

IPBES-8 Highlights: Monday, 14 June 2021

The eighth session of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-8) opened online Monday with 100 governments and almost 900 participants registered and participating.

Highlights of the day included:

- Evidence on the increasing significance of the IPBES assessments, in particular the Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, for raising awareness of biodiversity loss and promoting policy changes;
- The discussion on funding needs as IPBES work increases and many assessments are forthcoming; and
- The exchange of ideas on the importance of all forms of knowledge and the inclusion of Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) holders and practitioners in expert panels.

Plenary

Delegates watched an introductory video noting the Platform's work since IPBES-7 in bringing biodiversity conservation to the forefront of environmental sustainability, especially through the influence of its Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

IPBES Chair Ana María Hernández Salgar (Colombia) thanked all participants for their commitment to overcome challenges posed from the COVID-19 pandemic and drive the Platform's agenda forward. She outlined the meeting's agenda and stressed the importance of credibility, transparency, and solid scientific knowledge for a sustainable future.

Anne Juepner, UN Development Programme (UNDP), also on behalf of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), stressed "we are at a critical point in our joint mission to forge a new relationship between mankind and nature." She highlighted IPBES work and assessments as powerfully portraying the interrelationship between sustainable development and ecosystem health, and called for a more circular and equitable economy.

IPBES Executive Secretary Anne Larigauderie underscored the significance of the Global Assessment, noting it was well received by the media and broad audiences new to biodiversity concerns. She highlighted IPBES-8 will consider two scoping reports on: the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food, and health in the context of climate change (the nexus assessment); and the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and the determinants of transformative change (thematic assessment on transformative change). Larigauderie further underscored the launch of the Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics, and the IPBES-Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) co-sponsored Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Climate Change.

Opening Statements

Mexico, for the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), welcomed progress on the ongoing assessments, and thanked the IPBES Secretariat for their work in organizing workshops and disseminating activities since IPBES-7. He

reiterated the region's commitment to fostering the scientific credibility, transparency, and legitimacy of the IPBES process and its deliverables.

China, for ASIA AND PACIFIC, emphasized the importance of the report from the first ever collaboration between IPBES and the IPCC, noting its relevance for the upcoming Conferences of the Parties (COPs) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). He highlighted the report's relevance for the IPBES scoping report on the nexus assessment. He further stressed all time zones should be equally accommodated when holding virtual sessions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, for EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA, emphasized the importance of cooperation between parties to enable joint action and fruitful exchange of relevant experiences.

South Africa, for AFRICA, asked for the regular review and update of the IPBES reports, and stressed the importance of capacity building for addressing gaps and ensuring regional balance when identifying experts.

Portugal, for the EU, welcomed the reports on the agenda, taking note of outstanding deliverables on the implementation of the work programme for 2030. He also expressed concern at the low number of IPBES Members making voluntary financial contributions.

The US welcomed the two scoping reports for discussion at IPBES-8 and reaffirmed her country's commitment to ensure both assessments remain relevant to policy-makers. She called for "time zone equity" when holding future sessions. She also noted the offer by the US to host IPBES-10 in Madison, Wisconsin in 2023.

CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema stated that the effective implementation of plans and actions to reverse biodiversity loss needs to be based on the best available science. Mrema emphasized the IPBES work programme, which addresses both the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, lays the scientific foundation for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

The Open-Ended Network of IPBES Stakeholders (ONet) urged IPBES Members to take more advantage of the skills and capacity of stakeholders. He also encouraged strengthening multidisciplinary approaches for policy making to curb biodiversity and ecosystem loss, and called for greater research funding.

The Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IIFBES) said virtual meetings pose a challenge for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as they face technical and time zone challenges, calling for a review of how to ensure their equitable inclusion in meetings. She underscored IPLCs' contribution to the assessment processes, highlighting the connection between knowledge and values, and emphasizing the strength of holistic approaches. She reaffirmed IPLCs' commitment to disseminate the outcomes of the IPBES assessments to drive policy reform at all levels.

Organizational matters

Chair Hernández introduced the meeting's agenda and organization of work (IPBES/8/1 and Add.1), which were adopted without comments. She noted a number of measures are suggested to accommodate the meeting's agenda given the limited time, including pre-recorded presentation of reports and deferring consideration of some items to IPBES-9. She further noted contact and working groups will be formed to address specific agenda items.

Regarding IPBES membership, Chair Hernández noted that since IPBES-7, Italy, Myanmar, Serbia, Sierra Leone, and Uzbekistan joined the Platform, raising membership to 137.

Delegates adopted a procedural decision to extend the term of office of the current members of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) until the end of IPBES-9 and of the Bureau until the end of IPBES-10.

On admission of observers, Members welcomed all new observers as recommended by the Bureau. Regarding related procedures, delegates discussed whether the Bureau or the Plenary should approve observers in future sessions as well as ways to table potential objections to the admission of observers. They did not reach consensus.

