



**United Nations
Environment
Programme**

Distr.: General
17 October 2008

Original: English



Ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Kuala Lumpur, 10–12 November 2008

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Consideration of an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services:

objectives and functions of an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Building on the global strategy for follow-up to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the consultative process towards an international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity

Revised concept note¹ on an intergovernmental science²-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Executive summary

1. The current science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services comprises a number of national and international mechanisms and processes. The contribution of all these processes for policymaking at the appropriate levels could, however, be strengthened further if they were supported by an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services that ensured the credibility, legitimacy and saliency of emerging scientific findings and recommendations.
2. The platform will function as an intergovernmental mechanism to strengthen existing scientific bodies, whether by providing them with access to the best science or by providing the link with policymakers to make their work more policy-relevant. Similarly, the platform will provide policymakers with the best available science and advice in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services. In doing so, it will harness networks of scientific experts and the policy communities. It is envisaged that the platform will complement, among others, the scientific subsidiary bodies of the biodiversity- and ecosystem-related conventions and relevant intergovernmental bodies with the needed

* UNEP/IPBES/1/1.

1 The original concept note was prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in consultation with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity network of experts. It was developed following an invitation included in the statement adopted by the international steering committee of the consultative process towards an international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity, at its meeting in Montpellier, France, in November 2007. This revised concept note reflects the comments received during the open e-review process.

2 The term “science” is used in the platform in the broadest sense that includes natural, social and economic sciences, in addition to the discipline of traditional knowledge.

scientifically credible information on emerging issues in the science of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

3. It is envisaged that the main value that the platform will add to existing scientific and policymaking bodies will be:

(a) Early warning and early lessons by monitoring trends and new scientific findings in the form of reports and alerts to be made available to relevant stakeholders in a timely manner;

(b) A uniform and consistent framework for generating policy-relevant information, through integrated assessments using the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment framework, about the state, drivers, trends and outlooks of interactions between humans and the environment, focusing on the impacts of changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services on human well-being at multiple levels;

(c) To provide policy support and outreach to relevant stakeholders by packaging and disseminating scientific information in a manner that responds to their needs.

4. A four-year cycle approach is recommended for delivering the benefits outlined above. This will enable the platform's progress to be monitored and evaluated and will create the flexibility to change, revise and amend its work programme accordingly to meet stakeholders' needs.

Overcoming barriers to development

The world is witnessing unprecedented losses and changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services, which are having a negative effect on human well-being and sustainable development. The future development of all countries will be impaired if these losses are not reversed, but especially hard hit will be developing countries in their efforts to alleviate poverty. Public and private stakeholders therefore need to mitigate and adapt to changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services through appropriate policy decisions. Such efforts are, however, knowledge-intensive and need to be supported by a dynamic science-policy platform that is credible, salient and legitimate.

I. Background and rationale

1. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment demonstrated that, over the past 50 years, humanity has caused unprecedented losses in biodiversity and declines in ecosystem services. In fact, 60 per cent of the 24 assessed ecosystem services are in decline and further degradation is expected if immediate action is not taken. This would have a particular, but not exclusive, negative impact on development processes in developing countries.

2. Scientific knowledge on the links between biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being has increased significantly since the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was completed. There is, however, a need for a stronger international science-policy platform to enable emerging scientific knowledge to be translated into specific policy action at the appropriate levels.

3. The current science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services comprises a number of national and international programmes, organizations, mechanisms and processes. The biodiversity and ecosystem-related multilateral environmental agreements, for example, contain provisions on scientific and technical cooperation. Their contribution to policymaking at the appropriate levels could, however, be strengthened further if an intergovernmental science-policy platform were able to provide a scientifically sound, uniform and consistent framework for tackling changes to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

4. The report by the European Environment Agency, "Late lessons from early warnings: the precautionary principle 1896–2000", identifies a gap between scientific findings and policy responses. There is therefore a need for a mechanism to convey the findings from the scientific community to the needs of the policy communities in a timely manner and vice versa.

5. The consultation towards an international mechanism for scientific expertise on biodiversity and the global strategy on Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up both reflect a general agreement on the need for an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services. This need was further strengthened by decision IX/15 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on

Biological Diversity at its ninth meeting, held in May 2008, which welcomed the initiative by the Executive Director of UNEP to convene an ad hoc open-ended intergovernmental multi-stakeholder meeting to consider establishing such a platform and to invite Parties to send their science and policy experts thereto.

