



**Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy
Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
Ninth session**

Bonn, Germany, 3–9 July 2022

Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

Improving the effectiveness of the Platform**Lessons learned from online meetings and other online working practices**

1. In decision IPBES-8/4, on financial and budgetary arrangements, the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), requested the Executive Secretary, under the guidance of the Bureau, to review the lessons learned from online meetings and other online working practices; to provide proposals to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the working arrangements of IPBES, including the implications for the budget, while responding to the need to enable the full and effective participation of members, experts and stakeholders; and to report thereon to the Plenary at its ninth session. In decision IPBES-8/1, on implementation of the rolling work programme of IPBES up to 2030, the Plenary requested the Executive Secretary to consult the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel on aspects related to reviewing the effectiveness of IPBES in the context of the request in decision IPBES-8/4.
2. In response, the Executive Secretary conducted a survey among participants of online meetings organized by IPBES in 2020 and 2021. The survey was sent, as notification EM/2021/37, to 1,588 meeting participants on 2 December 2021, with a deadline for response of 3 January 2022.
3. An analysis of the responses is presented in the annex to the present note, without formal editing.

* IPBES/9/1.

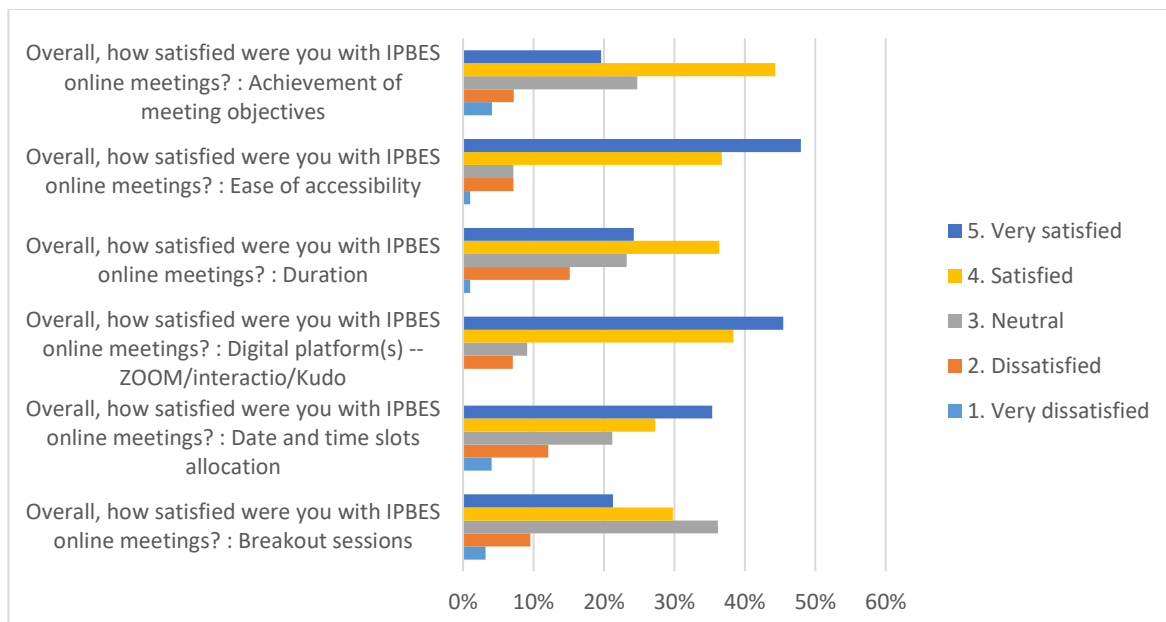
Annex***Analysis of responses to the survey on lessons learned from online meetings and other online working practices****I. Participants in the survey**

1. 99 respondents completed the survey, from which 19% came from the African Region, 10% from the Asia-Pacific Region, 9% from the Eastern European Region, 23% from Latin America and the Caribbean Region, and 38% from the Western Europe and Others Region.
2. 56% of the respondents had participated in the eighth session of the IPBES Plenary, 51% in IPBES assessment-related meetings, 26% in meetings of IPBES task forces and 33% in other IPBES expert meetings, including workshops; most respondents had participated in more than one IPBES online meeting.

