



**United Nations
Environment
Programme**

Distr.: General
10 August 2011

Original: English

**Plenary meeting to determine modalities and institutional
arrangements for an intergovernmental science-policy
platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services
First session**

Nairobi, 3–7 October 2011

Item 4 (f) of the provisional agenda*

**Consideration of the modalities and institutional
arrangements for an intergovernmental science-policy
platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services:
work programme of the platform**

**Options for implementing the assessment function of the
intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and
ecosystem services**

Note by the secretariat

The annex to the present note sets out the executive summary of a report by the secretariat on options for implementing the assessment function of the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The full report, in English only, is presented in document UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/INF/4/Add.1. The report has been produced by the secretariat in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

* UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/1.

Annex

Options for implementing the assessment function of the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Executive summary

1. The outcome document of the third ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, known as the “Busan outcome”, states that the proposed platform should:

Perform regular and timely assessments of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services and their interlinkages, which should include comprehensive global, regional and, as necessary, subregional assessments and thematic issues at appropriate scales and new topics identified by science and as decided upon by the plenary. These assessments must be scientifically credible, independent and peer-reviewed, and must identify uncertainties. There should be a clear and transparent process for sharing and incorporating relevant data. The new platform should maintain a catalogue of relevant assessments, identify the need for regional and subregional assessments and help to catalyse support for subregional and national assessments, as appropriate.

2. Continuing and recently completed global assessments of relevance to the platform include the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, the Global Environment Outlook, the Global Biodiversity Outlook, the Global Forest Resources Assessment, the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity and the Global International Waters Assessment. A number of regional assessments have also been carried out, including the African Environment Outlook and the Southern African Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, in addition to a growing number of national assessment activities being undertaken around the world. There are many lessons that can be learned from these and similar assessment processes that can be used to inform the development of the assessment work programme of the platform.

3. While the assessment processes listed above are numerous and broad in scope, gaps in the assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services nevertheless remain, as discussed in the gap analysis set out in document UNEP/IPBES/2/INF/1. In particular there is a need for a regular, periodic, multi-level assessment process that provides a conceptual and institutional framework that will allow for the coherent gathering, review, synthesis, communication and monitoring of information, as well as the tracking of changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services and their consequences for human well-being.

4. In addition, there is a need to set up a global process to ensure the timely provision of scientific advice on emerging issues of concern, whether in response to policymakers’ requests or concerns arising from the scientific community.

5. There are a number of options for how assessments could be implemented under the platform in line with the needs listed in the Busan outcome. The platform plenary and assessment working groups, if established, may therefore wish to consider the following, among other things, with regard to the assessment work programme:

(a) Priorities for assessment on the regional, subregional and global scales, including how subregional and regional assessments might contribute to global assessments to ensure that information is available on the scale of greatest utility while using standard frameworks to allow integration across and between assessments performed on different scales;

(b) How to incorporate different types of knowledge, such as scientific knowledge, traditional knowledge, grey literature and citizen science, into the assessment process;

(c) How to provide economic valuations for various ecosystem services and changes under different conditions and in different regions;

(d) How to assess and communicate social and ethical values for biodiversity and ecosystem services and how to take them into account alongside ecological and economic values;

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- (e) How to develop quantitative and qualitative models, scenarios and indicators that will aid understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services and their relation to human well-being;
 - (f) How new topics identified by the scientific community might be brought to the attention of the plenary;
 - (g) The processes for the selection of authors and peer review to ensure scientific credibility and transparency;
 - (h) How the assessment work programme might be designed in a way that is mutually supportive of the knowledge generation, policy support and capacity-building functions of the platform.

6. Options for implementing the assessment functions of the platform include global, regional and subregional assessments that could be undertaken using a standard conceptual framework that is sufficiently robust and inclusive that it could be used in various regions. A global assessment could begin after the regional assessments have started, which would allow it to draw on regional datasets, assessments and knowledge. Alternatively, a global assessment could be undertaken in parallel with regional assessments and a synthesis produced to bring the findings together.

7. Thematic assessments could be carried out on a demand-driven, ad hoc basis, as decided by the plenary. Alternatively, the plenary could decide that a set of thematic issues and assessments should be produced on a regular basis or that the platform should develop partnerships with existing assessment processes such as the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment to provide regular thematic assessments on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

8. Assessment of new topics identified by the scientific community could be carried out on an ad hoc basis by establishing a specific process that regularly reports to the plenary, for example by creating a working group or task force on emerging issues, by establishing a framework for the submission of suggestions to the plenary for consideration or by forming a partnership with existing processes and inviting them to submit a list of topics for consideration by the plenary.

9. Regardless of the decisions taken on the scope and process of assessment, the plenary might also wish to give attention to how the assessment work programme could link to existing assessment processes to ensure that it adds value and does not duplicate work.