Reports

IPBES Executive Secretary Larigauderie introduced the document (IPBES/8/2) on the report on the progress of implementation of the rolling work programme up to 2030, along with additional information documents.

Members highlighted the important interlinkages between IPBES and other bodies, especially the CBD, and asked for IPBES to contribute toward CBD processes, including the post-2020 global biodiversity framework; asked for a process addressing areas where progress has been limited; and called for reviewing lessons learned from virtual working arrangements in order to improve the effectiveness of the Platform. Participants further called for greater focus on the marine environment, including capacity building at all levels, and cautioned against duplicating work of other expert bodies.

Financial and Budgetary Arrangements

Chair Hernández introduced the agenda item on financial and budgetary arrangements (IPBES/8/5 and INF.24). Executive Secretary Larigauderie said since IPBES-7 all planned activities have been completed within budget. She noted, however, future budgets will have to take into account that five assessments will be underway.

During the discussion, many Members lauded the Secretariat for the savings realized during 2020. They recommended assessing lessons learned from working virtually, with a view to realizing more efficient ways of working going forward, potentially through making use of both virtual and in-person meetings in the future. While delegates reaffirmed the importance of the assessments, some suggested postponing some of the assessments to reduce the financial and resource burdens on the Secretariat in the future. Others, recognizing private sector contributions to the Platform, suggested further exploring how to continue diversifying income streams. Delegates emphasized IPBES must "demonstrate both results and fiscal responsibility." Discussions will continue in a contact group Tuesday.

Assessing Knowledge

IPBES MEP Co-Chair Luthando Dziba presented the scoping reports on the nexus assessment (IPBES/8/3) and the thematic assessment on transformative change (IPBES/8/4), and relevant information documents (IPBES/8/INF/4 and 6). He described the inclusive process that led to the development of the reports despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. He further drew attention to the Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics, and the IPBES-IPCC co-sponsored Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Climate Change, noting video presentations are available on IPBES' website. Deliberations will continue in a working group Tuesday.

Regarding work related to the interlinkages between biodiversity and climate change, and collaboration with IPCC,

Members discussed a draft decision welcoming the report; inviting experts of the nexus assessment to make use of it; and inviting the Secretariat to explore further possible joint activities.

Many Members welcomed the report and the collaboration with IPCC. Their suggestions included: conducting further consultations, including inviting governments to explore pragmatic approaches for future work; considering transparency, accountability, and government participation in joint efforts as well as the respective rules of procedure; reflecting on lessons learned from cooperation so far; and establishing robust processes for future collaboration.

Chair Hernández noted the draft decision will be reviewed, following the interventions and further consultations.

Building Capacity, Strengthening Knowledge Foundations, and Supporting Policy

IPBES MEP Co-Chair Marie Stenseke introduced the document (IPBES/8/7), which contains information on the accomplishments of the IPBES task forces. In the document, the Plenary is invited to assess the work of the task forces and approve the work plans. Discussions will continue in a working group on Thursday.

Improving the effectiveness of the platform

Chair Hernández introduced the agenda item, noting the suggestion for Plenary to only receive a report on progress; adopt a procedural decision; and defer further considerations to IPBES-9.

Discussions focused on: the importance of ensuring IPBES processes remain inclusive to all stakeholders and that expert panels include representatives of IPLCs and other practitioners; the standardization of data platforms for easy access; and the development of more accessible formats of reports, especially regarding documents for policy-makers. Some parties asked for an extension of the deadline for reviewing the conceptual framework.

Dates and venues of future sessions

Simone Schiele, IPBES Secretariat, introduced the relevant documents (IPBES/8/9 and IPBES/8/9/Add.1), noting there are currently no offers to host IPBES-9, while the US has offered to host IPBES-10. The two meetings are scheduled for 2022 and 2023 respectively. She said the Bureau will consider the modalities for IPBES-9, including the possibility of holding a virtual meeting, if a physical meeting cannot be held. Chair Hernández requested any offers to host the IPBES Plenary be sent in writing to the Secretariat.

UN collaborative partnership arrangement for the work of the Platform and its Secretariat

Chair Hernández introduced this agenda item (IPBES/8/INF/23), thanking the partnership for their continued support of the platform's work and the implementation of its work programme.

In the Corridors

The first day of IPBES-8 was a testimony to the Platform's increasing significance as a generator of policy-relevant scientific information on the biodiversity crisis. Spearheaded by the fifth edition of the Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES work has witnessed unprecedented media coverage and attracted audiences new to biodiversity concerns. Many have recognized this sound scientific basis is key for driving true transformative change.

However, as a participant noted, with quality work comes increased expectations. IPBES' plate is full. It has many assessments, reports, workshops, and other related activities in the pipeline, and the Platform's Members will have to ensure human and financial resources can meet the level of ambition and maintain the quality of work demonstrated thus far. Monetary contributions are expected (and required) to increase to achieve these goals. How do you find a balance between reducing costs, increasing efficiency, maintaining quality of science, and implementing an ambitious workplan? This will be the crux of discussions under the contact group on budget.