II. Overall experience

3. On the question, how satisfied people were overall with IPBES online meetings, 68% of participants responded that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied”, while 20% were neutral and 12% either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the various elements of online meetings. By region, 55% of respondents from the Eastern European region, 56% from the Asia-Pacific region, 62% from the African region, 68% from the Latin America and the Caribbean region and 73% from the Western Europe and Others Group indicated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied”.
4. In terms of specific element of online meetings:
 - (a) About 64% of respondents were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with online meetings in terms of the achievement of meeting objectives, with 11% “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” and 25% “neutral” responses. More than half of the participants from each region were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” (African region: 53%; Asia-Pacific region: 66%; WEOG: 65%; Eastern European region: 55%; Latin America and the Caribbean region: 74%);
 - (b) About 51% of respondents were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with online meetings in terms of the use of breakout sessions, with 13% “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” and 36% “neutral” responses. Responses varied across regions, with 22% (Eastern European region), 40% (Asia-Pacific region); 44% (African region); 57% (WEOG) and 64% (Latin America and the Caribbean region) of participants indicating that they are either “satisfied” or “very satisfied”;
 - (c) About 62% of respondents were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with online meetings in terms of date and time slots allocation, with 16% “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” and 21% “neutral” responses. Half or more of the respondents from each region indicated that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” (Asia-Pacific region: 50%; Eastern European region: 55%; Latin America and the Caribbean region: 61%; WEOG: 66% and African region: 69%);
 - (d) About 83% of respondents were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with online meetings in terms of digital platform(s) – Zoom/Interactio/Kudo, with 7% “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” and 9% “neutral” responses. The Platforms received positive ratings across regions: 69% (African region); 77% (Eastern European region); 87% (WEOG); 90% (Asia-Pacific region) and 91% (Latin America and the Caribbean);
 - (e) About 60% of respondents were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with online meetings in terms of the meeting duration, with 16% “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” and 23% “neutral” responses. Responses varied across regions, with 33% (Eastern European region), 40% (Asia-Pacific region); 58% (African region); 65% (WEOG) and 73% (Latin America and the Caribbean region) of participants indicating that they are either “satisfied” or “very satisfied”;
 - (f) About 85% of respondents were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with online meetings in terms of ease of accessibility of the meeting, with 8% “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” and 7% “neutral” responses. A large majority of the participants from each region were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” (African region: 79%; Latin America and the Caribbean region: 83%; WEOG: 87%; Eastern European region: 88% and Asia-Pacific region: 90%).

* The annex has not been formally edited.



5. About half of the respondents (52%) felt that online meetings did not hamper the overall achievement of the objectives set out for the meetings, while 48% thought they did.

6. However, asked for their preference, 86% of respondents still stated that they prefer in-person meetings over online meetings.

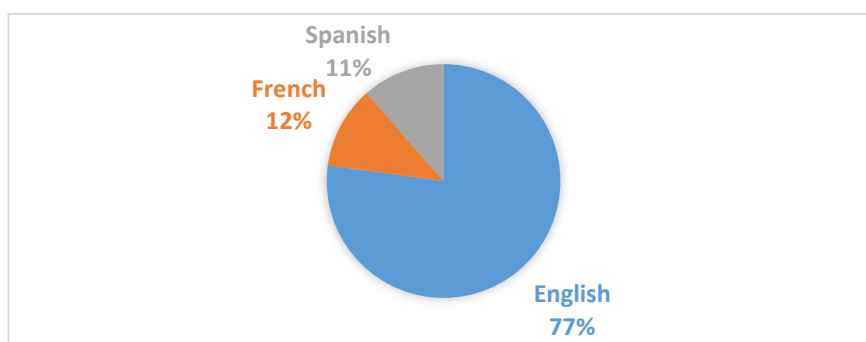
III. Documents and supporting material

7. 85% of respondents had no difficulty accessing meeting documents on the IPBES website made available ahead of the meeting; and 83% indicated that they did not have any difficulty accessing meeting documents made available on the IPBES website during the meeting.

8. In terms of the introductory videos for IPBES 8 agenda items, 82% of the 56 respondents who answered the question found them useful.

