiversity-based products, as appropriate.

On wild meat as a primary objective of terrestrial animal harvesting, some members noted that other objectives exist, using ivory as an example. The co-chairs pointed to lack of relevant data, noting the issue as an area for further research.

On a subsection discussing interventions to implement and scale up policy actions to enhance the sustainable use of wild species, members accepted the headline statement without comments. On a paragraph specifying seven key elements of such policies and their current state of integration into binding and voluntary agreements, and certification schemes, several iterations of comments were needed to clarify changes for consistency with revised infographics and diagrams contained in the SPM.

On a list specifying how these seven key elements could be used as levers of change, delegates focused on:

- ensuring language is in line with the science, precise and not policy-prescriptive;
- references to access and benefit-sharing (ABS) agreements, and consistent use of language pertaining to “free, prior, and informed consent” and to “ensure and promote fair and equitable distribution of costs and benefits”;
- differentiating between ABS in the context of genetic resources, and the use of wild species; and
- highlighting that concepts limit to institutional challenges for monitoring exist in all countries, whereas some challenges are more pronounced in developing country contexts.

Delegates agreed setting quotas or levels of extraction is crucial to prevent species decline. They further agreed on the need for cohesive and consistent international obligations and for taking into account customary rules and norms.

On the need for constant negotiation and adaptive management for the use of wild species to remain sustainable, delegates debated whether:

- to differentiate spillover disease from pandemics;
- to reference the One Health approach;
- relevant scientific evidence supports that the intensification of uses can reinforce negative impacts, including zoonotic diseases; and
- to refer to the interconnection of human, domestic, and wild animals, plants, and the wide environment.

WG1 further addressed the SPM’s appendices. On definitions, delegates agreed to refer to “good quality of life” rather than “human wellbeing” in the definition of transformative change. They further decided to add a definition for bioeconomy, and include a definition on robust fisheries management as a footnote. A controversy on knowledge gaps was accepted with one additional entry for “data and information availability and access.”

Delegates then addressed all outstanding issues in the SPM. In the introduction, delegates agreed to refer to the aim to “reduce and eventually eliminate” unsustainable and illegal use. For the definition of sustainable use, delegates agreed to: specify “socio-ecological systems” when referring to this assessment; add a reference to the “social, economic, and environmental dimensions” of sustainability in a reference to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and separate the three components of the definition.

WG1 resolved issues related to the share of wild species used for food, and their contribution to achieving food security and nutrition, and terminology referring to nature-based tourism and wildlife watching. Delegates agreed on adding text to a paragraph discussing overexploitation on the use of wild species in the context of a significant decline in wild species populations and natural habitat.

Delegates further addressed and resolved issues around:

- the link between Indigenous territories and deforestation, in cases where secure land tenure exists;
- the percentages of wild fish stocks that are overfished or “fished within biological sustainable levels”;
- selective hunting of particular species and its impacts;
- drivers that impact the abundance and distribution of wild species;
- links among effective policies and levels of poverty, inequality and food insecurity;
- illegal seizure of land that violates the rights of Indigenous Peoples and land holders; and
- gender and its linkages with governance of wild species and the distribution of related benefits.

On tenure in the marine context, delegates referred to language in the FAO’s voluntary guidelines on tenure to “promote secure tenure rights and equitable access to land, fisheries and forests.”

Language specifying the potential contribution of protected areas, and enabling factors, was included in the section on policy tools and instruments, as requested by several members.

Delegates agreed to include text on raising demand for wood-based bioenergy and associated trade-offs between management of natural forests to meet demands for wood and biodiversity conservation replacing pre-existing language related to human drivers of land degradation and deforestation. After a protracted controversy around the role of agriculture and food production, and inquiries regarding old growth forests, delegates agreed on text as suggested by the co-chairs.

Delegates decided to remove numerical estimates describing the extent to which global fisheries catch could be potentially

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reduced, particularly in certain geographical areas, as a result of climate change. They reached consensus on language noting that the development and improvement of sustainable forest management practices would provide tools to support sustainable economic activities and wild species-based products.

Agreement was not easily reached on reference to agricultural intensification. Some members observed the SPM seemed to go beyond being a business and biodiversity scoping report. On an introductory chapter setting the scene, delegates focused on ensuring language was not too prescriptive for the assessment authors.

On a chapter on ways that business impacts biodiversity, one member questioned how such a chapter fits into a methodological assessment. Experts responded that it is needed to frame the issues. Delegates also considered whether the language on potential synergies was too prescriptive. They further agreed to allow experts to try and streamline the text to be more concise.

In the evening, delegates returned to consider the structure of the assessment’s chapters, trying to streamline and harmonize the text. Delegates agreed the promotion of accountability and transparency should be included not just the public sector, and improving knowledge of impacts and dependencies should apply to both producers and consumers.

They actively engaged but did not reach agreement on:

- business’ indirect dependencies and impacts should be considered in addition to direct ones;
- risk identification should be “science-based,” “evidence-based,” or unqualified, the latter to account for ILK, which may not fall within the first two; and
- to refer to “existing international obligations, in particular trade-related obligations.”

Delegates debated a sentence on what the assessment can do, particularly whether it: can only identify or also address potentially conflicting approaches; and should refer to standards, different sectors, the entire value chain, producers and consumers, and cumulative effects or impacts.

In the afternoon, delegates turned to the chapter outlines for the business and biodiversity scoping report. On an introductory chapter setting the scene, delegates focused on ensuring language was not too prescriptive for the assessment authors. On a chapter on ways business depends on biodiversity, WG2 heavily debated the level of detail, with some delegates proposing listing items the authors should consider, and others suggesting such lists are not necessary as the authors will address all the concerns as they develop the report. Details considered included:

- benefit-sharing;
- direct and indirect dependencies, and related risks;
- supply chains or value chains; and
- linkages with other global crises.

On the last, some members proposed including linkages to other relevant environmental crises like climate change. Some preferred “challenges” to “crises”; others opposed any mention of linkages to environmental crises.

A delegate opposed inclusion of addressing ways to enhance compliance with international environmental law at the national level, noting this is beyond the mandate and is an “absolute red line.” Several brackets remained and consideration will resume later.

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The corridors were quiet. WG1 was hard at work finishing the sustainable use assessment’s SPM: initially set to finish Tuesday night, the deadline was extended to Wednesday 11:00 am, and then 3:00 pm, with the chair warning this was “the real deadline, not the threat deadline.” Delegates ended up working non-stop until the early evening, leaving experts on the sidelines awaiting their turn despite having been summoned for a morning start.

WG2 was similarly occupied, making slow progress with the business and biodiversity scoping report and prompting Co-Chair Julia Martin-LeFevre to note “rapid is definitely not our middle name!” The German government at least showed impeccable timing, designating a “Happy Hour” precisely with the final whistle for the sustainable use SPM, drawing some thirsty delegates to the halls for a short break and some clinking glasses.