**United Nations
Environment
Programme**

**Second ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an
intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity
and ecosystem services**
Nairobi, 5–9 October 2009

Summary of perspectives from the scientific community and broader civil society

Note by the secretariat

The annex to the present note contains a summary of perspectives from the scientific community and broader civil society as regards an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The summary is presented as received and has not been formally edited.

Annex

IPBES: Needs, Functions and Form

A summary of perspectives from the scientific community and broader civil society[1]

One of the major challenges for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services is to enable decisions to be made with guidance from the best-available scientific information. To help address this, an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES) has been proposed to further strengthen policy making, through enhancing the credibility, legitimacy and saliency of the science policy interface in areas relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services. In support of the ongoing process of consultation and negotiation, IUCN, ICSU, and DIVERSITAS are collaborating to raise awareness and engage the scientific community and broader civil society. An online consultation process was undertaken between mid-August and mid-September 2009, in preparation for the 2nd IPBES meeting on October 5-9th. The consultation solicited perspectives of the scientific community and broader civil society on the need for IPBES as part of a strengthened science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and on the potential functions and form of IPBES (see Annex 1). The results presented below synthesize the responses of more than 300 hundred participants to this survey, drawn together at a synthesis meeting convened by IUCN, ICSU, and DIVERSITAS.

This consultation also highlighted the increasing concern among the scientific community and broader civil society over the continuing deterioration of biodiversity and ecosystems and their ability to support the needs of people. As highlighted by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, there are already certain ecosystems where the rate or nature of use is compromising future users and their needs, and other ecosystems where interventions now would substantially enhance future options.

in pointing to the potentially significant benefits that could result from an enhanced communication mechanism between scientists and policy-makers, as well as the need to consider repeated assessments. the recommendations below echo many of the conclusions from reviews of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment[2] as well as from the Imoseb consultation[3].

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[1] See end of p3 – 'sope of online consultation' for a description of who was consulted.
[2] E.g. http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvaud/77/77.pdf;
http://www.unep.org/eou/Pdfs/Millennium%20Eco%20Assessment%20Report%20unedited.pdf
[3] http://www.imoseb.net/international_steering_committee_2

Annex

Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface: the need for IPBES.

Existing science-policy interfaces could be strengthened, to increase the frequency and quality of ongoing communication and dialogue between policy and scientific communities; more clearly identify and communicate needs for scientific information; improve the generation and dissemination of policy-relevant research; and increase coordination in the scientific community to engage in policy processes.

However, even with improved coordination and communication, strengthening existing mechanisms would not be sufficient to fill current gaps in the science-policy interface The absence of an overarching scientifically and politically independent, credible, relevant and legitimate mechanism for the existing science-policy interfaces is a key problem. There remains considerable scope for the needs of decision-makers for scientific information in range of policy processes to be more clearly articulated, and thereby enable a more efficient and effective relationship between the demand for scientific information, and the response of the scientific community to this demand.

Communication between scientists and decision-makers is hampered by the lack of a channel for efficient communication as well as differences in style, focus and priorities between the policy and scientific communities. While scientists need to know about current and future policy issues in order to respond to these, decision makers need also to be informed about relevant new findings, and emerging scientific issues. In addition, career incentives for scientists in the area of biodiversity and ecosystem services do not often include the provision of policy advice. Policy-makers can often obtain rapid responses through secondary sources (for example using consultants and online sources), whereas high quality advice from the best qualified scientists often requires more time to be solicited, compiled and appropriately synthesized. The time required to produce robust scientific assessments needs to be a consideration when policy-makers seek high quality science advice.

Science advice currently comes to decision-makers from many sources that are often difficult to choose between, compare, and/or link together. There are many perceived problems with quality, relevance and independence as a result. At global scales especially, many competing information suppliers in some areas have vested interests, while information is scarce in other important areas for policy. At national level, the structures and processes to provide scientific information may be clearer but choosing amongst different sources and making reference to the international context is often compromised by the lack of consistency.

Regular communication and dialogues are needed between scientists and policy makers to strengthen the effectiveness of the science-policy interface, in particular through formal assessments of the state of knowledge on policy-relevant science relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Over 80% of respondents to the consultation believe that there is a need for a new mechanism to be established, to better address the challenges faced on policy issues relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

An appropriately designed new mechanism would help the efficient coordination of the scientific community to respond to policy needs, and increase the communication of scientific findings to decision-makers in a range of policy processes. Such a mechanism would ensure that decision-makers are aware of the best-available scientific information on biodiversity and ecosystem services, including on the options available to respond to the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services.

Although there are many instances where the uptake of science into policy processes has been relatively slow or insufficient, there are also many examples of the effective response of policy-makers to emerging scientific information from which lessons can be learned. Examples of relatively poor uptake of science into policy processes can be found in many areas including the response to various pandemics, pollinator decline, and dangerous pollutants, and invasive species. Lessons can be learned from examples of more effective science uptake (such as on climate change, acid rain and the impacts of CFCs,), although even in many of these areas, serious obstacles remain. Lessons to be drawn for a new mechanism such as IPBES include the need to produce timely, adequate and credible scientific information, identify the relevance of biodiversity issues to the economy and to human well-being, provide (if possible) options for feasible solutions to problems, and publicize the scientific information widely and efficiently.