IV. Interpretation

9. 48% of respondents indicated that they participated in meetings for which interpretation was provided. When interpretation was provided, 70% of respondents stated that they made use of the interpretation. Noteworthy is that respondents only used interpretation into English, French, and Spanish. No respondent indicated use of Arabic, Chinese or Russian interpretation:

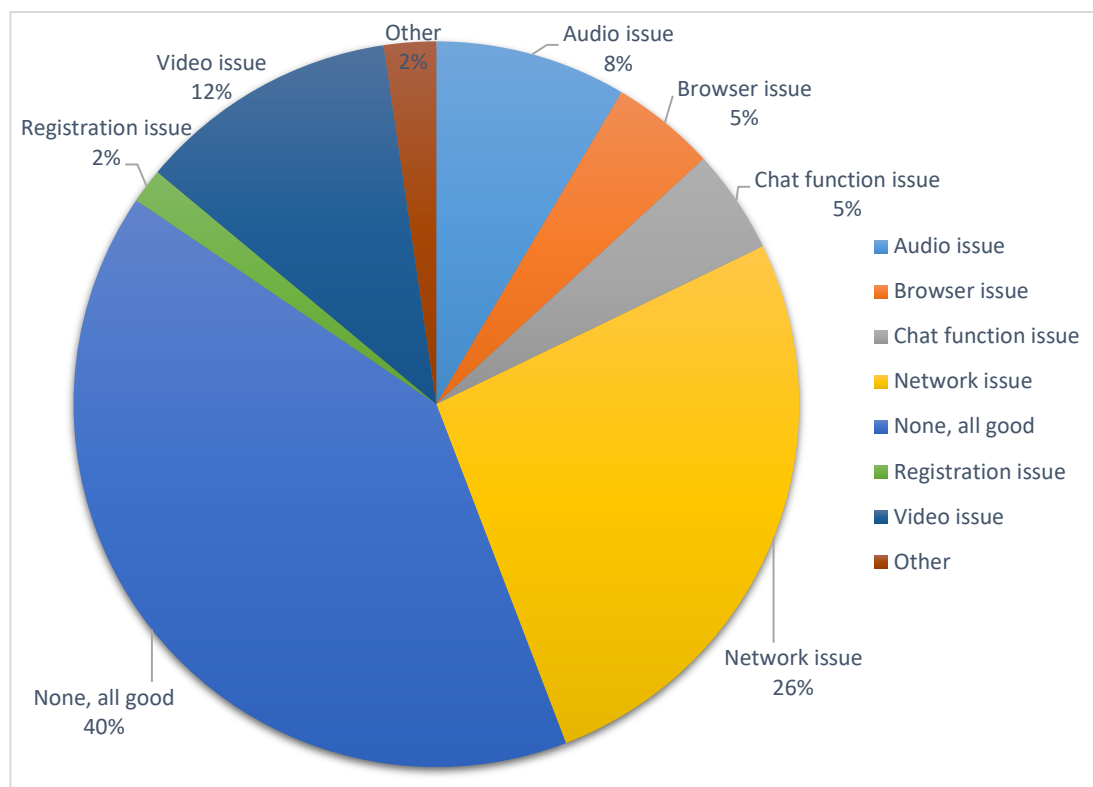


10. 94% of respondents indicated that it was “easy” or “very easy” to switch between languages. Interpretation services were overall rated as “good”, “very good” or “excellent” by 97% of respondents.

V. Technical considerations

11. IPBES online meetings used Interactio, Kudo and ZOOM as platforms to convene the meeting and provide interpretation. The rating of the ease of access and use of the digital platforms varied considerably among the different platforms: 46% of participants rated Kudo “easy or very easy” to access and use, 71% of participants Interactio, and 94% of participants ZOOM.

12. In terms of technical issues encountered, 40% of participants did not experience any problems; 26% network issues; 12% video issues, 9% audio issues; 5% browser and chat function issues; and 2% each registration issues or other problems.



13. Looking at the regional distribution of the technical issues, 38% of the network issues were indicated by participants from the African region; 24% by participants from the Western Europe and Others Group, 21% by participants from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 9% each by participants from the Asia-Pacific and Eastern European Regions.

14. 82% of respondents indicated that helpdesk staff were helpful and did provide timely assistance.

