

IPBES 11 Highlights: Tuesday, 10 December 2024

The 11th session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES 11) opened on Tuesday, 10 December, in Windhoek, Namibia. In plenary, delegates heard opening statements and introductory remarks on most items on the meeting's agenda. Plenary decided to convene two Working Groups (WGs), with WG 1 addressing the thematic assessment of the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food and health (Nexus Assessment); the scoping report for a second global assessment; and the improvement of the effectiveness of the platform. WG 2 will tackle the thematic assessment of the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, determinants of transformative change and options for achieving the 2050 vision for biodiversity (Transformative Change Assessment); engagement with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); and the agenda item on building capacity, strengthening knowledge foundations, and supporting policy.

Plenary

IPBES 11 opened with a performance by local artists followed by a video highlighting the contributions of IPBES to science and policymaking and the commitment of host Namibia to environmental protection.

IPBES Chair David Obura opened the session. Anne Larigauderie, IPBES Executive Secretary, emphasized the value and impact of IPBES' work, including recent recognition by receiving the 2024 Blue Planet Prize, and highlighted the significance of the Nexus and Transformative Change Assessments, stressing that they together address the most critical issues that the world needs to solve.

Speaking on behalf of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) as IPBES' four UN partners, Antonio De Sousa Abreu, UNESCO, stressed that IPBES assessments have been instrumental for a whole-of-society approach in building a comprehensive knowledge base for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). He highlighted the partners' contributions to IPBES' work and emphasized that the upcoming assessments will serve as a roadmap toward living in harmony with nature.

Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), described the important intersections between the work of IPBES and the CBD in providing a robust knowledge base on biodiversity. Upon highlighting positive outcomes from the 16th Conference of the Parties of the CBD (COP16), held in Cali, Colombia, she urged delegates at IPBES 11 to roll up their sleeves to fill the remaining gap between "the policies the world needs and the policies it currently gets."

Pohamba Penomwenyo Shifeta, Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Namibia, underscored Namibia's unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship, including by enshrining environmental protection in its national constitution and its thriving network of community-managed conservancies. He stressed the importance of including local communities in conservation strategies, including by halting the detrimental

effects of poaching and encouraging the environmental and socio-economic benefits associated with "conservation hunting," erstwhile known as trophy hunting.

IPBES Chair Obura outlined priorities for IPBES 11, in particular approving: the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) for the Nexus and Transformative Change Assessments, and the scoping report for the second global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Regional and stakeholder statements: Mauritania, for the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized Africa as one of the world's biodiversity strongholds, and called for sustained efforts to address the region's knowledge gaps, investing in regional research, and improving representation of African experts in IPBES' work.

Pakistan, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, underscored the role of IPBES assessments in informing national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs). Noting prioritization of biodiversity protection for climate mitigation and adaptation in the region's countries, he welcomed IPBES' cooperation with the IPCC.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, on behalf of EASTERN EUROPE, voiced support for emphasizing regional differences in the second global assessment; and underlined the need for solid scientific evidence when addressing the biodiversity crisis in interlinked nexus elements.

Mexico, for the GROUP OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (GRULAC), urged using previously agreed language in the SPMs to maintain policy-relevance and coherence with nationally relevant processes. He welcomed the opportunity to exchange views on cooperation with IPCC, and highlighted challenges for smaller delegations.

Hungary, on behalf of the EU, highlighted the relevance of the upcoming assessment reports for implementing the GBF, the Paris Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Noting the need to account for the interdependence between biodiversity loss and climate change, he called for strengthening cooperation with the IPCC.

The US, on behalf of JUSSCANNZ, underlined that IPBES is globally respected as the depositary of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services; called for increasing cooperation with the IPCC to break silos; and recalled IPBES' mission to provide policy-relevant knowledge without politicizing the work of the authors.

The OPEN-ENDED NETWORK OF IPBES STAKEHOLDERS (ONet) urged for wider access to and promotion of IPBES' outputs. He recalled that stakeholders are essential to promote transformative change and called for enhanced capacity building efforts to promote meaningful participation.