Ensuring Effectiveness: some important elements for the function and form of IPBES

IPBES should have a core function of guiding the scientific community on the needs of policy makers, and engaging the scientific community to respond to these needs, especially through targeted and periodic peer-reviewed thematic assessments at multiple scales, and through raising awareness of emerging scientific issues within the policy community.

IPBES would also help to identify and fill gaps in knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services and bring emerging issues to the attention of policy-makers, including through providing ongoing updates which synthesize peer-reviewed scientific knowledge and provide a credible assessment of the range of (sometimes conflicting) scientific information; increasing the opportunity for existing institutions to bring knowledge to bear on policy processes; and providing an avenue by which trends identified from monitoring efforts on biodiversity and ecosystem services can be brought to the attention of policy makers.

In order for IPBES to be most effective, strengthened capacities are necessary to enhance the science-policy interface. In particular capacity building is needed to promote interdisciplinary science; to ensure the involvement of the scientific community in developing countries in global science-policy initiatives; to understand and make use of science in decision-making; and to improve the integration of traditional and local knowledge with scientific information into policy making. The establishment of IPBES can act a stimulus for the strengthening of institutional and human capacity in these areas.

To be effective IPBES should:
- **Be Intergovernmental,** to ensure the buy in from governments (in an analogous manner to the IPCC, and learning from lessons from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, and other processes).
- **Include strong multistakeholder characteristics and governance**, to ensure involvement of information providers and users from a wide range of stakeholder groups, . In order to ensure the scientific independence, credibility, relevance and legitimacy of a new mechanism, the scientific community and other key stakeholders should be involved beyond the provision of scientific information, and play a key role in the governance of IPBES, including in the identification and formulation of questions to be addressed by the mechanism.
- **Build on lessons learned and ongoing processes of successful science-policy interfaces at international, national and regional levels**, including for example from scientific institutions such as CONABIO,[4] SANBI,[5] and ATREE.[6]

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[4] Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad, Mexico

- **Draw on a combination of engaging individual scientific experts, and existing science networks at different scales**, in order to ensure the best available scientific expertise is brought to bear on policy processes.

Scope of online consultation

The consultation was conducted through an online survey, which was announced to a wide community of scientific and technical experts, including the many thousands of individuals in the science networks of DIVERSITAS, ICSU and IUCN. In addition, the survey was publicized to over 700 local, national and international NGOs, through IUCN membership distribution channels. A total of 324 people responded to the survey, although not all questions were completed by all respondents. Respondents were mainly scientific and technical information providers, with contribution from some information user representatives in non-governmental and other organizations. Institutional affiliations of respondents were 59% from academic institutions, 19% from NGOs, and 22% from other affiliations (including IGOs, consultants, private research, and students). Responses were received from over 70 countries, with a regional variation in respondent residence (Africa 12%, Asia Pacific 20%, Europe 34%, Latin America & Caribbean 12%, and North America 22%).

The substantive survey questions can be seen in Annex 1.

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[5] South African National Biodiversity Institute, South Africa

[6] Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, India

Annex 1. Survey questions for online consultation of scientific community and civil society.

A) Strengthening the science-policy interface

1. What are the major barriers to ensuring that decision-makers are aware of the best-available scientific information?

2. What are the major barriers to ensuring that scientists are aware of decision makers' needs for scientific information?

3. What do you consider the most effective channel to deliver scientific findings to decision-makers?

4. a) Can you provide examples of issues where emerging scientific information has been slow to be taken up by the policy community, or where policy moved ahead quickly without a scientific basis?
   b) What were the reasons why the uptake of science was slow?

5. a) Can you provide examples of issues where the policy community has rapidly taken up on emerging scientific information?
   b) What were the reasons why the uptake of science was rapid?

6. Do you believe that existing arrangements for delivering scientific information to policy processes are sufficient and efficient?

7. What are the key gaps in the existing science policy interfaces at national level where you work?

8. What are the key gaps in the existing science policy interface at the international/global level?

9. What are three most important things that could be done to strengthen existing science-policy interfaces?

10. Are there any gaps in the science policy interface that could not be filled by strengthening existing processes?

11. Do you believe there is a need for a new mechanism to bridge the science-policy interface?

B) If a new mechanism were to be established:

12. What should be the scope of any new mechanism?

13. What role(s) should the scientific community play in such a mechanism?

14. How should the scientific community be engaged in the mechanism?

15. How can the needs of civil society for information on biodiversity and ecosystem services best be met by a new mechanism?

16. Which areas of capacity need to be built in order to ensure that the scientific and policy communities are better connected?

17. How could a new mechanism help to fill current knowledge gaps in biodiversity and ecosystem services?

18. Which lessons can be learned from other processes (please name them) that might be useful in establishing a new mechanism?

19. Do you have any additional comments or guidance on strengthening the science-policy interface, related to the above questions or other relevant issues?