6. The present concept note is intended to support consultations with Governments and other stakeholders on the proposed establishment of a platform. It explores the needs, rationale and modalities for such a platform, together with possible activities and institutional arrangements. In doing so, it draws not only on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity processes, but also from lessons learned from global processes such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Global Environmental Outlook, International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, Global Biodiversity Outlook, the Economics of Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity, national processes for linking science and policy and continuing networking and capacity-building initiatives.

II. Core mandate and expected outcomes of an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

7. The platform's core mandate would be to provide authoritative, independent, credible, inclusive and internationally peer-reviewed, policy-relevant scientific advice on changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services and their implications for human well-being at multiple levels. Its overarching goals will be to contribute to more effective and equitable decision-making that secures human well-being and strengthened scientific linkages between biodiversity and ecosystem-related multilateral environmental agreements.

8. The platform would generate a range of outcomes, including:

(a) Authoritative, up-to-date and policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive analyses of the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services and their relationship with human well-being to support decision-making at the appropriate levels and scales with the relevant information needed for improving understanding of changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services and the implications for human well-being, monitoring and reporting and developing policy;

(b) Improved dialogue between scientific and other knowledge systems and understandings, perspectives and values regarding biodiversity and ecosystem services to help to make policy decisions more effective, efficient and equitable for the sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services;

(c) Improved communication and knowledge-brokering to aid understanding and policy-relevant application of scientific results on biodiversity and ecosystem services;

(d) Improved scientific support based on requests from the subsidiary advisory bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, natural resource management and development-related international bodies, multilateral banks, regional biodiversity and ecosystem services programmes and national Governments by providing proactive, credible scientific advice on existing and emerging threats;

(e) A common scientific platform to strengthen the links between the various biodiversity- and ecosystem-related multilateral environmental agreements, building on and taking into account existing processes such as the liaison group of the biodiversity-related conventions.

III. Proposed focus areas for an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services³

9. Three main focal areas have been identified for the platform based on recommendations from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment independent evaluations and the international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity consultation process:

(a) *Early warning, early lessons*: Monitoring trends and new scientific findings and proactively alerting organizations and Governments to emerging issues and threats to enable timely responses, in addition to providing rapid scientific analyses of such threats;

³ The platform's programme of work and budget is set out in document UNEP/IPBES/1/3, with detailed information on objectives, expected accomplishments and activities related to each of the focal areas.

(b) *Catalysing knowledge*: Undertaking regular, independent, integrated assessments of changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services at multiple levels and rapid targeted assessments of specific issues that are linked with, build on or inform other relevant assessment processes, in addition to preparing for a second global assessment;

(c) *Policy support and outreach*: Supporting relevant stakeholders with the requisite scientific information:

- (i) To improve understanding of changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services and their implications for human well-being;
- (ii) To assist monitoring and reporting on biodiversity and ecosystem services changes;
- (iii) To package and disseminate scientific information in a manner that responds to relevant stakeholders' needs.

10. Capacity-building will be an integral part of each component. The main focus will be on building the scientific expertise to undertake activities for each respective focal area.

11. It is envisaged that the activities undertaken by the platform will benefit from and contribute to continuing initiatives on biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being that are implemented outside the framework of the platform. This will be especially true for activities that will continue to be implemented by Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up partners in their own capacity.

IV. Operational modalities of an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

12. The key operating principles of the platform are that it shall be:

- (a) Inclusive of intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and build upon existing networks of scientists and knowledge-holders;
- (b) Scientifically independent, credible and subject to critical expert peer review as appropriate;
- (c) Responsive to policy needs as identified by decision-making organizations at multiple levels, including biodiversity and ecosystems-related multilateral environmental agreements and relevant intergovernmental bodies, by being legitimate and policy-relevant without being policy-prescriptive;
- (d) Underpinned by experiences of relevant assessment processes;
- (e) Monitored from the outset with procedures for measuring its effectiveness.

13. The platform's proposed institutional structure is set out in document UNEP/IPBES/1/4. The structure should be lean, comprising members chosen with due regard to the principles of equitable geographical distribution and gender and discipline balance, and with clear terms of reference.

14. With regard to the platform's timeframe, it is suggested that a four-year cycle approach should be undertaken for the implementation of its work programme. This will enable stakeholders to evaluate and monitor the platform's progress, performance and success. Specific activities to be undertaken in each four-year period will be determined in plenary.

15. The present meeting brings together Governments and interested stakeholders for the first time to discuss the need, modalities, objectives, scope, programme of work, institutional arrangements and rules and procedures for the platform. It is proposed that participants should draw up a set of recommendations to be presented to the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-fifth session for its consideration.