The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES (IIFBES) expressed appreciation for the efforts to include Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) in the assessment process, pointed to challenges such as the continuing dominance of western science frameworks, and highlighted avenues to improve inclusion.

Organizational matters, admission of observers, and credentials: Chair Obura introduced the provisional agenda (IPBES/11/1 and IPBES/11/1/Add.1) and provided an overview of the organization of work, including the establishment of two WGs to continue discussing substantive issues and a contact group to

focus on financial and budgetary issues. BRAZIL underscored a disproportionate burden on small delegations, reserving the right to reopen in plenary any document negotiated in a WG that they cannot participate in. Delegates adopted the agenda.

Delegates welcomed four new IPBES members, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Seychelles, and Somalia, bringing the total to 147. They further elected Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico) as Bureau member to fill a vacant seat for GRULAC. Delegates further elected Paulina Stowhas Salinas (Chile) and Ruleo Camacho (Antigua and Barbuda) as alternate Bureau members.

IPBES Members welcomed 15 new observers as recommended by the Bureau ([IPBES/11/2](#) and [11/INF/3](#)) and decided to continue using the interim procedure for observers' admission for IPBES 12. Chair Obura urged delegates' timely submission of credentials.

Financial and budgetary arrangements: Executive Secretary Larigauderie presented the relevant documents ([IPBES/11/4](#) and [IPBES/11/INF/12](#)). She addressed: income for 2023, including contributions and in-kind support; expenditure for 2023; budgetary implications of ongoing and upcoming IPBES assessments; and the overall financial situation. She noted that the relevant contact group will discuss, among other things, recommendations on the fundraising strategy and options for providing funding to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and youth.

Chair Obura noted that while IPBES has fulfilled its mission through very efficient resource use, it will be necessary to raise at least USD 2 million per year to match financial pledges with expenditures. The NETHERLANDS and BELGIUM pledged an additional EUR 900,000 and EUR 66,000 respectively for 2024. JAPAN committed to contribute USD 189,814 to the Trust Fund for 2025 and stressed the importance of aligning annual commitments to reliable income sources for each fiscal year. Discussions will continue in a contact group co-chaired by Erik Grigoryan (Armenia).

Nexus Assessment: Chair Obura introduced the relevant documents ([IPBES/11/5](#), [11/INF/1](#), and [11/INF/5](#)). Members agreed to assign consideration of the assessment to WG 1, co-chaired by Douglas Beard (Western Europe and Others Group, WEOG) and Bishwa Nagh Oli (Asia-Pacific). They also agreed to use the Chair's note ([IPBES/11/Other/1](#)) and the draft decision as contained in the draft decision document for IPBES 11 ([IPBES/11/1/Add.2](#)) as a basis for their deliberations.

Transformative Change Assessment: Chair Obura introduced the relevant documents ([IPBES/11/6](#), [11/INF/2](#), and [11/INF/6](#)). Members agreed to assign consideration of the matter to WG 2, co-chaired by Sebsebe Demissew (African region), Eeva Primmer (WEOG), and Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (GRULAC). They also agreed to use the relevant Chair's note ([IPBES/11/Other/2](#)) and the draft decision document as a basis for their deliberations.

Scoping report for a second global assessment: Chair Obura presented the relevant documents ([IPBES/11/7](#) and [11/INF/7](#)). Members agreed to assign consideration of this item to WG 1 and use the relevant Chair's informal note ([IPBES/11/Other/3](#)) and the draft decision document as a basis for their deliberations.

Engagement with the IPCC: Chair Obura presented the relevant documents ([IPBES/11/8](#) and [11/INF/10](#)). Members agreed to assign consideration of this item to WG 2 and to use the relevant Chair's note ([IPBES/11/Other/4](#)) as a basis for their deliberations.