VI. Additional suggestions by survey participants

15. Participants were asked to share any comments or feedback on the meetings they attended and suggestions to improve future meetings. In the responses it was recommended:

- (a) To set clear objectives for each online meeting and structure meetings well;
- (b) To rely more on expert leadership during sessions of the Plenary;
- (c) To alternate online and face-to-face processes and meetings, for example, to organize one face-to-face meeting of each group every one or two years, especially at the initial stages of work, with the rest of the meetings held online, taking into account the specific objective of the meeting in question;
- (d) To hold shorter, smaller, more regular meetings online and longer or bigger meetings in-person;
- (e) To consider organizing hybrid meetings; other participants recommended to avoid hybrid meetings due to the risk of unbalanced representation;
- (f) To consider organizing online preparatory meetings ahead of Plenary sessions to introduce items and share information, while actual negotiations are held in-person;
- (g) To ensure effective facilitation of the online meeting;
- (h) To focus meeting time on discussions and share presentations and introductory materials beforehand;

- (i) To use the chat function during online sessions of the Plenary to share files or images in support of proposals by Parties or Observers;
 - (j) To promote informal online meetings among national focal points, MEP and Bureau in order to strengthen communication in the pandemic situation;
 - (k) To ensure equal distribution of time zone burdens across all the regions for online meetings.
 - (l) A number of respondents indicated their appreciation for the online meetings organized by IPBES, noting that they:
 - (m) Have a lower environmental impact;
 - (n) Have significantly lower cost implications for participants;
 - (o) Allow balancing competing demands, for example childcare, allowing some participants who would not otherwise be able to do so, to participate in a meeting;
16. Others felt that online meetings:
- (a) Are not as effective as in-person meetings due to the lack of opportunity for side-conversations, parallel meetings and in-person regional consultations;
 - (b) Do not allow to understand the context and emotions of other participants in a discussion;
 - (c) In the case of expert meetings, may risk a lower-quality output;
 - (d) Cannot completely replace in-person meetings;
 - (e) Do not allow for social interaction;
 - (f) Do not provide sufficient time to complete work, especially where writing tasks are involved;
 - (g) Make participation difficult if participants are located in different time zones;
 - (h) Are less efficient in creating a team spirit and a community among a group of experts, motivating experts to contribute to a deliverable and keeping them engaged;
 - (i) Can be more challenging for non-native English speakers;
 - (j) Are less engaging, with fewer people actually contributing to the discussion;
 - (k) Take more time in terms of number of days, as due to time zone constraints, only parts of a day can be used for meetings;
 - (l) May lead to more conflicting demands, as very many meetings are organized online due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
17. Another participant expected that online meetings will be used more and more in the near future.

VII. Suggestions for future meetings

18. In sum, it appears that, overall, the majority of participants were satisfied with the various elements of IPBES online meetings. At the same time, a number of disadvantages and technical issues were reported. It is therefore suggested that, in the future, a mix of online and in-person meetings be used. In particular:

- (a) Sessions of the Plenary could be held in person whenever possible, while online preparatory meetings could be used to facilitate the in-person discussions and shorten the time needed for the in-person meetings.
- (b) The IPBES Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and the Bureau could hold only one of their two intersessional meetings in person, including the first meeting following the appointment of a new Multidisciplinary Expert Panel or a new Bureau.
- (c) The author meetings for IPBES assessments (first, second and, if applicable, third author meetings) and one meeting to advance the summary for policymakers could be held in person to facilitate engagement by all authors and ensure the highest quality IPBES assessments, while further meetings to advance the summary for policymakers could be held online.

(d) The first meeting of an IPBES task force during its three-year mandate could be held in person to allow the group to form a team, understand its mandate and establish working modalities, while other meetings of the task force could be held online where the nature of the work allows.

(e) Dialogues with IPBES national focal points and stakeholders during the external review periods of IPBES products and, in regional settings, on the use of IPBES assessments could be organized online; where warranted by the programme of work, a dialogue with national focal points on a broader theme may be organized in person.

(f) Dialogue workshops with representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities and experts on indigenous and local knowledge, on the determination of questions on indigenous and local knowledge for an assessment and during the first and second external review periods, could be organized in-person, while dialogue workshops during assessment scoping and during additional reviews, if any, could be organized online.

(g) The modalities of other meetings, such as meetings of the IPBES capacity-building forum, youth workshops, meetings on national platforms of biodiversity and ecosystem services and dialogues with research programmers and funders, could be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on their agenda and context.