Building capacity and supporting policy: Chair Obura presented the relevant documents ([IPBES/11/9](#) and [11/INF/13-18](#)). Members agreed to assign consideration of this item to WG 2 and to use the relevant Chair's note ([IPBES/11/Other/5](#)) as a basis for their deliberations.

Improving the effectiveness of the Platform: IPBES Chair Obura presented the relevant documents ([IPBES/11/10](#), [11/INF/21](#), and [11/INF/22](#)) and assigned consideration to WG 1.

Dates and venues of future sessions of the Plenary: Chair Obura presented the relevant document ([IPBES/11/11](#)), highlighting that IPBES 12 will consider the business and biodiversity assessment and IPBES 13 the monitoring assessment. He announced an offer by the UK to host IPBES 12, which will be presented on Saturday, and invited others to consider submitting relevant offers.

Working Group 1

WG 1 Co-Chair Beard opened the WG's first session, outlining the group's working method and schedule, and presenting the report's contributors and relevant documents ([IPBES/11/5](#), [IPBES/11/INF/5](#), and [IPBES/11/Other/1](#)).

Nexus Assessment Co-Chairs Pamela McElwee (US) and Paula Harrison (UK), shared insights into the report's preparation, stressing, among other things, that it considered different worldviews, values, and knowledge systems, taking account of ILK, and outlined the SPM's structure. They further discussed comments received during the SPM's review by governments and how they were addressed.

Many delegations highlighted the SPM's strength, including with regard to breaking silos between sectors, its unique methodology, and interlinkages with the Transformative Change Assessment. Among suggestions for improvement, delegates called for:

- inclusion of the role of nature in mental health;
- deletion of reference to specific countries in the context of biodiversity and conflicts;
- greater emphasis on impacts of wildfires and natural disasters on biodiversity;
- stronger emphasis on climate adaptation in addition to mitigation;
- inclusion of the notion of "mainstreaming"; and
- more concise language and simplified figures.

Different views were expressed on the framing of "sustainable and healthy diets," including references to meat overconsumption, and how, and whether, to define One Health in the SPM. Delegates also emphasized the need to: take into account regional contexts; incorporate positive examples from the biodiversity-food nexus; improve the inclusion of ILK by providing direct funding options; build financial resources to ensure implementation; ensure targeted communication to achieve broad uptake and concrete action; and ensure "science has the last word."

Following general statements, WG Co-Chair Beard invited delegates to engage in textual negotiations, starting with the background messages of section A, which addresses past and current nexus interactions. On intensified trends in direct drivers of biodiversity loss, delegates discussed whether to refer to exploitation, unsustainable exploitation or over-exploitation, agreeing on "unsustainable exploitation of organisms."

On the topic of armed conflicts as intensifying indirect drivers for biodiversity loss, one delegation stressed that the text should remove references to loss of human life, human displacement, and socioeconomic impacts. A couple of delegates suggested removing references to armed conflicts as contributing to climate change, noting evidence remains unclear. Co-Chair Beard proposed, after suggestions from several delegations, to consider other nexus elements such as human health and well-being to replace existing text on loss of human life and displacement. Delegates also discussed the evidence base for highlighting that 80% of armed conflicts between 1950 and 2000 have damaged ecosystems and species in biodiversity hotspots, which, they were assured, is strong.

In the Corridors

Boosted by the receipt of the Blue Planet Prize and vitalized by a performance of local artists, delegates embarked on the first-ever IPBES Plenary session on the African continent. Important firsts did not end there. In his first appearance as the IPBES Chair, David Obura, the first IPBES Chair from Africa, outlined the ambitious agenda for the days ahead.

Many participants highlighted the key importance of the two thematic assessments to be addressed at IPBES 11, emphasizing the Nexus and Transformative Change Assessments' relevance for implementing milestone agreements, including the GBF, the Paris Agreement, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. Kicking off negotiations on the Nexus Assessment revealed much common ground among delegates, but also some delicate and controversial issues, including armed conflicts as intensifying indirect drivers for biodiversity loss, which will need to be thoroughly discussed to reach consensus.